

UK BAHÁ'Í

Spreading the Light of Unity

*Twin Holy Days celebrated
throughout the UK and
around the world*

MESSAGE OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

*To all who have come
to honour the Herald of
a new Dawn*

THE SHRINE OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

*Concept for design
unveiled*

BRITISH LIBRARY EXPLORES SACRED TEXTS

*The revolutionary
changes that heralded
a new era*

A SINGULARLY, REMARKABLE LIFE

*Passing of "extraordinary
figure", Alí Nakhjavání*

Welcome to UK Bahá'í

For the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, the Universal House of Justice gave us two gifts. Firstly, the film *Dawn of the Light*, which has been shown in countless settings, from gatherings in homes to screenings in cinemas. The film demonstrates that every soul has the capacity and possibility to effect a transformation not only in their own lives but in their entire community.

The second gift was the letter addressed to "all who have come to honour the Herald of a new Dawn". As we report in this issue, armed with the film and the message, friends everywhere set about celebrating the twin Holy Birthdays. Following the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh in 2017, the House of Justice urged us "to see in each person who responded to your invitation a potential protagonist in the community-building process." It remains a summons upon which victory in the Five Year Plan depends.

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introduction

72 hours, one world

At the end of October 2019, over the course of three rotations of the Earth, humanity in every land commemorated the anniversaries of the births of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh

THESE DAYS OF commemoration offered a glimpse into a humanity that is rarely, if ever, so profoundly depicted in its oneness. Neither borders, nor conflicts between nations, nor prejudices of class, race, religion or culture, were able in the least to obscure the reality that all humanity is one.

The description below, from the message of the Universal House of Justice on the occasion of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb, was illustrated through the multitude of examples that flowed in over these days:

“... these are communities that define themselves by their commitment to the oneness of humanity. They value the rich diversity represented by all the world’s kindreds, while maintaining that one’s identity as a member of the human race has precedence before other identities and associations. They affirm the need for a global consciousness, arising from a shared concern for the well-being of humankind,

and they count all the peoples of the earth as spiritual brothers and sisters. Not content with simply belonging to such communities, Bahá'u'lláh’s followers are making constant effort to invite like-minded souls to join them in learning how to put His teachings into effect.”

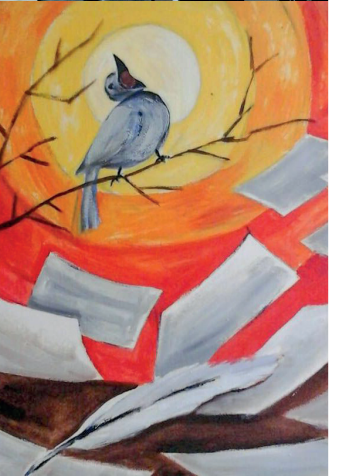
Two centuries ago during His brief and dramatic ministry, the Báb suffered exile, imprisonment and martyrdom at the hands of a fanatical leadership that was determined to snuff out His light and keep the populace in darkness. He Himself, during His imprisonment in the remote fortress

of Mah-Kú, was kept in darkness, denied even a candle at night. In contrast to that oppression, His Shrine on Mount Carmel stands lit every evening as a reminder that His light, and indeed the light of Bahá'u'lláh for Whom He paved the way, cannot be extinguished.

The celebrations that encircled the planet brought to vivid life the well-known passage of Bahá'u'lláh: “So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth.”



ABOVE: More than 16,000 visitors attended a special visit to the Mount Carmel Terraces on 16-17 October 2019.





The Universal House of Justice

8 November 2019

DEARLY LOVED FRIENDS

THE MEASURE OF what you have achieved—not only in the last few weeks, but during a two-year period of remarkable advance now brought to a stunning climax—compels us to address you who are the visible hosts of a movement that has proved itself irrepensible. Far from being merely a memorable event, the celebration of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb was the fruit of eight cycles of devoted effort, carried out in unity and with a sense of undaunted initiative. We rejoiced to see the friends so assured in their response to the call to service. Local communities, neighbourhoods, and villages became arenas for intensified activity of all kinds, as the knowledge of what the community could accomplish—witnessed at the last bicentenary—prompted a release of tremendous energy and enterprise, supported by a sound process of preparation and reflection. There are so many highlights to acknowledge. Celebrations within families and among families featured prominently; gatherings organized by youth for their peers were likewise a strength. Opportunities for animated retellings of the lives of the Báb and His early disciples were eagerly seized. Festivities were given added depth through conversations on the needs of society, often begun by the parents of young children. The bicentenary elicited artistic works of beauty and feeling, creative expressions of devotion too numerous and diverse to describe. And the way that each avenue of activity became a natural invitation to engage with the institute was especially noticeable. We were much encouraged by the capacity shown to bring the broadest possible spectrum of people into the embrace of the community's activities. Surely, this illustrates how moments sacred in human history and commemorated at Holy Days have immense power to uplift individual souls and

to weld a people together through shared experience. What great promise for advances at the level of culture lies in the universal celebration of such Festivals in place after place in the years to come!

The reality that there is abundant receptivity in the world at large is not in doubt. Progress depends on developing the capacity to extend the community-building process further still. And so all eyes turn to the months ahead. The devotion to the Twin Divine Luminaries and to the well-being of humanity which inspired your noble exertions thus far must sustain you in the coming six cycles. We urge everyone who worked to bring about this success to hasten now and gather again to reflect and to consult, and to determine how best to apply, in each unique setting, all that your experience has taught you: how an expanding nucleus of friends can cultivate a growing pattern of activity; how children can advance to the next grade and junior youth to the succeeding text, further developing their moral and spiritual qualities; how institute courses can yield much-needed skills and capacities; how the path of service can widen to accommodate large numbers; how real hope for the betterment of society can be demonstrated in action; and how all of God's peoples can be enabled to take inspiration from His new Revelation, and souls who are receptive can be invited to identify with the Cause of the Abhá Beauty. In this continuing period of special potency, at an hour when the world seems powerless in the face of overwhelming peril and souls have succumbed to dismay and despair, Bahá'u'lláh has shown us another glimpse of what the community that bears His name can accomplish through courage—even heroism—in the discharge of its God-given mission. We will pray earnestly in the Holy Shrines for His unfailing confirmations to surround every child and every youth, every woman and every man, every family and every community that treasures His love in their hearts.

– *The Universal House of Justice*



The Universal House of Justice

October 2019

TO ALL WHO HAVE COME
TO HONOUR THE HERALD
OF A NEW DAWN

DEARLY LOVED FRIENDS

CONSIDER WITH US. Whenever a divine Educator appears in the world, a Figure Whose teachings will come to shape human thought and action for centuries thereafter—at such a dramatic, seismic moment, what would we expect?

