



VOLUME 4

# SOLAS

A PUBLICATION OF THE  
ASSOCIATION FOR BAHÁ'Í STUDIES,  
*English-speaking Europe, Irish Edition*  
Volume 4, Autumn/Winter 2004

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# **The Significance of the Four Year Plan** *by Andrew Alexander*

## **Abstract**

*Developing a capacity to appreciate the significance of the series of International Plans, periodically launched by the Bahá'í World Centre, is an important activity for a Bahá'í in modern times. As the Bahá'í community and its institutions continue to evolve, the importance for its institutions and individuals to increase their familiarity with the vision outlined in this series of Plans has never been greater. The Four Year Plan (1996-2000) is often considered by individual Bahá'ís and their institutions as being one of the most significant of modern times: it simultaneously draws on past experience and reaches out to the future. The vision of the Plan is one that will influence, and be a key reference point for, the Bahá'í world community for a significant portion of the Twenty-First Century. It is for this reason that the author chose to have another look at the central documents which launched the Four Year Plan, seven years after first encountering them, at the Irish National Bahá'í Convention in 1996.*

## **Introduction**

International Plans are a series of campaigns periodically launched for the expansion and consolidation of the Bahá'í Faith and play a major part in modern Bahá'í activity. The origin of the contemporary sequence of International Plans stems primarily from initiatives undertaken by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His letters known as the Tablets of the Divine Plan (1916-17). These Tablets were addressed to the relatively fledgling communities of the United States of America and Canada and their goals included a call for Bahá'ís to move or pioneer to a number of specified territories, expand the scope of Bahá'í literature and learn the languages of the communities to which they pioneered.

The following decades saw a slow if steady evolution of the planning concept under the auspices of the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, Shoghi Effendi. Gaining a degree of momentum with the North American Seven Year Plan (1937-44), among the goals of which were included the formation of at least one Local Spiritual Assembly in each of the North American States and Canadian Provinces and the completion of the exterior ornamentation of the

Bahá'í Temple in Wilmette, Illinois, other nations and regions of the world followed suit; national plans were adopted by the Bahá'í communities of India and Burma, the British Isles, Iran, Australia and New Zealand and Central America. While varying in duration, all of the national plans of this period were focused on the domestic development of national Bahá'í communities. One plan which differed somewhat in the nature of its goals was the two-year Africa Campaign (1951-3), which called for collaboration between a number of National Spiritual Assemblies, thereby heralding to some extent the age of the international Plan.

The Four Year Plan (1996-2000) belongs to this international 'family' of plans and forms part of a sequence, initiated under Shoghi Effendi and continued by the Universal House of Justice, which was first elected in 1963. The first international Plan was known as the Ten Year Crusade (1953-63), in which all of the twelve existing National Spiritual Assemblies in 1953 took part. The central aim of the Crusade was the establishment of Bahá'í communities in every significant territory and island group throughout the world. Since its election in 1963, the Universal House of Justice has initiated six international Plans up to the launch of the Four Year Plan (1996-2000) at the Festival of Ridván in 1996. These were known as the Nine (1964-73), Five (1974-9), Seven (1979-86), Six (1986-92) and Three Year Plans (1993-6). The year 1992-1993 was deemed a Holy Year, the one hundredth anniversary of the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, and was marked by commemorative ceremonies throughout the Bahá'í international community.<sup>1</sup>

International Plans are typically launched through the medium of the Ridván Message, although not exclusively so. The Four Year Plan (1996-2000) is a case in point, where the Bahá'í world community was primed by a letter early in 1996 announcing that the next Plan would be four years in duration. Ridván constitutes the major Festival of the Bahá'í Calendar, commemorating Bahá'u'lláh's declaration as a Manifestation of God and marking the beginning of the Bahá'í administrative year, when annual elections take place for the Local and National Spiritual Assemblies. The goals of the international Plans are reflected and acted upon by local individuals and communities of the Faith under the auspices of the national and local

administrative bodies in their jurisdiction. The series of international Plans have included goals related to the numerical and qualitative expansion of the community, the production of literature, the translation of sacred texts, the search for greater public recognition, the enhancement of Bahá'í family life and the construction of building projects of international significance, for example, the construction of Continental Houses of Worship and the development of the administrative buildings at the Bahá'í World Centre on Mount Carmel, Israel.

Shoghi Effendi envisaged that the evolution of the Bahá'í community would be distinguished by a series of plans stretching far into the future to 'the fringes of the Golden Age' - a span of time whose length can only be speculated; it may extend to several hundred years.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Four Year Plan Documents**

The methodology employed in this brief re-visit to the Four Year Plan (1996-2000) was to read the series of introductory messages that launched the Plan in the winter of 1995 and the spring of 1996. These messages were compiled in a booklet entitled *The Four Year Plan - Messages of the Universal House of Justice* (Palabra Publications, 1996). The messages contained therein consisted of a message dated 26 December 1995 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, a message dated 31 December 1995 to the Bahá'ís of the World, the Ridván 153 message to the Bahá'ís of the World and a series of messages (eight in all) addressed to Bahá'í national communities in different regions of the world. The messages to the Bahá'ís in these different regions were issued along with the Ridván 153 message and were referenced in consultations at the various National Conventions which were then taking place world-wide. In the context of the actual execution of the aims of the Four Year Plan, the above messages served merely to launch it. A large part, some would say a major part, of the Plan are or were the activities launched by national and local institutions in response to the introductory messages; the latter have not been reviewed in this paper. It has been decided that the most appropriate way to begin the process of identifying the significance of the Four Year Plan is to re-visit the original introductory documents:

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.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Four Year Plan and a Leap in Consciousness**

From the outset, the Four Year Plan was singled out by the Universal House of Justice as a plan of special significance. It is for this reason that the author considers its introductory messages worthy of review, almost eight years since the Plan was originally launched. In advance of this launch, in the letter to the Continental Boards of Counsellors (December 1995) care was taken to reiterate the seven objectives of the preceding Six and Three Year Plans:

carrying the healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the generality of humankind;

greater involvement of the Faith in the life of human society;

a world-wide increase in the translation, production, distribution and use of Bahá'í Literature;

further acceleration in the process of the maturation of local and national Bahá'í communities;

greater attention to universal participation and the spiritual enrichment of individual believers;

a wider extension of Bahá'í family life;

the pursuit of projects of social and economic development in well-established Bahá'í communities.<sup>4</sup>

The Universal House of Justice wrote that these seven objectives 'describe interacting processes that must advance simultaneously over many decades.'<sup>5</sup> One sentence later, the House of Justice moved from the theme of goals to the theme of action and then beyond action itself to how that action should be undertaken:

National plans, however, will go beyond the mere enumeration of goals to include an analysis of approaches to be adopted and lines of action to be followed, so that the

friends will be able to set out on their endeavours with clarity of mind and decisiveness.<sup>6</sup>

In other words, beyond any analysis of what should and should not be done to further the aims of the Four Year Plan, just as important is the state of mind, 'the clarity of mind and decisiveness' with which any action should be undertaken. In this context, the Four Year Plan concerns a 'leap in consciousness' on the part of what are identified as the three essential components of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh - the individual, the institutions and the community.

Central to this 'leap of consciousness' is a call for the participants of the Plan to take decisive steps in taking ownership of the Plan and assuming responsibility for their own spiritual evolution, both as a community and as individuals. In launching the Plan, the House of Justice announced that the plan should have one major accomplishment: 'a significant advance in the process of entry by troops.' 'Entry by troops' is a term signifying sustained growth of the Bahá'í community on a large scale. In attempting this accomplishment, the first task to be undertaken was deemed to be a change in mindset, a revolution in the head: 'the individual, the institutions, and the community - can foster such growth first by spiritually and mentally accepting the possibility of it ...'<sup>7</sup>

In the section of the Ridván 153 message addressing individual Bahá'ís, the House of Justice draws attention to the fact that the individual has an important role to play in the evolution of the community:

at the crux of any progress to be made is the individual believer, who possesses the power of execution which only he can release through his own initiative and sustained action.<sup>8</sup>

For the institutions of the Bahá'í community, and those who elect them, the Ridván 153 message calls explicitly for 'a new state of mind':

The evolution of local and national Bahá'í Assemblies at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part their members

as well as on the part of those who elect them, for the Bahá'í community is engaged in an immense historical process that is entering a critical stage.<sup>9</sup>

For Bahá'í communities this theme is reflected in two paragraphs in particular. One of these paragraphs defines what 'a community' is deemed to be and the second clarifies the activities that need to be enacted in order for a community to flourish:

A community is of course more than the sum of its membership; it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organisations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders: it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress.<sup>10</sup>

The flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behaviour: those patterns by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly is manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth.<sup>11</sup>

In the concluding paragraph of the Ridván 153 message, the House of Justice returns to the theme of individual initiative:

May you all arise to seize the tasks of this crucial moment.  
May each inscribe his or her own mark on a brief span of  
time so charged with potentialities and hope for all humanity  
...<sup>12</sup>

### **The Development of Human Resources**

In addition to a change of mindset, the Four Year Plan was significant in introducing to the Bahá'í community the phenomenon of world-wide human resource development. If the



Four Year Plan could be said to have two wings, then the 'cerebral wing' could be said to be a change of mindset which embraced the possibility of large-scale sustained growth and its implications, while its practical wing was that of world-wide endeavours in the field of developing human resources. The theme of human resource development is conspicuous in all of the introductory documents of the Four Year Plan. In the message of December addressed to the Continental Boards of Counsellors, it is related that:

During the Nine Year Plan , the Universal House of Justice called upon National Spiritual Assemblies in countries where large-scale expansion was taking place to establish teaching institutes to meet the deepening needs of the thousands who were entering the Faith ... Over the years, in conjunction with these institutes, and often independent of them, a number of courses ... were developed for the purpose of helping the friends gain an understanding of the fundamental verities of the Faith and arise to serve it.<sup>13</sup>

it has become apparent that such occasional courses of instruction ... are not sufficient as a means of human resource development ...<sup>14</sup>

The development of human resources on a large scale requires that the establishment of institutes be viewed in a new light ... This purpose can best be achieved through well-organised, formal programmes consisting of courses that follow appropriately designed curricula.<sup>15</sup>

In the message of Ridván 153, the theme of 'institutes' is outlined in a way which places human resource development at the centre of Bahá'í community life – and in particular, local Bahá'í community life. The paragraphs of the Ridván 153 message which deal with the theme of the development of human resources outline the pivotal role this process is intended to play in the aforementioned 'central aim' of the Four Year Plan, namely, 'a significant advance in the process of entry by troops.' In order for the process of human resource development to contribute to the 'central aim' of the Plan, Bahá'í institutions had a pivotal role to

play in engaging with the associated 'institute' process. In addition, there was a requirement that both individual Bahá'ís and Bahá'í institutions appreciate the significance and the importance of this process in the light of humanity's needs and the prevailing condition of world affairs:

To effect the possibilities of expansion and consolidation implied by entry by troops, a determined, world-wide effort to develop human resources must be made.<sup>16</sup>

There should be no delay in establishing permanent institutes designed to provide well-organised, formally conducted programmes of training on a regular schedule.<sup>17</sup>

To sum up the on the subject of the need to develop human resources, and emphasise the significance this process has at the centre of the Plan, the Ridván 153 message contains the following dramatic paragraph:

The next four years will represent an extraordinary period in the history of our Faith, a turning point of epochal magnitude. What the friends throughout the world are now being asked to do is commit themselves, their material resources, abilities and their time to the development of a network of training institutes on a scale never before attempted. These centres of Bahá'í learning will have as their goal one very practical outcome, namely, the raising of large numbers of believers who are trained to foster and facilitate the process of entry by troops with efficiency and love.<sup>18</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It has now been almost eight years since the launch of the Four Year Plan. The Universal House of Justice has always stipulated that the Four Year Plan has a special place in the grand scheme of Bahá'í history. In writing this paper, I am reinforced in the belief that individual Bahá'ís and Bahá'í institutions would do well to study this Plan again. In doing so, they could 'touch base' with the original intent behind some of the most conspicuous activities in contemporary Bahá'í community life. In the period since the

launch of the Four Year Plan in 1996 and its conclusion in the year 2000, a number of documents exist which reflect upon the effectiveness of the Plan, and how it was implemented by Bahá'í communities throughout the world, the study of which was not included in this paper. However, it is safe to say that the Bahá'í community found the implementation an immensely challenging enterprise. As the above final quotation indicates, the process of entry by troops is to be facilitated not only with love, but with efficiency – a contradiction in terms, one might say.

The rate of the development of a flourishing and expanding local community life will be the litmus test as to how quickly the individuals, the institutions and the communities are successful in achieving the long-term goals of the Four Year Plan. Despite being international, the Plan, at its heart, was and is about enriching the life of local communities. Human resource development was a goal born of local needs. If there is a central 'canon' to be found at the heart of the Four Year Plan, it is that the three constituent elements of Bahá'í society – the individual, the institutions and the community - must realise that their destinies and well-being are intertwined and interdependent. They must learn to rise to a 'new state of mind' which allows them to embrace and facilitate sustainable growth, on a large scale, over a long period.

## References

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2. The Universal House of Justice *The Four Year Plan: Messages of the Universal House of Justice* (Palabra) p. iii.
3. *Ibid.* paragraph 2.13
4. The Universal House of Justice, from a letter dated September 30, 1992 to all the National Spiritual Assemblies introducing the Three Year Plan.
5. *The Four Year Plan* (Palabra) paragraph 1.5.
6. *Ibid.* para. 1.5.
7. *Ibid.* para. 3.18.
8. *Ibid.* para. 3.22.
9. *Ibid.* para. 3.23.
10. *Ibid.* para. 3.25.
11. *Ibid.* para. 3.26.

12. *Ibid.* para. 3.42.
13. *Ibid.* para. 1.13.
14. *Ibid.* para. 1.14.
15. *Ibid.* para. 1.15.
16. *Ibid.* para. 3.27.
17. *Ibid.* para. 3.27.
18. *Ibid.* para. 3.29.

# **Towards a complete and fully integrated model of the human species by Gearóid Carey**

## **Abstract**

*Extrapolating a full species model from correct but partial information has led to the generation of poor models. For example, developing a model that integrates all of the available scientific information without integrating the metaphysical information that divine revelation provides can never generate an adequate model. Similarly, failure to understand the effect of the Neolithic revolution on the human species leads to such mistaken modelling. Understanding the dynamics of the human species before and after the Neolithic revolution is like understanding the relationship between ice and water: one has come from the other and they both share fundamental constituents. However, their performances and properties are profoundly different. This paper briefly works towards articulating a correct and complete species model.*

## **Natural systems and the gene-trait link**

In natural systems, the traits of the species are linked to its genes. The genes linked to the fittest traits remain in the species gene pool while the genes linked to the least fit traits do not. Traits include physical, psychological and cultural traits.

## **Human beings in natural systems**

Human beings evolved through the same process of natural selection as animals. However, this process had a different effect on humans than it did on animals because human beings have a different relationship with God:

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 ... To a supreme degree is this true of man ... For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed ... <sup>1</sup>

### **The Neolithic revolution: the breaking of the gene-trait link**

The Neolithic revolution occurred 10,000 years ago. Human beings discovered agriculture and began to domesticate animals. During this revolution, we changed from being semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers to being settled villagers farming the land. The effect of this was that the strict gene-trait link that is required for the process of natural selection to perform was broken. Physiological, psychological and cultural traits were no longer being tested for being the fittest, as they had been previously. Human beings could perform pathologically and still survive. The species could be steeped in its own pathos (diseases or abnormalities) and the external regulating force of natural selection would no longer eliminate it:

In the days of old an instinct for warfare was developed in the struggle with wild animals; this is no longer necessary; nay, rather, co-operation and mutual understanding are seen to produce the greatest welfare of mankind. Enmity is now the result of prejudice only.<sup>2</sup>

### **Human beings outside natural systems**

Since the Neolithic revolution, civilization has progressively developed. Over this time our species has progressively come to terms with living outside the parameters which natural selection once applied to how we could and could not live. This journey has been difficult and painful. We are now at this journey's end. Civilization is finally entering into maturity as we attain the capacity to adequately, internally self-regulate:

The time foreordained unto the peoples and kindreds of the earth is now come.<sup>3</sup>

Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead.<sup>4</sup>

A new life is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth; and yet none hath discovered its cause, or perceived its motive.<sup>5</sup>

### **Spiritual development as a survival trait**

Spirituality is a trait of the human species. It is observable as psychological and cultural phenomena which are based on valuing the development of virtues like kindness, generosity, truthfulness, service, forbearance, forgiveness, etc. What role did this spirituality play during our evolution?

It is quite probable that before the Neolithic revolution, poor spiritual fitness was responded to with negative selection pressure on the individual, tribe or group of tribes that was performing relatively poorly. To explain this by exaggeration, imagine if one tribe was riddled with vices like dishonesty, crime and immorality, it would have had a much greater negative selection pressure than a tribe resplendent with virtues like patience, trustworthiness, generosity, moderation, forbearance and so on.

### **Species essence**

Our evolution is similar to that of animals in that natural selection was the governing process of both. Our evolution is different to that of animals as we have a unique ingredient which animals do not: the capacity to know of God and live in His image. This unique ingredient, the defining characteristic of our species, is essentially supernatural or metaphysical and so is independent of biological speciation:

This anatomical evolution or progression does not alter or affect the statement that the development of man was always human in type ... The human embryo when examined microscopically is at first a mere germ or worm. Gradually as it develops it shows certain divisions; rudiments of hands and feet appear ... Afterward it undergoes certain distinct changes until it reaches its actual human form and is born into this world. But at all times, even when the embryo resembled a worm, it was human in potentiality and character, not animal. The forms assumed by the human embryo in its successive changes do not prove that it is animal in its essential character ... Realising this we may acknowledge the fact that at one time man was an inmate of the sea, at another period an invertebrate, then a vertebrate

and finally a human being standing erect. Though we admit these changes, we cannot say man is an animal ... <sup>6</sup>

### **A scientific look at the human species and the Neolithic revolution**

Five million years ago, the biological species that was to evolve into human beings were tree-dwelling creatures living in a jungle. Two million years later, they foraged and scavenged for food throughout the open grasslands of African savannahs. Two million years later again, they were very successful hunter-gatherers living all over the world. 10,000 years ago our ancestors began planting crops and domesticating animals. This was the beginning of agriculture, and with it came profound changes in our species. Before we began farming, people lived together in semi-nomadic tribes. With the arrival of agriculture we began living in permanent villages. The day-to-day lives of the villagers were no longer taken up with the continuous search for food to survive. They had more time to develop other matters like art, crafts, technology and language. These early farming communities represented the very beginnings of civilization.

As civilization began to emerge, natural selection had less and less of an effect on our species. Eventually, natural selection was no longer determining how we could and could not develop psychologically and culturally. Our escape from the rigours of natural selection has had many consequences. Here are ten examples.

#### *Old Age*

Advanced old age does not occur in natural systems. It does occur in our species. So we must learn to tend to the unique needs of the elderly, and learn how to benefit from the unique gifts and experiential insights they have to offer all of us.

#### *Diet*

In natural systems, salty, fatty and sugary foods are scarce. However, these foods are of great benefit to a creature struggling to survive. Thus many animals are programmed to gorge on these kinds of foods when they become available. This genetic programming is also found in human beings. Eating salty, fatty or



sugary foods makes us feel good as chemicals are released in our brains. This encourages us to consume more of these foods than we need. While our species was governed by natural selection, over-consumption of these foods when they became available helped us to survive. These types of food were scarce and so their consumption was naturally regulated in our diet. Now, we must regulate the amount of salt, fat and sugar in our diets ourselves or suffer consequences such as obesity and tooth decay, to which a poor or unbalanced diet undoubtedly contribute.

### *Physical Fitness*

Natural selection evolves creatures to be physically fit in their environment. Now, the onus is on us to develop lifestyles and environments which encourage fitness.

### *Sexuality*

Human sexuality used to be an integral part of the workings of natural selection in our species. As this is no longer the case, we need to relate to and integrate our sexuality in a new way.

### *Physiological Disease*

In natural systems, disease has a very important role to play. As a device of natural selection, disease removes the weakest members of the species. Physiological disease used to perform this important function in our species. However, natural selection no longer applies to our species in this way, so there is no need for physiological diseases to occur in it. Thus we must endeavour to live in a manner where the occurrence of disease is minimal.

These various new challenges which face us can overlap. For example, the species' new relationship to sexuality and physiological disease together play a part in the way sexually transmitted diseases occur.

### *Starvation*

The phenomenon of starvation is a necessary part of natural systems. It is a part of the natural world and has a place in it. Starvation is the effective result of there being a limited food supply. In order for a natural system to work, the presence of a limited food supply is vital.

However, the starvation which has occurred in the human species since the Neolithic revolution 10,000 years ago amounts to sheer pathology.

#### *Environment*

Another example is the relationship of the human species to its environment. When the process of natural selection governed the human species, physiological, psychological and cultural fitness were paramount. Efficiency and recycling were therefore essential elements of human lifestyle. However, now we must learn to regulate our relationship with our environment ourselves, or suffer consequences like litter and pollution.

#### *Genetic deterioration of the gene pool of the human species*

Genes that are a contributing factor to the occurrence of an illness or that actually cause illness are permitted to remain in our gene pool as their carriers stay alive and propagate. Unless the illness directly affects sexual ability, chances are the carrier will have as many offspring as someone not carrying the offending gene. Examples of illnesses in which genetic make-up can be a factor are heart disease, cancer, schizophrenia and panic attacks. Dealing with our deteriorating gene pool requires minimising non-genetic factors which contribute to the occurrence of these illnesses such as smoking, poor diet, dysfunction and pollution. It also requires limiting the symptoms of gene-related illnesses by tending to them as best we can.

#### *Population*

Natural selection used to regulate the population densities occurring in the human species. Now the species must learn to do this for itself or suffer consequences such as chronic traffic congestion, to which population density is a contributing factor.

