

UK BAHÁ'Í

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A Call For Sacrificial Giving

*From the Guardian's Resting
Place to the growing needs
of neighbourhoods*

MESSAGES FROM THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

*Guidance for a time of
global crisis*

BAHÁ'Í LIFE DURING LOCKDOWN

*Activities and
conversations expand
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WHERE WORSHIP AND SERVICE MEET

*New Temples rise around
the world*

'ABDU'L-BAHÁ: SERVICE AND GENEROSITY

*Inspiration from the
Perfect Exemplar*

Welcome to UK Bahá'í

Since the last edition of UK Bahá'í appeared in March 2020, the lives of everyone have been affected by the unprecedented global health crisis. The physical distancing necessary to curb the spread of COVID-19 has necessitated our finding alternative means of connection. Technologies were quickly adopted, and the Bahá'í community's ability to adapt, continue and even considerably expand its activities has been remarkable.

In the midst of the crisis, the Universal House of Justice released three momentous messages—two to the Bahá'ís of the World and one to all National Spiritual Assemblies. They are included in this issue. While acknowledging the widespread suffering, the House of Justice noted “the resilience and undiminished vitality of the Bahá'í world.” This edition of UK Bahá'í looks at some of the numerous creative ways that the community has developed to convey hope and offer service to those in need.

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Writers this issue: Bahá'í World News Service (BWNS), UK Bahá'í News (UKBN), Sophie Gregory (SG), Barney Leith (BL), Alex Murray (AM), Darren Smith (DS), Rob Weinberg (RW).

introduction

Towards a new life-giving spring

During this period of unprecedented crisis—with social distancing preventing activities from happening as planned—the UK Bahá'ís have persevered undeterred, seeing a multitude of new opportunities to strengthen existing patterns of activity

WHILE THE RESTRICTIONS imposed as a result of COVID-19 could have resulted in the curtailment or interruption of Bahá'í activities, communities around the UK were able to rapidly adapt their initiatives to online spaces and even grow them further. The Universal House of Justice expressed its admiration to the Bahá'ís of the World in its Ridván 2020 message—included in this edition—at the “resilience and undiminished vitality of the Bahá'í world in the face of a challenge which has no likeness in living memory.”

Efforts to nurture flourishing communities within neighbourhoods continued online with the numbers of Bahá'ís and their friends participating in devotional meetings and study circles dramatically increasing. The hope, the comfort and the comradeship that such activities have imparted has had a profound effect on the community and those touched by its activities. Indeed, many victories are appearing to emerge out of this unprecedented global crisis.


Writing to an individual believer on 14 March 1985, the Universal House of Justice observed that:

The world is clearly beset by ills and is groaning under the burden of appalling suffering...

To understand the condition of the world it is necessary to step back, so to speak, to gain a clearer view of the panorama of God's great redemptive Major Plan, which is shaping the destiny of mankind according to the operation of the divine Will. It should not be surmised that the calamitous events transpiring in all corners of the globe are random and lack purpose, though individually they may be difficult to comprehend.

The invisible hand is at work and the convulsions taking place on earth are a prelude to the proclamation of the Cause of God. We can confidently anticipate, therefore, the arrival of the “new life-giving spring” once the destructive icy blasts of winter's tempests have run their course.

The Bahá'í approach to the building of a new world not only calls for the spiritual transformation of individuals but the establishment of a system based on the application of justice, together with the implementation of programmes of social and economic development that derive their impetus from the grass roots of the community. “Then,” observed the House of Justice in that same letter, “will the generations look back with heartfelt appreciation, for the sacrifices made by Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís alike, during this most turbulent period in human history.”



**GENERATIONS
[WILL] LOOK BACK
WITH HEARTFELT
APPRECIATION**



The Universal House of Justice

Naw-Rúz 177

DEARLY LOVED FRIENDS

WE FEEL COMPELLED by current events to write to you at this time and not wait until Ridván. As you will be all too aware, over recent weeks and months, an apprehensive world has been coming to terms with a rapidly evolving health crisis affecting the people in many countries, the consequences of which for society cannot yet be estimated with any certainty. We are sure that you, like us, have felt great concern for the well-being of humanity, especially for those who are most vulnerable. Seldom has it been more evident that society's collective strength is dependent on the unity it can manifest in action, from the international stage to the grassroots, and we know that you are giving your support to the essential efforts being made in this regard to protect the health and welfare of all.

Inevitably, the current situation will have an impact on the administration of the Cause of God in many places, and in every case the relevant National Spiritual Assembly will advise on the appropriate measures to be taken. In some countries this will include cancelling National Convention, with arrangements being made for the National Assembly to be elected by other means. Similar arrangements might also need to be made, in certain places, for the election of Local Spiritual Assemblies. However, in circumstances where even this proves unfeasible, it would be permissible this year for the existing membership of a Local or National Assembly to continue on into the next administrative year. Naturally, any National Assembly giving thought to approving such a step will seek the advice of the Counsellors at an early stage.

At a time of another crisis, 'Abdu'l-Bahá offered these words of counsel:

“In a day such as this, when the tempests of trials and

tribulations have encompassed the world, and fear and trembling have agitated the planet, ye must rise above the horizon of firmness and steadfastness with illumined faces and radiant brows in such wise that, God willing, the gloom of fear and consternation may be entirely obliterated, and the light of assurance may dawn above the manifest horizon and shine resplendently.”

The world stands more and more in need of the hope and the strength of spirit that faith imparts. Beloved friends, you have of course long been occupied with the work of nurturing within groups of souls precisely the attributes that are required at this time: unity and fellow feeling, knowledge and understanding, a spirit of collective worship and common endeavour. Indeed, we have been struck by how efforts to reinforce these attributes have made communities especially resilient, even when faced with conditions that have necessarily limited their activities. Though having to adapt to new circumstances, the believers have used creative means to strengthen bonds of friendship, and to foster among themselves and those known to them spiritual consciousness and qualities of tranquillity, confidence, and reliance on God. The elevated conversations that have occurred as a result, whether remotely or in person, have been a source of comfort and inspiration to many. Such efforts on your part provide a valuable service at this hour when many souls are perplexed and dismayed, unsure of what will be. However difficult matters are at present, and however close to the limits of their endurance some sections of societies are brought, humanity will ultimately pass through this ordeal, and it will emerge on the other side with greater insight and with a deeper appreciation of its inherent oneness and interdependence.

This is not the moment in which to describe in any detail the accomplishments of the Bahá'í world over the past year, or the extraordinary progress made in multiplying community-building activities worldwide and strengthening programmes of growth, work which continues in earnest

wherever circumstances permit. Suffice it to say that, four years into the current Plan, the tireless supporters of the Cause have brought the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh to the strongest position in which it has ever been in its history. Everything you have done and are now doing is preparing the global Bahá'í community for the next stage in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan.

For now, our thoughts and our prayers are focused on the health and well-being of all the friends of God and all those among whom you dwell. We pray earnestly, also, for the Almighty to bestow upon you assurance, stamina, and staunch spirits. May your minds be ever bent upon the needs of the communities to which you belong, the condition of the societies in which you live, and the welfare of the entire family of humanity, to whom you are all brothers and sisters. And in your quiet moments, when no course of action other than prayer seems possible, then we invite you to add your

supplications to our own and ardently pray for the relief of suffering. We turn to these words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Whose whole existence was an example of selfless commitment to the well-being of others:

O Thou Provider! Assist Thou these noble friends to win Thy good pleasure, and make them well-wishers of stranger and friend alike. Bring them into the world that abideth forever; grant them a portion of heavenly grace; cause them to be true Bahá'ís, sincerely of God; save them from outward semblances, and establish them firmly in the truth. Make them signs and tokens of the Kingdom, luminous stars above the horizons of this nether life. Make them to be a comfort and a solace to humankind and servants to the peace of the world.

—*The Universal House of Justice*

*In a day such as this, when the tempests of trials
and tribulations have encompassed the world,
and fear and trembling have agitated the planet,
ye must rise above the horizon of firmness and
steadfastness with illumined faces and radiant
brows in such wise that, God willing, the gloom of
fear and consternation may be entirely obliterated,
and the light of assurance may dawn above the
manifest horizon and shine resplendently.*

— *'Abdu'l-Bahá*



The Universal House of Justice

Ridván 2020

DEARLY LOVED FRIENDS

TWO EMERGING REALITIES have prompted us to address these words to you. The first reality is the growing consciousness around the world of the looming and appalling dangers carried by the coronavirus pandemic.

In many countries, despite valiant and determined collective efforts to avert disaster, the situation is already grave, creating tragedies for families and individuals and plunging whole societies into crisis. Waves of suffering and sorrow are breaking over one place after another, and will weaken different nations, at different moments, in different ways.