The appearance of every such Educator, as recorded in the Sacred Texts of the world's great faiths, is a pivotal event that propels the advancement of civilization. The spiritual stimulus each has provided throughout history has enabled the radius of human cooperation to extend from the clan, to the tribe, to the city-state, and to the nation. And each of these great Teachers promised that, in time, another divine Figure would appear, Whose advent should be anticipated and Whose influence would reform the world. No wonder, then,

that the coming of the Báb, Whose Birth two centuries ago we now honour, gave rise to unprecedented ferment in the country where He was born. The moment of His appearance, like the appearance of all such Figures, precipitated the release of powerful spiritual forces—but there was no accompanying spectacle. There was instead a late evening conversation, in a modest Persian dwelling, between a student of religion and his youthful Host, during which that Host revealed that He was the Promised One, the divine Educator His guest had been seeking. “Observe attentively,” He remarked, “Might not the Person intended ... be none other than I?” It is this Youth, the Báb, that we acclaim as the One Whose coming—after an interval of a thousand years—shed the light of divine guidance once again upon the human world.

From this first moment unfolded all that has since come to pass. The Báb's Writings flowed profusely from His pen, disclosing profound truths, dismissing superstitions that held sway in His day, urging the people to recognize the significance of the times, castigating the hypocrisy of their leaders, and summoning the world to an exalted standard of conduct. “O peoples of the earth!” He declares in one of His major works, “Verily the resplendent Light of God hath appeared in your midst ... that ye may be guided aright to the ways of peace and, by the leave of God, step out of the darkness into the light and onto this far-extended Path of Truth.” His influence spread with extraordinary rapidity, reaching beyond the limits of Persia. Observers were astonished alike by the fast-swelling numbers of His followers and by their deeds of unsurpassed bravery and devotion. Accounts of the Báb's life—the swift arc it traced and the tragic drama that ended it—induced curious souls to travel to Persia and investigate further, and inspired a range of artistic tributes to His Person.

The brilliance of the light of the Báb seems the more dazzling when set against the darkness of the social milieu



LEFT: “There was instead a late evening conversation, in a modest Persian dwelling, between a student of religion and his youthful Host...”

in which He appeared. Nineteenth-century Persia was far removed from its glory days when its civilization was the envy of the world. Ignorance now prevailed; senseless dogmas went unchallenged; inequality was fuelled by rampant corruption. Religion, the foundation of Persia's former prosperity, had become a body devoid of its animating spirit. Each succeeding year offered the subjugated masses only disillusionment and hopelessness. Oppression was complete. Then, like a spring storm, the Báb came to purge and purify, to uproot the withered and spent customs of a wayward age, and to wash away the obscuring dust from the eyes of those blinded by illusion. But the Báb had a special object in view. He sought to prepare people for the imminent appearance of Bahá'u'lláh—the second of the Twin Luminaries destined to bring new light to humankind. This was His most insistent theme. “When the Daystar of Bahá will shine resplendent above the horizon of eternity”, He instructed His followers, “it is incumbent upon you to present yourselves before His Throne.”

Thus did the Báb and, with even greater splendour, Bahá'u'lláh illuminate a society and an age shrouded in darkness. They inaugurated a new stage in social evolution: the stage of the unification of the entire human family. The spiritual energies They released into the world infused a new life into every sphere of endeavour, the results of which are evident in the transformation that has occurred. Material civilization has advanced immeasurably; astounding breakthroughs in science and technology have been achieved; the gates to the accumulated knowledge of humanity have been flung open. And principles set out by Bahá'u'lláh for the upliftment and progress of society and for ending systems of domination and exclusion have come to be widely accepted. Consider His teaching that humanity is one people, or that women are equal with men, or that education must be universal, or that rational investigation of the truth must prevail over fanciful theories and prejudices. Across all nations, a large segment of the world's people now agrees with these fundamental values.

Nevertheless, arguments against these values, previously confined to the margins of serious thought, are also resurgent in society—a reminder that ideals require the force of spiritual commitment to cement them. For it is one thing to acknowledge something in principle; it is quite another to embrace it with all of one's heart, and harder still to refashion society in ways that give collective expression to it. Yet this is the aim of communities emerging across the globe that are patterned on Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. These communities are striving to focus the light of those teachings on the chronic problems that afflict the societies around them; they are devising programmes of practical action centred on spiritual precepts. These are communities that champion the education of both girls and boys under all circumstances; that subscribe to an expanded conception of worship which includes work carried out in the spirit of service; that look to spiritual aspirations, rather than self-interest, as the ever-flowing springs of motivation; and that inculcate a resolve



ABOVE: The prison fortress of Mah-Kú where the Báb was held.

to advance individual and social transformation. They seek to bring about spiritual, social, and material progress simultaneously. Above all, these are communities that define themselves by their commitment to the oneness of humanity. They value the rich diversity represented by all the world's kindreds, while maintaining that one's identity as a member of the human race has precedence before other identities and associations. They affirm the need for a global consciousness, arising from a shared concern for the well-being of humankind, and they count all the peoples of the earth as spiritual brothers and sisters. Not content with simply belonging to such communities, Bahá'u'lláh's followers are making constant effort to invite like-minded souls to join them in learning how to put His teachings into effect.

This brings us to the crux of our case. The matter at hand is a challenging one, and requires candour. There are many noble and admirable causes in the world, and they arise from particular perspectives, each with its own merit. Is the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh merely one amongst them? Or is it universal, embodying the highest ideals of all humanity? After all, a Cause that is to be the wellspring of enduring justice and peace—not for one place or one people, but for all places and all peoples—must be inexhaustible, must possess a heavenly vitality that allows it to transcend all limitations and encompass every dimension of the life of humanity. Ultimately, it must have the power to transform the human heart. Then let us, like the Báb's guest, observe attentively. Does not the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh possess these very qualities?

If the teachings brought by Bahá'u'lláh are what will enable humanity to advance to the highest levels of unity, then one must search the soul for the right response. The multitudes who recognized the Báb were summoned to heroism, and their magnificent response is recorded by history. Let every one who is awake to the condition of the world, and to the persistent evils that warp the lives of its inhabitants, heed Bahá'u'lláh's call to selfless and steadfast service—heroism for the present age. What else will rescue the world but the efforts of countless souls who each make the welfare of humanity their principal, their dominating concern?

– *The Universal House of Justice*

Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb

Highlights from the Bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb

*Here is just a sample that illustrates the outstanding features
of the commemorations as described by the Universal House
of Justice in its message of 8 November 2019*

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE to do justice to the extraordinary range and variety of activities that communities and individuals across the United Kingdom undertook to honour the Báb on the bicentenary of His Birth.



