

# SCRIPTUM:

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## Newsletter for Bahá'í Librarians & Information Professionals

No. 3 (October 1995 = 'Ilm 152)

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### Librarians Needed at the Bahá'í World Centre

The following is an announcement that has been approved at the Bahá'í World Centre for dissemination among Bahá'í librarians. Please share it with other Bahá'í librarians who may be interested.

#### BEGINNING OF ANNOUNCEMENT

The International Bahá'í Library is to be established on the Arc on Mount Carmel, where the "world-shaking, world-embracing, world-directing" institutions of the Bahá'í World Administrative Centre are located. It could well become the modern equivalent of the great classical library at Alexandria. The embryonic form of this great institution is the Bahá'í World Centre Library, which is currently serving the information needs of the Bahá'í World Centre and building the world's most distinguished collection of Bahá'í-related publications. Those serving in the Bahá'í World Centre Library face immensely challenging and exciting tasks that will lay the structural foundation for the future library institution and its scholarly activities. The effective and successful prosecution of these tasks requires a staff of professional librarians.

The Bahá'í World Centre Library has two divisions, in addition to its administration: Reference, and Technical Services. The Reference Division oversees the answering of reference inquiries, research projects, circulation, the vertical file, and the maintenance of the newspaper clipping collection. The Technical Services Division handles acquisition of monographs and periodicals, cataloguing of works, maintenance and development of library computer applications, shelving and physical processing.

The Bahá'í World Centre has an immediate need for qualified individuals - with training and/or experience - for four key positions:

Head Cataloguer: a professional librarian in charge of creating and overseeing all cataloguing for items added to the collections; requires knowledge of classification and bibliographic description, particularly the Library of Congress classification, Library of Congress subject heading structure,

and the Anglo-American Cataloguing rules.

**Reference Librarian:** a librarian or researcher with a wide knowledge of Bahá'í information resources, to oversee the Reference Division of the Library, to answer inquiries and perform research as needed, and to oversee the processing and data entry for newspaper clippings on the Faith.

**Periodicals Librarian:** professional to oversee the library's collection of over 1200 Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í periodicals, including check-in, cataloging, processing and shelving.

**Persian/Arabic Acquisitions Librarian:** an individual with excellent knowledge of Persian and Arabic, familiarity with Bahá'í publications in Arabic-script languages, knowledge of (or willingness to learn) methods of acquiring materials through purchase, gift, and exchange.

The standard appointment is for a period of 2.5 years, although special circumstances and qualifications may result in appointment for longer term or indefinite. Individuals with an interest are urged to apply for this unique spiritual and professional opportunity to serve the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. Letters of inquiry, or resumes and offers of service, may be sent to Office of Personnel, Bahá'í World Centre, P.O. Box 155, 31 001 Haifa, ISRAEL.

END OF ANNOUNCEMENT

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## **Collaborating with Assemblies to Make Bahá'í Resources Available to the Public**

The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of New Zealand has just written to all Bahá'í communities in the country with some specific suggestions about presenting Bahá'í resources to public and school libraries. Prior to writing the letter, the Assembly consulted with Bahá'í librarians, and incorporated a number of their suggestions:

That resources in diverse formats books, videos, tapes, compact discs be offered to libraries.

That resources published by non-Bahá'í publishers (Joseph Sheppherd's "Elements of the Bahá'í Faith") and produced by non-Bahá'ís ("The Gardeners of God") be included.

That libraries receiving donated resources be given the opportunity to select those items that best meet their needs and help them build a balanced collection.

That communities shouldn't worry about the way donated books are catalogued and classified, since the rules for cataloguing and classification are determined by international bodies and negotiations with these bodies are being handled from the Bahá'í World Centre.

To consider devoting a significant percentage of the community's library budget towards donating Bahá'í resources to public libraries, since resources are often far more accessible to Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís alike if placed in a public library rather than in a Bahá'í library.

To consider donating resources, written by well-known non-Bahá'í authors, that have themes strongly in keeping with Bahá'í belief.

To ensure that resources for youth and children are included.