The second reality, one that is daily more apparent, is the resilience and undiminished vitality of the Bahá'í world in the face of a challenge which has no likeness in living memory. Your response has been outstanding. When we wrote to you a month ago at Naw-Rúz, we were keen to stress the impressive qualities being demonstrated by communities whose normal pattern of activity had been disrupted. All that has transpired in the intervening weeks, during which many friends have had to comply with increasingly stringent restrictions, has only deepened our feelings of admiration. Learning from the experience gained in other parts of the world, some communities have found safe and creative ways to raise awareness of public health requirements within populations. Special attention is being paid to those who are most at risk from the virus and the economic hardship arising from its spread; the initiatives featured on the Bahá'í World News Service in this regard are but a mere handful of the countless number under way. These are being complemented by efforts to examine, promote, and cultivate those spiritual qualities which are most needed at this time. Many such efforts are necessarily taking place in family units or in solitude, but where conditions allow or communication tools make it

possible, a sense of extraordinary solidarity is being actively nurtured among souls sharing similar circumstances. The dynamics of community life, so important for collective progress, will not be subdued.

Our spirits have been lifted by seeing how capably National Spiritual Assemblies, the unflagging generals of the Army of Light, have guided their communities and shaped their response to the crisis. They have been strongly supported by the Counsellors and their auxiliaries who, as always, have heroically raised aloft the standard of loving service. While staying well informed about the often rapidly changing conditions in their countries, Assemblies have made the necessary arrangements for administering the affairs of the Cause, and in particular for conducting elections, where these remain feasible. Through regular communications, institutions and agencies have offered wise counsel, comforting reassurance, and constant encouragement. In many instances, they have also started to identify constructive themes that are emerging from the discourses opening up in their societies. The expectation we expressed in our Naw-Rúz message that this test of humanity's endurance would grant it greater insight is already being realized. Leaders, prominent thinkers, and commentators have begun to explore fundamental concepts and bold aspirations that, in recent times, have been largely absent from public discourse. At present these are but early glimmerings, yet they hold out the possibility that a moment of collective consciousness may be in view.

The comfort we take at seeing the resilience of the Bahá'í world manifest itself in action is tempered by our sadness at the consequences of the pandemic for humanity. Alas, we are conscious that the believers and their associates also share in this suffering. The distance from friends and relations that, owing to the requirements of public safety, so many people in the world are now maintaining will, for some, give way to permanent separation. At each dawn it seems certain that more agonies will be endured before the set of sun. May the

promise of reunion in the eternal realms offer solace to those who lose loved ones. We pray for the relief of their hearts, and for the grace of God to surround those whose education, livelihoods, homes, or even their very means of sustenance are being put at risk. For you, and for those you cherish, and for all your compatriots, we supplicate Bahá'u'lláh and beseech His blessings and favour.

However long and arduous the road that must be travelled, we are supremely confident in your fortitude and

your determination to see the journey through. You draw from stores of hope, faith, and magnanimity, putting the needs of others before your own, enabling those who are deprived to be spiritually nourished, those who increasingly thirst for answers to be satisfied, and those who long to work for the betterment of the world to be offered the means. From the devoted followers of the Blessed Perfection, how could we expect less?

—The Universal House of Justice



LEFT TO RIGHT CLOCKWISE: Children from India's Bahá'í community took on a project to raise awareness of COVID-19 and encourage sanitary practice well before their area was affected. A group of youth in New Rochelle, New York, drew on the friendships and experience they had collectively developed through community-building initiatives to organize the distribution of food and other necessities in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. A Bahá'í youth in Tanzania created digital artwork to encourage compliance with preventive health measures such as physical distancing.





The Universal House of Justice

9 May 2020

DEARLY LOVED FRIENDS

AS WILL BY NOW be all too apparent, the Five Year Plan's final year has brought challenges different to those of the preceding four. The world is caught in the grip of a fast-spreading virus that has claimed many thousands of lives and severely disrupted a large share of humanity's social and economic activity. Yet the Bahá'í community has remained composed and has acted swiftly to meet the immediate demands that confronted it. It has found ways to ensure the continuity of community life, while also striving to play its part in meeting spiritual and material needs in society more widely—a fitting response to an emergency situation. We commend all the action that has been taken so far. Now, however, we wish to explore more fully what the coming year might entail. Your efforts to stimulate the advancement of the Plan in its final months will inevitably be shaped by your pressing responsibility to guide the friends in their response to an evolving global crisis. These unique circumstances require that we address you directly; you may share this letter with your communities, in whole or in part, as you deem appropriate.

When we expressed our desire to see five thousand intensive programmes of growth established by the end of this Five Year Plan, we were keenly aware of the magnitude of the undertaking this implied, but the condition of the world demanded it. We called for the work of strengthening programmes of growth to accelerate everywhere. We were gratified to see how the supporters of the Cause were galvanized into action, exerting unprecedented levels of effort. In the space of four years the Bahá'í community doubled both the number of core activities occurring worldwide and the number of their participants. To have

brought hundreds of thousands of individuals into the embrace of the community's activities in such a short period is an advance in capacity that has no parallel in any of the previous Plans in the present series.

Much, then, has been accomplished, and this is a clear indicator of the strength and confidence of the Bahá'í community. But, as you already appreciate, the current crisis has altered the context in which the Plan is being pursued. We have been impressed by how many communities have taken great strides in adapting to this new reality. Far from viewing the present period as simply a hiatus to be endured with patience, they have recognized that the state of the world has made the need to render meaningful service to humanity more urgent. Naturally, the activities undertaken must suit the prevailing conditions, but there should be no doubt that this is a time for noble aims, high resolve, and intense endeavour. As is well known, the activities of the Plan are intended to cultivate a thriving community spirit, through which resilience to mighty challenges is also strengthened. Educational efforts aim to raise up a growing number of souls who can contribute to the spiritual and material well-being of a community; devotional meetings nurture the spirit of service as it blossoms, rooting it in a culture of collective worship. In short, the promotion of the Plan implies building capacity to walk the path of service in every time and season—which must surely include moments of acute peril in the life of humanity, such as now. It is essential, then, that the steps being taken to learn how to apply the Plan's framework for action to the current circumstances of the world continue in earnest; in all likelihood, the global health crisis will have a direct impact on Bahá'í activities, to a greater or lesser degree, for months or even years, and the task of adapting to the situation cannot be postponed. In this regard, the Continental Counsellors and their auxiliaries, ably guided by the International Teaching Centre, have shown impressive determination in their efforts to spur on

the friends and orient them in their approach to the work at hand; they will doubtless do the same over the coming four cycles and beyond.

We appreciate, of course, that some activities have had to be suspended, and particular strategies or methods that are unsuited to current conditions have had to be set aside for a time. However, while certain possibilities have been temporarily closed, others have opened up, and new means have emerged for strengthening existing patterns of activity. Flexibility has proven to be an asset, but so has vigilance in ensuring that the primarily local character of community activities is not diluted; efforts to nurture flourishing communities within neighbourhoods and villages and across clusters must continue. In some cases, present conditions have created unexpected opportunities for widening community participation in devotional meetings and study circles, conducted with safety in mind. Many parents whose families have been confined to home surroundings have welcomed support that has helped them to move from the position of observer to protagonist in the spiritual education of their children. Junior youth and groups of youth have discovered the power of simple acts of compassionate service carried out with wisdom. Nevertheless, it would be understandable if you determine, in some instances, that plans that require the movement of pioneers, mobile tutors, or visiting teachers will have to be postponed, and this should not give you cause for concern; you can re-evaluate the situation in the months ahead. The coming One Year Plan could afford an opportunity to fulfil any goals or objectives that may in the end remain out of reach during the present Plan.

We recognize that continuing to function in the course of this crisis will, in many cases, put you under financial strain, and the economic hardship being experienced by many in the community may limit the resources upon which you can draw. Be assured that we stand ready to support you. Let there be no doubt or equivocation in this regard: it is essential that the institutions of the Faith maintain their operations throughout this period and not be obstructed by lack of resources in the discharge of their core duties. Unquestionably, the whole company of the faithful in each country will rally around you, and in particular, we are confident that believers with means will come forward to aid you.