*Local communities, neighbourhoods,
and villages became arenas for intensified
activity of all kinds, as the knowledge of
what the community could accomplish—
witnessed at the last bicentenary—
prompted a release of tremendous energy
and enterprise, supported by a sound
process of preparation and reflection.*

The sole believer in **Farndon**, West Midlands, invited his neighbours to drop by for tea and cake. An attractive invitation was hand-delivered to 11 households, prompting conversations that focused on the value of community and unity. Nineteen people attended on the day, with discussions focused on the bicentenary and community-building. Some who could not attend sent apologies and flowers.

In **Nottingham**, seven firesides and a musical devotional were held about the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, hosted by friends in different areas of the city. A special children's activity day was held; at the Holy Day celebrations, the Báb's Tablets to each of the Letters of the Living and other writings were displayed gallery style in a neighbourhood centre. More than 200 tins of food were collected for the food bank and homeless people.



Bahá'ís in **Ely** publicised their bicentenary event widely throughout the town. A special invitation card was designed and printed and distributed in key locations. A screening of *Dawn of the Light* was followed by more than an hour of conversations. One friend attending commented that she wished "this film be shown to all children in schools and their families. Everybody must see this!"



The **Ipswich** community gathered more than 45 friends and dignitaries to celebrate the bicentenary. This colourful gathering included African, Chinese, Romanian, Indian and Iranian friends. The mayor spoke about her passion for empowering the youth of Ipswich, which she has made her mayoral theme. Prior to the event a local believer spoke on BBC Radio Suffolk about the bicentenary.



In **Cambridge**, community consultations over a couple of Feasts leading up to the bicentenary led to the suggestion for a new monthly fireside and new monthly devotional to be established.



Two of the believers from **Grange-over-Sands** in Cumbria attended a meeting with the head of the local primary school to discuss the possibility of offering a lesson to one or more year groups about the Bahá'í views on justice, forgiveness and love. The head hopes that they can participate in further visits throughout the year which would tie in with other themes that pupils will be studying as part of their curriculum.



The **Brentwood, Billericay and Chelmsford** communities held an event to which neighbours and new contacts were invited. More than 80 people participated, of whom half were friends of the Faith.

In **Wandsworth (above)**, London, the friends started planning almost a year in advance. Trying to make their bicentenary celebrations as inclusive as possible, this community harnessed the capacities of youth, adults, junior youth and children and attracted more than 70 people. Alongside music and storytelling, the event explored the life of the Báb.



In **Maer and Whitmore**, Staffordshire, an isolated believer introduced the Faith to four friends when she attended a “Knit and Natter” group on the Birthday of Bahá'u'lláh. She took a special box of biscuits to the meeting, saying that she had brought them because it was a Bahá'í Holy Day and was able to speak about the principles of the Faith. She gave each person a little illustrated homemade book telling the story of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and including quotes from the Writings.



People in the neighbourhood of the Afnan Library in **Sandy (below)**, Bedfordshire were invited to a special open day. *Dawn of the Light* was shown three times, seven groups of people listened to a talk about the Library, Hand of the Cause of God Hasan Balyuzí, who was related to the Báb, then taken on a tour of the Library. One friend later wrote, “Two words stuck in my mind... Unity and Service!”



Twenty Congolese friends joined 50 others in **Sheffield**, where the bicentenary was celebrated with a devotional, storytelling, art activity, music and dancing. Two new Book 1 study circles are planned as a result.



Ahead of the bicentenary, the friends in **Altrincham and Sale**, Greater Manchester, organised a workshop for the whole cluster to familiarise the friends with the life of the Báb and how to introduce Him into conversations during home visits. A piano concert was also held in honour of the bicentenary.

Celebrations within families and among families featured prominently...

A group of friends from **Ireland (above)**, made the journey to find the grave of Dr William Cormick, the Irish physician who attended to the Báb, in Kensal Green, London.



In **Moniaive**, Scotland, the celebration of the Birth of the Báb took place during the 'Peacemakers' children's class. When everyone was together, stories were told about the Báb and the children asked about what it would have been like 200 years ago? They were curious about a life without electricity, asking "where did people get their information from?" This question allowed for an exploration of the importance of Holy Writings and how the early believers relied on the Teachings from God to guide their search. The children then recited their favourite prayer and were given clues to find a lamp hidden in the garden. As they searched, some collected some of the brightly-coloured leaves to craft a bright sun. With the sun setting and the lamp burning brightly, the group ended the celebration by singing "so powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth."



A consultation was held with families in the **Broomhall** neighbourhood of Sheffield, regarding how the area could be infused with the spirit of the Teachings. It was decided that regular service projects and worship open to all families will be a way to engage everyone in the neighbourhood.



A fireside in Persian was held in **Bushey**, Hertfordshire, where the life of the Báb and His station was shared, followed by questions and discussion. At the bicentenary celebration, a story about the Báb was shared with the audience which included Jewish, Muslim, Christian and agnostic friends. Persian-language and English firesides are planned and a regular devotional meeting.



A junior youth group that started a few weeks before in one of **Nottingham's** neighbourhoods decided to organize a family festival for its first service project, to which 40 people came — when the animators were only expecting 5 or 10 to show up! The junior youth made invitations, went on visits to invite their friends and family, told stories to the children and taught them the quotation 'do not be content...' through actions and song.

Gatherings organized by youth for their peers were likewise a strength...

The two neighbourhoods in **Manchester** city centre held a local youth institute camp. Twenty youth came along over the course of the five days for training in Books 1, 3 and 5. Three new local tutors were raised. The camp was punctuated by several neighbourhood celebrations to which more than 150 people came, the majority of whom were friends of the Faith.



In **Gibraltar** (above), after reflecting on their neighbourhood and inspired by the move towards a greater understanding of our environmental impact, the local youth group teamed up with a youth centre to create a sustainable urban garden. Using recycled materials, the large team worked hard to produce a vibrant and welcoming space. Striving together to create something beautiful, Bahá'í youth, local friends and youth leaders created a stunning garden. To celebrate the opening of the space, the youth group learned to sing the quotation "where there is love, nothing is too much trouble and there is always time", which they felt perfectly encapsulated the process of patience, commitment and collective effort that went into creating the garden.



In **Oxford** (below), thought was given to how to enhance the devotional character of the community. They invited a Bahá'í musician and friends, to offer a short musical devotional programme which could be hosted by local friends in their homes. 13 separate devotional gatherings were held with a total of 190 attendees. These "pop-up" devotionals gave many friends the opportunity to host their friends and families with the hope that many of these will become ongoing, regular gatherings.





Opportunities for animated re-tellings of the lives of the Báb and His early disciples were eagerly seized...

