

UKBAHÁ'Í

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Community & Collective Action

*What is the place of
community in our
modern world?*

THE ONE YEAR PLAN

*Day of the Covenant
message from the
Universal House of
Justice*

FAMILY LIFE & THE RIGHT OF GOD

*Living the law of
Ḥuqúqu'lláh*

LORD OF GENEROSITY

*'Abdu'l-Bahá's life of
selfless giving*

ARISING TO SERVE

*Youth reflect on years
of service*



Welcome to UK Bahá'í

In the past year, the global health pandemic has disrupted humanity's life everywhere. Yet it has also served to raise awareness about the importance of human solidarity and collective action. This edition of the UK Bahá'í explores the place of community in the modern world and the society that the Bahá'í Faith anticipates and strives toward. The perfect exemplar of how our lives can be oriented towards building a new society is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the centenary of Whose passing will be marked later this year. The forthcoming One Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice has written, "will be a year for profound reflection on the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the strength of the Covenant of which He was the Centre." With this in mind, the UK Bahá'í will be bringing the Master to the fore in this and future issues, exploring how He can be emulated in the lives of the Bahá'í community today.

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introduction

The example of the Master

Following so soon after the bicentenary celebrations of the Births of the Báb and of Bahá'u'lláh, 178 B.E. is destined to be another special year in the history of the Faith—a period when Bahá'ís the world over will mark the centenary of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

A One Year Plan is on the horizon—a Plan in which as many intensive programmes of growth as possible must be established; in which the many achievements of the Five Year Plan just past must be consolidated; in which the conditions necessary for welcoming larger and larger numbers of souls into the embrace of the Bahá'í community must be cultivated; in which communities of proven strength must help those where less experience has been accrued; in which “every community must draw on whatever untapped potential it may possess and seek to overcome any obstacles that are impeding its growth, thereby preparing it for the demands to come.”¹

As with every Plan from the Universal House of Justice, the call for sacrificial action and dedication to the task at hand is urgent, and maybe somewhat daunting if we dwell upon our own limitations. Yet 'Abdu'l-Bahá always called upon the Bahá'ís to follow His example and look beyond themselves:

*Look at me: I am so feeble, yet I have had the strength given me to come amongst you: a poor servant of God, who has been enabled to give you this message! I shall not be with you long! One must never consider one's own feebleness, it is the strength of the Holy Spirit of Love, which gives the power to teach. The thought of our own weakness could only bring despair.*²

On one occasion, after a meeting in London when many people had crowded around Him, 'Abdu'l-Bahá arrived back

exhausted at 97 Cadogan Gardens, where He was staying. Lady Blomfield, His hostess, wrote:

We were sad at heart that He should be so fatigued and bewailed the many steps to be ascended to the flat. Suddenly, to our amazement, the Master ran up the stairs to the top very quickly without stopping. He looked down at us as we walked up after Him, saying with a bright smile, from which all traces of fatigue had vanished: “You are all very old! I am very young!” Seeing me full of wonder, 'Abdu'l-Bahá said: “Through the power of Bahá'u'lláh all things can be done. I have just used that power. That was the only time we had ever seen Him use that power for Himself, and I feel that He did so then to cheer and comfort us, as we were really sad concerning His fatigue.”

In contemplating the tasks immediately ahead, the Universal House of Justice has expressed its hope that “frequent recollection...of the Master's matchless record will inspire and fortify His sincere admirers. Set His example before your eyes and fix your gaze upon it; let it be your instinctive guide in your pursuit of the aim of the Plan.”

¹ Universal House of Justice, 25 November 2020, To the Bahá'ís of the World

² 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, p. 34

³ Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, p.169

⁴ Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván 2011*, To the Bahá'ís of the World



The Universal House of Justice

25 November 2020

DEARLY LOVED FRIENDS

WE GREET YOU with immense affection on this special day, an occasion for calling to mind the power of the Covenant, that power which “pulsateth in the body of the contingent world” and forges enduring bonds of love among the believers. In the months since Riḍvān, we have seen the evidences of this dynamic power in the unified activity of Bahá’u’lláh’s followers, led so ably by the institutions of the Cause in each continent and country, as the friends everywhere have sought with characteristic creativity and determination to minister to the needs of an ailing world. Your resilience and your unwavering commitment to the well-being of those around you, persistent through all difficulties, have filled us with tremendous hope. But it is no wonder that, in some other quarters, hope has become a depleted resource. There is a mounting realization on the part of the world’s people that the decades ahead are set to bring with them challenges among the most daunting that the human family has ever had to face. The current global health crisis is but one such challenge, the ultimate severity of whose cost, both to lives and livelihoods, is yet unknown; your efforts to succour and support one another as well as your sisters and

brothers in society at large will certainly need to be sustained, and in places expanded.

It is against this background of furious storms lashing humanity that the ark of the Cause is about to embark upon a series of Plans that will carry it into the third century of the Bahá’í Era and significantly strengthen the Bahá’í community’s capacity for realizing the society-building powers of the Faith. As you are aware, the first Plan to commence this new series will last but one year. In places where circumstances prevent national communities from establishing as many intensive programmes of growth before Riḍvān 2021 as they intended, these twelve months will extend the time available to them to do so. Meanwhile, wherever the process of growth has already been intensified, the year will be an opportunity to consolidate the achievements made during the current Plan, while cultivating the conditions necessary for welcoming larger and larger numbers of souls into the embrace of a community recognized for its fortitude and outward-looking orientation. At the national, regional, and cluster levels, we look to communities of proven strength to help those in which less experience has accrued. In this year-long effort, every community must draw on whatever untapped potential it may possess and seek to overcome any obstacles that are impeding its growth, thereby preparing it for the demands to come. For it is within the context of a flourishing community, especially a centre of intense activity in a village or neighbourhood, and when each element of the

Plan's framework is given the attention it requires, that those elements most visibly cohere and connect, multiplying the community's powers in the field of action.

Besides providing for advances within clusters everywhere, the coming Plan will be a year for profound reflection on the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the strength of the Covenant of which He was the Centre, as the community prepares to commemorate the centenary of His Ascension. The observance of this anniversary will undoubtedly prompt individuals and communities alike to contemplate the significance of that infinitely poignant moment when He Who was the Mystery of God departed from this world. His passing took from the Bahá'ís of that era a Figure Who was the object of their ardent love and loyalty; to the faithful of this age, He remains without parallel: a perfect embodiment in word and deed of all that His Father taught, the One through Whom the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh was "proclaimed, championed and vindicated". We are conscious that the coming year will also mark a century since His Will and Testament—that "momentous", "historic", "immortal" Document—"called into being, outlined the features and set in motion the processes" of the Administrative Order, "the very pattern of that divine civilization which the almighty Law of Bahá'u'lláh is designed to establish upon earth". This "unique" and "divinely-conceived" Order, this "mighty administrative structure", had been fashioned by its Architect to perpetuate the Covenant and channel the spiritual powers of the Cause. It will be apparent, then, that the Day of the Covenant next year, exactly twelve months from now, will be especially meaningful. We ask National Spiritual Assemblies to determine how these two dates, occurring so close together, may each be observed, taking into account prevailing conditions in their countries.