I was one of the Bahá'í librarians asked to provide suggestions to the National Assembly. My wife encouraged me to include suggestions that I'd initially discarded as being so obvious as to be hardly worth stating. She argued that non-librarians were going to be carrying out the Assembly's request to place more resources in libraries and, to them, the suggestions would be both novel and pertinent.

-- Steve Marshall (Dunedin, NZ)

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## World Wide Web Sites for Bahá'í Librarians

As reported in *Scriptum* v.1 no.2, Mary Rowe, a student of librarianship at the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, has set up a page on the World Wide Web entitled "Resources for Bahá'í Librarians." The page is still under construction. Mary plans to put up the issues of *Scriptum*, as well as the Library-of-Congress-based and Dewey-based Bahá'í classifications. The site is accessible at:

<http://www.uwm.edu/People/mrowe/bahailib.html>

The Bahá'í World Centre is in the process of defining its presence on the World Wide Web. The Bahá'í World Centre Library's librarian for electronic systems is developing a page for the library, which will include a large array of documentation on the operations and tools used at the World Centre Library. This page is not yet accessible, but is expected to be part of the Bahá'í World Centre's WWW information some time during the 1996.

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## An Enormous Expansion in Access to Knowledge

"An enormous expansion in access to knowledge" is identified in the Bahá'í International Community's recent statement *The Prosperity of Humankind* as one of the requirements for the development of a global society. Clearly, this is a matter of importance to Bahá'ís working in the field of information sciences.

What is knowledge? What purpose does it serve? How is it made accessible? Consideration of these questions is essential to the definition of steps towards attainment of the goal; and it is necessary to consider them in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual principles, for the ultimate objective of that "enormous expansion in access to knowledge" is none other than to promote the establishment of a global society functioning in accord with the principles and provisions of His World Order. A study of Bahá'í Writings will serve to sanctify our views and orient our thoughts on the subject of knowledge. The following extracts from Bahá'u'lláh's Writings serve to illustrate the point:

"Through Him the ocean of knowledge hath surged amidst mankind and the river of divine wisdom hath gushed out at the behest of God..."

"We have decreed, O people, that the highest and last end of all learning be the recognition of Him Who is the Object of all knowledge..."

"Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone... In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him."(1)

Knowledge has a divine source, its ultimate purpose is the recognition of God, its influence on man is one of upliftment and empowerment. To enable man to recognize Him, God has also conferred on him "the gift of understanding", which "giveth man the power to discern the truth in all things, leadeth him to that which is right, and helpeth him to discover the secrets of creation".(2)

'Abdu'l-Baha has extolled man's intellectual powers as "the supreme gift of God", "the effulgence of God", and "a crown He has placed upon our heads".(3) Through this faculty, man is enabled to acquire knowledge:

"All the sciences and arts we now enjoy and utilize were once mysteries, and according to the mandates of nature should have remained hidden and latent, but the human intellect has broken through the laws surrounding them and discovered the underlying realities."(4)

With our thoughts turned towards the divinity of knowledge and intellect, we can then deduce that the purposes for which knowledge should be used are spiritual ones, such as the processes of justice, the promotion of unity, and the advancement of civilization -- all of them principles of Bahá'u'lláh.

Use of knowledge implies accessibility, the issue towards which we are directed by The Prosperity of Humankind. One of the keys to accessibility lies in communication, and here again the principles of Bahá'u'lláh show the way, for He has chosen to use words as the vehicle for communicating His Revelation -- while acknowledging the limitations of language in His statement, "How great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain!" (5) Words are communicated by writing and by speech, and Bahá'u'lláh has emphasised the importance of both literacy and language, through His Laws. Instruction in the arts of reading and writing is a parental obligation,(6) and the adoption of a universal language and script has been designated by Him as one of the "two signs for the coming of age of the human race":

"God, verily, maketh plain for you that which shall profit you and enable you to be independent of others... This will be the cause of unity, could ye but comprehend it, and the greatest instrument for promoting harmony and civilization, would that ye might understand!"(7)