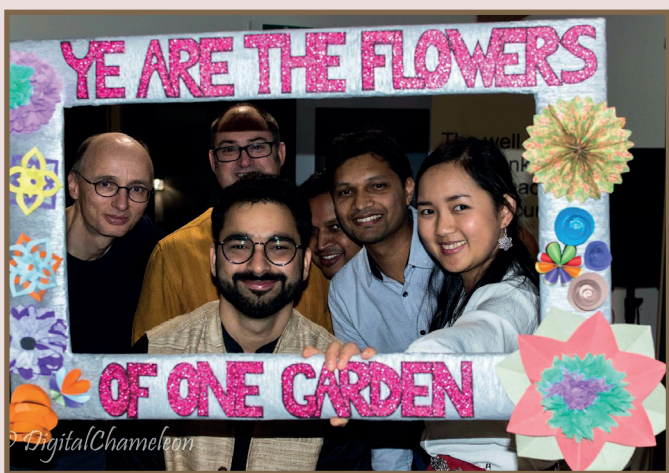
A family-friendly event in **Cambridge (above)** was attended by some 80 people included a devotional during which children, junior youth, and youth took a leading role. This was followed by a play telling the story of five individuals whose lives were closely associated with the Báb. The programme also included live musical performances and a storytelling about Táhírih.



In **Sedgeberrow**, Worcestershire, friends organised a dramatic presentation related to the life of the Báb. They are following up with firesides and devotionals for friends who attended the presentation.



In **Aberdeen (below)**, the celebration was a colourful event, filled with dance and stories. Four parts of the Báb's life in stories were shared. Other elements touched on by this community were pilgrimage and they shared some photographs of the Shrine of the Báb. A traditional ceilidh rounded the evening off.



In **Nuneaton**, events included conversations about the Báb and prayers shared with refugee friends in Arabic in their home. There have also been small home gatherings with different groups of friends talking about the Báb and a primary school assembly about the Báb, which included the children learning one of His invocations.



The story of the Báb was presented in a home in **Norwich** by three adults and four youth, two of whom were friends of the Faith, merging historical narrative, the Writings, music, visual images, and a beautiful range of voices. Nineteen friends of the Faith attended, including six people attending a Bahá'í event for the first time.



At a house meeting in **Southam**, Warwickshire, the story of the Báb and of Táhírih were told mostly by a friend of the Faith who attends a study circle.



In **Bethesda**, Wales, the children's class rehearsed and performed a play about Táhírih which they had been practising for several weeks in their class.

Festivities were given added depth through conversations on the needs of society, often begun by the parents of young children...

Birmingham held an event in conjunction with the end of a junior youth group, which has run for three years. Junior youth took part in a service project in the neighbourhood, accompanied by two parents and two siblings. This was followed by a brunch and conversations with some of the parents. The parents continue to meet on a regular basis.



In **Rugby**, families of children who have attended classes, and junior youth groups in the area, took part in a bicentenary event. The bonds with these families are strong and many conversations were held around the uniqueness and greatness of the Message of the Faith.



In **Hackney**, London, there was a flurry of activity as the community organised events for the local neighbourhoods. In particular, events held at the neighbourhood designated 'community flat' saw diverse and joyful celebrations, especially for younger members of the neighbourhood. Through three different events, the celebrations brought together people from diverse backgrounds, with those who are still in the stage of investigating the faith or attend children's classes and junior youth contributing to the programme, sharing

stories of the Báb and offering poems and songs. Members of the wider community also contributed food, helped with decorations and invited their friends. Even among those who have strong ties to Christianity and the Church, there is a great deal of love, trust and common purpose and growing attraction to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.



A children's class and junior youth celebration was organised by a neighbourhood nucleus in **Altrincham and Sale**. The Spiritual Assembly organised six celebrations for the junior youth to become familiar with the life of the Báb and they performed a song at the bicentenary celebration. A tree planting was organised by the children class to which the whole community was invited. The Deputy Lord Lieutenant and the vice-president of the Rotary Club also attended.

The bicentenary elicited artistic works of beauty and feeling, creative expressions of devotion too numerous and diverse to describe...

At the beginning of the year, the **Balsall Common and Meridian** community in Solihull, held a couple of workshops using the arts to explore the principle of unity with their friends. Activities explored origami, calligraphy, cross-stitch and baking, with a view for groups to form who might develop their own art for the bicentenary. A cross-stitch group created a piece based on the quote "Unite and bind together the hearts". The work was put on display alongside the message from the Universal House of Justice and other exhibits. For the rest of the year, they will host other artistic workshops with content suggested by their friends, screen *Dawn of the Light* and prepare an evening on the life of the Báb.



At the bicentenary celebration in **Leicester**, a friend of the Faith who regularly attends devotionals and is studying Book 2 shared a heartfelt poem he had composed about the Báb.



An original composition, Daystar, for violin, piano and soprano, was performed at St. Mary's Church in **Finedon**, Northamptonshire to an audience of 60. The work included the words of Bahá'u'lláh and Táhirih and the names and titles of the Manifestations of God.



The community in **Birmingham (below left)** partnered with the city's Museum and Art Gallery for several activity-based events. These included an interactive storytelling session, making crepe-paper roses, colouring and calligraphy, writing messages on a beautifully hand-made Peace Tree, and live music from two professional Bahá'í musicians. More than 200 people engaged in the activities.



An exhibition of books, photographs and artwork related to the Báb was held along with a devotional programme in **Mansfield**, Nottinghamshire, where presently there are no Bahá'ís living.



The community of **Dundee** in Scotland organised an exhibition titled 'Portal' at the Dundee Art Society's Roseangle Gallery. The Exhibition was initiated by a local Bahá'í and supported by the Local Spiritual Assembly. Eight Bahá'í artists and seven other local artists displayed work.

And the way that each avenue of activity became a natural invitation to engage with the institute was especially noticeable...

In **Dronfield**, Derbyshire, a Bahá'í carried out visits to seven neighbours to share the significance of the bicentenary. Freshly baked biscuits, accompanied by a card that gave a brief explanation of the bicentenary and the significance of the day, were given as gifts. These conversations are now continuing to strengthen bonds of friendship and the neighbours are being invited to engage further in community-building activities.



In **Doncaster**, live music and a screening of *Dawn of the Light* in a Bahá'í home stimulated conversations. A new study circle will begin soon.



In **Belfast**, Northern Ireland, the community celebrated the Bicentenary with a festival spanning five days of events that aimed to enhance conversations centred around the mission of the Twin Manifestations. This began with a festival at the Bahá'í-owned community centre called The Hub, which you have seen in the film *Dawn of the Light*. A two-day event centred mainly around children and youth

who take part in activities there. This was most significantly organised by the local residents and the participants in study circles.