#### *Self-destructiveness*

Prior to civilization, natural selection tested all of the attributes of our species for fitness and facilitated the human species to evolve accordingly. Natural selection had been able to test our physiological, psychological and cultural fitness. Without this strong and strict guiding force, our species was free to develop in new ways. Unfortunately, we have become self-destructive in

many ways, for example, in wars and in a multiplicity of mental illnesses.

The human species is in an extremely difficult period of transition. Its development is no longer ultimately governed and facilitated by natural selection. However, it has yet to learn how to adequately govern or facilitate itself. In the words of Bahá'u'lláh:

Consider the pettiness of men's minds. They ask for that which injureth them, and cast away the thing that profiteth them. They are, indeed, of those that are far astray. We find some men desiring liberty, and priding themselves therein. Such men are in the depths of ignorance.

Liberty must, in the end, lead to sedition, whose flames none can quench. Thus warneth you He Who is the Reckoner, the All-Knowing. Know ye that the embodiment of liberty and its symbol is the animal. That which beseemeth man is submission unto such restraints as will protect him from his own ignorance, and guard him against the harm of the mischief-maker. Liberty causeth man to overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his station. It debaseth him to the level of extreme depravity and wickedness.

Regard men as a flock of sheep that need a shepherd for their protection. This, verily, is the truth, the certain truth ...<sup>7</sup>

### **Natural systems**

Natural selection is a process whereby the traits that provide the best survival advantage, i.e. fitness, are propagated in the species. Thus, species evolve. To explain how this happens I will use the example of a herd of zebras in an African savanna.

The herd roams the grasslands of the savanna in search of fresh pasture for grazing. From time to time, a male and female zebra will mate and have offspring. Each newborn foal has some genetic mutations. These mutations give rise to new traits in the species. With each generation of zebra, many thousands of new mutations occur in the species. As the herd roams the grassland, the zebras have to overcome many adversities in order to stay alive. Predators, such as lions, are constantly watching the herd

looking for the zebra that they can take down most easily. Each zebra must also be strong enough to overcome any physiological disease it may catch. These diseases often occur only in zebras that are already run-down. The zebras also have to contend with a limited food supply.

In order to talk more easily about natural systems, I will apply some terms to the various events that happen in them. When a male and female zebra choose to mate with each other, this is called sexual selection. The various adversities, such as predators and disease, which test the zebras for fitness are mechanisms of natural selection. Sexual selection is also a mechanism of natural selection. It is through these mechanisms that the traits of the species are linked to the genes of the species.

In order for natural selection to perform, this gene-trait link is vital. In natural systems, the gene-trait link is present for physiological, psychological and cultural traits. A physiological trait of a zebra is its black and white stripes. A psychological trait is its ability to be aware of the presence of a lion nearby. A cultural trait is the bond between a foal and its mother. Another cultural trait is the way the animals of the herd stay close together in order to better protect themselves from predators.

Understanding the relationship of natural selection and health is vital to understanding our species. Natural selection evolves animals to be physically fit. In order for an animal to be physically fit, it first must be physically healthy. Thus animals evolved through natural selection are designed, in their genetically proposed form, to be physically healthy. In the same way, natural selection evolves animals to be psychologically healthy. Natural selection also tests animals' collective cultural performance, and therefore also evolves cultural performance to be healthy. Thus we can say that the human species has been evolved to be physically, psychologically and cultural healthy.

### **What we have been evolved to do**

While the development of our species was being facilitated by the governing force and principles of natural selection, we dynamically developed lifestyles and ways of living together which were fit for the situation and surroundings in which we

found ourselves. We were so successful at this that we survived in various habitats all over the planet.

It is our nature to develop our fitness individually, collectively and as a species. It is also our nature to develop our health and well-being as they are prerequisites for our fitness.

### **Life after natural selection**

The occurrence of agriculture in our species changed human beings remarkably. We were no longer semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers. Instead, we were settled villagers farming the land. Our new lifestyles prevented the mechanisms of natural selection from doing their job. The strict gene-trait link was broken. Natural selection was no longer able to test our traits for fitness as it had before.

The invention of farming 10,000 years ago brought many advantages. For example, people no longer had to worry about where their next meal would come from. Our species no longer had a limited food supply, as all species governed by natural selection are required to have: we had an abundant food supply. A sign of this is the exponential population growth which has occurred in our species. The species population has grown from approximately 3,000,000 people 10,000 years ago to over 6,000,000,000 today. Another benefit of farming was that people lived together in larger numbers and had more time to devote to developing things like language, technology and the arts.

### **Hygiene and warfare**

Our new lifestyles brought many new threats to our species. The village lifestyle which accompanied agriculture meant that many new diseases flourished among the people of the time. These diseases were no longer the workings of natural selection: they were just something harmful happening to the species. Farming meant that some people had to do tedious and back-breaking work they had not been evolved to do. The crops and animals had to be protected. Villagers had to fight to protect the possession of their crops and animals. The hurt, physical damage and distrust this fighting engendered was just more needless pain, occurring because we had not adjusted to living beyond the bounds of natural selection.

## **Feedback loops in our species**

In this way, our species began performing self-destructively. People responded to these new hostilities in a way that caused even more harm. Thus our self-destructiveness began feeding on itself: hostility and harm became the origin of hostility and harm. This feedback loop of self-destructiveness has been a part of our species for some 10,000 years. It generates wars, famines, murders, suicides, mental illnesses, pollution, economic crises and lots more and is profoundly complex.

There are different types of feedback loops. One is a reinforcing feedback loop. This is when the more something occurs, the more it tends to occur - for example, the retaliatory paramilitary violence occurring between nationalists and loyalists during the troubles in the Northern Ireland. Essentially, 'violence breeds violence.'

Another type of feedback loop is a balancing feedback loop. This is when the more something occurs, the more things which inhibit it will occur. An example of this is imprisonment. The more crime there is, the more people will be put in jail and so less crime will tend to occur.

The reinforcing feedback loop of self-destructiveness occurring in our species has the potential to destroy all of us. It does not fulfil this potential because the balancing feedback loop occurs in response to it. The balancing feedback loop puts a limit on how much damage the reinforcing feedback loop can do.

However, the balancing feedback loop does not remove the reinforcing feedback loop or its cause. In fact, the balancing feedback loop can itself cause harm. An example of this is imprisonment. Imprisoning people justly does limit the amount of crime occurring, but the act of imprisoning someone is or can be harmful to that person. Of this 'Abdu'l-Bahá observed in one of His table talks:

... communities are day and night occupied in making penal laws, and in preparing and organizing instruments and means of punishment. They build prisons, make chains and fetters, arrange places of exile and banishment, and different kinds of hardships and tortures, and think by these means to

discipline criminals, whereas, in reality, they are causing destruction of morals and perversion of characters. The community, on the contrary, ought day and night to strive and endeavor with the utmost zeal and effort to accomplish the education of men, to cause them day by day to progress and to increase in science and knowledge, to acquire virtues, to gain good morals and to avoid vices, so that crimes may not occur. At the present time the contrary prevails; the community is always thinking of enforcing the penal laws, and of preparing means of punishment, instruments of death and chastisement, places for imprisonment and banishment; and they expect crimes to be committed. This has a demoralizing effect.

But if the community would endeavor to educate the masses, day by day knowledge and sciences would increase, the understanding would be broadened, the sensibilities developed, customs would become good, and morals normal; in one word, in all these classes of perfections there would be progress, and there would be fewer crimes ...

Therefore, the communities must think of preventing crimes, rather than of rigorously punishing them.<sup>8</sup>

Ironically, the harm caused by the balancing feedback loop can feed the reinforcing feedback loop.

## **Conclusion**

Before the Neolithic revolution, there was an immense external pressure (natural selection) on us to attain maturity. After the Neolithic revolution, this pressure was no longer present and in its absence we fail to mature.

In our time this pressure is returning: pollution, genetic engineering, unguarded multinational corporations, the refinement of devices of war and terrorism, the rapid spread of physiological disease and so on. It is now internal. We must, as a species, mature or else face extinction. In his letter, *The Unfoldment of Civilization* (1936), Shoghi Effendi observed:

The recrudescence of religious intolerance, of racial animosity, and of patriotic arrogance; the increasing evidences of selfishness, of suspicion, of fear and of fraud; the spread of terrorism, of lawlessness, of drunkenness and of crime; the unquenchable thirst for, and the feverish pursuit after, earthly vanities, riches and pleasures; the weakening of family solidarity; the laxity in parental control; the lapse into luxurious indulgence; the irresponsible attitude towards marriage and the consequent rising tide of divorce; the degeneracy of art and music, the infection of literature, and the corruption of the press; the extension of the influence and activities of those 'prophets of decadence' who advocate companionate marriage, who preach the philosophy of nudism, who call modesty an intellectual fiction, who refuse to regard the procreation of children as the sacred and primary purpose of marriage, who denounce religion as an opiate of the people, who would, if given free rein, lead back the human race to barbarism, chaos, and ultimate extinction - these appear as the outstanding characteristics of a decadent society, a society that must either be reborn or perish.<sup>9</sup>

Likewise the Universal House of Justice pointed out in *The Promise of World Peace* (1985):

The human race, as a distinct, organic unit, has passed through evolutionary stages analogous to the stages of infancy and childhood in the lives of its individual members, and is now in the culminating period of its turbulent adolescence approaching its long-awaited coming of age.<sup>10</sup>

The process of global integration, already a reality in the realms of business, finance, and communications, is beginning to materialize in the political arena.

Historically, this process has been accelerated by sudden and catastrophic events. It was the devastation of World Wars I and II that gave birth to the League of Nations and the United Nations, respectively. Whether future



accomplishments are also to be reached after similarly unimaginable horrors or embraced through an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth. Failure to take decisive action would be unconscionably irresponsible.

To mature, the change must be both systemic and atomic. 'Systemic' means that changes will have to be made to all aspects of human life: political, cultural, artistic, economic, etc.; 'atomic' means that the smallest unit of the global society will have to change: '... peace,' 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to one believer, 'must first be established among individuals, until it leadeth in the end to peace among nations ...'<sup>11</sup>

As delineated in the Bahá'í Writings, the maturity of the human race is most likely to be represented by its diverse members consciously achieving and sustaining a balance between individual spiritual success (the atomic level) and collective or social progress (the systemic level). Thus will be erected, in the words of the Universal House of Justice, 'a social system at once progressive and peaceful, dynamic and harmonious, a system giving free play to individual creativity and initiative but based on co-operation and reciprocity.'<sup>12</sup>

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# Adventures in Biographical Research: John and William Cormick by Vincent Flannery

## Abstract

*Dr William Cormick, as far as is known, was the only person from a European background to have personally met with the Báb. This paper attempts to bring together details of his life from various sources.*

## Setting Out

On the borders of County Kilkenny and Tipperary in south-east Ireland, at the ancient Ahenny monastery, in the north and south of the site, stand two ringed High Crosses, symbols of that great age of the island's history when Irishmen travelled far and wide. The crosses are considered to be the first of their kind, dating to the Ninth Century. Although uniquely Irish, their visual references draw from other cultures: elaborately carved geometric strapwork ornament thought to have originated in Coptic Ethiopia as well as figurative ornament in scenes that include the Garden of Eden, which recent convincing research suggests to have been located in north-west Iran and specifically in Tabríz.<sup>1</sup> A special feature of the North Cross is its unusual large conical capstone.

A curious local tale tells of a third, West Cross, which is said to have been transported eastwards. As the story goes, it never reached its destination as the ship sank early on in its voyage from Waterford harbour. It is said this happened some 200 years ago. Perhaps to be dismissed as just a local story, it is interesting none the less to note that in 1800, a local man named John Cormick (of Cussane, Tullaghought, County Kilkenny, a few miles from Ahenny) did indeed go East, specifically to Madras, India as a surgeon to Sir John Malcolm's expedition to Persia and then via Bushire to Tabríz in 1810. We do not have a date for the birth of John Cormick, but we do know that he studied medicine in London. At that time it would not have been uncommon for a man of twenty to have completed his education, as will be seen from accounts of the life of his son, William.

It was my luck in June 2000 to come across a reference to John Cormick in an index for *The Old Kilkenny Review*, published by the Kilkenny Archaeological Society in 1996, by simply entering a search on the Internet using the terms 'Cormick, Tabríz;' I was

luckier still to obtain the last copy for sale and excited to find therein a photograph of William Cormick. In the

*Review*, the author's name, Mr John Landy, and his Galway address were listed. Later, in some nervousness, I telephoned him, stating my interest and conscious of the value of any information he may or not wish to share. I need not have worried; the Australian accent on the phone communicated warmth and an immediate invitation to visit. I went to see him two hours later and was treated with informal and polite friendliness by his wife and himself. At the time I arrived we sat together to watch the end of a television programme about a refugee to Ireland, a black artist and her work. With such interests, I knew then that



I was in the right place.

The home was filled with Mrs Landy's charming paintings and many books, and in a back room, used as a study where he spends much of his retirement hours, Mr Landy kindly began to share with me the fruits of his own research. Being a distant relative of John and William Cormick, he explained that his great grandfather (also John Landy) was a first cousin of William's, and that members of his own branch of the family had moved to Australia, whence he himself had returned to retire in Ireland. The Cormick family came originally from County Kilkenny, where they held land and property at Cussane, Tullaghought in the south-west of that county, near Ahenny and Carrick-on-Suir in County Tipperary. (The Landy family name comes from the Norman *de la Launde*.) Six Landy brothers had leases from the Ormonde estate. Ten sisters and three brothers emigrated to Australia in the 1800s. Mr Landy had heard from a Cormick relative that there were members of the family who had been in Persia. Although little attention was paid to this by others in the family, his father's aunt, Bessie Cormick, encouraged him. He

therefore decided to do some research and managed to trace photographs of both William and his Armenian wife, Tamar, and had corresponded extensively with authors of books and British record offices. Authors included Anthony Parsons, Ann K. S. Lambton, Moojan Momen and Denis Wright.

He encouraged me greatly and generously shared all of his information, including his copy of William's photograph, which I consequently scanned and edited. He told me that the photograph was 'amongst the effects of a late cousin of William's.' The photograph of Tamar, William's wife, he told me had been mislaid. With his directions and encouragement, I travelled to Tullaghought and took photographs of what I saw.

The remains of the Cormick home-place are still to be seen near Tullaghought. A visit there banished ideas of a grand residence, expected perhaps with some knowledge of the distinguished histories of some of the family. Accessed from the road by a lane-way bordered by dry limestone walls, one approaches a square pillared gateway, the entrance to a central courtyard with long outbuildings arranged around. Enough does remain, however, to imagine the place as it once was, with fine country stonework and some ancient shrubbery. Specific directions had been given by a neighbour who lived in a smaller, but similarly structured holding. The original Cormick dwelling house no longer stands, although its position is clearly seen by its remains. Tall oaks stand in the surrounding hedged fields, perhaps once witnesses to the lives of generations of this family with their remarkable story. I left in another direction through stubble fields and by a lane-way dotted with fallen crab apples in the sunset of one atmospheric All Souls' Eve. In timeless countryside and in the absence of the signs and intrusions of the Twenty-First Century, it wasn't difficult to imagine what it might have been like for a young man to be leaving his home, seemingly forever. Did William wonder about where his steps might be leading him and about the destiny awaiting him that would be talked and written about two hundred years later and beyond?

### **John Cormick**

At exactly what age John Cormick left Ireland we don't at present know. We do know, however, that he was to study in England and

qualify as a doctor at the Royal College of Surgeons in London in 1800. That a young Irish Catholic from a farming background should find himself so well-placed for a future career may appear at first surprising, but it seems that, from my talks with Mr Landy, the family was well established with their Protestant neighbours. In the area there was notable co-operation and even adoption of Irish culture by the English ascendancy, some perhaps Catholic and well-established in the area since Norman times. Also, other notable Irish families from the region had managed to maintain their Catholicism, perhaps because they served in British Government agencies and forces, including the Sheil and Ryan families of Waterford and Tipperary.

And so John Cormick went, after qualifying in London, to Madras, India, first as an Assistant Surgeon in 1800 and then as a Surgeon in 1807 with a British expeditionary force. He left India on 10 January 1810 with the ship *Psyche* to Bushire, with Major General John Malcolm on his second mission to Persia, and from there to Tabríz, where he was subsequently employed by the East India Company and attached to the army and household of the Crown Prince 'Abbás Mírzá,<sup>2</sup> who was a relatively enlightened member of the Shah's family, progressive in his thinking. John was married to an Armenian Christian woman in 1812. Henry Martyn, a Protestant minister, officiated. The name earliest associated with Protestant missions in Persia is that of Henry Martyn, who came from India to Shíráz in 1811.<sup>3</sup> Later the Russians objected to the British influence and when British connections to the court were severed in 1815, John remained in Tabríz. In 1820 a son, William, was born.

John found increasing favour with the Crown Prince, who encouraged Western medicine, and he was appointed his chief physician. He held this position alongside John McNeill after 1821 and became wealthy. (McNeill was appointed British envoy to the Shah in August 1836, and later Justin Sheil of Bellevue, Waterford in 1842.) Although considered by some to be a British spy, reporting regularly to the British representative at the Shah's court in Tehran, he nevertheless was dedicated as a doctor and companion to 'Abbás Mírzá, and to his profession. He had a treatise on smallpox translated into Persian in one of the first books printed in Persia.<sup>4</sup> He was twice decorated with the Order of

the Lion and the Sun, necessitating permission from King George IV of England, second class in August 1825 and first class in 1828. Armenians living in the border areas of north-western Persia suffered greatly, and due to concerned British intervention, a treaty was arranged for their well-being. The Armenian population in the region was placed under the care of John Cormick in 1830. When Cormick accompanied 'Abbás Mírzá to Khurasan in 1833, he contracted typhus and died in Mayamey. His body was buried in the Armenian cemetery in Tabríz, where there are now eleven Cormick graves.

### **William Cormick**

John's son, William, was to follow in his father's footsteps in a number of ways. William was born in Tabríz in 1820, eight years after his parents had married. We know he had at least one sibling, a brother.<sup>5</sup> At the age of ten he was 'sent by his father to study medicine'<sup>6</sup> in England. We have no details of where he was educated, the one reference to study medicine being highly unlikely at that age. So, did he travel further to attend school in Ireland? Were there relatives in London? At a later date, an address is given for him in London at 217 Albany Street, Regents Park. When he was 13, while so far away from his home, William's father died in Persia. One wonders how his mother would have fared in Tabríz in the years after her husband's death. British responsibility for the protection of Armenians lapsed after 1833 after John's death, and resumed only temporarily in 1838 when there was again a rupture in English-Persian relationships, after which the role that doctors could play 'as a medium of confidential intercourse between the Mission and the Shah' was lost in favour of the French. In this context, it is interesting to see that later the Persians complained that Justin Sheil, also of County Kilkenny and envoy to the Shah since 1842, had made the Mission 'a sanctuary ... a refuge for discontented persons.'

Wherever William had his secondary education, the next record is of his having qualified at age 20 in July 1840 at University College London (MRCS) 1841 (LSA) and later (MD) at St Andrew's (1841). He practised medicine in London and Paris and returned to Persia in 1844 and was appointed second physician to the British Mission in Tehran. One writer states that William was summoned

back by the Shah. In 1846, like his father before him, he was 'seconded as physician to the family of 'Abbás Mírzá, and later to the crown prince Názer-al-Dín Mírzá. When Názer-al-Dín Mírzá was appointed Governor of Azerbaijan, William accompanied him to Tabríz as his personal physician on 15 March 1847. At this time, to William, his future career must have seemed assured, being not yet thirty years of age, well-placed with the British agencies, doctor to the future Shah. He had also returned to his family and place of birth. But changes were to come.

### **Dr William Cormick and the Báb**

By the year 1848, momentous events were unfolding in Europe, in Persia and in the very heart of human existence, the import of which could not then have been outwardly perceived by William, although he was better placed than most to be aware at least of the surface appearance of events. Neither could he realise that he would be chosen, invited even, to a series of encounters that would assure the perpetuation of his name through future centuries. Hints there were, some of which he must have been aware of. On 1 and 19 November 1845, *The Times* of London published the first-known printed references to a new religious movement in Persia, concerning the arrest and torture of four of its followers, including one Quddús, which had taken place in Shíráz the previous June.

At the very time William was moving from Tehran to Tabríz, in March 1847, a Prisoner, the Founder of this new movement was, under the Shah's instructions, being escorted from Shíráz to meet him in Tehran. The Prisoner, the Báb, had so convinced His captor, Manuchír Khan, Governor-General of Isfáhán, of the truth of His mission being the fulfilment of prophecies of Islám, that the governor was moved to offer to Him all of his vast possessions in order to also convince the Shah. The Báb had declined this offer. Fearful of the effect the Báb would have on the Shah, the Prime Minister diverted the route of the Prisoner towards the prison-fortress of Máh-Kú, skirting Tehran and on towards Tabríz, where He arrived in May or June, just weeks after Cormick's own return there. What news might have spread throughout Tabríz about this Prisoner, whose guards and their chief had become so enthralled by Him that they implored His blessings and begged His forgiveness and pardon, as they handed Him over to the officials

of Názér-al-Dín Mírzá, to be imprisoned for 40 days in the citadel of Tabríz, called the Ark?

A tumultuous concourse of people had gathered to witness His entry into the city ... desirous of ascertaining the veracity of the wild reports that were current about Him ... the acclamations of the multitude resounded on every side ... Such was the clamour that a crier was ordered to warn the population of the danger that awaited those who ventured to seek His presence.<sup>7</sup>

How could Dr Cormick not have heard this and been aware of the Báb's presence nearby, even if restrictions were such that only two people were subsequently allowed to visit Him?

