

**CONFESSIONS OF A CHILD  
OF  
THE HALF-LIGHT**

**J.A. McLean**

**Ottawa**

**2022**

## PREFACE

Hand of the Cause of God, ‘Abul-Qásim Faizi, who was the essence of courtesy, refinement and service to Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá’í Faith, encouraged the Bahá’ís “to write everything down.” He remarked that the Bahá’ís of the future will be very curious to read any and all references to the way of life of their co-religionists in former times.

Now I add my voice to those who have already answered his call. Because I have by now exceeded seventy-five years of age, if I were to choose a subtitle for this volume, it would be “living and thinking past three-score-years-and-ten,” the allotted biblical lifespan given in the King James translation of the Bible.

A first glance at the Table of Contents will alert the reader to the fact that this book is not typical of those genres usually found in the ever-increasing corpus of Bahá’í secondary literature. The American anthropologist Clifford Geertz urged the use of “blurred genres” in the social sciences. Geertz’s recommendation has since spread beyond the social sciences to embrace the humanities.

Blurred genres is an apt descriptor of this book’s contents. The mixed material of *Confessions of a Child of the Half-Light* instead of one major theme offers: reported memories of some pilgrims I have known during the ministry of Shoghi Effendi; my edited 1967 interview in Paris with Laura Dreyfus Barney, the compiler of *Some Answered Questions*; one chapter of autobiography; short essays on various themes, theological, existential and literary; selected mystical experiences of mine; aphorisms of my own invention; family sayings that include those of my parents and grandparents; and the journal of a two-week travel-teaching trip in the former Soviet Union and Ukraine during *Perestroika* (1990).

This volume has not been conceived, consequently, as a fully formatted academic study. To facilitate ease of reading, I have avoided footnotes, while limiting the number of parenthetical references to the extent possible. When I have not been able to substantiate “factual” or otherwise historical information, I have followed the surgeon’s maxim: “When in doubt cut it out.”

I am very conscious that I have used the first-person-singular throughout this book. Now ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is reported to have said that in the future the little word “I” will become something of a diabolical world. But I hope the reader will accept, rather, all my frequent subjective references as an expression of Bahá’u’lláh’s sentence in *The Four Valleys*: “In this station the self is not rejected but beloved; it is regarded with favour and is not to be shunned.” (CDB 87-88)

Shoghi Effendi, quoting H.G. Wells from *The Shape of Things to Come*, who was in turn quoting Professor Maxwell Brown in *Modern State Prophets Before the Great War*, described the Bahá’ís of his time as the “generation of the half-light.” That apt little phrase and the classic work of St. Augustine of Hippo—a book whose narrative-line contributed to the development of

the modern novel and to Christian devotional and theological literature—have inspired the title of my book.

“Confessions” in the title, however, excludes any similarity to St. Augustine’s confessions of sins. It refers instead to the more antiquated meaning of one’s religious perceptions, principles or intimate experiences. I hope that readers, instead of finding the variety in the following chapters a distraction, will find this book useful for inspiration, pleasure, reflection and study. May the reader of my book experience the sentiment expressed in the Latin saying *Crescat scientia; vita excolatur*, “May knowledge grow and life be enriched.” Shoghi Effendi did not hesitate to remind us, however, that life is best lived, not only in the acquisition of faith and knowledge, but just as importantly, by their application in action.

## NOTES ON BAHÁ'Í PARLANCE

Although this book would interest mainly a Bahá'í audience, any Bahá'í author would be pleased if his or her writing attracted the wider community. Should this be the case, I am listing here some names and phrases used by Bahá'ís to facilitate the reader's understanding.

*'Abdu'l-Bahá.* The eldest son and appointed successor of Bahá'u'lláh, who along with the Báb, is the third of the Three Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith. Although He was not a prophet, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is called the "Mystery of God."

*Administrative Order.* The Administrative Order consists of the elected and appointed Bahá'í institutions created and designed by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá and established in the world by Shoghi Effendi. It is a system of global divine governance that is "the nucleus and pattern" of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

*'Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum.* "Maid-servant of Bahá, Lady Rúhíyyih (spiritual lady) was a title conferred upon her by her husband Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith. She was born Mary Sutherland Maxwell, the only child of her distinguished parents, Hand of the Cause, William Sutherland Maxwell, and the highly praised, distinguished disciple of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, May Maxwell. Mary was born in New York and raised in Montreal. She married Shoghi Effendi in 1937 when she was 27 years old. She achieved outstanding service to Shoghi Effendi during the 20 years of their marriage. After his death in 1957, she undertook historic, successive journeys around the world, teaching the Bahá'í Faith. She passed away in Haifa at the age of 89 in the year 2000.

*(The) Ancient Beauty.* One of the several honorific titles of Bahá'u'lláh.

*(The) Báb.* One of the twin Divine Manifestations/Prophets (1819-1850) of the Bahá'í Faith. Meaning "the gate," it is the main title of the Forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh.

*Bahá'u'lláh.* The other Divine Manifestation of the Bahá'í Faith who was prophesied by the Báb to manifest Himself nine years after the beginning of His own ministry. It means "the Glory of God."

*Believers.* An informal reference to members of the Bahá'í community.

*(The) Blessed Beauty.* Another of the many honorific titles of Bahá'u'lláh.

*Core Activities.* The current essential activities performed by Bahá'ís in collaboration with those in the wider community. These international community-building activities include, but are not restricted to, study circles, devotional meetings, children's classes and junior youth empowerment activities.

*Covenant.* Within the Bahá'í Faith, a binding agreement based on conditions established by the Three Central Figures with their followers to ensure the unity of the religion and the continuation of its divine authority.

*Covenant-Breaker.* One who claims to be a Bahá'í but who violates the religion by creating division, and who opposes the head of the Bahá'í Faith and/or attempts to create a following for himself.

*Divine Manifestation.* As used by Bahá'ís, this phrase is synonymous with a prophetic figure, more especially the higher Prophets who are the founders of the world's religions.

*(The) Faith.* A shorthand reference to the Bahá'í Faith used by Bahá'ís.

*Fireside.* The name given to an informal meeting usually held in private homes where some aspect of the Bahá'í Faith is discussed, either by a speaker who facilitates a discussion of the sacred writings or through an informal talk.

*Formative Age/Age of Transition.* This refers to the contemporary period which began in 1921 CE, after the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This age is divided in Epochs.

*(The) Friends.* An informal reference to the members of the Bahá'í community that is a shorter form of "the friends of God."

*(The) Garden of Ridván.* A garden whose name means "paradise" that existed in the then outskirts of Baghdád where Bahá'u'lláh spent twelve days (21 April-2 May, 1863), preparing for the next stage of His exile to Istanbul/Adrianople. It was in this garden that Bahá'u'lláh intimated to a few of His close followers that He was the Divine Manifestation who had been promised in the writings of the Báb. Today the Baghdád Medical Complex stands on the spot where the garden was once located. It is not to be confused with the other Garden of Ridván, favored and used by Bahá'u'lláh, located just outside of Acco/Akká, Israel.

*Hand of the Cause of God.* A title given by Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi to the highest-ranking teachers appointed in the Bahá'í Faith. Their function was to propagate and protect the religion. A total of fifty Hands of the Cause were appointed. The title no longer exists since all Hands of the Cause are deceased.

*Knight of Bahá'u'lláh.* A title created by Shoghi Effendi to designate those Bahá'ís who scattered and settled around the world during the Ten Year World Plan/Crusade (1953-1963) initiated by Shoghi Effendi. A total of 254 Knights responded. The Guardian inscribed their names on a special Roll of Honor that was deposited in 1992 at the entrance to the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh.

*LSA.* An acronym for the Local Spiritual Assembly, a body of nine persons, twenty-one years of age or older, who are elected annually by the local Bahá'í community to administer the affairs of the Bahá'í Faith.

*(The) Master.* One of the titles by which the Bahá'ís refer to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It was bestowed upon Him by His father, Bahá'u'lláh.

*Most Great Name.* A phrase that designates Bahá'u'lláh.

*Nasút.* In Sufi and Bahá'í cosmology, the lowest of five realms in the worlds of God. Nasút refers to the material world that humans inhabit.

*NSA.* An acronym for the National Spiritual Assembly, a body of nine persons who are elected

annually by delegates of the national Bahá'í community to administer the affairs of the Bahá'í Faith.

*Pioneer.* A Bahá'í pioneer is one who leaves home to settle in a foreign field or within one's national borders to teach the Bahá'í Faith.

*(The) Promised One.* A generic term that refers either to the Báb or Bahá'u'lláh. It signifies that the prophecies of a messianic figure have been fulfilled in the coming of these Twin Manifestations.

*(The) Qiblih.* The "Point of Adoration," literally "direction," that Bahá'ís face while saying their obligatory prayers. It designates the shrine of Bahá'u'lláh in Acco/Akká, Israel.

*Shoghi Effendi.* 'Abdu'l-Bahá gave this title to His successor and eldest grandson whose family name was Rabbání. 'Abdu'l-Bahá appointed Shoghi Effendi in His *Will and Testament* to be the "Guardian of the Cause of God." He directed the world-wide expansion of the Bahá'í Faith following the death of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921 until his own passing in London on 4 November, 1957. "Shoghi" means "he who longs or yearns" and "Effendi" is a Turkish honorific title referring to man of high education or standing.

*Travel-teacher.* A person who undertakes a journey of an unspecified length of time to teach the Bahá'í Faith.

*(The) Universal House of Justice.* The international corporate head of the Bahá'í Faith, consisting of nine men who are elected every five years by delegates to an international convention held in Haifa, its permanent seat and the world center of the Bahá'í Faith.

## POINTS ON FORM

**Gender.** I have alternated the personal pronoun using both "he" and "she." Both "man" and "humanity" will be used throughout to express the human race.

**Citations.** As mentioned above, so as not to distract the reader, I have provided parenthetical references to quotations from the Bahá'í sacred writings, while dispensing with foot/endnotes. Well-known familiar expressions or proverbs are put in inverted commas.

**Reverential Capitalization.** In keeping with Bahá'í practice of reverential capitalization, pronouns referring to the Three Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith are capitalized.

**Spelling.** Because it is slightly more economical than British and Canadian orthography, I have used American spelling throughout.

**Numerals.** No agreement exists on numerals because style books suggest different standards. Exceptions and inconsistencies vary from manual to manual. Written out in full are digits from one through ten. Numbers exceeding ten will use numerals.

**Page Numbers.** When sources are quoted in parenthesis, the mention "p." or "pp." is omitted.

**Dates.** Christian calendar dates will be used without the mention “CE” or Common Era. The day and the month will be written as follows: 9 June, 1945.

## **LEGEND FOR SOURCES USED**

**Bahá’í News (BN)**

**Bahá’í Administration (BA)**

**Book of Common Prayer (BCP)**

**Directives From the Guardian (DG)**

**Gems of Divine Mysteries (GDM)**

**Kitáb-i-Íqán (KI)**

**Lights of Guidance (LOG)**

**Gleanings From the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh (GWB)**

**God Passes By (GPB)**

**Persian Bayán (PB)**

**Promulgation of Universal Peace (PUP)**

**Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (SWAB)**

**Some Answered Questions (SAQ)**

**Star of the West (SW)**

**The Call of the Divine Beloved (CDB)**

**The Hidden Words (HW)**

**The Holy Bible (King James Version) (KJV)**

**The Master in Akká (TMA)**

**The Promised Day Is Come (PDC)**

**The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá’í Community (UDBBC)**

**Words With Power: The Bible and Literature (WWP)**

# CONTENTS

PREFACE.....	2
NOTES ON BAHÁ'Í PARLANCE.....	4
POINTS ON FORM.....	6
LEGEND FOR SOURCES USED.....	7
1. ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ: REMEMBERING THE MASTER.....	14
The Paris Interview with Laura Dreyfus Barney (1967).....	14
Her “Imperishable Service”.....	15
The Interview.....	16
The Old Frenchman who had met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.....	19
Memories of the Master: Highlights Reported by Curtis Kelsey.....	20
2. SHOGHI EFFENDI: REMEMBERING THE GUARDIAN.....	23
The Status of Pilgrim’s Notes Revisited.....	23
Mr. Daoud Toeg, Baghdad, Iraq and Hull, Quebec.....	24
Ms. Winnifred Harvey, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Hull, Haifa.....	25
Mr. Munir Bahá’í.....	27
Mrs. Laura Rumney Davis, Toronto, Ontario.....	28
Ms. Joyce Frances Devlin, Burritts Rapids, Ontario.....	30
Mr. Allan Raynor, Toronto, Canada.....	32
Allan Raynor through Robert “Bob” Leblanc.....	33
Mr. Mozhan Khádem, Son of the Hand of the Cause Mr. Zikrulláh Khádem.....	34
The Iranian Pilgrim (Paris, France).....	34
3. TEACHING THE FAITH, MAGIC MOMENTS, MEETING GREAT SOULS.....	36
Divine Foundations in Childhood: Five Bright Memories.....	37
Our Spiritual Mother: Ruth Halsted Kern, “Auntie Ruthie”.....	40



Faith of Our Fathers: Our Grandparents Jessie Fallon Halsted & William Henry Halsted..	42
The Devoted Servant of All: Violet Fallon Halsted, “Auntie Vi”.....	43
My Elder Sister Mary Louise McLean, Mary Lou.....	46
Early Youth and Declaration of Faith: Hand of the Cause of God, Mr. William Sears.....	47
Teaching the Faith to the Presbyterian Minister Reverend W.....	49
A Bountiful Harvest: The McLean Firesides at 6 Emery Circle, Etobicoke.....	50
Success in Teaching: My brother Stephen Stewart McLean.....	51
The Declaration of Faith of my Father Allan James McLean (1969).....	53
The Steadfast Teachers and Pioneers Who Arose.....	54
The Paris Years (1965-1968): Hands of the Cause, Outstanding Believers and Pioneers...	55
Marriage, Family Life, Teaching School.....	56
Transition Years: Salt Spring Island, British Columbia (1997-1999).....	58
The Return to Ottawa (1999-2013).....	61
The Last Hand of the Cause and One of the Last Few Remaining Knights of Bahá’u’lláh	62
Three Year Stay in Carleton Place (2013-2106): Second Return to Ottawa and Co-op Living (2016-).....	64
Fourteen Real Life Lessons and Recommendations.....	66
<b>4. ESSAYS AND REFLECTIONS.....</b>	<b>69</b>
“ <i>The Philosophic Mind</i> ”: Reflections on Wordsworth’s <i>Ode</i> at the Dawn of the Twenty- First Century.....	69
The Consumer Mass Market: Bridging the Gap Between the Secular and the Sacred.....	76
Voices of Conscience.....	78
Dichotomies are not Always False.....	79
The Prophetic Call, the Voice of God and Divine Signs.....	79
Actors and Acting Today: A Mixed Assessment.....	81
The Scholars of the Second Bahá’í Century.....	82
Mr. Roger White Poet and Dancer: What the Dream Revealed.....	83
The Relevance of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle for Saving the Soul from Twenty-First Century Materialism.....	84
The Soul and the Paradoxes of Human Existence in Light of Eternity.....	91

A Modern Ballad: The Tragic Death of John Doe.....	93
Recapitulation and Endurance in the Senior Years.....	94
The Strange Paradox of Theology and Union with God.....	96
The Simplicity and Complexity of Attaining Spiritual Freedom.....	100
Correlating the Four Universal Material and Spiritual Phenomena of Nature and Spirit. .	103
The Eternal Now, Attaining the Divine Presence, Discovering the Self and the Soul.....	105
Why Love is Greater than Science, Why Science Needs Love, Why Love Needs Science .....	108
The Messianic Secret Disclosed in the Garden of Ridván:.....	110
Contrast Between Cosmic Celebration and Historical Event.....	110
Spiritual Capacity and What the Photographs of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Reveal.....	112
The Degeneration of Morals, Broadcast News, Violence in Sports and Corporate Power	114
The Creative Process: A Little Bit of Heaven, a Little Bit of Hell.....	117
<b>5. MYSTICISM: EXPERIENCING THE TRANSCENDENT.....</b>	<b>119</b>
The Place of Mysticism in Religion.....	119
Five Types of Transcendental Experiences.....	121
<b>I.. BEING IN THE PRESENCE.....</b>	<b>122</b>
Falling on my Face Before the Glory of God.....	122
What Happened Then: What I Learned from this Experience.....	125
Hand of the Cause Mr. Zikrulláh Khádem Vehicles the Love of Shoghi Effendi.....	126
After His Passing: In my Father’s Presence with my Mother.....	129
Mother Keeps her Promise to Show me the Bliss of Heaven.....	130
And the Heavens Opened: An Experience of Cosmic Happiness.....	131
Resetting the Distressed Mind Through the Power of the Word of God.....	132
Meeting Hand of the Cause Mr. Khádem in the Rose Garden of the Spirit.....	133
Three Dreams: The Two Bábí Shaykhs, the Ark and the Lotus.....	134
The Blessed Night of Peace .....	135
<b>II. VISIONS.....</b>	<b>137</b>
Witnessing the Sacrificial Love of the Martyrdom of the Báb.....	137
Seeing the Unity of Humanity in a Student Restaurant in Paris.....	139

Seeing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Clouds.....	140
My Mother’s Vision When She Was Still A Child.....	140
Seeing Dr. Todd Lawson Underwater in Cuba.....	142
The Double-Sign: The Vision of Smoke and Mist.....	142
III. CLAIRVOYANCE.....	143
Seeing Roger Pereira Dressed as a Priest.....	143
Seeing my Father Dancing Before His Casket.....	144
IV. CLAIRAUDIENCE.....	146
“Do not grieve over that which God has ordained for it is light upon light.”.....	146
“You shall be weightless.”.....	146
“Nous vous avons donné les plus grandes joies, les plus grandes peines.” (“We have given you the greatest joys and the greatest sorrows”).....	147
“Verily We have chosen someone else for thee.”.....	147
“ <i>Goftam ke nakun!</i> ” (“I told you no!”).....	147
“Is that you Jack?” Message From Maternal Grandmother Jessie Fallon Halsted.....	148
“She died because she didn’t want to go on living. She just stopped breathing.”.....	148
V. DREAMS.....	149
Bahá’u’lláh, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Guardian, the Universal House of Justice and Eminent Others.....	149
Bahá’u’lláh’s Invitation to Pray is Lost.....	149
Two Dreams of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.....	149
Limit Speculation: A Lesson Taught By Humor.....	149
Personal Taste and Observing the Laws of God.....	150
The Guardian.....	150
“Shoghi Effendi is Chief”: Keeping Priorities Straight.....	150
The Photo of Shoghi Effendi as a Young Man: Stay Resigned and Peaceful.....	151
The Universal House of Justice: The Meeting on the Highest Peak in the World.....	151
DREAMS OF EMINENT OTHERS.....	152
A Multiple-Stage Dream of Ruhiyyih Khánum.....	152
Rúhiyyih Khánum Talking With Dr. Peter Khan About <i>A Celestial Burning</i> .....	154
The Suspended Pearl of Great Price.....	155

Mr. J. Douglas Martin: “Your Martyrdom is Greater Than Mine”.....	156
Former Universal House of Justice Member Mr. Ian Semple Encourages me to Jump In	157
The Premonitory Dream: Warning About Leviathan, the Giant Sea Monster.....	158
Seeing the Name of my Daughter Leah Before she was Born.....	159
DREAMS OF THE DEPARTED: FAMILY AND FRIENDS.....	159
Auntie Vi: Our Family’s Self-Effacing Maid-Servant.....	159
My Father as an Awesome Guardian-Angel.....	160
A Former Colleague Speaks From the World Beyond: “It’s true Rabbi! It’s true!”.....	161
My German Neighbors in Toronto Dr. Oskar Petersen and His Son Ralf-Jörn Accept the Faith in the World Beyond.....	162
The Dance of the Ten Lady Martyrs of Shíráz (1983).....	166
Three Indigenous Things.....	167
A SERIES OF DREAMS OF THE DEPARTED.....	169
How My Grandparents Halsted Departed This World.....	170
Three Dreams about my Mother Joyce: Tears, Warnings, Encouragement, New Powers.	170
Dreams of the Shrine of the Báb, the Mother Temple of the West, and the Universal House of Justice.....	171
Four Selected Dreams: Pope John-Paul II, Princess Diana, the Queen Mother, John Lennon .....	172
AN EXPERIENCE OUTSIDE THE FIVE CATEGORIES ABOVE.....	174
Finding Fluency of Speech in the Classroom.....	174
6. THE BOOK OF EIGHTEEN.....	175
1. THE LIFE IT IS.....	177
2. ART AND MORAL PURPOSE.....	179
3. THE WILL OF GOD.....	180
4. MIND THINGS.....	182
5. FINAL THINGS.....	185
6. WORDS WRITTEN ON WATER.....	186
7. SUFFERING HOPING AND FEARING.....	187
8. UNFOLDING DESTINY.....	189
9. TIME AND A HALF.....	190

10. RETURNING.....	191
11. THE MANY FACES OF LOVE.....	191
12. NATURE.....	195
13. GOD.....	196
14. DREAMING.....	198
15. PEAKS AND VALLEYS.....	198
16. TEMPTATION.....	199
17. TROUBLES.....	200
18. PERSONAL ZEN.....	201
7. FAMILY MATTERS.....	204
My Grandparents William and Jessie Fallon Halsted.....	204
Sayings of My Maternal Grandparents Halsted.....	205
My Parents.....	206
EULOGY FOR ALLAN JAMES MCLEAN (November 29, 1913-April 7, 1995).....	208
Scottish Tranquility (Allan James McLean 1913-1995).....	214
EULOGY FOR JOYCE MARY HALSTED MCLEAN (July 14, 1920-November 28, 2001).....	219
8. TRAVEL TEACHING IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION AND UKRAINE (1990).....	226
DEPARTURE.....	226
MOSCOW (5-8 August, 1990).....	229
ON THE TRAIN FROM MOSCOW TO KYIV.....	241
KYIV.....	243
LYVIV.....	254
HOMEWARD BOUND.....	265

# 1. 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ: REMEMBERING THE MASTER

## The Paris Interview with Laura Dreyfus Barney (1967)

The year 2021 marked the lapse of a century since the beginning of the Formative Age, with the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at His home in Haifa. This generation has witnessed a rare synchronicity of events: the beginning of a new millennium, the turn of the 20th and the inauguration of the 21st centuries. Some of us born around the mid-twentieth-century have had the good fortune of knowing one or more believers who made the pilgrimage during the lifetime of the Master.

I have met three such friends, 'Abdu'l Rahim Yazdi, formerly of Montreal, and Aziz Yazdi, both of whom met 'Abdu'l-Bahá when they were children. The other person was Laura Dreyfus Barney, the compiler of *Some Answered Questions*. Despite her advanced age of 88 years and frail condition, Madame Barney was kind enough to have granted a 21 year-old Canadian student an interview in her Paris apartment. Although I was not the lone recipient of that favor, I count myself among the very fortunate.

Had I not been actively teaching the Faith in *la ville des lumières* during my years at the Sorbonne (1965-1968), I cannot be sure she would have received me. During my parents' visit, while I was living at 16 rue Alain Chartier, Paris XV, she told my mother Joyce during a telephone conversation that took place from a small, nearby hotel, that she had heard about my teaching activities.

It both astonished and humbled me when my mother reported that Madame Barney had said that she was grateful for my teaching efforts because it brought a measure of impetus to the teaching work of the Bahá'í community. I had no idea whatever that my modest efforts to teach the Faith by accompanying seekers to the then Bahá'í Center, at 11 rue de la Pompe, Paris XVI, had produced any such change.

Madame Barney's kind remark to my parents indicates perhaps how the pace of teaching in Paris had been hindered following Mason Remey's misguided attempt to usurp the Guardianship. I am not sure what her role had been after five members of the French NSA in 1960, led by the American, Joel Marangella, accepted the false claim of Remey to the Guardianship, after the passing of Shoghi Effendi on November 4, 1957.

The aged and deluded architect had appointed Marangella to be the president of the Second International Bahá'í Council and the next Guardian; Remey had been the first president. Marangella (d. San Diego, 2013) could not resist the illusion of power that Remey had offered him. This attempted breach in the Covenant temporarily disturbed the unity of the French Bahá'í

community, until the situation was decisively resolved by the intervention of the Hands of the Cause, whose acting deputy in France was Mr. ‘Abu’l-Qásim Faizi.

After the resignation of the five dissident members of the French NSA, the national institution was dissolved. Thankfully, despite the disloyalty of the majority of the members of the French NSA, the believers in that nation were not swayed and stood firm in the Covenant. As it has been promised repeatedly in our sacred writings, the unity of the Bahá’í world remained intact, thereby preserving the most cherished desire of the Founders of the Faith: that love and unity be preserved, a unity for which the Báb and thousands of believers had sacrificed their lives in Iran and elsewhere.

### **Her “Imperishable Service”**

Laura Dreyfus Barney’s compilation and translation, called *Some Answered Questions* in English, has been described as an “imperishable service” by Shoghi Effendi (GPB 260). Laura Dreyfus Barney—a name that she preferred after her marriage to the first French Bahá’í, Hippolyte Dreyfus, lawyer, orientalist, world traveler—was an engaged, gifted Bahá’í, who was admired for her outstanding humanitarian and philanthropic services, both within and without the Bahá’í community. The fact that she had been born to wealth, and educated by private tutors, both in Paris and the United States, allowed her to freely pursue the spiritual, cultural and intellectual activities that she felt would most benefit humanity.

Laura had been an elocutionist when she began her outstanding life of service. Some of her early talks centered in improving race relations in the United States. Laura was between 25 and 27 years old when in Akká/Acco, Palestine, later Israel, over several extended pilgrimages, she lived with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s family between 1904-1906, where she acquired Persian. She began asking her Master to answer the abstruse philosophical and theological questions that had preoccupied her. The nature and number of her questions show that Laura was driven by a pressing intellectual curiosity to understand challenging, transcendental questions relating to Judeo-Christianity, Islam, philosophy, the nature of the human being, the Manifestation of God/Prophet and miscellaneous subjects.

In and by themselves, the questions Laura posed reveal the depth of her intellect. No one can ask such abstruse, pertinent, wide-ranging questions without an in-depth knowledge of religion and philosophical theology. We cannot be sure how Laura gained such deep knowledge of religion. Her familiarity with theological questions may have stemmed in part from the possibility that the study of religion formed part of the education she had received from childhood in Paris.

The answers that she received clearly reveal ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s mastery of the intellectual aspects of the transcendental realm. These answers provide one of the foundational texts in the Bahá’í canon for religious/theological scholars, philosophers and intelligent general readers

alike. The fact that she cared enough to search for the truth in the matters she raised with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá also secured her fame and name for all time.

That Laura was able to translate ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s recorded answers indicates her proficiency in Persian. She was no doubt fluent in that language, having learned Persian at the suggestion of the Master and having lived with the holy family. Excellence of speech formed part of her early *métier*. The fact that her sister was an accomplished poet indicated that fluency of speech was an attribute of the family’s considerable artistic and literary talents. According to one source, her spoken Persian was not that of an amateur. An Iranian official who met her and Hippolyte, and Laura’s French Bahá’í chaperone, Mme Lacheney, on their trip to Iran, reported that she spoke Persian better than many educated Iranians.

The Master’s very first telephone conversation took place in Persian in Paris, probably with Laura, because it was she and Hippolyte who were arranging the details of His stay in the city. (We cannot be absolutely sure, however, that it was Laura who called Him because Edith Sanderson also spoke Persian). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, according to the written report that has come down, was not eager to take the call, but since His assistants were not available, He obliged the caller. He said it was the first time He had spoken on the telephone.

Shoghi Effendi addressed Madame Barney, whom he had first met when he was only six years old, respectfully in his friendly letters as “Laura Khánum.” After Ahmad Sohrab’s ambitious attempt to reject the authority of the Guardian, and to declare the Bahá’í Administration null and void, an attempt that had troubled the Paris friends in the 1930’s, Madame Barney continued to assist in the administration of Bahá’í activities to correct the situation.

Laura was a determined and disciplined individual who devoted herself to what posterity has justly regarded as a remarkable record of historic services both to the Bahá’í Faith and to humanity, services that included care of the war-wounded, charitable work for the relief of war-children, the cause of peace and the rights of women, among other services. Like other believers of her generation who were women of financial means, charitable and relief work went hand-in-hand with their spiritual services to the Faith. In France, Laura was given a national double-honor when she was appointed both a *chevalier* and an *officier* of the Legion of Honor.

## **The Interview**

\*The following section contains edited, supplementary material that differs somewhat from the contents of the tab *Laura Dreyfus Barney* at [www.jack-mclean.com](http://www.jack-mclean.com)



A Spanish housekeeper opened the door of Laura's apartment at 74 rue de Raynouard in Paris's affluent 16<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*. She invited me to sit down on a hardwood chair that had been placed just outside the kitchen, near the entrance. I cannot say that she welcomed me; her manner was formal and reserved. I had the passing impression that she considered my visit an inconvenience, if not an intrusion, perhaps because of Laura's age.

She withdrew for a moment and returned to notify me that Madame Barney was ready. The maid led me to the door of the bedroom. I was not exactly dressed for the occasion. In retrospect, since I was about to meet a believer of such historic proportions, I should have dressed up, instead of wearing the casual brown cords, matching suede shoes and long-sleeved woolen pullover of the student.

I entered at the foot of the bed and saw Laura lying back, directly opposite me, propped up on a cushion of pillows. I had not yet seen any photos or portraits of Laura when she was young. I had, then, no clear indication of the physical aspect of the person I was about to meet. But I must admit that to my young eyes, Madame Barney looked quite pale and very advanced in years. But in fact, Laura was to live on for another seven years, until her passing in 1974, at the advanced age of 95 years. She is buried in the Passy Cemetery with her older sister Natalie, not far from her Paris apartment.

We greeted one another. I sat down in the chair that had been provided for me at the foot of the bed. The chair had been placed directly opposite Laura, rather than at an angle. At this writing, it has been more than fifty years since that conversation took place.

The reader, however, will not be at any loss for forgotten remarks. I remember very clearly all that Laura said. She spoke economically, even in relating what 'Abdu'l-Bahá had said in her presence. Like the other souls who were fortunate enough to have had the inestimable privilege of meeting Him, she must have had personal feelings and impressions of the Master, but she did not share them with me on that occasion. I did not dare to ask, as much as I would have wanted. Because of her advanced age, I feared tiring her any more than necessary. It was not until some 55 years later in 2022, with the publication of Mona Khademi's seminal book, *The Life of Laura Barney* (Oxford: George Ronald Publisher), that I read of that transformative moment. As Laura sat in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's presence, the tears of gratitude flowed down her cheeks, "tears one might shed if one had been locked up in a dark prison for years." (p.34)

Laura referred in passing to her meeting with May Maxwell in Paris in 1900, that illustrious soul who led so many distinguished believers to the Faith in Paris and Lyon, and later in Montreal and the United States. May's teacher was another great soul, the immortal Louisa Aurora Moore Getsinsger, called simply Lua by her family, and proclaimed by the Master as "Herald of the Covenant" and "Mother Teacher of the West." It was at May's apartment that Laura met her future husband, the first French Bahá'í, Hippolyte Dreyfus, but this did not come up in our conversation. (It surprised me that during my study term in Paris that the French Bahá'ís hardly ever referred to that distinguished and learned first French believer, but a book has now been published on his life and work).

Laura referred to Mrs. Maxwell as May Bolles. “In those days,” Laura said, “we knew her as May Bolles before she married Sutherland Maxwell.” The pace of the conversation was slow and measured. Laura waited on my questions; it was up to me to lead the conversation. I naturally asked about the compiling of *Some Answered Questions*. Madame Barney did not tell me any more than what is written in the Introduction to that great work, except that one of her earliest questions was about strikes. The word came to her in French—*grèves*—and since we were speaking in English, I supplied the translation. (His talk on strikes is the 78<sup>th</sup> of 84 talks in the retranslated, revised 2014 edition).

The heart of the interview came with the report of her memories of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. There were just three brief but nonetheless telling things, and they were completely in keeping with what we know about the Master: the first was that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá loved harmony and had an aversion to disunity. In the conversations that she observed Laura said: “If a difference of opinion entered into the conversation, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would change the subject and put the conversation back on a more harmonious track.” Her report is completely consistent with the Bahá’í Faith’s central teaching of unity in all its forms.

The second thing was on a sad note. One day, she said, a Jewish couple came to visit ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. I am no longer sure what they were seeking; Laura did not tell me. But after they left ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s presence, He began to weep and said: “They are spiritually dead.” Such was the Master’s great perception and His concern and compassion for the spiritual life of the soul. I suppose that if their contact with the Center of the Covenant was not capable of awakening their souls, their spiritual capacity was sorely deficient.

The third thing was a comment. I will call it the anticipation of final liberation. One day as He sat in His armchair, looking out onto the Mediterranean, in the dining room of the house of ‘Abdu’lláh Páshá, in the same wood-paneled room where the talks recorded in *Some Answered Questions* were given, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said: “Oh, won’t it be wonderful when we are liberated from the body and we’ll be able to fly throughout the universe.”

When I entered that room on pilgrimage in March of 2007, looking through the window, I saw that the Mediterranean lies only a stone’s throw from that room. Laura’s words, spoken more than five decades earlier, came back to me. For here was the very room, the same armchair and the Mediterranean sea beyond.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s remark to Laura took on a special poignancy, when I realized that the tissue of false accusations spread by the covenant-breakers to Sultán ‘Abdu’l-Hamid II and the Ottoman authorities had resulted in the renewal of the severe restrictions on His movements. I wondered if His poignant longing for freedom sprang from the increased duress imposed by His stricter confinement.

Sensing the time was up, I expressed my sincere gratitude to Madame Barney, took my leave, thanking the housekeeper as I left. As I quickly descended the stairs, which were carpeted in a deep, rich, royal blue, a wave of joy came over me. It never occurred to me when I came to Paris to study French literature that meeting Laura Dreyfus Barney would be the greatest benefit

of my academic stay. As I left the building, almost floating down rue de Raynouard, I continued to bask in the afterglow of our meeting. I realized that I had been graced by the presence of a historical great soul, one who had met other great souls, one who had seen great things, and done great things in the service of the Greatest Servant of humanity.

### **The Old Frenchman who had met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá**

Another less significant but still important connection with those who had met the Master in Paris was the man I refer to simply as the old Frenchman. I must refer to him this way because I met him only once and never knew his name. I say he was old, but age is a relative thing. To my young eyes, he may have looked old, but he was not far along in advanced old age.

Estimating his age in retrospect, he could have been in his late 60’s or 70’s. The visitor to the Bahá’í Center at 11 rue de la Pompe, Paris 16ième was alert and trim. He wore glasses and the French beret and appeared to be in good health. The Frenchman was polite, but he seemed to me to be slightly guarded, as the youth gathered round and greeted him warmly at the entrance.

I am not exactly sure of the nature of the occasion that brought him there. It is likely that he came because of some publicity about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, but whatever the reason, there he was. The significance of the moment was not lost on the youth, once they realized that this gentleman had been in the presence of the Master. Here was someone who had actually met the “Mystery of God”, that patriarchal figure who preferred above all His “styles and titles,” the one He loved best: “Servant of Bahá.”

The Center in those days contained two main rooms: a larger room for more formal meetings and an adjoining, smaller room reached through double-doors that was reserved for more intimate gatherings, such as the fireside. It was in the smaller room that we assembled. The senior Frenchman was not a formal believer in the Bahá’í Faith, but neither did he behave like a stranger.

The Frenchman knew, as we all knew, that we shared a strong common spiritual bond. But unlike those of us who were declared believers, that favored man had actually been in the presence of the Son and Successor of Bahá’u’lláh Himself. As selections from *Paris Talks* were being read, I fixed my eyes on the old man who sat with his head bowed, listening to the words of the Greatest Servant of humanity.

As he listened, it seemed to me that he became lost in his memories, as he recalled a time long ago in Paris when he had been in the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. When he raised his head again, his eyes became transfixed. It was the look in his eyes that I cannot forget. The far-away look that had settled on his face befitted someone who had seen a vision of something sacred and unforgettable, a vision that, despite the passage of more than 50 years, still captivated his soul. The expression on the face of that dear, old man was the look of someone who had seen the rare, living manifestation of the Divine, as it once inhabited the human temple.

## **Memories of the Master: Highlights Reported by Curtis Kelsey**

It is a very different experience to read about the history of the Faith than it is to hear it first-hand, especially from someone who had been in the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. An eye-witness gives a living, realistic quality to his or her report that corrects the false impression that could otherwise be conveyed by the imagination’s reconstruction of those same events.

In my limited experience, Curtis Kelsey’s recorded talks about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are the most complete, engaging and lively presentations that remain in English. Curtis was a captivating narrator who interspersed his talks with good humor. His narrative never dragged. On an Internet audio link, we can hear Curtis Kelsey relating his first-hand memories of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian. Curtis’s son-in-law, Nathan Rutstein, has also written a biography published by George Ronald entitled *He Loved and Served: The Story of Curtis Kelsey* (1982). Before he passed away, the gentle-spirited “Nat” was married to Carol Kelsey Rutstein, one of Curtis’s daughters.

Because the complete record is contained in his recorded talks, I will only highlight here in writing what I heard in person from Curtis Kelsey. Circa 1966 Mr. Kelsey, accompanied by his wife Olivia, gave a fireside talk at our home at 6 Emery Circle, located in the Toronto suburb of Etobicoke, when they were doing a travel-teaching tour that had brought them to Canada. (Curtis Kelsey passed away about 4 years after their visit to Toronto).

Mother was fortunately able to secure a time for Curtis and Olivia to come and speak at our fireside weekly gatherings, dynamic meetings that were well-attended in those days of our youth, mainly by friends of my brother Steve and me. But the presence of Olivia and Curtis Kelsey drew visitors of all ages to our home that evening.

Curtis brought with him a collection of photos of the Master that he distributed to the friends during the talk, although I did notice that he watched the photos carefully to ensure that they were all returned. Although the following remarks are contained in his internet talk, I repeat some of them here for the benefit of the reader.

At the beginning of the fireside, Curtis mentioned that when he was a young man, he had been very sick with typhoid fever, an illness that was accompanied by an unbearable pounding headache, when suddenly he heard loud symphonic music, “a full-piece orchestra,” playing in the room. When the music faded away, Curtis realized that his fever had suddenly ceased.

Following his father’s tendency, although Curtis was not interested in religion prior to his illness, that unusual healing marked the beginning of his spiritual search. Neither his mother nor the Bahá’ís were able to offer him an explanation of his rare experience, despite their searching the Bahá’í writings—that is, until he met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Curtis described to the friends his first meeting in his basement woodworking shop with one of the first Bahá’ís whom he met—Hand of the Cause of God Roy Wilhelm—a man whom

he grew to admire and greatly respect. He said that Roy had come to visit his mother who was investigating the “Bahá’í movement,” as it used to be called in those days.

Curtis Kelsey also informed the friends that in the first two decades of the 20th century, those seekers or western Bahá’ís who had not yet met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, often referred to Him as “the Persian philosopher.” Being a very practical and decisive young man, Curtis had already made up his mind that he was not interested in the Faith or any religion, despite his mother’s wishes and urgings to the contrary.

Being conflicted by the matter, Curtis sought his father’s advice. Mr. Kelsey senior convinced him that you could be a good person without religion, if you practiced moral integrity. Curtis’s father had mentioned honesty, integrity, and truthfulness as some of the outstanding virtues to his son. By contrast, his mother was a religious seeker. Mrs. Kelsey had investigated a number of churches and spiritual movements.

Curtis escaped to the basement to do some woodworking to avoid Mr. Wilhelm, but Mr. Wilhelm accepted his mother’s request to go downstairs to meet the young man in his early twenties. “Well now, I am trapped,” thought Curtis. “There was nowhere to escape because there was only one door to the basement,” he recalled. He prepared himself to “fence with” Mr. Wilhelm.

But during that first conversation, Roy Wilhelm never mentioned the Bahá’í Faith. They spoke instead about Curtis’s woodworking shop for which Mr. Wilhelm expressed admiration. The young Curtis was impressed because here for once he met a religious person who was not of a one-track-mind about religion. When Mr. Wilhelm expressed the desire that Curtis might come to New York to set up a similar woodworking shop for him, Curtis responded that it was very unlikely that he would ever go to New York, but he would be happy to do so if he ever did.

Mr. Wilhelm responded with the curious phrase, “Well you never know about those things,” a remark that struck the self-determined Curtis as being somewhat strange. But sure enough, Curtis Kelsey later found himself in New York city when he visited Mr. Wilhelm at his office “at the foot of Wall Street” where Roy Wilhelm was a very successful coffee merchant.

Roy Wilhelm had been saddened and struck by the fact that the Báb, the Light of the World, had been deprived of even a candle while He was imprisoned in the fortress of Chiríq. When they met at Mr. Wilhelm’s office, Roy suggested to Curtis that he should go to Haifa to offer his services to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to electrify the shrine of the Báb, a suggestion that Curtis accepted immediately.

Roy had offered the Master a power plant to illumine the sacred shrine on Mt. Carmel. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá responded that he should send Him three. The Master also accepted Curtis’s offer of service through Roy Wilhelm with a telegram that read simply: “Curtis Kelsey permitted.” The three power plants were destined for the Shrine of the Báb, the Master’s home and Bahjí, Bahá’u’lláh’s shrine just outside of ‘Akká/Acco.

Curtis booked passage. When later he met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Haifa, Curtis told the Master about the remarkable musical phenomenon that had suddenly cured his fever. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá responded that what he heard was “the music of the kingdom.” It had awakened him spiritually, an inner experience that assumed musical form which had simultaneously healed him physically.

The one thing that Curtis Kelsey mentioned at our fireside that was not mentioned during the internet talks about the Master was the love that he felt for the Centre of the Covenant: “The love that I felt for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was something like the love that I felt for my parents, except that it was much stronger,” he said.

He mentioned in his internet talk that in Haifa there was a feeling of homecoming, of entering a most loving home, where the pilgrim felt welcomed and loved. It was the same thing being in the presence of Shoghi Effendi, he said. Even though you knew you were not worthy to be in the presence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, nonetheless, He put you completely at ease and you felt comfortable.

## **2. SHOGHI EFFENDI: REMEMBERING THE GUARDIAN**

### **The Status of Pilgrim's Notes Revisited**

I am recording here the verbal remarks of those friends who had the good fortune of making the pilgrimage when the “Sign of God on earth,” Shoghi Effendi, our “true brother” was head of the Faith. (That bounty was regrettably not mine). Bahá'ís do well to remind the friends whenever “pilgrim's notes” are mentioned that they are not authoritative, that is, they do not have the same authority as the revealed sacred writings or those messages written over the signature of the Master or the Guardian.

But we should also remember that even though pilgrim's notes are basically verbal remarks that have been recorded in writing, neither did the Guardian wish to suppress the information that they contain. On the contrary. He encouraged the pilgrims to share the remarks he made at the pilgrim's table.

Here is his complete statement on the status of pilgrim's notes to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, delivered through his secretary:

Regarding the notes taken by pilgrims at Haifa, the Guardian has stated that he is unwilling to sign the notes of any pilgrim, in order that the literature consulted by the believers shall not be unduly extended...This means that the notes of pilgrims do not carry the authority resident in the Guardian's letters written over his own signature. On the other hand, each pilgrim brings back information and suggestions of a most precious character, and it is the privilege of all the friends to share in the spiritual results of these visits. (BN, July 1954, 4)

For each of the following pilgrims, I will write down the reported comments of Shoghi Effendi made to me in addition to their personal impressions of the Guardian. My interest in learning about Shoghi Effendi, the impression he made upon the pilgrim, and what the Guardian said have always been of the greatest interest to me. While these remarks carry no authority, I hope that they will be nonetheless of keen interest to the friends to assist them in formulating a better understanding of the Guardian and the impact that he had on the pilgrims who were privileged to have met him.

## Mr. Daoud Toeg, Baghdad, Iraq and Hull, Quebec

Daoud Toeg (the last name is properly pronounced in Arabic as “two egg”) was a steadfast believer who was highly praised by the Guardian. His wife Latifa whom Shoghi Effendi referred to as *Muqina* (a woman with certitude) never made the pilgrimage. When I asked her why she did not accompany her husband, she told me that she did not want Shoghi Effendi to look into her face and know everything that she was thinking.

Even though Latifa never met Shoghi Effendi in person, his remark about her spiritual state that she was a woman with certitude was completely accurate, as anyone who knew Latifa Toeg can attest. Her faith was rock solid; she spent her entire life serving the Cause to the best of her ability, right into the old age of 92, when she passed away in a nursing home here in Ottawa. Douad and Latifa were two of the central pillars of the Faith in Baghdad.

Mr. Toeg served among the first contingent of the then newly created Auxiliary Board in the Middle East. His life and services are recorded in one of the volumes of the *Baha’i World* which includes the year 1974, the year that Daoud Toeg passed away. His sons, my friends and contemporaries, Jamal, Jalal and Kamal—Kamal and Jamal predeceased their brother who at this writing is still living—the Guardian referred to as “Jamal Effendi, Kamal Effendi and Jalal Effendi,” when Shoghi Effendi asked Daoud to give his greetings to his young sons.

In the days of Shoghi Effendi, pilgrims were allowed to stay 19 days. Daoud Toeg was fortunate that his pilgrimage was extended to 20 days, with the permission of the Guardian, because a strike of maritime workers in the port of Haifa delayed his departure.

The recorded praises by the Guardian that I read of Mr. Toeg were lavish. Latifa had preserved these praises for her husband in a notebook with a padded white cover, containing blank pages on which the thanks of Shoghi Effendi were recorded by hand by someone in the family. I was amazed by their sheer number that extended page after page.

Mr. Toeg told me that when the Guardian led him into the shrine of the Báb to pray, Shoghi Effendi knelt in front. Mr. Toeg likewise knelt behind Shoghi Effendi. He happened to notice a hole in the heel of the Guardian’s sock. “At that moment, I felt ashamed of the brand-new suit that I had bought for pilgrimage,” he said.

He told me further: “One afternoon I was walking with the Guardian on Mt. Carmel. As we were walking, Shoghi Effendi began quoting from the writings of Bahá’u’lláh in Arabic: ‘Soon will the present-day Order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead. Verily, thy Lord speaketh the truth and is the Knower of things unseen.’ (GWB 7) At that moment Mr. Toeg experienced some sort of mystical transformation in the Guardian’s presence. He said: “When the Guardian spoke those words, I saw the old order fall into the sea and the new one rise up in its place.” What kind of visionary experience this was exactly, I do not know because I did not feel it appropriate to question Mr. Toeg further.



The Guardian asked Mr. Toeg if he prayed. “Well, yes, Guardian, I say my obligatory prayer,” he replied. “Oh,” said Shoghi Effendi, “but that is not to pray.” The gist of the Guardian’s remark was that saying the obligatory prayer was not sufficient. The Guardian told Mr. Toeg that he was fully confirmed in the Faith, not only in this world, “but in all the divine worlds.” He quoted the Guardian’s words in Persian. There may have been one Arabic word in the Guardian’s remarks.”Shoma mayyedid az har heiz/heith” Literally it means “You are confirmed on all sides/ in every direction.”

Although the Guardian and Mr. Toeg were both Arabic speaking, the Guardian spoke to him sometimes in Persian and sometimes in Arabic. He told Mr. Toeg that he should also learn Persian. Mr. Toeg did so which later facilitated his trip to Iran in the presence of Hand of Cause, Mr. Zikrulláh Khádem.

He told me that he was at the pilgrim table with some other Arabic-speaking friends. The Guardian was speaking to them in his impeccable Arabic, which Mr. Toeg told me was astounding. When the Guardian had finished his remarks in Arabic, he repeated everything that he had said in Persian, mainly for Mr. Toeg’s benefit because he was learning Persian.

### **Ms. Winnifred Harvey, Winnipeg, Ottawa, Hull, Haifa**

Winnifred Harvey was one of those believers belonging to my mother’s generation, i.e. someone who was born in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—1911 more exactly. She was the first believer to settle in Ottawa, Canada’s capital, where she worked as a statistician in the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, as it was then called. During midlife in 1965/66, Winnifred pioneered from Eastview, now called Vanier in Ottawa, across the river to Hull, Quebec, now in greater Gatineau. Winnifred settled on the hill in the Normandie apartments at 260 Taché Boulevard, where other believers had also lived, including Marjorie Merrick, the mother of Diana Dainty, wife of Don Dainty of Ottawa.

Winnifred served on the National Spiritual Assembly between 1950 and 1961. When the Guardian passed away in 1957, she attended the funeral as one the NSA representatives, along with Allan Raynor. She spent her final days serving the Faith in Haifa, where she compiled statistics. She served later as the manager of the bookstore. She died in 1990 and is buried in Haifa.

Winnifred was the aunt of the former Bahá’í Center manager, Heather Harvey, the very efficient multi-tasker, the wife of writer and poet Jim Desson, who passed away in 2020 here in Ottawa. Winnifred was taught the Faith in Winnipeg by one of Canada’s most outstanding early teachers, Rowland Estall, the first believer in the capital of Manitoba.

After he emigrated to Canada from England, Rowland became a member of the original Montreal youth group that centered in the Maxwell home during the late 1920’s and 1930’s. At its high-point, the youth group included about 60 believers. It was unique in the western world,

both for its time and the number of outstanding believers that it eventually produced. These believers, inspired by May and Sutherland Maxwell, and their distinguished daughter, Mary, later ‘Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhiyyih Khánum, the wife of Shoghi Effendi, contributed historic services to the early development of the Bahá’í Faith, not only in Canada, but overseas.

According to Heather Harvey, not long after her arrival in Ottawa in 1940, Winnifred became a Bahá’í on a visit to Montreal, where she had tea for the first time with a group hosted by Lorol Schopflocher, the wife of the later Hand of the Cause of God, Siegfried “Freddie” Schopflocher.

Although May Maxwell had only recently passed away, one of the senior women present spoke about meeting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Montreal. Although Winnifred was an intellectual who was not—outwardly seemingly at least—governed by her emotions, she accepted the Faith in the company of these women as a result of a sudden inner conviction that moved her to become a Bahá’í.

Winnifred was a quiet, deeply thoughtful, widely-read person. She was quite content to be in her own company, but she was by no means anti-social. As I observed her in the presence of my mother and others, she was smiling and friendly, as she engaged in quiet conversation, preferring to listen rather than to talk. Winnifred had strong convictions which she kept mostly to herself, unless something in the discussion prompted her to reveal them.

I strongly suspect she had a private mystical inclination. That observation is based on the fact that she helped to heal one of the believers, the father of a close friend, from a mental affliction by asking him to look into a picture that was hanging on her wall, and to relate to her what he saw. Healing took place through a purgation process during which the projected images brought him some degree of relief. Although she was not trained in psychology, Winnifred was enough in command of the situation to realize intuitively that the technique she proposed could give some measure of healing to the mentally afflicted believer.

On her pilgrimage in 1956, Winnifred brought a gift of maps to Shoghi Effendi. During her time there, the Guardian asked her how many Bahá’ís there were in Toronto, the largest Bahá’í community in Canada at that time. She responded “Fifty or more Shoghi Effendi.” “Tell them to disperse. Tell them this is a message from me!” was his emphatic reply, given with the force of a divine command. Winnifred did not neglect her duty. She delivered this message to the National Spiritual Assembly upon her return, and at a subsequent meeting with the believers in Toronto.

With few exceptions, there was little response. Knowing that she was a voracious reader, the Guardian gave Winnifred a ratio of the number of Bahá’í to non-Bahá’í books that she should read. Although I no longer recall what it was, the number of non-Bahá’í books was greater. What the Guardian told Winnifred about the “catastrophe” reportedly differs from the other graphic descriptions of destruction that some pilgrims brought back from Haifa. (Compare her report, for example, with that of Laura Davis below).

Winnifred reported that the Guardian said: “The catastrophe is not what the friends think. It will be political, social, economic and religious.” Winnifred’s report of the Guardian’s words reveals that the notes of pilgrims can contradict one another, a situation that Shoghi Effendi himself was reported to have said in another set of pilgrim’s notes.

We should not be too bothered by these apparent contradictions because world conditions are always in flux. The Guardian was reading the “signs of the times” according to the inscrutable Greater Plan of God which was and is constantly changing. Like the “tempest” to which he compared it in *The Promised Day is Come*, the unfolding of world events remains “unpredictable in its course.” (PDC, 1)

### **Mr. Munir Bahá’í**

Although I had met him years before, I met Munir again on pilgrimage in 2007, and again in 2018 at the summer school in Lindsay, Ontario that he attended with his sister Parvine. Munir was the son of Husnieh (“beautiful”) called familiarly “Mama Bahá’í,” the surname that was given to the family by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Husnieh was the grand-daughter of the faithful half-brother of Bahá’u’lláh, Muhammad Quli.