Friends in **Lincoln** are inviting families who came to bicentenary events to participate in children's classes and the junior youth programme. Firesides will aim to lead into a new Book 1 study circle. *Dawn of the Light* will be shown in more spaces with a view to meeting more youth.

We were much encouraged by the capacity shown to bring the broadest possible spectrum of people into the embrace of the community's activities...

A believer in **Ludlow**, Shropshire, has shown *Dawn of the Light* in their home to close friends. "As I have seen the film so many times, I have been able to introduce it better and discuss with more insight," they wrote. "I found the small scale of my showings really enabled conversation and questions afterwards — more intense and searching than on other occasions." At the last viewing, the longest and deepest conversation was held. Using the film, this friend also felt empowered to point not only to Bahá'í beliefs, but also to the activities being undertaken to help bring them to realisation. With one of the visitors leaving with *Thief in the Night*, others with a greater understanding of the faith, and still more with a renewed and strengthened sense of friendship, this individual initiative bore great fruit.



Across **Wiltshire**, Bahá'ís gathered at sacred sites across the county, including Stonehenge. Inspired by the quotation "This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future", friends held a devotional at the 5,000-year-old structure. A devotional was also held at Avebury. Here, two friends of the faith read from the Writings for the very first time.



In **Newtownards and Bangor**, family, friends and representatives of the borough council were invited to a celebration. Guests included the Deputy Lord Mayor Karen Douglas and MP Jim Shannon, who both spoke at the event, sharing that Bahá'u'lláh's message "The Earth is but one country and mankind its citizens" resonated with them. While Mr Shannon expressed support for the community-building projects across the region, the Deputy Lord Mayor commented on the powerful messages communicated through *Dawn of the Light*.



In **Gorleston** (above right), Norfolk, the Bahá'í group organised a Community Friendship Walk which attracted a



diverse group of 25 friends and neighbours. In the crisp and sunny air of an autumn afternoon, wrapped in coats and hats, the group came together to explore the scenic landscape of Gorleston. With great joy, laughter and chatter, they walked along the sea front, along an old railway line and finally towards the cliff tops. The event embraced the beauty of the local environment while also initiating new friendships, as well as consolidating old ones. After the bracing walk, the group gathered at a believer's house to share more about the Báb, His Teachings and what Bahá'ís believe. Conversations continued over refreshments, and the community have since reflected on all that they learned about the power of prayer, perseverance and the importance of good planning in all of their further activities.



In **Rhondda Cynon Taff**, Wales, the discourse on climate change was also at the centre of the activities celebrating the bicentenary. Around 50 people, most of whom were friends of the Bahá'ís, gathered to plant 200 trees at the Mountain View Ranch. Members of a local choir sang, and a poem was read in a house that had been decorated especially for the occasion. Children were encouraged to plant seeds. Acorns, crab apples, conkers and sweet chestnuts were sunk into the ground in the autumnal air. A spirit of love and kindness surrounded the celebrations as the community gathered to learn about the Báb and engage with a constructive and inclusive activity for the wider community.

Surely, this illustrates how moments sacred in human history and commemorated at Holy Days have immense power to uplift individual souls and to weld a people together through shared experience. What great promise for advances at the level of culture lies in the universal celebration of such Festivals in place after place in the years to come!

AM/SG

the arts

Art and the interconnectedness of all things

*In Oxford, the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb
was celebrated at a special event with exhibition held
at Wolfson College on 3 November 2019*

THE GATHERING featured presentations by a number of Bahá'ís who shared insights from their various creative practices. By way of an introduction and welcome to the event, Canadian scholar Todd Lawson sent some introductory thoughts on the Báb as “artist”:

“To isolate the spiritual from art is a bit like trying to isolate the wet from water. The essentially metaphorical processes of art—whether plastic, graphic, literary, architectural, or musical—isolates and privileges the spiritual quality of all artistic expression and practice. More than anything, what we call today “art” circumscribes an activity that seeks somehow to capture and even analyze a feeling or response to the world that would remain otherwise ineffable or unmarked. Art speaks a truth that cannot be spoken another way. In art there is a great reverence for the luminous interconnectedness of “deep down things” that mirrors, illumines and echoes the most profound mystical experiences of the prophets, messengers, teachers and gurus of what we call “religion”.

The works presented here today are stunningly beautiful examples of both the work of the individual artists and the vibrant, ceaselessly-changing and generative connectedness among the arts, art and the artists. This is symbolic of the occasion: to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of One whom Bahá'ís believe will one day be recognized by the world as having wrought profound change in the spiritual life of the planet.

‘Alí-Muhammad Shirází, known to history as the Báb—

an Arabic word meaning gate or door—spoke a new music to His society in mid-19th century Iran. So startling was His rendition of the familiar sources of Islamic religion, the Qur’án and the sacred words of Islam’s holy teachers, that He was eventually put to death by firing squad at the young age of 32 in 1850. He had insisted that the world was now at a point in which the deepest spiritual teachings of Islám cried out to burst beyond their typically circumscribed and, in the context of the burgeoning globalization of the time, frankly parochial cultural home to enrich the life of humanity as a whole. Through rewriting the Qur’án, a bold and audacious artistic gesture, the Báb attracted the admiration and devotion of thousands of His fellow Iranians who likewise felt the same inevitable transformations stirring in their souls. It has been said: “When the mode of the music changes, the walls of the city shake.” Nothing could be truer of the response of Iran to the new call of the Báb, Whose insistence upon the non-negotiable unity of humanity, of the interconnectedness of cosmic processes with the life of the soul, and the oneness of the divine source of imagination, creation and being was both His greatest message and His death warrant.

The Báb was, in His role as prophet, a highly accomplished artist, though He may not have used such a term to identify Himself. The calligraphic flaming star exquisitely demonstrates His mastery of His materials, His powerful creative imagination and His unremitting desire to demonstrate the quite sacred interconnectedness of all things. Simultaneously cool and hot, near and far, this star is symbolic of the human being through whom the forces of life

and art combine to create consciousness. It is one of several similar calligraphic works produced by the Báb during His short life. It is constituted largely of quotations from the Qur'án extolling the power of God and the imminence of a new cycle of life for the world. It promises hope for the future in a voice that Islam had not previously heard and may be thought to mark the beginning of a specifically Iranian modernism in addition to its unmistakably universal song of hope.

We are all deeply honored to be able to join together here on this occasion to celebrate through our own art His unquenchable luminosity and His veneration of the artistic vocation as a mode of truth-telling and revelation.

Rhythm, harmony, melody, form and space are experienced in a heightened way through what we call "art".



Colour, story and above all, time and, its offspring history, become tamed through artistic expression, whether musical, literary, sculptural, pictorial or graphic.