As you are aware, there is considerable unevenness in the ways that different societies are coping with the difficulties arising from this crisis; consequently, the challenges that confront different National Assemblies are not the same. And these challenges will change over time. This will call for tremendous agility as local, regional, and national institutions seek to read their reality and stay alert to new developments. We wish to impress upon you that your collaboration with the Counsellors will be of paramount importance: it should be committed and sustained, an almost constant exchange of information and insight, to ensure that you are responding swiftly to the needs of your community, anticipating problems before they emerge, seizing opportunities that

open up, and supporting promising initiatives. Exactly what measures should be taken by Bahá'í institutions will naturally depend on the relevant circumstances. But in every place, the friends will need clear and timely guidance; special attention must be given to those who are most at risk from the virus itself, or from the economic impact of its spread; and creative approaches will be required to sustain the collective spirit of the community during difficult times. Networks of various kinds comprising families, neighbouring households, or other groupings are offering valuable support to many; you should be confident in the resourcefulness of your communities, and seek to draw on their talents and energies to the fullest. As grave as conditions have already become in some places, National Assemblies in countries that have so far been spared the more severe consequences of the pandemic must keep in mind that there is the potential for worse to occur, and any preparations that can be made now for that eventuality, before the introduction of further restrictions hampers such efforts, should commence at once—without alarm, but without delay. Local Spiritual Assemblies in particular should consider what means might be within their power to prevent, relieve, or mitigate suffering in the wider society of which they are an integral part.

When society is in such difficulty and distress, the responsibility of the Bahá'ís to make a constructive contribution to human affairs becomes more pronounced. This is a moment when distinct but interrelated lines of action converge upon a single point, when the call to service rings aloud. The individual, the community, and the institutions of the Faith—inseparable protagonists in the advancement of civilization—are in a position to demonstrate the distinctive features of the Bahá'í way of life, characterized by increased maturity in the discharge of their responsibilities and in their relationships with each other. They are summoned to a fuller expression of the Faith's society-building powers. Agencies and projects dedicated to social action may have to adapt their approaches in order to meet expanded needs; efforts to do this are sure to infuse ongoing programmes with deeper meaning and purpose. Further, Bahá'í contributions to discourses newly prevalent in society are generating heightened interest, and there is a responsibility to be discharged here too. At a time when the urgency of attaining higher levels of unity, founded on the incontestable truth of humanity's oneness, is becoming apparent to larger and larger numbers, society stands in need of clear voices that can articulate the spiritual principles that underlie such an aspiration.

You are of course ever conscious that your responsibilities reach beyond those of administering the affairs of the community and channelling its energies towards the fulfilment of noble goals: you seek to raise awareness of those spiritual forces that are available to every confirmed believer and which must be marshalled at the hour of need. It is these forces which endow the community with resilience, ensure its integrity, and keep it focused on its divine mission to serve humanity and elevate its vision of the future.

It is not possible to foresee the extent to which this pandemic will influence the movement towards unity among the nations. But there is no doubt whatsoever that, for the endeavours of the Bahá'í community, the months ahead will be consequential. Indeed, it could hardly be otherwise. This final year, of the final Plan, in a series spanning the final quarter of the opening century of the Formative Age, will seal the foundation upon which will rest the next series of global undertakings. It is the concluding act in a captivating drama

whose end is yet unwritten.

Not a moment passes when you are not in our thoughts. All our trust and confidence in your capacity to face this challenge comes from our knowledge that your ultimate supporter and helper is the Abhá Beauty Himself. In our entreaties at the Sacred Threshold, we implore Him to make you pure channels for the flow of His grace to humankind.

—The Universal House of Justice



LEFT TO RIGHT CLOCKWISE: Bahá'is in the United Arab Emirates created a short film about the importance of prayer and service to society. In Kamuli, Uganda, Bahá'í friends have been broadcasting daily radio programmes on the importance of a devotional life. A devotional programme broadcast live from the House of Worship in Sydney Australia.





UK news

Election of the National Spiritual Assembly

Owing to the lockdown resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, National Convention could not happen this year in the usual way

THE ELECTION OF the National Spiritual Assembly was conducted by post and through electronic voting, using a system devised to ensure that the confidentiality and integrity of the process was protected. All 95 delegates participated in the election.

On Saturday 25 April, a special Zoom gathering of the delegates took place attended by the Counsellor, the Auxiliary Board members, and the members of the four Regional Bahá'í Councils. Following a reading of the Riḍván message, the Counsellor shared inspiring words relating the themes in both the Riḍván and Naw-Rúz messages to our reality in the United Kingdom.

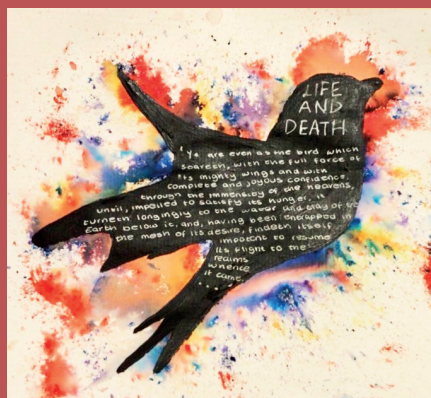
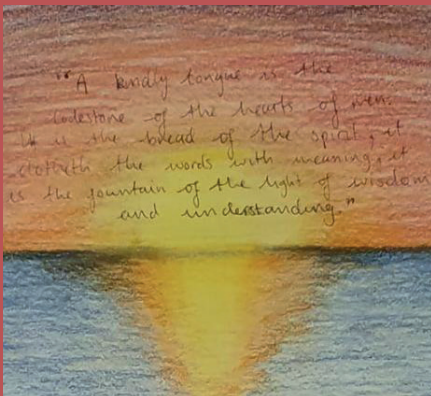
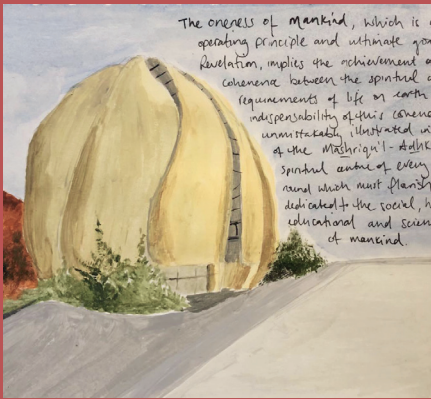
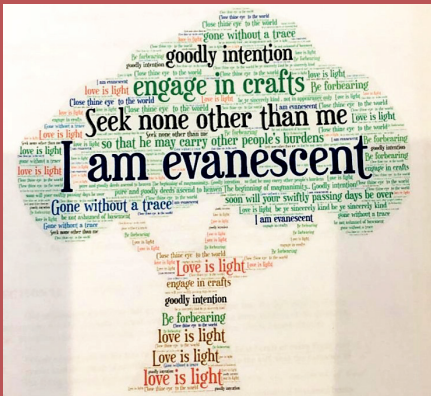
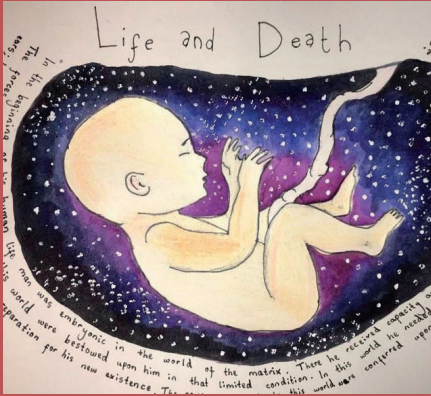
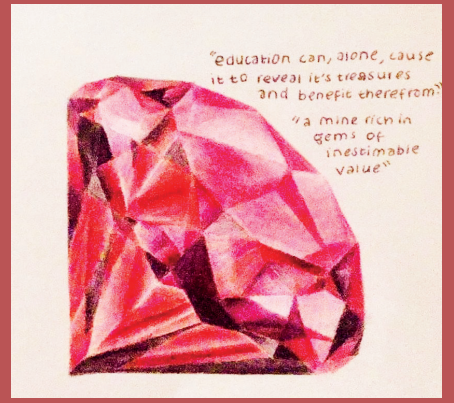
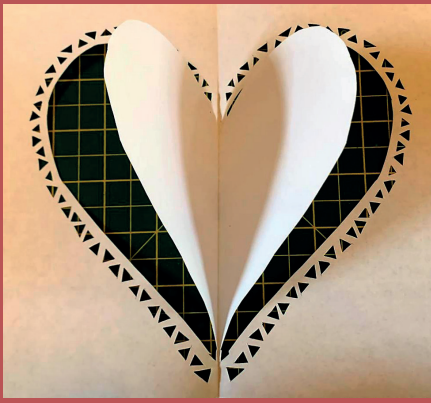
The result of the election of the National Spiritual Assembly was then announced by the Chief Teller. The members elected were: **Viv Craig, Annabel Djalili, Barney Leith, Wendi Momen, Patrick O'Mara, Vafa Ram, Darren Smith, Olinga Tahzib and Robert Weinberg.**

At its first meeting, the National Assembly had the opportunity to meet with Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi and together share prayers, beseeching Bahá'u'lláh's

assistance for the alleviation of the suffering of the peoples of the world and the advancement of the work of the Cause in the final year of the Plan. The Riḍván message was then studied together. The richness and tenderness of the letter inspired the consultation which explored many of its themes, including the emerging reality of the dangers facing mankind and the remarkable response of the Bahá'í community to the current unprecedented world-embracing crisis. The consultation particularly focused on the opportunities at the national, cluster, local and neighbourhood level, at this time of rapid change, to contribute to the “constructive themes that are emerging from the discourses opening up” in societies. The deep concern and love of the Universal House of Justice—“the last refuge of a tottering civilisation”—for the plight of humanity and the suffering of everyone affected by the pandemic, moved each and all to their core.