I once attended a gathering of the friends in Toronto when Mama Bahá’í recalled that when she was a little girl, the Master had healed her from a dangerously high fever just by standing in the doorway and glancing at her. Her parents had begged ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for healing because her illness was life-threatening.

Munir had grown up for part of his youth in Haifa. When the youth who were descendants of the original family of exiles met the Guardian, Munir told me that Shoghi Effendi always left them with the blessing “Movafaq bashid.” “May you be successful.” While we were on pilgrimage, Munir related a series of memories from that time. “In those days,” he said, “before the Archives building was completed, the Guardian simply brought the sacred relics out and arranged them on tables outside the Shrine of the Báb.”

The other remark concerned the Guardian’s attire. “Shoghi Effendi always wore his trench coat. I never saw the Guardian without it.” Another comment revealed something of the Guardian’s dedicated, strenuous work ethic: “When I was a young teenager,” Munir said, “I used to return from the cinema in Haifa in the evening. Whenever I passed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s house, I used to see the Guardian’s light burning. I wondered what he was doing up so late at night. Now I know.”

In the pilgrim group in which we found ourselves, while we visited the house of ‘Abdu’lláh Páshá, the guide pointed to one of the rooms that had once been the bedroom of the Greatest Holy Leaf, Bahíyyih Khánum. Munir, who was standing beside me, said: “I didn’t realize that the bedroom had once been hers. I shared that room with my brother.” He told me also that some members of the family did not speak to others members of the family. He was

referring to the separations between the faithful believers and the Covenant-breakers. “It was like that in those days,” he said.

### **Mrs. Laura Rumney Davis, Toronto, Ontario**

(The following text is an edited version of what appears on my website [www.jack-mclean.com](http://www.jack-mclean.com))

One afternoon I left the family home at 6 Emery Circle in the township, now borough of Etobicoke, and headed south on Royal York Road to 44 Chestnut Park in Rosedale, a familiar address to the friends in those days. My visit to Laura’s and Victor’s would have taken place circa 1965 when I would have been about 21 years old.

I was keenly aware that I was about to visit an historic individual in the Canadian Bahá’í community. Important developments in Toronto Bahá’í history had begun at that address. Not only were precious seeds sown for the expansion of the Bahá’í community at Laura and Victor Davis’s home, but outstanding services were also rendered by Laura to Canada’s national Bahá’í administration.

For over four decades, scores upon scores of Bahá’ís had attended firesides at 44 Chestnut Park during their investigation of the Faith. One of them was my aunt, Edna Halsted Nablo, my mother Joyce’s youngest sister, who attended her first fireside there, accompanied by our family’s spiritual mother, Ruth Halsted Kern, sister of Joyce Halsted McLean, Hope Halsted Hubbert, and Ruthie’s fraternal twin, Frank Halsted. Other believers had boarded there and/or were the recipients of the Davis’s hospitality.

I was always eager from the time that I first declared my faith in Bahá’u’lláh in 1962, at the age of 16 years, to have news from anyone who had met Shoghi Effendi in person. I felt fortunate that I was about to meet a pilgrim who had seen “the Sign of God on earth,” and who had the rare privilege of sitting at his table and hearing him expound the Bahá’í teachings and receive his inspired perceptions of world events and his instructions for the expansion and consolidation of the Bahá’í Faith. For I had come to realize that meeting historic individuals, and the making of historic developments, went hand in hand with meeting the Guardian.

Laura made the pilgrimage in 1954. To date, I have found only one small paragraph of Laura’s pilgrim’s notes on the Internet. According to what is reported there, the Guardian said to Laura and the other pilgrims that the year 1957 would refer to a crisis within the Faith itself. In another statement, he said that the friends would be cut off from the Guardian.

Although Laura at first thought Shoghi Effendi might be referring to a future war, when the Guardian later passed away on November 4, 1957, she understood the full significance of his comments. (His remark caused me to wonder whether or not Shoghi Effendi himself realized that 1957 signified the year of his death?) He also announced to Laura and the others in her pilgrim

group the principle of “crisis and victory.” The Guardian, she said, remarked with a wondrous smile that without the crisis, there would be no victory.

This was not my first meeting with Laura, as everyone called her, whom I had first met when I was still a child, but other occasions had been only brief hellos. I recall clearly climbing the steps to the Davis’s spacious red brick Georgian style home with its arched portico. Always eager to share her impressions of the Guardian, Laura met me at the door with that incongruous mix of bubbling enthusiasm, expressed in her girlish laughter and smile, and her more formal but gracious manner, typical of those Canadians of British ancestry belonging to her generation.

Her speech, particularly the more open “A” vowel, had that softer trace of English diction. It was not what has been called the more British-sounding “Canadian Dainty,” but it was somewhat closer to a mid-Atlantic accent than the flatter Canadian speech that is generally now indistinguishable from the US accent, except for distinctive regional pronunciations.

After we greeted one another, Laura welcomed me to the living room with its antique, large dark furnishings where our conversation began. (“Forty-four” has since been demolished to make way for residential development in the neighborhood). Laura referred to the theme that preoccupied many believers in the 1960’s and 1970’s: what the North American Bahá’ís refer to as the “calamity” or “catastrophe.”

Other pilgrim’s notes contain references, sometimes contradictory, to this event. For example, as mentioned above, Winnifred Harvey told me that Shoghi Effendi said the friends misunderstood the cataclysmic nature of the catastrophe. Yet other pilgrim’s notes are emphatic about widespread, nuclear destruction, especially in North America.

Objectively, Winnifred Harvey’s notes are a “one off,” since the preponderance of pilgrim’s notes refer to mass destruction. Laura’s report was that Shoghi Effendi had said that the larger cities of North America—his reported remark applied mainly to the cities of the USA—would be “vaporized.” That was the word. She named New York, Chicago and Pittsburgh as I recall.

The other reported comment was a reference to a powerful energetic force that was as of then still unknown. Atomic energy must be eliminated because it had already been discovered. Laura commented that she was puzzled by his remark, but it is quite possible that Shoghi Effendi was referring to the laser beam that was first used six years later in 1960.

But what struck me that afternoon, as much as her pilgrim’s notes, was her complete devotion to Shoghi Effendi. Her attitude was that of an unconcealed love, a love that was open, unblushing and ebullient. Laura was not at all embarrassed by her loving devotion to the Guardian.

On the contrary. But that love was also consistent with her personality. Laura had been in her day a member of a poet’s circle in Toronto and a romantic. “You know,” she said to me with a smile, “I tell Victor that I love Shoghi Effendi more than I love him.” I felt sure that Victor was humble enough—a humility for which he was known and loved—that he didn’t mind at all

taking a second seat to Shoghi Effendi, or to Laura herself for that matter. Victor used to refer to himself, on a note of humorous self-deprecation as “Mr. Laura Davis.” Until his passing, Victor and Laura had enjoyed a very solid marriage, based on a mutual deep love and affection.

The sincere love that Laura Davis felt for the Guardian centered in that profound admiration one would feel in the presence of such a unique spiritual dynamo and complete human being. I gathered from her remarks that Shoghi Effendi was also quite conscious of the state of Laura’s mind, for he seemed to comment on it in a rather direct way: “You know, Mrs. Davis,” Shoghi Effendi reportedly said, “the purpose of the pilgrimage to Haifa is to pray in the holy shrines and not to meet the Guardian.” Laura was not alone in hearing this caution from Shoghi Effendi. He repeated this remark to other pilgrims from both East and West.

But as former Universal House of Justice member Mr. ‘Ali Nakhjavání candidly said in one of his talks, years after hearing the same caution from Shoghi Effendi: “God knows we were there to see him.” The love and devotion that Laura felt for the Guardian became the main inspiration for the continual local and international travel-teaching trips and administrative services she rendered, both within and without the Bahá’í community.

The late author Marlene Macke, who wrote Laura’s biography, has estimated Laura’s travel-teaching trips over some forty years, counting local as well as national and international ones, at two-hundred. It is also noteworthy that she also had been active in social service in Toronto long before her pilgrimage. The last remark of the Guardian to the departing Laura Davis was “Take my love to the friends,” a farewell that became the title of Marlene Macke’s excellent biography.

When I think of her now, looking down the vista of bygone years, Laura strikes me as being one of the devoted, refreshingly youthful handmaidens of Bahá’u’lláh, even in her senior years. She was keenly aware that she had been the recipient of a rare privilege, and thankfully for us, she engaged those of us who were privileged to have met her in turn, with an innocent and frank celebration of the sincere love that she felt for our “true brother.”

Her decades-long service in Bahá’í administration, both on the Local and National Spiritual Assembly, combined with her outstanding service in the local, national and international teaching fields, unobtrusively assisted by Victor Davis and her mother, Violet Rumney, justifiably merit the title of the spiritual mother of the Toronto Bahá’í community.

### **Ms. Joyce Frances Devlin, Burritts Rapids, Ontario**

This accomplished fine artist, whose portraits of a number of senators hang in the halls of the Canadian Parliament in Ottawa and several other galleries, made the pilgrimage in April of 1956. Joyce told me that she was “one of the last western pilgrims to meet him.” They were only three. At the pilgrims’ table, Joyce was joined by two other women, Brigitte Hasselblat, née

Lunblade, an ethnic German from Estonia, who became the Knight of Bahá'u'lláh for the Shetland Islands, and another Canadian artist and art teacher, Kathleen Hamilton.

Joyce told me that Brigitte was so moved in Shoghi Effendi's presence that she could not stop weeping. Of Scottish descent, Kathleen was more stoic, but did not dare to ask any questions. The more demonstrative Joyce was afraid that if she didn't ask questions, there would be no pilgrim's notes! She was the only one to ask. Rúhiyyih Khánum was there to facilitate and encourage the conversation.

Joyce asked the Guardian how art would evolve in the future. He responded: "The art of the future will be decorative and symbolic." Joyce with her artist's eye shared her impression of the Guardian's physical and spiritual stature: "He was just so beautiful and refined." Her comment echoes that of the Hand of the Cause of God, Leroy Ioas, the Guardian's executive-secretary, who remarked in his tape-recorded talk in Johannesburg (1958), how much he used to admire the features of the Guardian's face, "so delicate and refined." Looking at Joyce, who like many creative personalities is strongly individualistic, Shoghi Effendi said: "You know the American Bahá'ís have to learn to work in groups." The Guardian also encouraged Joyce to paint in the gardens.

Joyce related that the Guardian made a passing but telling allusion to the unfaithfulness of Mason Remey, about which he was already aware, as his remark indicates. He said suddenly: "Where oh where is my wandering Mason?" Now the word "wandering" has a pointed, double-meaning: that Mason Remey was travelling, but also that he was straying from the right path.

Although 'Abdu'l-Bahá remarked approvingly that Mason Remey travelled much in service to the Faith, I take Shoghi Effendi's inference to mean that he should have been in Haifa serving the Guardian. Shoghi Effendi had named Remey president of the First International Bahá'í Council (1951), the forerunner of the Universal House of Justice. Remey could have fulfilled this function more efficiently if he had been in close contact with the Guardian, rather than being absent from Haifa. Allan Raynor of Toronto was also made unmistakably aware of Remey's faithlessness during his pilgrimage in 1956. (See below).

Joyce being the open personality that she is made no secret of the fact that she had been an inactive believer for about 13 years. The distinguished scholar and mathematician, Dr. William Hatcher, and the former Universal House of Justice member, Mr. Douglas Martin, the Canadian NSA secretary at that time, were instrumental through a personal visit in bringing her back into active service.

Joyce told me that the Guardian was somehow aware that this estrangement would happen. In retrospect she said: "I knew that he knew that my attempt at being a Bahá'í would not always be successful, but he loved me anyway and he did not make me feel self-conscious about it." Be that as it may, Joyce is one of the most dedicated and determined teachers of the Faith whom I have met. She always puts the promotion of the teachings first in her life.

During the pilgrimage, the Guardian anointed the three pilgrims with attar of rose, a practice that dated back to the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. A few years ago, when I was visiting

Joyce at her art studio in Burritts Rapids, she gave me a very small glass vial, enclosed in a metallic grey container. She said: “Jack, when I am gone and people find this little vial, they will not understand its significance. But since you have written a book about Shoghi Effendi, you are able to appreciate that this little object was once used by the Guardian to anoint me with attar of rose, so I am giving it to you.” When I opened the vial to smell its contents, the scent of rose perfume was still faintly lingering after all these years.

### **Mr. Allan Raynor, Toronto, Canada**

Allan Raynor and his wife Evelyn, who lived at 19 Carnwath Crescent in North York during our teen years, were contemporaries of my parents, Joyce and Allan McLean, and the parents of my childhood friends Doug, John, Bruce and Rosemary (Graham), who remain close friends during our senior years, despite our not seeing one another for long intervals. Doug and his wife Elida, and their children, Rosemary and Charles, lived in Gatineau, Quebec for a few years when both families were raising growing children.

Of all the Raynors, I have seen Doug and Elida most often over the years, but my friendship with the entire Raynor family is an old and valued one. Allan Raynor made the pilgrimage in January, 1956, the year before Shoghi Effendi passed away. He served on the Canadian NSA from 1954-1960, replacing Hand of the Cause of God John Robarts. He was chair of the National Teaching Committee for many years. He also helped to establish the Legal Affairs department of the NSA of Canada.

The following series of statements report what Allan told me about his pilgrimage. The first one underscores the impression the Guardian made on pilgrims: “Nothing whatsoever could have prepared me to meet the Guardian. I was electrified by Shoghi Effendi,” he said. One of the things he reported the Guardian saying, with great emphasis on Shoghi Effendi’s part was: “The laws of the Aqdas cannot be broken with impunity.” (I did not think to ask him at the time the context of that question).

The most telling remark he reported concerned the Covenant-breaker, Mason Remey. Mr. Raynor said: “I was with Shoghi Effendi at the pilgrim’s table when Mason Remey came into the room. The Guardian asked Remey to do something. When Remey left the room, the Guardian looked up and said: ‘It doesn’t matter what I ask him to do, he will do what he wants anyway.’” This was the second time that the Guardian alluded to Mason Remey’s disobedience. Joyce Devlin’s pilgrim’s report included in the section above also mentioned the Guardian’s allusion to Remey’s infidelity as “wandering.”

Mr. Raynor’s report about Remey has been questioned by one of the friends to whom I related it, on the grounds that the Guardian would have committed back-biting had he uttered such words. However, in light of the imperative necessity of preserving the integrity of the Covenant, and from what we know about the subsequent actions of Remey, Mr. Raynor had no



doubt that the Guardian had prepared him with those blunt remarks for Remey's defection. He told me that when Remey proclaimed himself to be the second Guardian in 1960, he knew immediately that it was a false claim because of Shoghi Effendi's very clear warning.

We also have to remember that the Guardian was very frank on occasion with the pilgrims, especially when he was pointing out the weaknesses of national communities, for the sake of correcting their faults. Although he rarely drew attention to an individual believer's faults, he did so on occasion, but only when it became necessary to end a quarrel or to preserve the unity of a Local or National Spiritual Assembly, or to ensure that his wishes were obeyed.

The Guardian praised national communities liberally in his world order letters, but he did not hesitate to point out national weakness, both to pilgrims and in his letters to the National Spiritual Assemblies. When he did impart corrective observations, he carefully balanced frankness with love, praise and wisdom.

The Guardian instructed Allan Raynor to deepen the Canadian friends in the Covenant. Mr. Raynor's response was to prepare a booklet called *The Covenants and the Administration* and to deepen the friends on the importance of better understanding the nature of the Covenant and the meaning of firmness in the Covenant. He travelled throughout Canada to comply with the Guardian's instructions. One of the ways of being firm in the Covenant, dating back to the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is knowing how to recognize a Covenant-breaker. As a result of Mr. Raynor's efforts, and the vigilance of the entire National Spiritual Assembly, no Canadian Bahá'í accepted Remey's false claims.

### **Allan Raynor through Robert "Bob" Leblanc**

Allan Raynor did not relate the following pilgrim's note to me, but it came through believer Robert "Bob" Leblanc, currently of Wakefield, Quebec, north of Ottawa. During a bike-ride in the country around Wakefield, one bright sunny day, Bob told me that he had heard it from Mr. Raynor. The Guardian's words must have had a momentary dramatic effect on the pilgrims who heard him suddenly declare: "Prayer is useless." This statement was followed by an embarrassed silence. Then he said: "Meditation is useless." Another strained silence. After pausing, the Guardian said: "Prayer and meditation without action are useless." The wisdom of the beloved Shoghi Effendi was conveyed in this instance with the most effective of teaching techniques.

## **Mr. Mozhan Khádem, Son of the Hand of the Cause Mr. Zikrulláh Khádem**

\*Unlike the distinguished scholar Dr. Moojan Momen, the architect Mozhan Khádem uses a different transliteration of his name.

Over the years, I would occasionally present a paper at the Association for Bahá'í Studies North America and/or English-speaking Europe, and less frequently at the Ifrán Colloquia in North America. On one occasion, I attended the Bosch Bahá'í School in Santa Cruz, California, where I happened to share a room with Mozhan Khádem, the son of the Hand of the Cause, that fervent admirer and great devotee of Shoghi Effendi, Zikrulláh Khádem. Mozhan told me that at the request of the Prince Imám Áqa Khán IV, he had designed one of the buildings belonging to the Nizari Ismaili sect of Islam of which the prince is the spiritual head.

During our conversations, Mozhan explained a few similarities in the phraseology of the sacred writings of the Ismailis and the Bahá'í sacred scriptures, giving me a few examples. I suspect that the Bahá'í writings share this linguistic similarity in divine phraseology in common with Shí'ih Islam, of which the Ismailis form a major sect.

When I mentioned how his father had been so well-known for his great love of and devotion to Shoghi Effendi, Mozhan shared with me a memory of the pilgrimage he had made with his father while he was still a boy. When they came into the Guardian's presence, Mozhan said that his father knelt before Shoghi Effendi. The Guardian was not pleased and ordered him to stand saying: "If you do that the confirmations of God will not reach you." Kneeling in his presence was clearly not a devotional gesture that met with the Guardian's approval.

The Guardian's view of spiritual protocol was entirely consistent with the desires of 'Abdu'l-Baha who desired the friends to act naturally in His presence. Like his grandfather, who did not permit the believers either to kiss His hand or kneel before Him, Shoghi Effendi did not approve of outward demonstrations of obeisance.

The Guardian's reported remark is entirely consistent with his written statements on the station of the Guardian, and what is required of believers to observe that station befittingly, either in forms of address or when in the Guardian's presence. He preferred that any fervid expressions of devotion be reserved for the Three Central Figures.

### **The Iranian Pilgrim (Paris, France)**

I no longer remember the name of the Iranian English-speaking gentleman who shared the following impressions when he was passing through Paris. Although I met him while I was a student in the French capital between 1965-1968, more than 50 years ago at this writing, I recall very clearly his remarks.

These were his recollections: “What I noticed about Shoghi Effendi’s clothing was the poor condition of his shirt. His collar was frayed and Rúhíyyih Khánum had sewn repairs in the front of the shirt. I also noticed that the pressure of his pen had permanently marked one finger of his writing hand.” He also said: “I asked the Guardian why he insisted so much on the necessity of pioneering.” Now I am not sure why this pilgrim asked the Guardian this particular question. It should have been quite obvious in light of what Shoghi Effendi has written and said about the vital importance of pioneering to spread the Faith around the world. But perhaps this pilgrim was looking for a little encouragement to arise.

He reported the Guardian’s answers as follows: “First, to save your soul. Second, to spread the Faith around the world. Third, to help secure your material situation.” Now I assume that this comment was addressed to the personal needs and spiritual condition of this particular pilgrim. The Guardian’s remarks must have impressed him in the end because he and his wife did in fact become pioneers.

### 3. TEACHING THE FAITH, MAGIC MOMENTS, MEETING GREAT SOULS

‘Abdu’l-Bahá once called the believer’s life a “pilgrimage,” a word that invests the brief passage of life through the world with sanctity and spiritual meaning. For those who accept this perspective, it applies especially to the journey of the soul, the most mysterious of divine gems. What precisely that precious stone is, what its powers and capacities are, mankind is only beginning to discover.

Understanding the nature of consciousness, the primary manifestation of the soul in the everyday world, constitutes *the* great adventure in both the scientific and spiritual understanding of this age. Now we are standing only at the outer fringes of understanding the phenomenon of consciousness, a process that has only recently begun to be explored systematically by neuroscientists, as well as practitioners of meditation and those who investigate mysticism and paranormal psychology.

Human civilization stands to be greatly enriched by a deeper understanding of this great mystery. Without consciousness, there would be no life as we know it. In the great unified manifold of the complexities of human nature, consciousness is closely tied to the exercise of reason, as it is applied to the various forms of scientific, social and spiritual knowledge. A better understanding of the nature of consciousness, which will prove to be a multi-generational task, will no doubt help to sharpen and refine the functioning of the human brain, thereby increasing at scale human intelligence, a phenomenon alluded to by Shoghi Effendi in one phrase of his world order letters.

\*\*\*\*\*

When I look back now upon this pilgrimage of life, I realize that three principles have guided me above all, three principles that I continue to hold dear: first, the importance of teaching the Faith; second, the impact of magical and mystical moments; third, the influence of great souls. My life has been largely determined by these three things. I should append to these three the importance of living the integral Bahá’í life, which remains a life-long challenge for every believer.

The Foundation should not be overlooked. For a Bahá’í, everything begins and ends with Bahá’u’lláh. When I declared my faith in the Divine Manifestation at the age of 16, everything changed significantly and began to evolve from that point on, right until this very moment. What my life would have been without the Bahá’í Faith, I cannot even begin to imagine, but I am fairly sure that without it, I would have been long dead by now, caught in one of the snares of my own invention, swallowed up by the world and its ways.

As I look back on the vista of my life now, right back into my childhood, from the vantage point of the current seventh decade of life, I realize that the Divine Manifestation was revealing things in my life and guiding me from a very early age, just as He has guided countless other believers over the ages. Within the short span of this chapter, I can touch on only the highlights of my little journey. I am very conscious that some of the great souls mentioned below deserve ampler treatment than I have given here.

I should say at the outset that the vital activity of teaching the Faith is never a one-way street; it is not merely a matter of dispensing knowledge to those who do not know. Learning is also intrinsic to all teaching. Teaching cannot take place without much hard-won, humble learning, both theoretical and, especially, practical.

Everything that we do in life, from the smallest act to the greatest, is a form of both teaching and learning, a unified manifestation of the witness to divine presence. The most practical form of learning is the one that leads to wisdom; and wisdom can be found only in that universal school—the school of life itself—for whose experiences there can be no substitutes.

The lessons we learn in the school of life can be learned only in passing time, in light of the valuable experiences that life inevitably brings. In teaching, whether by word or deed, I have always sought to express love, to speak the truth and to contribute what I perceive to be the rich spiritual heritage shared, not only by Bahá'ís, by also by followers of all religions. If I were to invent a personal motto and guide-to-life, based on the Latin that used to be the standard language of mottos, it would be *Deus, Fides, Amor et Veritas* (God, Faith, Love and Truth).

### **Divine Foundations in Childhood: Five Bright Memories**

It all begin, officially at least, when I joined the Bahá'í community in May of 1962 when I was 16 years old. At three Goswell Road, in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Maude and Craig Weaver, the first Bahá'ís in Etobicoke, I was warmly welcomed one evening by the Etobicoke LSA. As often happens, it was in childhood that the seeds of all future spiritual growth were sown.

I must acknowledge here the major role played by my mother, Joyce Mary Halsted McLean (1920-2001). Joyce McLean was both my biological and spiritual mother. Had it not been for her constant prayers for her three children and husband to recognize Bahá'u'lláh, for her effective and persuasive teaching skills, her genuine interest in the spiritual well-being of her family, and especially by the love she showed her husband and children, it is by no means certain that we would have become Bahá'ís.

Five defining early experiences awakened my consciousness to the significance of spiritual life. All five experiences conveyed that bright joy, peace and assurance that are manifestations of the life of faith. The first scene took place when I was about seven years old. I was standing and watching two young women rejoicing. One was my mother Joyce; the other my

aunt, Edna Halsted, later Nablo, the mother of Heather Nablo Cardin and her sisters, Andrea Doran, Laurel Batterham, Sylvia Vasquez and their brother Robin Nablo.

Mother and Edna were standing in the kitchen of our home at 156 Hay Avenue, Etobicoke (Toronto) hugging one another joyously. Their bodies and their faces were animated with excitement. They were celebrating the good news that Auntie Vi (Violet Fallon Halsted), their aunt and my great-aunt, had just become a Bahá'í. Auntie Vi had just recognized the same Divine Source that had brought the bounties of faith into the lives of her nieces. The year was circa 1952, my seventh year.

The little scene that played itself out before my eyes, in the lapse of only a brief moment, taught me something that has had an enduring impact on my life: becoming a Bahá'í was the cause of the rejoicing of the people whom I loved. As young as I was, I did not need any explanation to understand what had then just occurred. Becoming a Bahá'í made my mother and my aunt very happy. That happy little scene established a template that has stayed with me ever since—the recognition of Bahá'u'lláh is synonymous with joy and celebration.

The second bright scene occurred at or before the same time. While she was studying the Bahá'í Faith, our mother sent Mary Lou and me to Sunday School. (Steve was probably too young at the time to attend). I am thankful for the experience because although I did not attend church regularly, another defining moment took place there. This moment is associated with the famous story of the wisdom of King Solomon (I Kings 3:16-28), as told by our Sunday School teacher.

The reader will recall that Solomon proposed to cut a baby in half to satisfy the competing claims of two women—they were actually prostitutes—who claimed to be the infant's mother. Since the biological mother could not suffer her child to be killed, she yielded her claim to the other woman who had stolen her baby. By this bold gesture, Solomon awarded the child to its rightful mother. As young as I was, I was greatly impressed by the drama of this story, and particularly by the decisiveness of the great King Solomon to bring the issue to a sudden head, a quick decision that revealed the wisdom for which he is known.

Through this story, I understood two things: that God bestowed wisdom on certain chosen ones, and that divine judgment is sometimes required and proves to be life-changing in certain situations. Although it took many years before I understood the full implications of the biblical story, the seeds were sown in that moment for learning two important lessons, relating to God's chosen ones and the charisma of divine judgment.

The third bright scene also occurred in Sunday School. It came as a mystical moment, when I became suddenly aware of a divine love that revealed itself as a benign, comforting, knowing Presence. In that moment, light, love and peace penetrated the room. Although these three words have been overused to the point that their meaning has lost some of its impact, "light, love and peace" are the only words that accurately describe what occurred that day.

The magic moment happened during a simple game. After we gathered in a circle, our teacher would have us repeat this little refrain: "I point to the East. I point to the West. I point to

the one that I love best.” (If the game is repeated often enough, the one loved best could be a different person each time). I have no idea whom I chose that day; all I remember is pointing to another child.

I still do not know who that Presence was, whether it was Jesus or Bahá’u’lláh, but for the unified mind, the Manifestations of God are the rays of one single light. That Living Force revealed Itself with power, assurance and strength enough to change the consciousness of a little boy. Although I was very young, my age did not seem to hinder my soul’s ability to understand the loving power that invaded that room of the church.

When it manifested itself so strongly that Sunday morning, I felt acknowledged, loved, and safe. This experience was also my first lesson in learning that it was appropriate to express an innocent love for another child, the child who in the course of time becomes an adult. In that moment, a seed of love was sown: to show those whom we love that we love them is both fitting and necessary.

The fourth bright scene represents both a literal and symbolic awakening. It occurred one summer morning when I first opened my eyes. When Mary Lou, Steve and I were young children, our parents took us occasionally to a cottage owned or rented by Auntie Vi and her then husband “Uncle Stewart” Halsted, my maternal grandfather Will Halsted’s brother. (The two brothers Will and Stewart were married to the two sisters Jessie and Violet). It was located in cottage country, on Red Pine Lake, in the beautiful Haliburton highlands, not far from the town of Gooderham, Ontario, north of Toronto.

When we went to the cottage, I used to sleep on a cot in the screened-in verandah overlooking the lake. One summer morning I awoke early. The sun was already up. I opened my eyes, but the vivid brightness of the sun’s rays was too strong for sight and forced me to squint. I closed my eyes, lay still for a moment, then turned on my side to look out again onto Red Pine Lake.

There I beheld an entrancing scene! My consciousness became entirely transformed by the brightness of the sun, dappling its thousands of dancing jewels on the surface of the pristine lake. The total effect produced a magical dance, a vibrating energy configured as motes of light reflected on water. My entire being opened up to embrace the beauty that I saw. My soul was entirely suffused by a joyful, peaceful bliss. There was nothing in the world that I desired or lacked; at that moment I was completely satisfied in my ecstatic state.

Again, my ability to process this experience, like the Divine Presence in the Sunday school room, was not at all related to my chronological age, for the simple reason that the capacity of the soul to experience such things is not determined by chronological age. This transcendental experience, manifested by a scene of natural beauty, in which the sun became the symbol of the Divine Manifestation, reflecting His splendourous light in thousands of brilliant jewels, exposed my soul, not only to one of its first experiences of external beauty, but also to a hidden world within, a blissful realm where complete peace is found.

The fifth scene occurred during winter. To a Canadian child who revels in the games of winter, the first snowfall is eagerly anticipated, since it announces ice-skating, sledding, sliding, snowballs, snow forts, snowmen, and tobogganing. I was standing with mother at the front door, looking out from our home at 156 Hay Avenue, in the former village and later municipality of Mimico, Toronto.

It was evening. The first snowfall of the year was coming down. Mother and I stood and watched silently as the downy flakes fell gently in the light of the streetlamp. As I watched, I felt that keen, pure joy that every eager child feels with the first snowfall that announces winter. But there was something more. In the remembered sacred silence of mother and child who watched at the door, I felt the same stirring feelings that I have felt during other peaceful moments of childhood. It was a feeling of shared communion. I knew that mother shared my joy as she watched. This was an experience of “first communion,” a faith experience that became part of the template of life, for spiritual relationships with other children, and later with adolescents and adults.

### **Our Spiritual Mother: Ruth Halsted Kern, “Auntie Ruthie”**

One of our mother’s younger sisters, Ruth “Ruthie” Halsted was a twin. When the twins Frank and Ruth were born, and laid on her stomach, my grandmother Jessie dedicated them to the service of God, in the same way that the biblical Hannah had dedicated her son Samuel. Ruthie and Frank’s siblings were our mother Joyce, the eldest, Hope nicknamed “Babes,” later Hope Hubbert, and the youngest Edna, later Nablo, who was eleven years younger than our mother.

Ruthie, like her sisters, had attended the Mimico Baptist Church where grandfather Halsted had once taught Sunday School. During the Second World War, Ruthie secured a job for a British Major in Washington. There Ruthie met a young sailor, David Kern, and married him. They had four children: Bonnie, Kathy, David and Allan. Before she left Toronto, Grandmother Halsted gave Ruth her Bible and said: “Ruth, I don’t care which church you attend, but find a church where God is truly worshipped.” Grandma’s prayers were answered in a way that she did not expect, for Ruthie became the first Bahá’í in our family.

According to aunt Edna Halsted Nablo, Ruthie’s job with the British Major brought her into contact with diplomatic circles, where she met the well-known early believer, the fiery and flamboyant Ali Kuli Khan, the father of Marzieh Gail, the distinguished writer. Edna related that Ali Kuli Khan taught Ruthie the Faith. Ali Kuli Khan served as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s assistant and secretary in translating the Bahá’í sacred writings into English and the Master’s correspondence in Persian and Arabic.

Ruth met “Khan,” as she used to call him in her letters to mother, when she was working as his secretary in Washington, where he was working as *Chargé d’Affaires*. Ruthie was intrigued



by the personality of the Iranian diplomat. One day she expressed an interest in hearing more about Khan's religion. He smiled and said: "Well, some time I'll tell you more about that." The rest, as they say, is history.

There is another version of the story that says that Ruthie first heard of the Faith through a man named Bob Hart, a friend of her husband, David Kern's friend, Lou Newkirk. One day, Bob came to their home at 717 Maple Avenue in Rockville, Maryland, to use David's photography dark room. Ruth was reading the Bible grandmother had given her when Bob Hart, a perfect stranger until then, passed through. He saw her reading the holy book, took the direct approach, gave her the message. Judging by her response, Bob Hart told her she was already a Bahá'í.

Although the relationship of these two stories is not exactly clear, the second version could have been the beginning of Ruthie's investigation of the Bahá'í Faith. Although it was clearly Ali Kuli Khan who led Ruthie into the Faith, perhaps the other version of her story occurred earlier.

When I was a child, Ruth made a special trip to Toronto to tell our mother and her sisters about the Bahá'í Faith. One of my early memories is of our aunt Ruth sitting at the kitchen table discussing the Faith with mother. I did not know at that young age what precisely they were discussing, and the conversation would have been beyond me regardless, but the earnest tone of their dialogue became another defining moment. It me taught that adults could have serious conversations that engaged their whole being in a way that really mattered.

The approach Ruthie had been taught and used with our mother and her sisters was that of the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, centering in the second coming of Christ. Mother was amazed at how well Ruthie knew the biblical prophecies that announced the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. My aunt left her with three books: *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, *The Heart of the Gospel* by the former Canon of St. Patrick's Cathedral in Dublin, Rev. George Townshend, and a Bahá'í prayer book.

Although Ruthie was initially "broken-hearted" at the lukewarm and cautious reception from her sisters and brother, after two years of study, mother, Edna and Hope accepted the Faith. Mother became a believer in 1952, and her two sisters accepted the Faith about the same time. Only her twin-brother Frank did not. But as grandma used to say: "All the fruit on the tree does not ripen at the same time." And as Bahá'u'lláh has revealed in the *Gleanings*, some fruit even ripens after "it has been severed from the tree." (GWB 155) Uncle Frank was a warm-hearted, much-loved member of the family, who had a keen sense of humor and a melodious singing voice. I know uncle Frank had his own relationship with God, but he kept it largely to himself.

Once ignited, Ruthie's faith burned like a bright flame. She was eloquent, zealous, and lived for teaching the Faith. Charismatic and beautiful, Ruth commanded attention. When she walked into a room, heads turned. Multi-talented, she played the violin, painted landscapes and gave inspiring talks. She engaged life with full enthusiasm. Her letters to my mother are affectionate, informative and a pleasure to read.

She and her husband David were the first Bahá'ís to open Rockville, Maryland to the Faith and to enter the black churches in Montgomery County. She broke ground in interracial teaching during the days of segregation, when such activity was not at all socially acceptable. African-Americans loved her.

Our Aunt Ruth was taken in mid-life with cervical cancer, but her legacy lives on in the hearts and minds of those whom she taught. She bequeathed a priceless heritage to her sisters and their immediate descendants: the McLeans, the Nablos, the Hubberts, the Kerns and their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, many of whom became believers. Edna and Ron Nablo had numerous descendants extending into grandchildren and great-grandchildren, with 92 year old “Sir Ronald” today being the patriarch of the clan. (Edna passed away in 2012).

To combat the disease, Ruth underwent painful and exhausting radium treatments. Although she spent the end of her life in great pain, she gave firesides until it became no longer possible. At the interracial meetings, 100 people frequently attended her talks. She spoke from a wheelchair. They all knew she was dying. Dr. Irving Lawry, who attended her throughout her illness, said she would burst forth in the meetings “like a torrent, with such force and beauty.” She passed away on October 8, 1965 at 42 years of age. Because David Kern had served in the navy, Ruthie earned the right to be buried in the Arlington National Cemetery in Arlington, Virginia.

### **Faith of Our Fathers: Our Grandparents Jessie Fallon Halsted & William Henry Halsted**

As the story of Aunt Ruth indicates, the spiritual roots of our family lay in “the faith of our fathers,” our grandparents, Jessie Fallon Halsted and William Henry Halsted. Our grandparents emigrated from Sheffield, England to Toronto in 1920, two years after the Great War ended. Our mother Joyce was born in the same year.

Jessie and Will, although they were both committed Christians, practiced Christianity according to their very contrasting personalities. Jessie was soft-spoken and unassuming, but very firm in her convictions. I considered her to be a model of Christian virtue and gentility, but she was unshakeable in her love for Christ and for His unique station as the Son of God.

Grandpa, by contrast, was bombastic, eccentric, and outspoken, but generous in his love and kindness. He read widely on biblical subjects and Christian spirituality, but he was inclined to esoteric matters such as astrology, psychic phenomena and the Rosicrucians. In his spiritual search, he practiced astral traveling for a time, in a day when few were even aware that such a phenomenon existed. He told me that a group of initiates had at one of their meetings in England levitated a table.

However, the biblical texts, which were passed down to their children and grandchildren, formed the spiritual foundation for our grandparents' faith. It was through lively discussions with

my grandparents about the Bible and the Bahá'í Faith that I learned some memorable lessons in biblical teachings.

As Grandma watched her daughters becoming Bahá'ís, one by one, she was naturally alarmed. She had read Christ's warnings about the false prophets who would arise in the latter days. Her daughters tried to reassure her that, as followers of Bahá'u'lláh, they still believed in the divine Sonship of Jesus. But Grandma was not entirely convinced. I heard her say more than once: "If ever I had found anything in the Bahá'í writings that denied that Jesus is the Son of God, I would never have accepted it, no matter what my daughters did."

One day when her mind was troubled again by the matter, she decided to pray. Her answer came quickly: "Well dear," she said, "I took the book the *Bahá'í World Faith*. (It had been a gift from her daughter Edna). "It was just as if an angel went before me. I opened the book to the very page where Bahá'u'lláh was speaking about 'Jesus the Son'. From what I read there, I knew then that Bahá'u'lláh and the Bahá'í Faith could not be false."

In that moment of inspired guidance, Grandma was reassured. Grandma and grandpa Halsted both became Bahá'ís late in life. They attended the Bahá'í Feasts and Holy Days. Grandpa even served on the Local Spiritual Assembly. Although they accepted the new Revelation, they remained fundamentally Christian in their orientation.

Grandma's faith was hyphenated. She used to call herself "a Christian-Bahá'í." She was able to find and accept certain biblical passages that she felt pointed to the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. William Sears's book *Thief in the Night* became a great help, as it was to all members of our family who were interested in the Second Coming of Christ and biblical prophecy.

That Jessie referred to herself in a hyphenated way, as a "Christian-Bahá'í" was perfectly all right. She had accepted both Jesus and "Bahalallah," the way she used to pronounce the Divine Manifestation's name. The Bible that grandma had given Ruth when she left for the United States served as the link that connected with Bob Hart at the moment that he announced to her the coming of the Promised One.

### **The Devoted Servant of All: Violet Fallon Halsted, "Auntie Vi"**

Another great soul who entered the Faith because of Ruthie's seminal visit to Toronto was grandmother's sister, my great aunt, Violet Fallon Halsted, "Auntie Vi". We called her simply Auntie. Auntie lived with us for about ten years. In 1953, when I was seven years old, she moved into the unfinished home our parents had built in what was then the country, on Martin Grove Road, north of Dixon Road, in the township of Etobicoke in north-west Toronto.

When we moved six years later to a modern, split-level suburban home at 6 Emery Circle, Auntie came with us. In her next move, the last one before she passed away, she joined

her sister Jessie and brother-in-law Will in their basement apartment on Scarlett Wood Court, off Scarlet Road in Weston (Toronto).

Auntie Vi's entire life was devoted to serving others. When my mother was a child, her family caught Scarlet Fever. With no regard for her own health, Auntie quit her job, waited on the family and nursed them back to health. During her stay with us, she assisted my parents with house-keeping and made the meals.

Auntie was a second mother to our mother. When Auntie was married to Stewart Halsted, grandpa's brother, Auntie and Uncle Stewart relieved our grandparents of caring for mother while our grandparents were raising a young family. They looked after mother for an entire year in their home in Toronto while she was recovering from a serious back operation, a spinal fusion performed because mother had broken her back in a tobogganing accident.

When the McLean children were still small, when father was working during the day at Anaconda American Brass in New Toronto (later Noranda), Auntie used to come and visit us at 156 Hay Avenue in the village of Mimico. She sometimes wore a light, black veil over her face, but not because she was in mourning; it was fashionable at the time for women of a certain age. Auntie would bring us the welcome treat of "Chelsea buns." I remember how I loved to see and eat the small colorful red and green currents imbedded in the buns. Then she would sit with mother, chat for a bit and play canasta.

Violet admired and loved my father Allan James and called him "a prince." After we moved to 6 Emery Circle, every day just before four o'clock, when dad arrived home, she would wash her face, comb her hair and make him tea and greet him with a smile. Auntie was grateful to my parents for providing her with a home when her marriage to grandfather's brother, Stewart Halsted, fell apart. She was living in very straitened circumstances, in Mrs. Bottomley's house in fashionable Brûlé Gardens near the lakeshore, when our father rescued her, by inviting Auntie to come and live with the McLean family.

Violet Halsted attained, in my view, the high station of a true believer. Like the flower which is her namesake, she thrived in the shade. She never sought the limelight and was content to rejoice in the success of others. Violet was humble, soft-spoken, long-suffering, patient, striving, wise and kind. Although she had received very little formal education in Sheffield, England, she was intelligent and perceptive.

However, when the occasion demanded the defense of a particular Bahá'í teaching, Auntie was fully capable of convincingly making her point. I remember how forthrightly she defended Bahá'u'lláh's teaching on collective security, when once in my mistaken youthful judgment, I had made the wrong evaluation of a political crisis in world affairs. I was quite astonished by her response. The soundness and strength of Auntie's sudden, emphatic answer revealed her profound and sure knowledge of the Bahá'í teachings. Until that moment, I hadn't realized that this normally quiet, unassuming lady in her senior years was such a keen analyst of world-events. Auntie was the epitome of the saying: "Still waters run deep."

Although her marriage ended in estrangement, through no fault of her own, Auntie had served Stewart Halsted well. I sensed that their separation caused her a deep, silent pain, although I never heard her complain about the marriage, except to say that uncle Stewart imposed high standards on her. He wanted, for example, a knife-like crease ironed into his trousers.

After we moved to 6 Emery Circle, she used to sit in her armless easy-chair at one of the two large picture-windows and look out across the ravine to Sanctuary Park Cemetery where Stewart was buried. As I watched her looking out in the direction of his grave, I had the impression that she was thinking about him with a mingled sense of nostalgia, regret and worry. When she passed on, Auntie was later buried in that same cemetery. When I visited her grave site on a recent trip to Toronto, I stood beside her marker and looked out across the ravine, now grown up with trees, in the direction of our old house, from where Auntie used to sit and gaze toward the spot that later became her resting-place.

But despite the vicissitudes of her life, Auntie kept up her witty, somewhat enigmatic sense of humor. One of her favorite sayings, which she would often repeat with a smile, was “There are no flies on me.” When we children awoke in the morning and came out of our bedrooms, she would say: “Another country heard from.” The closest she ever came to speaking an unkind word was to call someone a “psycho-ceramic,” her amusing way of saying a crack-pot. Auntie’s subtle, understated sense of humor only served to enhance her spiritual character. Religious types are sometimes far too serious for their own and others’ good.

Violet Halsted was not one of those believers who command or expect attention. Rather, she attracted attention by her humility, a humility that could easily deceive those who interacted with her because it concealed a truly selfless life that had no desire to be the center of attention. She took the Bahá’í Faith and its teachings entirely to heart in full earnestness and complete sincerity, two qualities that were never on display, but were always noticed by those of us who were close to her. I suspect that most of our parents’ adult friends did not realize the depth of Auntie’s wisdom, for it was rarely on display. Neither were they aware of the sacrificial life she had lived and the sufferings she had endured.

Reading the Word of God was her daily pleasure and solace. On my way to bed, I would pass by her open bedroom door to say goodnight. I would see her sitting up in her single bed, resting on pillows against the head-board, quietly reading a Bahá’í book or saying her prayers, a fragile, grey-haired, pajama-clad older woman, her bi-focal, horn-rimmed glasses reflecting the light of the lamp burning on the night table beside her.

One sunny, summer afternoon, during my teenaged years, I saw Shoghi Effendi’s *God Passes By* sitting on her walnut dresser. In another defining moment of my life, I was properly arrested by the pathos of the title and went in to examine that seminal book which I had not yet read. After a brief perusal, I determined there and then that I was not going to let God pass me by. Although I read little more than the title and a few pages of the introduction, it was my first brief glimpse into the writings of the Guardian, a glimpse that would lead almost 50 years later to the publication of my selective in-depth study of Shoghi Effendi’s writings, *A Celestial Burning*.

That brief moment in Auntie’s room became another vital turning-point in the intellectual and spiritual development of one Bahá’í believer.

Auntie Vi passed away in hospital on February 28, 1968, about a week after I returned home from studying in Paris. I visited her just a few days before she died. Although she was unconscious, I still spoke to her. I told her I had just arrived from Paris to see her. She opened her eyes briefly and said “I know.” Those were her last words to me—a fitting description of her spiritual state. Her last words when I left for my study-stay in Paris was “Be a good boy.”

After she died, I remember falling asleep one night, praying sincerely that I would see her again. I never really had the chance to say a proper goodbye. That very night, my prayer was answered. I dreamt she came walking toward me, from a point in the purple twilight on the far away horizon, moving along a narrow isthmus of stratospheric clouds, a bridge between my world and hers.

She continued to walk intently, slowly and deliberately toward me. When she reached the spot where I stood, somewhere between heaven and earth, she looked at me and said: “Praised be to God who has permitted His servants to meet in His love.” I had the impression that she had to travel a very great distance to reach the place where I awaited her. Then she turned and walked slowly back to her heavenly home, with the same patience and detachment that she showed in her earthly life.

### **My Elder Sister Mary Louise McLean, Mary Lou**

In my immediate family, my sister Mary Lou was the eldest and the first born of the three McLean children to become a believer in 1956 at age 15. According to our mother, Mary Lou was the 12<sup>th</sup> Bahá’í youth of her generation in Canada. It was sometimes lonely being a Bahá’í youth then; there was much to do and the tasks seemed daunting.

Before she was 15 years old, Mary Lou met ‘Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum during a stop-over in Toronto. Rúhíyyih Khánum met the friends at Maude and Craig Weaver’s home at 3 Goswell Road in Etobicoke. She spoke about the importance of indigenous teaching. Mary Lou was sitting only a few feet away from her, and the talk made a deep and lasting impression on her young mind.

As she grew older, Mary Lou engaged in indigenous teaching—called “Indian teaching” in those days—and she attended some pow-wows, those intertribal festive gatherings. Early in her teen years, Mary Lou taught children’s classes. Later she occasionally assisted our mother, who was the first paid employee of the Canadian NSA, with office tasks at the “National Office,” a converted house on 15 Lola Road in Toronto. Mary Lou also served on a youth committee with Dorothy Weaver, Maude and Craig’s only daughter, who later married Bill Carr, one of the first pioneers to Greenland, whose photo Shoghi Effendi placed in Bahji.

Mary Lou volunteered at the Bahá'í booth at the Canadian National Exhibition, participated in interfaith activities with B'nai Brith, attended summer schools at LouHelen near Davison, Michigan—the school was called Davison years ago—at Lake Kashabog, Ontario and Beaulac, Quebec in the Laurentian mountains. She attended public meetings at the Westbury Hotel with mother.

Mary Lou had two spiritual mentors in the Faith: our maternal grandmother, Jessie Fallon Halsted, who was not yet then officially a Bahá'í, and the long-serving former NSA member, Husayn Banani, one of the three accomplished sons of the Hand of the Cause, Mr. Músá Banání and his wife Samihih. Husayn's distinguished sister was Rúhíyyih Khánum's faithful companion, Violette Nakhjavání. Husayn taught study classes on the Three Central Figures to my sister and the Weaver children, David, Don and Dorothy, when they were young teens. To this day, Husayn holds a special place in Mary Lou's heart.

When Mary Lou was little, she used to stay overnight and on week-ends with grandma Halsted. At breakfast time, Jessie would sow the seeds of God's love and faith in my sister's heart, and quote her verses from the Bible to apply to real life-situations. In this way, Mary Lou learned to start each day by relying on the Word of God, and to find practical solutions to life's problems by searching the scriptures.

Mary Lou continues to be my “big sister.” I still turn to her for advice and guidance. She has acute, accurate insights into people's behavior and psychology. The spiritual virtues she lives by are fidelity, justice, and truth. If I were to conceive a motto by which our sister has lived, it would be “Stand in your truth.”

She made a special early study of the Right of God when it first became obligatory in 1992 for the friends in the West with the publication of the Book of Laws, *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. She has deepened herself on special questions in the Faith. One of them I remember was on the Epochs and Ages in the Faith for which she made an impressive chart correlating the two measures of time. She is motivated by a search for certitude in her desire to make clear the formerly obscure, and to impart that knowledge with those who share the same thirst. To this day, I greatly enjoy my conversations with my sister. We always share spiritual insights with one another.

### **Early Youth and Declaration of Faith: Hand of the Cause of God, Mr. William Sears**

In late childhood and early adolescence, like every child and young teenager, I was preoccupied with my own little life, but I remained nonetheless an interested observer of the Feasts and Holy Days that were held in our home. At those gatherings, I noticed something about the Bahá'ís that impressed me: whenever they came into our home, the house seemed to light up. The little troop of the friends would walk enter our home, smiling, happy, and content. Their spirit transformed the atmosphere at our house.

I noticed something else. If my mother was hosting the Nineteen Day Feast, no matter how tired she may have been that day, when it came time to welcome the friends and chair the administrative part of the Feast, she would brighten up; the loving and gracious side of her personality would more fully emerge, transformed by her participation in Bahá'í service. I came to understand by observation that service to the Faith was an energizing and love-generating influence in her life.

When I remember now my mother community of Etobicoke, a community that included, among others, Maude and Craig Weaver, the first Bahá'ís in Etobicoke, and their children my contemporaries, Dorothy, David and Don, Mr. and Mrs. Bruce and Loretta Francis and their children, the Roberts family, mother Emily, and her children Margaret and Charles, Mrs. Jean Burke, her husband Bill and son Michael, Dorothy Harvey and others, I still feel for them all, a sincere fondness and debt of gratitude that remains undiminished by time.

The debt of gratitude stems from the fact that these friends were simply there. Just *being there* was their gift and their legacy, for they were living witnesses to the truth of the Faith by the manifestation of their spiritual qualities. These friends showed a graceful courtesy, quiet assurance, peacefulness, an easy sense of humor, and reasonable conviction that bore no trace of fanaticism, and a firm determination to spread the divine teachings. In those early days of the first Bahá'í presence in the township of Etobicoke, the friends manifested a warm love for the Faith and for one another, without which any effective power to attract others would have been lacking.

Although my mother had been praying for years that her three children and husband would recognize the Blessed Beauty, the turning-point for me came when I listened to an inspiring talk on an LP (Long Playing) vinyl record by that moving flame of fire, former radio and television personality, author and international pioneer and travel-teacher, Hand of the Cause of God, Mr. William Sears. The talk was entitled “The Meaning of the Feast of Riḍván,” and it was given circa 1962 at the Wilmette Temple during the Most Holy Festival.

I listened to it in our living room several times. I was completely captivated by its earnest, gripping message. That talk brought the spiritual potential that was latent within me bursting into new life. His message centered in the Hebrew Bible and Gospel prophecies of the return of Christ, the same material that is found in his book, *Thief in the Night*, which is still the best-selling book, editor Dr. Wendi Momen tells me, at George Ronald Publisher in the UK. The book has become a Bahá'í classic, having been reprinted many times since its publication.

The theme of the return of Christ was the same approach that had brought my aunt Ruth into the Faith in Washington, and subsequently my entire family. For my father, Allan James, it was the overall coherence of the teachings that eventually convinced him.

My spiritual birth was dramatic but somewhat traumatic. I was overjoyed at the great goods news of the coming of Bahá'u'lláh, but at the same time I was shaken to the core by the weight of the sudden realization of so momentous a claim, but also deeply saddened that the world had tragically missed its Promised One.



At age sixteen, moved to my spiritual depths by William Sears's recorded talk, I declared my faith in Bahá'u'lláh. But it hardly seemed like a choice. The evidence was so strong that I did not want to withhold myself a moment longer from joining my name to those believers in the Most Great Name. As mentioned above, I was lovingly received into the Faith one evening by the Local Spiritual Assembly of Etobicoke. Time has since claimed the dedication page of the red, hard cover edition of *The Hidden Words*, bearing Craig Weaver's graceful, hand-written inscription in green ink. It read: "To Jackie, With love from the friends in Etobicoke." That same book, now much worn for wear by the years, still sits proudly on my library shelf, as a reminder of that joyous evening.