All the while, earnest preparations continue to be made in the Holy Land for the commemoration of the centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at a gathering at which, it is hoped, representatives of National Spiritual Assemblies and Regional Bahá'í Councils will be present. Similarly, plans are already being made for the conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members, which will coincide, in January 2022, with the lapse of one hundred years since the first public reading of the Will and Testament of the Master. Conditions in the world may, of course, require the plans being made for these gatherings at the Bahá'í World Centre to change. But come what may, we have no doubt that the efforts made in local communities worldwide to befittingly commemorate the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and to honour the Day of the Covenant in this coming centennial year will provide the impetus needed to launch the succeeding stage in God's Minor Plan, even as Providence propels the unfoldment of His Major Plan in accordance with His incontestable decree.

The momentum that is sure to build with each successive cycle of the One Year Plan will be further augmented by the release of two films. The first of these, which will become

available in time for the centennial commemoration, will be a portrait of the Person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Besides being a tribute to His life and work, it will explore how, by championing the oneness of humanity through His words and deeds, He offered a challenge to the stale assumptions and prejudices of the age, and gave stimulus to a process of unification which continues to this day. A second film, following soon after the first, will reflect on the expiration of the first hundred years of the Formative Age from the vantage point of the heights to which the Bahá'í community has climbed, and from where it can now gaze upon new horizons.

The significance of the occasions being marked during the One Year Plan will lend it a unique character, enhancing the work being undertaken in clusters and making this single year the ideal preparation for the global endeavour that is to follow. With a sense of joyful anticipation, we announce that the Bahá'í world will, at Riḍván 2022, begin a Nine Year Plan. Its requirements and provisions will be set out at a later date, but its duration already gives an unmistakable indication of the expansive prospect it will present. God willing, it will be heralded by the convocation of a series of conferences held over a span of months across the globe.

This, so far as it can be foreseen, is the course the Bahá'í community will seek to tread. For the present hour, we urge you to recommit your energies, keeping your focus on the mission immediately before you. We are immensely gratified to see the assured composure with which the community of the Greatest Name has sought to offer the divine remedy under all conditions, especially during this period when society's established patterns of life have been disrupted and risks of different kinds are being faced by so many. Withal, the friends must guard against being drawn into the ultimately futile conflict and strife that characterizes so much of the discussion of the affairs of society, or—heaven forbid—allowing interaction of this type to permeate, even fleetingly, the conversations of the community. Yet such vigilance on your part in avoiding discord and in not becoming entangled in society's controversies should under no circumstances be construed as aloofness from the many pressing concerns of this time. Far from it. You are among the most active and earnest of humanity's well-wishers. But, whether through deeds or words, the merit of your every contribution to social well-being lies, first, in your resolute commitment to discover that precious point of unity where contrasting perspectives overlap and around which contending peoples can coalesce.

Less than two full cycles remain of the present Five Year Plan—indeed, of the current series of Plans inaugurated in 1996. In these closing months, we will be sure to offer ardent prayers on your behalf in our supplications at the Sacred Threshold. May you succeed in giving hope to those who know not where to find it in a world disoriented and adrift, sorely lacking the unity which you, through your heart-pledged devotion to the Covenant, so conspicuously manifest.

—*The Universal House of Justice*

Around the UK

Early stirrings of social action

Amid the mounting realisation in society of the challenges that the coming decades will represent, the Universal House of Justice is calling upon the Bahá'í community to play its part in serving humanity

AS WE ARE all painfully aware, humanity is burdened with numerous ills, all of which have been exacerbated—and impacted upon—by the current pandemic. A heightened community consciousness in the wider society is, however, allowing for meaningful collaborations with like-minded others, in service to the most vulnerable.

During recent months, the United Kingdom has witnessed an increase in the mobilisation of many organisations to bring practical support to those in need. Despite the necessary restrictions on face-to-face gatherings, the current circumstances have provided new opportunities for Bahá'ís and their friends to reflect deeply on the theme of social action and to share generously the methods, approaches and skills that have been honed through participation in the training institute process over the last two decades.

Social action is emerging naturally out of the many service projects of a Junior Youth Programme that is gaining in strength. Some examples include junior youth helping those younger than themselves with reading and homework, as well as organising activities such as crafts, baking and physical exercises on Zoom—all in an effort to keep up spirits and foster friendships. In other localities, the focus of a community has been on forging meaningful friendships through Zoom conversations on themes of race and social justice. Some neighbourhood teams have created online

friendship spaces in response to the loneliness, isolation and anxiety experienced by many during the current crisis.

There have been numerous initiatives, in different settings, to respond to food shortages, such as delivery of food packages, and coordinating food banks. In one focused neighbourhood, a community garden was created to offer a space where friends could gather safely outside. This space has allowed for conversations around social action to evolve, for ideas to take shape and for projects such as book exchanges and winter coat collections to be initiated.

Elsewhere, friends working with newly arrived Persian populations, are learning about the systematisation of their efforts in the organisation of material means, as well as creating English language programmes, literacy support and the use of the arts to help alleviate mental health issues.

All of these fledgling efforts are undoubtedly enhanced by the participation of Local Spiritual Assemblies, neighbourhood nuclei and individuals, in the study of Ruhi Book 13. These materials are helping to consolidate our collective understanding that it is ultimately the capacities we gain through the Training Institute process that equip us to become the most effective—as well as the most 'active and earnest'—of humanity's well-wishers. UKBN

RIGHT: A community garden at the Hub in Belfast's Windsor neighbourhood has been created to offer a space where friends can gather outside. (Photograph taken before the current health crisis.)



Efforts of social action, have proven more sustainable when they emerge in localities with a strong institute process, as a natural extension of the community-building activities under way. Early stirrings of social action in the UK are being conceived ever more firmly within the framework of the Plan, and a body of experience is growing.

– Universal House of Justice, 9 April 2017 to a National Spiritual Assembly

However humble an instance of social action might be at the beginning, it is an indication of a people cultivating within themselves a critical capacity, one that holds infinite potential and significance for the centuries ahead: learning how to apply the Revelation to the manifold dimensions of social existence.

– Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors



Our spiritual heritage

‘Abdu’l-Bahá – “Lord of Generosity”

“The coming Plan,” the Universal House of Justice has written, “will be a year for profound reflection on the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the strength of the Covenant of which He was the Centre...”