Following this reflection, the National Assembly elected its officers: **Olinga Tahzib (Chair), Patrick O'Mara (Secretary), Darren Smith (Treasurer), Annabel Djalili (Vice-Chair).**

ABOVE: Delegates gathered on 25 April 2020 to hear the result of the election of the National Spiritual Assembly and reflect upon the Riḍván message with Counsellor Shirin Fozdar Foroudi.



UK news

Bahá'í life during lockdown

The COVID-19 crisis appears to have endowed the Bahá'ís of the United Kingdom with a stronger sense of mission than ever before. Not only were most community-building activities that were happening previously sustained throughout the pandemic, but the numbers of activities and friends participating substantially increased

ACROSS ALL FOUR regions of the UK, new online spaces opened up for tutors and participants to advance the training institute process. Devotional meetings and study circles have multiplied, sometimes happening on a daily basis, often reaching isolated friends and neighbours in lockdown, creating a sense of solidarity and support. Additionally there were family festivals, children's gatherings, cluster-wide junior youth camps, and opportunities for youth to train.

Here *UK Bahá'í* presents a brief survey of some of the highlights from many significant developments, illustrated with artworks produced by youth and other friends from around the United Kingdom during their online study sessions.

ONLINE DEVOTIONAL GATHERINGS

From the moment the lockdown began, the number of friends gathering together in online devotional meetings multiplied. In **England**, at the end of October 2019 there were 594 devotionals. More recently, 847 devotionals were counted.

Believers who live in remote and isolated parts of the UK were able to join with friends from other, sometimes far-away communities, often for daily prayers. Those who in the past felt unable to host face-to-face devotionals found

a space to which they could invite neighbours and friends, to offer comfort, support and reassurance. **Devon**, for example, was one of many places where people connected across generations. During one of the twice-weekly online devotionals that the community began, a 90 year-old friend was able to join from their retirement home, with the kind assistance of the owner of the home.

To lend impetus to the efforts already under way, the National Spiritual Assembly invited everyone to join together in a *Day to Pray* on Saturday 4 April. This was an opportunity to beseech the protection and care of God, to pray for the tranquillity of hearts, for the healing of those who are ill, for the souls who have departed, for the comfort of those who have lost a loved one, and for the assistance and safety of those who are serving society at this time of great need. For example, during the *Day to Pray*, 27 devotionals were held in **Scotland**, attracting more than 400 participants, at least one third of them friends of the Faith. A weekly parent and toddler/baby devotional and deepening that started at local level has since been extended to the whole region. Hosts of devotional meetings in Scotland now meet monthly to reflect together.

TEACHING CONFERENCES ON ZOOM

More than 700 friends from **England** attended three Regional Teaching Conferences held over the weekend of 27-28 June 2020. It was the hope of the Bahá'í Council

LEFT: Artworks from various participants in Bahá'í Zoom gatherings across the UK.



for England that the conferences would help to further strengthen a culture of teaching and lend impetus to the work in the final year of the Five Year Plan. Moving video devotionals were held on the example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the spiritual heritage of the English Bahá’í community. Break-out workshop groups enabled participants to explore the “twofold moral purpose” and an “expanding of nucleus of friends.”

Scotland’s *Clear Voices* conference took place over two sessions on 30 May and 20 June, each attracting more than 140 friends. The first focused on teaching and fostering meaningful conversations, while the second explored the centrality of the institute to growth. A major feature was the use of the arts, including drama, visual presentations and storytelling. These were created by various households including children, junior youth and youth from both Scotland and the Faroe Islands, conveying a sense of both historical perspective and where humanity is heading.

An uplifting and joyful teaching conference session for the friends in **Wales** was also held over three evenings—29 June, 30 June and 1 July. One participant noted, “The devotion to the Cause was truly felt over those three days and I am sure the spirit has been illuminating our meetings since.”

In **Northern Ireland**, more than 80 people gathered for their online teaching conference, drawing inspiration from the history of the Faith and reflecting on how individuals could contribute to the progress of the Plan. One particular highlight was a selection of stories about the late Jane Villiers-Stuart, a much-loved member of the Northern Irish community. Her dedication, love, lively personality and sense of urgency has left a profound impact on many of the friends. One participant remarked, “People have developed greater confidence in reaching out to their friends and starting Book 1s and devotionals. This is happening in both neighbourhood settings but also in the wider cluster where it had previously been more challenging.” The release of the updated Ruhi Book 1 has resulted in ten new study circles beginning in Northern Ireland, with a regular space also being created to

learn about inviting new friends to participate in the institute process.

COMMUNITY-BUILDING

Perhaps not working, or not travelling to work, or not being able to go out for other activities, has meant that friends have found more time to immerse themselves in studying the Ruhi books with greater intensity than before. **England** saw an increase of about 20% in the educational activities.

In **Greater Manchester** alone, attendance in study circles rose from 94 to 163 friends since the previous cycle, with 75 friends of the Faith participating.

The lockdown in **Scotland** witnessed an unprecedented 84% increase in the number of study circles in progress and a 134% increase in participants. More than 30% of tutors took to facilitating study circles. In early March, the Training Institute Board for Scotland hoped to have to have one regional tutor reflection gathering every three months; now there are six, and some 20 tutors are meeting fortnightly for an online reflection.

In Leith, **Edinburgh**, the nucleus of friends working in the neighbourhood created a Zoom space for individuals to come together and engage in meaningful conversations. One of the team said, “Scepticism over whether activities would work smoothly online was quickly replaced by excitement. Of course there was the odd challenge of a child leaving the screen at the climax of a story to grab their doll or the appalling sound from the microphones when attempting a group sing-along at a devotional! We quickly learnt from these challenges, and after adapting to the intricacies of our new reality, we found that the activities worked really well online and became a source of profound comfort and joy for all involved.”

In Broomhall, **Sheffield**, a neighbourhood team created packs with adapted lessons from Grade 1 children’s classes, arts supplies and games, which were shared with families. The children were then encouraged to go through the lessons with their parents and siblings. In an online space organised

by the team, families shared their art, played games, and even sang together.

In Hackney, **Greater London**, young people involved in the neighbourhood projects took the opportunity to teach their younger siblings the alphabet as part of their service to the wider community.

In **Bristol**, a nucleus of friends organised two online family camps, open to all. Wanting to share the invitation more widely, the team created a promotional video that was shared on social media and with friends in the South West. The camp attracted more than 142 children, junior youth, and adults. It allowed friends to invite their neighbours and families to experience community-building activities. One of the participants, who was new to the activities, commented, “I felt the unity and love at the weekend, it really was a lovely experience and the children seemed to really love the classes.” A member of the Bristol community emphasised the importance of capacity building: “We tried to keep the facilitators local in order to raise both capacity and enthusiasm in our cluster. Further, being online, we could concentrate our energies on the sessions and invitations, instead of the usual logistics of organising a venue and food.”

Through creating these spaces, parents have been able to take greater ownership over their children’s spiritual education. They shared: “The hope is that a regular online space will continue for all these families to come together to continue their spiritual education. We would also like to learn how to support the parents more closely in caring for their families during this time and to help to raise their capacity as spiritual teachers of their children.”

INTENSIVE CAMPAIGNS

Easter saw more than 80 people in England gather in 17 study circles on Zoom. A residential period of training had been planned at the Bahá'í Training Centre prior to the pandemic, but given the situation the team soon chose to move the training online. This required consultation around how to share the arts, how to create a sense of unity despite physical separation, and how to ensure that participants were able to truly engage with the materials. Plenaries and devotionals prior to the study circles allowed participants to share what they had been learning in creative ways. Skits, poems, quizzes, PowerPoint presentations, and visual arts contributed to a spirit of joy and unity. Such were the bonds of friendship formed over the call that many study circles then went on to study the next book in the sequence. One of the participants in *Ruhi Book 9.1* remarked, “It was such a wonderful and uplifting experience, immersing ourselves in the Writings and sharing thoughts and insights, that I quickly forgot that I was not in the same physical space. In fact, this separation was easily overcome by the spiritual proximity generated throughout the weekend. One is reminded of the beloved Guardian’s statement that ‘Opportunities, though multiplying with every passing hour, will not recur, some for another century, others never again.’ Zoom is opening up a

new world of possibilities, we need to make the most of this opportunity!”