### **Teaching the Faith to the Presbyterian Minister Reverend W.**

In the days immediately following my declaration of faith, I felt that I had been admitted into the Garden of Ridván when Bahá'u'lláh sojourned there. My happiness was that of an ecstatic youth, wandering joyously in a newly discovered rose garden that had been hidden hitherto from view. On fire with the Faith, and having drunk the wine of a newly awakened celestial love, I decided that I must proclaim the Cause to the ministers of the local churches.

I tried to set up appointments. I succeeded with the local Presbyterian minister, Reverend W. who had been an occasional visitor to Fairhaven Public School to instruct our class in religious knowledge. When this minister of the Gospel agreed to meet me, I decided to play for him the same recorded talk that had brought me to spiritual life. I naturally told Reverend W. the purpose of our meeting. Although he knew my stated intention, he was gracious enough to have taken the time to meet me. We met in his study which was located in the modest St. Andrew's Humber Heights Presbyterian Church that stood next door to the more impressive sanctuary, constructed in 1961, that now stands at the corner of Royal York and Dixon Roads.

The reverend minister brought out his portable record player, and we both sat down to listen. At first, Rev. W. was quite receptive to Mr. Sears's talk. He seemed relaxed and laughed readily at the jokes, since this man of the cloth had a good sense of humor. But as the message became more and more earnest, as Mr. Sears laid out his convincing arguments and proofs for the return of Christ, and the mission of Bahá'u'lláh, the minister's demeanor changed markedly.

By the end of the talk, he was literally shaking, more in anger, I think, than confusion. Although I was not disturbed, there and then, by his reaction, I realized of course that he was very troubled by what he had just heard. When the talk ended, Reverend W. composed himself and told me that he needed some time to consider the message. I left him with a copy of *The Hidden Words*.

We met again about two weeks later on a sunny, summer's day, standing outside the church, across the road from the Sanctuary Park Cemetery. One of the books he had consulted in the meantime was the classic work by J.K. van Baalen, *The Chaos of Cults*, a polemical volume

that can hardly be described as an informed, objective source. The article on the Faith showed an older black and white photo of the Wilmette House of Worship, surrounded as yet by undeveloped gardens and landscaping.

By the time of our follow-up meeting, the reverend had returned to his well-anchored Christian mindset. “The Bible,” he said, quoting what must have been an old pastoral saying he learned in ministry, “is like a violin. You can play any old tune on it.” He told me that he could not accept Mr. Sears’s arguments. He then followed up with the declaration, following St. Paul, that Christ was the sole Lord of the universe. The claims of Bahá’u’lláh presented so convincingly by Mr. Sears had been summarily dismissed.

Although he rejected the message I had brought, Reverend W. was courteous and kindly. Although his ministerial convictions were strong, he refrained from sending me to hell, like some fundamentalist evangelicals, a tactic to which I have been occasionally treated. Nor did Reverend W. give me any grave warnings about endangering the life of my soul for having accepted what he no doubt viewed as an oriental cult.

Although I had been hopeful in sharing the same good news that had awakened me to a wholly new, vast dimension of spiritual life, I was, strangely enough, neither surprised nor disappointed by his response. I was thankful that I had been able to proclaim to him, with the aid of the Hand of the Cause, the latest Manifestation of God for our age. Reverend W. was the first one in a series of persons of capacity—clerics, professors, teachers, writers, and intellectuals—as well as to various and sundry, to whom I have had the privilege of being able to give the divine message over the past 60 years.

### **A Bountiful Harvest: The McLean Firesides at 6 Emery Circle, Etobicoke**

During the mid-to-late 1960’s, a bountiful harvest was reaped through fireside teaching at the family home at 6 Emery Circle. The declarations at 6 Emery Circle came at a very magical, God-assisted time in our lives. I have never experienced anything quite like it, before or since. Everything we did for the Cause during those days of our youth was palpably aided by the grace of Bahá’u’lláh. It all unfolded like a heavenly script written by an unseen Hand. We simply played our parts. Divine assistance accomplished the rest with remarkable ease.

In 1959 our parents purchased a modern, split-level home with a mustard-yellow roof, overlooking a ravine, now a park, with a creek running through it, down the hill at the back of the property. Father actually found the home and mother agreed it was ideal. Six Emery Circle was well-suited to holding firesides with its L-shaped living and dining room. Some Friday nights both spaces were packed with as many as 30-40 people. After the firesides, and between them, young people would gather downstairs in the “recreation room” for conversation and socializing.

## **Success in Teaching: My brother Stephen Stewart McLean**

The success of those firesides happened largely through the concentrated and courageous efforts of my brother Steve. I assisted him summers when I returned home from the academic year at the Sorbonne, and later at the University of Toronto, while he was home from studying at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland. Together we made a dedicated and determined teaching team.

Steve had been teaching the Faith actively, first at Richview Collegiate in grade nine, and later at Scarlett Heights Collegiate until he graduated. He had no special teaching technique. With his usual confidence and strong belief in the truth of the Faith, Steve would simply invite his friends to come and hear about the Bahá'í Faith and the new, progressive ideas it had to offer. Steve's invitation and their own curiosity brought them out, and much to our amazement, they kept coming back. They listened and were moved.

One by one, to our great joy, our friends embraced the Faith. Our mother Joyce estimated that about 25 youth became believers through our firesides, but other seeds were sown at that time which germinated later on. It was a very special joy each time we saw that yellow enrollment card signed by one of our friends.

Steve also served his fellow students. He drove them to the Wilmette Temple, to Lake Kashabog, north of the town of Havelock, Ontario, where the NSA once owned a property, and to other summer schools and firesides around Toronto.

It was at Scarlett Heights Collegiate that Steve was led to find a nucleus of fine young people who would soon enter the Faith. Among them, Linda Gershuny and Marg Rumpel, later Niego, attended the same school I did, Kipling Collegiate, before transferring to Scarlett Heights. Those new believers also included Linda's sister, Sandy. Our neighbors the Gershunys lived just around the corner at 20 Saskatoon Drive.

Another young woman who became a believer a little later in Paris was Anke Petersen, later Samii, a neighbor from just down the street at 17 Emery Circle. Larry Raymond and Vicky Eeles, who later married, Fred Rocca, then President of the Students' Council at Scarlett Heights, Michael Beechey, Michael Bailey, David Eeles, Vicky's brother, Tom Story, Mary Rose Imbroil, later van Kesteren, Sandra Hutchison, David Rosati, my close friend and fellow amateur musician, scholar Irene Mary Doran, Lucy Kazmarek, Rick Blake, Ward and Will Hazen—their mother Helen Hazen and their father Oz were Bahá'ís—Jay Telfer, Suzanne Chipman, and a trio from Brampton, named Lee-Anne, Debby and Dave—last names now forgotten—also attended those firesides or visited Steve and me on different occasions. Bob Crane did not attend our firesides, but learned about the Faith at Scarlett Heights and declared his faith later in Winnipeg.

For a while our cousins, Linda and Susan McLean attended, the daughters of our father's brother, uncle John. Although they did not become Bahá'ís, our cousins went away with a positive impression of the Faith. Our whole family was happy that in the days of our youth, our

firesides provided a dynamic forum in which these young people could hear about the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and where Steve and I could hone our teaching skills.

Coincidentally, both Steve and I ended up becoming professional teachers. It was all so very exciting. It gave us the first concrete experience of what it means to be warmed by the heat generated by the flame of the spirit of teaching, which is to receive the Spirit of Life, and to be blessed with divine confirmations.

I should note that the McLean firesides were not, of course, the only exposure that our friends had to the Faith. Others, both adults and youth, played their parts in assisting these young people to awaken to the reality of the New Day, but for these brief few years, our firesides provided dynamic, regular spiritual teaching for seekers and new believers, and also for those youth who already came from Bahá'í families.

We all felt a thrilling spirit of search and discovery throughout the whole process; and for all those who accepted the New Revelation, and remained under its shadow, it was the greatest discovery of a lifetime. We Bahá'í youth were favored with some of the Faith's best teachers of the day. They included our mother, Joyce, who taught and mentored many, Husayn Banani, longtime NSA member, Douglas Martin, former long-serving member of the Canadian NSA and later member of the Universal House of Justice, Alex Frame, who at his retirement in 2002 had risen to become Vice-President of national radio at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). Other fine teachers included Betty Frost and Barbara Phillips, who both eventually went on to serve in Haifa.

Not long after he had declared his faith, the great jazzman, John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie, came out when he was playing in Toronto to give a moving and humorous talk to a packed house at 6 Emery Circle. (His friends called him John Birks; Dizzy was a stage name not used by close friends or family). The great jazzman was buzzing his mouthpiece in the car as I was driving him back to the Park Lane Hotel. Coincidentally, I had been studying the trumpet seriously during my teenaged years. I naturally felt very moved to be in the presence of one of the greatest jazz trumpet players of all time.

Dr. Suheil Bushrui who was teaching English literature at York University in Toronto also spoke at our firesides. Some of the youth who were already new believers who spoke at 6 Emery Circle included Jack Lenz who went on to have a very successful career as a musician-composer-arranger. How blessed we all were to be young, seeking, teaching and learning in the knowledge of God's latest revelation, and growing in love and friendship.

Our firesides were for some of the new believers, including Steve and myself, their first experience of a faith community and spiritual family. The wonderful spirit of those days is well-expressed by the verse in the Hebrew Bible: "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh..." (Ecclesiastes 12:1). While other joys and blessings have since followed me on this spiritual journey, those halcyon days of teaching were the best days, when one after another our friends entered the Faith of God. It was

then and there that the spiritual foundation of a lifetime was laid, both for Steve and me, and for some of our friends.

### **The Declaration of Faith of my Father Allan James McLean (1969)**

Our father, Allan James, who was not yet a Bahá'í, grew to be very intrigued by the fireside meetings. Father was by nature an independent personality, but he took pleasure in simple, affectionate human company. Once he joined something, whether it was the Golf Club, the Army and Navy Club, or the Lacrosse Association after he retired from the game, he was, as our sister Mary Lou said, "a lifer."

Although he had not set foot in a church for years, except to attend a wedding or a funeral, I suspect that more than anything, he felt some loyalty to the tradition of being a Presbyterian Christian. Although he had been exposed to Bahá'ís and to some extent the Bahá'í teachings since mother joined the Faith in 1952, it would take a strong conviction to induce father to break with religious norms to become a Bahá'í. During the time that we held our weekly firesides, father listened thoughtfully to the speakers, as he sat back unobtrusively, but he personally waited on the friends during the social hour.

It was wonderful to see father gradually coming to spiritual life. I sensed by the subtle changes that came over his face that he was pleased with the talks, although sometimes a more sober, serious look would define his expression. How wonderful it was, then, when he too signed his declaration card on January 31, 1969. In my mother's eyes, my father became the most precious graduate of the McLean firesides!

It was strange that somehow mother had not noticed that father had actually signed his declaration card a few days before and had left it on her bedside night table. One night at supper, father left the table, something that he didn't usually do, and returned to the kitchen, sat down, and put the yellow card on the table, without saying a word. It didn't take long for mother to notice it.

On picking up the card and reading it, mother broke down and wept with deep emotion. I had not seen the card myself at first. I thought that mother was experiencing another unsettling episode brought on by the hormonal fluctuations of "the change of life." Then I noticed the card. Father sat quietly in his chair, never uttered a word and looked a little embarrassed.

I sprang from my chair, voiced at once joyous congratulations, and went over to give father a warm embrace. Mother had waited patiently for 17 years, praying all the while for her beloved Allan to join the Faith. The entire McLean family were now committed believers. We had been one in flesh and blood, but more importantly, now we were one in faith.

The impact of father's declaration struck mother with the full-force of someone whose most cherished desire, one that had been painfully frustrated for many years, had been suddenly

and unexpectedly granted. After those 17 years of sincere, heart-felt longings and prayers, the desire of her heart was in that very moment realized.

In mother's sobs and tears, it was as if a great dam had suddenly burst, to release the enormous weight of the heavy waters that lay behind its wall. That dinner hour in 1969 became for me the most joyous and memorable of the many meals taken over the years at the McLean family table. I sat down immediately to write to Steve, who was studying at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland. The letter began with just two ringing words: "Daddy declared!!!"

### **The Steadfast Teachers and Pioneers Who Arose**

With each declaration of faith, Steve and I encouraged our friends to try their wings with a fireside talk; that way the momentum for teaching and all the blessings that accompany teaching the Faith, were maintained. Unlike some believers who entered and then left the Faith during the 1960's period of mass teaching, most of these friends remained steadfast. Some of them became respected teachers and exemplary pioneers.

Linda Gershuny eventually pioneered to Haiti from Gatineau, Quebec and became a Continental Counselor for the Americas, where she excelled in mass teaching; at this writing she has returned to Etobicoke to share accommodation and to look after her elderly mother Bess, who has been mother to both her own children and some of her grandchildren. Linda's sister Sandy became a homefront pioneer to various places in Quebec. Sandy also did short-term pioneering in Africa. At this writing, she is still living and pioneering in Val David, Quebec.

Marg Rumble Niego went north to Baker Lake in 1968, where she raised a family with her Inuk husband Joe. Margaret and Joe retired to Renfrew, Ontario in 2006. After her husband passed away from cancer, Margaret pioneered to Renfrew. At this writing, after moving back to Etobicoke to attend to her parents, Margaret is living in Arnprior, after pioneering for a couple of years in Fergus, Ontario.

Larry and Vicky Raymond pioneered to Sarnia, Falconbridge, and Timmins and they spent 17 years in London, Ontario. After having retired from his career as pilot with Air Canada, Larry served as the only pioneer in Mount Forest, Ontario. He moved eventually Owen Sound, Ontario. Vicky is currently living in Guelph, Ontario.

While studying in Paris during my study-stay, our neighbor, Anke Petersen, met and married a medical student, Kambyse Samii, who later became a specialist in internal medicine. As a young chairman of the Etobicoke LSA, I had the privilege of performing the legal requirements for their wedding in December, 1970, in Toronto, where I gave a brief talk congratulating the newlyweds. Anke and Kambyse were actively serving the Faith together in Brussels, Belgium, where they raised a family of three girls. To my great sorrow, my old friend and neighbor, Anke Petersen, passed away in December, 2018, in Brussels.

## **The Paris Years (1965-1968): Hands of the Cause, Outstanding Believers and Pioneers**

One of the blessings of my study-stay in Paris was meeting some of the great souls of the Faith. Foremost among them were the Hands of the Cause of God. Like gemstones, each Hand of the Cause presented contrasting but complementary facets that lent luster and prestige to the Faith. Like the multi-colored light refracted through a prism, each great soul reflected the love and knowledge of this Most Great Revelation and their dedication to Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian.

Some were ruby red and blazed out like fire; others were sapphire blue and manifested peace and patience; still others were like amethysts, reflecting the richness and nobility of royal purple; still others, like pearls or moonstones, served as examples of humility, modesty and selflessness. But all were united by their consecrated service to the Faith and to Shoghi Effendi. All were as one person in their dedication to achieve the goals of the Divine Plan.

It was in Paris that I met the princely and gracious Mr. Abul-Qásim Faizi, the deeply thoughtful, contemplative, mystical Dr. Aldebert Mühlischlegel, the quiet, self-effacing Shu'a'lláh 'Alá'í, and that congenial, humble and loving soul, Mr. Paul Haney. Mr. William Sears I had met first in Toronto when I was about 14 years old, but I had the pleasure of meeting again this earnest, entertaining, humorous, instructive, motivating and remarkably eloquent Hand of the Cause.

Outside the contingent of Hands of the Cause, I was fortunate enough to have met other great souls in Paris. I also met at a fireside at the old Bahá'í Center, at 11 rue de la Pompe, Paris XVI, the great medical doctor, founder of the Chair of Anatomy at the University of Tihrán, Dr. Manuchir Hakím, who was later martyred at his clinic in Tihrán (1981), shot by assassins who posed as patients. He struck me on the afternoon when I met him as a very deep, thoughtful, dedicated and serious Bahá'í—a man of extraordinary capacity.

That dynamic, good-humored, courageous pioneer to Europe, Marion Little, lived in Paris and Versailles. I had the good fortune of visiting her twice and hearing something of her life-story. Marion had once traveled with Martha Root down the east coast of the United States. She recounted to me on a trip to her apartment in Versailles the following scene.

At one of their stops, Martha was scheduled to speak at a public meeting. But only one solitary soul showed up! Martha said to Marion: “Marion, you go and sit beside the man and say the Greatest Name and I'll give the talk.” Marion followed the advice. “Martha went up on the stage and spoke,” Marion said, “as if the hall were filled to capacity.” It didn't matter to Martha whether the audience were one or one thousand. (I have no idea what became of the man. She didn't say).

Marion came out to help send me off when George and Diane Starcher, who have since returned to the United States, hosted a going-away party at their home in the Paris suburb of St.

Cloud, just before I returned to Canada in February, 1968. I also met Lucienne Miguette, one of the early French believers, who had been taught by May Maxwell in Lyon. She lived in the 20<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement* in Paris, but she did not come out often, although she remained in contact with the NSA until she died. Before my return to Canada, I served briefly on the Paris LSA with Anita Ioas Chapman, the elegant and distinguished daughter of Hand of the Cause Leroy Ioas, and met her sweet mother, Sylvia, who spoke one evening with such gentility, admiration and respect for her beloved husband “Roy.”

### **Marriage, Family Life, Teaching School**

By the time I had finished my M.A. in the History of Religions at the University of Ottawa (1972), time, that old thief, was stealing away my youth. Before graduation, and all through my life, until that moment, passing time held no special significance for me. The demands of the present hour had just never seemed urgent; there was always tomorrow.

But I remember well a sudden moment of clarity, when I sat alone one afternoon in the student lounge, thinking about my future, now that the end of my formal studies was in sight. I asked myself what profession would I choose once I had graduated? I realized then that I did not have any clear idea. With a Master’s degree in the History of Religions, not a lot of options were open to me, unless I continued on with the PhD and became an academic in Religious Studies.

But the fact of the matter was that I was nervously exhausted by the end of the M.A. I had no desire at that point to continue on with the doctorate. I was suddenly struck with the realization that my student days were soon coming to an end; the practical business of earning a living and making my way in life were looming up large.

High school teaching seemed like a natural choice, but I knew that there might not be much call for religious studies in a secular high school. Since I was fluent in French because of my time at the Sorbonne, and because I had studied French literature in my undergraduate courses, I knew that I could also teach Canada’s second language, or other subjects in the arts including English. So I decided on school teaching.

My decision not to become an academic has had its advantages. Had I become a university professor, I am not sure I would have developed my intellectual and spiritual life as a free-ranger, following the promptings and creative influxes of my own mind and heart, both in poetry and scholarship. The academy, depending upon which subject one teaches, exerts certain pressures and constraints that are not always compatible with Bahá’í intellectual and spiritual life.

Although a good number of Bahá’í academics have succeeded well in managing these challenges and excelling in their careers, others have been adversely affected. I keep in touch all the same with the academic milieu, with Bahá’ís especially, but also with friends in the wider community. My friend Dr. Juan Guillermo Renart, a retired professor of Spanish literature, and I



regularly discuss various aspects of literature, literary criticism and spirituality whenever we get together.

We are both great admirers of the great Canadian literary critic, Northrop Frye, who was in a class shared only by a few others. We sometimes find ourselves reading a text of Frye's together from Guillermo's extensive library, or some other renowned literary critic—a Harold Bloom, a David Lodge, a Terry Eagleton, or of late, Erich Auerbach and his great work, *Mimesis*.

What was more important to me than becoming a professional academic was to make a modest contribution to Bahá'í Studies and the literary arts. I felt both honored and humbled when my study of the Guardian's writings, *A Celestial Burning: A Selective Study of the Writings of Shoghi Effendi* (2012) was unanimously awarded the distinguished scholarship prize in the book category by the Association for Bahá'í Studies of North America in 2013. In 1995 I was also honored with the annual prize from ABS for creative writing. (The prize was actually awarded for poetry). I am very grateful that I have been able to contribute something both to Bahá'í studies and to creative writing, although I do freely recognize that other scholars and writers have been far more prolific than I am.

In 1972, while I was completing the M.A. at the University of Ottawa, I married Brigitte Maloney who, despite her Irish maiden-name, was the first French-Canadian Bahá'í from the Gaspé Peninsula of Quebec. Brigitte is also through her grandmother of indigenous ancestry, probably from the Mi'kmaq tribe.

I first met Brigitte at Evelyn and Allan Raynor's home at 19 Carnwath Crescent in the borough of North York in Toronto. I acted as her translator one night for an Australian travel-teacher who was speaking about the education of children. Brigitte had been sent by her teacher, Anne-Diane Beliveau, to the Raynors from the *Collège de Matane*, Quebec, where Brigitte had become a Bahá'í. Anne-Diane wisely wanted Brigitte to learn English and to become deepened in the Faith. She felt that the Raynors would be an excellent choice. We met again about a year later when she subsequently enrolled at the University of Ottawa where I was also studying.

Despite our best efforts, although our marriage did not survive, Brigitte and I have since become like brother and sister. We still share a close family bond with our two lovely daughters, Mukina and Leah. Brigitte is now happily married to a good-humored, warm-hearted, spiritually committed Haitian gentleman named Yves Polycarpe. Brigitte and Yves, our two daughters and our four grandchildren, Ella, Ethan, Evan, Cole and I enjoy a warm, fun-filled family relationship.

During our student years at the University of Ottawa, Brigitte and I pioneered to Rockland, Ontario, a French-Canadian town some 25 miles/40 kilometers east of Ottawa. I became a member of the first LSA there in 1972, but Brigitte was too young to serve on that body. After Mukina was born, we settled in La Pocatière, Quebec, 80 miles/128 kilometers east of Quebec city, where I obtained my first teaching job in the *Collège de la Pocatière*, a private school, where I taught English as a second language for one year.

We then returned to the Ottawa Valley, where I taught middle school for one year at St. Michael's in Low, Quebec, a village 30 miles/48 kilometers north of Ottawa in the Gatineau Hills. When I found another teaching job at Philemon Wright Regional High School in Hull, now located in greater Gatineau, we moved to Gatineau, Quebec where we both served on the first LSA of that city which was formed in 1975. Leah, our second child, had been born on July 14 of that same year.

I spent 15 years at Philemon Wright, but in 1990 I transferred to Hadley Junior High School which was then located on 2 Miller Street in Hull. (These days Hadley has been annexed to Philemon Wright High School). At last notice, the old Hadley Junior High School had been renamed Pierre Elliot Trudeau Elementary School. Hadley was my last teaching assignment in the public school system.

### **Transition Years: Salt Spring Island, British Columbia (1997-1999)**

Beautiful Salt Spring Island, the most well-known and largest of the Southern Gulf Islands, lies just off the south-east coast of Vancouver Island. With its palpable creative energy, Salt Spring is the California of the North. It has become a point of attraction for painters, writers, ceramic artists, organic farmers, persons in transition, retirees and ordinary folks who are escaping the harsher Canadian winter further east.

My parents and my older sister Mary Lou had moved to the island from Ontario in 1977. The attraction for father was year-round golf, even if he had to play during the rainy winters. The attraction for both parents and my sister was to help complete the requisite nine believers to form a Local Spiritual Assembly.

When our daughters Mukina and Leah were children, we always looked forward to visiting Salt Spring with its "cool Mediterranean" climate, coastal salty ocean waters, giant firs and the somewhat exotic flora that does not thrive in cold central Canada. We also enjoyed the folksy, more relaxed ways of Salt Spring islanders.

In 1995 my father Allan James passed away unexpectedly. My parents were deeply devoted to one another. After fifty-four years of marriage, our mother was attempting a hard return to normalcy. Within months of my father's passing, I would be making my own transition, trying to recover from the demise of a 23-year-old marriage. After 24 long years in the classroom, burnt out by stress, in a move necessitated by psychological well-being, and an indwelling urge to pursue further what creativity was still left in me, I decided to take early retirement at age 52.

Although I had written my first book, *Dimensions in Spirituality* (1994), while I was still teaching full-time, I felt increasingly the desire to devote myself entirely to research and writing. Early retirement would allow me to pursue my creative and scholarly interests, and to free me up

to offer more time for Bahá'í community service, even if it meant that I would have to live on a substantially reduced pension.

Two years after my father died, after praying for guidance, and probing various possibilities, I had a series of vivid dreams in which I kept seeing islands. It finally dawned on me that I was being led westward to the Gulf Islands. I suggested to mother that we share accommodation and she agreed. I offered to do housework, maintain the grounds, keep her company and pay rent.

In return, I would be able to write and readjust after the dislocation of divorce and be able to keep mother company after father's death. At the back of my parents' cozy bungalow at 131 Mount Baker Crescent was a sleeping cabin that was used occasionally by relatives and guests. It had once been the workshop of a Scot who coincidentally was also named McLean, who was the original builder and owner of the house.

Before my arrival, mother had the sleeping cabin converted into a writing studio. The finishing touches were being added by a handyman mother had hired when I arrived on the island one sunny day in July, 1997, after having driven my 1987 five-speed, five-door, Honda Accord all the way from Ottawa-Gatineau. (It seemed to take forever just to get out of the province of Ontario).

I furnished the studio with floor to ceiling bookshelves. After some 35 boxes of books, together with my bike, arrived from Gatineau by moving van, I spent an entire morning setting them up. Thanks to mother's thoughtfulness, a welcome retreat had become available at just the right time. Just beyond the sliding glass doors of the studio, near to the giant firs that surrounded the house, scattered white daisies nodded gently in the summer breeze along the fence. I settled into my studio to write down my thoughts and perceptions in poetry and prose.

The two years on Salt Spring Island provided a much-needed rest and welcome period of transition. Not only was I able to accompany mother through her grief after losing father, and to attend to some of her health needs, my stay there also allowed us to become reacquainted. Her understanding and wise counsel in the post-divorce phase of my life greatly helped in the restoration of my sanity. In turn, it was a comfort for her to have another family member present on the island, along with my sister Mary Lou.

During our conversations, I learned some interesting facts about our family history that I had not known before. Within a few months, I started a writers' group which included both amateurs and professionals. One of our members was a colorful, senior local personality, the witty Alex Mitchell, a Scot who was short in stature, but long on wit and humor. Alex wrote a humorous column for the local newspaper, *The Driftwood*. I wrote spiritually-oriented pieces called "Pilgrim's Notes" for the same paper. During the two years that I wrote for *The Driftwood*, I submitted about 30 short essays on a variety of spiritual, social and moral issues, some of them topical items taken from the news of the day.

It was on Salt Spring Island that I did the final revisions of *Under the Divine Lote Tree: Essays and Reflections* printed by George Ronald Publisher (1999) and began writing the first

drafts of *A Celestial Burning: A Selective Study of the Writings of Shoghi Effendi*. After submitting *Under the Divine Lote Tree* to the publisher, I had first entertained the idea of writing something for the mass-market, perhaps a historical novel or a self-help book on spirituality. But I knew that once I chose a project, I would be married to it for the duration of its creative life, so I wanted to choose carefully.

I prayed for guidance, reflected and looked for signs, but for a while I had not yet struck on anything firm. Then one day, the idea occurred that I should write something on Shoghi Effendi's writings. It came, as the expression has it, out-of-the-blue, almost literally, when I was standing one morning, looking out of the living room picture-window toward Mt. Baker, across the waters in the state of Washington.

I had no idea then of what sort of book it should be, but it was the certainty of the project itself that I sought first. The illumination and clear sense of guidance that accompanied the birth of the project convinced me that this should be my next book. I did not know then that this project would morph into a major study that would take some six-and-a-half years of research and composition and some 13 years before it was actually published in 2012.

I chose that topic because I felt that the Guardian's English-language writings have been somewhat neglected in scholarly research; western scholars have been spending valuable time learning Persian and Arabic and translating tablets and making commentaries on our sacred literature. Since I have no Arabic and since my Persian is quite limited—I took Introductory Persian at the University of Toronto—I did not feel competent to undertake a translation-commentary approach, although I did eventually end up writing a book on *The Seven Valleys*, during which I consulted that outstanding scholar, Mr. Adib Masumiam, when I needed a clarification on the meaning of the source language. (That book at this date has not yet been sent for review nor submitted for publication; it still needs a few finishing touches).

After a year-and-a-half on Salt Spring Island, the time had come for me to move into my own place. At Vesuvius Bay, I rented a very small apartment on a rocky slope that had once been an artist's studio, annexed to the home of a friend of the Bahá'ís, Terri Noel Cooper, a very congenial lady in her sixties. Mother hired a personal assistant who moved in after I left, but we kept in close touch. I was only a short drive from 131 Mount Baker Crescent and my sister Mary Lou was not far away. Both of us would be able to provide any family help for our mother's declining health.

I might be still living on Salt Spring Island had it not been for a common factor that affects everyone—the weather. Although the summers are usually sunny on the island, winters are generally rainy, cloud-covered and damp. The first winter I was happy to exercise out-of-doors all year round, and to be relieved of winter snow-shoveling. But the second winter I developed Seasonal Affective Disorder. The *El Niño* effect of 1998 only added to the steady downpour. I escaped to Arizona for two weeks to dry out and expose myself to sunlight.

But it seemed that summer enjoyment would be inevitably canceled out by the winter blahs. Reluctantly, I came to the conclusion that Salt Spring Island did not augur well for long-

term residency. I had arrived in the summer two years earlier; two years later I was planning another summer departure. In August of 1999, after six months at Vesuvius, I made arrangements for my library to be shipped back east, packed up my vehicle with all my worldly goods, the same five-door Honda Accord that had brought me to the island, and headed out.

On my way to the ferry terminal, I stopped in at 131 Mt. Baker Crescent to say good-bye to mother. I had no way of knowing if I would ever see her again, since she had had a number of gradually debilitating mini-strokes. But I did my best to keep my emotions under control. I did not want to make it a tearful good-bye. As I drove up the slope of Mt. Baker Crescent toward Charlesworth Road, I looked back in the rear-view mirror to catch a last glimpse of mother bending over to pick up something on the driveway. Joyce McLean surprised us all by surviving for two more years. I would see her one last time on Salt Spring before she passed away in December of 2001.

### **The Return to Ottawa (1999-2013)**

They say once you've left it, you can never go home, but if fortune smiles on you, you can. In returning to the Ottawa Valley, I had a sense of going home. This time I decided that I would not return to the province of Quebec. Instead, I would begin a new chapter by settling across the river in the nation's capital. I had not lived in Ottawa since I had been a Master's student-in-residence at Ottawa university 25 years earlier.

When I began looking for an apartment in Ottawa, I would cruise around town with my daughters, Mukina and Leah, cell phone in hand, ready to call about rentals. The girls had already scouted in advance an apartment at 145 McLeod Street in Centertown. By the time I caught up with them, Mukina was already standing on the front balcony of one of the five-unit residences, smiling and holding thumbs up. She called down to me on the street below that this would be the perfect place.

I went upstairs to apartment #2 where I met the owner, Mr. Stephan Katz, a local architect, and signed the lease. Providence must have been working in our favor because Stephan had already accepted a cheque from someone who wanted the apartment, but something prompted him to change his mind; he accepted me instead. Perhaps a young senior would be less of a risk as a tenant, especially one with a quiet lifestyle. I was happy that Stephan accepted my offer. I moved in during November, 1999.

My return to Ottawa turned out to be a happy chapter of my life. On McLeod Street I completed *A Celestial Burning*, working at it systematically for the next few years. I continued to convene the Ottawa Creative Writers' Group, after its "dean," poet and prose writer, the delightful and witty Larry Rowdon, passed away in 2001.

Our writing circle was once called the Ottawa Bahá'í Creative Writers' Group, but we decided in fairness to those members who were not Bahá'ís that we should omit the word that

identified the faith of most of the members. After my return to the capital, at the urging of Bill Harsch, I was asked, as one of several contributors from the world's religions, to submit again the Bahá'í response to the Ottawa Citizen's weekly question on the "Ask the Religion Experts" page.

Although the page was very good publicity for the Faith, and kept matters spiritual and religious before the reading public, circa 2013, with declining sales because of increasing online news sources, the owners downsized and reformatted the Citizen. The publisher decided to cancel the religion page, even though it had a fairly wide readership.

During my time on McLeod Street, I continued to offer deepening courses on the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, the writings of the Báb and Shoghi Effendi and to speak at firesides. Sometimes I made presentations at the Study of Religion Special Interest Group of the Association for Bahá'í Studies or submitted the occasional article, commentary or book review to Bahá'í journals. During this time, with scholars Mark Keedwell and Harold Rosen, I taught courses at the Furútan Academy, organized by Shahrokh Monjazeb, with branches in Ottawa and Vancouver. Within a few years, Mark, Harold and I became absorbed in our own pressing projects; the Academy came to a slow halt. In 2004, I made a month-long travel-teaching trip to Britain and France where I had BBC and French radio interviews.

At 145 McLeod Street, I used to visit the Starbucks café around the corner every morning—it is now called the Happy Goat—where I would have coffee and do some writing, hoping to meet new acquaintances who could become friends, and who would perhaps be receptive to the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. A close friend of mine, poet Damian Firth and member of our writers' group, said that I was leading a "civilized life" on McLeod Street. True enough.

But life at 145 McLeod was no Bohemian heaven. No soul escapes the tests of life, and I did not escape mine. All the same, it was a good life there. I have never regretted leaving the classroom, but the great classroom that is life itself is inescapable. Sometimes it's the proverbial "school of hard knocks." Hopefully that school of life will help to knock you into shape to learn the vital life-lessons that need to be learned. The athlete's saying, "No pain no gain" applies well to the tests of life.

### **The Last Hand of the Cause and One of the Last Few Remaining Knights of Bahá'u'lláh**

During pilgrimage to the Bahá'í World Center in the Spring of 2007, I was conscious of witnessing another momentous occasion when the last Hand of the Cause of God, Dr. 'Alí Muhammad Varqá, a member of the very eminent Varqá family, and chief trustee of the Right of God, addressed the pilgrims from the stage at the International Teaching Centre. (This Hand of the Cause, although appointed by him, had never met Shoghi Effendi face to face, as he himself had mentioned).

Elegantly and neatly dressed in a suit and tie and polished shoes, Dr. Varqá was accompanied by a young man who assisted him to move on and off the stage. He was perfectly lucid in the message he gave to our group of pilgrims to persevere in teaching the Faith. He passed away only a few months later on September 22, serving the Cause so faithfully to which he was so humbly and selflessly devoted, until the last days of his earthly life.

Dr. Varqá was the greatest living example whom I knew of the power of humility and lowliness, a humility and lowliness whose eloquent silence radiated love. He drew others to him by his meekness, a meekness that attracted the friends like a magnet. I know one Bahá'í in Ottawa who told me that when they first met, he was so powerfully struck by Dr. Varqá's spirituality that he was left almost speechless

He was the living example of one of Christ's most famous beatitudes, "Blessed are the meek: they shall inherit the earth." (The Gospel Greek word for "meek" (*praus*) refers to gentleness/mildness but it does not imply weakness). The earth that the meek shall inherit refers to the exercise of spiritual authority by humility.

Christ's saying could also be extended in our day to all those serving in the elected or appointed branches of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, *viz.* to serve humbly without in any way abusing the authority that has been granted to its trustees. Christ's beatitude (Mat. 5:5) could even be interpreted as a prophecy of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order itself, in which the rulers will "inherit the earth" and govern humanity in the spirit of humility, love, wisdom, and justice, rather than arbitrary power and violence. Dr. Varqá was not a man of many words, but his deeds, person and spirit were in themselves eloquent testimony to the gentle, but strong spirituality of service that motivated his entire being and inspired others to action.

Some of the friends belonging to my generation have been privileged to have known a few older Bahá'ís who made the pilgrimage during the ministry of Shoghi Effendi. There are even a few of my generation who met the Guardian when they were children, while accompanying their parents on pilgrimage. However, at this writing (2022), the only two persons of my personal acquaintance who met "the sign of God on earth" are the artist Joyce Frances Devlin and the architect Mozhan Khádem.

Mozhan accompanied his father and Hand of the Cause, Zikrulláh Khádem, on pilgrimage when he was a boy. Joyce made the pilgrimage during the administration of Shoghi Effendi, when she was a young woman studying fine art in England. Joyce who is now in her 80's, lives in her elegant studio-home near Burritts Rapids, a small village located on the Rideau River in the countryside south-west of Ottawa.

Although they did not make the pilgrimage during the days of the Guardian, I am still in touch with one Knight of Bahá'u'lláh, Clifford Huxtable, who with his young wife Catherine Heward Huxtable, opened the southern Gulf Islands in British Columbia to the Faith during the Ten Year World Crusade (1953-1963), following the passing of Shoghi Effendi. Cliff and Catherine later pioneered to St. Helena Island in the South Atlantic where Catherine passed away from muscular dystrophy within two years of their arrival and where Cliff still lives with his

second wife, Delia Duncan. (I wrote the biography of Cliff and Catherine's life together in *A Love That Could Not Wait*).

Catherine sought the Guardian's advice on how she could best teach the Faith while she was confined to a wheelchair. His ingenious and practical suggestion was to advise her to transcribe the sacred writings into Braille. Catherine also corresponded with Rúhíyyih Khánum. The Gulf Islands in British Columbia, according to Rúhíyyih Khánum, as related in Africa to pioneer Steve Fletcher, were the last goal chosen by Shoghi Effendi during the Ten Year World Crusade/Plan. This does not mean that it was the last goal that was filled, but it was the last goal that was chosen by Shoghi Effendi.

The Gulf Islands were chosen by the Guardian as a substitute for Manitoulin Island from his room in London, where he passed away in the early hours of November 4, 1957. It was there that Shoghi Effendi put the finishing touches on his magisterial map of the Ten Year World Crusade. Cliff who is now well into his 80's is one of the now small and dwindling number of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh who are still left in the world.

### **Three Year Stay in Carleton Place (2013-2106): Second Return to Ottawa and Co-op Living (2016-)**

I pioneered in 2013 for three years to Carleton Place, a town of some 10,000 people, located about 40 minutes' drive southwest of Ottawa. Based on my experiences there, after helping the friends to form the first LSA, I decided that I could better serve the Faith by returning to Ottawa. The friends had enough numbers to maintain their LSA in Carleton Place, and the Institute process had seen early beginnings in the community.

After spending a few months in Almonte, Ontario, not far from Carleton Place, and a few months with my eldest daughter Mukina in Gatineau, Quebec, where our children had grown up, I relocated back in Ottawa. Just as they had been helpful in finding the apartment at 145 McLeod Street, after my return from Salt Spring Island, once again, my daughters Mukina and Leah were helpful in finding accommodation. Leah noticed an Internet announcement for a seniors' co-op at 1435 Larose Avenue, in the Carlington neighborhood in west-central Ottawa, not far from Westgate Plaza.

I applied. Soon after an interview was conducted by the Membership Committee. I was accepted for residence in a one-bedroom apartment on the first floor (#110), one of 44 units. I moved in on December 1, 2016. Apartment #110 was located at the back of the building, where it does not receive direct sunlight. The view, except to a line of cypress trees and a fence, was lacking, but I was happy to be relocated back in Ottawa.

Within a few years, however, the monotony of the lack of sunlight and the limited view began to wear on me, although I did enjoy feeding the birds and watching the squirrels running along the electric lines, jumping from branch to branch. I applied for an internal move. With a



balcony facing the street, more exposure to sunshine, and a view in both directions onto Larose Avenue, apartment #205 became available. At this writing, after having moved in on March 1, 2022, I am still at the same address.

My first experience in co-op living has been very positive. The members own the corporation; the rent is set below open market value, an advantage to those on a limited or fixed income. All members have voting rights in the decisions of the Board that affect the entire membership. Consultations are regular. Various committees perform required tasks that maintain the co-op, facilitate good communication and promote a healthy social life.

I started a writers' group here after I arrived, just as I had done on Salt Spring Island, but it petered out: only two of us were serious writers; the others were just along for the conversation and the entertainment. They were welcome to be there, but the commitment was not high enough to maintain the group.

I had maintained my link with the Ottawa Creative Writers' Group while I was living in Carleton Place. I was happy to have the monthly meetings closer at hand, now that I was back in Ottawa. Upon my arrival, two other co-op members and I began publishing a monthly newsletter called *Community Matters* that keeps members informed about co-op business and its social life. According to the feedback we have so far received, the newsletter has been much appreciated. It gives me a lift to see our newsletter published each month. I deliver the hard copies to apartments on the second floor, while Leslie Bury, another committee member, distributes them on the ground floor.

A dedicated core of members maintains a strong spirit of mutual aid and community sociability. Living here reminds me of village life where most villagers cooperate and are friendly. As in any village, the inevitable personality conflicts arise, as they do wherever human beings interact, but I have done my best to maintain good relations with everyone here because I have made friendly relations one of my priorities.

Some people choose not to participate in the social life of the co-op, but they remain friendly, although not overly social, when meeting others. A few members are solitary and participate at meetings only when required to do so. We have hired a part-time one-person staff member to administer the front office, a handyman to repair the apartments, a cleaner for the building, and a trucker to plow and remove snow in the winter and to salt walkways.

The Gardening Committee has done much to improve the appearance of the property, keeping the grass cut and watered in summer. This year the committee planted a herb garden. Individual members take good care of their garden plots. We do two annual outdoor clean-ups in the spring and fall, but the number of volunteers is slowly decreasing as a result of our aging population.

The outbreak of the pandemic COVID-19 in 2020 has greatly adversely affected the social life at the co-op; it has practically ground to a halt, although there are still a few spontaneous conversations in the halls. The other day the second barbecue since the pandemic began was held out-of-doors, with about 21 of us members attending.

All seniors have to face the increased health challenges that come with aging. I began experiencing a gradual decline in fitness and mobility after I turned 65 years old, mainly because of arthritis and a few other ailments. But as I have just celebrated my 77<sup>th</sup> birthday, I am grateful to be still “walking and talking,” although I must confess that aging has been more challenging than what I imagined it might be when I was much younger. (Youth generally have very little appreciation of the rigors of old-age experienced by family, friends and relatives).

My present form of exercise consists mainly in walking with a close companion, on a more or less regular basis. Because of neuropathy in my feet, my walking is aided by an orthotics insert and brace for each leg that fastens just below the knee. Her companionship has greatly enriched my life, not only with company and meaningful conversation but also with the spiritual dimension that comes with sharing a common faith.

Our friendship is accompanied by the gratitude that comes with having such a faithful friend at my age, during a time of life that many seniors find unbearably lonely. Whatever time remains to me during my stay on the earthly plane, I have no doubt that when I am finally called to leave it, it will be with a heart full of gratitude for the many blessings that I have received throughout my life by the abundant grace of Bahá’u’lláh.

### **Fourteen Real Life Lessons and Recommendations**

I conclude this chapter with the following fourteen lessons, some of which I have already learned, while others I am still learning. Learning and relearning are ongoing cradle-to-the-grave phenomena. Blessed and happy are those who become masters of the adverse circumstances of their life. I cannot in all honesty make such a claim, but nonetheless, it is heartening that we can make progress as the years go by. To be fully liberated from the “prison of self” is a challenging work-in-progress that continues until the very end of our earthly life.

**1. Make the Love of God Your Sure Foundation.** Make divine love, in all its manifold expressions, the dominating principle governing your life. It is still, and will always remain, the greatest phenomenon and power in the universe. Jesus said that “God is love,” the simplest but most sublime personal three-word definition of God that exists. Bahá’u’lláh’s succinct two-word definition of God as the “unknowable Essence” is the most cogent metaphysical definition of the Divinity. Although God can never be fully defined by formulas, these two definitions, taken together with the belief in the intermediary of the Divine Manifestation, constitute a firm foundation for faith in God.

**2. Happiness and Unhappiness.** To the extent that we are able, we owe it to ourselves to banish all traces of unhappiness from our lives. Bringing happiness to others is one of life’s greatest blessings; causing unhappiness to others is one of life’s greatest sorrows. Unhappiness causes great suffering both to body and mind. It may result from one or more of the following factors:

failing to realize the transitory nature of life's circumstances; undervaluing the power latent in God's creation; being too adversely affected by another's negative treatment of us, i.e. a lack of detachment; underestimating the divine nature and power of the soul; failing to realize that the joys of the present moment to which we cling cannot endure when measured against the substance of eternal realities; lack of faith in the certain blessings of the life beyond; or, in 'Abdu'l-Baha's stricter view, ingratitude for God's infinite bounties.

With the great stresses and anxieties produced by the business of living in these troubled times, biochemical or neurological factors are often involved in the determination of one's mood and outlook. Whatever medical remedies may be found for alleviating mood disorders, our spiritual philosophy will always help in overcoming any negatives influences in our lives. Shoghi Effendi has assured us that many of the mental trials to which human beings are now subjected will be largely resolved by medical science in the future. Divine happiness is always at hand, when we forget ourselves and open our souls to receive it. It transcends the illnesses of body and mind.

**3. The Unfortunates.** Try to remember that the unhappy or negative people whom you meet became so for a reason. That reason you may not always be able to discover. Some souls have been ruined or defeated by life. They deserve our succor and compassion, never judgment and condemnation.

**4. Choosing and Making Friends.** Love all sincerely from the depths of your heart, but choose as close friends especially those who educate the mind, uplift the soul, or refine the character. We should not be disappointed if everyone with whom we desire friendship does not wish to reciprocate. Some people prefer to remain anonymous. Friendship is necessarily a bilateral or multi-lateral relationship. "Like will unto like." It is a fact of life that not everyone with whom we desire friendship will necessarily desire to reciprocate.

**5. Wisdom.** When I turned 50, I foolishly thought I would be qualified to write about wisdom. But I soon realized that I was far from being wise. In my 50's, I discovered that I was as prone to error as I was in my youth. It was only in my 50's that I began to learn something about this mystery called "self". Now in my 70's, I am learning a little more. The human being is prone to error; to our last breath, we will require divine forgiveness.

**6. Forgiveness.** The great Swiss psychologist, Carl Jung, observed that in most of his patients, forgiveness was a major issue. Learn to forgive others and to accept life's circumstances. It is strange but true that some souls find it hardest to forgive themselves. The Dali Lama wisely observed that there is too much self-loathing in western peoples. If we claim to love God, then we must love ourselves, no less than we love others, for He created us out of love. The love of our neighbor should surpass the love of self.

**7. Learning, Teaching and Serving Humanity.** Discover the great joy there is in teaching the Faith and serving others, while always remembering that teaching and learning are reciprocal acts. Bahá'ís have an infinite fount of wisdom and good counsel to share, but others also have much to teach us also. Teaching is never a one-way street. Learning is the other way. Serving

others is the best remedy for misery. To bring joy to others is to bring joy to oneself and to please God.

8. **Appreciation.** Appreciate “all things bright and beautiful.” Find joy and pleasure in each and every thing created by God, however great or small, for each and every created thing is worthy of admiration. Appreciation is a balm to the soul, a light to the eyes and a solace to the spirit.

9. **Studying the Creative Word.** ‘Abdu’l-Bahá said in His talks in London that the greatest joy was to read the Word of God with a spiritual mind.

10. **Being Right, Admitting Wrong and Letting Go.** Without surrendering the truths of which we are firmly convinced, we should be prepared to admit it when we are wrong. It is better to be happy and united than right, but miserable and divided. Learning to let things go brings freedom and release from “the prison of self.”

11. **Drawing Boundaries.** Sometimes it becomes necessary to distance oneself from others by drawing boundaries for our own sake as well as theirs. If our best attempts to improve relations fail, a certain distance, while maintaining cordiality, will prove useful. For believers, association with the ungodly, as Bahá’u’lláh reveals, will only increase sorrow.

12. **Our Testing Ground.** Remember that this life is a constant testing ground. We should fully enjoy our days of ease, recreation, renewal and refreshment; they are a grace of God. But the tests of life, be they mental, physical, familial, relational, financial or professional are always with us. This life is not an end-stop but a way-station. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reported “tough-love” counsel puts it better: “This earth plane is a workshop not an art gallery.” (SW, vol. 16, no. 5, p. 518, August 1925)

The tests of life, if only we knew it, are the surest preparation for our ultimate destination. For the friends in the West, as in the East, some of the hardest tests will come from our fellow believers and/or our family. To the extent possible, we should endeavor to remedy these misunderstandings and compose our differences. When that is not possible, the practice of detachment will help to restore peace of mind. It takes two to compose a difference, but only one to offer reconciliation.

13. **Prayer and Protection.** We pray for God’s protection and blessing for both others and ourselves.

14. **The Glory of God.** We pray that Bahá’u’lláh will graciously accept any good deeds that He has permitted us to achieve in His path. We owe Him our very life and breath.

## 4. ESSAYS AND REFLECTIONS

### **“The Philosophic Mind”: Reflections on Wordsworth’s *Ode* at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century**

**Wordsworth’s Alleged Pantheism.** In one of his most celebrated poems, *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* (1807), William Wordsworth (1770-1850), completes a philosophic retrospective on the span of human life. Although the poet was only 37 years old when *Ode* was first published, Wordsworth contemplates with regret the passing of the visionary freshness, purity and spontaneity of childhood, while ascribing significance to the whole life-panorama, setting childhood into relationship with the advancing stages of youth, adulthood, old age and death.

His overview of adulthood and old age acknowledges a progressive despiritualization of the once spontaneous powers of the soul, experienced by the child and youth in his or her natural surroundings. The same theme recurs as he contemplates his youth in *The Prelude*: “Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive. But to be young was very heaven.” In the Lake District of Cumbria, his birthplace, where he enjoyed contemplating the seasonal changes and subtle tone colors of its hills, lakes, mountains, streams and valleys, Wordsworth gathered the fruits of introspection that were to inspire his finest verse.

The Cumberland poet could properly be called a nature mystic, as much as poet. He lauded nature’s grand design no less than the Psalmist, no less than the Qur’án praises the miracle of creation. “Nature’s holy plan” in its unspoiled state was for Wordsworth the most sublime mirror and visible evidence of the manifest beauty of God.

The worship of nature by England’s poet laureate has been misconstrued by some scholars and literary critics as pantheism. But aside from the fact that he never referred to his belief in God-in-Nature as “pantheism,” and although some scholars have argued the contrary, it is doubtful that Wordsworth ever consciously thought of himself as a pantheist. That he venerated nature is blatantly obvious even to the poet’s most superficial reader, but the label pantheism requires a theological specificity that Wordsworth never formally espoused.

He believed, rather, in the divine immanence in all things, or the transcendentalism that regards nature as divine. We have no real evidence to suggest that the poet restricted his understanding of Divinity to its manifold expressions in the natural world. That he viewed nature as the principal expression of the Divinity, no one will doubt. But to suggest that it was *all of* divinity for Wordsworth exaggerates the encomiums of nature found in the poet’s verse. Wordsworth’s love of nature was felt, seen and expressed esthetically, not defined theologically.

***Leonardo and Wordsworth.*** The most outstanding example of a creative genius who succumbed to the ravages of the passing years, despite the valiant battle that he waged, was the great Leonardo da Vinci. We recall him at life's end, burnt out when death claimed him at age 67, still eager to complete the unfinished projects that his fertile imagination had conceived. Being a man of great passions, da Vinci intensely deplored the gradual ebbing of his creative powers, the rushing stream that once fed his artistic genius. Did Leonardo find a Wordsworthian solace in his declining years, or rather in Dylanesque fashion, did he "Rage, rage against the dying of the light"?

Wordsworth, for his part, acquiesced. He muses on the solace that the solitary individual can find with age. Chief among these consolations was the immortality of the soul itself, born of God and returned, through death, unto Him: "But trailing clouds of Glory do we come from God, who is our home." No evidence exists in Wordsworth's verse that the soul is reabsorbed in nature, blotting out our individual consciousness: "Our souls have sight of that immortal sea which brought us hither." While this line might tempt the belief in Wordsworth's alleged pantheism, it contains no suggestion that the individual consciousness of the soul after death ceases to exist within that "immortal sea."

While Wordsworth regrets the once bright powers, the vanished innocence of childhood and youth, he asserts nonetheless that their traces still exert their influence: "What though the radiance which was once so bright!/ Be now forever taken from my sight/ Though nothing can bring back the hour/ Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower/ We will grieve not, rather find/ Strength in what remains behind/." Other consolations are found at life's end. He mentions: "... the soothing thoughts that spring out of human suffering; in the faith that looks through death, in years that bring the philosophic mind."

***Acquiescence and the Philosophic Mind.*** Above all, Wordsworth's cogent little phrase "the philosophic mind" suggested to the poet the necessity of surrendering to the inevitability of old age and death. Acceptance or acquiescence is his panacea for inescapable losses. The poet's declining powers, the loss of the bright visions of youth, he comes to embrace with a certain detachment: not one that begrudgingly surrenders to fate, but one that shows the benign face of "primal sympathy," a sympathy that bows to the changing seasons of life.