FROM HIS EARLIEST childhood, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s interactions with others were characterised by unsparing generosity. Once He was sent to some mountains where His Father Bahá’u’lláh owned a large herd of sheep. The shepherds desired to honour the visit of their guest by arranging a banquet. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was preparing to

depart for home, the principal shepherd shared that it was customary for a gift to be provided to the shepherds. Having nothing with Him to give, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá presented them with the entire flock of sheep. Upon hearing this story, Bahá’u’lláh is reported to have laughed, saying, “We will have to protect ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from Himself. Some day he will give himself away.”

LEFT: 'Abdu'l-Bahá with a group of friends in Brooklyn, New York, June 1912

In 'Akká, at the onset of winter, the Master went to a clothing shop where He arranged that a number of the poor should come to receive their annual cloaks. He personally would adjust the garments over some of their shoulders. When a friend sent some fur so that the Master could have a good warm coat, He had it cut up and made into 20 hats for the elderly men of the town. The citizens called Him the “Lord of Generosity” and the Bahá'ís marvelled at His constant acts of kindness.

Another time, when He was to entertain the Governor of 'Akká, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's wife felt that His coat was hardly worthy of the occasion. Well ahead of the day she went to the tailor where she ordered a fine coat, thinking that, with His lack of self-consciousness, He would surely not notice that His old coat was missing. He desired, after all, only to be scrupulously clean. The new garment was laid out at the proper time, but the Master went searching for His own coat. He asked for it, insisting that the one laid out was not His. His wife attempted to explain the new coat, but He would have none of it, and He told her why: “But think of this!...For the price of this coat you can buy five such as I ordinarily use, and do you think I would spend so much money upon a coat which only I shall wear? If you think I need a new one, very well, but send this back and have the tailor make Me for this price five such as I usually have. Then you see, I shall not only have a new one, but I shall have four to give to others!”

During His travels to the West, many a friend would attempt to present money, lavish gifts and the comforts of expensive accommodation to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. He would, however, decline these and only accepted small tokens borne of love. On one occasion, a believer in London presented 'Abdu'l-Bahá with a cheque that had been given to her by a friend, who had begged it be accepted for buying a motor vehicle for the Master's travels. Upon receiving the offering, 'Abdu'l-Bahá commented, “I accept with grateful thanks the gift of your friend. I return it to be used for gifts to the poor.” A pilgrim to 'Akka in 1905 recounted how 'Abdu'l-Bahá was offered a sum of money by a wealthy woman. He refused to accept it. But when the lady pleaded for the privilege of

placing it in His hands, He said, at length, “I never accept anything for Myself, but if you wish you may bestow it upon a poor man...for the education of his son.” So the money was used for this purpose.

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá first arrived in England, he stayed with a believer who lived in a village near the capital. He would often go for walks around the town, attired in His long Persian coat and white turban. During these outings, it caused the Master great distress to witness the impoverished conditions under which so many lived in so wealthy a nation. Naturally, His unusual garments attracted the attention of the locals who only knew Him as “a holy man from the East”. Children would gather around Him, pulling at His hands or

robes. Immediately, the Master would take them into His arms, filling the children with great joy. Upon putting the children down, what amazed them further still was that 'Abdu'l-Bahá would place within their hands a shilling or sixpence, money that to them was a great rarity. Word of this generous being—with seemingly endless pockets of sixpences—soon spread. People from neighbouring villages began arriving with their children to receive blessings and a coin. The friend with whom 'Abdu'l-Bahá was staying soon became anxious about the quantity of money the Master was giving away and discussed the issue with another guest who was staying at the house. “He comes to us accepting nothing and is giving to our people all the time! It must not go on!” they exclaimed. That day, the Master had given away many sixpence coins. The friends at the house

decided that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was not to be disturbed by any other visitors that evening. Later, however, whilst the friends were at the front of the house, another man bearing a baby with several other children hanging on to him arrived and asked to see “the holy Man.” The friends believing the man to have travelled solely to receive coins rather than for any interest in the religious nature of the Master, turned the man to begin his six-mile journey back home. Suddenly 'Abdu'l-Bahá appeared from the side of the house. He embraced the man and his children with great love and filled their hands with sixpences. The friends were so moved by what they had witnessed and the generosity of the Master. “How wrong we were!” they remarked. “We will never again try to manage 'Abdu'l-Bahá!” AM

The exemplary manner in which the Master lived—constantly sacrificing His own comfort and ease to lessen the burden of others—serves as a reminder of these words of Bahá'u'lláh: “To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine, well is it with him that adorneth himself with My virtues.”



feature article

Community and collective action

The current global crisis has raised awareness about the importance of human solidarity and collective action, writes Gustavo Correa, a former member of the Universal House of Justice. Within this context, it seems timely to ask ourselves: What is the place of community in our modern world and what is the kind of community towards which we aspire?

IN NEIGHBOURHOODS AND villages around the world, tens, hundreds, and in some places, thousands of people, inspired by the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, are engaged in activities that aim to “build community.” In their efforts, we can already see signs of the emergence of new patterns of collective life: a village coming together regularly at the hour of dawn to summon divine assistance before the day’s work; a group of people combining skills and knowledge to carry out a reforestation project; neighbours consulting on ways to establish classes for the spiritual education of their children; a population beginning to shed age-old prejudices and build new patterns of interaction based on justice and unity; young adults, in rural and urban settings, initiating small-scale agricultural projects to support their communities—examples like these and many more are springing up from every continent and multiplying.

The image that is evoked by the word community can be quite different from one person to the next. Some think of a community simply as those who live in the same geographic area, regardless of whether its members interact; others use the word to refer to a collection of people who share common interests or are motivated by the pursuit of a common goal; and, for many, community is seen as a population that shares

a common ethnic identity and set of traditions. We also come across people who believe that the sense of togetherness that we need as human beings can be fulfilled through virtual networks, and some thinkers even predict that the whole concept of a community as it has been traditionally known will eventually disappear.

Although certain aspects of the conceptions above may be valuable, the relationships that sustain society are also being reconceptualized by many in light of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Our understanding of community, then, will need to move beyond anything humanity currently knows or has experienced. To build a common vision of community, we turn to the messages of the Universal House of Justice. For instance, in 1996, the House of Justice described a community as:

a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families, and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its borders; it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress.¹

The House of Justice has also written about “vibrant communities,” describing them as being characterized by “tolerance and love and guided by a strong sense of purpose

LEFT: Bahá'í inspired social action and educational activities from around the world

and collective will” and explaining that they provide an “environment in which the capacities of all components—men, women, youth and children—are developed and their powers multiplied in unified action.”²

Over the past decade, Bahá'í community-building efforts have unfolded in smaller geographic areas like neighbourhoods and villages. This process has been very similar to the organic processes that take place in nature. Indeed, creating something new in social reality is, like the growth of a tree, an organic process that begins by planting a seed in fertile soil.