Indeed, change was in the air, and not just in Persia. Throughout Europe, revolution after revolution was shaking established governments to the extent that the following year, 1848, became known as 'the Year of Revolutions.' In Ireland, since 1845, famine was ravaging the land through death and emigration. Although on the periphery of Europe, the *zeitgeist* could not be resisted even there. Only a few miles from William's father's birthplace, in Carrick-on-Suir, County Waterford in the last week of July 1848, crowds were gathering:

... a torrent of human beings, rushing through lanes and narrow streets, whirling in dizzy circles and tossing up its dark waves ... wild half-stifled, passionate, frantic, prayers of hope, ... scornful exulting defiance of death. It was the revolution, if we had accepted it.<sup>8</sup>

This same week in Tabríz, crowds, too, were gathering again - one year since the Báb had been taken to be imprisoned in a more remote outpost:

The tales of the signs and wonders which the Báb's unnumbered admirers had witnessed were soon transmitted from mouth to mouth, and gave rise to a wave of unprecedented enthusiasm which spread with bewildering rapidity over the entire country.<sup>9</sup>



Tabríz, in particular, was in the throes of this 'wildcat excitement':

The news of the impending arrival of the Báb had inflamed the imagination of its inhabitants and had kindled the fiercest animosity in the hearts of the ecclesiastical leaders of Adhirbayjan ... Such was the fervour of popular enthusiasm which that news had evoked that the authorities decided to house the Báb in a place outside the gates of the city. Only those whom He desired to meet were allowed the privilege of approaching Him ... <sup>10</sup>

The Báb had returned to Tabríz. A tribunal was gathered for a trial, of which the Báb took control, embarrassed the clergy, and made a formal declaration of His mission. Presiding was the young Crown Prince and alongside him, his tutor. In the course of the trial, seemingly, reluctance on the part of a number of the participants to endorse a death sentence caused Dr Cormick and two Persian physicians to be called to carry out an examination on the Prisoner to certify as to His state of mind. Years later, Dr Cormick's memories of the event were to be gathered and compiled.<sup>11</sup>

You ask me for some particulars of my interview with the founder of the sect known as Bábís. Nothing of any importance transpired in this interview, as the Báb was aware of my having been sent with two other Persian doctors to see whether he was of sane mind or merely a madman, to decide the question whether to put him to death or not. With this knowledge he was loth to answer any questions put to him. To all enquiries he merely regarded us with a mild look, chanting in a low melodious voice some hymns, I suppose. Two other *Sayyids*, his intimate friends, were also present, who subsequently were put to death with him, besides a couple of government officials. He only once deigned to answer me, on my saying that I was not a Musulmán [Muslim] and was willing to know something about his religion, as I might perhaps be inclined to adopt it. He regarded me very intently on my saying this, and replied that he had no doubt of all Europeans coming over to his

religion. Our report to the Sháh at that time was of a nature to spare his life. He was put to death some time after by the order of the Amír-i-Nizám Mírzá Taqí Khán.

On our report he merely got the bastinado, in which operation a *farrásh*, whether intentionally or not, struck him across the face with the stick destined for his feet, which produced a great wound and swelling of the face.

On being asked whether a Persian surgeon should be brought to treat him, he expressed a desire that I should be sent for, and I accordingly treated him for a few days, but in the interviews consequent on this I could never get him to have a confidential chat with me, as some Government people were always present, he being a prisoner.

He was very thankful for my attentions to him. He was a very mild and delicate-looking man, rather small in stature and very fair for a Persian, with a melodious soft voice, which struck me much. Being a *Sayyid*, he was dressed in the habits of that sect, as were also his two companions. In fact his whole look and deportment went far to dispose one in his favour. Of his doctrine I heard nothing from his own lips, although the idea was that there existed in his religion a certain approach to Christianity. He was seen by some Armenian carpenters, who were sent to make some repairs in his prison, reading the Bible, and he took no pains to conceal it, but on the contrary told them of it. Most assuredly the Musulmán fanaticism does not exist in his religion, as applied to Christians, nor is there that restraint of females that now exists.

It is very interesting to study carefully this unique record, for it goes some way in revealing the effect that this meeting had on Dr Cormick, and something of his own character. For example, it opens with the words, 'nothing of importance transpired,' yet we also have strong expressions such as 'with a melodious soft voice, which struck me much' and 'In fact his whole look and deportment went far to dispose one in his favour.' Did Cormick really believe the Báb was not sane? Despite his report (note 'at that time'), there is nothing to be seen here that would have us

accept that the doctor really believed this. Unless there was a prior arrangement to have this result, then we could conclude that the doctors themselves wished to save the Báb. Other aspects are also interesting, especially the fact that the Báb requested that William should attend Him, which he did, and on a number of occasions. We have seen above 'Only those whom he desired to meet were allowed the privilege of approaching Him.' What are we to make of this? The Báb was far beyond requiring favours of anyone, as is obvious from declined offers to escape or save his own life. We see also Dr Cormick's desire to have a confidential conversation with the Báb, this after the need for a psychological assessment had passed. The attention to religious aspects in the record is also interesting and it appears, if we regard his opening question about considering adopting the new faith as a means to have the Báb respond at that stage, William was keen to find out more and was apparently impressed by what he heard. He gives us some details: lack of fanaticism (a very interesting judgement, considering the official report), toleration of other religions, and the freedom of women. In this respect, perhaps, news was current in Tabríz that just a few weeks earlier, sometime in the first two weeks of July, the leading female follower of the new faith, the beautiful poet, Táhirih, had removed her veil, dramatically announcing the birth of a new Divine cycle, the break with Islam and also symbolically declared the emancipation of women. (It is interesting to note that thousands of miles away, on 20 July in North America at Seneca Falls, a formal declaration of the rights of women was also heard.<sup>12</sup>) The information that the Báb was wounded in the face, as well as being bastinadoed, does not seem to be recorded elsewhere. It should be noted that some of the information is not first-hand, some of it being reported by 'Armenian carpenters.'

Was William present as the Báb revealed His sacred Scripture? His account is that he heard the Báb chanting. In Lady Sheil's later brief account of the Báb, attributed as information to her from Dr Cormick, he also witnessed how the Báb 'wrote rapidly and well.' Only one other Westerner, Mochenin, a Russian student, is recorded as having been present to observe, from a distance, as the Báb taught His doctrine to a huge crowd who listened to 'the new *Qur'án*' at Chihríq.<sup>13</sup>

William's life was to take a different course than what he may have expected, and at the hands of one who was to be instrumental in making fateful decisions regarding the life of the Báb. Just two months after Dr Cormick's meeting with the Báb, in September 1848, Muhammad Shah died. On his death and the 17-year-old Crown Prince's accession to the throne, William went with him to Tehran. Mírzá Taqi Khan, the Prime Minister, opposed this, not wanting to be dependent on either Britain or Russia, and so Dr Cormick was replaced by a French physician, Dr Cloquet. William returned to Tabríz, his life in public service seemingly ended. At 28 years of age, he opened an apothecary shop, practised medicine, and was later to serve as a physician to the late 'Abbás Mírzá's family and become wealthy. Two years later, in May 1850, Tabríz was yet again in upheaval:

That day witnessed a tremendous commotion in the city of Tabríz. The great convulsion associated in the ideas of its inhabitants with the day of judgement seemed at last to have come upon them. Never had that city experienced a turmoil so fierce on the day the Báb was led to that place which was to be the scene of His martyrdom.<sup>14</sup>

Mírzá Taqih Khan, the Prime Minister, was shaken by events that had involved the astoundingly successful self-defence of a few of his Prisoner's followers against the might of his armed forces. Alarmed at the rapidly increasing emergence of more and more adherents to the new faith all over Persia, despite strong advice to the contrary, he demanded the immediate execution of the Báb. Forty of the Christian Armenian soldiers of Tabríz were appointed to guard Him. The subsequent execution of the Báb was accompanied by such disturbing events as to affect even the physical atmosphere of that city. An Armenian regiment under Sam Khan, assigned to carry out the deed, dramatically, and despite risk to their own lives, had refused to proceed. One wonders on the reports coming to William, and their effect on him, considering his personal encounter with the Báb, just a short time previously. How much might he have actually witnessed?

There were a number of Irish people in Tabríz at some stage in these momentous years: Sir Justin Sheil of Waterford, his wife

Lady Mary (*née* Woulfe) and their three children, who had with them three Irish servants (recorded as having worshipped at an Armenian service), a young man, Art McMurrough Kavanagh, of Borris House, Carlow, who later became an MP, with his older brother, Charles, and their tutor, Rev. David Wood. Of these eleven people, there is no clear record of their having actually met William, but it would be surprising had they not.

Not long afterwards, Burgess reports, in 1851, that William is married to Tamar, an Armenian, 'one of the most beautiful girls in the country,' in fact, a sister of Edward Burgess's own wife, Anna. He has an income of £1,000 per annum and is thinking of going to London for the Great Exhibition in 1853. He says that William wants to pursue medical study - 'his passion' - for one or two years in London, even though this would reduce his income to £200 per annum. Burgess, of a famous British merchant family, had long lived in Tabríz, but had become virtually trapped in Persia, deciding to honour his older brother Charles's debts to the government rather than leave. Having finally obtained permission to visit England in 1855, he sadly died en route. He was survived by his wife and daughter, Fanny, who at least once visited England, staying with Edward's father in London. With such close family ties with William, their history is worth considering.

In August 1857 there were unsuccessful attempts by the deputy-governor to dispossess William of his property in Tabríz. This does not seem particularly aimed against him, but was consistent with levels of injustice that prevailed at the time. In the summer of 1861, he was in Salma in the company of a friend. Just past forty, he was very near Chihríq where the Báb had, only a few years previously, been imprisoned. Concerning the nature of creative inspiration, the Báb had looked towards Salma from His mountain-prison in Máh-Kú and had quoted Hafiz:

He gazed towards the west and, as He saw the Araxes winding its course far away below Him, turned to Mullá Husayn and said: 'That is the river, and this is the bank thereof, of which the poet Hafiz has thus written: 'O zephyr, shouldst thou pass by the banks of the Araxes, implant a kiss on the earth of that valley and make fragrant thy breath. Hail, a thousand times hail, to thee, O abode of Salma! How

dear is the voice of thy camel-drivers, how sweet the jingling of thy bells!' Continuing His remarks, the Báb said: 'It is the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit that causes words such as these to stream from the tongue of poets, the significance of which they themselves are oftentimes unable to apprehend.' The Báb subsequently quoted this well-known tradition: 'Treasures lie hidden beneath the throne of God; the key to those treasures is the tongue of poets.'<sup>15</sup>

Now in his private life, William was not to forget his interview with the Báb. W.A. Shedd, from a family of American missionaries, writing to *The Moslem World* in August 1914, says:

I found the following memorandum among the papers of my father, the Rev. J. H. Shedd D.D. The record was made sometime between 1860 and 1870, perhaps in 1861, when Dr Cormick spent the summer or part of it in Salma, where my father was then stationed, and, they saw a good deal of each other. Dr Cormick was an English physician, who for a number of years lived in Tabríz, having there a large medical practice and being much esteemed. The events referred to took place in Tabríz some time before the execution of the Báb in July, 1850, probably at the time of his first examination in Tabríz. Probably no other European had an interview with the Báb and certainly no other record of such an interview is extant.<sup>16</sup>

This account of the origin of Dr Cormick's descriptions of the event is a little confusing. On 1 March 1911, Dr Shedd had previously written to Edward Granville Browne. Heading the interview account, Prof. Browne writes that they are 'Dr Cormick's accounts of his personal impressions of Mírzá 'Alí-Muhammad the Báb, extracted from letters written by him to the Rev. Benjamin Labaree, dd.' So, did Dr Cormick give the account directly to John Shedd or to him through Rev. Labaree? Whatever the case, compassion in this circle towards the Báb is revealed by W. Shedd writing about the 'period of his imprisonment and suffering.'<sup>17</sup> Esteem for Dr Cormick is shown too by the description of 'a cultivated and impartial Western mind.'<sup>18</sup>

In October 1875, like his father, William receives the Order of the Lion and the Sun. On 19 October 1876 he becomes a fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons, and continues to promote Western medicine. His photograph must have been taken around this time; it shows two decorations, but we have records of only one.<sup>19</sup>

On 30 December 1877, almost 57 years of age, William Cormick died. He was the last to be buried in the Armenian Cemetery in Tabríz, where there are eleven other Cormick graves, including those of his father and brother. Of his children, there is but one account: of a son who was in Iran until the last decades of the Nineteenth Century and who returned to England.<sup>20</sup>

At present there are no available records of contact between any English members of the family and the Australian and Irish relatives for these later years. Mr Landy provides an invaluable link in this most interesting history. Once on a visit to his home, I brought the postage stamp and the Haifa Municipality brochure of the gardens surrounding the Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel. Mr Landy appeared pleasantly surprised as he examined them and my impression was that he realised then more clearly the importance of his family's history.

### **Endnotes**

1. About David Rohl's Eden discoveries:

<http://www.biblicalheritage.org/Archaeology/eden.htm>

2. In the early Nineteenth Century, 'Abbás Mírzá had stood among the ruins of the Iranian army on the Russian front. Suffering the disgrace of his country, he saw in retreating soldiers and captured armaments Qajar Iran's backwardness and impotence. When he returned from war, he began to agitate within the court for reform of the monarchy and the nation. Tragically dying before his father, 'Abbás Mírzá left his vision to the few enlightened minds within the palace.

<http://bahai-library.org/excerpts/mackey.html>

3. Martyn was in Shíráz only about ten months but toiling amid heat and dust in weakness of body and with many enemies about him, he completed his Persian translation of the Psalms, begun in India. A few months later he died alone at Tokat in Turkey on his way home.

4. Fath 'Alí Shah's Crown Prince and Governor of Tabríz, 'Abbás Mírzá, is a quintessential example of this trend towards the espousal of European preventive health practices. Having been cured of a venereal complaint, the Prince embraced the recommendations of his English physician, Dr James Campbell, and agreed to have his family vaccinated against smallpox. Furthermore, he requested the permanent appointment of a British physician to his service and undertook the sponsorship of Mírzá Bába Afshar's medical studies in London and Oxford in 1818.

It was 'Abbás Mírzá's recognition of the significant life-saving value of the smallpox vaccination, together with his quest to preserve the health of his *Nizam i Jadid* [new army], that led to the first steps in spreading the knowledge of the Jennerian method of vaccination among Iranian physicians.

Accordingly, Dr John Cormick, who had succeeded Dr Jukes as 'Abbás Mírzá's personal physician, composed a treatise on vaccination at the Crown Prince's request so as to promote this practice. The tract, entitled *Risalah i abi-lah-kubi*, was translated by Mohammad 'Ibn-i 'Abd al-Sabur, and when published in 1829 was among the first works to be printed in the newly established printing press in Tabríz.

5. Comprehensive summary of life of William: Moojan Momen, <http://www.iranica.com/articlenavigation/index.html>.

6. Burgess *Letters from Persia* p. 112.

7. Shoghi Effendi *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabíl's Narrative of the early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation* p. 239.

8. Quote from Thomas Francis Meagher of The Young Ireland Movement in , Cecil Woodham-Smith *The Great Hunger* (London, 1962) p. 351.

9. Shoghi Effendi *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabíl's Narrative* p. 313.

10. *Ibid.* p. 312.

11. Dr Cormick's accounts of his personal impressions of Mírzá 'Alí Muhammad the Báb, extracted from letters written by him to the Rev. Benjamin Labaree, dd.

12. On 20 July 1848, the Seneca Falls Convention convened for a second day. On the previous day, convention organizer Elizabeth Cady Stanton had read the 'Declaration of Sentiments and Grievances.' In the process of reviewing a list of attached



resolutions, a group united across the boundaries of gender and race to demand women's right to vote in the United States.

13. Momen, Moojan *The Bábí and Bahá'í Religions* p. 75.

14. Shoghi Effendi *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabíl's Narrative* p. 507.

15. *Ibid.* p. 358.

16. An interesting document on the Báb in *The Moslem World* (28 August 1914).

17. A plaque, currently being restored at Princeton Seminary, recalls William Shedd (Class of 1892), who died of disease in 1918 in Persia while leading a company of Armenian Christians escaping persecution. He was hastily buried under rocks while his wife prayed the Lord's Prayer as the group continued its flight.

18. Extract: *Materials for the Study of the Bábí religion* p. 260.

The last two documents, which are in English, were kindly communicated to me by Mr W.A. Shedd, who wrote concerning them as follows in a letter dated March 1, 1911:

Dear Professor Browne,

In going over papers of my father, I found something which I think may be of value from a historical point of view. I have no books here, nor are any accessible here, to be certain whether this bit of testimony (or rather these two bits) have been used or not. I think probably not, and I am sure that I can do nothing better than send them to you, with the wish that you may use them as you think best. Of the authenticity of the papers there can be no doubt.

Yours very truly,

W. A. Shedd.

The first of these two documents is very valuable as giving the personal impression produced by the Báb, during the period of His imprisonment and suffering, on a cultivated and impartial Western mind. Very few Western Christians can have had the opportunity of seeing, still less of conversing with, the Báb, and I do not know of any other who has recorded his impressions.

19. Of course, this might raise doubts as to whether the photograph may have been of John. Photography would not have

been available in 1833, the first photograph in Iran is from 1842. Perhaps he wore one decoration which had belonged to his father. Also, Mr Landy assures me it is of William. On photography in Persia:

[http://www.kargah.com/history\\_of\\_iranian\\_photography/early/index.php?other](http://www.kargah.com/history_of_iranian_photography/early/index.php?other)

20. Letter: Moojan Momen to John Landy, Nov. 1984.

# The Use of Trees as Symbols in the World Religions

by Sally Liya

## Abstract

*The tree is a universal symbol found in the myths and sacred writings of all peoples. The psychologist Jung showed that the tree is part of the collective unconscious of all peoples, and frequently figures in dreams. The symbolic meanings of trees in dreams include growth, unfolding, shelter, nurture. In primal and shamanistic religions, the tree is regarded as the gatekeeper to the next world. Trees figure in all of the Dispensations of the Adamic cycle and in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, where they are used to explain many Bahá'í teachings. This paper surveys the symbolic use of trees in the world religions.*

## Introduction

Trees are the largest and longest lived of all living things, and are used by humankind in numerous ways: shade, shelter and protection, for making fire, for fruit and nuts. Wine and mead are made from the sap; in deserts trees provide drinking water; medicine is made from leaves, stems and roots.

As a symbol, the tree is therefore rich in meanings. As well as their practical uses, trees also demonstrate the interconnectedness of leaves, stems and roots, the growth of a tall tree from a tiny seed and the amazing ability of trees to revive after winter or dry seasons. In some cultures, the tree represents the life of a human being – one is planted at the birth of each child and their fates are thought to be interlinked.

According to the Bahá'í Writings, spiritual truths can be learned from observing the physical universe. Bahá'u'lláh says that existence is a book,<sup>1</sup> 'revealing that which God has written therein.'<sup>2</sup> Just as the Holy Writings have letters, words and verses, so also, according to 'Abdu'l-Baha, 'creation is in accord with the written word, and this is certain.'<sup>3</sup> Bahá'u'lláh says that every created thing 'is but a door leading into His (God's) knowledge ... a token of His power.'<sup>4</sup> In other words, it is 'a scroll that discloseth hidden secrets.'<sup>5</sup>

... the rays of the Sun of Truth are shed upon all things and shineth within them, and telling of the Daystar's splendours,

Its mysteries, and the spreading of Its lights. Look thou upon the trees, upon the blossoms and fruits, even upon the stones. Here too wilt thou behold the Sun's rays shed upon them, clearly visible within them and manifest by them.<sup>6</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá furthermore states that one needs to understand the natural world in order to be able to understand the spiritual world: 'Those who are uninformed of the world of reality and do not study created things, cannot investigate and discover hidden truths. They only have a superficial idea of things.'<sup>7</sup>

### **The tree and the collective unconscious**

The psychologist Carl C. Jung, in many years of research, using drawings and dream analysis, explored the unconscious mind of people of different cultures. Fascinated by how often people dreamed of trees, he listed the various meanings of trees in dreams, drawings and fantasies. The commonest were growth, life, unfolding of form in a physical and spiritual sense, development, growth from below upwards and from above downwards, protection, shade, shelter, nourishing fruits, source of life, solidity, permanence, firm rootedness, being rooted to the spot, old age, personality, death and rebirth.<sup>8</sup> He discovered that the images and meanings given to trees corresponded to the use of trees in ancient scripture, myth and poetry, of which the people had no prior knowledge. Jung concluded that the tree is an archetype: an element of the human collective unconscious – a symbol hard-wired into the brains of peoples of every culture.

### **The tree in primal and shamanistic religion**

In ancient traditions all over the world, the tree is a symbol of life itself, representing the totality of a universe in which everything is imbued with spirit. This symbol is termed 'the World Tree':

Its trunk roots in the primeval depths and the mighty crown brings forth the multitude of creatures. In its seeds lie all species ... the stars too were its fruits ... the sap bestows all-knowledge and enlightenment ... The far-branching World Tree is the invisible spiritual structure of the universe, the

material structure of which we perceive in spherical shapes and movements ...

A mystical communion with (the World Tree) brings knowledge. This is why the Siberian shaman searches the World tree to climb it in order to reach the spirit world.<sup>9</sup>

The shaman believed that the Ruler of the World lives at the top of the World Tree. 'Abdu'l-Bahá speaks of the World Tree as follows:

The Blessed Beauty ... likened this world of being to a single tree, and all its people to the leaves thereof, and the blossoms and fruits. It is needful for the bough to blossom, and leaf and fruit to flourish, and upon the interconnection of all parts of the world-tree, dependeth the flourishing of leaf and blossom, and the sweetness of the fruit.<sup>10</sup>

Kar Morgenstern says:

Since time immemorial plants have played a key role in human spirituality. Their sublime beauty, entrancing scents ... have suggested a connection with 'the other world', the non-material world of Gods and sprites, demons and devils. The spiritual world can be a terrifying place ... traditionally the domain of the spiritual guides of a community, nowadays usually referred to as shamans ... Shamans are usually chosen by an inner calling, they have no choice but to serve their community as ambassadors in the spiritual world.<sup>11</sup>

Trees represent the symbolic connection between the different levels of existence: the heavens above in its crown, the world of human affairs round its girth, and the underworld beneath its roots.<sup>12</sup>

Ancient Egyptian and Indian traditions noted that the tree crown resembled networks found in the geography of river deltas, the structure of the nervous system. Especially in the human brain, these networks resemble a tree crown, with the spinal chord being a 'trunk.'