Wordsworth associates the philosophic mind with the acceptance of the contrasting phenomena between the fresh joys of youth and the waning powers of old age; with the noisome vitality of life finally set against the hollow silence of the grave. The poet is able to accept each soul's ineluctable fate because he perceives the whole life cycle as a panorama designed by the Hand of God. Although life's losses must be inevitably sustained, for him as they are for all, Wordsworth has embraced the firm conviction that these losses will be fully recovered when he rejoins the infinite Sea of Life from whence his soul began its journey.

*Seeking Root Causes of Existential Despair in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.* And what is the philosophic mind to those of us who have by now crossed the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we city-dwellers who are far removed from the pastoral landscapes that Wordsworth contemplated? Our contemporary scenario presents a brutal and chaotic contrast to the tranquil countryside enjoyed by the poet of the lakes.

Whether in the hostile world of global affairs, the ongoing degradation of the environment, the natural disasters caused by anthropogenic climate change, the worldwide spread of deadly communicable diseases, or in the existential human condition itself, today's electronic and print media reveal universal human misery. The citizens in the more affluent nations of the western world have not been spared by their wealth.

Instead, they are assaulted by various mental illnesses, afflicting especially, but not exclusively, the youth. Anxiety and depression, addictions, obsessive compulsive disorders and meaninglessness are pervasive. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is not unknown among adolescences and adults, even without any specific cause being identified by physicians: the accumulated stresses and strains of modern living will trigger it by themselves. Tragically, except for accidental death, suicide remains the second cause of fatalities among young people.

The philosophic mind is not an antiquated notion that has outlived its usefulness in today's conflicted postmodern world: it is rather needed now more than ever—especially to enable us to discover those dynamic and vital meanings and values that Dr. Victor Frankl called “logotherapy,” meanings and values that serve to alleviate human suffering. The philosophic mind exercised by the thoughtful man or woman of the 21<sup>st</sup> century invites us to discover the root causes of the pathological paradigms that we are witnessing daily in both international relations and individual lives.

The philosophic mind today realizes that it is self-defeating for the collective centers that constellate our diverse humanity, whether as clans, tribes, ethnic groups, socio-economic classes, races, and nations, to turn one group against another. If the practitioners of today's “identity politics” attempt to strengthen their political base by attacking, demeaning, or demonizing any other, such harmful adverse tactics must be resolutely rejected and combatted by all the constructive human resources that seek instead to promote ethnic, racial, and religious integration and more cordial, constructive, less partisan political solutions, to work instead for the common good. Humanity only engages in self-destruction when it seeks to find an enemy within.

Based on his mastery of the Bahá'í sacred writings, Shoghi Effendi had already discovered these root causes in the third decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, brilliantly expounded in his world order letters. His arresting phrase, “internecine conflicts,” just one of scores of dynamic word duos found among his lucid expositions of “a strangely disordered world,” suggests that our only “base” today must be love of the entire human race and a universal recognition of its organic unity.

The world's leaders, he firmly maintained, would slowly but painfully discover the incontrovertible truth that humanity constitutes one organic whole, one clarion expression of One Divine Will that must abolish war and seek to live in unity—or perish! Shoghi Effendi held that injury of one makes the injury of all; each and every one constitutes the matrix that makes the whole.

World citizens, governors and governed alike, are fitfully awakening to the liberating truth that the unity of humanity is *the one and only foundation* capable of assuring a just and lasting peace. To impair that unity only perpetuates dysfunction. Shoghi Effendi teaches that war, except when waged to combat naked aggression, is insane: insane because it is a self-destructive, wasteful tragedy. Bahá'u'lláh's moral law forbids “conflict and contention.” This law, when violated, whether between individuals or within the body politic, will bring its own inevitable disillusion or punishment, depending on the severity of the trespass. Bahá'u'lláh has sworn in *The Hidden Words* that the cruel oppressors who crush the bodies and spirits of peace-loving souls or shed the blood of the innocent will not escape divine justice.

***Necessary Cautions and Qualifications.*** Wordsworth's evocative phrase “the philosophic mind” leads his readers to contemplate the wisdom of bowing gracefully to the inevitable changes that all must face with the turning wheel of the life cycle. But the exigencies of our time and place demand certain cautions and qualifications, regarding the acceptance that comes with the passing years. The acquiescence recommended by Wordsworth should not be confused with passivity, stagnation, maintaining the *status quo*, or turning a blind eye to abuse, injustice, poverty, or wrongdoing of any stripe. In the autumn of life, the elderly are not exempt from doing their part. In a world torn asunder by divisions of class, creed, ethnicity, party, race, and tribe, the dire ecological, geopolitical, humanitarian and national crises that confront us today demand the active participation of all, young and old alike. Wordsworth's consolation of the “primal sympathy which having been must ever be” can surely be extended to every suffering one. It costs nothing, but affords compassionate relief to all on whom it is bestowed.

The decline of modern civilization has reached its nadir, a low-point which has far surpassed the conditions that exacted the fall of Rome, despite the naysayers who claim that such decadence has ever been so. Anthropogenic climate change is threatening the very fabric of material civilization itself, with ongoing floods, droughts, fires, volcanic eruptions, tornadoes, landslides, food shortages and crop failures.

So severe is the onslaught of humanity's recurring crises today that our ability to commiserate with the plight of others is being tested by so-called “compassion-fatigue,” which is just another symptom of the psychological distress that results in apathy. The “apathy, timidity and complacency” that Shoghi Effendi warned us against is widespread.

At this late, fateful hour, neither national leaders, special programs, dedicated activists, seasoned diplomats, think-tanks, experienced experts, nor a sage intelligentsia can any longer save the world. What the world now requires is the divine remedy revealed by Bahá'u'lláh: a



common universal framework for action. This universal framework of action, based on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and the present Divine Plan, requires nothing less than world reconstruction, a reconstruction that begins with the community-building process that acts locally but is applied globally. The philosophic mind in our time may momentarily take refuge in quiet contemplation or meditation, but it must return to the field of social action.

Here I highlight but a few of society's current distresses in North America. I submit that these remarks also apply to the countries of western Europe: our children and youth are forced to witness, in the very homes that were intended to be havens of love, refuge and stability, the acrimony and estrangement of divorce, a division that undermines the foundation of the institution of marriage itself; young, middle-aged and old alike suffer the enervating stress of living with an alcoholic parent, partner or spouse; parents endure the numbing heartbreak of watching a troubled child slip into toxic drug abuse, or worse—the death of their daughter or son by overdose.

And how do parents survive the horror of teen suicide, caused by the relentless bullying of their child's peers? How does one acquiesce to the indignity of rape, sexual molestation, physical or verbal abuse at the hands of a cleric, coach, mentor, foster-parent, parent, relative or trusted in-law? Acceptance of these situations is not an option if life is to continue. Remedies—legal, medical, psychological, social and spiritual—must be sought if happiness is to be restored and life continue to be enjoyed with a modicum of happiness.

Trauma survivors must serve in turn as midwives of compassion and healing. In dispensing these remedies, Wordsworth's "primal sympathy" is aligned with the compassion (*Karuna*) and loving-kindness that the Buddha made one of the central tenets of his ethical teachings. Once they find healing themselves, survivors will bestow healing to others.

Acceptance of the adversities we have suffered, but more especially finding the remedy to those adversities, will help to restore sanity and peace of mind, not only to ourselves, but also to the numberless victims of abuse, addiction, neglect and violence. May the many non-violent activists throughout the world continue their indispensable work of restoring the environment to its pristine purity, by reversing the effects of climate change, of upholding justice, and of pacifying the world in all the ways their conscience has devised. Bahá'ís join them in their laudable efforts by applying the divine remedy to a struggling humanity that is slowly awakening to the salutary truths contained in the Bahá'í Revelation. We welcome with open arms any and all like-minded collaborators, just as we seek, to the extent possible, to assist them in the work they pursue.

***The Life Beyond.*** Wordsworth's "philosophic mind" must include the inevitable acceptance of death, the greatest mystery that faces pilgrims on the journey of life. Wordsworth envisioned the experience of the Great Beyond as one of the consolations of advancing old-age. A rational impulse, a deeper longing drives the searching mind to explore the meaning of this ultimate event that ends life on earth as we know it.

The great question is and remains: does death cause the extinction of the mind, or rather, does it signal a new beginning, one that reveals an unimagined, exponentially dynamic transformation of consciousness? Wordsworth's poem affirms, in Father Thomas Merton's phrase, that "the seeds of contemplation," sown in moments of tranquility, gather the lilies of immortality. Death is not extinction, but the return to the Infinite Source of all life. This return to that Infinite Source will not dissolve our individual consciousness in an undifferentiated pantheistic sea of existence. Individual consciousness will no doubt become more acutely perceptive in the worlds of God.

Mysteries that have escaped our rational grasp, and truths only dimly understood, will stand out, fully revealed. Once our earthly life, the first stage in an eternal journey, is complete, death will signal the sudden transition to a fuller, richer, more complete existence. With the end of our terrestrial journey, the immortal soul is released to return to the presence of the One who launched its journey—to this end: that the divine attributes continue to be manifested throughout eternity, so that we and others may benefit from their manifestation, both in the world that we have left behind and the world to come. This is sufficient reason for the soul's existence after death.

The world beyond is birthless, deathless and infinite, impervious to the limitations of time and space and freed from the toils and troubles of human existence. The souls in the worlds beyond are fully engaged in executing the Will of God. Theirs is not a quiescent existence. They have their own dynamic sphere of action, one that influences in unsuspected ways the lives and activities of those with whom they were once associated on earth.

Socrates is reported to have said that all philosophy is a reflection on death. Since the dawn of human consciousness, men and women, according to the capacity commensurate with their time and place in history, have increasingly sought to discover the meaning of our fleeting days against the backdrop of that ultimate event of our lives.

Some of the earliest archaeological evidence of burial customs suggests that humans living in the Paleolithic age of humanity anticipated that the dead continue to live on in some other existence. Sacred scripture and divine philosophy enshrine the promise that the blurred vision that now obscures our perception, will suddenly burst into pristine clarity, causing us to vanquish the limitations that were once imposed by Providence on life in this world.

In that final moment, it will become plain how well or ill we have spent our days, how much we have loved, or not loved, how much we have served, or not served, whom we have helped or hurt, the opportunities we seized and those we lost, the victories we won, and the defeats we suffered.

In the light of that clear consciousness, we shall ask ourselves: "Why did I not love more?" "Why did I not I serve more?" "Why did I not seize the golden opportunity that was mine?" In that moment, we shall humble ourselves and supplicate the God of Mercy for forgiveness and intercede for the forgiveness of other souls. We hope that calling ourselves to

account each day, while we are here, may ultimately serve as our passport to a more blissful existence after death.

***Acceptance of the Manifestation of God.*** Another kind of “acceptance” is suggested by the philosophic mind. As our days roll on by, this acceptance is one whose challenge humanity increasingly will have to face—either to embrace or to reject. In our time, that Great Acceptance is generally dismissed outright, is met with lukewarm reception, or is opposed by a wall of frigid indifference. Its earnest appeal is too often spurned by a deafening silence.

In days gone by, it was greeted with sharpened swords and spears, chains and fetters, and instruments of torture. In Iran especially, both the Iran of today and yesterday, that Great Acceptance has been violently opposed, and treated to wave-upon-wave of systematic persecution and the egregious violation of human rights.

This acceptance has far greater consequences for the well-being of individuals and the happiness of nations than anything else we can imagine. The possibility of this acceptance occurs rarely, for the appearance of a prophetic figure is a seldom event in human history. But it is one that holds the most far-reaching consequences for every wrinkle, corner, department, and sphere of human existence.

This acceptance makes every dream for the betterment of humanity capable of realization, every project to rescue Mother Earth from further degradation a guaranteed success, and each humanitarian project equal to the task. The toiling masses on every continent do not suspect that this acceptance might change their lives in all the ways that matter, or have the greatest impact on the betterment of humanity’s civilized life. But in the final analysis, this acceptance can never be compelled, like the laws of the criminal code. It must, rather, be freely accepted by perceptive, seeking minds and faithful hearts. And yet, God will not relinquish His hold on this Most Great Acceptance. So humanity must come to it by suffering.

***Bahá’u’lláh as the Sublime Creative Artist.*** To return to the literary vein that first prompted the above reflections: it occurs to cast Bahá’u’lláh in another guise; that of the Divine Artist, the Poet of Poets whose words have the power to bring into existence hidden, unsuspected realms; the Playwright who has written the drama of dramas that will dominate our lives for the next 1000 years and beyond, into the far reaches of time; the Divine Actor whose charms can move us as no other; the Fine Artist who is overlaying a gigantic canvas with the forms and colors that will engender the greatest of all dazzling and stupendous art forms: the New Creation.

This New Creation, as yet unseen by human eyes, will vibrate to an as yet unheard heavenly music composed by the Master Musician. The growing throngs around the world who have come to recognize Him, manifest a determined desire to communicate His truth, but they betray no attitude of superiority in their beliefs or actions. Theirs is only a heartfelt gratitude, a

hymn of praise, and a mysterious wondering that they have been the chosen recipients of so great a bestowal.

These believers are like the little creatures in Whitman’s poem “The Noiseless, Patient Spider,” working quietly at their task, spinning their webs of unity to create the world-wide net to catch other souls—not to consume them, like the spider and the fly, but rather to connect their hearts in the web of the strongest possible bonds of unity. The binding “filament” alluded to in his poem, forms the nexus of unbreakable ties that bind each soul to every other in the new world order, in that universal fellowship that Whitman had anticipated.

***Sacrifice of the Lower Self.*** In its ultimate sense, the weighty word “acceptance” means to accept the sacrifice of self, in that lifelong struggle to forego one’s private wants and needs to realize the greater good, to contribute to the “common weal.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá told Miss Julia Grundy in ‘Akká/Acco, Palestine in 1905 that through the consigning of self to oblivion, heaven and earth could be won for the true believer.

Except for the dying martyr, that seeming impossible goal is not won in a once-and-for-all ecstatic moment. It is won through the daily effort of continual striving, falling, rising up and trying again, by steadfastness and resistance, and the wise avoidance of temptation. The philosophic mind must create a vision that sees beyond the vivid prose of sense experience to gaze on the sublime poetry of spiritual reality, that luminous realm that is vague only to those who never experienced it.

In an untitled poem, Emily Dickinson, one of the greatest of all metaphysical poets, alluded to the deceptions that come with the anticipation of peace. Her confident realism cautions that peace may prove to be illusory, and yet this one line retains the hope that the reality of peace will surely be found: “How many the fictitious shores—Before the harbor.” I am not surmising that her allusion to peace points to the peace of the nations. Ms. Dickinson was probably thinking of the peaceful end of every faithful believer. But although humanity is still far-distant from that longed for shore, the harbor is now in sight. The ships that seek its shelter are slowly massing in their thousands.

### **The Consumer Mass Market: Bridging the Gap Between the Secular and the Sacred**

One of the myriad valuable psychological assets the Bahá’í revelation offers is to awaken and maintain that sometimes elusive human engine—motivation. One of the Báb’s ethical teachings, expressed as a close paraphrase is: the perfection of a thing is its paradise. (PB 4:11) And He goes on to reveal that perfection consists in achieving the highest and purest state for each and every created thing.

While the Báb’s maxim can be applied to arts and crafts, to the development of souls and spiritual life, the Guardian’s exhortation, expressed through his secretary, “to make up your

minds to do great, great deeds for the Faith” (DG 87) is entirely consistent with the Báb’s maxim. The Master in His tablets likewise set very lofty goals.

Now the public admires and honors those individuals who rise to excellence in their chosen fields, whether in the fine arts, athletics, business, literature, music, economics, the pure and applied or social sciences. The Master’s exhortation to achieve excellence applies, not just to learned or creative individuals of recognized ability, that is to a rarified elite, but to each and every believer. A line from one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s prayers for humanity reminds us that “Thou hast endowed each and all with talents and faculties...” Without exception, striving for excellence (*Arete*), one of the cherished moral objectives of the ancient Greeks, is a duty incumbent upon all, whether our endowment be of greater or lesser capacity.

These thoughts lead me to contrast here the remarkable accomplishments in the various fields of endeavor with a more mundane, material sector of societal life, a sector where we expect excellence, but do not always find it. I refer to the consumer market, and to the manufacture of mass-produced goods that are so readily available, especially in the west and increasingly in Asia.

Unsustainable “conspicuous consumption” has become in our time the most baneful manifestation of the materialistic philosophy. The consumer market offers an abundance of products that have a relatively low offshore manufacturing cost, which reaps huge corporate profits for the directors of these companies and their shareholders. Regrettably these massive profits do not always trickle down to the hard-working poor in the developing world, who mass produce these goods for the more affluent population.

Now generally speaking, “You get what you pay for,” but these consumer goods are often of poor quality, shoddy workmanship, and/or have a short life-span, as expressed in the telling commercial phrase, “built-in obsolescence.” With few exceptions, craftsmanship is now *passé*. Workers in the manufacturing industry, especially in developing countries, are to a great extent virtual cogs in the heartless machines in which they earn their living.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has observed that each human being, regardless of his or her station in life, has been placed in a position of honor. He expects that we minister to that position with full integrity. I wonder at the great transformation that would take place in human society, if each and every corporate manufacturer and employee adopted the highest possible standard of excellence in service.

The idealism I am expressing here assumes, to modify a phrase of Nietzsche, that a positive spiritual transvaluation of all materialistic values will have occurred. This much anticipated transformation in human character would find itself more fully expressed in the material world. For even in the secular world, the Holy Spirit holds the potential for finding Itself reflected to no less an extent than It does in the virtuous acts performed by enlightened souls for one another.

The line from *God’s Grandeur*, the sonnet written by the poet-priest, Gerard Manley Hopkins (1844-1889), “The world is charged with the grandeur of God.” remains true, not only

for the brooding Spirit that hovers over nature at each morning's sunrise, but no less in the great world metropolis. In the soaring glass and steel towers of busy commercial activity, in the rush of crowded streets, in artistic exhibitions and theatric performances, in concert-halls, galleries and museums, the Glory of God is no less reflected.

This glory is mirrored no less in the human ingenuity that has crafted mighty bridges that span flowing rivers, no less in mute skyscrapers that stretch their fingers heavenward to grasp an unknown god. Yes, even in the bewildering variety of items found in our department, grocery and hardware stores, we find divine sustenance. No less in the edible products that we consume daily is the vital force inherent in God's creation dispensed.

Providence has graciously offered this great abundance to further the preservation and transmission of life, to sustain "the great chain of being" in the world below. When all the world's citizens, whether as country, village, town or city dwellers, will have perceived that the Glory of God is manifested in each and every human activity, and in all of creation, "excellence in all things" will have become the hallmark of a God-centered civilization, no less in the consumer market-place than in the sacred precincts of the House of God.

### **Voices of Conscience**

Saints, mystics and seers hear voices, but so do schizophrenics. Almost everyone has voices of conscience by which the mind, like so many electronic impulses, receives cautions or warnings. Most of us listen to these voices of conscience, but we do not always follow what we hear. Ignoring *strong* voices of conscience can lead to dire consequences. In certain depraved souls, to echo a phrase of Shoghi Effendi in the world order letters, "the voice of conscience is stilled." Such people work evil in the world and usually self-destruct after destroying others. It would prove salutary if they only destroyed themselves; but regrettably, others are harmed by them.

When we meditate, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, we are speaking with our own spirit. In this process, our spirit or rational soul engages in question-and-answer with itself. In the discovery of truth, this speaking to oneself takes the form of mirror-like reflection: the mystery we seek to uncover is reflected to the mind in the mirror of truth, until the answer emerges. This meditation may also take the form of an examination of conscience (*examen de conscience*), a phenomenon that normally takes place *in voce*, that is, in words. The power of truth wells up suddenly from silence, as insight, answer or command. Decisions will follow if we seek a course of action,

## **Dichotomies are not Always False**

It has become something of an intellectual trend these days to eliminate dichotomies. To be sure, resolving false dichotomies produces its own benefits because the mind is troubled when confronted with polarities. The fact that one form of meditation is a dialogue with self indicates the dualistic nature of body and soul. The active mind in this life remains dependent on the brain. If body and soul were one and the same thing, this dialogue with self could never occur.

It becomes evident, then, that although body and soul are two distinct phenomena, they are intimately linked in this life, the body being dependent upon the soul for its sustenance. Such dichotomies/dualisms/polarities are necessary and useful in this world. The body is both blessing and a test to the soul, just as the soul is both blessing and test to the body.

The one becomes necessary to the other for moral and spiritual progress to take place. That master key of the Bahá'í revelation, unity in all things, would seem to require the elimination of dichotomies, but paradoxes and opposites are intrinsic to the very nature of the mortal world. Except in those rarefied moments when we find ourselves absorbed in the mystical state, dualities would seem to be a permanent fixture of the world of *Nasut*. We should seek to eliminate dichotomies when and where possible; and yet dichotomies contain their own necessary wisdom.

## **The Prophetic Call, the Voice of God and Divine Signs**

I alluded above to the voice of conscience. This singular feature, along with the meditative faculty, distinguishes humans from animals. With the Prophets, however, the voice of conscience becomes the voice of Divine Revelation. This Voice originates in a celestial realm with which the common mortal has no comparable experience whatsoever.

In the third chapter of the Book of Exodus, God spoke to Moses from within the sacred fire, the Burning Bush, the tree that was not consumed by the flames, a symbol of its eternal life. The other signs of Moses' divine mission were "a pillar of cloud" by day and "a pillar of fire" by night, the mighty pillar representing divine omnipotence and infallible, omnipresent guidance for God's chosen Spokesman, who led the former band of slaves from Egypt, the land of tyranny, to their Promised Land, the land of freedom. If the Exodus narrative (13:21) of these signs is interpreted as a literal theophany, rather than symbolically, this continuous divine guidance indicates that God may choose any natural sign to reveal Himself.

Hearing the Voice of God in an earthquake or a mighty whirlwind typified the experience of Elijah. An exhausted Elijah, hiding in a cave, and fleeing the wrath of the apostate Queen Jezebel, the wife of the Israelite King Ahab, who had ordered the murder of the remaining bands of prophets of Yahweh, received the divine message as a "still, small voice." (1 Kings 19:12).

This phrase suggests that the Voice of God is not always perceived in dramatic natural phenomena as the earthquake, fire, cloud, flood, thunder or lightning.

During the baptism of Jesus by His cousin, John the Baptist, the alighting of a snow-white dove on the Messiah in the Jordan river, signaled the descent of divine revelation. The Prophet Muhammad was compelled to accept His prophetic mission by the archangel Gabriel, who, like a mighty titan dominating the entire horizon, appeared over the cave on Jabal an Noor and commanded the Prophet to “Recite!”

The consort of the Báb, Khadijih Bagum, saw His upper room ablaze with brilliant light and witnessed, with her own eyes, the very moment of the descent of revelation when Siyyid ‘Alí Muhammad Shírází became the Gate of God. This was a perplexing, soul-troubling experience for His wife, until He calmed her fears by revealing to her the true nature of His person and mission.

Reliable historical accounts describe Bahá’u’lláh’s awesome, majestic state when the divine verses, like a mighty torrent, were descending upon Him. When the Blessed Beauty was bound in chains and fetters in the Síyáh Chál of Tihrán, two signs were manifested: the first was the mighty torrent of the Holy Spirit cascading down the mountainside, as it poured from the crown of His head over His breast; the second was the beauteous heavenly maiden who, suspended in air, pointed to Him while proclaiming aloud the true nature of His person and mission.

The special moments of revelation that descended upon Bahá’u’lláh may be described by a series of metaphors that attempt to describe the indescribable: a sudden crack of thunder, an instant bolt of lightning, the rush and roar of a celestial conflagration, a mighty wind, or the reverberating peel of Gabriel’s bell in the spreading vault of heaven.

But these metaphors cannot, even in the remotest way, ever capture the reality of those stupendous moments. Some of those who were in Bahá’u’lláh’s presence during those moments when the divine verses were descending, fainted away or became dazed because they could not withstand the force of the great power that He radiated. This stunning effect was produced by Bahá’u’lláh upon the scholar E.G. Browne during one of his interviews with the Persian Prince in 1890.

These latter-day Revelations of Bahá’u’lláh should not be reduced to mere verbal, i.e. metaphorical expression, as the reductionistic interpretation of sacred literature by some literary critics. This reductionist approach vitiates the divine power and knowledge conveyed by these revelations. The reductive literary analysis focuses exclusively on the outer metaphorical or mythical garments that clothe the revelation, but it all-too-often ignores the body of truth that lie beneath this dress.

Northrop Frye (1912-1991), the great Canadian literary critic, has correctly observed that the academic approach that analyses “the Bible as literature” is superficial since it ignores the main thing that the Bible is really about. Such approaches one-sidedly analyze form, but ignore content. I am not suggesting that literary devices and figures of speech should not be analyzed to



better understand the verbal architecture and literary art that frames the world's holy books. Only that the analyst should not be content with form alone; substance is the main thing. Literary criticism works constructively with theology in a cross-fertilization process.

### **Actors and Acting Today: A Mixed Assessment**

Today's cinema, stage, television, and computer media have created hordes of devoted fans. While the worship of the "die-hard fan" is excessive and misplaced, the actor-to-actor relationship is noteworthy for the admiration that actors hold for their colleagues. Anyone who has viewed Hollywood's Academy Awards knows that actors can be moved to tears simply by recalling the performance of another actor. Any actor who is rewarded for a long and distinguished professional career secures an enviable position in the pantheon of stars of the Silver Screen.

Certain members of the actors' guild are capable of eulogizing, with fine psychological acumen, the stellar performances of their associates. These players prize the skill that enables them to move an audience by tapping into a wide spectrum of emotions that ranges from subtlety and finesse to stark emotional power. Acting talent consists in the ability to create a living character, an on-screen personality that is sometimes generated by "method acting."

"The Method" features a variety of dynamic techniques that enables the actor to project the character from the inside out. The actor rehearses the role by reaching deeply into her own reservoir of inner emotions and experiences, using empathy, imagination and will-power. The system has its detractors within the acting profession itself; critics maintain that method acting is too rehearsed and can impede spontaneity.

The ability to move the spectator through a wide range of emotions—anticipation, desire, fury, love, passion, pity, scorn, sympathy and tenderness—is no mean skill. In the subtle or overt range of emotions on full display in the cinema or theatre, actors must possess one necessary quality: credibility. Successful players must be able to perform scenes that are believable.

In the execution of any major role, the actor journeys in-and-out of the myriad contrasting places in the soul that separate, by the thinnest of momentary veils, the realms of imagination and reality. As the plot thickens and suspense heightens, dramatic moments explode, only to climax in the resolution of the conflict and the dénouement of the plot.

Yet, despite my admiration for the professional skill of the cinema or theater actor who achieves distinction through excellence, I have certain reservations about this talent as its used today in the television industry. Through its various networks, television studios have at their disposal a veritable small army of actors. These days it seems that everyone wants to be an actor.

For the major television networks and their commercial sponsors, acting today is produced, not so much to honor the profession, but as entertainment for mass consumption; and

consumerism is based on the profit-motive. On the smaller screen, each player in this vast company of aspiring actors enthusiastically performs his or her assigned role.

However, with the proliferation of “soap operas,” situation comedies and dramas, I must wonder how much skill is actually involved in playing the assassin, coroner, criminal, detective, dysfunctional family member, forensic pathologist, judge, lawyer, nurse, surgeon, police officer, or quirky, at odds colleagues or roommates. Some of these roles, grown too familiar by overexposure, have had to resort to type-casting, making fresh approaches to the role difficult to achieve.

The large number of aspiring and existing actors, and the desperate drive for commercial success by the television networks, has had the negative effect of devaluing the profession, compared to the days when the number of actors was smaller, and only the relative few possessed the necessary art to merit public acclaim. The vast increase in smaller motion picture production companies, whose products are also intended for the television industry, has also contributed to undermining the quality of the profession.

This erosion of excellence has also been exacerbated by the gratification of the viewer’s visceral emotions. The satisfaction of the baser instincts has been knowingly exploited by the commercial interests directing the television studios. They understand all too well that these insistent appetites have the power to compel and even to addict.

Throughout the last seven decades, dating from the 1960’s, through repetition of graphic scenes of gratuitous violence and raw sex, the actor’s role has increasingly appealed to the glands, not the heart of the spectator. In some incisive lines from his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize for literature in 1950, William Faulkner had already warned that if writers do not write of “the old universal truths,” they will write “not of love but of lust,” “not of the heart but of the glands.”

The same may be said of stage, screen and television writers. With few exceptions, the universal truths seem to be conspicuously lacking on the big and small screens. But they surely belong there, as much as they do in literature and religion, for without them, as Faulkner warned, art suffers degeneration.

### **The Scholars of the Second Bahá’í Century**

Some of my generation of post-World War Two “baby boomers” belong to the third great wave of scholars who have succeeded the “learned in Bahá” of preceding generations. The first wave lived in the days of the Three Central Figures; the second wave in the interval between the world wars; the third wave, comprising academics, intellectuals, poets, and scholars arose in the generation born after the Second World War (1939-1945). Some, of course, transitioned between waves.

Shoghi Effendi remarked to Mr. Daoud Toeg of Baghdád, a man highly praised by the Guardian, who repeated Shoghi Effendi's comment to me, that the great scholars of the Faith would arise in the West in the second Bahá'í century. Some in this generation may be surpassed in profundity and learning by the scholars of the future or the past, but they will not be able to ignore what this generation has accomplished. All those who have contributed to the fields of scholarship and *belles lettres* have initiated a new stage in the grand journey of learning and creativity that is destined to continue for generations to come.

This is just the beginning of a tidal wave that will continue throughout the Bahá'í Dispensation. This journey beckons all seekers of truth to deepen in the ocean of His words, an ocean whose breadth will extend to the four corners of our planet: "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Habakkuk 2:14) Even the smallest hamlet in the future shall have its scholar, poet, writer or sage.

We who do this work, in our long and sometimes lonely hours of solitude, even as we compose, meditate, pray, read, and delve into the seemingly endless books, files and websites of research, yearn for those painstaking, patient, inspired ones to rise up in our stead to continue this sacred task when we are gone. For these are the learned and creative spirits who shall speak truth to power, fire the imaginations and inspire the souls, and thereby banish the dark forces of contention, corruption, ignorance, mediocrity and superstition forever from the earth, and finally break the chains that have shackled humanity since the beginning of recorded time.

### **Mr. Roger White Poet and Dancer: What the Dream Revealed**

Sometime after Roger White died on April 10, 1993, I had a remarkable dream of the poet. I saw Roger wearing ballet tights, standing before a wall of mirrors, limbering up at the bar, stretching his legs and hip muscles in that swinging, backward-forward leg motion that is one of the basic exercises of the ballet warm-up. I knew, of course, that Roger was a poet and writer. Any Bahá'í who reads creative writing knows that Roger has added his name to the preeminent Bahá'í poets of his generation.

But until the following story was related to me by my mother Joyce, I did not know that Roger had been a dancer. (Those who knew him better than I did were no doubt aware of this fact). This story not only confirms what I dreamt, but it also tells us that in dreams we may access information that is otherwise unavailable to consciousness.

Mother related that in 1955, she had attended a summer school held by the Bahá'ís in the beautiful resort town of Banff, Alberta, located within the famous national park of the same name. She had become a believer just three years before in 1952. The particular scene that she was to witness took place, not in the rugged, majestic wilds of the lovely natural setting that Banff is known for, but in the parking lot of the Banff Hotel.

Mother had ventured out that summer night to enjoy the pristine mountain air. She was sitting on a bench in the light of a gorgeous, full moon, when something in the distance caught her eye. She focused her vision in the half-light to get a closer look, when she saw a solitary figure at one end of the parking lot. She moved closer.

There, adjacent to some pine trees, she saw a man—dancing. In the semi-darkness, she recognized Roger White, dressed in tights, moving his long slim legs and body, performing various dance movements. (Roger would have been at that time about 25 years old). Roger had been much inspired by the Spirit that had animated all those present at that remarkable summer school: the words of Bahá'u'lláh, the learning, the loving fellowship and unity of the friends had moved his soul. That night his body gave expression to what his soul was feeling. With the parking lot as his stage, entranced by the wine of the Spirit, and observed by a young woman of whom he was entirely oblivious, Roger danced his improvised solo of poetry-in-motion.

The seeds for Roger's success in poetry that flowered in the fifth decade of his life, had been sown much earlier in Toronto. Accompanied by his mentor in poetry, the widely published departed poet Larry Rawdon, the former member and dean of our Ottawa Creative Writers' Group, the two young men used to visit Toronto Island together and read their poems to one another. In his early twenties, Roger published at his own expense his first collection of poems, *Summer Window*, illustrated by himself. (Like many creative people, Roger was multi-talented).

When I found out after his death that Roger White had also been a dancer during his artistic career, my dream, I realized, had been a true vision of reality. Poet, actress, writer-producer and esthetics professor, Dr. Anne Gordon Perry, told me later during one of our conversations that earlier in life Roger had succeeded in winning a leading part in the musical "Guys and Dolls," which premiered on Broadway in 1950. And he danced by the light of the moon.

## **The Relevance of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle for Saving the Soul from Twenty-First Century Materialism**

### ***What Modern Philosophy has Forgotten***

Approximately ten schools of ancient and modern philosophy have been identified by scholars. Although the ancients were preoccupied with different philosophical questions than modern philosophers, the issues that have arisen in modernity could not have developed without the early foundations built by the ancient seekers of knowledge. In that sense, modern intellectual attainments depend upon past achievements.

The reported quip of Alfred North Whitehead makes the point that the history of western philosophy consists of nothing more than "footnotes to Plato." Now academics maintain that it is notoriously difficult to distinguish the teachings of Plato in the Socratic Dialogues from those of

Socrates himself. It is clear that Plato's acknowledged debt to his teacher indicates that his thought is largely coherent with the philosophy of his mentor.

The philosophical discourse that has emerged since the Enlightenment is heavily indebted to Plato. Kant's remark that the Enlightenment consisted in the human ability to think for oneself independently of other authorities—he certainly had Christian ecclesiastics in mind—is totally coherent with Socrates' fierce search for *Philosophia*, i.e. the love of wisdom.

The meaning of the binary root of the Greek word yields both “love” and “wisdom.” The *Philo* (love) component of the root has almost completely disappeared from the discipline. Love *per se* is rarely considered in the study of philosophy, except as a passing mention.

It is also ironic that modern students of philosophy seem to have forgotten that *Sophia* must also be found in the practical decisions that regulate human conduct. Outside the purely abstract realm, with the possible exception of the existentialists, philosophers rarely apply their understanding of philosophical questions to the human condition.

Philosophy, then, begs to be applied to the human condition, and more particularly to decision-making. These decisions or moral choices should reflect sound judgment, based on mature knowledge and experience, rather than purely abstract intellectual speculation that has no direct bearing on human existence.

The philosopher in our day has lost his or her role as a sage, a role that the philosopher in ancient times enjoyed. The sage-philosopher should embody in his or her teaching a return to Lady Wisdom. Wisdom is by nature perennial. And yet, the notion of wisdom has all but disappeared in the pursuit of modern philosophy. Wisdom belongs, not only religion, but also to philosophy. The concept of wisdom itself bears further examination. What does it mean to be a sage?—a wise woman or man?

Socrates and Plato, who along with Aristotle are the two outstanding founders of western ethics and epistemology, continue to be relevant today. Although it is not immediately self-evident, their relevance still serves to combat the materialism that has vitiated both western and eastern civilization today. Materialism, although it manifests itself primarily in the economic activity of capitalism and the lifestyle that it generates, it is nonetheless rooted in a false philosophy.

### ***The False Premises in Materialistic Philosophy***

This “philosophy” is based on a set of implicit, unexamined, erroneous assumptions pertaining to human existence. Some of these main false assumptions follow: (1) that the acquisition of capital and material goods is directly correlated to the health, well-being and happiness of both individuals and nations (2) that the acquisition of capital gain is *the* worthy and justified main purpose of human life (3) that the accumulation of wealth and acquired goods is the standard to which all should aspire (4) that the amassing of wealth and material possessions indicates that an individual has achieved greater “success” than any other individual. (5) that the

wealthy individual bears no special responsibility in sharing wealth with others and engaging in philanthropic deeds (6) That one is perfectly justified in flaunting one's wealth and gratifying one's desires, whatever the cost, because one has worked hard in acquiring wealth and deserves to do so.

Just as millions have died for the old lie that it is sweet and fitting (*dulce et decorum*) to die for one's country, today millions have lost their soul to the false faces of materialism. These deceptive illusions, to the extent that they are ambitiously pursued and acquired, breed superficiality, vanity, hubris, addictions and lust: be it for fame, material possessions, or power.

In its most grotesque manifestation, materialism is idolatry. In contemporary society, this idol-worship propitiates the cult of the public personality and the coveting of mammon. This idolatry is essentially the same phenomenon illustrated by the biblical paradigm of the ancient Israelites, who reverted to worshipping the Egyptian bull-god Apis, and in a later period, the Canaanite bull, "the golden calf," the fertility god Baal, under the leadership of Aaron, the brother of Moses. (Ex. 32, 1 Kings: 12)

Paul Tillich's definition of faith expresses the religious attitude toward life as that of "ultimate concern." Our ultimate concern tends to be what drives or dominates our total experience. If our ultimate concern is the acquisition of capital and material goods, to the exclusion of transcendental values and the community-building actions that express them, then we qualify as idolaters. When the acquisition of material objects, power, fame or success becomes the dominating passion of our lives, it banishes from hearts and minds the love of God and devotion to Him. Worshipping anything other than God is idolatry and qualifies as *shirk* in both biblical and Islamic terms.

### ***The Ancient Battle of Matter and Spirit: What is the True Foundation?***

Materialism is no modern phenomenon. The battle against materialism began with Socrates and Plato. Both men presented the phenomena of being as transcending the strict materialism of Democritus the atomist. Democritus held that the atoms that existed in the void were the only real things in the universe because they were eternal and indestructible.

Democritus's discovery, although it was certainly remarkably visionary considering the then rudimentary state of "natural philosophy" (science), it set the stage for the ongoing battle between matter and spirit, as to which entity constitutes the one elementary "substance" and ultimate reality. For Democritus the only reality was atomic. For masses around the world, the only thing that matters is matter. To resolve the perceived spirit versus matter dichotomy, the postulate that matter and spirit require one another for human existence would appear to be the commonsensical solution to the bifurcation, if one seeks to eliminate a "false dichotomy."

The question of matter and spirit, or matter versus spirit, suggests another compelling question in face of the universal and ineluctable phenomenon of death: "Every soul shall taste death." (Qu'rán 29:57) Death looms up large to confront thoughtful souls with one ultimate

question: what becomes of consciousness *if* it is dependent on the bodily infrastructure of the brain and nervous system, when they no longer function? This question of the one, enduring, fundamental reality continues to be relevant, at least for those who affirm the continuity of human consciousness in a life-after-death. For those who deny the afterlife, human existence must depend on matter alone and must needs be confined to this world only.

### ***Materialism and the New Atheism***

It is no coincidence that the current wave of materialism has been accompanied by the so-called “new atheism,” and a dramatic falling away from organized religion, with the concurrent, rising prestige of the perceived epistemological certainties of science and its benefits. Materialism tends to be inimical to religion, except, notably today, in those Protestant evangelical Christian denominations that inculcate “prosperity theology.”

Marx’s proletarian secular revolution, which viewed religion as the symptom of temporary distress, i.e. of failed social conditions, a distress that would ultimately disappear once the working classes had achieved material prosperity, stands out today as a failed vision of the earthly paradise he promised, in which man, and man alone, “will move around himself as his own true Sun.”

We should note that prosperity theology has produced critics from within the same Christians denominations that once generated it, because it covers materialistic “blessing” with a veneer of self-serving piety. Those same critics charge that it exploits the wealth of naïve believers, including the poor, to enrich the “televangelists” who preach it, some of whom have been charged with the scandal of financial fraud, and who ostentatiously display conspicuous, inordinate wealth, well beyond their needs.

Any lifestyle, theology, philosophy or political system that is based primarily on consumption and the acquisition of wealth and material goods, as the sole markers of status, success, prosperity and guarantors of happiness is doomed to eventual bitter disillusion. It is ironic that the philosophy of consumerism is proving today to be self-defeating. The hope of limitless growth, and the constant plea of politicians to stimulate the economy through consumption, is increasingly being recognized as unsustainable. So-called “trickle-down economics,” has proven in-the-end not to trickle down at all. It continues to further enrich the wealthy and widen increasingly the already unconscionable gap between the-haves-and-have-nots.

Although organized religion has continued to suffer a serious decline during the opening two decades of the twenty-first century, interest in things amorphously “spiritual” has persisted since the 1970’s under the umbrella term, the New Age Movement. A noteworthy new dichotomy has arisen during the last decade, often expressed as “I’m spiritual but not religious.” So numerous are the people who have separated spirituality from religion that they have been assigned an acronym: the SBNR’s.

The Bahá’í Faith heals the severing of spirituality from organized religion by ensuring a dynamic, functional relationship between the spiritual wisdom found in its sacred writings and

the transformation of society through its community-building activities and administrative institutions. It further restores the delicate balance between the mandate derived from institutional authority, one the one hand, and the respect for individual freedom of conscience and action on the other hand.

Although the Bahá'í Faith clearly recognizes individual rights and freedoms, it prescribes certain limits on this “freedom” by replacing the culture of critique and contest with that of “frank and loving consultation,” and by reminding the individual of his or her social responsibilities to participate in grassroots community-building endeavors. It balances the western propensity to self-centered individualism with the eastern tendency to enforce collectivism and conformity.

### ***Science and Scientism***

I return to a theme alluded to above. We must distinguish the legitimate pursuit of science, one of the glories of humanity, from scientism. Since the post Second World War period, the western world has been witnessing an increase in the numbers of both the agnostic and atheistic supporters of scientism. These overly confident supporters of scientism believe that God, religion and spirituality may be dispensed with because science is all-sufficient unto itself. They hold that science will eventually explain everything and solve all humanity's problems through technical and scientific achievements.

The tenor of this overly confident attitude in the all-sufficiency of science is found in some words of the distinguished theoretical physicist, the late Stephen Hawking (d. 2018). Dr. Hawking boasted at the end of his book, *A Brief History of Time*, that when scientists will have formulated a unified field theory, *viz.* one that would coherently explain all the physical laws of the universe, they will succeed in explaining “the mind of God.”

It is surprising that Stephen Hawking had not yet realized that any cosmological theory, however sophisticated it may be, can never be sealed by finality. A “final” understanding of the laws of the cosmos and the natural world will be forever beyond the grasp of the human intellect. As long as instrumental, experimental and theoretical means allow the investigation of natural phenomena, the process of discovery will continue as long as humans engage in the scientific enterprise.

The “solution” of any one of the laws of physics must necessarily give rise in turn to other unanswered questions until a new paradigm emerges. This sequence of paradigms, with alternate theories replacing one another, and former theories being questioned, will continue as long as the scientific quest itself continues.

It did not occur to Dr. Hawking that when he finally declared that he was an atheist late in his life, that understanding “the mind of God” must also include Divine Revelation. No end can be conceived to learning and understanding, whether it be for the multitude of questions raised by either the investigation of experimental science or religion with its theological paradigms,



new theories and textual and historical studies. Humanity's quest to push back the frontiers of both science and religion will never end. The human thirst for knowledge is forever unquenchable, just as the scope of knowledge itself is forever infinite.

Materialism and its twin brother scientism are two of the pernicious myths that are being eagerly swallowed *holus bolus* by large segments of the population in virtually every country of our globe. These two myths are surely more harmful for the life of the mind and soul than the ancient superstitious belief that the gods were angry when it thundered.

Implicit to the unexamined assumptions of scientism, which are prompted largely by the hubris generated by the epistemological certainties of science, the following have resulted: (1) The denial of Spirit, only to be replaced by and reduced to biochemical processes and the dynamic workings of natural law. (2) The recrudescence of agnosticism and atheism. (3)

The gainsaying of the existence of the immortal soul and the afterlife. These three baneful results will eventually prove to be the nemesis of humanity's overconfidence in its own powers and abilities.

### ***Nature's Revenge and Climate Change***

Saving the earth from anthropogenic climate change and global warming has initiated a modern international crusade by many a courageous and perspicacious young and older adult. Hinduism teaches at a very basic level of its understanding of Divinity that God is manifested in the operations of nature, either to reward or punish mankind by its own virtue or folly.

Before sophisticated moderns dismiss such an idea as being puerile, they should reflect on the disastrous results that the world is experiencing today as a result of the unconscionable abuse of the natural resources that humanity has inherited from a bounteous Creator. In the Book of Psalms (77:18), God's thunder and lightning are present in the whirlwind, the symbol of *karma* or the consequences of our actions: "They that sow the wind, shall reap the whirlwind (Hosea 8:7). The prophet Isaiah (17:13) depicts the rushing nations fleeing before the whirlwind of God's rebuke. In all three biblical examples, the chastising Will of God is depicted as being expressed through natural phenomena.

This precept should not surprise us, if we pause to consider its meaning in a more detached perspective. Consider that the human body, that most intricate marvel of nature, will begin to rebel and react against its owner if it is abused. The result is an angry storm of illness and pain.

It is no different for the delicate balance that nature preserves in order to perpetuate its own existence. In our time, Mother Nature, the origin of all physical life and the progenitor of all mankind, is surely stirring up this planetary whirlwind as she reacts to global warming and climate change. The industrial despoilers and polluters of our world are now witnessing the deleterious effects of their own actions. Who knows what other catastrophes lie in wait for mankind as we reach the critical threshold of global warming caused by the CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations

that produce greenhouse gases? By the ineluctable law of cause and effect, these catastrophes have become largely unavoidable.

### ***Spirit is the Foundation of Matter not the Reverse***

Plato, Socrates and Aristotle were not of course preoccupied by climate change, but their inclusion of the purely spiritual element(s) in the phenomena of being—in the spirit of nature, the human soul, justice in the state, and especially in the transcendent realms of Plato’s unchanging world of Forms—established the forms of spirit as the foundation of matter.

This major insight oriented intellectual pursuit in an entirely new direction, one that turned out to be coherent with Judeo-Christian monotheism. This monotheism had already conceived of God as Spirit, and the divine names as the fundamental reality. Plato, Socrates and Aristotle added weight, along more proper philosophic lines of inquiry, to the monotheistic Judaic belief, shared by Christianity and Islam, in Eternal Spirit, i.e. God.

It has often been mentioned by students of philosophy that the Platonic foundation of reality created a dichotomy of body and soul, spirit and matter with which we have wrestled ever since. Plato, and later Descartes, have been accused of creating a dualism of mind/matter, soul/body. This dilemma *seemed* to have already been solved centuries earlier by the Hindu Vedic pandits with their belief in pantheism, the fusion of matter and spirit. That doctrine, however, should be reformulated to make it coherent with transcendental monotheism as *panentheism*: i.e. God is in all things but all things are not God.

The Platonic view, however, is not ultimately dichotomous; it is only partially dichotomous. As I have suggested above, it holds that Spirit is the eternal foundation on which matter rests—not the reverse—even if they require the existence of one another in space-time.

Matter is subject to the inevitable changes that accompany birth, growth, maturity, old age and death. But the soul and “the world of the Forms,” that is the world of the eternal archetypes (*alám-i-mithál*), translated as “world of similitudes” by British scholar Stephen Lambden, and the “imaginal world/realm” by Henri Corbin, are ever-bright, beautiful, changeless and deathless.

Socrates, Plato and Aristotle taught that above and beyond, within and despite the natural world, and the temporal flux of this world of illusion, an immortal soul and a beatific visionary realm exist. This realm can be discovered in the dream world, through philosophic contemplation, mystical experience, and the systematic investigation of Truth.

### ***The Trial and Death of Socrates***

At his trial, Socrates was offered a pardon, if he gave up his philosophy, but he willingly drank the poison Hemlock to execute the death sentence handed down by the Athenian jurors. This is clear evidence that Socrates was so convinced of his own teaching that he was willing to

die rather than renounce the search for truth, his belief in the oneness of God, the immortality of the soul, and his belief in the Ideal Good, where both truth and beauty dwell together in a “Sea of Beauty.”

The world that Socrates believed he would find at the hour of his death, should not be conceived as some abstract, ethereal world of the philosopher’s ideas. It was a personal immortality in which he believed. For there, as he told the men of Athens in his famous *Apology*, he hoped to converse with Orpheus, Hesiod, Homer, Odysseus, Sisyphus and others.

To fearlessly and willingly forfeit his own life amply demonstrates that the thing of greatest value to most humans—life itself—meant nothing to Socrates, compared to defending the intellectual freedom of conscience, the search for Truth, and his profound conviction in the vast and immortal sea of souls.

He anticipated joining the great ones whom he admired and loved, and contemplating the spiritual realities that form the eternal, unchanging design and pattern that constellate the numberless, magnificent forms of the *Kosmos*, in the Pythagorean sense, as adopted by integral philosopher, Ken Wilber.

Socrates’ execution was punishment for the charge of impiety, which challenged Athenian polytheism. Socrates was *the* leading advocate of monotheism in the city-state. The other charge that he had corrupted the youth of Athens had strong political motives, since the widespread support that Socrates had gained as an outstanding, influential teacher of young men, was threatening the city-state with an intellectual and spiritual revolution, a revolution that the men of Athens, with their vested interests, hoped by his death to prevent.

But there was a price to pay for the execution of the great philosopher, unsuspected by those influential men who sought his death. The gradual collapse of Athenian democracy can be traced from the death of Socrates. His prophetic words proved true, for he warned the Assembly that governed the *polis* that they would bring divine punishment down on their own heads by his unjust death.

### **The Soul and the Paradoxes of Human Existence in Light of Eternity**

The paradox, contradiction or opposite is an essential condition of the mortal world. When considered, however, in the perspective of this life and the next, the soul reveals an ability to resolve certain existential paradoxes. Paradoxes or contradictions pose the greatest logical challenges to philosophers, logicians and mathematicians.

We perceive paradoxes intuitively by reflection on the nature of our own existence, such as the juxtaposition of motion and stillness, permanence and change, life and death. These paradoxes can be resolved through deep reflection as a function of the dynamics of the human soul. Because we continuously face the opposites of motion and stillness, permanence and change, life and death, it is only fitting to ask: which condition ends up being the final state? Is it

motion or stillness, the fluctuations of time or the steady-state of eternity, eternal life or the death that signals the end of consciousness?

Within the dynamics of the human soul, what are perceived as contradictory states may be seen actually to co-exist without contradiction. To illustrate this point, we shall consider Wittgenstein's use of the duck/rabbit sketch, first conceived by Jastrow. This sketch is based on a Gestalt principle, i.e. the duck-rabbit figure is first perceived as just one figure.

Experience shows, however, that it can also be perceived as two figures, but not, it is important to note, simultaneously. Here the factor of time, as well as the intention and perception of the observer, alters the vision of what is seen, either as a duck or rabbit, from one moment to the other. This is not an exact comparison to the point I am making, but what I want to emphasize from Jastrow's sketch is whether the illustration is perceived as a duck or rabbit is resolved through perspectivism, that is, by the taking of thought and by willing what the observer intends to see.

So too is the soul's ability to resolve the above-mentioned existential paradoxes. Although the soul was created on a moment in time, and although it dwells in space-time through its association with the body, it is an article of faith that it is eternal. It may now be understood that the soul *already dwells in eternity*; it does not have await the moment of death to experience eternity. Although in space-time the body's activities depend on the motive-power of the soul, the soul is *itself* not in space-time.

This assertion may at first strike us as being counter-intuitive because the soul is associated with the body in the temporal flux. The bodily subject, however, when she meditates upon the existence of her own soul, perceives the soul to be in space-time because the body exists in space-time. It is *only* space-time that creates the illusion of the temporality of the soul.

Eternity is not a condition that is acquired only at the moment of death. The bliss of eternity may indeed be acquired at the moment of death, but the experience of eternity already pre-exists in the human soul. That it will experience a radically different condition at the moment of death is without question; but the possibility to experience eternity is not attained only at death's door. It is a faculty that the soul already possesses during its association with the body. Because the soul temporarily inhabits the body, but dwells also in eternity, it exists simultaneously in both states.

To repeat: the soul exists in the paradox of space-time while it inhabits the body, but at the same time by meditation and profound reflection, it becomes conscious that it also lives at the same time in eternity. Although this realization resolves the paradox, it does not, of course, completely deliver us from existing in space-time because temporality is an essential existential condition.

We have seen in the essay above the formula prescribed by Plato and Socrates for attaining the Ideal Good after death: contemplation of the Form of the Good, which may be practiced as the contemplation of God through the intermediary of His Divine Manifestation, and living a life of virtue.