The process begins with a group of people inspired by a hopeful vision of change who take action together within the context of a neighbourhood or village. The initial steps they take are not random or haphazard but rather unfold within a framework defined by the growing experience of the worldwide Bahá'í community. The various elements that cohere to advance this process include classes for the spiritual education of children; groups of junior youth who, together with an older youth, support one another, study together, and carry out acts of service; the opening of homes and community centres for collective prayer and discussions about the progress of a neighbourhood or village; regular visits by neighbours to meet with one another and strengthen bonds of friendship; educational programs for youth and adults in which they reflect on the spiritual dimension of life and prepare themselves for a life of service; and in some places, initiatives that seek to enhance the social and material well-being of a population. Whatever the form and arrangement of activities, however, the process of community building is a process of transformation in which a population takes ownership of its own spiritual and social development.

The fruit of the process of community building is a unit of civilization that is characterized by the principles and teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. The House of Justice has explained the long-term nature of these efforts:

*The work advancing in every corner of the globe today represents the latest stage of the ongoing Bahá'í endeavour to create the nucleus of the glorious civilization enshrined in His teachings, the building of which is an enterprise of infinite complexity and scale, one that will demand centuries of exertion by humanity to bring to fruition. There are no shortcuts, no formulas. Only as effort is made to draw on insights from His Revelation, to tap into the accumulating knowledge of the human race, to apply His teachings intelligently to the life of humanity, and to consult on the questions that arise will the necessary learning occur and capacity be developed.*³

We are, of course, too early in these efforts to know exactly what the entire process looks like, what stages we will have to pass through, what obstacles we might face along the way, and what capacities will need to be developed at each stage of development by the members of the community, individually and collectively. These are questions we must

ask ourselves in the years and decades to come, and answers to these questions will become clear to us as we engage in a systematic process of learning.

Much has already been learned about the early stages of community building: A group of people turns to the sacred Writings and the guidance of the Universal House of Justice and takes action within a framework defined by the growing experience of the worldwide Bahá'í community; it draws insights from the existing body of knowledge and reflects on experience; it has regular conversations in which questions are asked and ideas are clarified; and, as understanding advances, the group adjusts its plans, approaches, and activities. The result is that its efforts become more and more effective, and the process it is trying to promote advances. In this way, the Bahá'í community is gradually developing its capacity to operate in a mode of learning and, as an organic global community, is advancing collectively.

As people learn more about the process of community building and how to effectively contribute to it, certain questions arise. For instance, what is my conception of community and what contributions can I make to the development of my community? What are those qualities, skills, and abilities that need to be developed in individuals and in groups to build vibrant communities? What are the things that are needed to enhance the relationships in a community? In seeking answers to these questions, we turn to the guiding and operating principles involved. As we understand these principles better and internalize them, they begin to find expression in our actions. They influence how we see ourselves in relation to others which in turn influences how we interact with others.

There are many principles that are relevant to the process of community building. Foremost among these is the oneness of humankind. Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, talked about the principle of oneness as “the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve.”⁴ He said that it cannot be seen as a “mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope” and that it cannot be merely identified with the “reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men.”⁵ It has profound implications for every aspect of the organized life of society. Having the principle of oneness in mind as the guiding and operating principle sheds light on the process of community building and gives direction to our efforts as participants.

In His letter to Queen Victoria, Bahá'u'lláh writes: “Regard the world as the human body.”⁷ This metaphor of the human body, or a living organism, was also often used by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá when He wanted to illustrate the implications of the principle of the oneness of humankind. Like any analogy, there are limits to how much it can explain. Nevertheless, like the elements of the human body, “all the members of this endless universe are linked one to another.”⁸ He urged us to act as the members of one body, each connected to the other with “a linkage complete and perfect”⁹ and contributing its



part for the benefit of the whole. He said that “man cannot live singly and alone. He is in need of continuous cooperation and mutual help... He can never, singly and alone, provide himself with all the necessities of existence. Therefore, he is in need of cooperation and reciprocity.”¹⁰ The House of Justice, in commenting on this metaphor, has further explained:

In the human body, every cell, every organ, every nerve has its part to play. When all do so the body is healthy, vigorous, radiant, ready for every call made upon it. No cell, however humble, lives apart from the body, whether in serving it or receiving from it. This is true of the body of mankind in which God “has endowed each humble being with ability and talent.”¹¹

Some characteristics of the living organism suggest where to focus our efforts as individuals. For example, the cells of the body are intimately connected to each other; their existence is purely in relation to the whole body. There is no possibility for the cell to live without its connection to the rest. The purpose of the cell is to maintain the health of the body and, at the same time, its life depends on it. In this regard, a characteristic that stands out is the necessity for the basic units of the organism to be selfless. Cells, in their very essence, are selfless. They are made that way. They adapt their functions in order to respond to unforeseen needs or emergencies or to protect the organism. The cell also takes only what it needs from the organism. The behaviour of healthy cells in the body illustrates well the high standard that the individual whose purpose is to work for the common good aspires to as a member of a group or community. This implies, for instance, giving of one’s time and energy generously, sacrificing when the situation requires it, being detached from the results of what we do, and carrying out our actions with sincerity and purity of heart.

This concept of selfless service and the responsibilities that everyone has in accomplishing the collective aim have many implications for the way we relate to others and to our work. It adds significance to various roles and responsibilities that we undertake. To see ourselves like the cells of the body implies that each of us gives our very best in fulfilling our

ABOVE: A group studying the spiritual empowerment of junior youth in Sinazongwe, Zambia

responsibilities; each one is conscious that everything he or she does influences the functioning of the community. And since each of us is responsible not only for his or her part but also for the functioning of the whole, cooperation and reciprocity should characterize relationships. In such an environment, everyone strives to draw out the best in people and to help others develop their full potential and takes joy in the progress of others.

This concept of selfless service also has implications for the manner in which we approach the acts of service we undertake and our various roles and responsibilities in a community. Serving with selflessness and diligence requires making choices, because, unlike the cells, we have free will. To put the interests of the collective before our own and to devote ourselves to doing things with excellence; to be ready to collaborate; to prefer our brothers and sisters over ourselves; to orient ourselves toward that which brings about the well-being of the community; to move beyond the inertia that sometimes holds us back from working to the best of our ability—all of these are individual choices that have to be made consciously. To give of ourselves is embedded in our nature; it is a capacity within us that can be developed and strengthened through constant effort, prayer, reflection, and the acquisition of knowledge. Maybe a word of caution is also needed here: To put the interest of the community before our own does not imply that we lose our individuality. We do not become dissolved in the community. There are many references in the Writings that shed light on the question of serving the common good.