On the subject of the international auxiliary language 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated:

"...then mutual interchange of thought will be possible for all... The world of matter will become the expression of the world of mind. Then discoveries will be revealed, inventions will multiply, the sciences advance by leaps and bounds, the scientific culture of the earth will develop along broader lines. Then the nations will be enabled to utilize the latest and best thought. because expressed in the International

Language..."(8)

An essential prerequisite to accessibility of knowledge is its organization, an activity in which we are involved directly through our professions. Through the discovery of new technologies, the window to new means of accessing and organizing information has begun to open. It would be well to bear in mind the source of these technologies. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

"Now consider, in this great century which is the cycle of Bahá'u'lláh, what progress science and knowledge have made, how many secrets of existence have been discovered, how many great inventions have been brought to light and are day by day multiplying in number. Before long, material science and learning, as well as the knowledge of God, will make such progress and will show forth such wonders that the beholders will be amazed. Then the mystery of this verse in Isaiah, "For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord," will be completely evident."(9)

Lest these words leave us in any doubt as to the divine source of technology, we can turn to this passage in the Writings of the Báb: "I yield praise unto Thee, O Lord our God, for the bounty of having called into being the realm of creation and invention..."(10)

In light of the Bahá'í teachings we can envisage that the call for "an enormous expansion in access to knowledge" goes beyond anything that we, as librarians, archivists and others working in the information field, have experienced or dreamed of. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written that the new principles revealed by Bahá'u'lláh require that: "The people... must be set completely free from their old patterns of thought, that all their attention may be focused upon these new principles, for these are the light of this time and the very spirit of this age."(11) We must continually be willing to take a fresh look at our work as information scientists, to review our philosophy and practices, to discover new methods and examine new ideas, and above all, as Bahá'ís, to lead the way. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "change is a necessary quality and an essential attribute of this world, and of time and place".(12) The Association of Bahá'í Librarians and Information Professionals and its newsletter provide a forum for exploration and debate of such vital issues.

Notes:

-- Judith Oppenheimer (Bahá'í World Centre Archives)

(1) *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, page 47; *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, para. 102; *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, pages 51-52. The Islamic tradition "Knowledge is twenty and seven letters..." quoted and authenticated by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Iqan* (page 243), both acknowledges the divine source of knowledge and indicates the vastness of the expansion in knowledge inaugurated by the new Dispensation.

(2) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XCV

(3) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pages 350 and 351.

(4) *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, pages 351.

(5) *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXXIX.

(6) *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, para. 48 and note 105.

- (7) *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, para. 189.
- (8) *Bahá'í Scriptures*, page 340.
- (9) *Some Answered Questions*, page 64.
- (10) *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*, page 195.
- (11) *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pages 252-253.
- (12) Quoted in *Wellspring of Guidance*, page 84.

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## **Bahá'í Academy in India Needs Advice: Library Computer Software**

The Bahá'í Academy, according to L. Azadi, is planning to prepare a project index for its library books. They will be grateful to anyone who can advise on the necessary software or other aspects of the work. It is the first time that they are trying to computerize their library -- the largest Bahá'í library in Asia -- so any suggestions will be warmly welcomed.

Contact:

L. Azadi  
Bahá'í Academy, Panchgani, India  
[uucp@bahasia.ernet.in](mailto:uucp@bahasia.ernet.in)

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## **Library Position Opens in Kazakhstan**

Position: Library Institution: Kazakhstan Institute Location: Kazakhstan Library: The Kazakhstan Institute for Management, Economics, and Strategic Research, Almaty, Kazakhstan, is seeking applications for a one-year appointment as Library Development Specialist beginning January, 1996. Required qualifications are a graduate degree in librarianship, ability to organize and implement library automation projects, and experience in business/economics collection development. Knowledge of Russian useful. Salary is mid-\$20's, and benefits include housing and roundtrip air travel. For further information, contact Catherine Friedman, 619-594-5877; or [friedman@mail.sdsu.edu](mailto:friedman@mail.sdsu.edu). Review of applications begins November 17 and will continue until position is filled.

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