In a faith-based perspective, Christianity teaches a similar precept, through one of Christ's main teachings: the "second birth." This refers to the life of faith, the awakening to inner spiritual life, one of the several meanings of attaining to the Kingdom of God, one of Christ's central teachings. Eternal life is attained through faith in Christ, and by the consequent living of a virtuous life, through which the Kingdom of Heaven/God is attained. As a property of the soul, the Kingdom of God is both within us now in space-time and lives forever after death in eternity. Eternity in temporality and eternity in eternity.

Plato and Socrates supplied intellectual foundations to Jesus's later Gospel teaching, but the Christ, like Socrates before Him, testified to the eternal life of the Spirit by the living example of His own life and sacrificial death, just as Socrates willingly forfeited his own life for his love of Truth and his refusal to submit to tyranny.

The same gift of the Kingdom of Heaven Christ offered to every believer who accepted Him, just as Plato offered the teachings of Socrates to those who were willing to pursue truth, virtue and the contemplation of the transcendent Ideals, those realities of beauty and truth that constellate the supreme Form of the Good, that is God.

### **A Modern Ballad: The Tragic Death of John Doe**

\*The following essay is a belated rendering of a story reported on 28 July, 2000 by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) television news. It lay in my files for years. I am resurrecting this modern story here because it has all the features of an ancient ballad. Like the ballads of old, this tragic story evokes a heart-rending pathos.

He was a young man in his 20's or early 30's. We do not know his name, his exact age or any other fact connected to his life. He may have been from east coast Canada or New England. A hitchhiker with whom he once traveled reported to the police that he mentioned going "back east." He showed neither the tell-tale signs of a street person, nor the tattered appearance of those migrants who live on the open road. His hands were soft and his nails carefully manicured.

While eating a meal at a fast-food restaurant, witnesses say he showed a certain decorum in his table manners. He unfolded his napkin carefully and placed it on his knees. He was reportedly well-spoken. The only thing he carried was a precious memento, a pewter rose broken off at the stem, a symbol perhaps of a love-gone-wrong.

As a child or youth, this man was once a fragment of someone's heart, the piece of a puzzle that belonged to a family—to a mother, father, sister, brother, relatives. But he was more, much more—and—sadly, less, much less to those who knew him. The traveler was just one of the many lonely misfits and victims of a society grown too callous to care.

Try as they may, these souls are unable to secure a place of belonging in the world, to find a sweetheart or a wife, to establish a home and family, to secure a profession, or just to find in life all the ordinary things that we so carelessly call "normal." To these souls, what is called

“the world,” which is meant to be the womb and bosom of us all, becomes instead a fearful and lonely place of exile, a barren land so cold that only the specter of death offers relief from an unbearable *Weltschmerz*.

He had a certain dignity, this nameless one. And he died as nobles in another age and land went to the guillotine for crimes they did not commit. On a sunny, windblown day, when green blades of grass grew up among the grey rocks of the railbed, he knelt down, as a young knight might kneel before his liege lord, and placed his neck on the rail, just as the locomotive with its long load of freight was shuffling into the trainyards. The engineer had no hope of stopping. He is haunted by that ghastly scene that so suddenly surged up before his astonished eyes. Choking back the tears, he recounts the tale.

The police have taken the case to the media in the hope that someone might come forward and claim the body of the lost traveler. Although the authorities are usually obliged to dispense with cases of unknown persons quickly, especially when the facts they possess are so meagre, they are showing for this man extraordinary compassion.

By the strange circumstances of his life and death, this nameless one, with the mild manners and gentle ways, has moved them to take extra steps. In their efforts to connect him to others, the police have made a composite sketch from his severed head. They are hoping that someone will know or remember him: an acquaintance, friend, relative, or even a member of his own family.

Although bureaucracy is usually heartless and impersonal, this case shows that even faceless officialdom can be moved by caring and compassion. The authorities have buried the stranger with more than a modicum of dignity and respect. Those who showed proof of compassion in these unusual circumstances did honor to the nameless one—and, by the same gesture, they did honor to themselves.

Two words were inscribed on his tombstone: “John Doe” the neutral designation we invoke when one’s personal identity does not matter. A comforting Gospel verse was written below his name. I would have added, had I somehow been able, the following epithet: “May the gentle stranger who longed to find love in this world find it in the next.”

### **Recapitulation and Endurance in the Senior Years**

If we manage to survive the vicissitudes of life into our senior years, we find ourselves contemplating the cycles of the years now fled—childhood, youth, adulthood, the middle years. With them come a flood of memories that constellate each stage of life. Much like a farmer who reaps a rich harvest, these memories are stored in the mind, until they are recalled, as gleanings of cherished moments we once lived through.

This recollection is not just an exercise in nostalgia, an old person’s vain repetition of the past, nor a way to escape the present. Rather, it is a necessary recapitulation of the life we have

lived, so that we might better adapt to and sustain the increased load imposed by life as we enter our declining years.

This retrospective brings its own welcome consolations, as we take a legitimate but measured pride in any accomplishments we have striven to realize over our lifetime. This exercise of recalling the past in the evening of life enables us to become more reconciled to that little known and poorly understood person called the self. At the same time, we rediscover the brighter, soul-satisfying scenes that constellated the *tableau vivant* of our past lives.

Any individual who has a conscience still struggles to accept those memories that continue to trouble the mind. We wonder, as we look back, how we could have done such a thing at a time of our youth or adulthood when we lacked the maturity or the will-power to withstand what today we would adamantly refuse.

But with passing time, we learn to pacify these memories. We realize that we simply did not possess the maturity at an earlier age to do that which we surely would have done at a later age. With that realization, these memories recede into the background, losing their sting.

When joined to gratitude for the precious gift of life, acceptance and detachment enable us to draw nearer to that elusive goal: becoming an authentic self. It is a strange paradox that we must constantly strive to improve our character, just as we must learn to accept the person that we are. This dual dynamic of the balance of striving and acceptance, even into old age, helps us to achieve that state of mind that eludes so many: contentment.

I alluded above to troubling memories. Our recapitulation must include them, if for no other reason than to discover any instructive lessons that can still be found in the past (or present) error of our ways. In bringing ourselves to account, we do well to recall, that although our past mistakes may be many, one tiny drop of the compassionate mercy of the Ever-Forgiving Lord of mankind is able to wash away our most grievous sins.

Much about surviving and overcoming the ongoing tests of life depends upon patience and the ability to endure. Many of those who survive into old age have been able simply to endure. And even if we cannot fully fathom how we were enabled to survive our most troubled times, even when we thought we could not endure the pain, even when we feared that we were condemned to a suffering that seemed impossible to bear, somehow we found the strength to endure.

And... just as the dark clouds of suffering were lifting, just as the raging storms were subsiding, our eyes were suddenly brightened by the unexpected sunshine of His love. We felt the touch of a loved one's hand, the warm embrace of the open arms that welcomed us home, the companionship of a tender heart, the smiling face and the ready laughter that reawakened the bubbling joy that had all but faded away. From that moment forward, life made sense again; we felt whole once more.

We hope that endurance will count as steadfastness because we kept faith throughout our darkest hours. May it count as precious in His sight because we did not allow our afflictions to

sour the heady wine He so graciously offered us, the wine that could have turned to brackish waters, drunk by the ingrates who blame God for their adversities and losses. Abandoned to their fate, they forgot the promise contained in these words of Christ: “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10)

After we have been forged in the fire, we shall find ourselves grateful for the adversities that we have sustained, whether those adversities rose out of the depths of our own ignorance and weakness or the chastening but loving Hand of God. As time passes, we begin to see that the heartbreaks and sorrows we endured were but the dawning-places of brighter tomorrows.

We shall see that our shattered nerves enabled us to forge a new identity, one that transformed the callow, carefree youth into the mature, seasoned adult. We shall understand that *la noche oscura del ama* (the dark night of the soul), portrayed in St. John of the Cross’s celebrated 16<sup>th</sup> century poem, prepared us to ride the riotous waters on the ark of salvation, instead of sinking beneath the waves.

Excruciating though it may be, once we have torn away the mask of the false self, we shall rejoice that God had *His* way with our poor, paltry selves. Though we began the pilgrimage of life as lowly vessels of water and clay, in the end we shall rejoice that the Hand of the Divine Artisan so fashioned the gemstone of our soul as to reflect the multi-faceted splendors of His glory.

### **The Strange Paradox of Theology and Union with God**

Theology is based on a strange paradox. I say this as one who has loved the sacred study ever since my university days, although some Bible stories had already captured my interest at Sunday School, during the days when my mother Joyce Mary Halsted McLean was studying the Bahá’í Faith. Although the cognitive, doctrinal approach to religion has clear limitations, I have always believed that the metaphorical “voice of God” could be heard within sound theological arguments or propositions. Man-made theology—in writing “man-made,” I recognize that women theologians and mystics have also contributed to the discipline—although it contains a multitude of errors, derives ultimately from the divine revelations given to the Prophets.

I listen for the echo of the divine voice when I read or write theology, as I attempt to distinguish erroneous and obscure interpretations from those high thoughts that convey the sterling ring of truth. Theological discourse originated in the noble human attempt to understand the Word of God, but over the centuries, theology became corrupt.

It has suffered from clericalism in all its baneful associations: dogmatism, fanaticism, hypocrisy, intellectual pride, legalism, and sectarianism. The historical record shows that some dogmas have caused heresies and sectarianism; and if that were not enough, bloody wars among religionists, both within and without the same faith. Historically, theology has been perverted to justify assassination, the abuse of children and women, crusades, hate-speech, inquisitions and



warfare. Any theology that is weaponized for ideological and political ends both perverts and subverts the true purposes of religion.

Despite *odium theologicum* and its blood-stained record, the aim of theology to understand the teachings of the world's holy books, to separate truth from error, remains an admirable endeavor, so long as it fulfills the motivating impulse animating creation: to know, love and serve God and man.

Theology is an earnest striving to understand God, His Divine Manifestations/Prophets, His ways, and the multitude of divine questions that arise regarding His existence, His actions in the world, and the understanding of "dark passages" i.e. obscure scriptural verses. But theology can never be fully authentic, never entirely complete, never fulfill its intended purpose, without being rooted in these four things: the sacred texts, the love of God, the love of mankind and ethical living.

Theology is based on a strange paradox: it attempts to understand a Mystery that can never be explained. But then it holds this attempt in common with all science. Even the "hard sciences" explain what was originally mysterious. Theology's fundamental axiom holds that the nature of God or the Divine Essence is unknowable. In one sense, it seems illogical to attempt to understand what can never be fully understood. Political scientists know the science of government; microbiologists understand the workings of the single cell; the botanist understands the mechanics of flowers; sociologists understand the dynamics of human societies and organizations.

But theology states that in His essence, God can never be known. Man's capacity to understand the Divinity is completely outside the order of human intelligence, for the simple reason that the creature can never fully understand the Creator, any more than the musical instrument knows the nature of the musician who plays it or the statue understands the sculptor who molds it.

Islam condemns as impiety the attempt to penetrate the Essence of God because it is a thing forbidden and impossible. Any such attempt trespasses on both the sanctity of God and the limitations imposed on human capacity by the Creator. Any such attempt constitutes *hybris*, the sin of pride, the root of all sin.

Our attempt to understand God is greatly assisted, nonetheless, by the axiomatic distinction between understanding the Essence of God, on the one hand, and His names and attributes, on the other. Although understanding the names and attributes of God clearly lies within the range of human cognition, we should disabuse ourselves of the notion that our capacity to do so solves the mysterious nature of the divine names. Our understanding of the "names and attributes of God" is relative, never absolute. It is relative to our capacity to understand them at any given point in our life, which in turn is relative to the age in which we live.

No matter how learned believers may be, they can never attain an absolute understanding of the divine names revealed by the Divine Manifestation. What we do know of the divine names

is revealed in His sacred writings and is manifested in His person. Other limitations are imposed on the human ability to understand certain divine questions. Bahá'u'lláh tells us in *The Hidden Words* that He left some hidden mysteries undisclosed that He has concealed behind the veil of the Holy of Holies. These sacred realities can never be penetrated.

Within the Adamic cycle, Abraham, the prototype for all faithful monotheists, and later Moses within Judaism, upheld the absolute transcendent nature of God. The Hebrew Bible teaches that His face would forever be hidden; and yet He revealed Himself nonetheless “in a pillar of cloud by day” and “a pillar of fire by night.” (But the cloud still obscures and the fire is still surrounded by outer darkness).

The great lawgiver would speak to Israel from behind a veil. Although Moses spoke to God face to face, He was forbidden from seeing God in the fullness of all His Glory. *Moshe Rabbainu* was denied from beholding the Creator, the Infinite *Ein Sof* of the Jewish mystics, the eternal “I am that I am,” (YHWH) (Jehovah), the theonym revealed to Moses on Sinai.

God’s answer to Moses, although it revealed one of the names of God, still conceals as much as it reveals of the nature of the Holy One of Israel. For what does it tell us of the nature of God if He reveals simply “I am that I am?” (The four-letter tetragram is sometimes translated as “the Eternal” or “the Creator.”) With every advance into the nature of the Divine Darkness, the cosmic void continues to expand.

Ages would pass away before the nature of the divine attributes would be more fully revealed in the unparalleled outpouring of Divine Revelation dispensed by the Three Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith, thus creating a “quantum leap” in the history of religion. *Some Answered Questions* by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is obviously central to understanding Bahá'í philosophical theology; Shoghi Effendi’s *The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh* and his letters have in turn cast further light on fundamental divine questions. The as of yet untranslated tablets of the Three Central Figures will continue to cast further light on the divine questions. These sacred writings will continue to be translated throughout the remainder of the Bahá'í Dispensation.

The mystics seek union with God, but Bahá'u'lláh has revealed that when they claim union with Him, they have erred. Despite their exalted claims, they have never merged with the Divine Essence, but instead, they have communed with the highest manifestations of their own soul’s divine nature.

Were it possible to attain the Divine Essence, the Blessed Beauty reveals, death would immediately result, in the same way the wood-chip would be instantly consumed by the heat of the sun. “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.” (Ex. 33:20) Humans do not possess the spiritual capacity for “union with God,” at least in the literal-grammatical sense of the phrase, but rather with the higher nature of the believer’s own soul, the “divine gem” that is among the greatest of the many great gifts of God.

Now the phrase “union with God” does have a variety of other valid meanings, including merging one’s will with the divine commands, a virtue that requires not only obedience, but especially love, since love is a more noble motivator of obedience than fear. The phrase “union

with God” also points to the obliteration of the ego to live in God, the well-known Sufistic precept of the death of self (*faná*), and being “reborn” in the Christian Gospel sense, when the believer experiences a much fuller, immediate manifestation of the divine attributes within the soul.

The death of self, a usually gradual process, witnesses the birth of a new creature, a recreated soul who, as Bahá’u’lláh describes it in some remarkable passages in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, awakens to a new life that is charged with an entirely new, fresh increment of spiritual perception and power. The struggle with one’s own ego and its imperious desires is inherent to the process of spiritual growth and continues for a lifetime until our last breath.

Although mankind collectively will progress eternally toward the perfection of its own station, just as the individual soul will progress forever toward the goal of its desire, Shoghi Effendi has written through his secretary that the individual’s ego cannot be fully quelled as long as humans live on the face of the earth.

This “death of self” and living in God, consequently, must have in this life a relative meaning. Based on the testimony of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in *Memorials of the Faithful*, it is certain that the death of self was achieved in their lifetime by some of those who attained the presence of the Three Central Figures, and even by some who did not attain the physical presence of the Three Sublimes Ones or the Guardian.

Union with God can also refer to the believer’s attaining the mystical presence of the Divine Manifestation, but this does not mean that the believer has become one with God’s Perfect Intermediary. One can “be in the presence,” without attaining union with the Presence. Whatever mystical union the believer feels that he or she has attained with the Divine Manifestation is but a grace on His part.

Complete union with the Divine Manifestation/Prophet can only be accomplished by another Divine Manifestation. The sincere believer may be favored with attaining the Divine Presence, but this realization is but that of a servant falling at the feet of the King. If the servant is in his Lord’s presence, it is only by His grace; the servant remains the servant and the King remains the King.

To return to the theme. That the purpose of existence is to know and love the Unknowable One is a theoretical, but not a practical paradox. Despite the contradiction inherent in sacred study—striving to know the Unknowable—the theologian/divine philosopher will continue to clarify all the divine questions relating to the nature of God and His attribute. This is to be sure a very tall order, one that will not appeal to every spiritual seeker, but to adopt the *via negativa*—to remain silent about God—is not an option.

For in their love for God, men and women cannot but help to mention and to strive to understand Him, however limited their speech, however obscure their thoughts. *Lectio divina*, seen in its most transcendent dimension, is limited by the human inability to circumscribe what must forever be a closed circle. Seen in this light, praise becomes the highest form of wisdom.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has greatly assisted in resolving the paradox of theology with His hierarchical, quaternary, *abjad* schema of God, the Prophet, the Holy Spirit and Mankind. His schema offers a succinct representation of God’s creative, divine action in the past, present and future. The Master portrays in His original diagram the eternal process of divine revelation.

And what of our understanding of the station of the Divine Manifestation? Nor can human understanding ever penetrate the transcendent station of the Divine Manifestation because for *Irfán*, or mystical understanding to occur, unless we have experienced a thing, we cannot understand it. We may discuss it, attempt to explain it, but we have not really understood it unless we have experienced it. Because we cannot experience God directly, understanding God is impossible, except for that which is revealed by the Divine Manifestation.

And although the understanding of the Divine Manifestation becomes more accessible to human understanding because of the abundance of sacred writings, neither can the station of the Divine Manifestation be fully understood, since humans occupy a station radically different from the Prophet. To say that the Divine Manifestation is human, like us, is not an exact statement either, although it is often repeated. His humanity is not the same thing as our humanity.

A clue to the limitations of divine knowledge can be read into the compound word “understanding.” It combines two root words, “standing” and “under.” If we understand something, *it* stands under us, as it were, meaning that we have grasped the meaning. But if we invert the sense, if *we* “stand under,” the meaning still remains above our heads. The word understanding interpreted in this latter sense adumbrates one meaning of the word: that understanding can never be complete.

“God-talk” must use rational constructs to describe the divinity of His chosen Prophet/Divine Manifestation, and the many questions related to the Prophet’s actions, attributes, and ontological nature. But again, these rational constructs are not fully adequate to depict the metaphysical realities that they attempt to convey. We must live, therefore, with this strange paradox and strive, as long as we are able, to resolve the paradox of theology to the best of our ability.

### **The Simplicity and Complexity of Attaining Spiritual Freedom**

Spiritual freedom is the most beneficial psychological condition that humans can attain. I say this as one who has often felt that he is much less free than he longs to be. I once knew that freedom in my childhood and youth, but this was a freedom based on innocence and naïveté, not strength. In adulthood, my life has been a sacred quest to find the spiritual freedom that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has defined as release from “the prison of self.” Attaining spiritual freedom is particularly challenging to believers in the West, whom the Master warned would be subjected to afflictive mental and emotional tests in this formidable Age of Transition.

Although our sacred writings present a clear map of the way to spiritual freedom, we still have to learn the harder, more subtle skill of “walking the walk” as well as “talking the talk.” A map is useful only to the extent that a traveler is capable of using it to read the terrain and find the way to the intended destination.

Although I have often heard assertions to the contrary, attaining spiritual freedom may not be as simple as just choosing the right thoughts, or making up our minds to dwell on the positive rather than the negative things of life. Although such sentiments constitute helpful folk wisdom, and happily may be effective for many believers, life reveals that these confident assertions are too simplistic to remedy the sometime painful complexities of the human condition.

If spiritual freedom were so easy of attainment, I should think there should not be one unhappy soul left among the spiritually minded. Were “the divine art of living” as simple as it is sometimes presented, all would choose the appropriate thoughts and right actions to secure and maintain spiritual freedom and peace of mind at all times.

My own experience and observation of the life of others tell me, rather, that human beings are complex. It is a sign of complexity that we often treat others better than we treat ourselves. We too often lack that self-compassion necessary for the recovery of the childlike innocence and simplicity that we once enjoyed, a simplicity that is one of life’s greatest blessings.

In our mature years, we have to relearn that simplicity, which is closely aligned to the pure heart, a simplicity that will dispel the dark clouds that temporarily obscure our happiness. Even in the face of the superabundance of spiritual guidance that we possess, no ready-made formulas will achieve the desired goal, without constant striving, trial and error, and perhaps most importantly, forgiveness of self and others.

Many of us are carrying heavy baggage from the past. Who is not dealing with “unfinished business,” either with ourselves or others? In western societies, multitudes are dealing with post traumatic distress order, even though, unlike the soldier, they have not had the experience of war. That such a condition is so widespread indicates that emotional and mental stress has become epidemic and out-of-control.

Identifying the factors that promote the process of spiritual growth will assist in drawing us closer to our cherished goal. The acquisition of authentic spirituality includes study, prayer, meditation, service and action. We can banish the low, menacing clouds that occasionally hem us in and obscure our vision by engaging in a process of life-long learning, and drawing on the strength and friendship we share with others, and by engaging in community-building activities. This latter activity assists us in becoming less preoccupied with self and more outward-looking and other-oriented.

Over the centuries, the spiritually wise in all religious traditions have consistently recognized that love, patience and long-suffering are the best provisions for those who devote

themselves to spiritual life. Love enables patience; patience is the proof of love. Spiritual freedom cannot be attained unless we are ruled by the monarch of love.

Yet this noble queen wears many faces. Some of them are deceptive masks that hide rather than reveal the true nature of love. One of our greatest tasks in life is to discern true love from false; otherwise, we will not only be bitterly deceived but also cause heartache and disillusion to others.

Spiritual freedom necessitates proper discernment, true insight that is as sharp as the sharpest blade of steel. Bahá'u'lláh reveals in *The Hidden Words* that our vision is sometimes distorted to the extent that we will behold a thorn and yet call it a flower. (Persian #45). For what can a thorn offer but the pin-prick of pain?

The widespread lack of spiritual discernment and the not-as-yet-fully-understood reactions of brain chemistry have deranged the happiness of large numbers of people in our civic populations. Every street corner, café, supermarket, shop and city street reveal the sad spectacle of someone who is mentally ill. The sudden and unexpected visitation of adversity can turn an unsuspecting person's life helter-skelter. The joy of life, once savored with pleasure, can turn suddenly to depression and darkness. These souls merit our compassion, loving-kindness, and any moral support and understanding that we can offer to assist in their return to "normalcy."

God did not put us on this earth to steal our happiness. The hapless souls who take their own lives, those who prefer death to life, do not really seek their own annihilation. What they really seek is relief from their desperation and pain, to find meaning-in-life, a worthwhile purpose to their existence, and a durable, intimate and uplifting connection to other souls.

In addressing ourselves diligently to acquire the means to these latter ends, we will gradually attain the spiritual freedom that generates the joy of life. To be released from the prison of self, the pilgrim must undertake a long journey of self-discovery, a pilgrimage that includes a compassionate understanding of the other and oneself, one that invests in understanding that our existence is *la vie sérieuse*, Durkheim's shorthand definition of religion.

This serious business of life means accepting that life circumstances bring adversity to our doors with our daily bread. We can learn, however, to alleviate the sometime gravitas of existence by finding meaning in suffering and thereby alleviating the angst and ongoing stress to which every soul is subjected. While philosophy cannot totally eliminate the pain of human existence, it helps to create a certain distance between oneself and one's troubles.

Let us also remember that the saint who never laughs is a sad saint indeed. Humor is a welcome but perhaps too rare ingredient of spiritual practice. Not all laughter is frivolous; it is often proof of perceptive intelligence. It manifests the necessary qualities of detachment and light-heartedness that alleviate the tendency to over-dramatize adversity. Good humor assists in placing our personal problems in their proper perspective, by shrinking to a more appropriate size what may seem at first to be an overwhelming problem.

Saying a daily prayer of thanksgiving, or even just feeling genuine thanksgiving, be it only for a passing moment, will help to suffuse our hearts with contentment. The prayer of thanksgiving need not be spoken in words. Gratitude rises from the heart in a mere moment: in the innocent smile of a child; in the glimpse of a bird on the wing; in the embrace of a loved one; in the gentle hand that reaches across the table to comfort us in a moment of sorrow. Even at the graveside, as we lay a loved one to rest, we can utter a prayer of gratitude for the gifts and blessings we have received from the ascended soul.

The title of a best-selling book of yesteryear, *How to Become Your own Best Friend* (1971), recalls the uplifting line from the prayer of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “Thou art more friend to me than I am to myself.” If we do not heed Bahá’u’lláh’s counsel to “refresh and revive your souls,” the knocks and shocks we receive will prove more difficult to sustain.

Although relief from the cares that so often beset us is afforded by every joyful moment or mood of quiet contemplation, attaining enduring spiritual freedom often comes with the slow passage of time, just as a fruit ripens to maturity with age.

The period of maturation, the ingathering of the harvest, is reaped by the journey of an entire lifetime. Although an epiphany can bestow sudden insight, restore peace of mind, or give new life to the soul, the long, lingering expanse of life itself, with all its tests and trials, is our one permanent school, the nurturing *alma mater* from which we never graduate, until we close our eyes for the last time.

### **Correlating the Four Universal Material and Spiritual Phenomena of Nature and Spirit**

In nature and spiritual life, we observe four universal phenomena of the life cycle: (1) birth (2) death (3) transition (4) equilibrium/homeostasis. We experience these four states at different times from the beginning to the end of life. This quaternary is present in both nature and the life of the spirit. Close observation permits us to discover a dynamic correlation between matter and spirit with these four universal phenomena.

The literary devices of simile and metaphor enable us to better understand how nature provides the symbolism that correlates to our understanding of spirit; the symbolism of nature that pervades romantic poetry, for example, correlates well to spiritual dynamics. Although spirit is the fundamental reality, nature is an extension and reflection of spirit. The two interactive worlds of nature and spirit function in a cross-fertilized, synergistic effect.

Non-material phenomena—ideas, moods, emotions, psychological states—influence both body and mind; in a feedback loop, bodily reactions, through the nervous system, affect in turn ideas, moods, emotions and psychological states. This feedback loop is ultimately temporary. It functions only as long as the physical body has life. Ultimately, because spirit is the fundamental reality, unlike the interactive process of nature and spirit that occurs during the life of man, the

hereafter assumes the form of a purely spiritual state, during which the soul reaps the rewards of its earthly life and continues to draw ever-nearer to the Divine Presence.

**Birth** bestows motherhood through a process of labor. In the dynamic correlation alluded to above, spiritual birth is just as real as childbirth. Spirituals, like mothers, also labor to bear and to develop the psycho-spiritual states that will benefit the community, the environment and the individual. The rebirth or second birth of spiritual consciousness occurs either in a unique transcendental event or over a multitude of lesser, life-long, significant transcendental moments. The commanding words of Jesus, “Ye must be born again” (John 3:7) indicate the correspondence of the two most significant events in the life of the flesh and the journey of the soul/spirit.

The fact that **death** is an inescapable, universal fact of life has been repeated so often that the full impact of the reality behind the statement has lost its significance—perhaps because we feel powerless in the face of our inevitable fate. Meditation on death, a practice that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recommends, should produce a profound reorientation of life. That it rarely does so signifies that most men and women never seriously contemplate the meaning of death; for them no reorientation of life is consequently forthcoming. Yet death is the most significant event of life.

Just as death bestows eternal life on those who know, love and serve God, we are spiritually born again in this world, to use the Sufi metaphor, by dying to our former self (*faná*), or as in the more ascetic theology of the Apostle Paul would have it, by crucifying Adam, i.e. the desires of the flesh, sometimes called “the old man,” the symbol of the believer as he was before the second birth. (Gal. 5:24, Rom. 8: 13-14).

And what of the chilling thought of spiritual death? Humans who say just what they like and do just what they like, without fear of consequences, who hurt or offend others, risk spiritual death if they turn reject God, His teachings, laws and precepts. Those political megalomaniacs who destroy others work real evil in the world. They make gods of themselves. In reality they live in a lonely, isolated shrine of self-worship, in a perpetual state of idolatry. However, Bahá’u’lláh assures us in the *Iqán* that redemption is possible even for these souls at the perilous moment of death.

St. Paul referred to spiritual death when he wrote his famous line, the “the wages of sin is death.” (Rom. 6:23). Sin would have been for most Jews in the time of the Apostle the breaking of a Torah commandment, but for St. Paul, the former persecutor of Christians, it would have resulted from failure to recognize the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ the Messiah: “...but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 6:23)

Curiously, birth and death, those two phenomena that mark both the beginning and end of life are painful, but each is also a transition that leads to a new homeostasis. The child’s birth into this world, although it brings joy to the parents, also announces one of life’s *bruta facta* that every child soon discovers: life inevitably brings a mix of pleasure and pain. After death, bliss is promised to the faithful as the new homeostasis. If we are able to attain that rare state of “dying



to self and living in God” (GDM 70) while we are still in this world, we will be able to transcend the contrary psycho-spiritual agony of birth and death.

During *transition* spirit leads us forward toward fulfillment and/or maturity. But the transitional state, like all transitional states, is dangerous: it can also bring failure, reversal or setback. During the transition to old age, we are bound to experience the gradual decline in our bodily abilities and powers. But with this transition, paradoxically, the material and the spiritual do not always correspond. The decline of our physical powers does not always signify a corresponding decrease of our spiritual powers. The contrary often proves true. Illumination has often been observed on the faces of those who stand at the gate to the Great Beyond.

An equilibrium or *homeostasis* exists for short periods of time in life, but the interaction of pleasure and pain that we experience in transition is constant, especially as we age: “In the midst of life we are in death.” (BCP 1549). The contrary phenomena of intense pleasure and excruciating pain produce either agony or ecstasy. These antipoles are normally not experienced at once, but at a given point, they intersect. Contrary states are not like parallel lines that never meet. Ordinary language suggests the intersection: “I laughed till I cried.” The American folksong “O Susanna” says it well in a nonsensical phrase: “The sun so hot I froze to death.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has assured us that the spiritual world bestows only joy, but in the world of *Násút*, spiritual growth involves real *jihad*: struggle. Struggle, depending on the degree of exertion, produces pain. The agony of the dual processes of birth and death, whether in the physical or spiritual realms, would seem to be thus unavoidable. Paradoxically, both birth and death also produce joy; the former in the birth of a child, the latter in the death of the body which signals the bliss of the soul.

Although we should, as a sign of gratitude, enjoy those precious but all-too-rare moments when joy reigns supreme, the nature of life in this world means that we will always be confronted by the contrary phenomena of joy and sorrow. Each stage of this life, from the proverbial cradle to the grave, is fraught with the pain and joy of birth, transition with its dangers and possibilities, stabilizing homeostasis, followed by the agony of decline and the release of death, the predetermined end for all pilgrims on the journey of life. The cycle is finally broken as the people of faith advance toward the “throne of God” (GWB 112), the metaphor that can be likened to the paradise of resting in the shadow of Bahá’u’lláh, in the company of His chosen ones.

### **The Eternal Now, Attaining the Divine Presence, Discovering the Self and the Soul**

Since God is eternal, i.e. has always been, is now, and will always be, He has revealed Himself in the past, is revealing Himself in the present, and will continue to reveal Himself in the future. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has revealed that past, present and future are all one in the mind of God.

(SAQ 130). Because the Deity is not bound by space-time, in the realm of the Eternal, the future is now.

Our personal experience of the Divine, as distinct from our intellectual understanding of history, always detects the Divine Presence in the present tense. If we are seeking God experientially, He is present in this moment. God is eternally present to each loving heart that acknowledges Him, seeks His guidance or communion with Him. In the *telos* that leads each individual life forward, the accumulation of all our past history, whether it be for the individual or the collective, culminates in the now.

Although knowing, loving and serving God constitute the whole purpose of our creation, in achieving this purpose, we also discover the knowledge and experience of true self. This gradual attainment of self-knowledge fulfills a God-ordained duty; for, if we fail to discover who we are, we will have suffered a most grievous loss: the alienation of self from oneself, one of the greatest tragic ironies any human can experience.

Self-knowledge depends upon discovering the full range of divine attributes within the human soul. The discovery of these divine attributes constitutes the discovery of the one and only authentic self. Reading the Book of Man—Man being the generic for both men and women—as the book of self is another archetypal book in the story of creation, along with the Book of Divine Revelation and the Book of Nature, books that we must learn to read for a fuller understanding of our world and the universe. As we strive to perfect these divine attributes within the soul, which manifest concretely in human character, we become like well-traveled sailors who navigate the broad, meandering river of time.

The journey into the knowledge of self is as real as any journey made in space-time. It is actually more real—more real because the consequences of that inner journey far outweigh any other journey. The long journey inward comes by ways and means that are easy and hard, arduous and carefree, pain-filled and pain-free. We ragged pilgrims must traverse the valley of sorrow, before we attain the shrine of heart's content and wonderment on the mountain-top. The journey inward unrolls over the years like the long, slow distance of the marathon runner. Sometimes we “hit the wall” during the race, but we pray to reach the finish-line by the power of divine sustenance.

To discover one's authentic self, every spiritual seeker is faced with the need to overcome the promptings of the lower self. The Gospel stories record the healing miracles performed by Christ when He cast out “demons” or “devils.” Two millennia later people still speak of fighting their “inner demons.” We understand today that these demons are mental afflictions, psychiatric disorders or psychosomatic illnesses.

Over time, we realize that these inner demons are not the terrible things we once imagined them to be. The more we realize the greatness of the love and mercy of God, the more we are able to forgive and to love ourselves and others. We realize that the positive forces of healing, bestowed by the essence of divine compassion, are infinitely greater than the negations that are the shadows of error and sin. On the journey inward, we come to realize that the holy

light of love and mercy banishes every dark corner of our room. No corner of that room is too dark or shameful not to benefit by the light of God. For once that dark corner is exposed to the warm light of God's love, health and healing will inevitably follow in their wake.

It is no easy task to discover the factors that sometimes cause believers to become dysfunctional, miserable or depressed. To discover these factors, we should combine both spiritual and medical healing. The knowledge of self, in its purely human dimension, can be as mysterious as the Sphynx. For just as the fish have no inkling that the medium of water, as their second nature, gives them life, we too can be woefully ignorant of the unconscious, psychological factors that have contributed to the dysfunction that may arise during any period of the life cycle. It takes a sharp mind to discern these causes and a wise physician to heal them.

To discover our true self, first we must know, with all the conviction of our inner and outer being, that the immortal soul is the one and only enduring, eternal human essence. To realize that this divine gem is one of the most mysterious, subtle, and powerful of all the divine forms wrought by the Hand of God becomes one of the mightiest fulcrums of faith during our life journey. To discover one's true self means to know that we carry within us the soul as a sacred trust. This sacred trust does not belong to us; we are its only trustee, and for it, only we are ultimately responsible.

In American psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, a paradigm that originates partially in Aristotle's philosophy, to discover our true self means that we are consciously fulfilling our human potential. Unless we fulfill that potential, we cannot become fully human. The discovery of true self is to know that the purpose of life in this world—at least as it pertains to the individual rather than the collective—is to recognize the existence of the soul as a creation of God and to set about consciously to develop it systematically. Systematic development does not mean here that the soul can be subjected to a scientific program or a planned agenda. Human behavior can be programmed: the soul cannot.

Many are the mysteries and secrets connected with the development of soul. Its development is too dependent on divine grace to be totally self-determined by any systematic program. Yet "method" does apply, nonetheless, to the development of the soul. The method of the soul's development is provided by the laws and teachings of the Prophets of God, by their earnest application in our lives and by the constant attention required to perfect our spiritual life.

The discovery of true self cannot be fully attained unless we know the teachings of the Divine Manifestation for our day and age. In achieving this greatest end of life, we will be better enabled to understand who we are, why we have been created, and just as importantly, to apply His Divine Plan to build both the local community and the wider society, and to become more wisely equipped to aid in the reconstruction of the world, in collaboration with like-minded souls.

We set out to discover the true self in the same adventurous way that the European explorers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries sailed away to discover new worlds. But the ways to find God are many; they are often surprisingly unexpected and unpredictable. Some are

astonished to discover that they find their goal without realizing that they were seeking it. Still others are mysteriously and suddenly awakened from their sleep of unbelief. While they slept on, it never occurred to them that they needed God, just as plants need the rain. For others, the search was arduous before they attained their heart's desire; afterwards the way and the journey became lighter. For some, the way became arduous, not before, but after they found their goal.

The true self is always here, revealing itself in the eternal present: inside us, all around us, in our relations with others, in our moments of isolation, when we contemplate the known and the unknown, when we commune with God, and when we behold the beauty of nature in all its splendid, infinite variety. The discovery of true self is a journey that takes place literally anywhere and everywhere. It can be attended to at all times and in all circumstances and conditions. It is manifest in the Divine Presence that is the Golden of Now.

### **Why Love is Greater than Science, Why Science Needs Love, Why Love Needs Science**

The Prophets, mystics, saints, martyrs, chosen ones, and great teachers of divinity have all emphasized that love is greater than science. Science as it is used here is *scientia*; it applies to both science proper and the various forms of knowledge as they developed over the millennia. 'Abdu'l-Bahá teaches in a powerful statement that "...love is the cause of the existence of all phenomena and that the absence of love is the cause of disintegration or nonexistence." (PUP 255). He teaches further that "...love is the ground of all things." (SWAB 65). These statements are sufficient to convey the idea that love is greater than science.

The discovery of the laws of nature and scientific formulae apply to a creational, pre-existent world. Reason dictates that physical science is not the cause of creation. Science, rather, studies the *effects* of creation. Although we find subjective differences of perception among the authors of the creative arts and *belles lettres*, the laws of physical creation are, by contrast, objective. While the physical world is organically connected to humans in a symbiotic, delicate web of life, it exists independently from the human being. Human mortality does not annihilate the great work of creation. The creational world will go on, with or without the human species.

The *explicit* recognition of the importance of love for science is only now, at the beginning of the third millennium, just starting to permeate world-consciousness. Although love is greater than science, love is not antithetical to science. Although for those who are mad with love, be it the mystic lover of God or the Romeo and his Juliet, love can completely consume reason. Love, consequently, needs science to establish the harmonious, ideal balance of these two great phenomena.

Outside the Bahá'í sacred writings, love is rarely explicitly mentioned as being implicit to science. But love is inherent to science for the simple reason that the scientist's love of his/her discipline drives the pursuit of calculations, experiments, models and theories. Although the

expression of the scientist's love of science is usually implicit rather than explicit, it takes little reflection to realize that the love of science is the great motivator behind scientific inquiry.

For the scholar, the little phrase "the love of learning" juxtaposes the two great faculties of love and knowledge in their natural relationship. Science and love belong together, but for the lover, it is no different: the lover requires knowledge if his relationship with the beloved is to endure. Lovers long "to know" the beloved better.

Although in biblical Hebrew, the verb *yada* "to know," as in "And Adam knew Eve his wife..." (Gen 4:1) refers to sexual intimacy, when we say that lovers long to know one better, the meaning of the infinitive "to know" has a much broader range of meanings, notwithstanding its sexual connotation. Here we see clearly that knowledge is implicit to love.

Once the love of God is universally recognized as the cause of creation, once the laws of God rule the hearts and minds of humanity, once the laws of science and religion are harmonized, love and science will be yoked together to transform our world in a multitude as of yet unimagined ways. Once love and knowledge are wed, a quantum leap in the growth of civilization will take place. Dynamic forces will be set in motion.

When love and science will work hand-in-hand, humanity's stubborn tendency to resist change will be overcome by a universal assent of the will to accomplish great endeavors and undertakings. These projects will accomplish unprecedented scientific innovations and societal transformations. In the future, great things will be accomplished easily and relatively quickly, both in science and religion.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has observed that love operates by the law of attraction. Outside the obvious socio-biological implications of the "law of attraction" for marriage and family life, this law of attraction has far more comprehensive and dynamic implications for friendship, fellowship, affiliation, association, co-operation and inclusion. When love is absent, nothing is accomplished. Negative, partisan forces assert themselves and begin to dominate. Forward motion stalls; stagnation occurs, the first step toward devolution. When love is lacking, creation is undone in a destructive process that manifests in breakup and breakdown.

The absence of love means that psychological, spiritual and social aggregates disintegrate, whether as belief-and-value systems, as wholesome affects within the human heart, or as positive social cohesion. Atomization takes place, the breaking down of once strong cohesive wholes into smaller, dysfunctional parts. Today's alarming rise in the proliferation of hate-groups is producing a massive increase in hate-crimes. Random acts of violence are widespread. Murder and mass-murder, the ultimate deeds of hate, are on the increase everywhere.

Humans of the future will look back in disbelief and wonder how the human race could have ever engaged in "internecine strife" (PDC 105) for 6000 years. The future citizens of a united world will regard war as sheer insanity, tantamount to gouging out one's own eyes, or severing one's own hand or foot or cutting out one's own tongue! When love rules the world, when the spearhead of divine justice ensures the rule-of-law, anarchy, chaos and violence shall

be forever stilled. A new world civilization will be born, whose glory shall eclipse all the accumulated splendors of the past.

### **The Messianic Secret Disclosed in the Garden of Riḍván: Contrast Between Cosmic Celebration and Historical Event**

When I was a young man, I thought that Bahá'u'lláh made His declaration in a grand and glorious, open event in the garden of His great admirer, Najíb Páshá, the governor of Baghdád. During this time, I imagined that the believers were coming and going, in and out of His blessed tent, expressing their love and gratitude for such a bountiful favor. But I discovered in the intervening years that the historical facts present us with a much different picture. The Riḍván event is an instructive example of how the Bahá'u'lláh of faith—or at least one believer's onetime perception of faith—and the Bahá'u'lláh of history do not exactly coincide.

The misconception I innocently fabricated for myself was created in part by the tone of the sacred scriptures themselves. The celebratory, triumphal, kerygmatic language of proclamation used in our sacred writings, describing this unparalleled event, led me to conclude that His actual declaration was very public. In actual fact, the messianic secret was disclosed only to a chosen few.

The twelve days in the Garden of Riḍván were also a historical oxymoron of joy and sorrow. The Glory of God was being exiled from Baghdád at the same moment that He chose to reveal His messianic secret to a mere handful of family and close friends. The Riḍván event was coincidentally the saddest farewell of all farewells, and the most joyous celebration of all celebrations.

During the days when preparations for His departure were being made, the overwhelming emotion experienced by His followers, except for those believers who were accompanying Him, was sorrow. The joy was reserved for the select few. This joy remains, of course, for all those down the generations who celebrate the Riḍván festival with the aid of the scriptural readings revealed for that occasion. (See for example the Riḍván section of *Days of Remembrance*, 2016).

I also learned later in life that the celebration of His declaration in our sacred writings was not revealed just on the one moment when it occurred. The Riḍván event continued to be proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh throughout the rest of His earthly life. That the Great Proclamation celebrated in our sacred writings did not correspond to the actual historical circumstances should have been clear to my young mind from what Shoghi Effendi wrote in *God Passes By*. The Guardian tells us that historians will take great pains to uncover what really transpired during those days, i.e. what was said and to whom (GPB 153). This explicit statement should have alerted me to the fact that the Riḍván declaration did not take place as I had imagined. (Again, I confused the triumphal tone of our sacred writings as being identical to the actual manner that His declaration took place).

My illusion persisted for years because I had been overwhelmed by the dramatic power of the sacred writings underscoring the cosmic significance of the celebrated twelve days. Later I discovered that Bahíyyih Khánum related in the summary she gave of the lives of the exiles, as told to Myron H. Phelps in *The Master in 'Akká*, that the Blessed Beauty declared His mission to only five individuals (TMA 38-39). One of them, she tells us, was 'Abdu'l-Bahá, her brother, whom she calls Abbás Effendi, the name by which He was known in the family when the children were growing up, until Bahá'u'lláh ascended. The four others are not named. (Because of the false accusations of Muḥammad-'Alí and the covenant-breakers that He was claiming to be a Divine Manifestation, in 'Akká/Acco He took the name 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the name He preferred to all other titles).

Another individual who witnessed the declaration of Bahá'u'lláh that He was "Him Whom God shall make manifest" prophesied by the Báb would have been the great poet-chronicler Nabil. In his description of the Riḍván declaration, Nabil uses the first person singular "I" as he relates his observations of Bahá'u'lláh's wakefulness, His emergence from the tent, the night-time walk in the garden along the rose-bordered avenues, and His remarks on the melody of love and beauty between the nightingales and the roses. (The latter are two of the three standard tropes found in classical Persian poetry, along with the mystic wine).

Based on Nabil's own words, it seems sure that he was one of the chosen few to whom Bahá'u'lláh intimated His station: "Not once could I discover in the words He spoke any trace of dissimulation." (GPB 153). This sentence clearly indicates that Nabil understood the significance of the event. I suspect that Bahá'u'lláh's faithful brother, Mirzá Musá, called Aqá-i-Kalím, and Bahíyyih Khánum were two others who shared in Nabil's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's understanding of the declaration.

But for reasons of His own, probably as a protection for the safety of the exiles, Bahíyyih Khánum also told Mr. Phelps that Bahá'u'lláh commanded those whom He told not to disclose the full significance of what had just taken place. (TMA 39). This then was the paradox: although the veil was lifted during the twelve holy days, the lifting of the veil was only partial. The messianic secret was still operative in the garden. It remained in force until their arrival in Edirne/Adrianople, when every veil of concealment was burnt away in a conflagration of unrestrained proclamation, during the last phase that first began with the dramatic intimation of prophethood in the Síyyáh Chál of Tihrán.

We have, then, this remarkable contrast: on the one hand, our sacred writings openly proclaim and celebrate this event in truly cosmic proportions; on the other hand, the actual historical event revealed itself as an intimate declaration, shared with only a few trusted believers, who were advised to keep the secret that they had just been privileged to share.

I alluded above to the striking paradox connected with Riḍván, i.e. the meeting of joy and sorrow, which 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us is a condition typical of the world of *Nasút*. Bahá'u'lláh's joyful declaration in the garden of Najíb Páshá, occurred in the midst of sorrow, the royal decree commanding the Most Great Prisoner and the other exiles to quit Baghdád and to make their way

to Istanbul/Constantinople. Here we find not only a divine wisdom in the timing of Bahá'u'lláh's declaration, but also the expression of the most considerate divine compassion.

In the midst of all the sadness and sorrow of that cruel expulsion, amid the onerous preparations that were suddenly laid on the shoulders of the family and exiles for the arduous, upcoming long journey, Bahá'u'lláh brought joy to those who were closest to Him by revealing His divine station, and by allowing His bereaved friends the opportunity to say a final adieu. No opportunity to say farewell to One who was so uniquely loved by high and low alike, in the "City of Peace," would have been the greatest of all lost opportunities and bitter privations. For the chosen few, the Blessed Beauty attenuated the sorrow of the hour of departure by the revelation of the greatest joy.

### **Spiritual Capacity and What the Photographs of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Reveal**

Like so many other Bahá'ís, ever since the days of my youth, I have been fascinated by the photographs of the Master. Except for the two photographs of His father, the photos of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are a first in the history of photography for such a unique sacred personage. These photos are a remarkable treasure, when you consider that someone of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's unique station has been neither captured by the camera before, nor photographed so often.

One can spend long meditative moments studying these photos. What these photographs share in common is the recognizable image of the person of the Mystery of God. They capture for posterity the many manifestations of the Center of the Covenant's divine and human personality.

Yet what strikes the observer at the same time is the remarkable diversity in the appearance of the Master. We see in one photo the kindly, smiling, seated old sage who radiates welcoming human love and warmth. In another picture, we catch a glimpse of the Master's heavenly glory. (At least, I should say as much as the instrument of the camera is able to convey). In yet another photo, He stands and beckons to us with that characteristic gesture of the upturned hands, urging us on to go forward and accomplish great things for the Cause.

It is especially from the photos that capture His princely image that we can detect something of the magnetic radiance and sublime nobility that emanated from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In other photos, we see very much the human side of the Master: His age, the marks of long-suffering on His face, His occasional need of the cane, His weariness with the world.

The friends have sometimes correctly observed that the ability to see the glory that He reflected, as a pure and polished mirror reflecting the light that shone from Bahá'u'lláh, depended on the measure of the individual's spiritual capacity. Quite so. But neither should we expect the camera, which captures an image on paper, or today's digital image on an electronic device, to be able to convey that glory in every photo. For it was not 'Abdu'l-Bahá's wont to reveal His full radiance on every occasion.



But for the chosen few who had the spiritual eyes to see it, and who were deemed worthy by Him to see it, they were granted that inestimable blessing. With some friends it was well-nigh overwhelming. May Maxwell and Stanwood Cobb, to name only two individuals, on first view, saw nothing but a radiant sheen of light hovering around Him, a light that concealed for a moment the image of His human reality. In both cases, this vision took place in Akká, although Stanwood Cobb also saw the Master in America on four other occasions.

On their first meeting in Akká, the radiance of that glory was so strong that it consumed the tenuous threads that held together May Maxwell's fragile constitution. But in that moment, the fabric of her entire being was recreated. So overwhelming was His presence that 'Abdu'l-Bahá commanded that she be moved away from Him. May wrote of that first pilgrimage in 1898, led by "the mother of the faithful," Phoebe Hearst: "Of that first meeting I can remember neither joy nor pain nor anything I can name. I had been carried suddenly to too great a height; my soul had come in contact with the Divine Spirit; and this force so pure, so holy, so mighty, had overwhelmed me." (*An Early Pilgrimage*). Their first meeting was like the encounter of an intense flame with dry tinder. Yet this simile is not exact: although it consumed, it also recreated her.

What is perhaps more remarkable is the fact that a young Leroy Ioas, who later became a Hand of the Cause of God, and Executive Assistant to Shoghi Effendi, was able to perceive the light of 'Abdu'l-Bahá through the thickness of a wall. The Master was indeed close by, just on the other side, and appeared momentarily!

But it was not so for everyone. For Stanwood's Cobb's atheistic, albeit humanitarian employer, Porter Sargent, owner of Porter Sargent's Travel School for Boys, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was nothing but "... a dear, kind, tired old man." Such, at least, was the measure of the biologist's spiritual capacity. Or perhaps one could put it this way: such was the measure of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's willingness on that day to reveal Himself to Stanwood Cobb's spiritually myopic scientific friend. For although Juliet Thompson and Bahiyyih Randall Winckler said that He could control the revelations of His power at will, 'Abdu'l-Bahá was never on theatrical display.

I return to the wide range of human emotions that we are able to discern on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's face. We see, either in individual portraits or in group photographs, the whole gamut of expressions: fatigue, joy, gravitas, curiosity, serenity, calm, relaxation, humor, determination, reverence, nobility, radiance, and even—in one photo at least—complete indifference to the camera.

One rare photo defies any description I can make. I came across it only recently, although I am told it was available in earlier photos of the Master. To me this amazing photo manifests a perfect blend of his divine and human personality, a face revealing assurance, love, joy and vibrancy all at once. It was a look that seemed to say: "I am 'Abdu'l-Bahá! I know who I am! I see you! See me! I am here!"

These various manifestations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "personality" have been mentioned by some of those who lived through the latter part of the Heroic Age of the Bahá'í Faith. They

related that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá appeared as a somewhat different person to each of those who had the great bounty to be in His company. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was not just one man, but many men to many a man and woman. He was, in Stanwood Cobb’s word, who spoke to us at Beaulac, the summer and winter school formerly located in the Laurentian mountains north of Montreal, “protean.”

The Master assumed the personality that was best suited to the occasion, be it sublime or more mundane, whether it was proclaiming Bahá’u’lláh’s world mission from the pulpit, or discoursing to a captivated university audience of 2,000 students and faculty at Stanford University.

Whether He was speaking to an intimate gathering in a private home, attending a midday luncheon as the guest of honor for Mrs. Parsons’ well-to-do friends in Washington, telling humorous anecdotes to Mrs. Hearst’s wealthy friends in California—they were probably expecting instead a lesson in oriental wisdom, as was Mrs. Hearst herself—or ministering to the many and various needs of those individuals who sought His presence, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá always knew just how to measure the spiritual capacity of His audience and to dispense the appropriate remedy.

We know that in the beginning of His western tour, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was not fond of having His picture taken, but He finally consented to the many requests, for the purpose of proclaiming the Faith. He finally allowed the photographs that we now have, thus creating this rich historical visual legacy. But in some instances, the Master was not inclined to have His picture taken.

I was amused by one photograph in a coffee table book that I saw in the home of one of the friends in California to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s back as He walks away from the camera. In so doing, He holds out for the too eager photographer, with a backward twist of the arm, only the palm of His hand. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá did accede to the pilgrim’s request, but it was entirely on His terms! As precious as all these photographs are, we do well to remind ourselves that they are but a pale reflection of the dynamic living reality of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for those who were graced to be in His presence.