O MY SERVANT! Thou art even as a finely tempered sword concealed in the darkness of its sheath and its value hidden from the artificer’s knowledge. Wherefore come forth from the sheath of self and desire that thy worth may be made resplendent and manifest unto all the world.¹²

Senses and faculties have been bestowed upon us, to be devoted to the service of the general good; so that

*we, distinguished above all other forms of life for perceptiveness and reason, should labour at all times and along all lines, whether the occasion be great or small, ordinary or extraordinary, until all mankind are safely gathered into the impregnable stronghold of knowledge.*¹³

*How excellent, how honourable is man if he arises to fulfil his responsibilities; how wretched and contemptible, if he shuts his eyes to the welfare of society and wastes his precious life in pursuing his own selfish interests and personal advantages.*¹⁴

In these early stages of building this new kind of community that reflects the divine teachings, we have to learn how to manage the apparent tension between pursuing our own interests and contributing to the common good. It is a very real tension within human beings. Undoubtedly, this will always be the case, since it is part of human nature. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has explained:

*Man is in the ultimate degree of materiality and the beginning of spirituality; that is, he is at the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. He is at the furthest degree of darkness and the beginning of the light. That is why the station of man is said to be the end of night and the beginning of day, meaning that he encompasses all the degrees of imperfection and that he potentially possesses all the degrees of perfection. He has both an animal side and an angelic side, and the role of the educator is to so train human souls that the angelic side may overcome the animal. Thus, should the divine powers, which are identical with perfection, overcome in man the satanic powers, which are absolute imperfection, he becomes the noblest of all creatures, but should the converse take place, he becomes the vilest of all beings. That is why he is the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection.*¹⁵

Although this tension will always be there, the Bahá'í writings also explain that the desire to do good is inherent in human nature because we are created noble. This desire to do good, however, needs to be cultivated and strengthened. It is through faith and our spiritual alignment with the will of God that we are enabled to do this.

The image of the functioning of the human body also gives us insights into the quality of the relationships that should exist within a healthy community. In the human body, we can appreciate how healthy interactions take place and how they contribute to maintaining unity and harmony among the diverse parts. Different organs, each with their own assigned functions, work together to allow new capacities to emerge—capacities that are manifested only when all the parts are functioning properly, each in its own sphere, and in perfect synchronization. Some of these capacities are associated with a specific organ while others do not belong to any particular one; the emergence of such capacities requires cooperation and reciprocity among the parts of the body. Whenever this

cooperation breaks down or is replaced by competition, the body’s ability to manifest these capacities is inhibited.

The intention of this presentation is not to present a thorough analysis of the process of community building. It is simply to share a few ideas for reflection on the efforts of Bahá'í communities worldwide to bring about a new kind of community and ultimately contribute to the emergence of a peaceful and just world civilization envisioned in the sacred Writings. In this connection, we have spent some time examining the implications of the principle of the oneness of humankind. The analogy of a human body was used to see how the principle of oneness is foundational to our conception of a community and guides our choices and our actions.

The Bahá'í world is still in the early stages of the process of community building, and there is a great deal to be done before the process reaches fruition. In light of the challenges facing humanity, the task before us may seem daunting indeed, but we are committed to this process over the long term and are inspired to make constant efforts to better understand the relevant principles and to reflect this understanding in our approaches. We draw on spiritual forces to assist us and to propel us forward, and the most powerful force binding us together is the force of universal love. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addresses us: “Strive to increase the love-power of reality” and “to make your hearts greater centres of attraction and to create new ideals and relationships.”¹⁶ Love, He writes, is “the magnetic force that directeth the movements of the spheres in the celestial realms” and “the establisher of true civilization in this mortal world.”¹⁷ GC

1 Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 1996

2 Universal House of Justice, To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 26 December 1995

3 Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of the World, Ridván 2010

4 Shoghi Effendi, “The Goal of a New World Order”, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p.42

5 *ibid.*, p.43

6 *ibid.*

7 Bahá'u'lláh, Suriy-i-Haykal, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, p.90

8 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 21

9 *ibid.*

10 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, 102

11 Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá'ís of the World, September 1964

12 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, From the Persian, 72

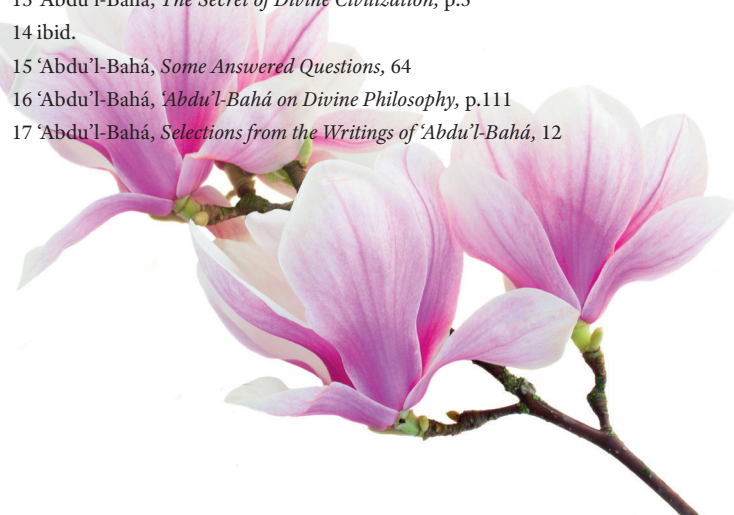
13 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p.5

14 *ibid.*

15 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, 64

16 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy*, p.111

17 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, 12



youth

Arising to serve

With the One Year Plan on the horizon, to be followed by a Nine Year Plan, young Bahá'ís have the opportunity to consider offering a focused period to service. Here, four youth reflect on their years of service—the highlights, the challenges, and the enduring learning they have been able to take with them as they continue along their paths of service

MY PERIOD OF service was a real opportunity for me to understand better the role of Bahá'í agencies and institutions. Consulting, reflecting and serving alongside them was a real highlight of my time. This was particularly significant for me as I grew up in a community without a Local Spiritual Assembly and sometimes cluster agencies.

It was also a time to reorient myself and centre my focus on the Faith. Through committing time to serving in this way, I became well acquainted with the goals and vision of the Plans of the Universal House of Justice. With this, I was able to understand my service within a wider framework and think more systematically about how to serve. I was able to distinguish between different lines of action, while also appreciating the relationship between serving the Plan, fulfilling other aspects of Bahá'í life and strengthening my Bahá'í identity.

No period of service is without its challenges and I had to continually remind myself that I was in the process of serving Bahá'u'lláh. Learning from these experiences, however, has supported me in my service moving forwards.

During this period, I was afforded the time to study the Writings and other Bahá'í literature systematically. I was also able to form strong and lasting friendships, centred in service. The learning I gained from this year was invaluable

and my friendships continue to be a source of support.

Sophia Fozdar

Sheffield



From 2016 to 2017, I took a year before university to offer a year of service. I lived in a neighbourhood in Bristol called Easton where I served with two other girls, and we started and ran a range of activities, including a devotional for youth, children's class and junior youth group. It was a really formative time, which allowed me to put Bahá'u'lláh and the Faith at the centre of my life while I was creating the rest of my independent self – like kick-starting the “life-long path of service” that the Universal House of Justice wrote about ahead of the 2013 youth conferences.