Out of the apparent chaos — or at least bafflement — of being in the world the artist perceives and experiences harmony, unity, resolution, meaning and hope. The artist communicates this perception, this feeling, to the world, and the world is

enriched, emboldened, heartened, given life. The strange and undeniable experience of sensing music in art, art in literature and literature in all artistic expression, as if art itself creates and speaks its own language, maintains our attraction to and, in fact, dependence upon art. There is a kinship that flows through it all and the kinship is essentially spiritual." TL

*Arts, crafts and sciences uplift the world of being,
and are conducive to its exaltation. Knowledge is as
wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its
acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge
of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can
profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin
with words and end with words...*

— Bahá'u'lláh

international news

Design concept for the Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá unveiled

The Universal House of Justice has released the highly-anticipated design concept for the Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

FOR BAHÁ’ÍS, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá occupies a station without parallel in the religious annals of humankind. In a letter dated 20 September 2019, the House of Justice stated that the structure envisaged in the design seeks “to honour ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s unique position” and “to reflect at once His lofty station and His humility”.

“This should be unlike any other building,” explained Hossein Amanat, who has been selected as the architect for this historic initiative. “It seeks to manifest ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s selflessness, wisdom, openness, acceptance, and kindness towards all people, to embody His love for gardens and nature, and to reflect His progressive and forward-looking approach.”

“‘Abdu’l-Bahá had expressed His wish regarding where He should be buried,” explains Mr. Amanat, a distinguished Iranian-Canadian architect. “He had said to an early believer that if something should happen to Him and He should pass away, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wanted to be buried under the sands between Haifa and ‘Akká, which He described as the pathway trodden by the loved ones and the pilgrims.”

In a prayer composed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, recited by visitors to His resting place, He expresses this supplication to God: “Make me as dust in the pathway of Thy loved ones.” This idea in the prayer is one of the organizing principles of the design.

“Considering the essence of these words and referring to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s attributes, one is hesitant to design an

imposing structure for His resting place. His wishes must be taken into consideration,” Mr. Amanat says, “but not to such a literal extent that His station is not revered and recognized. His resting place must be new and unique, and not like any other building.”

Visitors will walk on a path designed to facilitate stages on a meditative journey toward the Shrine at the central point of the garden.

“The interior of the Shrine is envisioned to be a place of diffused light and quiet contemplation. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s resting spot is placed at the centre of this serene space, and a sunburst pattern emanating from His resting place will embrace the whole garden, symbolizing the radiance that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá brought to the people of the world,” says Mr. Amanat.

“‘Abdu’l-Bahá was a modern Man,” he continues. “He was a harbinger of the new—His words were new, the Teachings of His Father that He promulgated were new, and He called humanity to a new set of relationships. This building seeks to reflect that.” BWNS

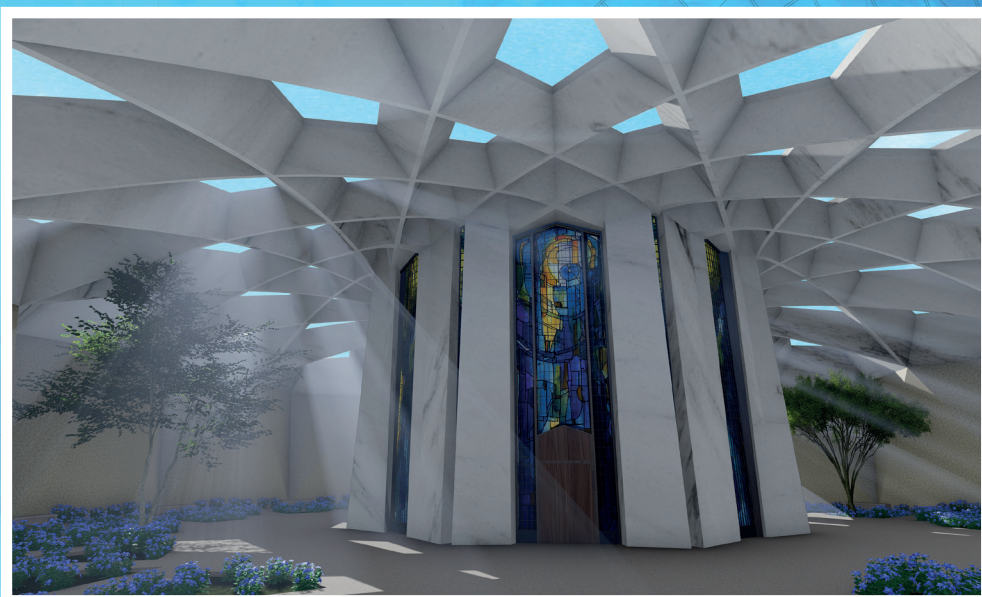
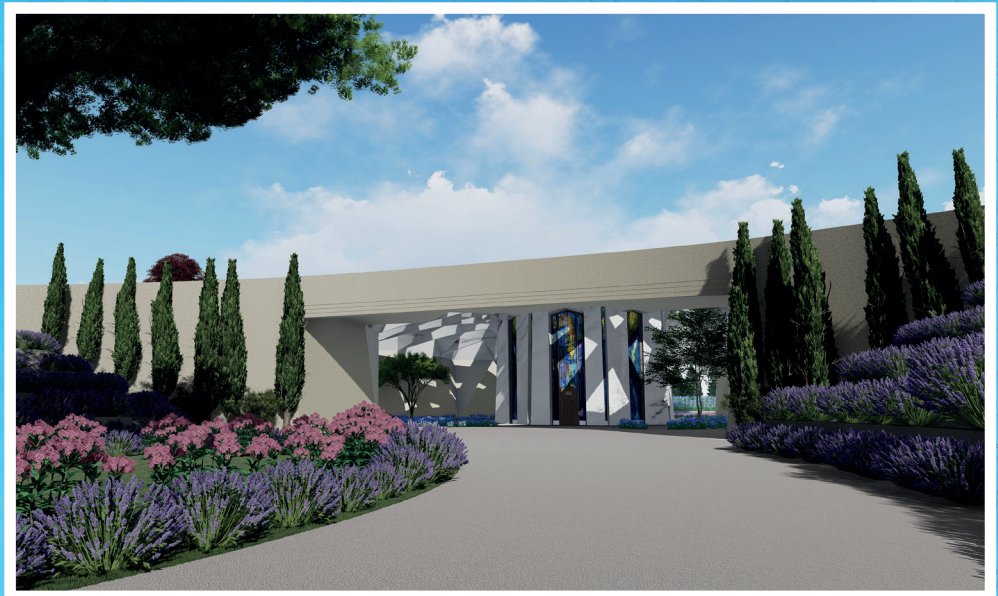
LEARN MORE AT

www.news.bahai.org/construction-of-the-shrine-of-abdul-baha/



"It seeks to manifest 'Abdu'l-Bahá's selflessness, wisdom, openness, acceptance, and kindness towards all people..."