### **The Degeneration of Morals, Broadcast News, Violence in Sports and Corporate Power**

“In a time to come, morals will degenerate to an extreme degree.” So wrote the Master in *Selections From the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (127). It has taken perhaps a century for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s prophecy to become fully realized, but that time has now surely arrived. His prophecy had become already partially fulfilled during the lifetime of Shoghi Effendi.

In his world order letters, the Guardian captured and condemned, with remarkable panoramic insight, the moral degeneracy of his time, a degeneracy that he attributed to humanity’s turning away from God and religion, a turning away that was only exacerbated by the tragic rejection of the Bahá’í Revelation.

Since the Guardian's passing in 1957, the moral climate of western society, particularly in Europe and North America, has become thoroughly rotten. This morbid condition, however, is by no means limited to those two continents; its demoralizing influence has spread throughout the entire globe.

Driven by the profit-motive of avid commercialism, the media feature news that is predominantly catastrophic, conflicted, frivolous, scandalous and salacious. The owners and producers of mass-media outlets know that conflict, scandal and violence are the hooks that will attract the viewers' attention. Although representatives of that industry contend that the media do not create but only reflect society's existing conditions, the media have doubtless helped to perpetuate the enervating, voracious appetite for things unsavory that feeds the news cycle.

The appearance of the social media within the last two decades has improved the moral climate, at least when healthy-minded users create a more positive atmosphere by engaging in uplifting conversations. These users of social media realize that sharing good news of a social nature, and giving others selected glimpses of their personal lives, is decidedly more pleasant than a constant stream of demoralizing news.

But even here, a risk of another sort remains: social media can be used to overfocus on the self, when "I" becomes the subject of every conversation. Although they were not originally designed to do so, social media can also serve as effective centers of learning for specialized study groups.

Notable exceptions to moral degeneracy in the media today are found in selected live-streaming broadcasts, podcasts and television documentaries, some of which alert the viewer to the dire straits into which humanity has fallen. Although these programs do not always convey good news, at least they inform us of the necessary requirements needed to begin to address and to solve the manifold dire crises that threaten the very existence of world civilization. These alerts will encourage a larger number of activists to arise to save our stricken world.

Anyone who is exposed to a steady bombardment of broadcast news will suffer a distressing effect on mental health. To counterbalance this distress, media producers routinely assign a "good news" segment to every newscast, or they encourage easy banter among broadcasters, a practice that was unheard of a generation ago. Unplugging from the media—the more radical solution adopted by some families—or reducing screen time will provide relief.

Sometimes I follow national and international news hoping to see justice done, crime punished and/or peace come to a troubled land. My hopes are sometimes realized for the most egregious cases, but all too often the accused are exonerated because of plea bargaining, legal loopholes, technicalities, manipulative jury selection, smart lawyering and corruption. It is just as the Blessed Beauty revealed—and His words are just as applicable today as when they were revealed: "Justice is, in this day, bewailing its plight, and Equity groaneth beneath the yoke of oppression". (GWB 92).

Aside from the weather, media reports in those democratic nations where the press, the electronic and social media are “free,” usually fall into these categories: (1) political conflicts, power struggles and corruption (2) sex scandals, sexual abuse, human sex trafficking (3) war and violence (4) financial reporting and forecasting (5) epidemics and pandemics (6) catastrophes caused by climate change: earthquakes, droughts, famines, floods, hurricanes, and landslides. (7) sports (8) entertainment.

One sport has taken on the character of fanatical religion in former times. (The word “fan” is actually an abbreviation of “fanatic”). European “football hooligans” attack and even kill the supporters of opposing teams. Canadian hockey has become a disgrace with an unprecedented degree of fighting and violence, especially with deliberate, so-called “head shots,” which until very recently were accepted as a matter of course, although they sometimes resulted in career-ending, severely debilitating injuries.

Hockey violence was and is still considered “just part of the game.” Hockey officials governing the National Hockey League took steps to correct the situation only when career-ending injuries occurred, resulting in law-suits. Only when the police began to lay criminal charges for assault with violence on the ice did NHL officials begin actively to curtail these injuries.

The commissioner of the National Hockey League realized that the League could be subjected to lawsuits if steps were not taken to curb head and neck injuries. Canadian hockey players were correctly labelled “hockey hooligans” by Russian coaches, when the Summit Series between the two great hockey powers began in 1972, although through the bad example set by Canadian players, Russian hockey has also become increasingly violent. It has by no means, however, reached the level of violence that we find in Canadian hockey.

These are among the most appalling news items these days: the international human trafficking of sex slaves who are usually young females or children when sold; child pornography; sexual, physical and verbal abuse of children by parents, teachers, relatives, coaches and clerics, resulting in a stolen childhood for many and possible lifelong emotional dysfunction; the widespread use of intoxicants, resulting in a dramatic increase of addiction and fatal overdoses; teenage suicide; the unprecedented number of unsolved murders of indigenous women and girls in Canada; the bribery, coercion, deceit and lying that have become widespread at the highest levels of government; the unconscionable gap between the extremely rich and the poor, the working poor, the unemployed and the homeless, a gap that has never been wider than at present.

We also witness the endless wrangling and intractable positions of political partisans without due regard to the best interests of the nation. We watch helplessly as the United Nations fails to enforce peace as belligerents bomb and kill innocent men, women and children, forcing them to endure the horrific cruelty and the terror of impending death. Naked aggressor nations are free to attack and kill with impunity. Religious minorities are everywhere suppressed, their rights ignored or violated, and in the worst cases terrorized by bands of armed fanatics bent on exterminating them. The list goes on. A Hadith, a traditional saying of the Prophet Muhammad,

has it that on in the latter days, sometime called Judgment Day or the Day of Resurrection, “the living will envy the dead.”

The quiet but steady seizure of properly government functions by transnational corporations, whose power exceeds that of many legitimate states, has become another feature of a world-gone-wrong. Some of these corporations bully any individual who attempts to defy them, even when that individual is legitimately protecting health, livelihood or property. Lawsuits are initiated by teams of lawyers who are retained for the sole purpose of protecting the corporation’s economic hegemony. These corporations have for too long lived with impunity, despite the destruction they cause to the environment and the threat they pose to human populations.

Set in stark contrast to this distressing scenario, the best Gospel (“good news”) being offered today invigorates and strengthens all hearts, by the pursuit of world-wide, community-building activities. But I hasten to add this note of realism. Bahá’ís are not starry-eyed pollyannas. “To build the world anew” will be a slow, steady, multi-generational task, extending far into the future. The New World Order of Bahá’u’lláh can be established only by successive generations, both by Bahá’ís and the wider community, working patiently in concert to achieve the same sublime objective. In “the fullness of time,” our comprehensive global program of community-and-society-building activities will completely eradicate the criminal, morally and spiritually abhorrent practices alluded to above.

### **The Creative Process: A Little Bit of Heaven, a Little Bit of Hell**

For any major writing project I undertake, it is vitally important to have a clear sense of guidance regarding the selection of the projected work. Because the investment of time and energy usually takes years before a book is published, I must know that the choice of the project is not random, but a reflection of the “will of God.” I place “will of God” in inverted commas, not to suggest something absolute, but only to indicate that meditation and prayer lead to a positive answer. Without this guidance, forging ahead with confidence becomes difficult.

To begin with a little bit of heaven: how to describe the certainty that the choice of the project is the right one? The major signs are a dawning brightness, accompanied by a sense of calm, clarity, and confidence. The confidence created is accompanied by an influx of creative energy that enables me to complete the task. This positive sense of guidance does not mean that a writer will not face obstacles along the way, both in one’s personal life as well as task-oriented challenges. Although these obstacles are intrinsic to the creative process itself, the heart-felt strong impression of guidance assures me that the project is the right one. This sense of certainty helps to ensure the creative flow throughout the life of the project.

It is vital to the health and well-being of any creative person that her energies, which are a divine endowment, not be squandered. This *élan vital*, to use Bergson’s phrase, must not be

wasted because “The grace of God is not idle.” (The original expression “The grace of God was not idle in St. Paul.” is from a sermon by John Wycliffe, the English priest, scholastic theologian, reformer and translator of the Bible into Middle English).

Like the fine race horse that has been bred to run, creativity must be exercised. Otherwise, the pent-up energies of the artist, scholar or writer turn inward and hamper inspiration, impeding the sense of both personal well-being and accomplishment. Without the flowing stream of this creative energy, one can feel like Samson, who had the handsome locks of his spiritual powers shorn by the Philistine Delilah.

By contrast, the one project that became a little bit of hell and almost defeated me was my shorter commentary on *The Seven Valleys*. This book was by far and away the most difficult one of my entire writing career to complete. It was much more difficult to complete than, say, the 600 page analysis of the writings of Shoghi Effendi, *A Celestial Burning*. The commentary on *The Seven Valleys* was also the longest in the making. I worked at it off and on, as near as I can estimate, for about 20 years.

I abandoned the project for several years, only to take it up again. During the last composition phase, after I had determined to finish the book, I was thoroughly disillusioned to discover one day that I had completely run out of energy. This was the first time in my life I had ever experienced the proverbial “writer’s block.” The virtual total eclipse of my creative energy could be partly explained simply by my age and the vicissitudes of life. By that time, I had entered the seventh decade of life. Unlike some other authors in the Bahá’í community, I was feeling my age. (My friend Dr. Udo Schaefer, for example, kept on writing unabated well into his 80’s until he passed beyond the veil).

As it turned out, the book was never really completed, as I had originally intended. I soon came to realize that had I wanted to dilate on every theme found in Bahá’u’lláh’s best-know mystical work, the book would have taken me several more years to complete. What had originally been planned as a much longer work became a shorter one. Being faced squarely with the waning of my creative powers, I had no choice but to accept the adjustment.

It took me some months struggling with myself to accept the fact that that I simply no longer possessed the where-with-all to complete the book. That little bit of hell produced in the end a much shorter work. What did musical superstar John Lennon of the Beatles say in his 1980 song about his son Sean, “Beautiful Boy”? “Life is what happens to you when you’re busy making other plans!” (That quotation has also been ascribed with slight variation to a number of others, including Robert Balzer, Henry Cooke, Thomas à Kempis, Allen Saunders, etc.)

## 5. MYSTICISM: EXPERIENCING THE TRANSCENDENT

### The Place of Mysticism in Religion

The sacred literature of the world's religions has recorded various mystical experiences for thousands of years. Among those who have experienced the Transcendent, we should not forget the prototypical mystical experience, i.e. the divine visitation that awakens and enlightens the soul and signals the onset of the mission of the one person who is central to the story of religion: the Divine Manifestation/Prophet.

The mystical experience is thus pertinent to the entire history of the world's revealed religions because it marks the genesis of the Prophet's mission on earth. The Founder of the Bahá'í Faith validated mysticism when He specifically referred to it as one of the nine voices by which He spoke. In identifying the *Book of Certitude*, the *Hidden Words* and the *Seven Valleys* of Bahá'u'lláh as “doctrinal,” “ethical” and “mystical” works respectively (GPB140), Shoghi Effendi has further validated the mystical category of religion.

Although it may seem counter-intuitive, mystical experiences have also occurred with agnostics and atheists, causing conversions in some and awakening curiosity in others. The well-traveled and experienced writer and European intellectual, Arthur Koestler, who may be described as a reluctant agnostic, was imprisoned in solitary confinement during the Spanish Civil War under threat of death.

At the window of his jail cell, he experienced the peaceful and detached dissolution of his ego—“the I had ceased to exist”—and his absorption in an “oceanic feeling” that he describes in detail in his autobiography *The Invisible Writing*. Because of this experience, Koestler became interested in paranormal experiences for the rest of his life. He retained a faint hope in the afterlife according to the note he left at the time of his death by his own hand.

Skeptical rationalists, like the atheistic psychologist of religion, J.H. Leuba, are prejudiced against the validity of supernatural mystical experiences; they would like to reduce them to explicable, natural psychological phenomena, or to biochemical processes in the brain. It has been suggested that a negative pun on the English word “mist” reinforces the connotation that mysticism is lacking in substance. However, the noted Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye has remarked that the “mist” mentioned in Genesis 2:6 signifies the fountain that watered the original paradisaal Garden of Eden. (WWP 202). This meaning suggests by phonetic association a relation between mysticism and water as the source of life.

Those of a practical mindset show little or no interest in exploring such esoteric phenomena. Some may find it bizarre to explore systematically what is always described as an ineffable phenomenon. Yet according to the perennialist Frithjof Schuon, “quintessential esoterism,” that is, mysticism, lies at the heart of perennial philosophy and universal religion.

(*The Transcendent Unity of Religions*). The sense of the mystical, “touching the absolute,” or attaining the Transcendent, however it may be defined, is the common core of the world’s great religions, according to this view.

Some people are not at all temperamentally interested in mysticism. Questions of taste are difficult to arbitrate. Others may find it self-indulgent to record what are very intimate, personal experiences that have meaning especially—and perhaps only—for the person who experiences them. But these mystical experiences are being shared, nonetheless, because members of the Bahá’í community will no doubt make mysticism an object of study, a study that has already begun, just as such studies have long been established in the other world religions.

The study of mysticism in the Bahá’í community cannot be done without personal testimony. It will be a matter of interest for scholars, writers, researchers and general readers to know what sort of transcendental experiences typify the spiritual life of Bahá’ís: whether they have common features; how precisely the teachings of the Faith come to be manifested in these occurrences, whether as visions in the waking or sleeping states, dreams, in prayer and meditation, contemplation, during pilgrimage, at the Nineteen Day Feast or on holy days, or by communion with any of the Three Central Figures or the Guardian.

Shoghi Effendi has written in one of his letters that genuine mystical experiences are very rare, and to paraphrase, he also says in that same letter that if a believer is going to have a mystical experience, God will grant it to him or her without the believer having to look for it. (LOG 1742). I suspect that his intent was to discourage any Bahá’í to label him/herself as a “Bahá’í mystic,” i.e. as an identifiable type or category.

The Guardian’s incisive observation describes exactly the experiences recorded in this chapter. Although I have been long interested in mysticism, and although I am by temperament inclined to contemplation, I did not aspire to have these experiences, beyond the benefits of prayer and meditation. Nor do I know why I have had more than one type of these experiences, which have manifested themselves in various ways as altered states of consciousness, whether as visions, dreams, clairvoyance, clairaudience, etc. Unlike prayer and meditation, none of them was subject to my conscious control; they occurred spontaneously. They have given me pause to reflect on the unsuspected, normally hidden capacities latent within the human soul.

Although mystical experiences are relatively rare, they are perhaps not quite as rare as we might imagine. In the history of every religion, testimony abounds validating this life-changing phenomenon. We should also remember that for the Divine Manifestation, He who controls the laws of nature and the dynamics of the spiritual realm, the occurrence of this phenomenon in the soul of any believer is easy to achieve. This is precisely the impression I have about the experiences described below. I experienced them through a Power that accomplished them easily and naturally, although to me they seemed quite extraordinary because they were categorically different from my ordinary, mundane consciousness.

It is important to note that direct experience of the phenomena of the Transcendent is not something that occurs just for its own sake. I believe it has a much deeper meaning and purpose



for the individual. Something may be learned from these experiences, both by the subject who experiences them and for the benefit of others. The extraordinary grace of these experiences is not “free.” To the extent possible, the believer should attempt to translate what has been learned from them into living the Bahá’í life, to teaching the Faith, and to enriching the lives of others and being of service to the community.

### **Five Types of Transcendental Experiences**

Five types of spiritual experiences are recorded below. Dreams are universal in all cultures, but the ones that I have selected are especially memorable. It bears repeating at the outset that Bahá’í scripture has affirmed that complete absorption in or total union with the Godhead is an impossibility and a mistaken interpretation of the mystics themselves. These descriptions of absorption or union with God are a metaphorical attempt to express the inexpressible.

Even with “Falling on my Face Before the Glory of God,” the most dramatic and powerful of them, never did I conclude that I had become one with Bahá’u’lláh. He remained in His station, transcendent, powerful and majestic. What the mystics experience, then, is not union with the Godhead, but rather union with the highest register of the soul. Even the claim of union with the Divine Manifestation, should it be advanced, is questionable for the simple but persuasive reason that to achieve union with the Prophet, one must also have the same station. Put simply, only a Manifestation of God can experience union with another Manifestation of God.

1. **Being in the Presence.** The first and easily the most powerful episode corresponds to the phrase of German theologian and comparative religionist Rudolf Otto’s phrase of the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*. For me this was a “one off” encounter with the Divine Manifestation. A very different but nonetheless extraordinary experience is described in “Hand of the Cause Mr. Zikrulláh Khádem Vehicles the Love of Shoghi Effendi.”

2. **Visions.** The visions described below occurred both in both the waking and sleeping state. I should explain my somewhat atypical use of the word “vision.” In “Witnessing the Sacrificial Love of the Martyrdom of the Báb,” I definitely saw something, but what I saw may not be described by the usual meaning of the word “vision.” The scene before my eyes did not disappear, to be replaced by other striking figures not normally visible. It was a perceptual vision in which a veil was removed and understanding was conferred; but the understanding took place through vision, i.e. through the eyes witnessing something.

“Seeing the Unity of Humanity in a Student Restaurant in Paris” was similar to the same process I experienced above as Bahram Katirai and I commemorated the Martyrdom of the Báb on the campus of the University of Ottawa. The scene before me in the Censier student restaurant

in Paris did not change, yet the whole scenario “shifted” to a higher realm, to be transformed or overlain with a filter that revealed the blissful, future unity of mankind.

3. **Clairvoyance.** Closely resembling visions is clairvoyance. By clairvoyance I do not mean feeling something, i.e. having an intuition about someone or something that is true. Clairvoyance means seeing something unusual while I was awake, a vision that made me aware of something that I had not previously known. Two of these episodes are described below. I would be hard-pressed to distinguish between visions and clairvoyance in the waking state, except to say that the three visions that I report below were connected directly with the Faith: one with the sacrifice of the Báb, one with the Master, and the other was a visual expression of the unity of humanity. The clairvoyant experiences revealed something to me that I did not know previously. I do not propose that this distinction between visions and clairvoyance is hard and fast; I am only stating the distinction based on my own personal experience. The distinction is a subtle and difficult one.

4. **Clairaudience.** Clairaudience is the audio equivalent of clairvoyance. It refers to words heard in the waking state that provided either guidance or consolation.

5. **Dreams.** Some of the dreams that have been selected below, although they occurred in the sleeping state, seem to me to be closer to actual visions. For example, the Dream of the Lady Martyrs of Iran falls into that category, as does the paradisaic state that I found myself in as I approached the Shrine of the Báb in tears. Seeing my friend and Islamic scholar, Dr. Todd Lawson, snorkeling underwater in Cuba also falls into this category. Although it was a dream, its clarity qualifies it as a vision. He confirmed that what I saw was true, although I was not aware that he was traveling in Cuba. Often those dreams that have a high spiritual register are brightly colored.

## I.. BEING IN THE PRESENCE

### *Falling on my Face Before the Glory of God*

**Background: Illness and the Meaning of Healing.** I recorded this remarkable incident in a file called *The Special Glory File*. I wrote at the head of the sheet of paper that records the sayings I spoke that night: “This night I have experienced repentance, thankfulness, deliverance, rebirth, dumbfoundedness, utter weakness, confusion, the majesty of God, the fear of God, the power of God, the love of God—it was all the Presence of Bahá’u’lláh.”

As the Sufis say, I “tasted” these things immediately, just as one tastes food, or touches or feels any object through the intermediary of the physical body. There was nothing abstract or esoteric about the experience: it was as real, as concrete as anything one can imagine—no, more so, because it was grounded in Reality—in that divine space that belongs to the Divine Manifestation where He interacts with the human soul, there where all things pertain to nothing

but the unadulterated Divine, fulfilling the very purpose for which we have been created. The nine things that I said during my altered state were all recorded immediately following the experience.

Time has not dimmed the memory of that unforgettable evening. My former wife and close friend Brigitte Maloney Polycarpe and I were living on the main street of La Pocatière, Québec, about 80 miles/128 kms. east of Quebec City, in a two-bedroom apartment above Khazoom's, a clothing store that is still located in that town. I had found my first teaching assignment at the *Collège* on the hill, after completing my M.A. in the History of Religions at the University of Ottawa. I was assigned to teach English as a second language to secondary students who were both day students and boarders in the school that is attached to La Pocatière's famous agricultural college.

During this time of my life, circa 1970 CE, I had suffered what is commonly called a "nervous breakdown." An Ottawa neurologist, Dr. Attack, the brother of Bahá'í Jim Attack, diagnosed it more specifically as an "acute anxiety neurosis" that manifested also as depression. It is important to note that I was suffering from a mood, not a cognitive disorder at the time. The condition was serious enough, but it was not accompanied by any disorder of the rational process. The revelation that followed was intended to relieve me of this affliction, or at least, to give me a perspective and a conviction that would enable me to endure and understand it.

Thankfully this condition eventually attenuated, but at that time I had been afflicted with unrelenting emotional pain, that left me feeling very much like an iceman who had been frozen with this affliction. I had not been prescribed, nor did I seek any medication at that time to relieve the intense anxiety I was feeling. I had completely succumbed to a distressing and acute psychological condition. I was helpless to know what had caused this acute emotional pain, nor was I in any way able to relieve it. How I ended up in this condition, it took periodic sessions of psychotherapy to discover, but at the time, there was no knowing or understanding why I felt such terrible desolation. It was truly the lived experience of St. John of the Cross's "dark night of the soul."

While I was still a student at the University of Ottawa, I did receive some very helpful psychological counseling from that compassionate and insightful, now departed physician, psychiatrist Dr. Juanita Casselman. Thanks to her kindness and skillful care, I experienced some relief from my oppression, and with her benevolent care, I gained some insights into the reasons for my condition, insights that brought gradual relief. My gratitude to Dr. Casselman remains profound to this day.

**Setting the Scene: The Divine Encounter.** The date was March 3, 1974 during the Fast. On that snowy, winter evening, Brigitte had taken baby Mukina, who was one and a half years old, out for a walk. I was alone. The stage was now set for that transformative, rare and powerful experience that was about to take place. Seeking relief for my condition, I entered the bedroom, faced the Qiblah and began to recite my favorite prayer: "Create in me a pure heart, O my God,

and renew a tranquil conscience within me, O my hope!” I had intoned only the first few lines of the prayer, when “suddenly”—that word which often signals the direct intervention of the Divine—the room began to fill up with an overpowering presence.

This experience was not visual. I saw nothing, but the overwhelming power of that Majestic Presence began to increase, just as an adjustable light—a “dimmer switch”—gradually illumines a dark room until it reaches full power. In the face of this growing, powerful, undeniable but invisible Presence, I began to repeat over and over again “O my God!” “O my God!” “O my God!” That was all I could say initially as this Majestic Force completely dominated the room. The strength of that Divine Presence continued to increase in just a matter of moments, until I was forced to my knees.

This gesture of falling on my knees occurred quite spontaneously. It was not a matter of choice. I was overwhelmed, completely overpowered by that Mighty Presence. I felt that I would fall down or faint if I did not humble myself. Once I was on my knees, my soul began a dialogue with its Lord, Bahá’u’lláh. I say “dialogue,” but in reality, I did not hear anything in this conversation, except my own words. The Divine Presence evoked certain responses from a hitherto, deep, unknown sacred place at the center of my soul, responses that were voiced aloud before It.

This “conversation,” although it was very intimate, did not occur in any sense as a conversation that occurs between human beings. The words that I spoke came from such a profound depth of soul as I had never before known in the waking state. Bahá’u’lláh was not in any sense speaking to me, but He was certainly aware of the responses that His presence evoked. Although I was fully conscious, I was nonetheless in a very altered state. It was the state of a humble servant bowed down before His Lord, when no word is spoken belonging to the mundane world that we normally inhabit.

There was no such thing, as the mystics sometimes claim, as union with one’s Lord. Bahá’u’lláh remained fully transcendent throughout. He was fully aware of my condition. I was entirely ignorant of anything else but His lordship. The divine encounter took place in that sacred space where the only words spoken are holy words, uttered only by His leave. I do not say “holy words” to suggest that I am in any way holy, but only to indicate that by the grace of Bahá’u’lláh, He allowed me to access my innermost heart where the Presence of God resides, in that space that Louis Massignon and later Thomas Merton called “*le point vierge*,” the virginal point, that immaculate place that can never be sullied by the things of the earth, the place where the beautiful “brides of inner meaning” (KI 175) are unveiled.

Here follow the things that I said when, like the prophet Daniel on the banks of the Tigris, where Bahá’u’lláh had once walked in Baghdád during His exile, I too had fallen on my face before the Glory of the Lord.

**The Soul's Conversation with its Lord:** To read these words again, words that are so intimate and personal, and to expose them to public scrutiny, seems to trivialize the significance they had for me then, when I spoke them aloud before that Divine Presence:

“O my God! O my God! O my God!”

“It was Bahá'u'lláh!”

“Bahá'u'lláh loves me! He loves me! I know He loves me for He came to me!”

“It is going out, it is all going away. It is leaving me. All the sorrow, the pain and suffering, it is all being taken away!”

“I have suffered so much. Nobody knows what I have suffered these past three years.”

“I am becoming new. I am being born again. I am becoming a new man, a new person!”

“It's a divine healing! It's a miracle!”

“O thank you my God! Thank you! Thank you for answering my prayer!”

“You have answered my prayer. My prayer has been answered!”

### *What Happened Then: What I Learned from this Experience*

If the reader now supposes that I experienced a complete cure from the distressing psychological state that had assailed me, and although such a perfect healing has happened to others, this sort of cure did not occur for me. No, healing from the condition that I labored under actually took years. But this experience confirmed in the most real way what I needed to understand to bear it: that Bahá'u'lláh is the All-Seeing, the All-Knowing, the All-Powerful, the Healer, the All-Sufficing.

It taught me that although I was not immediately psychologically healed, that my innermost soul was impervious to any ills of the body or mind. It taught me that God is able to change at His bidding any painful states of mind or adverse psychological conditions. This means that all healing is ultimately subject to the Will of God. No condition exists which God is not able to heal, however acute it may be. In that blissful state, I was entirely unaware of illness of any kind, be it of body or mind. I was not actually at all aware of my physical body; I was pure spiritual consciousness.

Unlike others who have been touched by the Divine Physician, although this experience did not bring complete and immediate healing of the mood disorder I was laboring under, I understood something else: that the soul is indeed a mysterious and powerful creation of God, beyond the capacity of humans to understand fully. It occupies a sacred space that is forever immune from any disability. I understood also that only a small part of the soul's full capacity and power is normally revealed in this life.

I do not consider that this experience was in any sense a reward for anything I had done. I believe rather that it was indisputable proof of the omniscience and mercy of the omnipotent Manifestation of God who does not wish to witness the dire suffering of even the least of His believers. I believe that it was precisely because this suffering was so acute at the time that Bahá'u'lláh chose to reveal Himself in His attribute of Power, the dominating attribute of the entire experience.

The power that forced me to my knees that night was only a smidgen, “an infinitesimal glimmer,” as He has written, of the power that the Ancient Beauty could have revealed. As it was, in the aftermath of the experience, I was left dazed and bewildered for a short time, just as if I had been struck by a lightning bolt. The dose of spiritual healing that I received then was measured to the limit of my capacity. Although I had been struck by lightning and knocked to the ground, somehow I lived to tell the tale.

I wrote above that on that night, one of the dynamic elements that I experienced had been “the fear of God.” I must clarify the meaning of this sentence. As has often been discussed by the mystics and other spirituals, this was not “fear” as we usually understand that word. It was not the fear that causes us to cower, to freeze or to run to save our lives or to stand and fight. No, fear of this sort did not enter the picture, simply because I had no choice but to submit. I did not submit because of fear; I submitted because of Power.

My bowing down was rather the one and only perfectly natural disposition of the soul to humble itself before such Majesty and Power, and to speak sacred words to its Creator in its gratitude. Although I remained awe-struck throughout the entire experience, I was completely lucid in a transcendental way that I had never before known. Despite the transcendental realm of the soul I had entered, the experience transpired “naturally” in that sacred space. He chooses to do as He wishes, and it is not ours to know the whys and wherefores. In the face of such irresistible and overwhelming power, the servant simply bows and obeys His Lord.

***Hand of the Cause Mr. Zikrulláh Khádem Vehicles the Love of Shoghi Effendi***

\*The same phenomenon described here below recurred in a less intense experience with Shamsi Sedaghat on a bus in the Soviet Union in 1990. The latter experience is found in my Russia journal, *To Russia With Love*, which is posted on my website, [www.jack-mclean.com](http://www.jack-mclean.com). It is also found in the last chapter of this book.

Each Hand of the Cause of God had particular qualities that made him or her distinct from all other Hands. In that sense, each Hand was the essence of individuality, notwithstanding their collective devotion to the Guardian and their service to the needs of the Divine Plan. Mr. Khádem was noted particularly for his remarkable love, dedication and personal devotion to the Guardian, whose true servant and fervent admirer he was. Affectionate, humble and courteous, a

man of refined manners and finely tuned spiritual sensitivity, he was like an evanescent drop lost in the ocean of Shoghi Effendi's love.

Unusually rare in this world, the love that Mr. Khádem transmitted that day to one who was then a Bahá'í youth, was vastly different from any form of affection that one may feel for loved ones, whether friends, family, fellow-believers or spouse. It was a type of love that was of an entirely different order of quality and magnitude.

I was about 21 years old. The youth of the Toronto community had been invited to a youth conference at York University to which the Hand of the Cause of God was scheduled to speak. It was a sunny day. I was seated somewhere near the back of the large hall. Mr. Khádem was speaking from the stage at the front of the room. I cannot recall the substance of his address now, but I do remember that he began by chanting in Persian the very beautiful passage translated in the *Gleanings* that begins "Release yourselves, O nightingales of God, from the thorns and brambles of wretchedness and misery, and wing your flight to the rose-garden of unfading splendor." (GL 319).

At some point during his talk, the divine visitation that I was in no way expecting began. Again, it began suddenly. I was sitting in my seat, listening to Mr. Khádem, when this irresistible wave of a most potent love came over me and sent me into another realm, where I quite lost my ordinary senses. In that moment, I became Majnun. Now the madness of the love that is written of Majnun for Layli in Middle-Eastern literature is a type of metaphor for the soul's love for God in its highest stages, but it is not actually a madness in the ordinary psychiatric sense of the world; not a madness that requires medical intervention.

But it would require medical attention if the experience of divine love that takes command of the soul were to become a permanent state *in this world*. Were it become a permanent state in the world of *Násut*, no individual could live in this world and be functional under such a powerful, consciousness-altering state. The divine love that I experienced during that episode, which lasted for about five minutes, was a foretaste of the heavenly love that is reserved for the Abhá Kingdom.

It is reserved for the inhabitants of the Crimson Ark because in the "land of there," as the poet Roger White called the world beyond, the soul is able to permanently sustain that sort of consciousness; in this world it cannot. It creates a kind of madness in this world, only because it is ordinarily reserved for the next. It would create a psychic disturbance if it lasted for any length of time in this world.

I can best describe that unexpected experience with a metaphor. This metaphor will better explain this spiritual experience to those who may be skeptical that such a thing could exist. Imagine a colossal magnet suspended in the air just above the stage where Mr. Khádem was speaking. Now picture yourself as a metal speck, a single iron filing lying in close proximity to that gigantic magnet. Would the metal speck be able to escape such an irresistible, powerful force?

That force transformed my entire being into an irresistible object of attraction, closely followed by an ecstasy during which, although I could still see with my physical eyes, I was really blind to anything else in my visual field. In a sense, that Magnetic Force caused the temporary suspension of my five senses, of everything except the overwhelming consciousness of love.

The proof of Its great magnitude is that it drew me literally out of my seat. If one can imagine—I then walked down the aisle, and in full view of all the assembled friends, mounted the stage, even as Mr. Khádem was speaking, and completely unembarrassed and forgetful of myself, threw my arms around him and kissed him on the cheek. This spontaneous, unusual gesture in such a formal setting, which might have been viewed as inappropriate by some, was not even a choice of mine, any more than breathing, eating or sleeping are choices.

It was something that I was utterly compelled to do, just as I have described falling to the floor in the presence of the Glory of God in the section above. Choice did not exist in that moment, either theoretically or practically. As the Greek root of the English word ecstasy suggests, I was standing “outside myself.” I had in a sense left my physical body. Normal social conventions were obliterated as was mundane consciousness.

Mr. Khádem looked at me, this strange young man who had climbed the stage to interrupt his talk, but he seemed not at all surprised or disturbed by my unusual behavior. He looked at me and said simply “God bless you.” He could not have known, just by looking at me, anything of the transformed state I was actually in. Still oblivious to those around me, I left the stage blinded by my own tears and returned to my seat, as everyday consciousness gradually returned.

For many years after, I had been unable to identify precisely the origin of this Divine Love which drew me toward Mr. Khádem like a gigantic magnet, nor for some years did I really seek to comprehend the experience any further. But some 25 years later, after Mr. Khádem had passed from this world, I met his wife, Javidokht Khádem, at a conference in Quebec City. As she gathered with some of her children during the afternoon break, I found a brief moment to tell her about my unusual experience, although I am certain that my words did not convey to her the enormity of the experience.

She listened politely under the circumstances and responded with the simple but certain observation: “Yes, that was the love of Shoghi Effendi.” Mrs. Khádem’s insight was the master key that instantly unlocked the meaning of that rare spiritual event. Although Mrs. Khádem clearly identified the dynamic source of that divine love, it could not explain the mysterious nature of that other worldly experience. No way exists to explain that divine love, other than how love itself has been described in our sacred writings.

But what *is* very clear to me is that Mr. Khádem vehicled the love of Shoghi Effendi to me that day. Beyond that I do not know, for divine love remains now and forever the mystery of mysteries. Yet, for all its mysterious power of attraction, it remains an enigma that can be experienced by all the friends, in its various forms and faces: in everything that ranges from simple cordiality, to friendship and fellowship, to more intense joy and exaltation, even unto the



bliss that makes us forget who we are, a love that can turn a callow youth into a Majnun, an ecstatic lover who, lost in the Valley of Love, forgets himself and all that is in the world, except the love that has possessed his entire being.

*After His Passing: In my Father's Presence with my Mother*

It was a very difficult adjustment to make for my mother Joyce after my father Allan James died suddenly on April 6, 1995. They loved one another deeply—so deeply that a mystical bond connected them, all the more so during their last years together. During that first year after my father died, my mother decided to visit us in Gatineau, Quebec from Salt Spring Island, British Columbia where my parents had retired circa 1978.

My mother was doing her best, as she always did, to live her life as courageously as possible, without having her husband by her side, but the pain of his absence lingered on despite her valiant efforts to resume life without him. It was the first time that I had seen my mother following my father's funeral on the island.

To outward appearances, she seemed to be coping well, but as I have mentioned elsewhere, she told me that the second year after my father's death was more trying for her than the first year. (I imagine that the first year of widowhood was a period of grieving and adjustment, while the second year became one of settling in to the harsh reality of life without father). We had moved from the living room into the bedroom where we continued our conversation—I was looking for a book in my library—when I suddenly felt my father's overpowering presence standing before us.

Although I could not see him, in the same way that I could not see Bahá'u'lláh in "Falling on my Face Before the Glory of the Lord," my father's presence was unmistakably strong. It was no vague impression. On the contrary, it was a clear, definite, magnetic presence. The presence was so strong that I bowed my head and said: "O Mom, Dad is here!" But on that day, I was only the messenger to my mother of my father's love and continued existence beyond the grave.

My mother remained perplexed because she could not sense what I was feeling. I was chagrined in turn because I wanted her to feel what I was feeling—that strong magnetic love emanating from my father's invisible presence right in our midst. No doubt my father also desired that my mother should feel his presence, but on that day she could not. She had to content herself with my testimony that he was with us that day, radiating his love to her. Their joyous reunion took place six years later.

## *Mother Keeps her Promise to Show me the Bliss of Heaven*

My mother Joyce Mary Halsted McLean died on November 28, 2001 on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia. I had lived with her on the island from 1997-1999, following my early retirement from teaching, but I returned to Ottawa after my two-year stay because I found the grey, damp, drab winters on the island psychologically challenging. I preferred the cold, dry, snowy but sometimes sunny Ottawa winter to the damp, cloudy, west coast hibernal season. During one of our conversations, I asked her that if it were possible, would she reveal the next world to me when she passed on? She responded: “Well, if I can, I will.”

After mother died, one day back in Ottawa I saw a flock of Canada geese flying overhead. Seeing Canada geese is not an unusual sight in this country, but I thought that perhaps the freedom of their flight, as they winged effortlessly through the sky, might have been the precursor sign mother promised of the happy life after death. It was an exhilarating experience to watch those geese on their flight path, but the gentle, peaceful mood that observing them evoked in no way compared to the extraordinary event that occurred one afternoon sometime later.

In November of 1999, I moved into a small but comfortable flat at 2-145 McLeod Street, just around the corner from Elgin Street, one of the main streets running north and south in Ottawa. I had already begun *A Celestial Burning* on Salt Spring Island, my selective study of the writings of Shoghi Effendi. Once I returned to Ottawa, I continued in earnest, researching and writing that book.

One afternoon, in connection with a passage I was writing, I was doing some research on the origin of the conception of paradise. I was consulting the entry under “Paradise” in an old 1959 edition of my *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The article stated the word paradise was of Persian origin, meaning “green garden.” It included a description that was based mainly on biblical passages.

The heavenly picture that emerged was based on figures of speech derived from nature: broad, flowing, rivers on whose banks trees grew which bore luscious fruits that bestowed healing to sick souls, and flowering, luxuriant gardens of exquisite beauty. I did not know it, as I began to read, but my mother’s promise was about to be realized.

As I perused the article, it began to dawn on me that the description of paradise was not based on mere verbal similes and metaphors. I was invaded by the certainty that visually the happy inmates of paradise would actually be able to see such blissful, bright, enchanting scenes in their beatific vision.

Then suddenly it happened! Imagine for a moment the ascent to a bubble that one sees above the heads of cartoon characters dialoguing in comic books. That bubble became that place which mother had promised to reveal. There for only a brief moment, I saw and felt the joy, love and light of the world to come. I saw and felt only light, love and space—no other figures were

visible at that time—but the one overwhelming feeling that transformed me, the only feeling that defined my consciousness, was that of a bliss beyond joy.

Not only was it “light upon light,” as ‘Abdu’l-Baha says in our sacred writings, but it was also joy upon joy, the kind of joy of that cannot be sustained for long in this world, but which can and will be sustained in the great world beyond. The joy I felt was registered at a much higher scale than the earthly joys that we know in this life.

The difference could best be understood this way: if you take the greatest experience of joy that you have had in this life—the birth of a child, a wedding, the freshness of a love relationship, the joy of companionship, the joy of adventure and travel, the realization of a cherished desire, or the joy of success—then multiply the intensity of that joy by a factor of say five-hundred. That comparison approximates the light and joy that I felt and saw when I ascended momentarily to that world.

### *And the Heavens Opened: An Experience of Cosmic Happiness*

This particular episode took place, as often happens, during a major dislocation in my life that occasioned great disappointment. I was in the process of moving to Almonte, Ontario, from Carleton Place, a move of short duration, before I relocated in Ottawa on December 1, 2016, after spending a few months in Gatineau, Quebec with my eldest daughter Mukina. I was having coffee in Almonte at the Equator Coffee Roasters with my good-humored, wise, truly spiritual friend and writer Richard van Duyvendyk.

We were sitting outside on a fine, summer’s day at a little circular coffee table and two chairs, the three pieces of the ensemble being painted bright red. Richard stood up and returned to the café to get a second cup. It was not a happy time of my life; I was experiencing again another situation of profound disillusionment. I looked up into the bright, cloud-filled, summer sky. As for some of the other transcendent experiences I have described, a veil was suddenly removed. Although there was no actual change in the visual landscape, my perception of the scene changed entirely. I should use rather the passive voice: it was changed. It came in the form of a revelation--with a small “r”.

A cosmic happiness was revealed in that heavenly vista. I say cosmic happiness because typically it was markedly different from all the manifestations of personal happiness that we usually experience in this life. I had been praying to be relieved of the distressing condition I was in, but I know that I did not—could not—cause it to happen by sheer force of will. The happiness that I saw and felt as I looked up, was remarkably broad, free and spacious. It was without limits. Hence the descriptor “cosmic” used in the title. It was supra-personal.

Although I was the experiencing subject, the experience did not belong to me. It was not something that was in my control, nor anything that I could have determined by changing my

attitude. It was God's joy, an objective joy that was above and beyond personal happiness, a joy that had been infused into the very being and fabric of the world that I saw.

When I shared this experience with my close friend of many years, Jamal Toeg, a friend who had not always had an easy life, he confided that he too had experienced the same thing, during a very trying time. He told me that what we both had seen was a foretaste, a previsioning of the life that awaits beyond death.

His understanding, I felt, was entirely correct, and I readily accepted his explanation. What we had seen corresponded to the joy described in Bahá'u'lláh's thirty-second Arabic Hidden Word: "O SON OF THE SUPREME! I have made death a messenger of joy to thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve? I made the light to shed on thee its splendour. Why dost thou veil thyself therefrom?" (HW Arabic #32) That messenger of joy brings the welcome news of an expansive, cosmic joy that is rarely obtained in this earthly life.

### *Resetting the Distressed Mind Through the Power of the Word of God*

As the reader will have by now already realized, some of the transcendental moments described above came in the waking state during moments of emotional crisis or distress. The moment related here came as sudden healing to remedy an emotional upset caused by a misunderstanding in a personal relationship. Although this episode did involve clairvoyance and clairaudience, these faculties did not operate precisely in the same way as in the experiences described elsewhere in this chapter.

I had been too upset to sleep. As I lay in the dark, I saw in my mind's eye—not objectively or externally in the room—a quotation from the Bahá'í sacred writings. Positionally, it appeared above my head. I can no longer recall the identity of that sacred text, but my eye began slowly to follow each word from left to right. As my eye scanned the words, I heard them being recited, but with full emphasis on each word. It took only a few moments to reach the end of the quotation, when suddenly, it was as if someone pressed a "reset button" in my brain. The cycle of agitation that had previously prevented sleep was instantly broken. It was as if a circuit-breaker had been closed and opened again, fully clearing the mind.

Because I was too astonished to fall asleep immediately, I began to reflect on the experience. I recalled the verses in our sacred writings that speak of the amazing powers that are latent in the Word of God, the magnificent powers of creation, for example. Although a believer does feel these creative powers moving the heart during pilgrimage or in prayer, or while listening to the sacred word during the Nineteen Day Feast, this was the first time I had experienced immediate healing from a distressing emotional condition that had occurred through the direct agency of the Word of God.

This experience enabled me to understand that the creative, healing powers latent in the Word of God cannot be reduced either to mere dramatic effect or poetic metaphor. These sacred

texts are literal truth expressed symbolically. My impression was that the healing that I experienced was a small demonstration of a much greater potential power, for the healing was effected with the greatest of ease and swiftness.

*Meeting Hand of the Cause Mr. Khádem in the Rose Garden of the Spirit*

While the mystical moment described here is not as dramatic and life-changing as the episodes mentioned above, it clearly falls within the mystical domain. It was only a brief meeting, but often in our brief passage through this world, the things that have the greatest impact on the soul can occur in only the briefest moment in time: in a glance, a chance meeting, a touch, a brief spoken word, or a gift.

The physical meeting—I should really call it an “encounter” because it was no ordinary meeting—with the Hand of the Cause was of the briefest duration, no more than a minute, but it was a true occurrence of the meeting of two souls in the rose garden of the spirit, where two believers are suddenly united in a moment of mutual recognition in the love of God.

It happened this way. It was about 1970 when I was attending the LouHelen Bahá’í school near Davison, Michigan, a suburb of Flint. Davison, as it was then called, looked quite different from the expanded and greatly improved facility that exists at the present time. It was during this visit to LouHelen that I met Helen Eggleston herself, the founder and donator of the facility, who was by then in her senior years. (Lou was somewhat older than Helen and he had since passed on).

Helen was living on the property at the time, and she was kind enough to invite me into her home where we chatted about the Faith and its history. As I was leaving, she gave me as a memento of the visit, a thick typewritten compilation of the Bahá’í Writings. The compilation was of European length, i.e. the paper was slightly longer than the standard letter size in North America.

One afternoon I happened to be walking between buildings, going no place in particular. At the same time, Mr. Khádem, who was also walking between buildings, suddenly appeared just across from me. From what I recall, only the two of us were in the same spot at the same time. We were only about 10 meters/11 yards from one another when our paths crossed.

I saw the Hand of the Cause before he saw me. I saw him first because he was wrapped in his devotions, as he often was, lost deeply in thought. He looked like the true image of a walking contemplative, musing on the mysteries of the Kingdom of God or on his beloved Shoghi Effendi. His head was slightly bowed and his hands were clasped behind his back.

Then he looked up and saw me. Now this encounter happened as if two old bosom pals who had not seen one another for many years were suddenly reunited. It was the archetypal experience of the kind of meeting that should take place between the friends of God that has

been described in ideal terms by ‘Abdu’l-Baha: the lovers of the East should in perfect love outstretch their hands to embrace the friends of the West, and to rejoice in that love and unity.

I did not know Mr. Khádem well, so I cannot claim to have been in any sense a close friend of the family, although I had met his son Ramin and his daughter May when I was young, and much later his older son, the architect Mozhan Khádem, when we shared a room at the Bosch Bahá’í School in Santa Cruz, California.

Forgetting himself in that magical moment that I was not Iranian—I am of Anglo-Saxon origin, tall and in those days, I still had a full head of blond hair—Mr. Khádem began to speak to me quite spontaneously in Persian, the language of his heart, as he reached out to embrace me. Although I was young and he was middle-aged, during our sudden encounter, there was no age discrepancy, no barrier of any kind between us.

All barriers, all formalities, all distinctions had been removed. We were united in the eternal presence of God’s love, when the friends of God, as the Báb has revealed, become mirrors for one another’s souls. I have never before or since had such a full, immediate spiritual encounter with one individual: a moment of instant recognition in which a unity of spirits in the love of God is spontaneously realized.

### *Three Dreams: The Two Bábí Shaykhs, the Ark and the Lotus*

In my nocturnal travels in one of the worlds of God, I entered the humble dwelling of two Shaykhs. Their dwelling was nothing more than a hut, indicating that they lived in a state of utter poverty. They wore turbans which were really nothing more than simple cloths wound around their heads. They wore the simplest attire. Their earthly identity could have been either Persian or Arab.

They were sitting in the typical manner on the ground. It was clear to me that these two learned men were studying the Word of God; they were conferring on spiritual matters in single-minded fashion. They were serious. All that mattered to them was the Word of God and the spiritual life. They had no other interests. They seemed to me to be disciples of the Báb, perhaps two Letters of the Living or other Dawn-breakers. When I entered their hut, one of them looked up at me and said: “When you came into this room, the whole atmosphere changed.” (I think he meant in a positive rather than a negative sense.)

The second dream conveyed an atmosphere of joy and adventure, and the greatest sense of exhilaration and freedom. I found myself on the ocean in the middle of a robust storm. The waves had been whipped high by the wind and the heaving of the waters. I saw myself standing on the outside edge of a small ark that was riding the waves. I was completely unafraid as I stood on a footing at the back of the vessel. The small craft moved speedily forward, in the midst of the storm, rising and falling with the motion of the waves. The salty spray from the water splashed over my body and face.

It was so thrilling to ride this ark in the midmost ocean, enjoying this adventure, while being not the least bit concerned for my own safety. I was completely abandoned to the joy of the experience. This dream was an indication that we should joyfully ride the ark of faith in the midst of any storm. Perhaps it was an ideal vision that we should ride the waves of the tests of life on the ark of the divine teachings.

The third dream was also aquatic, but this time it took place not *on* but rather *in* the water. It was the polar opposite of the dream of the ark which was all excitement, freedom and movement. I saw myself sitting on the sandy bottom of the ocean in the lotus position with my eyes closed. This time I was completely immobile, totally immersed in the contemplation of the Spirit, concentrated, but again completely unafraid and at peace. Underwater I could breathe.

### *The Blessed Night of Peace*

At this writing, the most recent of these transcendental experiences happened on 23 March, 2020 when I was 74 years old. It took place during the world-wide pandemic caused by the Coronavirus (COVID-19), when citizens around the world were expected to stay home and self-isolate to contain the spread of the infection. That evening I was home alone reading Frances Worthington's excellent book *Abraham: One God Three Wives and Five Religions* (2011).

The mood, or more properly, the higher stream of consciousness that came over me, was not self-generated. It came rather as a visitation from above or beyond. The paranormal experience manifested as a peaceful rapture that lasted about an hour. It came over me so gradually that I was not fully aware at first that a change was taking place, until it took entire possession of my soul.

During the time of the visitation—"visitation" being used here in the sense of an extraordinary visit—it seemed that this state of mind, although it came from a higher plane than any mundane awareness, was entirely mine, not something foreign. The "I" then experienced was fully me, but it was the "I" of the higher self. The "stream of consciousness," that felicitous expression coined by the great psychologist William James, manifested both thoughts and feelings simultaneously. Some of the thoughts I spoke aloud as I was experiencing them.

The ostensible point of departure for this transcendental experience was some of the remarkable insights contained in Frances Worthington's book. Although I had long been familiar with some of these ideas, during this experience they assumed a greater depth-dimension of significance.

Among them was a deeper realization that all the Prophets are related as one brother and that mankind is indeed genetically one family in which all the races are related. Her book fully validates God's promise to Abraham that his descendants shall cover the earth as the dust: "and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:3) Her book has it that all of us—every human being on the face of the earth—share a common ancestor, not in the remotest of

ancestral times, but only some 2,000-3,000 years ago.

The intellectual realization that preceded the transcendental experience was in sum a fuller understanding of the organic unity of the human race, a unity that included an even profounder unity of all the Prophets, who were both spiritually and genetically related. What astonished me especially was to discover that white Europeans had descended from Muhammad through an Arabian Amir in Muslim Spain, and that Abraham and Keturah's six sons had voyaged east and had taken Abraham's religion as far as the Indus River, where it became known as Brahmanism, a word that contains a linguistic cognate of the word Abraham. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also confirmed in *Light of the World* that the sons of Abraham had travelled as far east as Afghanistan.

A Christian missionary of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Phillipus Baldeus, met a group of Brahmans in Sri Lanka who told him that their ancestors were descendants of Keturah. The Brahmans held the reverse theory that Abraham was not the forefather of Brahmanism, but a descendant of it. They tell that in ancient times they had been forced out of the Indus valley and had journeyed from India during a devastating famine and had arrived in Mesopotamia in Ur of the Chaldees, in what is modern day 'Iráq.

But the blessed night of peace went beyond any profound intellectual realization. It was a state of consciousness that could not really be described as "cosmic consciousness," the title of Richard Maurice Bucke's 1901 book. I had no awareness of traveling great distances or looking down from on high to visualize the world below me.

I would describe it rather as an "elevated consciousness" or "higher consciousness" that felt akin to an anointing. This higher consciousness was characterized by all of the following: a total absence of fear or anxiety, whether of death, sin or any other thing; serenity and bliss; it lauded the blessings of God in gratitude and thanksgiving.

In that state, I was conscious of some other souls who had blessed me during my life, such as my children and my parents. It seemed to me that my soul was entirely satisfied and lacked nothing nor desired anything; it knew no form of desire. It was all thankfulness and blessings for the precious gifts that I had been given in my life. The line from the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm of the Prophet-King David of Israel expresses it well: "My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

During this experience, all the distress of the world completely disappeared, despite the trying conditions the human race is currently experiencing through a worldwide pandemic. I sat peacefully, reading and meditating as holy thoughts kept running slowly through my mind. I repeated aloud: "Yes, yes, I understand. Yes, it's true. It's all true."

As I looked around the room, I saw the white rose, the favorite flower of Bahá'u'lláh. I saw the photo of my beloved parents side-by-side looking smilingly upward to their left, as if they had caught a glimpse of heaven. I saw the photo of my two daughters, Mukina and Leah, when they were children. I kept thinking on all these things, while I said aloud quite self-unconsciously: "Yes, I am blessed with so many blessings and all this is holy. Everything is



holy.”

It was as if I were a noble wrapped in a royal robe of purple during the time that it lasted. I felt fully integrated; any sense of a divided self was obliterated. Another form of unity, unity of the self had been easily attained. Although I was conscious that I still lived in this world, I felt elevated and whole. I had entered a higher realm.

That hour was a blessed night of peace, the hour of confirmation, a special time to pause, savor and value all the blessings with which my life had been graced. And when I closed my eyes during this time, I could see little motes of lovely light dancing before me, imparting joy, and thin, moving, far-off lines that were symbols of the traces of paradise. For that blessed hour, a door to the Abhá Kingdom had been momentarily set ajar.