Of course there are always challenges. Although we focused on trying to make our efforts sustainable, most of our activities were not sustained after we left the community. One of the most important things we took from this is the necessity of ensuring that, during a period of service, time and energy are devoted to supporting a range of activities with the community and ensuring we accompany one another in raising the capacity to serve. Hopefully, with this mode of activity, the endeavours we start can be more sustainable.

The best part of my year was definitely making connections with people. Bristol is my holy ground, and the people my family. So the transition after such a great year was, of course, also very hard. I found myself asking: “Can I not just serve all of the time? Adult life is tough!”

Over all, I learned a lot. When I first started the year I was told by a friend that it makes the Faith your own, instead of your parents'. I found that being fully immersed in a pattern of Bahá'í life like that really helped me to find my path in the training institute process and the Plan, especially as I served in the UK. Originally I was attracted to serving abroad but I was able to learn a lot about the reality of local communities here, their processes and challenges, and I am able to continue being part of this process of learning despite moving around the country. I also learned a lot about myself, and the year consequently shaped my career aspirations and thoughts on

life as a whole. I'm now a youth worker while I pursue a career in international development, all because of the aspects I enjoyed most about the year.

Rozita Leetham

Bristol



Although the path of service entails sacrifice—of time, energy and comfort—ultimately it's one of joy. In fact, there is no greater joy than reflecting upon the Word of God with others, sharing aspirations for ourselves and for the neighbourhood, and walking shoulder to shoulder, learning how to use the training institute, this “instrument of limitless potentialities” in our community.

My consciousness of the twofold moral purpose that is at the centre of our lives—whereby refining our own characters and contributing to the transformation of society are mutually reinforcing—was, and continues to be, nurtured during this period of service. This is evident in the development of capacities that really assist you through your life. For me, these include the ability to share the Word of God freely in conversation, refining your ability to draw on the example and teachings of the Personage of Bahá'u'lláh, and understanding the importance of (and attending to) the spiritual education of children.

Committing to a year of service allows you to reassess the way you look at the world, including your friendships. Any assumptions you had about what friendship looks like are challenged and it is often with the people, at a superficial level who seem the most different to you, that you build the strongest bonds of friendship. It's through these friendships that you learn what being inclusive really is.

Similarly, I was able to consult with a number of like-minded individuals throughout my year of service, which helped to shape not only my personal goals, but also my





perspectives on important global issues. Serving in this way helped me to put into practice some of the elements I had studied during ISGP, clarifying parts of the conceptual framework and learning what coherence truly looks like.

For me, offering a year of service has also been a great opportunity to become part of a wonderful new Bahá'í community, build it together with others, and explore a beautiful and historic city.

May Hayati

Leith, Edinburgh



A blessing and challenge in my year of service was the new opportunities that opened up to me. On one hand, I really get to explore my independence, but with that came the responsibility to ensure that freedom was used in the correct way and that it was contributing to my own betterment and that of those around me.

With the challenges, however, came the great support of the people around me, friendships which became really deep and long-lasting. I had time to conduct studies with my friends— especially given the time we had to deepen—and contributed to creating an environment that enhanced my capacity to offer love, support and service. This also helped me in setting an example to which I can compare all of the future environments I find myself in, allowing me to see which elements I can bring to a space to ensure it is always fruitful.

In addition to deepening on aspects of a Bahá'í life, learning how we can incorporate service into our lives after the year of service is also a concept that becomes developed and better understood. In the Holy Land, Bahá'ís are not allowed to teach, so service is expressed in a slightly different way. But the key aspects are there, and there is also the blessing of proximity to the Shrines and all that comes with

the World Centre. However, one thing you have to guard against is taking things for granted or getting worn down by any repetitive tasks or general tiredness. It really makes you reflect on why you carry out service.

In general, I was feeling quite nervous before I went and was not sure what to expect. But the whole experience was full of joy. Youth should make the most out of the learning opportunities created and put yourself out there. The memories and friendships will be unforgettable and play a key part in your future.

Navid Kalani

Bahá'í World Centre



Service to humanity is service to God. Let the love and light of the Kingdom radiate through you until all who look upon you shall be illumined by its reflection. Be as stars, brilliant and sparkling in the loftiness of their heavenly station.

– 'Abdu'l-Bahá



Huqúqu'lláh

Family life and the Right of God

We are living through an extraordinary time in the history of humanity, when we want to give our children the best opportunities in life. But in an unequal society, asks the Regional Board of Trustees of Huqúqu'lláh for Ireland and the United Kingdom, how can we make choices that ensure justice for all?

THE COMING OF Bahá'u'lláh has released tremendous, transformative forces which are shaping a new world. Yet, in response, negative forces are equally creating chaos and turmoil. We have seen this in the integrative and disruptive patterns at work during the current health crisis: while neighbours look out for one another and front line workers self-sacrificingly serve society, domestic violence has increased and people have hoarded goods, fearing for the future. 'Abdu'l Bahá likens the force of materialism to the force of gravity: just as gravity attracts objects to the centre of the earth, so materialism pulls us to the centre of self.

Yet while childhood and adolescence are times of great potentiality, they are also the periods when individuals are most vulnerable. Children and teenagers are often on the front line of any breakdown of society and have to negotiate many challenges inherent in a world dominated by materialism and consumerism.

A weighty responsibility falls on the shoulders of adult family members: “The forces at work on the hearts and minds of the young..., are pernicious indeed...What needs to be appreciated in this respect is the extent to which young minds are affected by the choices parents make for their own lives, when, no matter how unintentionally, no matter how innocently, such choices condone the passions of the world—its admiration for power, its adoration of status, its love of luxuries, its attachment to frivolous pursuits, its glorification

of violence, and its obsession with self-gratification.”¹

The law of Huqúqu'lláh

The law of Huqúqu'lláh—the Right of God—is a core Bahá'í practice, which is evidenced materially in a payment of 19% of our excess wealth to the Centre of the Faith. It is disbursed for the benefit of the whole of humanity.

This simple act of giving comes at the end of a process suffused with deep spiritual principles. The Universal House of Justice has written: “Examining one’s life to determine what is a necessity and then discharging with joy one’s obligation in relation to the law of Huqúqu'lláh is an indispensable discipline to bring one’s priorities into balance, purify whatever wealth one possesses, and ensure that the share which is the Right of God provides for the greater good.”² We strengthen our spiritual muscles by carrying out the process with honesty, trustworthiness, detachment, joy and love.

The law of Huqúqu'lláh radically alters the way we experience ourselves in relation to the rest of the world. It takes us to a new level of functioning in which we are living with the profound awareness of what it is to be a single humanity. This cycle of giving and receiving not only connects us to the Universal House of Justice but to every other soul on the planet.