Central England also began a course of intensive training sessions, which saw many individuals arise to serve as tutors. Youth were a particular focus for the sub-region and many were invited to begin study circles. Given the inability to meet in person, the tutors focused specifically on how to build unity of vision over Zoom. Together, they discussed accompanying these groups of youth in ways that built capacity and strengthened ownership.

STUDY & SOCIAL CHANGE

In May, young friends from across the **South West of England** explored how to contribute to social change in an online space, titled *United from Home*. Thirteen sessions were held on various topics—including mental health, the environment, and social media—as well as interactive arts sessions. The gathering’s atmosphere of kindness and inclusivity helped to motivate participants to commit themselves to personal and social transformation. Further discussions on various topics were requested and a regular discussion evening has since continued.

A conference for the **East of England** attracted more than 30 youth. Bahá'ís and their friends took part in deep discussions about their powers as youth and their ability to transform society. Everyone was very engaged in the study, arts explorations, music and drama. Plans for specific clusters emerged at breakout sessions.

A conference for up to 28 youth in **Scotland** aimed to encourage them to be of active service. With the theme, *Building a Unified Vision for Service*, participants looked at such themes as The Suffering and Regeneration of the World, Integration and Disintegration, Understanding and Applying the Plans of the House of Justice, and Barriers to Service. Games were played at the beginning of sessions creating energy and overcoming any awkwardness.

The lockdown also presented many Bahá'ís and their friends with extra time and the opportunity to deepen their study of the history of the Faith, its Writings and Teachings. Young believers in Tower Hamlets in **London** initiated a study on Sunday evenings of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Other youth joined together to study *The Dawn-Breakers*. Courses were also held on the *Kitáb-í-Íqán* as well as Islám, which attracted friends from all corners of the UK and further afield.

The annual seminar for the academic study of the Bahá'í Faith, now in its 49th year, went ahead for the first time on Zoom on Saturday 13 June welcoming some 80 attendees from the UK, as well as many other countries. A supportive and joyful spirit pervaded presentations on a range of subjects including Shoghi Effendi’s transformation of Nabil’s Narrative, the Declaration of the Báb in light of contemporary historiography, and Bábí and Bahá'í claims on religious history. **SG**

UK news

Reaching out through social media

As we have had to adapt to the unprecedented changes around us, several communities have begun learning how to use online platforms to reach out to individuals in their localities and build new bonds of friendship, rooted in reflection and meaningful conversation

S PURRED ON BY the need for lasting change in society, friends began experimenting with how to use social media platforms to make new contacts, interested in having deeper conversations about how the world's problems can be overcome.

For example, a group in the North of England were keen to try to learn about how to use online spaces to teach the Faith, engage in meaningful conversations, enhance the devotional character of the community, and stimulate other communities to do the same. This initiative, titled *Northern Souls*, makes use of Facebook, Instagram and Soundcloud to share materials and invite interested people. With a conscious effort to focus on images of the North to highlight the local nature of the endeavour, the *Northern Souls* team posts quotations, pictures, videos and podcasts. Online devotional spaces, called *Kindle the Spirit*, and Zoom firesides, titled *Elevated Conversations*, are also offered to further engage with pressing discussions of the day.

Another initiative, based in York, focuses on building and strengthening local community bonds. Activities had begun to flourish in one neighbourhood and, undeterred by the lockdown, the friends set about continuing and growing their activities. *York Unity Chat* has evolved as an online venture. In a themed space, friends come together weekly for prayer and to discuss ways to advance community based on quotations from the Writings.

"We primarily reach people through direct messaging on social media platforms," explained one of the York friends.

"According to the chosen topic for the week, local people or groups who may share in that particular interest, are messaged directly through Facebook and Instagram. We normally say we are holding the space based on the Bahá'í principle of oneness, and we're trying to explore pertinent topics with others who are passionate about social change."

The friends consciously draw on the power of prayer and have also been exploring the idea of paying for placed postings on social media to help promote the gatherings to a wider audience. Their aim always is to invite participants to engage in some of these existing community-building activities.

An initiative titled *Search for Meaning Oxford* has been using has been using Eventbrite, in addition to Facebook, to invite people into a weekly, one-hour discussion based around a particular theme. During the week, quotations from the Writings that relate to this theme are posted.

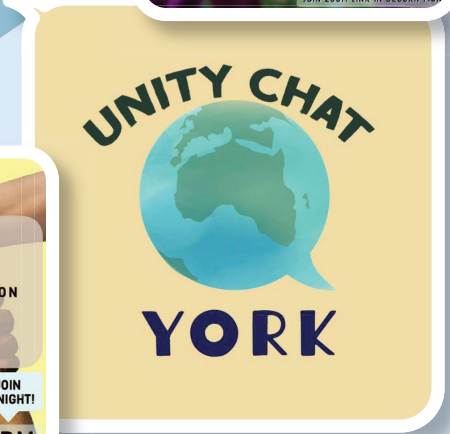
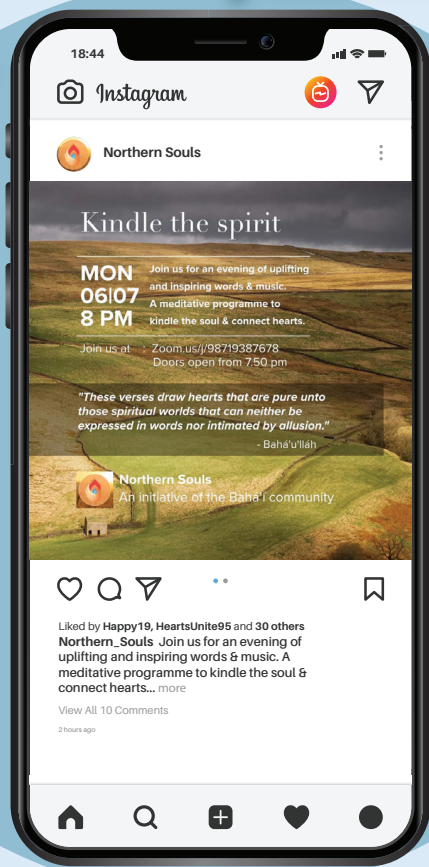
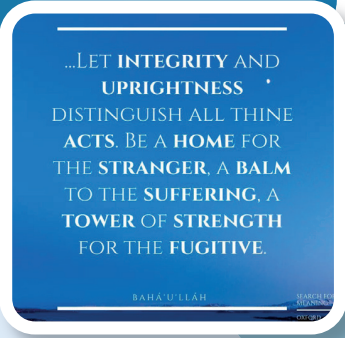
"Our primary hope is to meet new individuals who are increasingly concerned with the needs of the day and interested in discussing these with other individuals in an open and welcoming setting," explained one of the team.

"The programme is relatively simple with a short selection of quotations from the Writings around which the discussion is centred. Our hope is that this initiative grows organically in the local area, but we are also trying some 'boosting' of posts to see if this might be a way we can meet new friends. It's still early days but it feels like there is real potential and hopefully we will be able to translate some of the movement into the

community-building initiatives.”

Meanwhile, the Wellingborough community in Northamptonshire has been drawing upon the materials from the *Elevate* website, to create a stimulating Zoom devotional and conversation space every Saturday morning. In one neighbourhood, where eight Bahá'ís are living, a

nucleus of friends has been reaching out through setting up a Facebook group promoting the gathering and produced a flyer advertising the *Elevate Wellingborough* sessions, which was taken to every flat and house in three adjoining streets, totalling more than 200 households. AM



feature article

A growing movement of devotionals and conversations

*The Elevate website has been providing materials to inspire
and support individual and community activities throughout
the health crisis*

IN ITS NAW-RÚZ 177 message—published in this edition of *UK Bahá'í*—the Universal House of Justice observed how, in this period of the global health crisis, “the believers have used creative means to strengthen bonds of friendship, and to foster among themselves and those known to them spiritual consciousness and qualities of tranquillity, confidence, and reliance on God. The elevated conversations that have occurred as a result, whether remotely or in person, have been a source of comfort and inspiration to many.”

In its reflections upon the Naw-Rúz message with Counsellor Shirin Fozdar-Foroudi, the National Spiritual Assembly considered what creative means it could practically put in place to assist the friends in the United Kingdom to foster such a spiritual consciousness and the qualities noted by the House of Justice, as well as inspiring meaningful conversation.

As a result, a new website *Elevate* was born. *Elevate* was conceived as a collection of resources that could support a growing movement to develop spiritual consciousness

and the capacity to serve society. Profound passages are specially curated by theme, to foster *elevated* conversations and encourage the exploration of timeless spiritual values and fundamental questions, while celebrating their intellectual and creative expression.

Every week a collection of quotations, prayers, videos, questions for discussion and other resources is posted on the *Elevate* site on a particular theme.

These have ranged from Crisis to Hope, from Upholding Justice at the Individual and Collective Levels to Resisting Passivity. The site has also been able to respond to contemporary events and concerns with collections, for example, on Overcoming Racism and Mental Health and Kindness, posted for Mental Health Awareness Week.