### **The tree and the Adamic cycle**

The Bible begins and ends with the story of the Tree of Life. The Tree of Life was one of the two trees in the middle of the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve ate, not of the Tree of Life, but of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.<sup>13</sup> According to ancient Jewish tradition, these trees represented man. (The Tree of Knowledge is often assumed to be an apple tree, though this is an inference as neither the Tree nor its fruit is specifically named.) Because Adam ate of this tree, mankind was expelled from the Garden of Paradise and separated from the Tree of Life, lest he eat also of the Tree of Life and 'live for ever.'<sup>14</sup> The *Qur'án*'s version of the same story mentions a single tree, 'the Tree of Eternity and the kingdom that faileth not.'<sup>15</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that sin is symbolised by the fruits of the tree of which Adam ate and which include 'injustice, tyranny, hatred, hostility, strife which are the characteristics of the lower plane of nature.'<sup>16</sup>

However, the Bible predicts in Revelation that when Christ returns with the New Jerusalem, the Tree of Life will be growing there beside the water of life, 'bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month – and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.'<sup>17</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá interprets this image thus: 'The Tree of Life ... is Bahá'u'lláh and the daughters of the kingdom are the leaves upon that blessed Tree.'<sup>18</sup>

### **Trees in Hinduism**

In India, a tall, impressive fig tree (*Ficus religiosa*) – the banyan, asvattha, peepal or bo tree – is sacred. It is often worshipped as a daily morning ritual.<sup>19</sup> In ancient times the wood was used to make fire by friction. Wild fig trees are also sacred all over Africa.<sup>20</sup> In the Upanishads, the fruit of this tree is used as an example to explain the difference between the body and the soul: the body is like the fruit which, being outside, feels and enjoys sensory phenomena, while the soul is like the seed, which is inside and therefore witnesses these phenomena. The tree is sacred to the Hindu trinity of Vishnu, Shiva and Brahma. The roots are Brahma (the Creator), the trunk is Vishnu (energy) and the leaves are Shiva. The tree is closely related to Krishna, who is supposed to have died under it.<sup>21</sup> This tree is mentioned twice in the *Bhagavad*

*Gita*: first, as one of the splendiferous manifestations of the Supreme Personality of the Godhead;<sup>22</sup> secondly, in a teaching story. The reader is asked to imagine an upside-down banyan tree whose leaves are vedic hymns, the twigs the objects of the senses, the roots the achievements of human society. In this world, the real form of the tree cannot be perceived, but, according to the *Gita*, one must cut down this strongly rooted tree with the weapon of detachment in order to escape from entanglement with the material world and, having done so, surrender to the supreme God.<sup>23</sup> Some Hindu scholars envisage the upside-down tree as a tree reflected in still water. This passage then refers to this world as an illusion, an image of the spiritual world which is the real world.<sup>24</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms this idea: 'the Kingdom is the real world, and this nether place is only a shadow ... a shadow hath no life of its own, its existence is only a fantasy, and nothing more; it is but images reflected in water.'<sup>25</sup>

### **Trees in Judaism**

God appeared to Moses in the Burning Bush, a burning thorn bush: ' ... God appeared to Him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.'<sup>26</sup> In the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'* the Báb wrote: 'I am the Flame of that supernal Light that glowed upon Sinai in the gladsome spot, and lay concealed in the midst of the Burning Bush.'<sup>27</sup> Burning bush symbolism is used time and again in the Bahá'í writings, while tree of life symbolism is used in the Book of Proverbs:

'(Wisdom) is a tree of life to those who embrace her'; 'the fruit of the righteous is a tree of life'; 'Hope deferred maketh the heart sick but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life'; 'the tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.'<sup>28</sup>

### **Trees in Zoroastrianism**

The Tree of Life was considered by Zoroaster as the law itself and formed the centre of His philosophy and way of thinking. He said of the Tree of Life: 'To the soul it is the way to heaven.'<sup>29</sup> Trees are venerated by Zoroastrians: to destroy a tree is a sin.<sup>30</sup>

### **Trees in Buddhism**

Gautama Buddha was seated beneath a tree, since then known as the Bodhi or Bo tree, 'the tree of wisdom' (*Ficus religiosa*), when He received enlightenment. To this day there are Bo trees in monasteries where Buddhists worship.<sup>31</sup> He also used trees in His teaching, for example:

'As a tree cut down sprouts again if its roots remain uninjured, even so, when the propensity to craving is not destroyed, this suffering arises again and again'; 'It is well with the evil-doer until his evil (deed) bears fruit, then he sees its evil effects'; 'it is ill perhaps, with the doer of good until his good deed ripens. But when it bears fruit, then he sees the happy results.'<sup>32</sup>

When in San Francisco 'Abdu'l-Bahá told an Indian:

Man must irrigate the Blessed Tree which has eternal fruits and is the cause of life for all on earth. This goodly Tree, though hidden at first, will ere long envelop the whole world, and its leaves and branches will reach the heavens. It is like the Tree which Buddha planted: although at first it was a small sapling, it eventually enveloped the countries of Asia.<sup>33</sup>

### **Trees in Christianity**

Jesus used the same tree and fruit metaphor used by Buddha to warn about false prophets:

By their fruit you will recognise them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognise them.<sup>34</sup>

In a profound passage, Jesus teaches the necessity of bearing fruit, while at the same time showing how the bearing of fruit entails suffering (such that suffering is equated with pruning). The



passage also explains the nature of the covenant with the Manifestation:

I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain on the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.<sup>35</sup>

The tree symbol comes into the prophecy of the two witnesses in the Book of Revelation, who 'will prophesy for 1,260 days': these are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.<sup>36</sup> In *Some Answered Questions*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that these two trees symbolise Muhammad, the Messenger of God, and the Imám Alí.<sup>37</sup>

### **Trees in Islam**

In Islam the *Sadratu'l-Muntahá*, literally 'the crown of the jujube tree', is variously translated as Lote Tree of the Extreme Limit, the Sidrah tree which marks the boundary or 'the furthestmost Lote-Tree'.<sup>38</sup> (The term was translated by Shoghi Effendi as 'the Tree beyond which there is no passing.')<sup>39</sup> The tree is *Ziziphus jujuba*, a leguminous, prickly plum tree used for hedges. In India, a decoction of its leaves is used to wash the dead on account of the sacredness of the tree.<sup>40</sup> The *Sadratu'l-Muntahá* is used to describe the spiritual experiences of Muhammad in His encounter with God during the Revelation of the *Qur'án*:

The Koran is no other than a revelation revealed to Him. One terrible in Power taught it Him, endued with wisdom. With even balance stood He in the highest part of the horizon: then came He nearer and approached, and was at the distance of two bows, or even closer, and He revealed to His Servant what He revealed ... He had seen Him also another time, near the Sidrah-tree, which marks the boundary, near where is the garden of repose. When the Sidrah tree was covered with what covered it, His eye turned not aside, nor did it wander: for he saw the greatest of the signs of His Lord.<sup>41</sup>

The two bows are understood as the two arcs of a circle caused by the descent of God and the ascent of His servant to meet Him.<sup>42</sup> According to Rodwell's notes, the Sidrah tree 'covered with what it covered it' means hosts of adoring angels, by which the tree was masked.

This symbol is also used in the accounts of Muhammad's Night Journey to mark the point in the heavens beyond which neither men nor angels can pass in their approach to God and thus to delimit the bounds of divine knowledge that can be revealed to mankind (see note 42).

To Muslims, the *Sadratu'l-Muntahá* symbolises a station of spirituality, the extreme limit of human development. It is the moment when a person finds himself between the Hands of God. Muslims consider this Lote Tree of the Extreme Limit to be the very inner content of Ritual Prayer.

In another significant passage in the *Qur'án* we find the significant use of a symbolic olive tree:

God is the light of the Heavens and the Earth. His Light is like a niche in which is a lamp – the lamp encased in glass – the glass, as it were, a glistening star. From the blessed tree it is lighted, the olive neither of the East nor of the West, whose oil would well nigh shine out, even though fire touched it not! He is light upon light. God guideth whom He will to His light, and God setteth forth parables to men, for God knoweth all things.<sup>43</sup>

Shoghi Effendi clarified that this Olive Tree is the Báb, and the release of the oil is a symbol of His martyrdom, which shed light on all humankind. In the *Qayy'úmu'l-Asmá'*, the Báb wrote: 'I am the Lamp which the Finger of God hath lit within its niche and caused to shine with deathless splendour' (see note 27).

### **Trees in the Bahá'í Faith**

Bahá'u'lláh described Himself as a tree. In *Hidden Words* we find the Tree of Life, the Tree of Wealth, the Tree of Love. Moreover, He referred to all female believers as leaves of this tree, and to all males as branches. In important passages, when referring to Himself as a Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh uses the term *Sadratu'l-Muntahá* or Divine Lote Tree, i.e. 'the tree beyond which there is no passing.'<sup>44</sup> For instance, in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* He counsels: 'Advance, O people, unto the blest and crimson spot, wherein the Sadratu'l-Muntahá is calling "Verily, there is none other God beside me, the Omnipotent Protector, the Self-Subsisting"'<sup>45</sup> and 'Give ear unto the verses of God which He who is the Sacred Lote-Tree reciteth unto you.'<sup>46</sup> And in the Medium Obligatory Prayer: 'He in truth, hath manifested Him Who is the Dayspring of Revelation, Who conversed in Sinai, through whom the Supreme Horizon hath been made to shine, and the Lote Tree, beyond which there is no passing, hath spoken.'

Furthermore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the Greatest Branch of the Divine Lote Tree, as powerfully described by Bahá'u'lláh in the Tablet of the Branch.<sup>47</sup> In the Ridván Tablet, the imagery of tree foliage is used very vividly:

This is the Paradise on whose foliage the wine of utterance hath imprinted the testimony ... the rustling of whose leaves proclaims: 'He who, from everlasting, had concealed His Face from the sight of creation is now come.'

The tree symbol was also used by the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá to explain many of their teachings. The oneness of God can be likened to a tree. The Báb wrote: 'O Lord! Provide for the speedy growth of the Tree of Thy divine Unity.'<sup>48</sup> The renewal of religion or progressive revelation can be likened to the cycle of a fruit tree growing old and bearing no fruit: 'Then doth the

Husbandman of Truth take up the seed from the same tree, and plant it in a pure soil; and there standeth the first tree, even as it was before.'<sup>49</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá used this analogy on other occasions.

The renewal of religion is like the response of trees to the cycle of the seasons:

From the seed of reality religion has grown into a tree which has put forth leaves and branches, blossoms and fruit. After a time this tree has fallen into a condition of decay. The leaves and blossoms have withered and perished; the tree has become stricken and fruitless. It is not reasonable that man should hold to the old tree, claiming that its life-forces are undiminished, its fruit unequalled, its existence eternal. The seed of reality must be sown again in human hearts in order that a new tree may grow therefrom and new divine fruits refresh the world. By this means the nations and peoples now divergent in religion will be brought into unity, imitations will be forsaken, and a universal brotherhood in reality itself will be established, warfare and strife will cease among mankind; all will be reconciled as servants of God. For all are sheltered beneath the tree of His providence and mercy ...<sup>50</sup>

With regard to the oneness of humankind, Bahá'u'lláh's pivotal teaching, several tree images are used. One is the image of all the people of the world being 'beneath the shadow of the Tree of His care and loving-kindness.'<sup>51</sup> A second image is the following metaphor: 'Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship.'<sup>52</sup> A third image is that of different peoples resembling the different organs, branches, leaves, buds and fruit of one tree: 'Think of all men as being flowers, leaves or buds of this tree, and try to help each and all to realise and enjoy God's blessings. God neglects none: He loves all.'<sup>53</sup> A fourth image uses the tree which flourishes only when the organs function in co-operation in order to emphasise the need for interconnectedness among the members of humanity: 'For this reason must all human beings powerfully sustain one another ...

Let them ... behold all humanity as leaves and blossoms and fruits of the tree of being. Let them at all times concern themselves with doing a kindly thing for one of their fellows, offering to someone love, consideration, thoughtful help.<sup>54</sup> A fifth image emphasises the beauty of diversity:

Behold a beautiful garden full of flowers, shrubs and trees ... The trees too, how varied are they in size, in growth, in foliage – and what different fruits they bear! Yet all these flowers, shrubs and trees spring from the self-same earth, the same sun shines upon them and the same clouds give them rain ...<sup>55</sup>

In relation to the purpose of our lives, Christ emphasised the importance of leading a fruitful life. Bahá'u'lláh explains what the appropriate fruits might be:

each tree yieldeth a certain fruit, and a barren tree is but fit for the fire ... The fruits that best befit the tree of human life are trustworthiness and godliness, truthfulness and sincerity; but greater than all, after recognition of the unity of God, praised and glorified be He, is regard for the rights that are due to one's parents ...<sup>56</sup>

This analogy is further elucidated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to explain the relationship between prosperity and virtue:

material comforts are only a branch, but the root of the exaltation of man is the good attributes and virtues which are the adornments of his reality. These are the divine appearances, the heavenly bounties, the sublime emotions, the love and knowledge of God; universal wisdom, intellectual perception; scientific discoveries, justice, equity, truthfulness, benevolence, natural courage and innate fortitude; the respect for rights and the keeping of agreements and covenants; rectitude in all circumstances; serving the truth under all conditions; the sacrifice of one's life for the good of all people; kindness and esteem for all nations; obedience to the teachings of God; service to the

Divine Kingdom; the guidance of the people, and the education of the peoples and races.<sup>57</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh uses a vivid metaphor to solve the knotty theological problem about whether an individual is saved by faith or saved by deeds – the two are inseparable: 'Regard thou faith as a tree. Its fruits, leaves, boughs and branches are, and have ever been, trustworthiness, truthfulness, uprightness and forbearance.'<sup>58</sup>

Another metaphor for faith is the seed, which will grow into a tree:

Lift up your hearts above the present and look with eyes of faith into the future! Today the seed is sown ... but behold the day will come when it shall rise a glorious tree and the branches thereof shall be laden with fruit.<sup>59</sup>

Bahá'u'lláh uses a tree simile to explain how the soul is invisible, even though its development is so important:

... the fruit, ere it is formed, lieth potentially within the tree. Were the tree to be cut into pieces, no sign nor any part of the fruit, however small, could be detected ... Certain fruits, indeed attain their fullest development only after being severed from the tree.<sup>60</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá also uses the tree describe the connection between soul and spirit:

the soul is the intermediary between the body and the spirit. In like manner is this tree [a small orange-tree on the nearby table] the intermediary between the seed and the fruit. When the fruit of the tree appears and becomes ripe, then we know that the tree is perfect; if the tree bore no fruit it would be merely a useless growth serving no purpose!

When a soul has in it the life of the spirit, then does it bring forth good fruit and become a Divine Tree.<sup>61</sup>

He used the tree symbol to comfort a bereaved mother:

... the Merciful Gardener, if He loves a young tree, takes it out from among the others and carries it from the restrictions of narrowness to a large farm and a beautiful flourishing garden, in order that the young tree may develop, its branches grow high, its flowers open, its fruits appear and its shadow expand. But the rest of the trees do not know this, because this is a hidden mystery which becomes unfolded to us in the eternal kingdom.

A similarly gorgeous metaphor was used in a letter to a wife, recently widowed: 'Grieve not therefore and be not despondent ... strive that the orchard of his highest wish may abound with fruitful trees.'

'Abdu'l-Bahá uses the symbol of the seed becoming a tree to illustrate spirituality and the consequences of sacrifice:

If you plant a seed in the ground, a tree will become manifest from that seed. The seed sacrifices itself to the tree that will come from it. The seed is outwardly lost, destroyed; but the same seed which is sacrificed will be absorbed and embodied in the tree, its blossoms, fruit and branches. If the identity of that seed had not been sacrificed to the tree which became manifest from it, no branches, blossoms or fruits would have been forthcoming. Christ outwardly disappeared. His personal identity became hidden from the eyes, even as the identity of the seed disappeared; but the bounties, divine qualities and perfections of Christ became manifest in the Christian community which Christ founded through sacrificing Himself. When you look at the tree, you will realize that the perfections, blessings, properties and beauty of the seed have become manifest in the branches, twigs, blossoms and fruit; consequently, the seed has sacrificed itself to the tree. Had it not done so, the tree would not have come into existence. Christ, like unto the seed, sacrificed Himself for the tree of Christianity. Therefore, His perfections, bounties, favors, lights and graces became manifest in the Christian community, for the coming of which He sacrificed Himself.<sup>62</sup>

Of the Word of God, Bahá'u'lláh writes:

The word of God may be likened to a sapling, whose roots have been implanted in the hearts of men. It is incumbent upon you to foster its growth through the living waters of wisdom, of sanctified and holy words, so that its root may become firmly fixed and its branches may spread out as high as the heavens and beyond.<sup>63</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá in turn uses the example of exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide between plants and animals as a metaphor for co-operation, which is 'One of the greatest foundations of the religion of God.' He continues:

For the world of humanity, nay rather all the infinite beings exist by this law of mutual action and helpfulness ...

When one considers the living things and the growing plants, he realised that the animals and man sustain life by having the emanations of the vegetable world, and this fiery element is called oxygen. The vegetable kingdom also draws life from the living creatures in the substance called carbon.

In brief, the beings of sensation acquire life from the growing beings and, in turn, the growing things receive life from the sensitive creature. Therefore this interchange of forces and inter-connectedness is continual and uninterrupted.

'Abdu'l-Bahá used trees to illustrate the equal rights of men and women:

God has created all creatures in couples ... and there is absolute equality between them.

In the vegetable world there are male plants and female plants, they have equal rights, and possess an equal share of the beauty of their species; though indeed the tree that bears fruit might be said to be superior to that which is unfruitful.<sup>64</sup>



Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá also use trees to illustrate the difference in functions of men and women: 'The Tree of Life, of which mention is made in the Bible, is Bahá'u'lláh, and the daughters of the Kingdom are the leaves upon that blessed Tree' (see note 18). Women are generally called leaves and men branches in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. This paints a picture of the strong branches holding the leaves up to the sunlight where they can photosynthesise and produce nourishment for the tree, neither being able to function fully without the other.

Teaching the faith is like watering parched souls: 'even as the clouds of heaven, shed ye life upon field and hill, and like unto April winds, blow freshness through these human trees, and bring them to their blossoming.'<sup>65</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá repeats the tree metaphor used by Christ to explain how the individual must be part of a religion in order to be fruitful, just as branches cut off from the root bear no fruit.<sup>66</sup> At another time He described this faithfulness to the Covenant as resembling the maintaining of the tree's root. Independent action, like an uprooted plant, will not survive:

... all the forces of the universe, in the last analysis serve the Covenant ... what can these weak and feeble souls achieve? Hardy plants that are destitute of roots and are deprived of the outpourings of the cloud of mercy will not last.<sup>67</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá uses trees to explain the relative importance of both nature and nurture in education. One cannot change a seed from one species of tree into another even as

education cannot alter the inner essence of a man, but it doth exert tremendous influence, and from this power it can bring forth from the individual whatever perfections and capacities are deposited within him. A grain of wheat, when cultivated by the farmer, will yield a whole harvest, and a seed, through the gardener's care, will grow into a great tree. Thanks to a teacher's loving efforts, the children of the primary school may reach the highest levels of achievement; indeed, his benefactions may lift some child of small account to an exalted throne ...<sup>68</sup>

## Conclusion

Given the richness of symbolic meanings of trees and the spiritual and social truths which they help us understand, it is not surprising to find that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá experienced great joy in being near trees, and wanted the same for all people. In 1912, when in Dublin in the United States, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said:

How calm it is. No disturbing sound is heard. When a man observes the wafting of the breeze among these trees, he hears the rustling of the leaves and sees the swaying of the trees; it is as though all are praising and acknowledging the One True God.<sup>69</sup>

Later the same year while in New York City, 'Abdu'l-Bahá walked to Broadway and Central Park. He was not pleased with the dense population and the height of the buildings, saying: 'These are injurious to the public health. This population should be in two cities, the buildings should be lower and the streets should be tree-lined as they are in Washington.'<sup>70</sup>

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## The Life of Hugh McKinley, Knight of *Bahá'u'lláh* by Olive McKinley

Everyone's life is unique but not everyone's life is exemplary. Hugh McKinley's life is of interest to all Bahá'ís but especially, perhaps, to the Irish. One might even say that long before Hugh's birth, Bahá'u'lláh had considered the land of 'saints and scholars' and had chosen one Irishman to be part of the remarkable and historic growth of His Cause. That man was David McKinley, Hugh's father, who came from Co. Armagh.

The story of how he met and married Hugh's mother is part of the saga of wonderful happenings which is his story. Violet Watson was suffering from duodenal pains, probably an ulcer, and was on her way to visit her doctor. She was walking into the town from her home when a thunderstorm arose and it began to pour with rain. As she was getting more and more soaked, she happened to pass a gate on which there was a doctor's plate. This was not her doctor, but she decided to try to see this doctor, perhaps in the hope that he would have some better advice for her about her condition.

The doctor was kind and caring and, when he had examined her, asked if she would be willing to take a prescription of his own that he would like to try and to let him know the result. Some days later he visited her at her home to see how she was feeling, and she was so impressed by his concern that there was an immediate bond between them. They became friends and later married. (As far as is known, her medical condition also improved.)

The next part of the story is not wholly clear as to the timing. But at some time after their marriage the couple began attending meetings of the Theosophists. This movement was very popular and widespread in the early years of the Twentieth Century. At one of these meetings there was a Bahá'í speaker and the McKinleys took home a copy of *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* to find out more about the new Faith. Hugh says they read it together in one night, looked at each other and decided this was for them. This was in 1923.