## II. VISIONS

### *Witnessing the Sacrificial Love of the Martyrdom of the Báb*

When I was studying for my Master’s degree in the History of Religions at the University of Ottawa in the early 1970’s, I had a close friend, a fellow-Bahá’í named Bahram Katirai, who was also studying at the same university. Bahram had lived with some of us university students in Rockland, Ontario, east of Ottawa, including my former wife and friend, the Gaspesian Quebecer, Brigitte Maloney Polycarpe.

It was while we were living in Rockland that Brigitte and I married. Our eldest daughter Mukina was born in Ottawa at the Montfort Hospital during our stay in Rockland. While we were studying at the University of Ottawa, we students of majority age formed the first Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Rockland in 1972. The other students on the Assembly were the married American couple Don and Catherine Gilbert, and their compatriot, Richard Heiser, Canadian Albert Ouimet, who later moved to the Netherlands, the married couple Paul and Louise Haines and the musician Pierre Tremblay and Michel Boucher.

On 9 July, although classes had been suspended for the summer, Bahram and I happened to be at the university. Even though there were only two of us, we decided that we would meet and commemorate the holy day. It was a warm, sunny day. We decided to make for the trees that stand on the campus, on the east side of the main administration building, with its pillared colonnade in the classic Greco-Roman style.

We met under a pine tree, on the spreading lawn. We scarcely chatted, being aware of the solemnity of the occasion. Now Bahram was a very faithful and deep Bahá’í, with a fine mind and a sensitive heart. I can still clearly recall, despite all these passing years, the look of reverence and humility on his face as we began the commemoration with prayer.

It was at some point during the devotions that the mystical visitation came over me. As it has been written many times about the ineffable, it was an experience well-nigh impossible to capture in words. I can only put it this way: as I was looking up into the heavens, I began to perceive the world through what may be compared to a transcendent filter. It was the filter of divine love and sanctity.

And if a filter can be conceived as a kind of “veil” that is burnt away, or a curtain that is raised to reveal a greater, heavenly reality, then it was the lifting of a veil, or paradoxically, seeing through the filter, that allowed me an insight into something extraordinary. The vision was superimposed, as it were, over the physical heaven that I was contemplating. Through that filter, or beyond that veil, I was able to see into one of the divine realities connected with the Martyrdom of the Báb.

The Blessed Beauty alludes to “veils of glory.” This fascinating phrase requires contemplation. Normally veils are things that blind the observer to reality, but they can also be viewed as curtains that are lifted or burnt away to reveal another reality. The phrase can also mean that Bahá’u’lláh, while revealing His glory, revealed that glory only to a limited degree, i.e. that He remained still wrapped in “veils of glory.”

Here I must use that paradoxical language that is so typical of mystical literature. Although I saw no physical vision, I mean as a literal transformation of the physical heavens, I nonetheless saw, felt, and understood what the supreme sacrifice of the Blessed Báb bestowed upon creation.

I saw and understood that everything in the world existed because of the supreme divine love that infused and suffused the world with the sacrifice of the Báb’s most precious earthly life. I understood also that the sacrifice of the Báb for humanity, and His companion Anís for the Báb, was not confined to noon on that July day in 1850. Its effects continue to radiate in inexhaustible waves of sanctifying energy that will continue forever.

No hint of tragedy or sadness marked that transcendent moment on that July afternoon, although historically the Martyrdom of the Báb was indeed the greatest tragedy of a lost opportunity for the Persian nation and for all humanity. It was rather a vision of sanctification, divine love and supreme sacrifice. The sacrifice of the earthly life of that “Master Hero,” as Shoghi Effendi has so accurately described Him, no doubt an expression contrasted with the Shakespearean “tragic hero,” bestowed a gift that was the essence of life itself.

In sum, I understood that everything in the world was sustained and energized because of that sacrificial love. For it bestowed life upon creation by an infinite store of love, love as a divine energy that serves to animate and sanctify all creation.

That scene was the living representation of the many life-bestowing, creative effects of the sacrificial death of Christ, so eloquently portrayed by Bahá’u’lláh in the *Gleanings*. In witnessing the effects of the sacrificial death of the Báb, I actually understood, or rather experienced, what the Blessed Beauty had revealed about Jesus of Nazareth.

## *Seeing the Unity of Humanity in a Student Restaurant in Paris*

Outside of my childhood experiences, through which I first acquired a consciousness of the spiritual realm, one of the first transcendental moments I experienced in adulthood occurred in a *restaurant universitaire*, during my student days at the Sorbonne (1965-1968). It was in Paris where I had my first exposure to a much wider internationalism than I had known in Toronto where I grew up.

Toronto in those days, although it had received waves of European immigrants following World War II, was still very much a city whose predominant population was of British origin. Unlike the present time, few were the immigrants then from South Asia, the Far East and Africa, although Toronto like most large cities had its “Chinatown” and “little Italy.”

In Paris, I met for the first time students from the former French colonies in Africa and *les pieds noirs*, non-Muslim French-speakers from Algeria. Although there are competing theories about the origin of the phrase, it was explained to me that “the black feet” alluded to the black boots that French soldiers wore in Algeria.

This wider exposure to the black race, as well as to whites from the various European nations who were studying at the Sorbonne was, of course, an excellent experience for one who had already embraced racial unity as one of the great tenets of his religious beliefs.

I don’t know to what extent this wider interracial exposure in Paris had to do with what happened to me one afternoon, as I was about to eat my lunch at the university restaurant. I was going through the cafeteria line in the Censier *quartier*, not far from the student center where foreign students had their transcripts assessed of their academic courses.

I had just selected my noonday meal after paying the very modest student price and picked up my tray. As I left the line, I naturally looked up to make my way to the nearest table. What I saw then was not the usual scene to which I was normally accustomed. A sudden, dramatic shift in perception occurred, as if a veil of holiness had either been cast over the scene, or as if a veil had been lifted so that that I might visualize this scene in a divine perspective.

Although the word “light” has been frequently used to describe mystical visitations—so often in fact that the word can lose its meaning—the words “light” or “illumination” are used to describe them because these words correspond exactly to the nature of the vision seen. Light is also symbolic for a newly revealed form of insight or knowledge.

I saw then an intimation of the future glorious unity of humanity. The black and white races that I beheld in the cafeteria were blended, melted or merged in a vision of oneness that overcast them in a wave of love, peace, harmony and unity. The lines of the Bahá’í prayer come to mind: “that all things may be merged into nothingness before the revelation of Thy splendor.” And “a single breath from the breezes of the Day of Thy Revelation is enough to adorn all mankind with a fresh attire.” What I saw was a creative vision of what the world will experience when all the races of humanity will be blended into one race, on a day when all mankind will live

each day, individually and collectively, as a living expression of the Divine Will through the teachings revealed by Bahá'u'lláh.

### *Seeing 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Clouds*

Along with the spiritual awakening in childhood described earlier in chapter three, the first incident of a vision occurred a little later when I was about ten years old. The vision described here is a different type from the two others described above. In this case, I actually saw a figure in the clouds, rather than having an image superimposed on my mind's eye.

It was a bright sunny summer's day, when I was returning from our neighbors, the Inesons, who had a son named Billy, a boy my own age. The Inesons lived a short distance north of my parents' two-story home on Martin Grove Road, in what was then rural Etobicoke, now a well-populated, industrial area of the city of Toronto.

I was walking home alone in the late afternoon or early evening, while the sky was still very bright, piled high and wide with enormous cumulus clouds. When I was just a short distance from home, I looked up into the sky to my left. Configured there, high in the clouds, and dominating the entire scene like a colossus, was the clear, huge image of a patriarchal man, with a long, white beard sitting in a very relaxed posture, with both forearms resting comfortably on the arms of his throne.

It was an awe-inspiring scene that evoked both fear and wonder. I was startled by the sudden vision. "Who is this?" I thought. "Is this what God looks like?" Just a few years earlier in 1952, my mother Joyce, after two years of study, had declared her faith in Bahá'u'lláh. Although the Master's photo hung over her chair in the living-room of our next home at 6 Emery Circle, Etobicoke, I do not recall that mother had placed a photo of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in our home on Martin Grove Road. As far as I remember, the earthly image of the Master had not fully entered my consciousness at that young age, although I knew His name from the prayers that mother taught us children.

It did not occur to me then that the celestial figure who appeared in the clouds was the Servant of Glory. It was only much later, as I reflected back on that late afternoon, did I realize that the towering figure riding on the clouds was the perfect image of a smiling, benevolent 'Abdu'l-Bahá. As the cogent literary expression has it, it was a clear case of "dramatic foreshadowing."

### *My Mother's Vision When She Was Still A Child*

\*The following section relates a vision during the waking state that my mother had when she was still a child herself. Although I had heard a few vague allusions to it during my adult

years, it remained a mystery to me. It was not until the 52nd or 53rd year of my life that mother related her vision to me. The main reason that she kept it to herself all those years was that she had not fully understood its significance—that is, until the streams of our two lives crossed again in the last few years of her life. It was then that the significance of her vision became apparent to her.

During the two years (1997-1999) immediately following my early retirement, I moved to Salt Spring Island from Ottawa, where my mother Joyce and my older sister Mary Lou were living. My father Allan James had died suddenly two years earlier on April 6, 1995. Although my sister was living on the island, Mary Lou was still fully employed at that time. Mother welcomed my company and my assistance—her health was beginning to deteriorate following my father’s death—and I appreciated having my mother in my life again and to be able to help her through a difficult period of transition.

At her invitation, I moved into my parents’ bungalow during the summer of 1997, helping out with the housework, the gardening, assisting her when she needed my help, while I worked on my writing. The company kept loneliness at bay for us both. It was a good arrangement. During that time, mother and son became better acquainted, albeit at a much later stage in our lives. We had many good and happy hours at 131 Mt. Baker Crescent, both between ourselves and in the company of friends and family.

During our conversations, we reminisced about family life and past events. I learned much more than what I had known previously about my parents’ conjugal life, my mother’s youth, and her family life growing up with my grandparents Halsted, how my parents met, their working life, etc. It was a time of recapitulation and rediscovery, of receiving a new perspective on family history.

One afternoon while we were having a conversation in the living room, something prompted her to speak about her vision. She told me that when she was only a child—I honestly don’t know how old she was, and she did not seem to be sure of her age at the time either—mother awoke one morning to see a luminous spirit sitting at the foot of her bed. She told me that the vision came in the form of a small figure of light, an illumined little child.

It seems somehow strange to say that it was one child looking at another child. She told me that she was momentarily troubled by this strange phenomenon that she could neither explain nor understand. The child whom she was watching sat very still, quietly meditating in a deep state of contemplation. Mother had related the vision to her parents and to her siblings, but it went unexplained for many years until the moment of our conversation that afternoon.

A moment of resolution came some 70 years later when mother finally discovered the key that explained the vision. After relating the vision, as if finding sudden relief, she announced: “Now I know that the little child I saw was you!” In the end, I accepted mother’s explanation that she had found at last the key to the mystery that had for so long eluded her.

But aside from the resolution that she found to her mysterious vision, I find such a phenomenon not only strange and mysterious, but also marvelous. That my mother when she was

still a child herself, could have seen one of her children before he was born, when she was given an intimation of her child's spiritual disposition many years in advance, gives us great pause for thought. Greater minds than mine will have to explain such things, if they can. "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy!" said Shakespeare's Hamlet (Act 1, scene 5).

### *Seeing Dr. Todd Lawson Underwater in Cuba*

I alluded to this dream at the head of this chapter under "Five Types of Transcendental Experiences." The dream that I had of my old friend and Islamic studies scholar who taught at the University of Toronto, Dr. Emeritus Todd Lawson, was pictured in bright, vivid colors. (When they were both young men, my brother Steve gave the first fireside that Todd attended in Toronto at Laura Vautour's home).

In my experience, the brighter the colors in a dream, the closer it is to true spiritual reality. The vision came as a snapshot. I saw Todd underneath the water, wearing snorkeling gear, in front of an underwater cave. I had no idea that he was vacationing in Cuba at the time. I sent him an email, telling him about the unusual clarity of the dream, because I suspected that it might be accurate. He wrote back saying: "That's uncanny. That's just what I was doing in Cuba." The dream-vision shows that the friends are spiritually connected, whether near or far from one another.

### *The Double-Sign: The Vision of Smoke and Mist*

Like the "Blessed Night of Peace," this vision was one of the more recent paranormal experiences. I remember the very day well because it was my 74<sup>th</sup> birthday, on 7 June, 2019. A group of kind friends here at the co-op at 1435 Larose Avenue in Ottawa decided to fête my birthday by taking me out to lunch.

On a sunny June day, our small group had gathered at the front entrance of the building, while we waited to be picked up by our driver. The scene took place on the west side of the semi-circular driveway, just beyond the main steps descending to the sidewalk. On the other side of the railing, stands a pine tree that is rather more lateral in shape than vertical in height. Stretching out from the pine lies a narrow strip of lawn extending the entire length of the west wing of the co-op.

As we waited for our driver, I looked up into the air above the pine tree to my right. At that moment, I saw two successive things. I should mention that this scene took place in full sight and hearing of my friends. When I saw wisps of smoke in the air, I said aloud: "Where is that smoke coming from? Someone is smoking over there."

I went to take a closer look, but I could not see anyone on the lawn. I thought then that the smoke had perhaps drifted down from the balcony of the apartment above. But when I looked up at the balcony, I saw no one smoking. Again, the friends I was with said nothing. They just assumed that I had seen cigarette smoke or that I was mistaken.

When I looked again, I saw the second phenomenon: a fine mist. I saw these two things objectively in the air, not in my mind's eye. Again, I said aloud: "Edie must be watering her lawn. I see mist in the air." Once again, the others did not react and said nothing, although they must have felt my observation to be strange because mist was not visible to any one of them, just as the smoke had not been visible to any one of them either.

But Edie, who lives on the ground floor, had not been watering her lawn, nor had anyone on the balcony above been watering flowers or smoking. The incident ended there because our driver then arrived, as we all piled into the car and made off for the destination of our chosen restaurant.

My Christian friend Christine Crawford was sitting opposite me at the lunch table. Now Christine has experienced herself a few transcendental phenomena. She does not doubt that such things happen. When I affirmed to her again that I had actually seen both smoke and mist, Christine accepted my explanation readily, without contesting my testimony, but without questioning me further.

Later I began to reflect on the meaning of the experience. The dual phenomenon that I witnessed was visible only to myself. It occurred to me that the two divine signs I had witnessed had appeared to remind me of just one thing. It was this: that whatever we do in this life, whether it be eating, drinking, celebrating, living and loving—these necessary and albeit legitimate things of life—are all transitory. Compared with Ultimate Reality, they have no real substance. They are, in a sense, illusions, as ephemeral as the mist or smoke that appears but for a moment in the air and then disappears.

### III. CLAIRVOYANCE

#### *Seeing Roger Pereira Dressed as a Priest*

This episode of clairvoyance happened in the presence of others. While Brigitte and I were living in Gatineau, West Quebec, raising our daughters Mukina and Leah, a brilliant secondary school teacher named Roger Pereira became a Bahá'í. Roger was working at the same *polyvalente* or comprehensive high school where believer M. Alain Robitaille was an administrator. Roger was originally Haitian and his congenial wife, whose name I have by now forgotten, was not a French Quebecer, but a French national.

Roger told us that he had a Bahá'í sister living in the United States who had once told him: "Oh Roger you are really a Bahá'í!" At that time, Roger knew very little about the Faith, and my impression is that he did not inquire further. In any case, shortly after he joined the Bahá'í community, Roger, his wife, Brigitte and I were sitting around their dining room table, chatting. Roger was seated directly opposite me at the other end of the table.

Suddenly I saw Roger dressed in black as a priest, with a large golden cross hanging around his neck. The sudden interposition of this vision startled me. Because it was so clear, I decided to share with the group what had just occurred. After I told them what I had seen, Roger looked at me and said: "Vous êtes un homme dangereux. J'étais prêtre pendant dix ans en Haïti." ("You are a dangerous man. I was a priest for ten years in Haiti."). We continued talking and determined that at no time before in our short acquaintance had Roger ever mentioned that he had been a priest.

### *Seeing my Father Dancing Before His Casket*

When our father, Allan James McLean, died suddenly on April 6, 1995, our mother Joyce and our whole family were deeply saddened, but nonetheless grateful to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Salt Spring Island, British Columbia, particularly to Dr. Dan Popov, for arranging the memorial service for our dad. Dan performed this service with great sensitivity and exceptional care. Dan is the husband of Linda Kavelin Popov, author, educator and creator of the Family Virtues program and the Virtues Cards. Her father H. Borrah Kavelin was a member of the Universal House of Justice during its early days following its first election in 1963.

Mother looked very subdued, but collected during the service. She would not feel the full impact of her husband's death until later. During the service, my daughters Mukina and Leah sat on either side of me. I had my arms around their shoulders, while the song by Barbara Streisand, "Why did I Choose You?" chosen by our mother was playing. My brother Steve and I both gave eulogies of our father; our older sister Mary Lou was too moved to speak. Dan Popov also spoke about Dad with great reverence.

Father's casket had been placed at the front of the small United Church that had been offered through the kindness of the local minister, the Rev. Barry Cooke. Steve spoke after me. By that time, I was sitting with the rest of my family at the front of the assembly, with the casket in full view, listening to my brother.

As we all stood to leave the church, I suddenly had a vision of my father as a young man dancing before his casket. I say dancing, but it was not exactly a dance. It was more of a victory or celebratory step, as he stood in place. As I watched, father lifted his left knee a short distance into the air, returned his foot to the ground, and repeated the same movement with his right knee. At the same time as he lifted each foot, he raised in turn each arm into the air to about the same height, as he raised each leg. Great joy and a sense of liberation were compressed into those deliberate, rhythmic, slow movements of his arms and legs.



He could move again! At the time of his death, father had been for some years confined to a wheelchair because of very painful “bone on bone” knee joints: the cartilage had wasted away. One hip was also so deteriorated that it would no longer support his weight. (I once heard him cry out in agony as he tried to move).

Now I was seeing him as a newly liberated youth, celebrating his newfound freedom of movement. He had been released from the prison of his pain-filled body. It was the same message that the west coast water-colorist, Carol Evans, also of Salt Spring Island, delivered to my mother after his death. According to Carol, my father insisted from the world beyond that she let mother know about his great liberation. The message was: “Tell Joyce that now I am flying with great freedom.”

In the vision in the church, father appeared to be a young man, about 15 years of age. The vision confirmed the wisdom that death bestows youth. Although there is no space-time in the next world, the state of my father’s soul had to appear to me in a framework that defines our mortal life here. I understood that he looked so young to my eyes because he had just started his journey in the next world. I had never before seen my father as such a young man, although I had seen some black-and-white photos of him when he was a little older.

But what I did find curious about the vision was not so much my father’s youth, which was surprising enough, but the manner of his dress. Now my father loved to play golf. He appeared to me, not as an occasional “duffer”—he was in fact a prize-winning amateur golfer—but as a serious linksman, wearing a golfer’s uniform, including the cap, the matching jacket and “plus fours,” the baggy trousers reaching just below the knee, worn by golfers in the early decades of the 20th century. Father appeared to me as a golfer because it was on the golf course that he found one of life’s greatest pleasures and relaxations.

It was very rare for my father to voice any sort of complaint, even less his fears, unless it was a fear that his children would hurt themselves. But my father feared the wheelchair. So it was a very atypical remark when one afternoon, after I had inquired about his health, that he said suddenly with strong emotion: “If I ever end up in a wheelchair, I’ll shoot myself.” I was very surprised by that personal comment, in view of the fact that father almost never complained about himself.

I am quite sure that my father never had a suicidal thought in his life, but his remark showed how much he feared the loss of mobility. It was both ironic and strange that his worst fear came true. Needless to say, my father did not shoot himself. When his mobility became impossible, he accepted the wheelchair with the same magnanimity that he accepted the other challenges in his life. The vision of my father performing a little victory dance, dressed as a young golfer, was heaven-sent glad-tidings that he had begun a new and greater journey of freedom.

#### IV. CLAIRAUDIENCE

Clairaudience means hearing a message very distinctly which is perceived as coming from a source outside oneself. It is a very different phenomenon from the normal thought process which is conversation with oneself, in which questions are asked and answers received, or when random thoughts drift into the mind unconsciously. All thoughts, as distinct from feelings, intuitions or impressions are received by consciousness verbally. However, the experience of hearing a message by clairaudience is markedly different in nature by the abruptness, strength and/or urgency of the message received. The clairaudient messages that I receive come usually during a time of test, either as a consolation or warning to avoid something impending. When clairaudient messages are received as consolations, although the message is still strong, a gentler, comforting quality defines the voice of these messages rather than a foreboding or warning.

*“Do not grieve over that which God has ordained for it is light upon light.”*

Following divorce, I had moved from the family home in Gatineau and had relocated in the nearby town of Hull, Quebec, now amalgamated with Gatineau. Although I still had close contact with my daughters, Mukina and Leah, and the Bahá'í friends, it was a lonely and painful time of readjustment. I was feeling very saddened and bereft, when this very comforting message came early one evening. The message came by way of a strong contrast to my prevailing mood. I will not speculate on the source of the message, except to say that it came from a higher realm. It did not originate with me. I had the clear impression that the message was sent as consolation to relieve my suffering.

*“You shall be weightless.”*

This message came to me during the same year that Brigitte and I moved to La Pocatière, Quebec where I had obtained my first teaching job and where we celebrated Mukina's first birthday, on 10 November, 1973. It came as consolation for the burdensome psychological condition of depression that I was laboring under. Today I take this message as having two meanings: one, in its ultimate sense, that it is only when we leave this world that we become truly weightless; the other meaning was that, relatively speaking, at this advanced time of my life, I am comparatively weightless to the burden I was carrying in those days. But the truer meaning lies in the ultimate sense.

***“Nous vous avons donné les plus grandes joies, les plus grandes peines.” (“We have given you the greatest joys and the greatest sorrows”)***

This message came to me in French, not long after I had returned from my study-stay at the Sorbonne in February, 1968, when I was 23 years old. It did not occur during any time of trial; on the contrary, when I received this message I was happy, still living at home, and doing well in my studies at the University of Toronto. In retrospect, this message came as a kind of forewarning of things to come in the future. It is also an objective description of both the joys and sorrows that I have experienced in my psycho-spiritual life.

***“Verily We have chosen someone else for thee.”***

Facing a necessary separation from a dear friend, and feeling grief-stricken at this prospect, my tears began to flow. I was sitting down at that moment when suddenly a loving presence that centered in my solar-plexus, moved up to flood my heart, like a warm and comforting wave. It suffused my entire being, while an angelic, sweet voice spoke these words: “Verily, We have chosen someone else for thee.”

This was not a voice that I heard outside myself, reverberating in the room objectively, but one that came from deep within my being. Yet it was clearly not a voice that I recognized as coming from me, but rather it originated in a higher, merciful, watchful Presence that wished to comfort, guide and reassure me.

***“Goftam ke nakun!” (“I told you no!”)***

One of the lessons that I had to learn in life was to trust these extraordinary paranormal, transcendent experiences, especially when the guidance they provided was contrary to my personal desires. I sometimes received it with misgivings and doubts. Although I was of a mature age and experience, my selfish desires would sometimes cause me to rationalize the clear and emphatic guidance I had received. But the mercy of God is so great and forbearing that it does not leave us to ourselves, especially when Providence foresees that in our own ignorance we are about to do something that will cause unhappiness to others and ourselves.

This time the emphatic message came in Persian. Now I do not speak Persian fluently, but I took introductory Persian at the Institute of Islamic Studies with Ms. Berengian at the University of Toronto, circa 1969. I had also learned some Persian words by listening to the Iranian friends speak to one another in their mother tongue and by picking up here and there some key Persian words from our sacred writings. But I knew enough Persian to understand the clear and emphatic message I heard that day. The fact that it came in Persian was meant to impress upon me that that the message came from a higher source, perhaps from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi.

‘In spite of this explicit guidance, I continued to rationalize my situation, justifying my actions by imagining that the message I had received was coming from a fear-based voice that was being projected from the unconscious mind or being picked up from others. The great lesson that I learned from subsequent events was never to ignore such explicit guidance, especially when it comes with such clarity, emphasis and repetition.

***“Is that you Jack?” Message From Maternal Grandmother Jessie Fallon Halsted***

Like visions, clairaudience can also occur in dreams. Both clairaudience and visions, in my experience at least, can occur in both the sleeping and waking states. What counts is the degree of assurance and clarity of the message, not whether it occurs during sleep or wakefulness. (The current view seems to be that visions occur only in the waking state, but I find that view unnecessarily restrictive).

The message above came in the voice of my grandmother Jessie Halsted, who by that time had passed on to the Abhá Kingdom. I had become upset about damage to the door of a new automobile the family had just purchased. My reaction had been excessive. Grandmother intervened from the next world to remind me, in her typically kindly way, that I was out of character. Her voice in the dream was also strong evidence, evidence that I have also learned from other dreams, that those who have passed on to the next world are aware of everything that we do—even, I believe, what we think. Nothing is hidden from them.

***“She died because she didn’t want to go on living. She just stopped breathing.”***

Sometimes an awkward situation can arise when you teach the Faith to a person of the opposite sex. It must be clear from your interactions, other than being friendly and personable, that the teacher’s motivation is the Faith, not the seeker; otherwise complications can arise. The same is true for the seeker. He or she must be clear that the object is the Faith and not the teacher.

The situation became unworkable. She did become a Bahá'í, but after I moved away, she ceased having any interest in the Faith. This weighed heavily on me until I heard the words quoted above—words that were uttered in a very definite and emphatic tone. The message made it clear, as Bahá'u'lláh has revealed in the *Gleanings*: “For the faith of no man can be conditioned by anyone except himself.” (GWB 143). This assurance greatly relieved my anxiety about the situation.

## V. DREAMS

### *Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Guardian, the Universal House of Justice and Eminent Others*

All these dreams were intended to teach me something. They came either as warnings, concerns or consolations. Although each dream was full of gravitas, one dream of the Master was comical, but even that dream was intended to teach me something serious.

#### *Bahá'u'lláh's Invitation to Pray is Lost*

The Blessed Beauty appeared silently and suddenly. He was dressed entirely in black, the color worn by judges and professors, symbolizing authority, knowledge and power. He did not speak but knelt down. By His gesture, I knew He was inviting me to pray with Him. I demurred by starting to mention my sins and shortcomings. The moment I did so, in a flash He disappeared. The lesson was clear. Bahá'u'lláh was entirely aware of my faults, but He did not want to hear about them. My confession was interfering with His invitation to pray. It became a lost opportunity.

### **Two Dreams of 'Abdu'l-Bahá**

#### *Limit Speculation: A Lesson Taught By Humor*

The Master and I were standing together looking at a sunset that contained a rainbow of colors. My arm was around His shoulder; His arm was around my shoulder. As we stood contemplating the beauty of the sunset, I remarked: “I wonder what the metaphysical meaning of the various colors in that sunset is?” ‘Abdu'l-Bahá looked at me wearing a broad smile and said: “You know, I sometimes wonder about that too!”

## *Personal Taste and Observing the Laws of God*

‘Abdu’l-Bahá appeared, not in his usual attire, but dressed like a hippie from the 1960’s. He was wearing a poncho, that South American rough, woolen garment that is pulled over the upper body by means of a slit. He was wearing sandals and trousers underneath the poncho. Instead of His usual dignified turban, he wore a bandanna around His head. Despite His strange attire, He looked at me and said gravely: “If you do not keep the laws of God, you will bring unhappiness both to yourself and to your family.” The message was serious and clear, but it was mixed in this sense.

His unusual attire was meant to suggest that the friends are allowed leeway in their personal lifestyle. This personal lifestyle includes one’s choice of dress, vocation, domicile, friends or spouse. In short, the believer is granted wide latitude in determining all those threads that compose the particular fabric of one’s personal life. But however unconventional a believer may be regarding personal taste, the revealed laws of God must be obeyed at all times. The line is drawn there.

### **The Guardian**

#### *“Shoghi Effendi is Chief”: Keeping Priorities Straight*

This dream of the Guardian occurred when I was composing my large theological and literary critical study of his writings, *A Celestial Burning: A Selective Study of the Writings of Shoghi Effendi* (2012). I began my book on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia in 1997 or 1998 and finished it in the years after I returned to Ottawa in the summer of 1999. In Ottawa I had become temporarily distracted by the weight of a personal problem. The emotional impact was considerable at that time, consuming much of my energy.

The dream helped me to reset my course. It took place in Haifa, near the Monument Gardens. One of the Iranian believers appeared from behind what looked like a small storage shed and announced excitedly: “The Guardian is coming!” Then Shoghi Effendi appeared, walking. He said nothing, but walked straight by me, kept going and disappeared.

What puzzled me initially was the long, elaborate, feather head dress worn by the Guardian, an adornment that is normally worn by members of the First Nations in North America. I could not immediately fathom the dream, but I knew that its symbolism concealed a message that I must uncover. As I continued to meditate for the next 24 hours on the solution, the answer came suddenly in a verbal formula: “Shoghi Effendi is chief.” Your chief priority is to continue working on the book of the Guardian’s writings, and not to allow yourself to be distracted by the wasted energy consumed by a personal problem.

### ***The Photo of Shoghi Effendi as a Young Man: Stay Resigned and Peaceful***

Bahá'u'lláh continues to pour out His loving-kindness and compassion on us, even when we are partially or fully responsible for the unhappy situations that we have ourselves created. We all have to learn from our mistakes, and this learning is often a bitter pill to swallow, but the mercy of God is such that it never ceases.

In the aftermath of a marital separation, I had moved from Gatineau to Hull, that is today part of greater Gatineau, Quebec. I chose an apartment on rue Bédard, in the same building as my eldest daughter Mukina. Although it was a great comfort to have Mukina present during the painful separation, I experienced nonetheless much anxiety following the move, an anxiety that was undermining my quality of life.

Shoghi Effendi appeared one evening in a dream. What I saw then was one of the photos of the Guardian as a young man, sitting calmly, looking at a slight angle away from the camera. (This photo was taken before Shoghi Effendi became Guardian because after he became the head of the Faith, he was not inclined to allow himself to be photographed).

Shoghi Effendi did not speak to me during this dream; it was not necessary. The message and atmosphere that he wished to convey were transmitted through the photo itself. Be humble, be resigned, be peaceful. He seemed to be saying, do not worry about the “changes and chances of the world.” They happen to us all. Nothing is more important than your sense of inner peace and self-composure. The atmosphere in the dream reminded me of the words of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá that my mother wrote in the first prayer book that she gave me when I was 12 years old: “Be strong, be calm, be grateful and become a lamp full of light...”

### ***The Universal House of Justice: The Meeting on the Highest Peak in the World***

When I was still a young man living at home in the borough, then township of Etobicoke in Toronto, I had a dream that was not to be fulfilled until some 40 years later when I made my first, and to date, only pilgrimage in 2007. In the dream, I found myself on a very high mountain, at such a rarefied high-point that I took it for the pinnacle of the world. The tremendous height of the mountain caused me fear and trepidation. I felt exposed and vulnerable.

Between the peak where I stood and the twin peak of the same height opposite was a gap of about 6 feet/2 meters. A thick wooden plank connected the two peaks. On a flat plain of the other peak stood a group of hooded figures, clothed entirely in white from head to toe. Their clothing looked exactly like the white sheets of the notorious racist organization in the United States, the Ku Klux Klan, but their garments had a very different spiritually symbolic meaning.

They were waiting for me to cross. Fearful of being at such a great height, I took my courage in my hands and walked across the plank into their midst, where they welcomed me warmly, although I could not see their faces. The dream ended. Although as Bahá'u'lláh affirms, the dream is mysterious, I am usually able to interpret some of my dreams at least, but this one had me stumped. Living in the Etobicoke community then was a strong believer of English origin named Emily Roberts. Emily was very visual. She had been a spiritualist before she became a Bahá'í. She once told me that she had seen Mulla Husayn walking up and down in the room while I was giving a talk in her living room, on the eve of the Declaration of the Báb.

Emily was outspoken and blunt, a no-nonsense kind of person. Her teaching voice was very strong; she used to lay down her opinions before the friends with much emphasis and occasional bombast, but Emily was kind and loving to all the friends, as well as being a very devoted believer. Although she had little formal education, Emily was a woman of penetrating insight.

I related the dream and asked for an opinion. She had an immediate and spontaneous reply. "What you saw," Emily said with her usual conviction, "were the men of the Universal House of Justice. They were hidden because their high station is as yet unknown to the friends. Their station is a mystery." (At the time of the dream, the first Universal House of Justice had been elected only a few years before). My response, just like her answer, was immediate. I felt that Emily's interpretation was one hundred percent correct. That dream was fulfilled four decades later, when the members of the Universal House of Justice greeted the pilgrims on the concourse of the seat of the Bahá'í World Center. At that time, I spoke briefly with members Mr. Paul Lample and Dr. Peter Khan, a meeting I still clearly recall as if it were just yesterday.

## **DREAMS OF EMINENT OTHERS**

### *A Multiple-Stage Dream of Ruḥíyyih Khánum*

When I was writing *A Celestial Burning*, one night I had a dream of Ruḥíyyih Khánum. Actually, it was a series of dreams that followed one another closely, in one larger connected sequence. It is the only type of sequential dream that I have ever had, a kind of four act play. The dream unfolded in four scenes. The first scene was the preview or "announcement." First Ruḥíyyih Khánum's face appeared in the far distance. Although the image was strangely blurred, I knew that it was she.

I speculate that this blurriness corresponded to the stage of transition in which she traversed one of the spiritual worlds to appear in our common meeting-place. Three subsequent scenes followed. In one of them she said nothing; she need not have spoken because her message was clear. In the other two scenes conversation took place. One of the conversations had to do



with the book that I was writing about her beloved Shoghi Effendi, but the language was both verbal and symbolic.

In the silent scene following the preview, Rúhíyyih Khánum's face and upper body appeared very clearly before me. As she looked into my face, I could see that she was very concerned about me, anxious about my disturbed state of mind. (Again it had to do with the same personal problem mentioned above in the two dreams of the Shoghi Effendi).

She was very elegantly dressed as an aristocrat of noble lineage, but her garment was classic in this sense: it was both modern and ancient. What Khánum wore would not have been out-of-place either in the Middle Ages or in modernity. A large but simply designed jeweled cross hung from her neck. The jewels were embedded into the frame or outline of the cross. The body of the cross was empty, unlike some of the heavier, ornate Christian crosses made by Catholics or Greek Orthodox during the "Age of Faith." It was studded at each corner with four, precious "royal purple" gemstones that resembled amethysts. The message she was silently conveying was that the suffering that I was then experiencing was not what she desired; it was not God's will for me. I should recover a state of inner peace.

Her anxious concern for my agitated state conveyed another lesson. As our sacred writings state, the souls in the worlds beyond are aware of our human condition. As I have affirmed above, they are even aware of our thoughts. We need to remain calm and composed, not only for our own sake, but also for the sake of those who love and watch over us from the Great Beyond.

Our mental and emotional states do affect them, but in ways that I cannot as yet fully fathom. Normally, we imagine that the souls in the worlds beyond enjoy a condition that is free from the sorrows and troubles that vex us in this life. Beatitude, bliss, and freedom from sorrow are some of the scriptural promises of the future life. And yet, as I have seen clearly in other dreams, our loved ones shed tears for us when we suffer duress in this life.

Our sacred writings are replete with dramatic references to the inhabitants of the celestial worlds who bewail the plight of the Manifestation of God for what He was made to suffer at the hands of cruel infidels. We know, moreover, that time does not exist in the next world. So I wonder: how do they experience this suffering for the Manifestation while they are supposed to be enjoying the blessings of the Abhá Kingdom? Can it be from moment to moment? But there is no time there! Are the lamentations for the sufferings of the Manifestation of God now over because His earthly sufferings are now long ended? Do they pass from their state of bliss to a state of sorrow for us, just as we can pass from state to state here? So many mysteries...

In the third scene, I was in a small room conversing with Rúhíyyih Khánum. She looked to be about 45 years old. The color purple reappeared in this scene. Although she was not dressed as elegantly as she was in the scene described above, she was wearing a purple skirt. I was quite conscious in the dream that I was speaking with Khánum, that is, with someone who occupied a high spiritual station. While speaking with her, I observed the deference due to someone of her

standing. For her part, Rúhíyyih Khánum was being friendly and natural with me. I was seated while she was standing.

It was then I noticed that I was sitting on a piece of her clothing. I stood up suddenly and as I handed it to her, I said : “Oh Khánum, I didn’t notice that I have been sitting on your robe.” I am not sure of the exact meaning of this scene, except to say that her robe, which I take to mean the symbol of her spiritual authority, had in some sense touched me.

The fourth scene concerned *A Celestial Burning*, my book on the writings of the Guardian. We were standing face-to-face. Khánum was wearing a plain, beige corduroy stole around her shoulders that was attached at the front by a clasp in the center of a chain. Now the English word corduroy comes from the French, meaning “court of the king.” It was a fabric that was worn by royalty.

The stole was trimmed with what looked like light-colored animal fur, perhaps symbolizing her great love for God’s creatures in the animal kingdom, a love that she had since childhood. (I remember one older male believer at the LouHelen school in Michigan, once known as Davison, telling me years ago that she used to bring pet snakes with her to the sessions).

Rúhíyyih Khánum unclasped the stole and passed it to me, indicating that I should touch it, as she said emphatically: “I want you to make one like this!” I reached out to touch the sole. It felt magical, imbued with a remarkable, living spiritual energy, unlike any fabric I had ever felt before. It reminded me of the quranic verse that mentions the reward of the faithful who wear silks and velvets in paradise (18:31).

Although my book was by then well underway, in the dream I felt powerless to recreate the magical touch of her stole. I responded: “Oh no Khánum. I can’t make something like that.” Strangely enough, despite my negative response, I did strive to imbue every word, phrase and thought of that book with the divine spirit that ideally inspires all Bahá’í discourse.

I understood later, reflecting on the fourth scene of the dream, that Khánum was symbolically referring to my book on the writings of Shoghi Effendi. Needless to say, she was informing me that she was well aware that I was writing it. She wanted me to make the language and the effect of the book as “magical’ as possible. Khánum wanted my book to be imbued with spiritual power—as far as I was capable of using the verbal power of the English language to do so—because it concerned the writings of her beloved Shoghi Effendi.

### ***Rúhíyyih Khánum Talking With Dr. Peter Khan About A Celestial Burning***

During one of his recorded talks while he was visiting North America, former Universal House of Justice member Dr. Peter Khan said that someone needed to write a book that would “crack the writings of Shoghi Effendi.” By that time, my book project was already well underway. His remark encouraged me; I felt that I was on the right track. I was hoping to

advance what seemed to me to be a long delay in the scholarly investigation of the Guardian's writings.

Scholars born in the post-World War II period have been occupied with learning Arabic and Persian and studying Islam to investigate the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, an entirely appropriate and necessary task to give precedence to an academic analysis of our sacred writings. Nonetheless, I felt that there had been a certain neglect of the Guardian's writings by the scholarly community, particularly because Shoghi Effendi's writings are the key to understanding the post-scriptural, modern era and worsening world conditions in light of the Bahá'í Faith. After Dr. Khan passed away, I dreamt that he was standing with Rúhíyyih Khánum observing me. Although they did not speak to me, I understood that in their conversation they were giving their approval of my book, after a fashion that seemed to translate as: "Now look what he has done."

### *The Suspended Pearl of Great Price*

The first dream that I had about my book, *A Celestial Burning*, occurred on Salt Spring Island where I had moved in the summer of 1997 from Gatineau, West Quebec, after taking early retirement from teaching. I was casting about in my mind, attempting to discover what project I should undertake next. (My book of short essays *Under the Divine Lote Tree* was in the process of being published at George Ronald Publisher). I had considered various projects, including writing a novel for the mass market, but no clear path had yet emerged.

After prayer and reflection, I hit upon the idea of a book on the writings of the Guardian, a work that would analyze them from two viewpoints: the one, literary critical, i.e. Shoghi Effendi the writer, and the other religious and theological, the Guardian as divine interpreter. This dual-pronged approach was best suited to my university studies in literature and religious studies.

Although my literary studies had been confined mainly to French literature, and despite the remarkable variety in the conceptual framework of the various literary critical schools, I felt that I had enough of a foundation to permit me to adequately address the task. I had read more widely in English poetry than prose, but I was more than willing to expand my horizons and to do the necessary research while I was working on the book.

I was standing in the living room of my parents' home at 131 Mt. Baker Crescent, looking out of the picture window in the direction of Mt. Baker in the state of Washington, due south. (The street is called Mt. Baker Crescent because the volcanic mountain is visible from Salt Spring Island). As for my other books, the confirmation that my choice was the right one was revealed in a moment of quiet assurance, accompanied by great clarity.

Following this sense of confirmation, I began immediately, gathering books and articles, doing Internet research, making notes and sketching out chapters in labelled files. Toward the

end of my two-year stay on the island, although my book was still in its early stages, I had a dream that looking up, I saw a pearl of enormous size suspended in the air above my head. It would be difficult to estimate its great size exactly because there was nothing beside it to give perspective.

I thought immediately about the priceless pearl, Shoghi Effendi. Now that great suspended pearl was a clear symbol of confirmation that had a double-meaning: it was a symbol of the presence of the beloved Guardian, but it also suggested the book I was writing. I concluded that the pearl was actually an archetype of the book, an ideal form that existed in the imaginal world before it was brought into existence in space-time. As it turned out, the enormous size of that pearl was accurate; by the time the book was published, it came out at 606 pages.

*Mr. J. Douglas Martin: "Your Martyrdom is Greater Than Mine"*

Although I did not know the former Canadian National Spiritual Assembly and Universal House of Justice member in a personal way, he was, of course, well-known to the Canadian friends during his long period of exemplary service to the Faith. I first met "Doug," as the friends called him then, when I was just a pre-teen. In those days, before I attained maturity, if I happened to hear a talk that he gave, I had no idea what Douglas Martin was talking about.

I remember one public meeting that I attended with my mother Joyce. Douglas was speaking at the front of the room from a podium, but he might as well have been speaking a foreign language, for the little that I could understand at my youthful age. Later, I would see him occasionally at a fireside, summer school, National Convention or Association for Bahá'í Studies conference where we had very short conversations.

Some years after I declared my faith when I was 16 years old, Douglas appeared in a dream with a message. As I recall, I was not preoccupied with the subject of martyrdom, but it surfaced in a very personal way. The dream was very short and consisted of only one declarative sentence. Mr. Martin said simply: "Your martyrdom is greater than mine."

Some years later I met him while we were waiting in line to enter the hall at a national convention. It may not have been the best moment to relate the dream which conveyed such a serious message. What could he possibly say in response? Although I put him in an awkward situation, he responded in the best possible way, with a humorous response followed by a chuckle. "Oh," he said, "that was just my natural humility." He certainly did the right thing to lighten what could have been an awkward moment for us both.

I am convinced that in the world of dreams, the friends do meet and interact in parallel spiritual worlds of which they may not be even remotely aware in their everyday consciousness. These parallel spiritual worlds take on a life of their own that exist entirely apart from the mundane life with which we are familiar in this four-dimensional space-time continuum. Despite

his good-humored response, I felt that J. Douglas Martin was telling me something in that dream that was true.

*Former Universal House of Justice Member Mr. Ian Semple Encourages me to Jump In*

For about five years, first by letter and later by email, I corresponded with former Universal House of Justice member, Mr. Ian Semple, who was elected to the first Universal House of Justice at the International Convention in Haifa at Ridván 1963. I was by no means his only correspondent. Ian Semple carried on a large correspondence with friends and family, despite the fact that he was extremely busy as a member of the International House of Justice.

He was also interested in matters theological, so we shared something in common, but most of our letters did not concern serious topics. He often wrote about family matters: what his children were studying, what the family was planning to do on vacation, what his wife Louise was doing, etc. I had the impression that writing about ordinary life was a kind of relaxation for him, a momentary pause from the serious topics on the agenda he faced every day with the other members of the Universal House of Justice.

Sometimes he mentioned the passing pilgrims and Bahá'í community life as he lived it with the friends in Haifa. Occasionally we did write about more serious matters. I remember once he corrected me by saying that the Universal House of Justice does not strive for “consensus” but rather for “unanimity.” (I had used the word consensus in my question).

After Ian died—I always called him Ian and he always called me Jack—I had the following dream. I was standing beside him as we stood on a slight eminence overlooking the Arctic Ocean. The air felt very frigid. I knew that the water below us was freezing cold. It was not an inviting scenario; I had no desire to be there and I was not dressed for the climate. Neither was Mr. Semple. He was dressed formally in a black suit, black being a symbol of authority and knowledge. Suddenly he jumped off the snowy ledge right into the freezing water below, clothes and all.

When I awoke, it did not take much reflection to understand the message he was conveying through his bold action. Jump into the waters of existence, even if they are cold. Immerse yourself. Be indifferent to changing conditions, whether they be hot or cold. The message came as a remedy to a tendency I have to withdraw from certain situations, although solitary time is a necessity for reflection, research and writing. I do try to balance my “alone time” with a healthy social life because I am intensely curious about my fellow human-beings; nothing is more fascinating to me than appreciating and understanding the unique qualities of another person.

When I wrote to Mrs. Louise Semple about the dream, she told me in her reply that it was also a timely message for her stage of life, after she returned to her native Switzerland without

him. Perhaps that too was part of the meaning of the dream. It may have also been intended for Louise Semple.

### *The Premonitory Dream: Warning About Leviathan, the Giant Sea Monster*

When I was a student in Paris (1965-1968), while living at 1 Place de l'Estrapade (1968), just around the corner from the Panthéon on *la rue Soufflot*, the giant mausoleum that contains the remains of distinguished French writers and scientists, I had a dream that proved eventually to be premonitory. In the dream, I was standing *on* the surface of the water, not far from the shore. My feet were not visible because they were submerged just below the water.

When I looked down, I saw that the sea waters were receding. The water continued to drain away, until I saw that I was standing on the long, dorsal fin of a dead, giant sea monster. Now I wanted to move forward to reach the sandy beach that I could see ahead of me, but the edge of the monster's back fin was razor sharp. Every time I attempted to move my feet forward, even with the slightest motion, I felt the most excruciating pain.

Although I was dreaming, the pain was more severe than the most serious accidental injury I have ever had. But I had no choice but to keep going. I had to move forward to free myself from being trapped on the leviathan's back. It was a painful, tortuous journey. But the dream ended happily. In the last scene, I saw myself jumping off the skeletal remains of the giant fish to land on the sandy beach—free to move without pain again.

The dead sea monster symbolized the pain caused by the loss of things past. Living fully in the present, moving forward without nostalgia for yesterday's happiness became one of my greatest psychological challenges beginning in my late twenties. But the dream carried the warning of a medical condition that was to visit me much later. During the second half of the decade of my 60's, some 45 years later, I gradually developed a sensitivity in both feet that grew in intensity, producing a numbing sensation, familiarly called "pins and needles." Thankfully, my feet do not trouble me when I am at rest, but only when I am in motion.

I consulted two specialists who performed nerve conduction tests; I was diagnosed with "polyneuropathy," a nerve disorder. Although I remained physically active well into my sixties, the condition in my feet made both walking and even biking uncomfortable. Jogging was excluded because of both arthritis and neuropathy. In my early seventies, I continued to exercise at the gym, using the weight machines and the reclining bicycle or the stair-climber to do a full body workout. But at my present age of 77 years, exercise consists now of walking and swimming.

Happily, I can report that about two years ago, I found great relief from my reduced mobility when my neurologist, Dr. Jody Warman, recommended that I see Dr. Nancy Dudek at the Rehabilitation Center at the Ottawa General Hospital. Dr. Dudek prescribed some expensive German designed carbon fiber orthotics which include a sole attached to a strut/brace that fits

with Velcro straps just around and below both knees. Since the orthotics are worn under the trouser legs, they are largely invisible.

Amazingly, the orthotics and the strut have almost entirely corrected my gait. I can walk normally again without a limp and my feet no longer “slap” the ground. Although the device has not reduced the pain in my feet when I walk, the pain is bearable. I am very grateful to have regained fuller mobility. The dream in my youth about the leviathan accurately predicted both a future painful medical condition and a difficult psychological challenge.

### *Seeing the Name of my Daughter Leah Before she was Born*

When Brigitte and I were expecting our second child, after our first child Mukina had been born on November 10, 1972, I was hoping that we would have a boy. I began thinking about names that we might call the child and proposed some of these names to Brigitte. But our second and last child was to be another girl. In the dream, I saw my name MCLEAN in black letters. Then the three letters LEA emerged from my name. Above these letters, I saw a golden H coming floating down from an upper realm and join itself to the other three letters, thus spelling LEAH. I awoke and said to Brigitte: “We are going to have a girl and her name is Leah.” My interpretation of the dream was that the black letters of my name signified that her physical nature came partly from me, but the golden H signified the H of Bahá and designated her spiritual reality.

## **DREAMS OF THE DEPARTED: FAMILY AND FRIENDS**

### *Auntie Vi: Our Family's Self-Effacing Maid-Servant*

In the *Seven Valleys* Bahá'u'lláh gives the dream as suggestive evidence of life after death. As mentioned elsewhere, my great Aunt Violet Halsted, whom we called simply “Auntie,” was my maternal grandmother Jessie’s sister. Auntie was once married to my maternal grandfather’s brother, Stewart Halsted. (The two sisters were married to the two brothers). Auntie was truly an exemplary steadfast Bahá’í, who lived a life of humble, self-effacing service. She lived with us for about ten years in Etobicoke (Toronto), while we children were growing up, helping my parents to manage the household.

Later she moved in with her sister and brother-in-law (my maternal grandparents) on Scarlettwood Court, a street that runs off Scarlet Road and sits high on the banks of the Humber River in Etobicoke. Auntie was living there when she passed away. Auntie died not long after I visited her in the hospital during a return home from Paris. When I returned to Paris to continue my studies, Auntie was very much on my mind. I was living at 1 Place de l’Estrapade, near the

Panthéon, the last place where I lived in the City of Lights before returning home to Toronto to complete my B.A. degree and continue my education.

I really did want to see her again because I was not given the opportunity of saying a proper goodbye. This desire of seeing Auntie again became a prayer. It was one of the few times that I have actually prayed to be reunited with a loved one who had passed into the Great Beyond. I said the prayer with great sincerity, just before falling asleep, petitioning God for an answer.

The prayer was answered that very night. In the dream, I saw Auntie, looking very much as she did in her latter days, high up on a stratospheric bed of clouds, tinged with purple and white. She was walking toward me on a narrow bridge of clouds, a safe-passage that traversed a great abyss falling away into the void on both sides. It seemed that she had walked a great distance to reach that point. She came ever closer, walking slowly and patiently.

When she reached the point where I was standing, she stopped and said: "Praise be to God who grants His loved ones to meet in His love." Then she turned away and walked slowly and patiently back into the great infinity from which she had come. Both her slow pace and the great distance she had travelled prompted the thought that some effort is caused to those who dwell so high, when these luminous souls descend to a point where they meet those believers still living on the earthly plane.

### *My Father as an Awesome Guardian-Angel*

I believe the vision in a dream may be just as realistic as a vision experienced during the waking-state. So it was for this dream-vision. After my father Allan James McLean passed away suddenly, I had a number of dreams about him in the aftermath of his death. My grieving mother did not have such comforting dreams, at least not in the days immediately following his passing, although some dreams came to her later on.

Messages of comfort had to come from others, including the celebrated Salt Spring Island water-colorist Carol Evans. Carol was pressed by my father to convey to my mother the good news of the extraordinary sense of great joy and freedom he was experiencing in his newly liberated spiritual state. I discovered in my theological research that the original biblical image of the angel or angels was based on its earthly counterpart of the soldier and armies, "the heavenly host" who did battle by order of the king. This idea is reflected in one of the many translations of the Bible that renders "Lord of hosts" as "Jehovah of armies." Like soldiers, angels are commissioned by their heavenly King to execute certain commands.

Although he appeared in the guise of what looked to me like a Roman legionary, I understood that my father was serving as a guardian-angel. (Bahá'u'lláh has confirmed the existence of guardian-angels in one of His as yet untranslated tablets). Father presented a most awesome image. He was standing at strict, motionless attention. His legs were covered in black



mesh stockings, over which he wore a short tunic whose edge fell to just above the knee. He wore a breastplate and helmet. The most redoubtable weapon stood upright in his hand: an unusually long spear about 15 feet/4½ meters high, whose sharp metal tip flared into curves further down the flat blade. The blade was configured in roughly the same shape as a flared urn with a narrow mouth.