"Visitors will walk on a path designed to facilitate stages on a meditative journey toward the Shrine at the central point of the garden."



"The interior of the Shrine is envisioned to be a place of diffused light and quiet contemplation."

feature article

British Library exhibits works of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh

*The British Library has launched a new website, **Discovering Sacred Texts**, with a companion exhibition, both of which feature examples of the Faith's original texts*

DRAWING FROM ITS vast collection, the library is displaying three rare and exquisite pieces in its Treasures Gallery: an original of the Báb's own handwriting, in the shape of a five-pointed star; calligraphic exercises written by Bahá'u'lláh in His childhood; and an example of "Revelation Writing", the form in which Bahá'u'lláh's words were recorded at speed by His secretaries as they were revealed. These manuscripts are on display at the library until the Spring.

The exhibition opened in conjunction with the library's new online educational resource which includes digitized selections of sacred texts from the world's religions. "Through the project we have made the British Library's significant collection of Bahá'í manuscripts accessible online," said Alex Whitfield, Learning and Digital Programmes Manager.

The new educational website "will provide an invaluable tool for students, teachers, lifelong learners, and anyone with an interest in the great world religions," says Dr. Whitfield. The site includes pages introducing the Bahá'í Faith, its sacred texts and Central Figures.

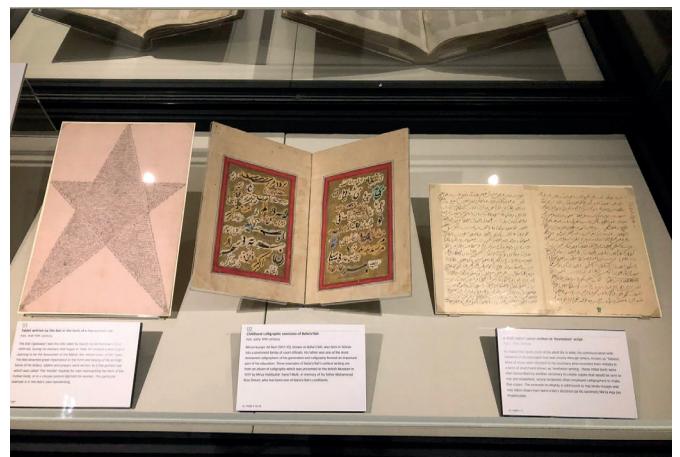
To further mark the bicentenary, the library invited actor and comedian Omid Djalili to stage five performances of his one-man show *A Strange Bit of History*, recounting events surrounding the appearance of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

Jon Fawcett, head of events at the British Library, first saw the show 25 years ago and had never forgotten it. "It struck me as a brilliant piece of storytelling," he said.

In the performance, Omid Djalili played 16 different roles.

The main characters are an executioner and a camel driver. "The executioner represents the reaction of the authorities at the time of the Báb," said Mr. Djalili, "while this lowly camel driver represents both the appeal of the Bahá'í Faith to people from every stratum of society and, at the same time, the sense of expectation during the Báb's time when, all over the world, people were spiritually searching."

In the play he also portrayed five modern-day performance poets. "They in turn comment on what's going on in the world, talking about their own search," he says, "but they also convey the sense that we are living at a great time, when two Divine Messengers have appeared in the world. **BWNS**



ABOVE: Three Bahá'í manuscripts on display at the British Library. RIGHT: A Tablet of the Báb in His own handwriting, on display at the British Library.

Handwritten text in Arabic script, arranged in a large, intricate star or floral pattern. The text is dense and fills the entire page, forming a complex geometric design. The script is finely written and follows the contours of the star shape, which has multiple points extending towards the corners of the page. The background is a light, aged paper color, and the text is written in dark ink. The overall appearance is that of a highly decorative and calligraphic manuscript page.

UK news

Bicentenary celebrated in Parliament

Members of Parliament, civil society, faith groups and journalists marked the 200th anniversary of the Birth of the Báb on 28 October 2019

A WARM AND joyful gathering, held at the Attlee Suite in Portcullis House, left attendees with a greater insight into the role of the Báb in foretelling the coming of Bahá'u'lláh.

Invited by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on the Bahá'í Faith, the guests were welcomed by Jim Shannon, MP for Strangford, who

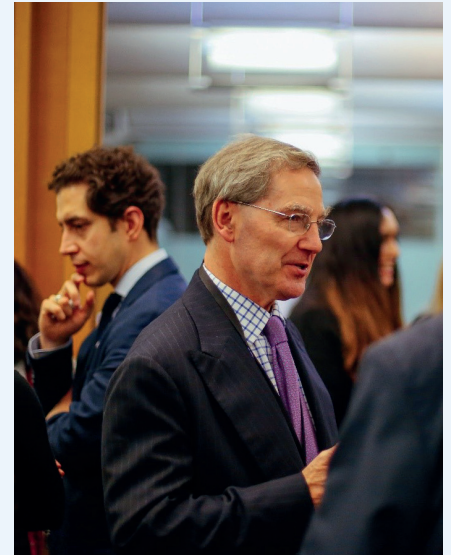
highlighted the friendliness extended by the Bahá'ís who reach “across the community to everyone.”

In his speech, Viscount Younger of Leckie, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, focused on the work of the Bahá'í community, the importance of the bicentenary and the diversity and pluralism of United Kingdom society.

“The teachings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh remain inspirational and relevant today,” he said. “They were both truly committed to improving the lives of the least fortunate in society.”

“Faith groups do so much for their communities—making them safer and stronger,” he continued. “I know the importance that Bahá'ís place on the betterment of their communities. Helping to support friends and neighbours, sharing prayers and worship, and encouraging younger members of the community to improve the places where they live.”

Olinga Tahzib, Chairman of the National Spiritual Assembly, explained that, “Bahá'ís are engaged with others in learning how to apply the rich and extraordinary range of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, which aim at building unity between all the peoples of the world.



Bahá'ís are driven by a vision of a united, peaceful and prosperous world—one in which prejudice finds no place, in which education is universal and the oneness of humanity is recognised and embraced.”

Guests also viewed a special exhibition that explored the Life and Mission of the Báb and an excerpt from the play *A Strange Bit of History*, which shed light on the widespread influence of the Báb's message, which attracted the attention of prominent academics, physicians and diplomats in the West as well as in Persia. **SG**



UK news

Bahá'í Training Centre

At noon on 5 December 2019, the National Spiritual Assembly took possession of the property at Arncott, near Bicester in Oxfordshire, that is now the Bahá'í Training Centre – the first of its kind in the United Kingdom

THIS **IMPORTANT** acquisition will facilitate the training and education of thousands of individuals, who – drawing on the Word of God and applying the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh – will contribute to the spiritual and social well-being of their communities.