Hugh was born in 1924 in Oxford and grew up in a Bahá'í home. His memories of his father, however, were few as unfortunately he died when Hugh was only four years old. Hugh's

upbringing was therefore the responsibility of his mother, who was also left in quite difficult financial circumstances since her own family had practically disowned her. They were well-to-do merchants, and as a girl Violet would have travelled abroad, had a French governess and generally a life of privilege. She quickly had to learn to be as self-sufficient as she could and to make do without help on very little money. Hugh was therefore used to hardship right from the start and was an only child. He was always insistent upon the fact that he had never been spoiled, in fact quite, the opposite. His mother was a strict disciplinarian and a good teacher who gave him his first years of education herself. They had moved to Cornwall where living was cheaper and Violet tried to make a little money from her craft work. She painted little water colours and was a skilled needlewoman. She had a few small investments of her own, but all through their lives was most careful not to spend a penny of her capital unless it was absolutely essential. Hugh was the same, never ungenerous but always thrifty.

Hugh later went to secondary school in Cornwall, but became very interested in country life and spent a great deal of his time with the children of the local farmers, learning how to farm himself which, when World War II erupted, was a very useful occupation. Years later, he still spoke of his 'Uncle Efe' with great affection any time he passed through the countryside, especially if the hedges were properly kept and the animals looked well. He went to work on the farm when he left school and this small income helped the family budget. He was even able to save up £23 for a second-hand motor cycle for which, like most boys, he longed, though he also wanted it by then for travelling to meet other Bahá'ís, especially when events for the youth were organised in other parts of the country.

It was on one of these trips that Hugh had a serious accident. He describes it as speeding through the countryside with nothing in sight. But suddenly he became conscious of a pillion rider on his motor cycle - no less a person than Quddús, the last and foremost of the Báb's Letters the Living. Then a lorry suddenly appeared from a side road, coming towards him. A car pulled out to pass it and crashed head-on into Hugh.

For two weeks he lay in hospital in a coma, his mother at his bedside day and night. When at last he came out of the coma she said he was repeating the Greatest Name. His injuries were severe, especially to his head. (There were no crash helmets in those days.) The side of his face was paralysed and it was feared this might never recover as the mastoid nerve had been severed. However, again Bahá'u'lláh sent help. There was a surgeon who had heard of a new electrolytic process and who managed to persuade the hospital to send him to Exeter hospital where he could receive this treatment. This treatment lasted nearly three months but was successful. Hugh later retained only a tiny irregularity of his facial features and some rather more serious damage to one ear, in which he had very little hearing ever afterwards. Fortunately his brain was certainly not affected by the accident, and he began to study the Writings in earnest during his recovery.

Again, this accident was a blessing in disguise, as he was naturally unfit for service in the armed forces during the War, but also unable to go back to farming as the noise of driving a tractor was still too difficult for him to bear. He and his mother wrote to the British National Spiritual Assembly and asked if they could be of use somewhere else, where Hugh might also find other work. And so they arrived in Cardiff, one of the 'pivotal centres,' goals of the Six Year Plan (1944-1950). (Dublin was another.) They stayed first with one of the Bahá'ís, and then went looking for their own bed-sit, where they managed to scrape together the rent but had almost no money for food. Hugh said they used to buy two kippers each day and share one for their lunch and the other for supper.

While in Cardiff, Hugh took a course in accountancy and went to work for a fruit importer, earning £5 a week, a welcome improvement in the family circumstances. He was also receiving great encouragement to train his singing voice. He wrote to one of the most prestigious teachers in London, Dino Borgioli, and asked for an audition. When he heard nothing more, he telephoned the great man and to his surprise, Borgioli remembered his letter: 'Oh, you are the bass!' So Hugh became his pupil and used to travel up each week for his lesson. He had a magnificent voice and was soon singing in many places all over the country. Later, he and his

mother moved from Cardiff to Brighton, from where it was easier to continue his singing lessons.

The following words of Hugh's give an impression of the early days of the Bahá'í Faith in Britain, as well as of his own character and passionate desire to serve the Faith:

I went up in 1948 to Convention. This was overwhelming. There must have been 60 or 70 Bahá'ís in the underground Centre at Victoria in London ... And seeing, in amazement, that everybody could find very good reasons for not doing very much, and I wanted to do everything all at once. Quite fiery!

During this period, the National Youth Committee was set up in the UK and Hugh became the editor of its Bulletin. He sent me a number of copies to Dublin in 1951 or 1952, not at all suspecting that I was the only Bahá'í youth in the whole of the country. I still have a copy somewhere of this, with its cover design by the famous potter, Bernard Leach, who then lived in Cornwall.

Perhaps a personal note is appropriate here. In 1951 Hugh had asked me to marry him and I had rather ungraciously turned him down, not of course without reason. I felt for one thing that I could never be the wife of a singer as I wasn't nearly musical enough. But the main reason was that I was not then in love with him and it would not have been fair to either of us. He came to Dublin on behalf of the National Teaching Committee some time later and went to visit the contacts on a list I had been given, but none of whom I'd ever seen at meetings. We had one long day, trudging from one address to the next on foot. This was characteristic of Hugh - why take a bus if you could walk? But it was fun and we always remembered that day afterwards.

Then the Ten Year Crusade began in 1953, and Hugh wrote to Shoghi Effendi about his singing career. He said of this:

Shoghi Effendi is exactly like Bahá'u'lláh, you know. He wrote back and said 'Do what you like! If you have a famous international career and become very well known, this is good for the Faith. If you go pioneering that also is very



good for the Faith.’ But it was Rúhíyyih Khánúm who wrote a little postscript, with marvellous sarcasm, that ‘whatever we do for the Cause of God is eternal, of eternal value; the success of our struggles in life is uncertain, problematic.’

So going to Cyprus was in many ways a wrench for Hugh, mainly the thought that he had most probably to give up all thought of a career in singing. Cyprus did not have a Covent Garden or La Scala – it just would not happen. However, his accountancy stood to him and providentially, almost the first person he asked about a job was able to point him in the right direction, so that he got one where he could use English as well. Later he became quite fluent in Greek, but at first it was another challenge to be met. And the pioneer move of the McKinleys to Cyprus in early 1954 meant that both were elevated to the rank of Knights of Bahá’u’lláh.

In 1955 he married for the first time, a Persian nurse whom he had known in Brighton. At all events, it did not work out and he was soon back living with his mother who was at the time well over 70 and in need of his help. She passed away on the island in 1959 after a short illness, during which Hugh nursed and cared for her on his own. Her grave in Famagusta is visited quite often by the Bahá’ís.

Hugh always remembered his years in Cyprus as his most useful to the Cause, although from his early youth he had been encouraged and was a willing helper in any way he could be. However, when asked at the end of his life which of his experiences was the most satisfying, he said he thought one would get a really good reference for him from the National Spiritual Assembly of Cyprus.

In another way, being in Cyprus was a wonderful time for the McKinleys since almost as soon as they arrived, they wrote to ask whether they might come on pilgrimage to the World Centre. Shoghi Effendi was still alive then, and when the permission came, they immediately packed their bags, sent a telegram that they were on their way and took the next boat. It was the experience of a lifetime but one of which many pilgrims, and this included Hugh, cannot speak adequately, cannot ever describe their feelings there,

and are even more helpless to do so when theirs was the bounty of meeting the Guardian himself.

Hugh and, I believe, his mother were always wonderful correspondents and their visit to the Guardian resulted in quite a number of letters from Haifa, which were discovered only after Hugh's passing. (There was one from Rúhíyyih Khánum, in which she thanked Violet for a recipe.)

Hugh remained in Cyprus for the ten years of the Crusade and we met again at the World Congress in London in 1963. By this time the British National Assembly had been formed and it was probably an appropriate moment to leave, even if we had not met then. However, we had a consultation in Athens that summer and after almost two years of anxious searching and praying, found there was a way to marry. And finally in April 1965, we did. Hugh moved then to Sligo where I was already teaching, so he was the second believer to move there. (We did not know then that the Townshend family had stayed at Rosses Point during their summer holidays on occasion, in a little house used often by visiting clergy in return for relieving the incumbent of parish duties for the time.) During his time in Sligo, Hugh managed to make many friends and a very good impression on our landlady, who was horrified when she heard that he had been looking for a job all the time we were with her. He was always so busy writing and gardening for her, that she did not realise he needed to be more gainfully employed.

In 1966 Hugh left to be in Greece for Ridván. There had been a passionate call by Marion Hofman at the Teaching Conference for pioneers there, and because Hugh already spoke Greek it was natural for him to go. I stayed in Sligo until the end of the school year and then joined him in July on the island of Syros in the Cyclades.

We had been extremely happy in Sligo, but Syros was a test which finally was too much for me. I cannot praise too much, however, the role played by Hugh in my studies at the time. It had been agreed that I should carry on with my external degree course, even though that no longer applied to my job in Sligo, and Hugh was unfailingly encouraging in all my work. When I had written an essay, he would want to hear it, usually at the lunch table, before I sent it off to my tutor in England. He had never even

finished his secondary schooling, but was so well read that he knew far more than I did at one stage about French literature. He certainly knew more about Greek culture and English literature. By this time he had begun to write poetry on a regular basis. Up to then and when in Cyprus, he wrote mainly prose and actually finished a novel which he had sent to me to read; unfortunately this has never been found among his papers.

In Greece there was a small Bahá'í community in Athens, pioneers in Crete and Rhodes and a couple living in Evvia. Life was not going to be easy on Syros as neither of us had permission to work, so the German National Spiritual Assembly, whose responsibility it was, sent us a monthly budget of the equivalent of £30. When we had been there a little while, a young bank clerk came to Hugh and begged him to give him English lessons. Hugh did not refuse and George later became the first Greek believer on the island.

During this time I also remember his great joy when he received a letter from one of the Turkish Cypriots saying that he and his friend had become believers and were working for the Faith in that part of the island. Hugh, though extremely isolated socially on the island of Syros, found ways of communicating with many people around the world. He went to the editor of the English-language *Athens Daily Post* and offered to write a literary column for them. His offer was accepted and he was thus able to obtain books free of charge for review. But he made sure to send these reviews to the authors, thus enabling him to have a correspondence with them and often mention the Faith in his first letter, tying it to some aspect of the book reviewed. Some of the writers thus approached remained in correspondence with Hugh until the end of his life and one, the eminent poet Kathleen Raine, sent a very appreciative letter upon his passing. Many of Hugh's poems were written in Syros and later included in *Skylarking* (Ferdia Press, Belgium, 1994), an anthology of his work. A number of poems have been published in *New Day* and two in the previous issue of this journal. There is hardly one which is not about his spiritual life, his relationship with the Cause of God or his views on our purpose here on earth.

But teaching the Cause continued to be difficult in Greece. When I had finished my Degree, I left for a year to complete my

Higher Diploma in Education at Trinity College, Dublin. The intention was that I should return to Syros the next year, but never did. This was not Hugh's fault as much as mine. It was, of course, difficult to live on an island where only about four other people spoke anything but Greek, and so I was daily dependent almost solely on Hugh for company. It was the climate that finally got to me and I felt unable to carry on. I therefore stayed in Ireland and hoped that a solution would be found. It never was.

Hugh's isolation at that time must have been hard to bear but the following poem shows how he resolved the problem - it is typical of his whole life, but especially so of his island existence. It came to me without a title and shows he has no regrets for what his life has become. (The punctuation and lineation are Hugh's - he was most insistent on this.)

Fortunate am I in needing N O T H I N G  
But pen, but paper, table, chair;  
AND soundless invisible intimation  
from . . .

Had I but followed Initial bent,  
'Imperativer Requirements' had been mine:  
The Opera House  
Make-up, Costumes, Chorus, Orchestra;  
And good Conductor.

Then - Concert Hall - Accompanist;  
and A G E N T !  
All ways travelling,  
All days rehearsing;  
Weighted down with Possessions  
learning new roles;  
Faithfully interpreting genius of others - - B U T

The poet's calling other;  
Calling with awe and reverence

Upon Calliope Erato  
 I wait their gift assured  
 As - and when received - refined,  
 Tuned to Their lyre, orchestrated  
 Into mortal tongue for Mortal ears  
 - Such verses shall stand Witness:

'Public Property', they may not die;  
 Recording - some times  
 Illuminant -

Steps into Transcendence...

During the early lonely years in Syros, Hugh must have written hundreds of letters to me, most of which have been preserved. They were unceasingly encouraging, loving, ever anxious to share whatever large or small triumphs for the Cause had been achieved, whatever good news received, accounts of his contacts the world over. There is still a huge amount of research to be done from this source alone.

I made one tremendous effort to return in 1976, having suffered a small tragedy myself early in that year, but it was then too late. It later appeared that Hugh, having been alone for nearly eight years in Syros, had already met Deborah, who was to become his third wife. He did return to England soon afterwards but not to Ireland. By 1979 he had obtained his divorce and married Deborah, settled in Suffolk and stayed in that part of England until his death in 1999.

Obviously it is not easy for me to research his life during their time together. But as he said in his last interview with Wes Huxtable, he only ever did anything for the sake of the Faith. One of the efforts he and Deborah made was to start the North Sea Conference, which was a link between East Anglia, Holland and Belgium. After some years, however, this had to come to an end as the various National Assemblies did not feel the Conference had the authority to function as a teaching institution on its own. On the English side, however, it turned into a very successful Spring School, which, to my knowledge, still continues with great success every year.

During his first years in Suffolk, I had no contact with Hugh, but finally re-established this on reading in the *Bahá'í Journal* that he was offering signed copies of his poetry anthology in aid of the fund. We exchanged a few letters subsequently, and one day he suddenly telephoned to ask if I would translate into English the *Life of Thomas Breakwell*, which had come out in French at the time of the discovery of the whereabouts of Breakwell's remains in Paris. Of course, I was delighted to make this translation, and the collaboration resulted in my visiting Suffolk several times before Hugh died, on the second occasion to give a talk about George Townshend at their Spring School.

At that time Hugh was not looking well; we little guessed that he was as ill as he really was. He was always extremely slow to consult the medical profession and had almost bled to death in the 1970s when he finally went for an operation for piles. He had to be given seven pints of blood before he was fit for that. Now, in 1998, he was suffering from angina and prostate cancer. Again, he could probably have been helped if the diagnosis had been earlier, but perhaps he longed too much for his reunion with the 'saints and Messengers' in the Abhá Kingdom to remain any longer with us here. He had telephoned me not a week before his death, saying he was very tired. I told him he must take more rest and his last words to me were: 'Not much chance of that.' I knew what he meant. He would keep going for the sake of the Faith until he could no longer go at all.

He is buried under a green headstone in the graveyard at the little church in Lawshall, Suffolk, where he had again made many friends over a large area who came to his funeral and came, too, to the memorial organised by Deborah on the erection of the headstone.

The message from the Universal House of Justice on his passing deserves special study by historians of the Faith:

HIS INDEFATIGABLE LABOURS PIONEERING FIELD, HIS TEACHING ACTIVITIES COUPLED WITH PROFOUND KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY WRITINGS AND FIRMNESS IN THE COVENANT BROUGHT GREAT VICTORIES TO THE CAUSE.

His last letter, posted on the morning he died, reached me afterwards. It contained what is probably his last poem. The poem read at his graveside the year following his death, however, is also typical, including his fine sense of humour:

## GARDENER WITHIN ETERNITY

'Where' is but my limiting perceptions;  
OR 'hither' :Earth: OR 'thither' : Beyond  
----- Out of Time and Place.

'Soil' Various - all who may hear;  
Those hearts able to respond;  
The condition of Eternity itself.

'And what do I sow' Because I do not  
'cultivate Eternity' Task that none may dare!

'endeavouring to plant Works whose content bright  
reflects that Ideal Power emerging from  
the Sun of Truth the Word of God;  
Works which impart their origins to all who  
Read Hear Rede are moved.'

On Earth, emotions spiritual develop and increase -  
Their growth transferrable - by planting,  
And perpetually re-planting

Deep within Soil of the Hearts:  
proliferation  
Only limited by opportunity. . .

For some through Door of the Mind: Thought;  
For some, colour, scent and Invisible Doors!

But in whose heart?

Not my business -

HIS!



## **‘His Eminence Mírzá ‘Abbás Effendi ... Has Reached the Shores of Alexandria’ by Betsy Omidvaran**

### **Abstract**

*Century of Light, the review by the Universal House of Justice of the key developments of the twentieth century, contains a short description of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sojourn in Egypt. This paper starts from the information contained there and follows its leads to investigate the contacts ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had with a wide variety of influential people in Egypt, and the impression he made on them.*

### **Background**

In the period between 1910 and 1913, when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá visited, Egypt was at the centre of a revival in Arabic intellectual, political and cultural life. It was nominally a part of the Ottoman Empire as it had been for centuries, but its political situation was complicated by two nineteenth-century developments. First, soon after the French occupation of Egypt under Napoleon ended in the first decade, practical control was taken by an Albanian officer in the Ottoman army, Muhammad ‘Alí, whose descendants acquired the title Khedive and ruled in one form or another for one hundred and fifty years until Egypt became a Republic in 1953. Second, in 1882, the British invaded, mostly to protect European financial interests and their path to India.

Muhammad ‘Alí began the process, which continued over subsequent decades, of closer contact with Europe, initially in order to learn new military techniques, but expanding to include European literature, and social and political ideas. This combined with and stimulated a revival of Islamic education and reformist thought. By 1910, there was a well-established education system, many newspapers and other publications, and a vibrant intellectual and cultural atmosphere: as *Century of Light* describes it, a ‘cosmopolitan and liberal atmosphere’, which allowed ‘frank and searching discussions’ with ‘prominent figures in the intellectual world of Sunni Islam, clerics, parliamentarians, administrators and aristocrats.’<sup>1</sup>

### **Impressions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Egypt**

Abdu'l-Bahá was in Egypt for about one year and nine months altogether, comprising three distinct periods. This was part of his three-and-a-half year journey to Europe and North America. The first time He left Haifa at the end of August 1910 and arrived in Egypt in early September.<sup>2</sup> He stopped in Port Said on his way to Europe, but ill health led to His remaining for almost a year. After a month he moved to Alexandria; then in May of 1911, he moved to Cairo. On 11 August 1911, he left for Marseilles to spend four months in Britain and France. The second period in Egypt was the months from 2 December 1911 to 25 March 1912, before He left for North America, where he spent nine months and crossed the continent. Then he returned to Europe and spent six months travelling again in Britain and France, then to Germany, Hungary and Austria. The third period in Egypt was at the end of his trip, when He spent the months from 17 June to 2 December 1913, first in Port Said and then moving to Ramleh, a suburb of Alexandria on 17 July. His grandson, Shoghi Effendi, and His sister, Bahiyih Khánum, joined Him on 1 August and He left for Haifa in December.<sup>3</sup>

The description of His sojourn in Egypt contained in *Century of Light* focuses on the first year: '... the months that followed were a period of great productivity whose full effects on the fortunes of the Cause in the African continent especially, will be felt for many years to come.'<sup>4</sup> It explains that the first year provided the opportunity for His first proclamation of the Faith and also contributed to His success in Europe, as the many Europeans resident in Egypt were able to meet Him and observe the warm reception he received from Egyptians.

The following passage from an Egyptian newspaper is partially quoted in *Century of Light* as part of its description of the importance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to Egypt: 'His Eminence Mírzá 'Abbás Effendi, the learned and erudite Head of the Bahá'ís in Akka and the Centre of authority throughout the world, has reached the shores of Alexandria.'<sup>5</sup> Like most of the material in *Century of Light* related to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Egypt, this was taken from Hasan Balyuzi's biography of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which gives more of the quotation, as follows:

Whosoever has consorted with Him has seen in Him a man exceedingly well-informed, whose speech is captivating, Who attracts minds and souls, Who is dedicated to belief in the oneness of mankind ... His teaching and guidance revolve around the axis of relinquishing prejudices: religious, racial, patriotic.<sup>6</sup>

The article makes other statements which were common in newspaper articles about the Faith in this period, for example, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was very knowledgeable on theology and the history of Islam, and that the Bahá'í Faith had millions of followers all over the world.

This was written by Shaykh 'Alí-Yúsuf (1863-1915) in his daily newspaper *al-Mu'ayyad*. *Al-Mu'ayyad* had been founded in 1889, the first major newspaper owned and edited by an Egyptian Muslim. Before that, the Arabic language newspapers and magazines had been mostly owned and edited by Syrian Christians who had immigrated into Egypt. Shaykh 'Alí-Yúsuf was educated at the al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo, the major centre of Islamic education, and his newspaper had been immensely popular. By 1910, it had lost its first position, partly because he remained intensely loyal to the Khedive of the time, 'Abbás Hilmí II, and partially because in the first decade of the twentieth century many other popular newspapers arose in Egypt. According to Balyuzi, Shaykh 'Alí-Yúsuf had previously written derogatorily about the Bahá'í Faith, but changed his mind when he met 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In 1900, 'Alí-Yúsuf had given a positive review to one of the books by Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl, a Bahá'í, but in 1903 had published news of persecutions of Bahá'ís in Yazd, accusing them of slandering the prophets. This may have been the negative article Balyuzi was referring to.

*Century of Light* also mentions the important role of Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh (1849-1905), who had met 'Abdu'l-Bahá, possibly on several occasions, in Beirut in the 1880s. There have been several articles written about this relationship. Muhammad 'Abduh was trained at al-Azhar, where he was closely associated with the well-known and influential Iranian activist Jamál al-Dín al-Afghání (1839-1897), who taught at al-Azhar from 1871 and was exiled from Egypt in 1879. Under al-Afghání's influence, 'Abduh

participated in the 'Urábí revolt which was suppressed by the British invasion in 1882. 'Abduh was then exiled to Beirut in January 1883. After a year in Beirut, he went to Paris, with al-Afghání, where, for six months in 1884, they published the influential journal *al-'Urwa al-Wuthqá*.