The National Assembly was gratified to note that individuals and communities have been making use of the materials in their online devotionals. Many

friends have also been sharing the quotations through their Instagram, YouTube, Facebook and Pinterest accounts, and new social media initiatives such as *Empower London* and *Soul Bytes* have been drawing upon the themes.



elevateworld.org

ELEVATE

Elevate is a platform of resources that support a growing movement to develop spiritual consciousness and the capacity to serve society. Profound passages are curated to foster elevated conversations, encourage the exploration of timeless spiritual values and fundamental questions, while celebrating their intellectual and creative expression.
This project is alive and growing and always open to your input.

[Collections](#)

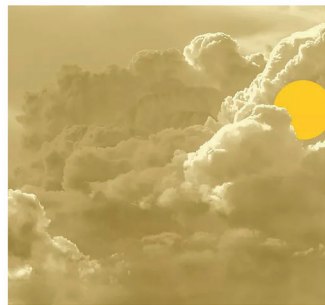
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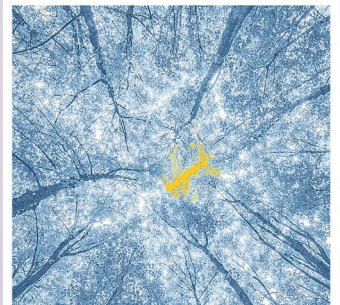
Recharging the Soul



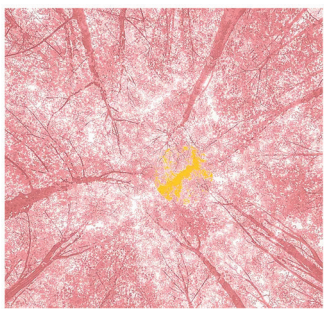
Reframing Disintegration



Resisting Possibility



Justice-Collective



Justice-Individual



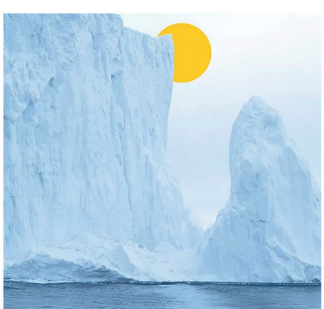
Change



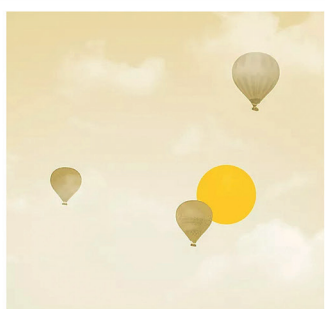
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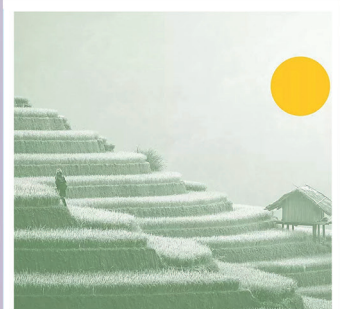
Crisis



Joy



Wellness



Gratitude

National Spiritual Assembly

A call for sacrificial giving

The current community-building activities and the swiftly advancing work of the Bahá'í Faith in the United Kingdom demands sacrifice from all of its devoted followers, both of their time and of their financial resources

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE of Justice has told the Bahá'ís of the World that the call to carry out their work “...will evoke a response in every heart that aches at the wretched condition of the world...”¹ and that “there is reassurance in the knowledge that, amidst the disintegration, a new kind of collective life is taking shape which gives practical expression to all that is heavenly in human beings.”²

At this critical time, when “a large share of humanity’s social and economic activity”³ has been disrupted, increasing numbers of friends are displaying “all that is heavenly”⁴, through their social interactions with each other. The increase in devotional gatherings, study circles, junior youth and children’s activities—along with other acts of generosity—are all contributing to humanity’s recognition of its inherent oneness.

But it is not only our time that requires the making of a sacrificial effort.

Over the past few years, communities across the UK have made a significant advance in the work of expansion and consolidation of the Faith. In the four years since the beginning of the current Plan, there has been a 50% increase in the number of ongoing activities that are taking place in the community at any one time. At every level the training institute is being strengthened—the early stages of an educational programme that is open to all mankind. And in a growing number of neighbourhoods across the UK, community-building activities are engaging increasing numbers of local people. But every advance inevitably increases the expenditure of the Faith. For example, tutors

and coordinators of the training institute, who are teachers of teachers, are being engaged on a full- or part-time basis; the cost of subsidising the production and distribution of literature, including prayer books and institute materials, has increased significantly; the number of properties required to support the teaching work is growing; the day-to-day running costs of the Bahá'í Training Centre is a new expenditure; and there is an ever-growing need for spaces to host larger gatherings such as family camps, junior youth camps and summer schools.

In Belfast, for example, we have been able to acquire a property, now known as ‘The Hub’, which was seen by the entire Bahá'í world in the film, *Dawn of the Light*. The building has played an integral role in the neighbourhood activities in Windsor. Extensive work is now required to refurbish and extend the space to provide the necessary accommodation and facilities needed for the ongoing efforts there.

Work was also undertaken recently at the Edinburgh Bahá'í Centre to make it a suitable venue to better support intensive training events, youth weekends and other gatherings to advance the teaching work in Scotland.

Last year, the community was able to acquire the Bahá'í Training Centre near Bicester in Oxfordshire, a significant milestone in the work of the Faith. The Universal House of Justice has described the institute process as “an instrument of limitless potentialities.”⁵ Having premises that are devoted to the training of human resources significantly strengthens our capacity to develop this instrument, enabling us to raise up large numbers of individuals who can contribute effectively to the spiritual and social transformation of society. Acquiring



The acquisition of the Bahá'í Training Centre near Bicester in Oxfordshire is a significant milestone in the work of the Faith.



The restoration work on 17 Royal York Crescent, Bristol, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá stayed on two occasions, is well under way.



The Edinburgh Bahá'í Centre has undergone renovations to make it a suitable venue for intensive training events, youth weekends and other gatherings.

such a venue, however, naturally brings with it the expense of essential repairs and renovations, as well as ongoing running and maintenance costs.

The cost of these developments—including the ongoing expense of administering the affairs of the community and supporting the teaching work, ably overseen by the regional institutions—can only be met by an increase in the contributions to the National Fund from the believers.

Furthermore, the UK Bahá'í community is uniquely blessed to be the custodian of two sacred sites. Many friends from around the world have delighted in the beautification and restoration of the environs of the Guardian's Resting Place. The final phase of this work is to landscape the grounds in front of the perimeter fence to enhance the tranquillity of the site, and to obscure the overlooking properties.

At 17 Royal York Crescent in Bristol, the renovation work is moving towards the final phase of redecoration and furnishing, to bring the apartment closer to its appearance when the Master made His two historic visits there and spoke in that very space. It is hoped that the apartment will be open to visitors in time for the centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in November 2021.

Last, but by no means least, the National Assembly announced in 2018 its intention to purchase land for the national Mashriqu'l-Adhkár or House of Worship for the United Kingdom. The Universal House of Justice speaks of the House of Worship as “a unique concept in the annals of religion” that “symbolizes the teachings of the new Day of God”, as a “collective centre of society to promote cordial affection”. It is a “...universal place of worship, open to all the inhabitants of a locality irrespective of their religious affiliation, background, ethnicity, or gender ... Men and women, children and youth, are held in its embrace as equals.” When built the House of Worship will not belong to the Bahá'ís but to each and every human being.

In summary, £1.8 million is still required for the Capital Projects and in addition, a significant increase in regular contributions to the National Fund is required to meet the annual expenditure, which is currently running at a deficit of £300,000 per annum against the level of contributions to the National Fund.

This deficit has been shared in a number of Fund Gatherings that are taking place across the country, and the friends are lovingly called upon to respond with universal participation and to contribute sacrificially.

Contributing to the Bahá'í fund constitutes an act of spiritual discipline which is an intrinsic element of the devotional life of the individual. No believer should be unaware of the privilege of contributing to the advancement of the Cause of God, irrespective of his material circumstances. The practice of giving to the Fund strengthens the connection between the believer and the Cause and enhances his sense of identification with it. Divine confirmations redound upon those who offer a portion of their material resources in a spirit of sacrifice, motivated by their love of the Faith and their desire to assist in its progress.”⁶

Darren Smith, Treasurer of the National Spiritual Assembly

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- 3 The Universal House of Justice, To all National Spiritual Assemblies, 9 May 2020
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- 5 The Universal House of Justice, To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 28 December 2010
- 6 The Universal House of Justice, 17 September 1992



feature article

‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Service and Generosity

Bahá’ís around the world are increasingly learning about how to live a life of generous giving. As individuals, communities and institutions increase their engagement with the life of society, the words and deeds of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá can provide inspiration and a perfect example

JUST AS A CANDLE’S purpose is to provide light, the human soul was created to give generously. Our highest purpose is fulfilled in a life of service, in which we offer our time, energy, knowledge, and financial resources.