In a letter to the Bahá'ís of Iran, the Universal House of

Justice counsels, “..Without doubt, the social and economic development of your nation will require, especially among its younger generations, a fundamental shift in perspective, one that changes the way in which certain essential concepts are viewed—the true purpose of life, the nature of progress, the meaning of true happiness and well-being, and the place that material pursuits should assume in one’s individual and family life...

Social justice will be attained only when every member of society enjoys a relative degree of material prosperity and gives due regard to the acquisition of spiritual qualities. The solution, then, to prevailing economic difficulties is to be sought as much in the application of spiritual principles as in the implementation of scientific methods and approaches. The family unit offers an ideal setting within which can be shaped those moral attributes that contribute to an appropriate view of material wealth and its utilization.”³

Balancing love of family with love of humanity

Society encourages a mindset of “if you can, you should.” If you can afford it, buy it. If you can exploit an advantage that others don’t have, you shouldn’t have a conscience about it. But when people who have privilege abuse their advantages, it creates an aggregate system of injustice. It is easy to feel that we are just doing the best for our family. But if we don’t stop and think of the questions above, we are unwittingly contributing to a system of oppression. Until we are willing to change our orientation from “me and mine first”, this will not change. The Bahá’í notion of the oneness of the body of humanity must be internalised; if one hand is in pain, it will be felt by the whole being.

While stressing the importance of family solidarity, particularly as it pertains to social progress, the Universal House of Justice has called for caution, “lest devotion to family interests diminish one’s commitment to justice and compassion for all or provide an excuse for perpetuating a harmful mentality of ‘us and them’. Many, indeed, are the ways in which the family can contribute to the life of society...”⁴

To combat the destructive forces impacting on our young people, families must apply opposing forces—the forces of divine power which are released by observance of the laws of Bahá’u’lláh. Rather than thinking about “obeying” the law of Huqúqu’lláh, then, it is perhaps more helpful to think about “living the law”—raising children that see their own welfare as inseparable from the welfare of others and creating conditions that will help them develop an appropriate view of material wealth and its utilization.



1 Universal House of Justice, To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 28 December 2010

2 Universal House of Justice, To the Bahá’ís of the World, 1 March 2017

3 Universal House of Justice, To the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith, 2 April 2010

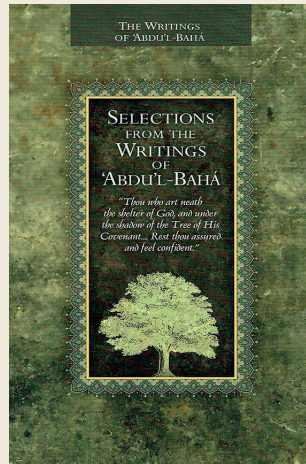
4 *ibid*

books

The Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

This year, leading up to the centenary commemoration of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, provides every individual with the priceless opportunity to deepen on the Writings and talks of the Master

and 22 April 1916, the remainder between 2 February and 8 March 1917. In them, 'Abdu'l-Bahá summons the believers "to diffuse the light, and erect the administrative fabric, of the Faith throughout...the globe."



Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

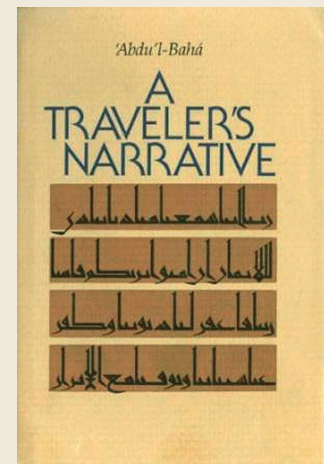
An essential compilation of more than 200 of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets and letters, conveying timeless wisdom that is as relevant today as it was when it was first revealed. Topics covered include physical and spiritual health, death and the afterlife, the spiritual reality of humankind, the oneness of humanity, and the elimination of prejudice.

The Secret of Divine Civilization

'Abdu'l-Bahá's treatise on the social and spiritual progress both of nations and individuals. Written in Persian in 1875, it was addressed to the rulers and people of Iran, but remains profoundly important as a guide to creating a peaceful and productive world. It contains an appealing and universal message inspiring world-mindedness, soliciting the highest human motives and attributes for the establishment of a spiritual society.

Memorials of the Faithful

Eulogies of some 80 early believers transcribed from a series of talks given by 'Abdu'l Bahá in Haifa around 1914–15.



A Traveler's Narrative: Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Bab

This simple, moving narrative recounts the events in the lives of the Báb and His followers, and illustrates the character of the Bahá'í Revelation by quoting passages from Bahá'u'lláh's Writings. First published anonymously in Persian in 1890, the English translation was prepared by Professor Edward G. Browne for the Cambridge University Press in 1891.

Available exclusively online:

Tablets to the Hague

Two letters of 'Abdu'l Bahá written in response to letters addressed to Him by the Executive Committee of the Central Organization for a Durable Peace.

www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/tablets-hague-abdul-baha/

Tablet to Dr. Auguste Forel

A letter written by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921 in reply to a letter from Professor Auguste Forel, a Swiss psychiatrist.

www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/tablet-august-forel/

Additional Prayers Revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá

www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/additional-prayers-revealed-abdul-baha/

THE BOOKS suggested here will no doubt also enrich every activity of the Bahá'í community.

All the following books are available online at:

www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/

www.bahaibooks.org.uk/

Writings

The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

'Abdu'l-Bahá's "Charter of a Future World Civilization" called into being, outlined features of, and set in motion the processes of the Bahá'í administrative order, preserving and extending Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant throughout the Bahá'í dispensation.

Tablets of the Divine Plan

Fourteen letters addressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the North American Bahá'í community as a whole as well as by region—Canada and the Northeastern, Southern, Central, and Western United States. The first eight letters were written between 26 March

*Additional Tablets,
Extracts and Talks*

[www.bahai.org/library/
authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/
additional-tablets-extracts-talks/](http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/additional-tablets-extracts-talks/)

Talks

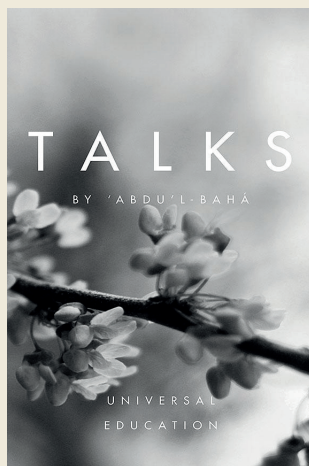
Some Answered Questions

Often one of the first books people study while investigating the Faith, *Some Answered Questions*—which has recently been re-translated—is the classic collection of table talks given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in ‘Akká, in which He explains fundamental Bahá’í Teachings. Every chapter of *Some Answered Questions* reveals new insights about such subjects as the existence of God, His Manifestations, Christian beliefs, and social issues.