Al-Afghání is a ubiquitous figure in discussions of the Middle East during this period. In fact, Bahá'u'lláh refers to him in the *Lawh-i-Dunyá* (Tablet of the World), revealed in 1891, translated into English and published in the *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, as follows:

One wondereth why those who have been the symbols of highest glory should now stoop to boundless shame. What is become of their high resolve? Whither is gone the sense of dignity and honour? ... The aforesaid person [Jamál al-Dín] hath written such things concerning this people in the Egyptian press and in the Beirut Encyclopedia that the well-informed and the learned were astonished. He proceeded then to Paris where he published a newspaper entitled '*Urvatu'l-Vuthqá* [The Sure Handle] and sent copies thereof to all parts of the world. He also sent a copy to the Prison of 'Akka, and by so doing he meant to show affection and to make amends for his past actions. In short this Wronged One hath observed silence in regard to him<sup>7</sup>

Shoghi Effendi also describes him in *God Passes By*, his review of the first hundred years of the Bahá'í Faith, as 'The scheming Jamálu'd-Dín-i-Afghání, whose relentless hostility and powerful influence had been so gravely detrimental to the progress of the Faith in Near Eastern countries ...'<sup>8</sup>

'Abduh then spent the years 1885 to 1888 in Beirut, after which he returned to Egypt. He later became a prominent reformer in Egypt, and was Grand Muftí, the highest Islamic judicial post, from 1899 up to his death in 1905. He was no longer alive when 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited Egypt, but they had kept up a correspondence and, as *Century of Light* points out, his admiration for 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'paved the way' to a degree for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's reception there.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá had been invited to Beirut by Midhat Pasha (1822-1884), an Ottoman constitutional reformer, who, from November 1878 to August 1880, was governor of Syria. Hasan Balyuzi, in his book on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, published in 1971, says the visit was in 1878 and quotes from a letter written by Bahá’u’lláh for the occasion.<sup>9</sup> It begins: ‘Praise be to Him Who hath honoured the Land of Bá [Beirut] through the Presence of Him round whom all names revolve.’<sup>10</sup> However, in his book on Bahá’u’lláh, published in 1980, Balyuzi says the journey was in June 1880, quoting from the same Tablet, which he dates 9 June 1880, and mentions that Midhat Pasha visited Haifa in May 1880.<sup>11</sup> Balyuzi also says that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá met ‘Abduh during a visit to Beirut.<sup>12</sup> However, in 1880 ‘Abduh was living in Egypt, and there is no evidence that he travelled to Beirut before 1883, so it is more likely that he met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at a later date.

A great deal of the evidence for the contact between ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Muhammad ‘Abduh comes from the three-volume biography of ‘Abduh written by his disciple Rashíd Ridá (1865-1935), who had been his student in Beirut as a young man. Ridá was a Syrian who moved to Cairo in 1897 to study with ‘Abduh, and in 1898 he started the journal *al-Manár*, in which he published several articles against the Bahá’í Faith over the years. In *World Order* magazine in 1981, Juan Cole published a report of a conversation in 1897 between ‘Abduh and Ridá about ‘Abduh’s attitude to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, which is reported in Ridá’s biography of ‘Abduh. In this conversation Ridá maintains that ‘Abduh had been favourable toward the Bahá’ís and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá but that he had not understood what the Bahá’í Faith really was. He maintains that ‘Abduh’s positive opinion changed when he found out. According to Cole, Ridá says that when ‘Abduh was in Beirut, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá more than once came to Beirut from Haifa and would make a point of attending some of Muhammad ‘Abduh’s study sessions.”<sup>13</sup>

Ridá’s biography of ‘Abduh shows that his time in Beirut was narrated by three sources, Ridá himself, Sayyid ‘Abd al-Básit and Shakíb Arslán, two other students of ‘Abduh. The three accounts are similar, describing lectures at the Sultaníya School, dialogues with religious leaders, his secret society to reconcile the three major monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity and

Islam) and the constant stream of visitors. Arslán particularly includes descriptions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s visits.

None of the notables or his acquaintances journeyed to Beirut without coming to greet him [‘Abduh]. He honored and exalted each one and, even if he conflicted with him in belief, he did not cease to respect him. Foremost among those he honored was ‘Abbás Effendi al-Bahá, leader of the Bábís, even though the Bábí way is different from what the Shaykh believes and is the creed that al-Sayyid Jamál ad-Dín refuted so strongly. But he revered ‘Abbás Effendi’s knowledge, refinement, distinction, and high moral standards and ‘Abbás Effendi similarly honored ‘Abduh.<sup>14</sup>

The reporter quoted here, Shakíb Arslán (1869-1946), was a member of a Druze family in Lebanon, and continued to be a close associate of Ridá. He was later drawn into Arab nationalism and activism for the Arabic language.<sup>15</sup> He was a deputy in the Ottoman Parliament 1913-18, then lived for twenty-five years in Europe, mostly Switzerland, returning to Beirut just before his death in 1946. In Switzerland, he published *La Nation Arabe*, an influential periodical, in French. His influence declined in later years, as he maintained a pan-Islamist tendency after other nationalists had abandoned it.<sup>16</sup> He spent a period in Egypt sometime during the last decade of the nineteenth or the first decade of the twentieth century.<sup>17</sup>

Just before he moved to Cairo, Ridá had read an article on the Bahá’í Faith written by Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl and published in 1896 in *al-Muqtataf*, a scientific and literary monthly published by Ya’qúb Sarrúf and Fáris Nimr, two Syrian immigrants. It was founded in Beirut in 1876 and moved to Cairo in 1884 and was a leading Arabic publication up to its closure in 1951.<sup>18</sup> Ridá and some of his companions in Beirut wrote a letter of protest to Abu’l-Fadl and received a reply.<sup>19</sup> Ridá met Abu’l-Fadl after he arrived in Cairo in 1897, and had several discussions with him.

Mírzá Abu’l-Fadl had been sent by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to Cairo sometime in 1894 or 1895. He began to teach at al-Azhar, was known as a Shí’i scholar and attracted a group of students. After about two years he was revealed to be a Bahá’í, which he did not

deny. Following this, he was free to write articles and books about the Faith. He published the above-mentioned article in *al-Muqtataf*, and followed this with two books. He published *al-Fará'id* ('Precious Gems') in 1898 in Cairo, whereupon some 'ulamá issued a declaration of takfír (unbelief) against him. His next book, *al-Durar al-bahíya*,<sup>20</sup> published in 1900, attracted favourable notices from Mustafá Kámil (1874-1908), a popular nationalist leader, in his newspaper *al-Liwa*, and from Shaykh 'Alí-Yúsuf, as previously mentioned, but was opposed by Ridá.<sup>21</sup> Abu'l-Fadl lived in Cairo until 1900, when he was sent to North America for four years until 1904, when he returned to Egypt and remained until he passed away in Cairo on 21 January 1914.

The publishers of *al-Muqtataf* founded the daily newspaper *al-Muqattam* in 1889, encouraged by the British, who provided financial support. Nimr edited it, while Sarrúf ran *al-Muqtataf*. It offered high quality journalism, supporting the occupation and opposing the Sultan. Like its sister publication, it was secularist in outlook.<sup>22</sup> Balyuzi mentions that *al-Muqattam*, in its issue dated 28 November 1910, published a positive article about 'Abdu'l-Bahá.<sup>23</sup>

Another newspaper mentioned by Balyuzi as having published a positive report of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was *al-Ahrám*, which was founded in Alexandria in 1875 by two Greek Catholic brothers from Beirut, Salím and Bishára Taqla. It was a weekly newspaper until 1881, when it became daily. It included pure news reportage, plus commercial, scientific and literary items, but avoided controversy and ideology. After the British occupation in 1882, it became more partisan and gained an image as a French mouthpiece.

Balyuzi mentions another newspaper by the name of *Wádí al-Níl*. A newspaper by this name was published from 1867 to 1874. It may have been started again or this may have been a new newspaper or there may be another explanation for Balyuzi's saying that it published an article during 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit. *Wádí al-Níl* is a logical name for a newspaper in Egypt, as it means 'valley of the Nile.'

Balyuzi discusses Jurjí (George) Zaydán (1861-1914): 'The eminent writer and celebrated editor of the magazine *al-Hilál* was another leading figure in the public life of Egypt who visited 'Abdu'l-Bahá.'<sup>24</sup> Zaydán founded *al-Hilál* in 1892, having moved to

Cairo from Beirut in 1886. It was a direct competitor of *al-Muqtataf* and is still in existence. He also held a regular salon-type gathering in his home, described as follows by Thomas Philipp: 'Once a week, on Tuesdays a soirée was given at the Zaidan's, attended by people from the cultural elite of Cairene society: journalists, writers, historians and sometimes even a teacher from al-Azhar. European orientalist visiting Cairo would join.'<sup>25</sup> Philipp says that Zaydan's letters to his son from 1908 to 1912 give many of the names of those attending. This would be in the period of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit, so he may well have attended this gathering, but I do not have access to his letters to his son and have no actual evidence that he did so.

Juan Cole mentions another contact of 'Abdu'l-Bahá with the press in Egypt long before he travelled there. It is a letter that 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to al-Afghání in response to an article the latter wrote in the newspaper *Misr* ('Egypt').<sup>26</sup> The letter is signed 'al-dá'í al-Bábí al-masjún fí Akká, 'Abbás' ('the Bábí missionary imprisoned in Akka, 'Abbás'), which Cole identifies as 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It is not dated, but *Misr* was published only from 1877 to 1879. The letter praises al-Afghání's article and encloses a treatise along similar lines by Midhat Pasha, but Cole does not describe the subject of the article except to say that *Misr* was part of the 'constitutionalist press.' *Misr* was published weekly in Cairo and Alexandria by Adíb Ishaq (1856-84), a Greek Catholic Syrian who arrived in Egypt in 1876 and was deported in 1879. He was a follower of al-Afghání.<sup>27</sup>

Salím Qub'ayn, in his book, *'Abdu'l-Bahá wa al-Bahá'íya*, quotes two articles published in September and October 1913 by the Egyptian 'Abd al-Rahmán al-Barqúqí (1876-1944) in his monthly journal *al-Bayán*, entitled "'Abdu'l-Bahá afandi, za'im al-Bahá'íyin' ('Abdu'l-Bahá Effendi, Leader of the Bahá'ís):

Among us now and before our eyes and ears is one of the distinguished men of the twentieth century, even one of the distinguished men of the whole world. Suffice it to say that he is the leader of a large religious faith with million of members, spread throughout Egypt, Iran, India, Europe and America, and most of the places of the inhabited world venerate him as they venerate prophets and messengers. The



newspapers, magazines and books in Europe and America devoted to him pages which praise him, spread his call, glorify his heroism. That one is our friend 'Abbás Afandí entitled 'Abdu'l-Bahá, leader of the Bahá'ís and the champion of religious reform in this age, nay chief of the reformers.<sup>28</sup>

In this article, al-Barqúqí also describes at length his contact with Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl, whom he met for the first time about 1904, presumably upon the latter's return from America. He expresses great admiration for him and says that he and his companions eagerly attended audiences with him. Al-Barqúqí was educated at al-Azhar where he studied with Shaykh Muhammad 'Abduh and other reformers. Al-Ziriklí says that his style of expression was pure and beautiful, that he lost money on this journal, which was founded in 1910, and that many of the outstanding literary men of Egypt were contributors.<sup>29</sup> Saláma Músá is less complimentary, saying that the aim of *al-Bayán* was to revive 'the old-fashioned dead language' and that it was suspended after a short period of publication.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, in his article, al-Barqúqí says that, if he were a believer in transmigration of souls, he would believe that Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl was the reappearance of Jamál al-Dín al-Afghání, which he intends as a compliment to Abu'l-Fadl.<sup>31</sup>

Interestingly, in his article about 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shaykh 'Alí Yúsuf compared him to al-Afghání:

... his conversation and opinions reminded us of the late Jamál al-Dín al-Afghání and in his grasp of subjects about which he spoke and his attractiveness to those with whom he conversed. However, his knowledge was even greater and he calmed those with whom he spoke and listened to them more than Sayyid Jamál al-Dín did.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to meeting editors of newspapers, many of whom published articles, 'Abdu'l-Bahá met a number of other prominent people. One of these was Khedive 'Abbás Hilmí II, the great-grandson of Muhammad 'Alí. Balyuzi reports that 'Abbás Hilmí met Him for the third time on 17 August 1913, but he does not mention the first two times they met, whether they ever met again

or any more details of this meeting.<sup>33</sup> ‘Abbás Hilmí II took office in 1892 at the age of seventeen, following the death of his father, Khedive Tawfíq. He was educated at the Theresianum in Vienna, where he had close contact with the Habsburg court, under the Emperor Franz Joseph, who ruled in style for sixty-eight years from 1848 to 1916 and was among the rulers addressed by Bahá’u’lláh.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s meetings with the Khedive were organized by ‘Uthmán Murtadá Pasha (1865-1935), the Khedive’s head chamberlain. He was from a prominent Albanian family in Egypt and graduated from the School of Law. He served in the public prosecutor’s office and other legal and political positions, until ‘Abbás Hilmí II appointed him head chamberlain. At the beginning of World War I, when the Ottomans joined the Axis powers and ‘Abbás Hilmí II was deposed, ‘Uthmán Murtadá was arrested by the British and exiled to Malta. He wrote articles in newspapers and was active in the nationalist movement and in the freemasons.<sup>34</sup> According to Balyuzi, he was ‘devoted to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and was the intermediary arranging meetings between Him and ‘Abbás Hilmí Pasha.’ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressed him a Tablet in October 1919.<sup>35</sup>

*Star of the West*, a Bahá’í-published magazine, of January 1930 reported an interview by American journalist and traveller Martha Root with Prince Muhammad ‘Alí (1875-1955), the younger brother of ‘Abbás Hilmí II, who describes his meeting with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in New York on 22 July, 1912. The Prince said ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was

a great friend of my brother ‘Abbás Hilmí II, the late Khedive ... I met your beloved Teacher first early in 1912 on my way to Paris ... ‘Abbás Bábá has proved to Europeans and the entire West that great generals of the Spirit are still born in the East! ... I was very sad when I heard of His passing, for I considered Him the most important man in our century.<sup>36</sup>

The Prince called on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in September 1913 in Alexandria.

According to Balyuzi, Shaykh Muhammad Bakhít (1854-1935) was another member of the clergy who called on ‘Abdu’l-

Bahá and received a call in return during 'Abdu'l-Bahá's sojourn in Cairo in 1911. Balyuzi says he was Muftí of Egypt, but according to al-Ziriklí, Muhammad Bakhít was Muftí of Egypt from 1914 to 1921. Bakhít was educated at al-Azhar, then taught there and in about 1878 transferred to shari'a law. He was associated with Jamál al-Dín al-Afghání and was one of the strongest supporters of Muhammad 'Abduh's campaign of reform.<sup>37</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá also had contact with British officials. He had met Sir Ronald Storrs when the latter passed through Palestine in 1909 on his way to Egypt to take up the post of Oriental Secretary to Sir Eldon Gorst (1861-1911), the British agent and consul-general. Storrs had first gone to Egypt in 1904 as a young British official under Lord Cromer. In *The Chosen Highway*, Lady Blomfield quotes a letter from Storrs saying this, and also that when 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited Egypt, he catered for Him and presented Him to Lord Herbert Kitchener (1850-1916), 'who was deeply impressed by his personality, as who could fail to be?' Lord Kitchener served as head of the British army in Egypt from 1892 to 1902, and was responsible for the British conquest of the Sudan. Then he went to India from 1902 to 1909, but returned as successor to Gorst in 1911, remaining until 1914. Storrs met 'Abdu'l-Bahá again after Lord Edmund Allenby (1861-1936) took Syria during the First World War and appointed Storrs governor. Storrs says 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited him in Jerusalem and that he always called on Him when he visited Haifa.<sup>38</sup>

An integral part of the vibrant intellectual and cultural atmosphere in Cairo were the many regular salons and gatherings. Jurjí Zaydán's salon was mentioned earlier. It was in its heyday during 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit and may very well have been attended by Him. There were other salons as well, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá may have attended, but I have no actual evidence that he did. Princess Názlí Fádil's salon was well-known and brought together Egyptians with English people, including many of the people known to have contact with 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Storrs describes it in his memoir, *Orientations*. Mayy Ziyáda (1886-1941) was a poet who had arrived from Beirut in 1911 and held a vibrant salon in Cairo until the late 1920s. Also, the offices of the *al-Jarída* newspaper were a regular meeting-ground from 1907-1914 of a wide variety of people. *Al-Jarída* published an article about the Faith in July

1910, translated from English, just before 'Abdu'l-Bahá's arrival and also Mrs. Jean Stannard, an English Bahá'í who knew Arabic, gave a lecture in its offices on the subject of psychology.<sup>39</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This paper has presented an overview of currently available information on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's visit to Egypt of almost two years, concentrating on His contacts with public figures outside the Bahá'í community, while also placing it in some kind of perspective in relation to the times. I have expanded on the short description given in *Century of Light*, to show the wide-ranging and positive contact that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had with leaders of thought in Egypt during His visit, and to reveal additional paths to further research this topic.

As we have seen, He met a wide range of people, of diverse backgrounds, Christian and Muslim, Syrian émigrés, reforming and more traditional, writers and publishers in the Egyptian press, the *de facto* and *de jure* rulers and prominent Europeans. From this basis of evidence, one can speculate that He may have met a much wider range of people and may have attended some of the vibrant salons and social gatherings of the time in both Cairo and Alexandria.

In the course of exploring these contacts, I have touched on some of His interaction with these people and how He influenced them. Those who met Him express their admiration for His personality and His breadth of knowledge. They were also impressed with the wide spread of the Bahá'í Faith and had a rather exaggerated impression of the number of Bahá'ís in the world at that time. There was some confusion over whether it was a new religion or a religious movement, but it was clear that it had the goal of bringing together all religions. More research remains to be done on this short but fascinating period of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry. It is hoped that this paper will provide historians of the Faith with the encouragement and the incentive to do so.

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## **Book Review and Commentary: A Bahá'í View of Evolution by Eamonn Moane**

Brown, Keven and Eberhard von Kitzing (eds) *Evolution and Bahá'í Belief: 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Response to Nineteenth Century Darwinism* (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 2001), 278 pages.

### **Introduction**

One of the fundamental beliefs of the Bahá'í Faith is the harmony of religion and science, faith and reason, heart and mind. The past three to four centuries have been an age dominated by science and reason increasingly severed from their theological and philosophical underpinnings. In the conflicts that have arisen between science and religion, the latter has appeared to lose. This has been due mainly to religion's man-made dogmas and rituals based on a primarily literal interpretation of sacred Scripture. Science must also accept some of the blame because it can tend to make unjustified speculative claims about its findings, especially concerning the origin and meaning of existence. Yet as 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, there can be no disagreement between the conclusions of sound scientific thinking and a correct reading of Scripture, because the physical universe is a shadow or reflection of an eternal spiritual realm:

Know that this material world is the mirror of the Kingdom, and each of these worlds is in complete correspondence with the other. The correct theories of this world which are the result of sound scientific thinking are in agreement with the divine verses without the slightest divergence between them.<sup>1</sup>

The whole issue of evolution is of truly world historic importance because, arguably, no single idea has been more responsible for the decline of religious belief in the West than Darwin's theory of evolution published in *The Origin of Species* in 1859. This is particularly so because of the sweeping claims that have been made about the theory since Darwin's time, and the fact that it has become one of the most influential doctrines of the modern age. Darwin's work appeared to strike at the foundation



of the religious view that God created all species separately, essentially in their present form, according to a divine plan, and linked them together in the great, continuous Chain of Being, with Man at the apex. Instead, the diversity of species was due to mechanical processes of random variations in organisms and natural selection by a changing environment of those variations best fitted to survive, with no goal or direction to the whole process and in which human purpose and destiny seemed to have no place.

This book is an impressive exposition of the Bahá'í view of a religious and scientific issue central to our understanding of our own nature and the meaning of our existence. The Bahá'í Faith affirms a harmonious belief in both divine creation and evolution. However, evolution is a process of development within a species, not of one species evolving by chance into another. The human species is a divinely created separate species that has always existed somewhere in the universe. Man has evolved on Earth as a separate species, with his physical, intellectual and spiritual evolution divinely guided for a divine purpose.

The book is also a powerful reminder of how modern science has become severed from its metaphysical (i.e. philosophical and theological) foundations. In this context, philosophy is concerned with true knowledge and understanding about the origin and purpose, and general causes and principles, of phenomena, while natural theology deals with the knowledge of God as gained from studying the workings of His creation.

### **Overview of Subject Matter of Book**

This is the first Bahá'í book to give such a rigorous treatment of the broad religious, philosophical and scientific aspects of one issue. It has over 500 endnotes and a very extensive bibliography of a wide range of sources, Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í, religious, philosophical and scientific. For the interested layperson without a background in philosophy or science, the book requires a concerted effort to be understood.

The book consists of two long essays by two Bahá'ís. The first essay by Keven Brown, a specialist in Near Eastern languages and cultures, focuses mainly on the philosophical issues relating to species and evolution. It starts with the philosophical response to

Darwin's theory in the West and in the Arab world. It then deals with the historical development of philosophical concepts of creation, species and evolution, from ancient Greece to the Nineteenth Century. It finally covers 'Abdu'l-Bahá's response to Darwinism.

The second essay by Eberhard von Kitzing, a specialist in theoretical physics and biochemical evolution, focuses on how 'Abdu'l-Bahá's views on evolution compare with the concepts of Nineteenth-Century biology and modern biology and cosmology. It covers the scientific challenge of Darwin to the then-prevailing scientific orthodoxy, looks at modern Western scientific concepts of species and evolution, considers the broader issues of the origin of complex order in the universe, and of cosmology, and discusses 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements and their compatibility with modern science.

It was originally intended to have a third article, by a non-Bahá'í scientist and practising evolutionary biologist, Dr Ronald Somerby, but it was not ready in time. This is unfortunate, as it would have added a broader perspective to the book.