The impulse to give springs forth from the love of God. As this love fills our hearts, generosity comes to characterize the pattern of conduct; when we serve others for the love of God, we are neither motivated by the hope of recognition and reward nor by fear of punishment. A life of service to humanity implies humility and detachment, not self-interest and ostentation.

In whatever ways we might choose to engage in service, and at whatever level, Bahá’ís the world over—as with all things—turn for inspiration and a perfect example to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

The Master’s involvement in the social well-being of His own community was recognized by the British government when he was knighted in 1920 for his work for the relief of

distress and famine in northern Palestine. Yet, from the earliest age, His natural concern for, and self-sacrificing generosity towards, those in need were a part of His character, even at times when His family were in dire need during their exiles. His sister Bahíyyih Khánum remembered,

For the poor also he had ever been very tender-hearted, and, destitute as we were, he always contrived to find something to give to others who were in greater want. This almsgiving proclivity of my brother was a great trial to our mother, for in our straitened circumstances she found it very difficult with the means at her disposal to provide for her own family only those things which were actually necessary.¹

One of His daughters, Túbá Khánum, also recalled:

One poor old couple, who were ill in bed for a month, had twenty visits from the Master during that time. To every sick person He sent each day a servant to ask “Did you sleep? How are you? Do you need anything?” All

LEFT: 'Abdu'l-Bahá visiting the Bowery—New York's impoverished, slum area—on 19 April 1912.

*their needs He supplied. Never did He neglect anything but His own rest, His own food; the poor were always His first care.*²

On his pilgrimage to 'Akká in 1907, an American Bahá'í, Roy Wilhelm—who would later be posthumously named a Hand of the Cause of God by Shoghi Effendi—witnessed the striking, regular occurrence, outside 'Abdu'l-Bahá's home:

*Friday mornings at seven there is another picture. Near the tent in the garden one may see an assemblage of the abject poor—the lame, the halt and the blind—seldom less than a hundred. As 'Abdul-Bahá passes among them He will be seen to give to each a small coin, and to add a word of sympathy or cheer; often an inquiry about those at home; frequently He sends a share to an absent one. It is a sorry procession as they file slowly away, but they all look forward to this weekly visit, and indeed it is said that this is the chief means of sustenance for some of them. Almost any morning, early, He may be seen making the round of the city, calling upon the feeble and the sick; many dingy abodes are brightened by His presence.*³

'Abdu'l-Bahá's concern for humanity was also expressed in countless ways throughout His travels to the West. During His stays in London, for example, He visited a children's home, spent Christmas Day 1912 at the Salvation Army shelter with poor men, and spoke at the Cedars Mission House and Club for working women and their children. The Passmore-Edwards settlement in Tavistock Place, London, which He visited four days after his arrival in England in 1911, was the site for a number of educational innovations, housing the first fully-equipped classrooms for children with disabilities living in the community and providing course work, physical therapy and meals.

One early attempt at providing Bahá'í education for underprivileged children was a school set up in Paris by Victor and Fanny Ponsonaille. They had settled in a poor quarter and, foregoing their lunch, gave the money they saved to waifs and orphans. In a small board cabin, the Ponsonailles ran a Bahá'í school. The Master Himself visited the school, telling the Ponsonailles, "This is a great work you are doing for the love of God in this great day, through the power of Bahá'u'lláh. Your station is great. Your names will go down through all the ages. Kings and Queens have never been talked of and remembered as you will be."⁴

In His communications to the believers, especially to those in Iran, 'Abdu'l-Bahá called them to exemplify Bahá'u'lláh's directive to be "anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements."⁵ As an expression of Divine love for all humanity and Bahá'u'lláh's call for universal education, Iranian Bahá'ís under 'Abdu'l-Bahá's guidance established schools—including the Tarbiyat school for girls, which gained national renown. With the assistance of

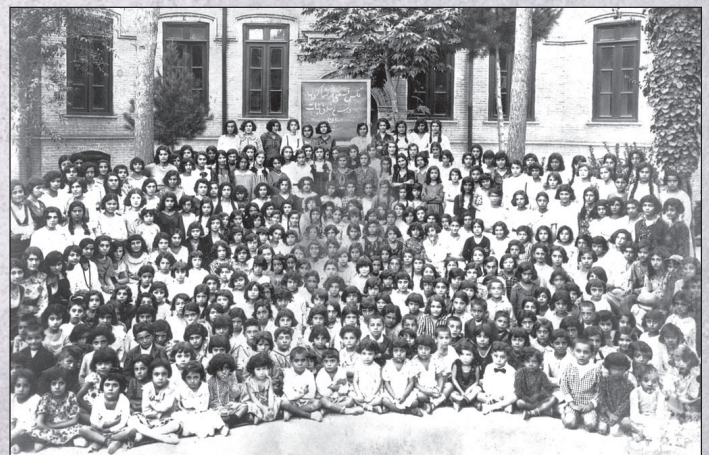
American and European Bahá'ís, clinics and other medical facilities followed. "All of these advances," *Century of Light* reports, "whether social, organizational or practical, owed their driving force to the moral transformation taking place among the believers, a transformation that was steadily distinguishing Bahá'ís—even in the eyes of those hostile to the Faith—as candidates for positions of trust. That such far-reaching changes could so quickly set one segment of the Persian population apart from the largely antagonistic majority around it was a demonstration of the powers released by Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant with His followers and by 'Abdu'l-Bahá's assumption of the leadership this Covenant invested uniquely in Him."⁶

Just over a year separates us now from the centenary of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing, presenting us with the opportunity to reflect further upon, and actively live inspired by, His example.

*May His loved ones, individually and collectively, little by little and day by day, increasingly embody His counsels: to be united in the Cause and firm in the Covenant; to avoid calumny and never speak ill of others; to see no strangers but regard all as members of one family; to set aside divergent theories and conflicting views and pursue a single purpose and common goal; to ensure that the love of Bahá'u'lláh has so mastered every organ, part, and limb as to leave no effect from the promptings of the human world; to arise with heart and soul and in one accord to teach the Cause; to march in serried lines, pressed together, each supporting the others; to cultivate good character, perseverance, strength, and determination; to know the value of this precious Faith, obey its teachings, walk in this road that is drawn straight, and show this way to the people.*⁷ **RW**

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- 3 Roy Wilhelm, *Glimpses of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp.7-8
- 4 *Sur les pas de 'Abdu'l-Bahá á Paris*, p.47
- 5 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity*, p. 21
- 6 *Century of Light*, p.11
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RIGHT: 'Abdu'l-Bahá sent American Bahá'í women to teach at the Tarbiyat-i Banat school for girls in Iran.



international news

New Houses of Worship rise around the world

Although at different stages of development, the sites designated for local Bahá'í Houses of Worship in Kenya and India, as well as the national House of Worship in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) are providing an early glimpse of a rising spirit of hope and unity

IN SPITE OF challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Bahá'ís in Kenya and the DRC have

persevered and found creative ways to proceed with their Temple projects while maintaining safety measures put in place by their governments.

After much anticipation, the design for the national House of Worship to be built in the DRC was unveiled on 2 July 2020 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the country. The design, created by Wolff Architects in Cape Town, South Africa, is inspired by traditional artworks, structures and natural features of the country, as well as by the Bahá'í Teachings, particularly the concept that God's bounty is unceasingly flowing over all people.

The site of the national House of Worship, on the outskirts of Kinshasa, overlooks the Congo River from the edge of a fertile valley. This river, whose tributaries gather rain from every part of the country into one great stream, provides a powerful image of the coming together of all people that is reflected in the design of the Temple. The patterns that will adorn the outside of the dome of the central edifice will express this idea in a style reminiscent of the artwork of various Congolese peoples.

In Matunda, Kenya, the emerging Temple has already become a symbol of unity. People of different religions from nearby villages have been gathering on

the temple site for collective devotions since before construction began. A growing number of residents of the area, feeling a sense of ownership for the project, have also been helping with various tasks, including tending an onsite plant nursery. The temple grounds have also hosted young people in Bahá'í educational programs which develop capacities for service.

The design for the local Bahá'í House of Worship to be built in Bihar Sharif, India, has also recently been unveiled. This will be the second Bahá'í temple in India. The House of Worship in New Delhi that has stood as a symbol of hope and unity in the country for decades has become a beloved place of spiritual reflection and renewal for Indians of all faiths and traditions.