Paris Talks

Transcripts of the extraordinary series of inspiring and uplifting public addresses ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave on his historic visit to Paris in 1911, addressing such subjects as the nature

of humanity, the soul, the Prophets of God, the establishment of world peace, the abolition of all forms of prejudice, the equality of men and women, the harmony of science and religion, and the causes of war.



The Promulgation of Universal Peace

A compilation of 140 talks and extemporaneous discourses given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá—in 1912 in the United States and Canada—on the fundamental

principles of the Revelation and Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. Among the multitude of subjects discussed are the coming of age of the human race, the oneness and continuity of the Manifestations of God, and the oneness of religion as a social force for establishing world order and peace.

Talks by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Four volumes of talks given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, collected under the subjects of The Existence of God, The Spirit of Christ, The Eternal Covenant, and Universal Education.

Available exclusively online:

Twelve table talks given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in ‘Akká

[www.bahai.org/library/
authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/
twelve-table-talks-abdul-baha/](http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/twelve-table-talks-abdul-baha/)

BELOW: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressing a large gathering at the Plymouth Congregational Church, Chicago, Illinois, 5 May 1912



in memoriam



Farzam Arbab (1941-2020)

FARZAM ARBAB, a former member of the Universal House of Justice, passed away on 25 September 2020 in San Diego, United States. He was 78 years old.

With grief-stricken hearts we mourn the sudden passing of our former colleague, our dearly loved brother Farzam Arbab, news of which has brought us fresh sorrow. His brilliant mind, loving heart, and vibrant spirit were ever turned towards the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, seeking to draw from it insights that, through the process of education, could build spiritual and intellectual capacity within entire populations. Born in Iran, he studied in the United States before settling in Colombia as a pioneer. His outstanding gifts fitted him, it seemed, for a distinguished career in the physical sciences—but Providence had determined otherwise. His rigorous scientific training was instead applied to the work of the Faith. He recognized that the verities contained in the Bahá'í writings concerning

spiritual and social transformation and the entry into the Faith of the masses of humanity demanded persistent effort to learn how to bring them about; the investment of his whole being in this great enterprise was complete and constant. Throughout his time as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Colombia, as a Continental Counsellor, as a member of the International Teaching Centre, and finally as a member of the Universal House of Justice for two decades, his unshakeable belief in the capacity of all of God's children, especially of young people, was the hallmark of his service to the Cause. Always insightful, always discerning, always attuned to spiritual reality, this man of exceptional vision lived a life shaped by the harmony between scientific truth and true religion.



To Sona, his beloved wife, and to Paul, his cherished son, as well as to other family members, we extend our heartfelt condolences at this unexpected loss. We supplicate in the Sacred Shrines for the progress of his illumined soul as it commences its journey into the eternal realms of God. May it be lovingly welcomed to its heavenly home. All Bahá'í communities are urged to arrange memorials, as circumstances permit, including in all Houses of Worship, to mark the passing of much-loved, illustrious Farzam Arbab.

— *The Universal House of Justice*



Douglas Martin (1927-2020)

DOUGLAS MARTIN, a former member of the Universal House of Justice, passed away on 28 September 2020 in Toronto, Canada. He was 93 years old.

With mournful hearts already brimming with sorrow, we announce the passing of our much-loved, much-admired former colleague, Douglas Martin. Having embraced the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh as a young man, he with all his heart dedicated his life to the Cause of God over successive decades of outstanding service. The special gifts he possessed for presenting the Faith with clarity and vision shone through as much in his scholarly writings as in his public presentations, including in vigorous defence of the Bahá'í community in Iran. Much of this work was undertaken while he simultaneously discharged weighty responsibilities in the administration of the Faith. This included a quarter century spent as a member of the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, most of that time as its Secretary. His scintillating intellect and uncommon grasp of the grand forces of history, combined with his formidable powers

of expression, were much in evidence during the years he spent as director-general of the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information, a prelude to the twelve years he served as a member of the Universal House of Justice. Resolute, ingenious, and blessed with piercing insight, he will be immensely missed.

We pray ardently that dear Douglas, now reunited with his beloved wife, Elizabeth, may be received with joy in the Abhá Kingdom, and that his illumined soul may ever soar in the limitless realms above. The friends in every community are called upon to honour his memory by convening memorials, including through devotions at every House of Worship, as circumstances permit.

– *The Universal House of Justice*



Violette Haake (1928-2020)

VIOLETTE HAAKE, a former member of the International Teaching Centre, passed away on 24 September 2020 in Melbourne, Australia. She was 92 years old.

Our hearts sorrow at the passing of dearly loved Violette Haake. Reared in a distinguished family tracing its roots to the early history of the Faith, she served the Cause of God with utter dedication over many decades, first in her native Iran, and later in the United States and Australia. Whether when pioneering, or during her time as an Auxiliary Board member, or as a Continental Counsellor in Australasia, and most especially in the ten years she served as a member of the International Teaching Centre, her intrepid spirit and radiant enthusiasm for teaching were ever in evidence as she rallied the friends, particularly the youth; poured out encouragement; and fanned the flame of love for Bahá'u'lláh in the hearts. Violette possessed a character that blended extraordinary resilience, steadfastness, and inner strength with unfailing kindness, a nurturing instinct, and true joy. To the last, hers was a life devoted to the service of the Lord.

To her husband, Roderic, and her daughter, Susanne, we extend our heartfelt condolences, with an assurance of our supplications at the Sacred Threshold for the progress of Violette's luminous soul as it plunges into the sea of light in the world of mysteries. The believers in every land are asked to arrange memorials in her honour, including in all Houses of Worship, as circumstances permit.



Further Reading

Here are some useful online resources to aid “profound reflection on the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the strength of the Covenant of which He was the Centre.”

The Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

www.bahai.org/abdul-baha/life-abdul-baha

The Significance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

www.bahai.org/abdul-baha/significance

The Covenant

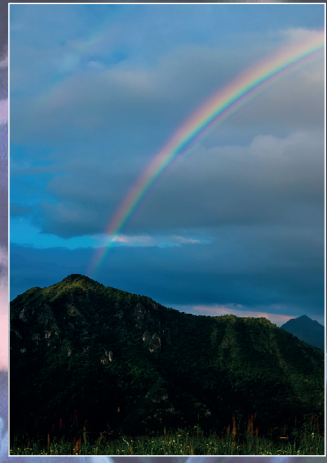
www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/compilations/covenant/

A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

www.bahai.org/documents/essays/balyuzi-hasan-m/commentary-will-testament-abdul-baha

Hand of the Cause of God Hasan M. Balyuzi examines the three provisions which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá created for the protection of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh after His passing.



...is not the object of every Revelation to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions?

– Bahá'u'lláh

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