The authors have different views on the extent to which 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements on evolution are to be taken literally. Brown's approach 'is to assume that 'Abdu'l-Bahá intended his words on this subject to be taken at face value' (Preface xix). In contrast to Brown, von Kitzing assumes that 'the statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá about evolution are not intended to be a detailed explanation of cosmogony and biological evolution. They are understood rather as seminal statements from which Bahá'í scholars may develop a relevant Bahá'í philosophy' (p. 141). Different interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words are possible and depend crucially on what He meant by the term 'human species.' Von Kitzing emphasises that his essay 'does not address the question of the particular mechanisms of evolution as such' (p. 142). Both authors agree, however, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's response to Darwinism was more philosophical than scientific in nature. Their articles aim to present interpretations of His statements on evolution that are in accordance with reason and scientific facts.

## Concepts of 'Species'

Central to both essays are two different ways of thinking about the meaning of 'species.' The classical approach up to the Nineteenth Century had thought of a species as a fixed, timeless entity or 'species essence', the law or blueprint or idea in the mind of God that determines the essential attributes of its biological counterpart. While variations in the biological form could occur over time, they could never stray from the limits set by the species essence. Natural selection merely eliminates accidental characteristics. This view that each species was created by design and for a purpose is known as 'teleological thinking.'

The central theme of Darwin's theory is that all biological species, including man, are not divinely created or fixed realities of nature, but have descended from common ancestors by a continuous process of branching. Accidental variations in a species, if beneficial for survival in the environment, would be selected by natural selection and hence be the basis of a new species. Only the individual members of a species are real, not the species itself, which is a mere mental classification or construct. A species is defined as a population of particular interbreeding organisms that can produce fertile offspring. This approach is known today as 'population thinking.'

Brown gives a comprehensive review of the development of philosophical ideas about the meaning of species, from ancient Greece to the Nineteenth Century. Plato taught that a species was determined by an immaterial archetypal Form or Idea beyond the grasp of the human mind and that these Ideas or Essences are the true timeless realities existing independently of the biological populations of particular members. This corresponds with fixed species and teleological thinking, and is closer to the Bahá'í view. However, Aristotle believed that a species was determined solely by its biological forms and assumed that the existence of particular members of a biological population is sufficient to maintain the species. Species was therefore a mental construct. This corresponds with today's population thinking.

Plato's Forms and Ideas came to be regarded by the early Christian Church Fathers as the Word of God, or Logos, by which God created the world. Augustine has God create seminal seeds that manifest themselves over time as environmental conditions

become suitable. Most later Muslim thinkers were in effect Neoplatonists. They believed that God's knowledge is the cause for the existence of all things, and that the Platonic forms are the immaterial roots of the biological members of species. The species appear when the physical environment is ready to receive them, and remain static over time.

Mullá Sadra (1571-1640) added the dimension of motion or 'becoming' to existence, and to the physical realisation over time of the fixed species essences that he regarded as part of God's changeless Essence. Shaykh Ahmad al-Ahsá'í (1753-1825), one of the two forerunners of the Báb, made a continuous process of action and becoming the very foundation of existence, allowing for a process of continuous evolution or becoming within individuals and species, and indeed within all systems in the universe. The species essences were created or activated by the Will of God, and were not part of His changeless Essence.

Von Kitzing explains how classical biology of the Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Century was essentialist, with the species essence being the unchanging idea in the mind of God of the ideal form of the members of a biological population. It was impossible that a species could change or evolve. The dominant concept was of a static unchanging world of short duration. Some scientists had a more mechanistic view of a universe created by God, Who then let it run on a few laws, while others believed in natural theology, which considered nature to be the result of the direct and detailed providence of God. The first challenge to this world view came from Lamarck (1744-1829), who was the first to propose a systematic theory of biological evolution, such that all species descended from earlier less complex forms. In addition, growing geological evidence began to imply that the world must be much older than the 6,000 years suggested by a literal reading of the Bible. Nevertheless, there was no essential contradiction between theology and biology until the mid-Nineteenth Century.

### **Evolution Thinking Since Darwin**

The above was the background and context in which Darwin's *Origin of Species* was published. Brown points out that Darwin never claimed to explain the origin of life. He proposed that God breathed life into a number of first primitive species, established

general but not detailed laws of nature, and then allowed the mechanisms of random variations and natural selection to gradually transform these common first forms into today's wide diversity of species. He did not claim that recent species derived from other recent species.

Darwin appeared to replace divine creation and teleology with natural selection by the environment of random beneficial biological variations, and to replace a theological with a scientific explanation of species. Proofs advanced by Darwin and his followers to support evolution include: rudimentary trace organs in man from an earlier stage of evolution; the stages of human embryonic development (ontogeny) recapitulating the stages of human biological evolution (phylogeny); the similarity of geographically isolated species; morphological similarity between species; and the fossil record showing the oldest layers of rock containing fossils of the most primitive species. However, the fossil record does not show transitional forms of species, but species appearing suddenly, remaining for a long time and then suddenly disappearing. The punctuated equilibrium theory of Gould and Eldredge, suggesting sudden leaps forward in evolution followed by long periods of stasis, tries to explain this.

Von Kitzing surveys the development of modern thought on evolution since Darwin. Life on Earth evolved from a pre-biotic soup over billions of years, with random mutations and recombinations in the genetic material of organisms being selected by the environment based on fitness for survival. The concept of species is based on individuals, not the fixed type, and is defined as reproductively isolated populations occupying an ecological niche. This removed purpose and direction from evolution and transformed the whole philosophy of biology.

Monod, the French Nobel Prize winner, regarded evolution as the emergence of new biological characteristics, based on chance. Dawkins, today's best-known exponent of reductionist Darwinian thinking, maintains that cumulative natural selection, by many small and gradual steps, is the only explanation for life's complexity and is the driving force of evolution. Evolution is the opposite of chance because, while mutations are random, natural selection is not: evolution is not teleological. However, as Ward points out, the gradual appearance of order requires the same level

of explanation as its sudden emergence. The Bahá'í writer, William Hatcher, argues that the development of life from more probable simple forms to less probable complex forms, despite the universal second law of thermodynamics, which states that all systems tend towards increasing disorder (entropy), is non-random, and requires a purposeful evolutionary force, which he calls God.

Von Kitzing contrasts 'top down' with 'bottom up' concepts of the origin of order and complexity. Classical concepts are top down, explaining complexity on intelligent design, and assuming that complex order and purpose existed from the start. Later Nineteenth-Century cosmology considered the universe to be infinite in space and time, hence avoiding the problem of Ultimate Cause. However, modern science seeks to explain complexity based on cumulative random trivial causes, a bottom up concept.

Today the universe is considered to be finite in space and time, with temporal causation starting with the Big Bang. Dennett proposes a kind of 'Darwinian cosmology' by cosmological selection, with perhaps 'a timeless Platonic possibility of order' (p. 178), but with no explanation for initiation or origin. Hence modern science merely assumes the *a priori* existence of complexity, and the non-existence of a scientific explanation for evolution. It ignores the fact that natural laws must be more complex than the particular structures they produce, and require explanation.

Interestingly, von Kitzing notes that while biology has rejected species essences, physics and chemistry remain essentialistic, with their general laws considered invariant in place and time throughout the universe.

Brown surveys how most Nineteenth-Century Arab thinkers (in particular al-Isfáhání), in their reaction to Darwinism, focused on its philosophical and social implications. They criticised Darwin's postulate that all species now existing were generated from a single germ over millions of years of natural action as being against sound intelligence. They maintained that the religious Scriptures are clear on the independent creation of species, but not on whether they were created all at once or independently, and they accepted progress towards perfection within independently created species. They also rejected the materialistic idea that the actions and powers of the soul are no more than the effects of

matter, and that human feelings and intelligence are merely the actions of the brain. Rather, the mind is independent of the brain, which is merely the instrument of the mind.

### **'Abdu'l-Bahá's Response to Darwinism**

The final sections of both essays focus on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's response to Darwinism. Brown puts more emphasis on the philosophical aspects of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's response and he helpfully provides new or improved translations of His statements on evolution (mainly in *Some Answered Questions*). Von Kitzing covers 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements from a broader scientific and cosmological perspective.

In summary, 'Abdu'l-Bahá understood species in its Platonic archetype sense as referring to a divine reality outside of time and space. The species is primarily that immaterial essence by which its biological form exists. Evolution (progress and development) takes place within the species itself and is the movement of the living species towards its own perfection. Species are not derived gradually and haphazardly from each other.

'Abdu'l-Bahá states that creation or formation can be of three kinds only: accidental, necessary, or voluntary. He rules out formation occurring by accident or chance (i.e. self-creation), because every effect must have a cause preceding it. It cannot be necessary because then the formation would be an inherent property of the constituent parts, and change and decomposition would be impossible. Voluntary creation by God for a purpose is the only feasible explanation. However, creation is not directly by God. The first emanation from God, outside of time and place, is the First Intellect or Primal Will, located in the Will of God, not in His Essence. This First Cause creates the species essences or realities of things, which in turn leads to the physical existence of things when environmental conditions are correct.

Bahá'u'lláh states that the very existence of a transcendent, infinite and eternal God requires a creation which is 'infinite in its range and deathless in its duration.'<sup>2</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that to imagine a time when no creation existed would be a denial of the divinity of God, because the eternal attributes of God would not then be manifest. However, the evolution of the universe is necessary for God's timeless creation to emerge in place and time

and to manifest His signs. Hence creation and evolution are complementary and mutually necessary processes. Motion and change are essential aspects of creation:

Creation is the expression of motion, and motion is life ... All created forms are progressive in their planes, or kingdoms of existence, under the stimulus of the power or spirit of life. The universal energy is dynamic. Nothing is stationary in the material world of outer phenomena or in the inner world of intellect and consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá' gives two main arguments against the modification and derivation of the human species from a lower species by chance. The first argument is that the eternal existence of the human species is necessary to act as a mirror of God's created names and attributes. If the human species (the reality or species essence of man) ever did not exist, the chief member of God's creation would be missing, and the creation would be imperfect:

The reflection of the divine perfections appears in the reality of man, so he is the representative of God, the messenger of God. If man did not exist the universe would be without result, for the object of existence is the appearance of the perfections of God. Therefore it cannot be said that there was a time when man was not. All that we can say is that this terrestrial globe at one time did not exist, and at its beginning man did not appear upon it. But from the beginning which has no beginning, to the end which has no end, a Perfect Manifestation always exists.<sup>4</sup>

The same argument applies to man's existence on this planet:

Now, if we imagine a time when man belonged to the animal world ... there would have been no man, and this chief member, which in the body of the world is like the brain and mind in man, would have been missing. The world would then have been quite imperfect.<sup>5</sup>



If there was no man, the perfections of the spirit would not appear, and the light of the mind would not be resplendent in the world. This world would be like a body without a soul.<sup>6</sup>

The second argument is that each being or species, including man, requires a particular prescribed composition of elements, and the right environmental conditions, to appear and exist:

... the perfection of each individual being ... is due to the composition of the elements, to their measure, to their balance, to the manner of their combination, and to the interaction and influence of other beings. In the case of man, when all these factors are gathered together, then man exists.<sup>7</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá states that nothing comes into being immediately in its perfect form, but everything grows and develops with its perfections appearing by degree. Like a seed or human embryo, all created things, large or small, are perfect and complete from the start, but progress and development take place by degrees within the species themselves:

All beings, whether universal or particular, were created perfect and complete from the first, but their perfections appear in them by degrees ...

Similarly the terrestrial globe from the beginning was created with all its elements, substances, minerals, atoms and organisms; but these only appeared by degrees; first the mineral, then the plant, afterward the animal, and finally man. But from the first these kinds and species existed ...

When you consider this universal system, you see that there is not one of the beings which at its coming into being has reached the limit of perfection. No, they gradually grow and develop and then attain the degree of perfection.<sup>8</sup>

Hence the Earth, of which man is the fruit or chief member, also evolved, with the more simple forms of existence appearing before the more complex forms:

But it is clear that this terrestrial globe in its present form did not come into existence all at once, but that this universal existence gradually passed through different phases until it became adorned with its present perfection ... it is evident that this terrestrial globe, having once found existence, grew and developed in the matrix of the universe, and came forth in different forms and conditions, until gradually it attained this present perfection ... <sup>9</sup>

'Abdu'l-Bahá is emphatic that the human species has been established from its origin as a separate species and has evolved as such. The fact that it appeared after the animals is not proof that it was derived from them:

In the world of existence man has passed through various stages until he has attained the human kingdom. In each stage the capacity for ascent to the next stage has appeared.<sup>10</sup> It may be that in the beginning he was in the stage of a seed ... but that seed which evolved belonged to the human species, not an animal species.<sup>11</sup>

Man's existence on this earth, from the beginning until it reaches this state, form and condition, necessarily lasts a long time, and goes through many degrees until it reaches this condition. But from the beginning of man's existence, he has been a distinct species ... a man, not an animal.<sup>12</sup>

... the animal having preceded man is not a proof of the evolution, change and alteration of the species, nor that man was raised from the animal world to the human world ... For man, from the beginning of the embryonic period until he reaches the degree of maturity, goes through different forms and appearances ... Nevertheless, from the beginning of the embryonic period he is of the species of man - that is to say, an embryo of a man and not an animal ... As man in the womb of the mother passes from form to form, shape to shape, changes and develops, and is still the human species from the beginning of the embryonic period - in the same way man, from the beginning of his existence in the matrix of

the world, is also a distinct species – that is, man – and has gradually evolved from one form to another ... Man from the beginning was in this perfect form and composition, and possessed capacity and aptitudes for acquiring material and spiritual perfections, and was the manifestation of the words ‘We will make man in Our image and likeness.’<sup>13</sup>

Brown emphasises that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s response to Darwinism was not a technical scientific refutation as such. Rather, he focused on its philosophical and religious implications for human society. In particular, He condemned the application of the principle of the ‘struggle for survival’ to human affairs as a grievous error.

Von Kitzing, in dealing with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements on evolution, emphasises that the origin of the universe was complex from the beginning, and included the potential for man’s intelligence to emerge. Evolution is the unfolding in time and place of this pre-existing order, not continual random self-creation of new characteristics. The world is a hierarchy of increasing complexity – mineral, vegetable, animal, human – with each level including all lower but no higher levels.

Evolution applies to all levels of organisation, from the atom up. A particular composition of elements, together with suitable environmental conditions, always leads to the emergence of man in the universe due to time-invariant laws.

Von Kitzing, and indeed the existing translation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements, could be clearer that the human spirit is not so much the by-product or consequence of a particular composition of atoms, but is associated with it in the physical world. It comes from a pre-existent spiritual realm and appears on earth and is individualised when a particular complexity in atomic composition is obtained. He quotes from Bahá’u’lláh, Who affirms an ever-changing existence sustained by the Word of God, with physical nature an expression of God’s Will:

That which hath been in existence had existed before, but not in the form thou seest today ... Verily, 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 ... Say: Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise.<sup>14</sup>

### **Parallel Evolution?**

Von Kitzing poses the question as to how literally we should understand 'Abdu'l-Bahá's analogy between evolutionary phylogeny (the human biological form) and embryonic ontogeny in the human species. Is it a philosophical statement about the nature of the universe, or does it mean that the evolving human form was biologically human all the way down? 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that even if the human biological body was different in the past, it was still the unchanged human species. But what does He mean by 'human species'? Is it the Platonic species essence or a physical form? Could the human species essence contain not only the ideal picture of the species, but different possible evolutionary pathways towards perfection?

A literal interpretation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements results in a model of parallel evolution where a biologically distinct line of each species has existed from the beginning of the earth and each species develops in parallel or independently from each other. But 'the assumption of parallel evolution produces more problems than it solves' (p. 234) and is not accepted by scientists as a serious theory. Von Kitzing accepts that other Bahá'í writers understand 'Abdu'l-Bahá to propose a biologically distinct evolution of the human species parallel to the animal kingdom. However, he suggests that His teachings on the subject have been widely misunderstood because of misinterpretations of His meaning of the term 'human species.'

For parallel evolution to be regarded as credible by today's science, a number of issues would have to be resolved. When did the vegetable, animal and human species branch from their common roots? A biological definition of species compatible with current scientific knowledge must be developed. If genetic DNA similarities among humans reflect biological relationships, why do

similar DNA sequences in different species, especially in the higher primates and humans, not imply biological relationships between them?

Von Kitzing argues that by the term 'human species', 'Abdu'l-Bahá means the eternal species essence of man as a perfect mirror reflecting all of the attributes of God, as a universal law pre-defining humanity, not a particular biological species. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement above that 'a Perfect Manifestation always exists'<sup>15</sup> seems to support this. Hence the evolution of the biological form of the human species on this earth is secondary. He accepts the conventional view that *Homo sapiens* and the modern higher primates have a common ancestor but that they branched off at least ten million years ago. But this view seems to contradict 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statements that man existed from the beginning of the Earth and that a particular, perfect composition of elements is required for the human spirit and intelligence to be made manifest in the physical world. It seems to this reviewer that Von Kitzing does not resolve this issue. To be fair, he is clear that his article does not aim to do this. At the start of the Twenty-first Century, it may simply be too soon to achieve a detailed technical synthesis between the Bahá'í view and modern science. Perhaps, as Friberg wrote,

It is wrong, therefore, to view man as *originating* from the animals. However, it would not be wrong to say that man *appeared* from the animals, as long as the place of appearance is not confused with the reality of that which has appeared.<sup>16</sup>

Von Kitzing quotes Shoghi Effendi, who affirmed that man, irrespective of his physical form, was always man, on the basis that no form or species can exceed its own potentialities and evolve into something else. These statements seem to leave open the exact biological mechanisms of man's evolution:

The Bahá'í faith teaches man was always potentially man, even when passing through the lower stages of evolution.<sup>17</sup> We cannot prove that man was always man for this is a fundamental doctrine, but it is based on the assertion that nothing can exceed its own potentialities, that everything, a

stone, a tree, an animal and a human being, existed in plan, potentially, from the very 'beginning' of creation. We don't believe man has always had the form of a man, but rather that from the outset he was going to evolve into the human form and species and not be a haphazard branch of the ape family.<sup>18</sup>

### **Some Criticisms of Book**

Notwithstanding its subtitle, the book focuses perhaps too narrowly in relating the topic of evolution to philosophical thought from the ancient Greeks to the Nineteenth-Century Arabs and to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It does not cover what the *Old Testament* (particularly Genesis, chapter 1), the *Qur'án*, and other Scriptures and philosophies say about creation and evolution. It would benefit from expounding on what today's mainstream Christian churches, and the 'scientific creationism' of American fundamentalist Christians, have to say on these issues. The inclusion of the originally intended third article would enhance the book by providing a broader perspective and treatment of the topic.

The book does not resolve how the Bahá'í view of evolution is compatible with the current scientific view of the biological technicalities of the evolution of the human species. There is a sense of an unsatisfactory incompleteness in this area, specifically whether or not the Bahá'í view implies the parallel evolution of all species and a separate biological form for man from his beginning on Earth, a concept rejected by modern science. Differing possible views of the meaning of the term 'human species' as used by 'Abdu'l-Bahá are not resolved.

The ordering of the book's contents could be better, perhaps covering the scientific aspects before the philosophical aspects. Brown's essay could have started with the philosophical and historical background to creation and evolution, rather than with the response of Nineteenth-Century Muslims and 'Abdu'l-Bahá to Darwinism. Parts of his essay can be hard to grasp for the layperson, especially some of the philosophical concepts in the third section (pp. 51-76) about substance, form, accident and becoming. The fact that the book consists of two separate essays leads to some duplication, although the subtleties and difficulties

of the ideas and concepts may justify this. An overall conclusion and synthesis would be beneficial.

One visible shortcoming is that there is no index, despite comprehensive endnotes and a bibliography, although the detailed contents section at the start compensates partly for this. Nor is there any biographical information about the authors.

### **Other Possible Applications of Book's Approach**

The approach used in the book could be applied equally to writing a Bahá'í response to the Big Bang theory of the origin and development of the universe that has, since the 1960s, become the dominant theory of cosmology. From observing today's expanding universe, it projects backwards to its origin some 15,000,000,000 years ago when all the matter and energy of the universe was compressed in an extremely small space of infinite density, a 'singularity.' This exploded and began to expand, leading by a long process, and through the power of gravity, to the formation of stars and galaxies and planets; and then through random mutations and natural selection, to the evolution of life and human beings, where conditions are suitable. The current prevailing view is that the universe will continue to expand until it reaches a final 'heat death' and grinds to a halt. This appears to conflict with the very emphatic Bahá'í view that the universe is eternal and infinite.

A philosophical approach would reject such sweeping speculative claims. It might maintain that the Big Bang was not 'the beginning', but merely the earliest time for which scientific evidence is available. Perhaps, as some scientists have suggested, the Big Bang was just a local phenomenon, or the exiting matter-energy from the black hole or contraction of a previous universe or of another part of the universe. Our universe may be just one small part of a much greater one, or one of many universes. It may be the beginning of just another cycle of expansion in an eternal cyclically oscillating universe. This would appear to agree with the fundamental principle of the cyclical nature of existence and life as explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá: ' ... in the whole universe, whether for the heavens or for men, there are cycles of great events, of important facts and occurrences. When a cycle is ended, a new cycle begins.'<sup>19</sup>

On more specific issues, what are we to make of Bahá'u'lláh's statement that 'every fixed star hath its own planets and every planet its own creatures whose number no man can compute',<sup>20</sup> in light of the current scientific view that life, as on Earth, does not exist in the rest of our solar system? How do we interpret the references in His Writings, confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to a future transmutation of elements by way of a hidden science or knowledge, which to modern science might appear to refer to alchemy, now regarded as a discredited occult subject? What about the paradigm of medicine and healing in the Bahá'í Writings, which appears much closer to traditional or 'alternative' medicine than to today's orthodox 'scientific' medicine?