"We have personally experienced the power of a space to inspire in the architecture of the Lotus Temple, which many of us have been visiting since we were children," stated the firm that designed the new temple. "We appreciate that the Bahá'í House of Worship in Bihar Sharif needs to offer a setting for the experience of the divine, while being humbly rooted in its surroundings."

"Bihar is a fertile land and its many villages present a timeless scene of Indian rural life," says Suditya Sinha,

LEFT: The new temple and its grounds will serve to enhance the connection between service and worship present in the community-building activities of the Bahá'ís of Bihar Sharif. With its doors open to everyone, the temple will foster a culture of inclusion and cooperation among all people.

one of the architects. “The House of Worship is coming up in this lush, rural setting. Inspired by traditional architecture and crafts, we chose to use brick made from local earth. The land is literally and metaphorically molded

into the form of the temple.”

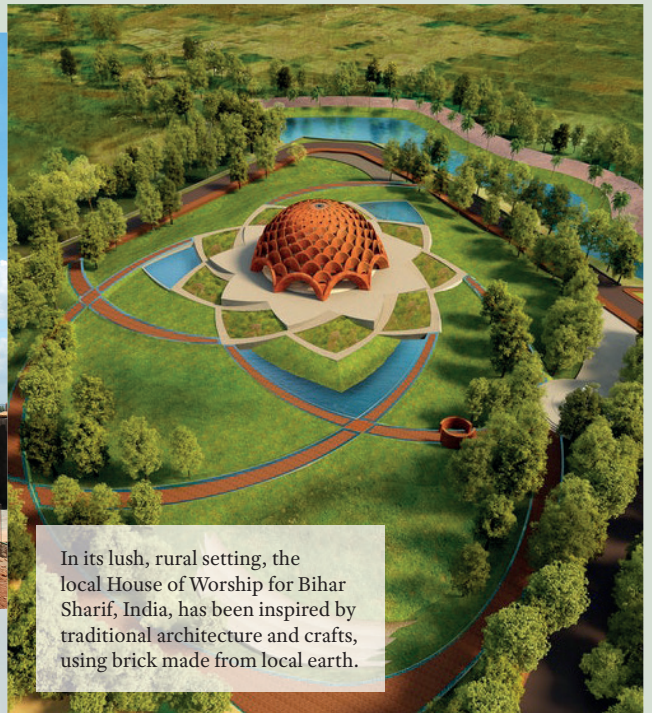
Drawing on patterns found in the Madhubani folk art of Bihar and the region’s long architectural heritage, the firm created a design with a repeating pattern of arches. The domed edifice will step up from nine arches at the base, multiplying until each segment appears to merge into a single geometry. Openings at the centre of the dome and in each ring of arches will reduce the weight of the ceiling while allowing

gentle light to filter in.

The new Temple and its grounds will serve to enhance the connection between service and worship present in the community-building activities of the Bahá'ís of Bihar Sharif. With its doors open to everyone, the Temple—as with all other Bahá'í Houses of Worship—will foster a culture of inclusion and cooperation among all people. **BWNS**



People of all ages regularly gather on the grounds of the local Bahá'í House of Worship in Matunda to pray together and offer assistance with various aspects of the site's upkeep, including tending an onsite plant nursery (photo taken before the crisis).



In its lush, rural setting, the local House of Worship for Bihar Sharif, India, has been inspired by traditional architecture and crafts, using brick made from local earth.



The design of the national Bahá'í House of Worship for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is inspired by traditional artworks, structures, and natural features of the DRC.

pilgrimage

Contemplating a group pilgrimage

The health crisis and measures taken by governments and airlines necessitated the suspension of pilgrimage and brief visits to the Holy Land in March 2020. However, friends around the UK are now taking the opportunity to consider making a group pilgrimage when circumstances permit them to resume

PILGRIMAGE IS one of the divine ordinances enshrined in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. It provides an opportunity for the friends to forge a stronger spiritual bond with the Central Figures of our Faith, thereby potentially invigorating and stimulating them to greater services to the Cause.

The Universal House of Justice announced in April 2017 a number of measures to make pilgrimage more accessible to a greater number and diversity of believers. These measures included encouraging groups to travel from neighbourhoods and communities and that these groups might also include relatives and friends who are not registered members of the Bahá'í community.

A short film has been prepared by the friends from the Windsor neighbourhood in Belfast, sharing their experiences of organising and participating in a group pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 2016. It can be viewed on YouTube here:

<https://youtu.be/OJJIw5oOMmw>

The friends have been encouraged by the National Assembly to reflect upon the film and the benefits of group pilgrimage. Group pilgrimage can also be considered for members of an extended family, friends serving together, such as teaching teams and nuclei of friends, or those who regularly meet together, such as participants in a study circle or devotional. The images on this page show a group visit to the Holy Land made in February 2020 by young people, many of them participants in neighbourhood community-building activities, from Woodberry in Hackney.

Statements made by and on behalf of the beloved Guardian indicate that pilgrimage to the Holy Shrines can become a means whereby one “can experience that mystic love which constitutes the very core of every true religion”, can enable one to obtain “a clearer vision of the mission and significance of the Faith”, and can “greatly invigorate the friends and stimulate them to greater services and sacrifice.

Holy places are undoubtedly centers of the outpouring of Divine grace, because on entering the illumined sites associated with martyrs and holy souls, and by observing reverence, both physical and spiritual, one's heart is moved with great tenderness.

– Bahá'u'lláh



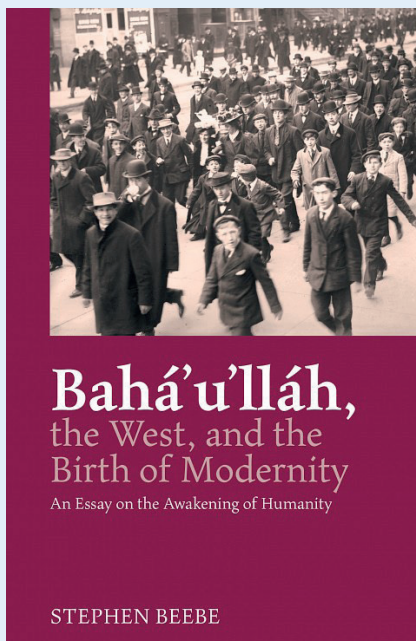
Young friends from the Woodberry neighbourhood in Hackney made a group visit to the Bahá'í Holy Places in Israel in February 2020.

book review

Bahá'u'lláh, the West and the Birth of Modernity

An Essay on the
Awakening of Humanity
by Stephen Beebe

George Ronald Publisher



The nineteenth century was distinctive for the vast, and previously unimaginable, changes that happened around the world. Some historians consider the 'long nineteenth century' to have begun with the French Revolution in 1789. In addition to political change, there were countless technological transformations that arose out of the Industrial Revolution. No matter when the century can be said to have started, it had undoubtedly ended by the beginning of the First World War in 1914, when humanity began to reap the harvest of the refusal of powerful monarchs—in particular those of Europe—to pay heed to the

call addressed to them by Bahá'u'lláh to accept the Most Great Peace. The optimism that accompanied the Enlightenment, the European intellectual and cultural movement associated with the rise of science and of philosophical rationalism, was devastated by the horrors of the Great War, replaced only with the kind of despair so vividly expressed in T S Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

When 'Abdu'l-Bahá made His historic journeys to the West in the early part of the twentieth century, He addressed hundreds of organizations and religious congregations, celebrating aspects of modernity, commenting on the needs and challenges facing societies in the modern era and warning

of the imminence of war.

In this welcome new publication, Stephen Beebe provides an informative exposition of the history of the era, especially those countries whose kings and rulers were addressed by Bahá'u'lláh. His narrative draws to a close with two crucial and magisterial chapters. One offers a brief analysis of identity and social transformation and introduces the institute process. The second, and penultimate, chapter outlines the challenges facing the world in our century. The masses have been left alienated and disillusioned by the failure of the ideologies and systems of modernity that grew out of the Enlightenment to meet the expectations engendered at the dawn of the nineteenth century. Dr. Beebe observes, however, that it "is the institute process which is emerging that fills the breach left by the revolutionary movements, the educational models, and the political processes of the modern age, and that lays the groundwork for an entirely new social structure that is worthy of the age of maturity."

"There is little doubt," he writes, "that the spiritual influence released by the Twin Manifestations of God gave an impetus to those transformations that so distinguished the nineteenth century and that formed the modern world."

This book—both informative and very readable—is highly recommended. **BL**

Further Reading

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/>

Stay up to date with the latest international Bahá'í News by subscribing to the Bahá'í World News Service [BWNS]. You can receive emails when new articles are published, and also be sent updates and notifications from the BWNS app.

*To be a Bahá'í
simply means to love
all the world; to love
humanity and try to
serve it, to work for
universal peace...*

— 'Abdu'l-Bahá



To contact the Editorial Team please
email: UKBahai@bahai.org.uk

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