Over the December-January holiday period, the first intensive training event took place at the Centre.

Preparing the premises in such a short period of time was truly a monumental task. It involved the sacrificial efforts of numerous volunteers from the hosting Thames Valley cluster and across the country, all of whom gave of their time with love. The venue was truly transformed; an elevated and joyful atmosphere pervaded the whole event and many commented on how, from the first moment, the Training Centre felt like a dedicated Bahá'í space. Some 15 study circles took place, involving more than 50 participants, including tutors. A parallel junior youth camp also happened, hosting some 17 persons from the focus neighbourhood of Woodberry in Hackney.

One tutor wrote: “Walking into the new Bahá'í Training Centre, was in itself a wonderful experience, the friends had done an incredible job of cleaning and arranging the venue, above all creating a beautiful atmosphere, felt by everyone when they arrived. It was such a relief for London friends who had formerly been involved in the time-consuming search for venues, to walk into a warm welcoming space – our space!”

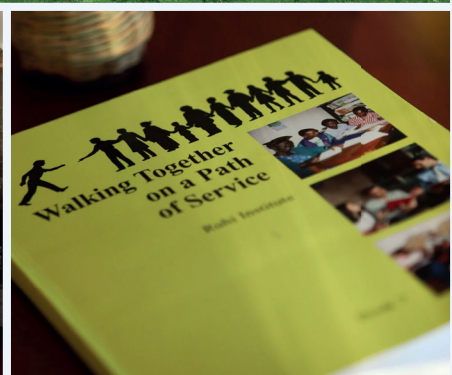
“Service was a major component of the experience. Study Circle participants worked in rotation to serve,

setting up breakfast, preparing the morning plenary devotional, clearing away and washing up after dinner and cleaning and tidying the venue at the end of the evening. During breaks the baristas and tea makers were busy serving and often cake would appear from the kitchen. Friends living nearby expressed their joy that the Training Centre was in their area, saying that previously they felt isolated, but now they have this wonderful opportunity for service. The main chef was a local believer who planned and prepared delicious meals which were offered with so much love. The spirit of joyous service imbued every aspect of the day in a beautiful and natural way.”

The acquisition of this Centre marks a milestone in the UK Bahá'í community's efforts to strengthen the institute process, “so that a sizeable number of friends proceed through the main sequence of courses.”

“Now we must learn how to use this gift from Bahá'u'lláh to greatest effect,” wrote the National Spiritual Assembly, “a conversation that is already taking place among the institutions of the Faith and the surrounding community.”

UKBN



in memoriam

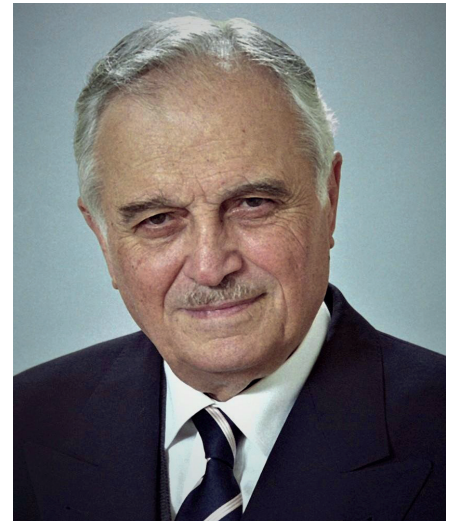
'Alí Nakhjavání (1919-2019)

'Ali Nakhjavání, former member of the Universal House of Justice, passed away in the early hours of 11 October in France. The Universal House of Justice sent the following message to all National Spiritual Assemblies.

WITH SORROWING hearts we convey the news that in the early hours of this morning our deeply cherished, illumined, and illustrious former colleague 'Alí Nakhjavání ascended to the worlds beyond.

We mourn the loss of an extraordinary figure who leaves behind a distinguished legacy of uninterrupted service to the Cause of God. In the

course of a singularly remarkable life that began in the closing years of the Heroic Age and extended to the very fringes of the second century of the Formative Age, he shone in the firmament of selfless devotion to Bahá'u'lláh and was called upon to be involved in many a major development in the rise of the Administrative Order, whether as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran, as an intrepid pioneer to Africa in the Ten Year Crusade, as a member of the African Auxiliary Board when it was first created, as a member of the Regional National Spiritual Assembly of Central and East Africa at its inception, and as a member of the International Bahá'í Council when it was first elected, a prelude to his membership on the Universal House of Justice when it was established in 1963. He brought to his decades of monumental service absolute fidelity to his beloved Guardian, an exceptional depth of knowledge of the Cause, leonine commitment to the defence of the Covenant, intense ardour for the teaching work, rare spiritual acuity, and a radiant heart brimming with love for everyone who crossed his path. His was a life of profound spiritual attainment lived at the hinge of history. May his utter consecration, his adamant faith, and his unswerving dedication to



duty inspire generations to come.

We supplicate at the Sacred Threshold for the progress of his noble soul, that it may be richly rewarded, and that it may be united with his valiant pillar of support, his beloved wife Violette. Our condolences are extended to his dear daughter and son, Bahiyyih and Mehran, and to their families, and we pray that their grieving hearts may be solaced. The friends are called upon to hold memorial meetings in his honour, including befitting gatherings in all Houses of Worship throughout the world.

— *The Universal House of Justice*



LEFT: Members of the first Universal House of Justice, elected in 1963. Left to right: Mr. Charles Wolcott, Mr. Amoz Gibson, Mr. Hushmand Fatheazam, Mr. Hugh Chance, Mr. Borrah Kavelin, Mr. Ian Semple, Dr. Lutfu'llah Hakim, Mr. David Hofman, and Mr. 'Alí Nakhjavání.

ABOVE: Early Cameroon pioneers. Left to right sitting: Enoch Olinga, 'Alí Nakhjavání. Standing: Samuel Najiki, David Taonti, Benedict Ebalá.



Further Reading

Bicentenary 2019: www.bicentenary.bahai.org/the-bab

The dedicated Bicentenary 2019 site includes messages from the Universal House of Justice, feature articles, the film *Dawn of the Light*, and glimpses from around the world on the two bicentenary days.

The Bahá'í World online publication: www.bahaiworld.bahai.org

The Bahá'í World volumes were established in 1926 under the direction of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith, as a unique record of world-wide Bahá'í activity. Today, The Bahá'í World online publication takes its place among the family of international Bahá'í websites, making available a collection of thoughtful essays and articles that seek to capture advances at the levels of thought and action and to reflect the Faith's purpose and mission in the world.

Bahá'í World News Service: <https://news.bahai.org/subscribe/>

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