### **Conclusion**

The development of biology since Darwin has undermined religious values by denying divine creation and a goal or purpose for evolution and life, and insisting that random genetic variations in species, selected by the environment according to survival criteria, can alone explain the evolution and diversity of life, including man. It regards the mechanisms of evolution – random mutations and natural selection – as sufficient to explain the cause and origin of life itself. It cannot explain the origin of complex order and so merely assumes it. Yet random mutations and selection by an ever-changing environment do not preclude the movement of evolution towards a goal, under the guiding force of divinely created species essences working through genetic information as a means to regulate the development of organisms.

Evolution, based on chance and without purpose, has become an all-embracing doctrine in the dominant Western civilization of today, imprisoning its culture in an apparently irreconcilable conflict between religion and science. Its philosophical implications taken to an extreme, especially the 'struggle for survival', have had disastrous consequences in ideologies like Nazism and Communism, and in extreme variants of nationalism and free-market competitive capitalism. The mainstream Christian churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, have accommodated themselves to the current prevailing scientific orthodoxy, while insisting on God as the Ultimate Cause of creation and on man's spiritual nature and destiny. However, in



the United States in particular, many Christian Churches have stuck to the literal biblical account of creation, and the creation versus evolution debate has become a major cultural and political issue. The construction of a new paradigm of evolution, with a true reconciliation of its scientific and religious dimensions, has still to be achieved.

The Bahá'í Faith does not merely believe in evolution as one among many beliefs. Rather, its fundamental outlook is inherently evolutionary. It regards motion and evolution as the essence of creation and life. It affirms that evolution has a divine purpose, and is the unfolding in time and place of that purpose and of the eternal signs and attributes of God, not continual random self-creation. Its central theological belief is that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, and Bahá'u'lláh states that 'All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.'<sup>21</sup> Von Kitzing is surely correct when he states that 'the complexity of the final goal of evolution may simply surpass the imagination of all evolving civilizations' (p. 210).

This book is an impressive and weighty contribution to the evolution debate, although it does not set out a detailed technical solution to the issues raised. It provides a framework for relating the teachings of religion and theology to the deepest scientific and philosophical issues facing today's world. It succeeds in its claim that 'it offers an ambitious model for the application of the principle of the unity of science and religion' (back cover). The book highlights the importance of a metaphysical and philosophical underpinning to science. Hence it should hold its own among any books, academic or otherwise, published in the area of the relationship between religion and science.

## References

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3. *Promulgation* p. 140.
4. *Some Answered Questions* p. 196.
5. *Ibid.* p. 178.
6. *Ibid.* p. 201.
7. *Ibid.* p. 179.
8. *Ibid.* p. 199.

9. *Ibid.* p. 182-83.
10. *Promulgation* p. 225-26.
11. *Makatib* vol. 3 p. 257.
12. *Some Answered Questions* p. 184.
13. *Ibid.* p. 192-94.
14. *Tablets* p. 140-44.
15. *Some Answered Questions* p. 196.
16. Stephen Friberg 'Commentary on Brown and von Kitzing on Evolution', *The Baha'i Studies Review* 8, 1998, p. 61.
17. *Unfolding Destiny* p. 458.
18. *Letters to New Zealand* p. 85.
19. *Some Answered Questions* p. 160.
20. *Gleanings* p. 163.
21. *Ibid.* p. 215.

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## **Songs of the Spirit: A Collection of Poems written During the Fast 2003 and 2004 *by Dawn Staudt***

### **Dawn Prayers**

In the pre-dawn darkness Thou dost call me  
To arise from my sleep and come to Thee.  
There it is in the darkness that I find  
The brilliance Thou dost reveal to my mind.  
These early dawn prayers radiance bestows;  
In these sacred moments, love for Thee grows.  
Thou dost open my heart to let in Thy light.  
And with such great thankfulness My soul takes flight.

How can it be that I am so, so blessed  
To see Thy Truth, when so blind are the rest?  
How can it be that in prayer Thou dost visit me?  
None more insignificant could there be.  
How can it be that Thou dost hear my small voice?  
Why was I worthy to make Thee my choice?

This love and wonder Thou dost bring to my heart.  
Each morn with the dawn again it will start.

## **Wandering in the Word of God**

Taking time to peruse God's verses I ponder  
What joy each reveals, as through them I wander.  
Within my heart and soul each verse will dance and play.  
Feeding my spirit throughout the long fasting day.

For at this time of year the path is extra sweet.  
Hunger spurs on my heart and spirit guides my retreat  
Into verses abstract with meanings once hidden;  
Secrets now shed their light, as I do as bidden.

This surely is the joy for all who God obey.  
New-found treasures in the Writings bless them each day.  
Within their heart and soul each verse will dance and sing,  
Feeding their spirits with all the bounties they bring.

Taking time to peruse God's verses we ponder  
What joy each reveals, as through them we wander.

## **The Friends**

We have such friends the whole world round  
The like of which you've never found!  
Some rich, some poor – it matters not;  
The love of hearts was all we sought.  
Some we've known for many long years;  
Some so briefly, it brought us tears.  
Cheerful, trustworthy and content  
Friends we have on each continent!

From the dark coal mines of Poland  
And the white snow fields of Iceland;  
Lots of friends in Dublin and Bray,  
A family gone to Paraguay.  
Others in Hong Kong and Macau  
Once lived near us, but they don't now.  
Tanzania and Fiji, too  
Ghana and even Lesotho  
New Hampshire and Bulgaria  
Czech Republic and Australia  
We love these friends with all our heart,  
Though miles and years keep us apart.

These are not 'just any old friends';  
The love we have, it never ends!  
Our spirits are entwined, you see,  
In God's great love and unity.  
Though you may think it strange to say,  
'We'd die for each other any day.'  
'Not possible', you think, I fear.  
But, I must make it very clear:  
Many gave their lives years ago  
To help this love the world round grow.  
Faith it was and faith it is still:  
The lone gift that achieves God's will  
To make mankind one family.  
Heart by heart, it works easily.  
Our Faith binds us to each other;  
It makes us as sister and brother...

## **Making Memories**

Feel the moment...don't let it slip away!  
Treasure the love in each minute, each day.  
Notice the small things; keep them in your heart.  
Each little deed plays such a special part.

For you see, each small act of thoughtfulness  
Builds in your heart a special tenderness.  
Each smile, each kiss...each way they show they care  
Builds strength and love to hold when they're not there.

Tuck away the memories bright and clear -  
Each hour, each day and hold them so dear.  
Special times and very special places -  
Most of all, treasure the loving faces!

Each scent, each sight, each hug, and each warm night  
Can be there in your memory closed tight  
To open when you're very old and grey!  
Hold each moment...don't let it slip away!

The ones we love most won't always be near.  
One day Time will take them away, I fear.  
But when they're gone, you can recall each day  
Those precious gifts that didn't slip away.

## Sacred Glimpses 1

Did you ever get a glimpse of reality?  
Never could we understand its totality,  
But I mean...just those few seconds,  
When understanding your heart beckons...?  
When your soul recognizes God's Splendour...?  
When your heart's awakened to this life so tender?

\* \* \* \* \*

Often it's nature's great expanse that can reveal  
God's Sovereignty for us to feel:  
The slight slit of the moon  
With bright stars appearing soon  
On sunset's blue-black nightfall  
Making you feel so infinitesimal!  
Or maybe a blue jay's call  
Against a brilliant winter sky  
With steep jagged mountains high  
Reflecting the sun's pink glow  
As sunrise bathes sparkling snow.  
In this beauty you rejoice,  
Thankful you had made the choice  
To seek nature's solitude  
And feel this great gratitude.  
Your heart sings the praises of God, the Creator...  
Simple, yet glorious!  
In your heart you know that nothing could be greater!

## Sacred Glimpses 2

These are great glimpses of reality so true...  
Momentarily feeling God's nearness to you.

Sometimes it's people that cause this door to open...  
Just a look, a small deed or words sweetly spoken:

A small child cuddled so close

Giving you a great big dose  
Of feeling needed and loved today,  
Looking at you that innocent, pure way.

Surely no gift is dearer!  
You know 'tis so and cuddle nearer.

A dear friend knocks at your door  
Bringing flowers and so much more:  
Kind words and heartfelt sharing...

Just when you so needed such caring.

Friendship is such a treasure!

A bond true without measure.

When you feel these moments in your awakened heart,

The great meaning of life within you plays its part.

Your heart and soul are once again bright and revived;

These times of love are when you thank God you're alive.

These are great glimpses of reality so true...  
Momentarily feeling God's nearness to you.





## **The Most Great Prison**

*...These are Thy servants, O my Lord, who have entered with Thee in this, the Most Great Prison, who have kept the Fast within its walls...*

It was dirty and dank, far from pretty  
The time I went to the Fortress City,  
Where the King of Kings they had imprisoned.  
(To stop His Cause, so they had envisioned.)  
Through the land gate and down that street I went...  
Into that Prison where He had been sent.  
Up the steps and into that cell...  
Yes...

I entered where He had been made to dwell  
For over two years in that cold, stark place,  
Where the sea was all the barred windows did face.

I looked through those black bars toward the cold sea...  
I felt His love...and knew He was with me.

The Most Great Prison, yes, I was once there...  
And I return each year...when I read this prayer.

March 2004

## Day Number Nine

Today is Day Number Nine  
Within the days of the Fast.  
No food or drink from dawn to dusk;  
Nine gone – ten more to the last.

Most of the time it's easy...  
Much easier than you'd think.  
But for me TODAY is hard.  
I feel I'm close to the brink!

Usually it's not so bad  
If you keep yourself busy.  
Despite being occupied,  
I feel weak, even dizzy.

My stomach hurts from hunger...  
My back feels like it will break...  
My head feels dull and spaced out.  
Just how much more can I take?

I want to cry but shouldn't,  
As I'll eat in an hour.  
In fact, I'll eat all I want –  
All in sight I might devour...

But, when I say my prayers now,  
That's when I actually cry.  
My spirit feels in touch now.  
My pain leaves me as I sigh.

How can I think I suffer  
These few days, these few hours?  
What about Bahá'u'lláh?  
He suffered despite His powers.

Like Christ upon the high cross,  
Bahá'u'lláh endured much;

Forty years a prisoner,  
Though His spirit they couldn't touch.

I sure don't compare myself  
To Him or to His kin,  
But when I consider Them  
Understanding does begin.

I know that my discomforts  
Are, in fact, so very small.  
Now that I have said my prayers  
I just don't feel bad at all.

## **For You, Bahá'u'lláh**

A day not fasting just doesn't feel right.  
I pray because it was for You, You might  
Understand and forgive me this night.  
You helped me so; I think that you might.

This was the day I've worked toward for more than a year.  
Through many, many tests You helped me persevere.  
Intuition didn't want this project pursued;  
At this stage of life many other things to do.

Such procrastination I've never had before...  
God's strength and assistance I often would implore.  
The commitment made, I had to see it through...  
Never would've happened, except it was for You.

A day not fasting just doesn't feel right.  
I pray because it was for You, You might  
Understand and forgive me this night.  
You helped me so; I think that you might.

Still...  
A day not fasting just doesn't feel right.

## A Plea to Saint Patrick

The Hill of Slane majestically rises,  
Ruined abbey and church tower so tall.  
Here Patrick lit the first fire so bright:  
To the Tara King he raised the great call.

The King declined, but let Patrick move on  
To the Druids and Celts God's Word to spread.  
Throughout the land Patrick travelled alone  
Bringing new life, awakening the dead.

Such was the effect on these humble souls  
Throughout the Emerald Isle the new Life grew.  
It became the land of Saints and Scholars;  
Such was the height of Spirit the land knew.

But the glory has faded. The Word now lost.  
Today this land is blemished with such shame.\*  
Though the Word Returned, they can't hear the Call;  
They reject all for the sake of His Name.

But we few Bahá'ís in Slane remember  
Here was the start all those long years ago.  
St. Patrick, aid us to raise the new Word!  
Here, again, set the new Spirit aglow!

\*When this poem was written, the great scandal had just come out regarding the Roman Catholic Church covering up the many cases of child abuse around the country and the world.

## **Blessings of the Morning**

5:50 – The alarm goes off waking me from a sound sleep:  
'But I only went to bed!'  
I hear in my tired head.

6:00 – Dragging myself out of bed, quietly I creep:  
To the sitting room still cold  
I bow my head, my arms fold.

6:05 – My sleepy soul wakes with this morning's sweet prayer:  
I'm feeling God's love so near...  
Memories of martyrs dear.

6:25 – Go to wake the others. Breakfast to now prepare:  
Hurry, hurry, rush, rush, rush!  
    Chatting, munching – gone the hush!

6:43 – It's time to be done now and clear the food away:  
Tummy full with toast and tea,  
It feels content as can be!

6:45 – So, there's the early start to this next fasting day:  
The others go back to bed.  
I decide to write instead.

6:48 – 'Another day of fasting', I say with a smile:  
Nothing at all until sunset,  
Only prayers my lips will wet.

6:50 – The red sun rising, looking so large for just awhile:  
A sight to behold at last!  
Another blessing of the Fast!

## **Spiritual Sisters**

Spiritual Sisters are White Feather and I

Sisters from the same dear mother's womb  
Sisters in spirit, whether near or far  
Sisters long ago and still today  
Sisters in the spiritual way

They both seek the way of the spirit -

One the path of the ancient native way;  
One the plan of the long Promised New Day.

They both seek the universal love -

One refers to Him as 'Great Creator';  
One says 'God' and knows none could be greater.

They both seek the way of reverence -

One with nature and sacred gifts given;  
One with prayers and songs sung to heaven.

Sisters from the same dear mother's womb  
Sisters in spirit, whether near or far  
Sisters long ago and still today  
Sisters in the spiritual way



## My First Prayer Book

O Friend! O Friend of long ago!  
How I do cherish you so!  
In my hand your soft green cover  
Still gives comfort like no other.  
With pages taped from being torn  
And some places dirt smudged and worn,  
You are to me still so, so dear  
As to my heart I hold you near.  
You went with me to places Holy.  
And many others much more lowly,  
Where together we tried to serve;  
Despite the tests, we didn't swerve.  
So long together, you and I.  
Many times your Words made me cry  
Tears of wonder, awe and joy.  
I prayed those Words I could employ  
To change my heart to serve mankind  
And put my old ways far behind.

Tattered and old you know me best;  
You stayed with me throughout my quest.  
From the start of the journey long,  
You gave me strength through right and wrong.  
You also caught my tears for pain  
And brought the peace again to reign.  
In the mountain of my strong heart,  
You, dear friend, played the biggest part  
Making me steadfast and so firm;  
From your pages so much I did learn.

Though faded and frayed, you are to me  
The dearest Friend there ever could be.

March 2004

## **Meeting the Master**

*Whoso reciteth this prayer with lowliness and fervour will bring gladness and joy to the heart of this Servant; it will be even as meeting Him face to face...*

Graciously look upon Thy servant,  
Humble and so lowly at Thy door...  
Canst Thou feel my love, 'Abdu'l-Bahá,  
As to Thee with my whole heart I implore?

I read stories of those Thou didst met –  
Ordinary people like me.  
I try to imagine that bounty  
And wish that I, too, could've met Thee.

So, I say this prayer quite often;  
It seems to be the only way.  
And it is just as Thou hast said:  
'Face to face' we do meet each day!

With this prayer doth Thy servant call Thee  
At dawn and in the night season...  
I thank Thee, O my Heart's Desire!  
How Thou dost bring life meaning and reason!

## The Race Unity Day

Such a blessing I had today...  
I watched the children laugh and play!  
Joking, skipping and running wild...  
Oh! The carefree days of a child!

Today I was their teacher new...  
Not always sure just what to do!  
Oh! What responsibility  
To see them all look up at me!

As their teacher throughout the day,  
I tried to make the work like play.  
Stories, art, lessons and a song...  
We got on so well all day long!

I told them all spiritual things  
About the love race unity brings.  
With pure hearts they listened away  
And heard God's Word for us today!

Like a seed these Words can now grow;  
Deep in their hearts the Truth they'll know.  
Oh! Such blessings I can't believe...  
For me to give and them to receive!

## **For Everything There is a Reason**

Why do we think we're told to Fast  
In this Great Day, as in the past?  
Does God wish to inflict such pain,  
As from food and drink we abstain?

The Great Physician sets the plan  
Calling us to before Him stand  
At each daybreak and at sunset  
To feel His love and not forget:  
Without His love we wouldn't BE.  
Why is this hard for most to see?

Why do some think they cannot Fast?  
Why do they think they could not last?

Don't they know God will help them through  
When they do as He asks them to?  
Though sometimes they may feel so weak,  
Great inner strength to them would speak.  
Without faith and obedience  
They cannot win this experience.

Why do others question our Fast?  
Why do they think we cannot last?

The Great Physician knows what's best;  
We simply obey His behest.  
When we just try, we can endure.  
He tests the hearts to find the pure.  
Exemptions His wisdom bestows.  
Special bounty to all He shows.

Why do we think we're told to Fast  
In this Great Day, as in the past?  
For everything there is a reason...  
Especially in the Fasting season.

## **To the Last Hour**

The days of Fasting are now coming to an end.  
You may think we'd be happy, but not so, my friend.

For every hour of these days has been endowed  
With that which would have caused every King to have bowed

Down in adoration and exaltation!  
Can you now see the error of your expectation?

For nineteen days abandoning sleep for His sake,  
We drink the cup of His remembrance at daybreak.

Of course this slight sacrifice we can well afford;  
The wine of His presence in our prayers our reward.

To the Most Great Prison fasting transports our hearts.  
We comprehend so briefly His enemies' darts

That kept Him imprisoned for those forty long years.  
Having visited that prison, we melt in tears.

The days of Fasting are now coming to an end.  
You may think we'd be happy, but not so, my friend.

The slow hours of these past nineteen days so long  
Make us physically weak, but spiritually strong.

These days hold for us such potency and power  
We cherish and treasure them to the last hour.

## Biographical Notes

**Andrew Alexander** is an Architect and currently resides and works in Dublin. Since 1997, he has had the privilege of being elected to serve on local Bahá'í Institutions in Thailand and in Ireland. He read Architecture at Queen's University Belfast between 1987 and 1994, and has since worked as an Architect in a professional and voluntary capacity in Ireland and in Thailand respectively. Andrew is particularly interested in the design of social buildings for the community – particularly schools and sports facilities – and has a keen interest in the architecture of the Alvar Aalto in Finland.

**Gearóid Carey** received his Degree in Computers 1995 and his Graduate Diploma in Humanities in 1997. Subsequent to his Diploma in 1997, he has done youth work and worked with people with mental disabilities.

**Vincent Flannery** lives in County Leitrim since 1984 where he teaches art.

**Sally Liya** is a Soil Microbiologist now back in her native Northern Ireland after 20 years in Africa. After 10 years in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where she taught microbiology, she moved to Nigeria to do research for her doctorate on nitrogen fixation by trees used for agroforestry. She has been a Bahá'í for over 40 years. She now does voluntary work for environmental and cycling charities, and is an active member of The International Tree Foundation. She is interested in the influence of trees on individual and community well-being.

**Olive McKinley** heard of the Faith in 1950 through Brian Townshend, son of Hand of the Cause of God, George, and declared two months later. She pioneered in 1953 to Blackburn, Lancashire, and attended the Intercontinental Conference in Stockholm that year. She pioneered to Leiden, Holland in 1960, and attended the World Congress in London in 1963. She taught French for eight years before becoming a translator of Dutch in The Hague in 1972. She returned to Sligo in 1976 and was a

member of its first Local Spiritual Assembly. Her published work includes translations from Dutch of two Bahá'í books for young people and from French of *The Life of Thomas Breakwell* (Baha'í Publishing Trust, London, 1998). She has been editor of *CAT CHAT*, the Newsletter of the Cats Protection Association of Ireland, since 1986 and enjoys fiction.

**Eamonn Moane** is a lecturer in Accountancy and Financial Management at the Dublin Institute of Technology. He accepted the Bahá'í Faith in 1977, and from 1981 to 1991 he worked as an accountant in the Finance Department of the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel.

**Betsy Omidvaran** joined the Bahá'í community in 1974 in the United States. She moved to Ireland in 1987 and has served as a member and officer of a number of Bahá'í institutions, local and national. She received a BA in psychology and sociology in 1979 from Wesleyan University in Connecticut (US). She also finished a BA in Arabic and History at University College Dublin in 2001 and recently obtained an MLitt degree at UCD for her thesis on the autobiography of the Egyptian journalist and educator, Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid (1872-1963).

**Dawn Staudt** has lived in Ireland since 1985, when she pioneered from the State of Vermont with her husband, Larry, and their three children. A fourth child was born here and it is only this past year or so that full-time mothering has not been her biggest job. She has been a Bahá'í for 25 years, and it is the spirit of the Bahá'í Faith that moves her soul to write poetry.

## Guidelines for Contributors

Bahá'í scholarship is an endeavour open to everyone. The editor and reviewer of *Solas* will be looking for the substance, method and spirit of true scholarship, a scholarship guided by the Faith's primary principle of the independent investigation of truth complemented by scholarly integrity and humility and due respect for the views and insights put forward by others. This involves concern for important issues and problems, careful and comprehensive consideration of the facts, logical development of ideas and moderate yet persuasive presentation of conclusions or interpretations.

We welcome contributions, preferably unpublished, on a broad range of subjects. Papers that relate contemporary issues to the principles, history, teachings and philosophy of the Bahá'í Faith are especially welcome. Short pieces of reflective writing may be submitted as a 'Sounding.' Poetry and reviews (e.g. of books, films, drama, music, television documentaries) are also welcome, as are responses to papers and reviews.

We ask that contributors simplify evaluation and publication by closely following the system used in the most recent issue of *Solas* where, for example, endnotes are used instead of footnotes. A bibliography may also be included, though this is left to the contributor. Papers should not normally exceed 6,000 words and should be sent to the editor, Eamonn Moane, as file attachments (preferably Word) to [eamonnmoane@eircom.net](mailto:eamonnmoane@eircom.net).

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