Father stood before the closed, thick, iron doors of a sanctuary. What was inside that sanctuary, I do not know, but it was something extremely rare, sacred and private. No one would ever be allowed admittance to that sanctuary without permission. He stood on guard. The very sight of him would cause one to pause with trepidation. Any trespasser would have to contend with him if they attempted to approach without permission the sanctuary that he was so carefully protecting. My earthly father had become transformed into a sacred soldier, a being that was guarding something precious and holy.

In my post-dream-vision consciousness, I wondered if the earthly relationship I had with my father would still apply in light of the great transformation I had seen. He seemed so remote and distant that I wondered if such a sacred personage could still be my father? Although later in life, even before I began to see angels in dreams, ever since the time when I first began to reflect on such mysterious beings, I came to believe in “choirs of angels,” whose existence is affirmed in the Bahá’í writings. The vision of my father in that dream brought confirmation that the widely held belief in guardian-angels, in both ancient and modern civilizations, cultures and religions, is indeed real.

*A Former Colleague Speaks From the World Beyond: “It’s true Rabbi! It’s true!”*

I have mentioned above that I taught high school at Philemon Wright Secondary School for 15 years (1975-1990) in Hull, now greater Gatineau, West Quebec. We had on staff an excellent science teacher I will name just “J.” J. was fairly tall, fine-boned, sharp featured, with reddish-auburn hair and pale skin. She was kind and affectionate, but high-strung, outspoken and readily combative, both with students and sometimes with staff members.

J. was divorced and spoke on occasion with some bitterness in the staffroom about her ex-husband who had once injured her. As is often the case, behind J.’s combative nature lay much emotional pain, and, I suspect, a disturbed childhood. She was not a woman at peace, but it was above all acceptance based on love and peace that she so desperately sought.

Although I was repelled by her attacks on others and even though I had borne the brunt of them myself on a couple of occasions, I admired J. for her dedication to teaching, her basically affectionate nature, sincerity, and truthfulness. She once told me that she had been favorably impressed by what she knew about the Bahá’í Faith, but she did not seem interested in following up her interest any further.

While shopping in the northern American town of Massena, New York, just across the border from the province of Ontario, J.'s car was struck at an intersection by another vehicle; she died almost instantly. Teachers from Philemon Wright paid their respects by driving to the visitation at a funeral home which was located a good distance from Ottawa, closer to the American border.

We all filed past the open casket, each of us taking a quick look at her remains. I remember that a former female colleague stood ahead of me in line. As if to steel herself to face the challenge of looking at J.'s embalmed corpse, she placed both hands on her hips and peered boldly, almost irreverently at the corpse, as if to say: "Well now, let's take a look at you!" J.'s dark, reddish-brown hair framed her face in death just as it had in life.

After her death, the dream that I had of J. was as clear as it was dramatic and telling. As with my series of dreams about Rúhíyyih Khánum related above, there was a forewarning of the message that was about to come. The connection was made from a realm above by a narrow, silver cord that manifested itself as a "sparkler" used in fireworks displays. The cord that connected the two realms sparkled brilliantly, as if it were a live wick set on fire.

I did not see J. but I heard her voice speaking to me in an emphatic, short message. Her astonished tone declared: "It's true Rabbi! It's true!" The use of the Aramaic/Hebrew word "Rabbi" (teacher), with its strong religious connotations and double-meaning of "teacher," was meant for me. It left no doubt in my mind about her identity and that it was a true spiritual communication.

J.'s remark meant two things: the first was that the existence of life after death is real and that the promises of the hereafter are also true; the second was that the Bahá'í Faith itself is true. J. was letting me know that the peace and security that had escaped her during her earthly existence, and whose lack had caused her so much suffering, had been found in the Great Beyond. As a science teacher, J. had been interested in discovering the truth about the mysteries of nature while she lived. In the ongoing, eternal journey of the soul, J. was able in the hereafter to discover a fuller measure of spiritual truth.

***My German Neighbors in Toronto Dr. Oskar Petersen and His Son Ralf-Jörn Accept the Faith in the World Beyond***

Circa 1958 with the money they had received from the sale of their then rural property on Martin Grove Road in Etobicoke (Toronto), my parents were able to buy a new, split-level, three-bedroom home overlooking a ravine—today a park—at 6 Emery Circle in Etobicoke. Despite its name, and the original intentions of the developers, Emery Circle was neither a crescent nor a circle, but a slightly curved line. This address proved to be the highlight of our family life when Mary Lou, Steve and I were growing into young adulthood.

After working hard to raise themselves from humble beginnings, my parents had attained a certain prosperity with the sale of their two and a half acre/one hectare country property. But the best of our good fortune was that we enjoyed the great blessings of being able to host Friday night firesides at 6 Emery Circle, firesides that led to the acceptance of the Faith by a good number of the fellow-students, friends and neighbors of my brother Steve and myself.

To the great joy of my mother, my father Allan James, after some 16 years of observation, also became a Bahá'í during this heyday of our youth. Our firesides were vibrant and well-attended. An enthusiastic spirit of teaching the Faith sustained them all. We could barely wait until the next fireside to learn what the upcoming fireside speaker would teach us and to see whether or not we would share in the joy of welcoming a new declarant.

The lively spirit of teaching the Faith at our house was caught especially by the youth, but the adults in the community had also caught the spirit and fully supported us in our efforts, especially our parents. We youth were fully conscious that we had discovered something precious—a life-transforming, community-creating, world-uniting Faith. It was not uncommon for our family living room to be filled with between 30-40 people each Friday evening. Youth declarations followed one after the other during those magical days.

Down the street at 17 Emery Circle lived a German family from Hamburg, the Petersens. Their family name was written with the Danish spelling because Mr. Petersen's ancestors had lived in the northern province of Schleswig-Holstein on the Jutland peninsula, which even today has ethnic Danish minorities. Helga and Oskar Petersen had three children: Heike, the eldest, Ralf Jörn (Jörn is north German for Georg, but we called him simply Ralf), and Anke the youngest. Dr. Petersen was an agronomist with a Ph.D. in agricultural engineering.

Before arriving in Toronto, the Petersens had lived in Egypt, where they had acquired pieces of exotic furnishings and *objets d'art* that I had never seen before in my Anglo-Canadian milieu. Among them were camel saddles, brass ornaments, pointed slippers, an Ottoman handcrafted leather footrest with a geometric design on its upper surface; multi-colored, rough-spun, thick cotton blankets; small tea glasses; and curiously, a semi-abstract painting in their living-room of buildings in Cairo, whose bright, modernist style did not fit my preconceived idea of the Muslim world of the Middle-East.

Ralf and I were about 16 years old when they moved into 17 Emery Circle. I befriended Ralf, who was thoroughly German both in dress and outlook. I helped him through his culture shock, which had not been made easy, because even in the early 1960's prejudices against Germans still lingered following World War Two. He enrolled at the same school that I attended, Kipling Collegiate Institute. Mornings we used to ride to the high school, driven by my next-door neighbor, Roger Pesce, who was one of those rare students who actually owned his own car, an older, but very well-conditioned, light-blue 1952 Chevrolet, with a gearbox on the steering column.

Another blessing of our stay at 6 Emery Circle was that Ralf's younger sister Anke also came to Paris to study French, while I was attending the Sorbonne. Anke, whom I had first met

when she was 11 years old, was accompanied by a Mormon friend, Louise. Neither Anke nor Ralf had ever come to our firesides at home. So a wonderful surprise was in store one evening when Anke, after attending a few meetings at the Bahá'í Centre at 11 rue de la Pompe, Paris 16ème, suddenly declared her faith in Bahá'u'lláh!

I asked Anke what had caused her rather rapid entry into the Faith. During the tearful recital of her declaration, she told me that her heart had been first moved by a remark of our mother Joyce, who had spoken to her at our home about the injustice of racial prejudice. Her heart was moved again at the Paris Center that evening by one of the Arabic-speaking believers who also spoke to her on the same theme. Whatever he said removed from her heart any further obstacle that stood in Anke's way to declaring her faith.

While visiting the Bahá'í Center in Paris, Anke met and eventually married another Bahá'í who was part of our Paris youth group, a medical student named Kambyse Samii. Kambyse eventually became a specialist of internal medicine. Kambyse and Anke settled in Brussels, Belgium, where they raised a family of daughters. Right into their senior years, they remained in Brussels, but I was distressed to learn a few months ago that Anke passed away with cancer at about 70 years of age. It was shocking news that I was not expecting. Although Anke and I did not keep in close touch over the years, such old friendships remain solid and precious.

Anke and Kambyse were married in Toronto circa 1970, while I happened to be the young chairperson of the incorporated Local Spiritual Assembly of Etobicoke. Since my family had introduced Anke to the Faith, the coincidence seemed fitting that I was designated to represent the LSA to fulfill the legal requirements for their marriage. Madame Samii, Kambyse's mother, wore a gorgeous, pearl and shell-encrusted long, white gown and chanted a prayer in Persian. Mrs. Petersen read the first *Hidden Word* in German. I gave a brief talk in which I said that the marriage of Anke and Kambyse represented the unity of the East and the West through the overcoming of prejudice.

Although his English was not totally fluent at that time, Kambyse gave a very warm, prepared talk in which he mentioned that he felt honored to be joining the Petersen family. Wanda Presley, the younger sister of Ralf's future wife Darla, who was about twelve years old, was also present. Wanda eventually joined the Faith. She told me only recently at the Lindsay, Ontario Summer School that the wedding was the first time she had heard the word "Bahá'í."

I was happy that both the Petersens and the Samiis were pleased with the marriage ceremony. Ralf and I lost contact during the post-university phase of our lives. We both married and moved to other locations. Ralf's parents, Oskar and Helga Petersen, moved to Port Hope, Ontario. Ralf and I had occasional contact over the ensuing years, usually when he came to Ottawa on business. After Ralf married Darla, they settled in Ajax, Ontario, where they raised two twin boys, Kevin and Steven. When our girls Mukina and Leah were children, Brigitte and I visited Ralf and Darla in Ajax when their twin boys were still babies.

While I was living on Salt Spring Island, British Columbia (1997-1999), Ralf contracted terminal lung cancer. We renewed contact by email during this time. Among other things, he

wanted my advice on how he should break the news to his boys that he was going to die. Within the next few years, I was able to visit Ajax again. During that Ajax visit, Ralf and I had a memorable last walk together.

Ralf knew of course that his sister Anke had become a Bahá'í. He felt attracted to the Faith, but he was not moved to join. He had never seriously studied the teachings, but his overall general impression was positive. Ralf and I had a relaxed, solid, enjoyable friendship; our conversation was often punctuated with humor and laughter. We shared a love of modern jazz. Most of our social visits took place at 17 Emery Circle.

With a twinkle in his eye or a smile on his face, he used to tell me not to give up hope that he would one day become a Bahá'í. He used to joke that if he ever became a Bahá'í, he wanted a "low membership number." (This was an oblique and humorous reference to the Nazi party in Germany prior to World War Two because low membership numbers were prized). His father Oskar had survived the terrible eastern campaign on the Russian front.

When Ralf died, I had a number of vivid dreams about him and his father who had predeceased him. (Helga Petersen courageously faced the death of both her husband and only son until her own passing). These dreams assured me that both father and son had accepted the Bahá'í Faith in the world beyond, thus confirming 'Abdu'l-Baha's statement that souls can accept the Bahá'í Revelation after departing this life, even if they were not believers while they were in the world.

In the first dream, Ralf was standing on a country road and challenged me to a race. He was full of the spirit of life and said: "Come on Jack. Let's go!" I was reluctant but Ralf did not wait for me; he took off in a spirited sprint, racing ahead down the long road. This first dream came as a sign that Ralf was free of sickness and spiritually well, but he was also giving me a message. It was the same message that I received in the dream about Ian Semple when he jumped into the frigid Arctic Ocean fully clothed: be active; jump in; run the race of life, full speed ahead.

In the second dream, Ralf used a German word. This German word ensured me that the dream was no illusion. He said: "I am a *Rechtsanwalt* now." (*Rechtsanwalt* means lawyer). I was initially puzzled, thinking to myself that there are no law courts and lawyers in the world beyond. But as I reflected further on the dream, I realized that Ralf was telling me that he was studying divine law. In the third dream, I saw Ralf in a state of ecstasy. He was present at a Bahá'í meeting during which an appointed member of the Faith was giving what I felt was a very boring talk.

Although Ralf was present at that meeting, he was in a completely altered transcendent state. He was beyond needing to know anything about the Faith, for he had already accepted the new Revelation. He was ecstatically reciting some poetic verses in German; he was filled with the Spirit of God. Since his death, his former passionate nature had been subsumed and transformed by the ecstasy that ravishes the soul with things divine.

The two contrasting dreams I had about Ralf's father, Oskar, were just as vivid and clear that the father, like the son, had accepted the Bahá'í Revelation. Dr. Petersen, having been pleased with the Bahá'í wedding ceremony of his daughter Anke, had exacted a promise from me that I would officiate at a Bahá'í funeral when he passed away. He had already been diagnosed with melanoma at that time. "The countdown has begun," he said, while standing beside his daughter Anke. I naturally agreed, but it turned out that the Bahá'í memorial service did not take place, for reasons beyond my control.

In the first dream after he died, Dr. Petersen did not look happy. He was standing in front of the large book cabinet that had once dominated the living-room at 17 Emery Circle. He had been a very active man during his lifetime; like many Germans, he was an action and project-oriented man and a great planner. He had not counted on being taken from life at a relatively early age; he still had things to do. I prayed sincerely that Oskar's soul would be moved to accept with serenity the new state in which he had found himself.

Time passed. Then the second dream occurred. Oskar Petersen lay recovering in a bed in what resembled a spacious hospital ward. He was the only patient I could see. Large glass windows formed the wall behind him at the head of the bed. Outside, through the glass, I could see large, green, tropical plants, thriving in their natural state.

I approached him. Because I was taking German courses at the Goethe Institute in Ottawa at the time, I thought I would practice my German with him. Oskar Petersen was not at all interested in speaking German with me. He said nothing. As I stood beside his bed, he raised his clenched hand and opened up his palm. "Much to my wondering eyes," I saw in the middle of his palm a Bahá'í ring stone! Did I need any further proof of his acceptance of the Faith in the world beyond?

### *The Dance of the Ten Lady Martyrs of Shiráz (1983)*

On June 18, 1983, one of the most shocking and unjust crimes in modern Iran took place in Shiráz. Ten Bahá'í women from the ages of 17 to 57 were hanged after a mock trial in which they were offered freedom if they would say just one word: "No". The judge offered them life and freedom with a quick denial: "Just say you are not a Bahá'í and I'll see that you are released."

The Iranian authorities did their best to intimidate the women into denying their Faith by hanging the older women first, in the hope that the younger women would yield through fear, but none would barter away her life at the cost of denying her most precious possession. The youngest was Muná, 17 year old Muná Maḥmúdniẓhád, who requested to be hanged last so that she could pray for her sisters. She kissed the hands of her executioner and the rope before putting it around her own neck. The names of the other nine women are: Zarrin Muqímí-Abyáníh (28), Ru'yá Ishráqí (23), Sháhín Dálvand (25), Izzat Jánamí Ishráqí (57), Maḥshid Nirúmand (28), Símín Šabirí (28), Táhirih Arjumandi Siyávuṣhí (30), Akhtár Thabit (25), Nuṣrat Ghufrání

Yaldá'í (47). The friends all around the world were greatly disturbed by the murder of these women.

Not long after their executions, I had a dream of the ten lady martyrs. I was enabled to envision the scene by a link that transported me from the lower realm that I occupied to the higher realm that they inhabited. I ascended on what appeared to be an ethereal cord or beam that connected the lower and higher worlds. I was both observer and participant as I ascended; I saw myself ascending quickly. In passing, I note in passing that the dream/vision state defies the laws of physics. Normally one can watch another ascend or ascend oneself. One cannot ascend and observe oneself ascending at the same time.

There before me I saw the ten lady martyrs. They were all dressed in hooded, purple, royal robes. A number of exalted attributes is suggested by the wearing of the “royal purple,” including dignity, grandeur, independence, wealth, and wisdom. I could not see their faces, indicating no doubt that their great stations had to remain hidden from me, and/or that I was not worthy to look upon them.

It was reported that these women went to their deaths chanting and singing as they were being transported to the prison. I saw them still together in the world beyond, most closely united. They were moving as one body, swirling slowly round and round, circumambulating, dancing in a state of grace to heavenly music. They were all in a state of ecstasy, totally consumed by the beauty and bliss that had become their one and only mode of being in that heavenly world we call Paradise.

### *Three Indigenous Things*

In the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá promised a leading spiritual role for the original inhabitants of the Americas, once they come under the educative guidance offered by the sacred writings of the Bahá’í Revelation. Whenever I witnessed the consultations at those Canadian National Conventions that I attended or spoke with the native friends in Canada, I was struck by the spiritual perception that the indigenous friends brought to the consultation.

It was different in quality and tone from the approach of those friends who belonged to non-indigenous ethnic groups. For one thing, it was simpler; but I hasten to qualify, not more simple-minded. It relied less on the analytical intellect that is so prone to make distinctions between this and that; instead, it relied more on the effusions of the heart and the clear spiritual perceptions that come from a strong sense of vision. We should remember that the vision-quest was/is an integral part of native spirituality. The First Nations have, then, a long tradition of seeing clearly, i.e. to find the truth in what they see. Truth for them is found in vision.

The world of dreams is a world of small “r” revelation, but it is also a world of wonderment and mystery, just as Bahá’u’lláh asserts in the Valley of Wonderment in the *Seven Valleys*. Two of the dreams related here are of aboriginal Canadians, one of whom is a mix of

indigenous, French Canadian and Irish extraction, my former wife and friend, Brigitte Maloney Polycarpe of Gatineau, Quebec, whose grandmother was indigenous, probably from the Mi'kmaq people in the Gaspé peninsula.

I have seen a photo of Brigitte's grandmother; her native traits were quite pronounced: a flat rather than round forehead, high, angular cheekbones, black hair and copper-colored skin. The second dream concerned storyteller, textile artist and cultural educator, Louise Profeit-Leblanc, currently of Wakefield, Quebec, north of Ottawa. Louise belongs to the Nacho Nyak Dun First Nation in the northeast Yukon territory of Mayo. The dreams of both women concerned their spiritual identity.

In her dream, Brigitte stood before me dressed entirely in light buckskin leather, complete with moccasins. She wore a band around her forehead from which protruded upward a large, single, white feather at the back of her head. Behind her stood a native chief, someone of impressive spiritual stature. Great strength emanated from his person.

My immediate impression was that the chief standing behind Brigitte was none other than the "Heavenly Messenger," Deganawidah from the Bay of Quinte in Ontario, who was born on or near what is now the Deseronto reservation. Deganawidah was "the great peacemaker" who was assisted by his disciple Hiawatha (Ayenwatha). Hiawatha was the main character, along with his tragic lover, Minnehaha, in Longfellow's epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855). Hiawatha's once reprehensible character and conduct was completely transformed by his spiritual guide. Together they established the "Great League of Peace," the Iroquois Six Nations Confederacy.

This confederacy was the first historically known tribal democracy in North America, governed by Iroquois matriarchs in consultation with elders and all other tribal members. Deganawidah stood in a strong, protective stance behind Brigitte. I concluded from the dream that Brigitte's native name is "white feather," a symbol of the purity of her soul.

The dream about Louise Profeit-Leblanc occurred while I was staying overnight in Wakefield, Quebec with Louise and her husband Bob Leblanc, an affectionate, gentle and kindly man who is always at the service of the friends. In the dream, I observed that morning had just broken, but there were still several stars visible in the sky. When I awoke, I understood that the dream, just like the one I had had of Brigitte, was one about naming a spiritual identity.

At breakfast, I told Bob and Louise about the dream. "If you will accept it from a non-indigenous person," I said half-jokingly, "your name is Louise Morningstar." Well, Louise did accept the name that I gave her, in addition to the aboriginal name that was already hers, Tse Duna, (Beaver Woman). But she changed the name Louise to Louisa—"Louisa Morning Star," a name which has a decidedly more pleasant euphonic ring.

The third dream concerned the future of Canada, a dream that caused me wonderment in its revelation of beauty, breadth and clarity. I saw the map of Canada spread out before my eyes from coast to coast to coast. The color of the map was a warm, bright red. In fine detail, every lake and river were clearly visible, but to my amazed eyes every single body of water, every river



and stream had been renamed with indigenous names, although I could not understand any of their meanings.

This dream signifies that one day in the far future, Canada will be restored to its original pristine purity through the aegis of the Bahá'í Revelation. The dream also alludes to the great spiritual station of the original inhabitants of this country, a station that all Canadians in the fullness of time will readily acknowledge and honor.

### **A SERIES OF DREAMS OF THE DEPARTED**

**Carlo Giuliani Recognizes Me.** Carlo was a good-humored, family man, a non-Bahá'í teaching colleague who taught math during my last seven years in the profession, when I transferred from secondary to middle school. He retired about 1995, two years before I did. The last time I saw Carlo at Starbucks café in Carleton Place circa 2015, he told me that he had had an operation for stomach cancer, but that he had recovered. A few years later, the cancer returned, and I learned from another teaching colleague, Ross Mercer, that Carlo had died. To pay my respects, I attended the overflowing reception for his family, friends and colleagues at his home in Ottawa on Sunnyside Avenue.

As his name indicated, Carlo was of Italian ethnicity. He was a Catholic, a kind-hearted man of short stature who enjoyed a witty conversation that he punctuated with good humor and a few bars of the occasional song. He had once lived and worked in Jamaica. One of the short lines that he used to sing out of the blue, with some pretense to a Jamaican accent, was “And the famous grandy scratch scratch,” from the Harry Belafonte tune “Man Piaba”.

Carlo knew I was a Bahá'í, but he never asked me about the Faith. After he died, I dreamt that Carlo took hold of me in a giant “bear hug,” but he would just not let go. He held onto me for a long time with a smile on his face, as he radiated to my soul the feeling of a warm, affectionate love. I was not at all uncomfortable that Carlo held on to me for so long, because it was such a pleasant experience to feel the warmth of the love that radiated from him.

Although the dream was non-verbal, I felt that Carlo was nonetheless conveying a message. He seemed to be saying: “Now I know better who you are and what you stood for. I know something more of the Faith that you lived by and I am happy to have discovered it.” If my interpretation of the dream is correct, it is surely proof that a soul can make spiritual progress and gain more knowledge of God's latest Revelation after death, even if he or she ignored it during life on the earthly plane.

Bahá'u'lláh has asserted in the *Gleanings* that “Certain fruits, indeed, attain their fullest development only after being severed from the tree.” (GL 155) This statement is both scientifically and spiritually true, for it applies not only to things organic, but also to the development of the soul after death.

### *How My Grandparents Halsted Departed This World*

My grandparents, Will and Jessie Halsted, had very different attitudes to death. Grandma who lived to be 92, used to say: “Well, dear, I don’t know why the Lord has keep me alive for so long.” Grandpa would get annoyed when she talked like that. He would respond emphatically with: “What do you want to be talking about death for?”

Both grandparents were persons of great faith, but these remarks clearly reflect their attitudes to our final act on earth: Grandma was looking forward to her final end. Grandfather, who was a few years younger than grandmother, just wanted to go on living. Even when he was at death’s door at age 88, he said to my father Allan James, who was visiting him in the hospital: “Allan, you are going to get me out of here aren’t you?”

Two dreams I had after they died were clear indications of how they had both entered the next world. In the dream of grandmother, I saw her standing all alone and unafraid on top of a very high cliff, overlooking a vast ocean. Suddenly, she dove off the cliff, and plummeting down with fierce intent at a terrific speed, plunged straight into the water, the water that symbolized the depths of the ocean of reality.

In the other dream, grandfather was also standing on top of a cliff overlooking the water, but it was not the summit of a great mountain on which grandmother stood, but much lower. It looked more like a cliff overlooking a lake, rather than an ocean, reminiscent of Haliburton in “cottage country” north of Toronto. Suddenly grandfather jumped, but he did not head straight down like an arrow as grandmother had. He dropped through the air, head over heels, not at all in control of his flight and crashed into the water.

I was watching the scene from above, standing on the same cliff behind grandfather. A few moments passed, when grandfather Halsted reappeared on a path behind me that led to the edge of the cliff. Dripping wet, and in his usual casual but frank manner, he said: “Boy oh boy!”—one of his favorite expressions—“Am I ever glad that I landed feet first!”

### *Three Dreams about my Mother Joyce: Tears, Warnings, Encouragement, New Powers*

The first dream about my mother was premonitory; its meaning did not become clear until after the fact. I dreamt that mother was shedding copious tears for me. She cried so profusely that her tears collected in a large puddle on the floor. Strangely enough, unlike the incident it was anticipating, I was not suffering at all in the dream. I was more concerned about my mother’s sorrowing state of mind. I approached and tried to comfort her and to stop her from crying. The emotional pain, however, that arose from the incident she was lamenting, and that she had seen in advance, was real enough when the time came.

The second dream was connected to the first, but the mood of it was very different. In the first dream, she was sorrowing over me; in the second she was very sober but reassuring. She

said simply in a firm, rather serious, matter-of-fact like voice: “We always get through the tests of life. It says so in scripture.” Unlike the first dream, there seemed to be little sympathy for me in the second one.

This dream also proved to be accurately premonitory. Although I did not understand it at the time, mother was warning me before-the-fact that I would recover more quickly than I thought I would from the incident it was foretelling. I have no doubt that my recovery was in large part due to the aid and succor that she was able mysteriously to send me.

In the third dream, I experienced for the first time communication through mental telepathy, i.e. understanding my mother’s thoughts without seeing her lips move. I dreamt in bright colors that mother was creating a painting in the style of abstract art that consisted mainly of intersecting, curved lines. During her junior years in school, I know that mother had sketched certain drawings that my sister Mary Lou came across in the family archives after mother had passed away. In the dream, mother held up a piece of abstract art that she had been painting. Without saying anything, the thought that she transmitted was: “See what I can do now!” I was reading her mind.

### *Dreams of the Shrine of the Báb, the Mother Temple of the West, and the Universal House of Justice*

The dreams of the Sacred Shrine of the Báb and the Mother Temple of the West always appeared as symbols conveying strength, happiness and spiritual power. I was a young man, perhaps 19 years old, when I had the first dream of the Shrine of the Báb. In that dream, I found myself truly in paradise. It was the only dream that I have had in which I felt that I entered a state that is called paradise. Enraptured by that point of adoration, I walked toward the Queen of Carmel with upraised hands, as the tears streamed down my face.

In another dream of the Shrine, much later in life, I was walking barefooted on a sunny day along the shores of the sandy beach of Haifa Bay. The beach was adorned with the occasional palm tree. I passed by with a contented heart, walking slowly along, as the water of the Mediterranean lapped at my feet. I looked up to the Shrine on Mount Carmel as I passed. The atmosphere in the dream was one of ease, contentment and safety.

Although in the dream the Shrine had been fully completed, nothing else existed on the mountain but the Throne of the Lord. Neither were there any buildings below the Shrine, around it or along the shore. It was the only thing that was worth the sight of a spiritual pilgrim. Nothing else of value existed on the sacred mount or its surroundings but the Shrine.

In other dreams of the Shrine or the North American House of Worship, I would simply approach the walls of the sacred house to gaze on the symbol of Greatest Name, or with the Wilmette Temple, to examine the filigreed design that adorned the walls. Sometimes I would

touch the walls with the palms of my hands. Just approaching these sacred buildings and gazing at the Greatest Name infused me with strength and spiritual power.

Once in another dream, I was looking from a great distance at the seat of the Universal House of Justice, when the men of the House of Justice were in session. From its elevated station, flags were flying all around and above the seat, as spiritual power emanated in invisible but nonetheless perceptible waves from that World Center of divine guidance. In these dreams, I sensed immediately and directly, more than I ever did when I actually visited them as a pilgrim, the spiritual power and strength that radiated from their walls and from the symbol of the Greatest Name.

*Four Selected Dreams: Pope John-Paul II, Princess Diana, the Queen Mother, John Lennon*

I have sometimes wondered whether or not authentic communications with the persons who appear in these dreams really take place, or if these dreams are solipsistically created by one's own conscience. In other words, is one having a dialogue with one's own soul, or is the dreamer actually communicating with the person seen in the dream? My question still remains unanswered, but my intuitive sense is that these dreams are authentic communications.

Regarding dreams of departed loved ones, such as my mother or former Universal House of Justice member, Mr. Ian Semple, I have no doubt that two-way communication took place in these dreams. The following dreams concern those who occupied an elevated social or spiritual status while they were in this world. The acclaim, fame or popularity that comes with an elevated social status in this life no longer applies, once a soul quits the earthly plane and arrives in the spiritual world. There an entirely different divine dynamic rules, one to which the souls inhabiting that world have no choice but to conform.

**Pope John-Paul II.** After Pope John-Paul II contracted Parkinson's disease, he continued to exercise his papal functions, but only with the greatest difficulty. I used to think it was deplorable that the Roman Catholic church did not have a transition procedure by which an ailing Pope could be replaced because he was laboring under such a serious illness. I used to think it was degrading both to him and to faithful Catholics, and to any other others who watched him struggle to perform his papal functions, when he could not move or even speak with ease.

When the Pope died in 2005, I dreamt that he was sitting in the center of a small circle, surrounded by a standing group of his compatriots, noble-looking Polish clerics. The Pope wore a trim, smart-looking white vestment—only the Pope is allowed to wear white—and white skull cap or zucchetto. A golden cross hung from his neck. The priests surrounding him wore black with red trim. The Pope was laughing; the loyal clerics who surrounded him were smiling

broadly. There was no verbal communication, but I understood immediately that the Pope was laughing heartily at his former appearance, as he struggled to exercise his functions.

**Diana Princess of Wales.** The whole world was shocked by the tragic, accidental death of the much-loved Princess Diana of Wales on August 31, 1997 in Paris. From the time that she married Prince Charles, the heir apparent to the throne, she had been hounded by the press and the paparazzi. Until the time of her death, she fought an ongoing battle against the invasion of her privacy, as her boys Princes Harry and William were growing up. When she died, I heard her say in a dream: “I am alone with my God.” She had found at last the peace that she so eagerly sought while she lived in the world.

**The Queen Mother.** During what must have been a trying time for her majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, the Queen Mother passed away at age 101 in 2002, just seven weeks after the queen’s younger sister, Princess Margaret of Snowdon. The German dictator, Adolf Hitler, once called the Queen Mother “the most dangerous woman in Europe” because of the active role that she played in cheerfully and steadfastly raising the morale of the British people during World War II. She enjoyed consistent popularity over the years, even when the respect for some other members of the royal family declined.

When the Queen Mother died, I had a one-scene short dream that she stood beside ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who had His arm around her right shoulder. The scene was consistent with the response of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself to one of the American women pilgrims, when He commented that her deceased brother had led her to Him. The pilgrim made the doubtful observation that He could not have known what her brother was doing in the next world because ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had never met the brother. His simple, direct response was: “‘Abdu’l-Bahá is manifest in all the worlds.” The pilgrim had not yet experienced nor understood the extent of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s powers. The Center of the Covenant goes anywhere and everywhere He wishes to go.

**John Lennon of the Beatles.** Being an enthusiastic Beatles fan in my youth, I was greatly saddened by the murder in 1980 of John Lennon, when he was just 40 years old. I watched with growing delight as the Beatles evolved from a wildly popular British rock ‘n roll band to a sophisticated, orchestrated musical ensemble under the brilliant direction of Sir George Martin.

The Beatles articulated in some of their songs the more worthwhile aspirations of the youth of our day. Included in these aspirations were the religious sentiments expressed in *Let it Be* (1970), with “Mother Mary speaking words of wisdom,” and bringing together “all the lonely people” in *Eleanor Rigby* (1966), and John Lennon’s celebrated chant “All we are saying is give peace a chance” (1969).

After John Lennon was murdered outside his New York home, I dreamt he was sitting at his concert piano in his Dakota apartment playing a tune. He looked resigned to his situation, more resigned than content, I would say. Suddenly he looked up at me and said emphatically: “World peace is more important than your personal problem!” It would appear that what matters most to spiritual souls in this world continues to matter to them in the next.

## **AN EXPERIENCE OUTSIDE THE FIVE CATEGORIES ABOVE**

### *Finding Fluency of Speech in the Classroom*

This particular experience was not typical of the five categories given at the head of this chapter. I will describe it as the sudden acquisition of a new capacity. Throughout my 23 years of professional life, I had been a teacher of secondary and middle school students. Although I had been a little shy during childhood, a shyness that was sometimes mistaken for aloofness later in life, I learned, as I grew up, to become more social because I am, as the current catch-phrase has it, a “people person.”

In addition to possessing the ability to explain the impact of ideas clearly, teachers of the humanities should possess fluent speech, which naturally enables them to be more effective communicators. Fluent speech was certainly necessary for the subjects I taught: Moral and Religious Education, Man in Society—a name that would be considered politically incorrect these days—English, French, French Immersion and History. Teaching helped me to overcome completely any still latent shyness that remained in adulthood.

I do not recall having difficulty expressing myself in the classroom, but what I do recall very clearly, is how this capacity for fluent speech suddenly increased. One day I was standing before the class in front of the blackboard explaining a particular point. I must have been groping somewhat to find the explanation I was seeking, when my capacity to explain in words suddenly markedly increased.

The difference in the moments of “before and after” is best explained by recalling the ancient Athenian Greek Demosthenes. The once stammering orator and statesman trained his oratorical powers by placing pebbles in his mouth. I refer to the use of pebbles by “the perfect orator” only to compare the sudden release that I felt at that moment. It was as if someone had suddenly removed any pebbles of hesitation I had while explaining a point.

## 6. THE BOOK OF EIGHTEEN

This chapter is divided into eighteen sections of sayings of various lengths and *pensées* grouped loosely according to topic. Aphoristic writing is ancient in many cultures. It has never been a preferred genre with general readers, although it was employed especially among religious and philosophical writers.

In classical antiquity, aphorisms constituted the *Fragments* and *Handbook* of the Greek Stoic moral philosopher Epictetus and the *Meditations* of the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius. In the 17th century, *Les Pensées*, Pascal's apology for Christianity, revived the genre. The writing of dictums was perpetuated by Nietzsche and Lamartine in the nineteenth century. In a Bahá'í context, *The Hidden Words* were revealed largely as aphorisms. Books of sayings largely disappeared in the twentieth century. *The Little Red Book*, the selected thoughts of Chairman Mao Tse Tung and such works as *Thoughts in Solitude* of the spiritual master Thomas Merton are notable exceptions.

The aphorism or *pensée* is the philosophic counterpart of the poetic *Haiku*; it has the ability to capture economically a strand of wisdom or insight. A collection of sayings can, however, challenge the reader. It is not the same thing to "read" sayings as one would read a novel or a poem. Novels have atmosphere, character development, "local color," and plot. Poems articulate a vision, a theme and create a mood. Psychological states are evoked by novels, short stories and poetry alike. Expository writing sustains an argument.

Aphorisms result from insights or provoke a thought. Even when they are grouped together, as they are here, sayings tend to be discontinuous. It becomes, consequently, more challenging for readers to locate themselves within the stream of consciousness that normally sustains a reader's interest and response.

God is the beginning and endpoint, the Alpha and Omega, of human thought. This means that if we imagine all human thought in its totality, God will be present at any point along the spectrum. Only He knows the total meaning of the whole. God is found at the antipodes of human experience: in joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, triumph and tragedy, bondage and freedom, the ordinary and the extraordinary, the agony and the ecstasy, and at all points in-between. Any thoughts bridging the gap between these antipoles are points of light to light the way at night, or to help us to read the signposts during the day.

Philosopher-poet George Santayana wrote in his meditative poem *O World*: "Our knowledge is but a torch of smoky pine that lights the pathway but one step ahead/across a void of mystery and dread/Bid then the tender light of faith to shine/By which alone the mortal heart is led/Unto the thinking of the thought divine." With these words, Santayana recognized the limitations of human knowledge, while he alludes to faith as a form of knowing leading to the higher realm of "the thought divine," the fruit of the "mortal heart" that finds the immortal.

While uncertainty remains inherent to the human condition, Santayana's lines suggest that as seekers exercise faith, they move from doubt and fear to greater certitude and peace of mind.

Zen practitioners know that uncovering one's Buddha nature, or as Bahá'í academic Dr. Daniel Jordan once cogently expressed it, "becoming your true self," is a delightful discovery that often comes only after long moments, days, months or years of disquiet, discomfort, existential crisis, experimentation or profound psychological pain. Zen masters have correctly perceived that too much comfort is inimical to knowing oneself.

And yet, it was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's constant reminder, shown best by the living example of His own life, that happiness is our spiritual birthright, and one of the outstanding hallmarks of the life of the Spirit. To live in a state of complaint, disquiet, or depression was for 'Abdu'l-Bahá a mark of ingratitude for the many and great blessing God has so freely bestowed upon His creatures.

While we are often "surprised by joy," as was C.S. Lewis, these moments of joy are often interchanged with episodic sorrow. This is the nature of the human condition during the pilgrimage of life on earth. These moments of sorrow are inherent to the process of the purgation of the soul, or the mortification of self, during the journey into the "dark night of the soul," alluded to in St. John of the Cross's celebrated 16th century poem as *la noche oscura del ama*.

To discomfit, to challenge, to turn on end is the role, not just of the spiritual master, but also the thinker, poet and writer. In the Hebrew Bible's Book of Ecclesiastes (*Qoheleth*), the preacher/teacher becomes the object lesson of his own suffering. Some of his words create a climate of "dis-ease," in a litany of surprising statements that appears to invalidate commonly accepted faith-based beliefs.

The preacher's occasional blunt pessimism—although it is clear that he still cherishes Lady Wisdom, the same great prize that is the object of King Solomon's Book of Proverbs—reminds us that the dismaying lessons he has learned have been won at great cost. For *Qoheleth's* disillusioning experiences, he reminds us realistically, are built into the very nature and pattern of formative spiritual growth.

The following sayings speak mainly in the classical voice of the aphorist, but some are familiar in tone. A few are cast as koans. The occasional use of the demotic is meant to emphasize that major perceptual shifts occur within the framework of the mundane. Rumi reminded us centuries ago that the Divine may break through at any moment to hallow the quotidian, even through dust and ashes. The same is still true today.

Although we have been surrounded in the 20th and 21st centuries by three alliterative, disturbing phenomena—madness, materialism and meaninglessness—epiphanies still illumine secular moderns, just as they illumined the devotees, prophets, spiritual masters, and mystics of times gone by. God is always with us, alive in the present moment, just as He was in ages past, just as He will be in the as yet unknown endless future. For God is always found in the Present, in the Eternal Now.



## **1. THE LIFE IT IS**

### **Faith**

Faith is the art of realizing possibilities.

Faith is never a partial experience. It makes ultimate and total demands on the life of the believer. The same is true for the salvation of the world. Only the complete application of the Divine Teachings will ultimately restore it to happiness, new life and prosperity.

### **Meeting Point**

The atheist and the believer meet in authenticity.

### **Heaven and Hell**

Two cars speed along the road. One speeds on to heaven. The other hurtles along to hell.

### **True Consultation**

Listening well is the beginning, but not always the end, of true consultation. For some situations, dedicated, empathic listening will suffice. In other circumstances, action must follow.

### **A Great Error**

It is a great error to treat the temporal as if it were eternal and the eternal as if it were temporal.

### **Spirituality is Relative**

“The good deeds of the righteous are the sins of the near Ones.” What we imagine are good deeds pale in significance before those of spiritual giants.

### **The Greatest Sin**

The greatest sin we have committed may not have been the one that earned the displeasure of God.

## **Truth**

The Truth is not abstract, but rather the most concrete of all things in the world. Truth is greater than a series of mere intellectual constructs or a totality of mental constructs. It is an irresistible, magnetic force field. Truth elevates the mind with beauty, but more importantly, it moves to action and transformation. Truth changes individuals, societies, and nations like nothing else.

## **Enjoying the Mystery**

When we begin to accept the mystery of life, to enjoy the dynamic tension that mystery and unknowing bring, without attempting to control and manage all, we will know a greater sense of adventure, the spirit of discovery and one of life's most elusive states—contentment.

## **Wisdom**

Wisdom is divine understanding translated into virtuous living.

## **Wisdom is a Treasure**

Wisdom is a treasure to be shared, but it is a travesty to share it with those who are incapable of estimating its value. Christ warned us not to cast pearls before swine. If we do, we only devalue the pearl, ourselves and the other.

## **The Broken Pieces of Our Life**

If we pick up the broken pieces of our life and begin again, we shall realize that with these scattered fragments, we have begun a lovely new mosaic.

## **This Old World**

This old world is like a dusty box of books. You realize that you have forgotten what the box contains and no longer care.

## **Holiness and the Plaster Saint**

The image of the bloodless plaster saint is a caricature of holiness. Holiness is colorful, dynamic, vital and wholesome. Holiness lives zestfully free, moving and rejoicing in the Will of God. The plaster saint dares not to embrace the vitality that is born of God.

## **2. ART AND MORAL PURPOSE**

Any work of art or literature can never be abstracted from moral purpose, despite those artists and writers who claim that art and literature should have no moral intent. All expressions of art are moral because they create psychological effects. Psychological effects either elevate or debase. These psychological effects are determined by the sanguinity of taste. Good taste enhances moral tone, just as bad taste degrades it.

### **When Art is Trash**

While genuine art exists in every age, some people today take any base expression for art. The raw, the vulgar, the repulsive, the trivial, the shocking all masquerade in our day as art. Instead of the exhilaration of the senses, the refinement of judgment, the inspiration of the mind, and care of the soul, society's mental and moral pathologies are instead exacerbated by what passes for "art."

### **The Perfection of the Art and the Perfection of the Artist**

Fine art, dance, literature and music exist independently of the fears, foibles, idiosyncrasies, quirks, and vices of the artist, musician, dancer or writer who create them. The concrete expressions of art earn humanity's praise, independently of the moral life of the creative artist. Religion and spirituality, however, expect the perfection of the man or woman, just as the arts expect the perfection of the work. Now if both are achieved in the same person, the artist becomes a fully integrated human being, a model worthy of distinction and high honor. By achieving both, the artist becomes a living work of art, while simultaneously producing creative works. This double honor produces a dual immortality: the greater immortality of the soul and the lesser immortality of enduring creative works.

### **Beauty and Functionality**

Beauty is not a mere matter of inconsequential, passing esthetic sensibility. Beauty is a practical, functional thing that produces long-lasting effects, even when beauty has faded.

### **The Art of the Future**

"The art of the future will be decorative and symbolic."

(Shoghi Effendi to artist Joyce Frances Devlin during her pilgrimage in April, 1956. Repeated to the author by Joyce Frances Devlin).

### **3. THE WILL OF GOD**

#### **The Will of God and the Myth of Sisyphus**

Along with consultation, meditation and prayer, one of the best ways to discover the Will of God is to continue doing what we are doing. Man's way will eventually yield to God's way. If not, the individual, like Sisyphus, the ancient King of Corinth, will keep rolling that boulder up the hillside in Hades, only to watch it roll down again, in a meaningless, repetitive, eternal cycle. Camus wrote that Sisyphus defeated the punishment of Zeus by being conscious of his act and finding a certain joy in the task. That is a positive interpretation, to be sure, but it is by no means certain. The whole point of the myth is that the craftiest, most deceitful men of wicked intelligence can never evade final judgment. Zeus was fierce in punishing, but he also forgave even those who tried to overthrow him. If Sisyphus had been truly repentant, Zeus would have forgiven him, but his sin of pride was grave and without remedy.

#### **The Will of God Lies Beyond Feelings**

While the Will of God ultimately has the well-being of humans and their feelings in mind, It does not care for the subjective reactions of believers to Its dictates. The divine command is unalterable, unless it be changed by another divine command. Although the Will of God is sensitive to the weaknesses of human beings, and is moved by compassion for the contrite, It cares not at all for the subjective reactions to the likes and dislikes of believers or non-believers.

#### **Beware of Red Flags**

All great life-decisions require certitude. We ignore red flags at our cost.

#### **Destroying One's Own Happiness**

The willfully blind soul always destroys its own happiness.

#### **Will and Knowledge**

Without will, knowledge is lame. Knowledge is the dancer at rest. Will is the dancer dancing.

#### **Fierce Resistance**

The most obdurate faculty is the human will. It has been created by God and fights against Him with the same ferocity as if it had created itself.

## **Our Life is not our Own to Take**

The spiritually wise speak well and truly when they say that we do not own ourselves. We do not own ourselves because we did not create ourselves. We exist only in the form of a trust by virtue of a greater Will than our own. In their unbearable desperation, those who take their own lives do not realize that their life is not theirs to take; no right has been granted them to destroy God's most precious gift. It is by no means certain that self-slaughter will end an individual's suffering. But for those who are hounded to death by the vicious cruelty of those who do not deserve the name humanity, or those who can no longer bear the pain of the unbearable, we implore the mercy of divine compassion.

### **Surrender or Die**

Some discover that they must surrender to God or die.

### **God Knows Best**

God has answered our prayers, but not as we had imagined. If we have been devastated by the answer to prayer, we foolishly assumed that we knew our own need better than Providence.

### **If**

If the answer to prayer will result in the unhappiness of others, it will not afford the happiness we seek. It will create instead a new situation of disillusion.

### **The Laws of God**

The divine law is no respecter of persons. If we violate the same laws of God we claim to honor, we will inexorably bring suffering on ourselves and those around us.

### **The Insistent Self: Caught in the Mire**

It is strange but true that believers sometimes will not accept the answer to prayer, even when it is manifestly revealed. The insistent self, captive of its own illusions, throws caution to the winds and ignores heaven-sent warnings. Like the bird caught in the mire, of which Bahá'u'lláh speaks, it is forced to dwell on earth when it was really born to fly.

### **Three Operations of Spiritual Growth**

Three operations are involved in the process of spiritual growth: knowing, agreeing, and acting. Without these three, the true self cannot emerge from the dark, solitary cell of ignorance and error. But once we have understood, agreed and acted, the walls begin to crumble.

#### **The Divine Decree**

It is better to submit to the divine decree than to win all the treasures of earth and heaven.

#### **The One Weighty Word**

So much in life depends on just one weighty word uttered by the divine command: “Obey!” What is required of the alert faithful, however, is not blind obedience but enlightened understanding; not blind faith but knowing and willing obedience.

#### **When the Heart is at Rest**

We know we have found the Will of God when the heart is serene and at rest.

#### **Natural and Manifest Guidance**

The more we are delivered from the prison of self, the more God will live in us, and the more will divine guidance be natural and manifest.

### **4. MIND THINGS**

#### **Silly Logic**

Common sense will always defeat silly logic.

#### **Clear Thoughts**

Clear thoughts are clean thoughts.

#### **Obsessions**

We should not obsess about our obsessions. They are punishment enough.

## **Outlasting**

He who believes that the arts, philosophy, science or literature will outlast humans does not believe in the power of the soul.

## **The Perverted Logic of Violence and the Absolute Will-to-Power**

The perverted logic of violence and the absolute will-to-power lead to atheism, militarism and nihilism; in short, to disaster and destruction.

## **Discerning Fire From Light**

The Báb has reminded us that the seer be able to distinguish the light (*núr*) of the splendors of heaven from the heat of the fire (*nár*) of hell.

## **The Hardest Thing**

The hardest but most rewarding accomplishment in life is to give our feeble mind entirely to God.

## **Ultimacy and Final Things**

Our task in life is to discover final things. Only final things ultimately matter. All else is contingent, temporary and insignificant.

## **Before We Act**

Before we act on passion's flight, let us wait till the morning light.

## **Pictures and Paintings**

Some pictures are more beautiful in another frame. Some paintings are more beautiful in another room.

## **The Beautiful Illusion**

The beautiful illusion has often fooled beautiful losers.

### **The Mirage**

The mirage is alluring because it softens the hard edge of reality. It conveys only the illusion of escape from pain.

### **The Beautiful Illusion**

The beautiful illusion intoxicates. Does not the drunkard enjoy his own drunkenness?

### **The Fairy Godmother**

The fairy godmother does not grant the wish of every child, but adults persist in believing that she will make the beautiful illusion come true.

### **One Tiny Drop**

A tiny drop of truth satisfies more than oceans of illusion.

### **Half-Thoughts, Full Thoughts and True Thoughts**

Half-thoughts are half-truths. To find a true thought, it must be followed through to the end. Truth is revealed when the end is reached. Truth is revealed in the full thought.

### **The Hidden Cause**

Behind the external event is a hidden cause. If the hidden cause be known, the external event will be resolved.

### **True Liberation**

True liberation is having mind, body and soul moving together as one.

### **Remembering**

Lovingly remembering your family and friends is a sincere act of devotion.



## **5. FINAL THINGS**

### **The Contemplation of Death**

Once we overcome the fear of the contemplation of death, we shall be filled with a profound sense of humility and gratitude.

#### **Murdered**

She was murdered and she is waiting for your prayers.

#### **It's Over!**

We shall find ourselves greatly relieved when we are finally able to say: "It's over! It's over! Thank God! It's over!"

#### **Promotion**

You have to die to be promoted.

### **The Denial of Death**

All the glitz and glamour, the staging, the strutting, the sex and show biz have become saleable commodities because we do not know who we really are and because we imagine that we can cheat death.

### **Death and New Beginnings**

We have to accept death as death, to accept endings as endings before we can fully enter into life and to make new beginnings.

### **The Paradox of the Prophecy of Doom and Gloom**

Paradoxically, the prophecy of doom and gloom is concerned with human happiness. Although its stern warning promises divine justice, the punishment it ordains is not an end in itself, but a transitional stage in the advancement of civilization. While it condemns the prevailing order and prophesies its certain extinction, it proclaims the death of the failed ways of errant man and the beginning of the sunnier ways of God.

## **The Departed Live, Know and See**

The departed live, know, and see realities in a timeless realm far beyond our limited human perceptions. They watch over us, knowing what we do and even what we think. Let us always keep them in our prayers, just as they keep us in theirs, and ask for their guidance and protection.

### **No Return**

The scriptures allude to a spiritual death from which no one returns. Jesus warned us to “Remember Lot’s wife.”

### **The Most Beautiful Death**

The most beautiful death occurs when all the dross has been burnt away and we soar upward on the wings of detachment.

## **6. WORDS WRITTEN ON WATER**

### **Writing**

Except for the genius of the few, writing is mostly rewriting.

### **The Witness of Words**

Writing stands as a living witness to our life, both guiding and confirming our present and future actions, testing us severely and challenging us to live out with full integrity all that we have written. Next to the Word of God, writing is our strongest voice of conscience and our *daimon*.

### **Your Same Old Story**

Keep telling your same old story, your tired, senseless love drama. Perhaps one day soon its inner energy will weaken, like a worn-out spring, and you will no longer feel the need to repeat it. Then you will know that you have found your heart’s desire, resolved your inner conflict and attained a welcome degree of liberation.

### **Being-in-Life and the Art of Poetry**

Being-in-life will always prevail over the art of poetry because the latter depends upon the former. Poetry creates a wide range of moods: a moment of delight, a celebration, a loss, an existential crisis, the song of a bird, the horrors of war, a gallery of deep thoughts. Poetry

expresses in words what no other verbal medium can, but the spirit of being-in-life is always present. It is the very air we breathe, the sustenance on which we feed, the bread-of-life, the raw material on which poetry and all the arts depend.

### **Pray-ers and Scholars**

The spiritually wise have long recognized the necessity of the disciplines of prayer and meditation to ensure the stable development and protection of the soul. But the consecrated will and the long hours of research and composition demanded by sacred study ensure the expansion of the mind and the widening of the frontiers of knowledge. While prayer and meditation strengthen soul and mind, sacred study is vital to the cause of truth. There is nothing to choose between them. Every seeker of truth must be a pray-er and a scholar.

### **The Power of Words**

Let anyone who doubts the power of words consider the following: “Guilty!” “Not guilty!” “Dead!” “Alive!”

## **7. SUFFERING HOPING AND FEARING**

### **Love and Fear**

The two greatest motivators of human behavior are love and fear. Our prayer is that God will remove excessive fear from our hearts so that love may rule us more completely.

### **The Joy of Hope**

We live as much in the anticipation and joy of hope as in its actual realization.

### **Hope, Sacrifice and Submission**

We live in the hope of realizing our legitimate human desires, but better still is to offer your heart on the altar of love’s sacrifice and to humbly ask God to do with your life as He wills. For what we have so fondly imagined may well be that which He does not desire for us. Sacrifice and submission are infinitely greater than the realization of our legitimate hopes and desires.

## **Distinct Despair**

Two things in this life will lead us into distinct despair: rebelling against God and attempting to live the impossible dream.

## **The Beatitudes of Suffering**

Blessed are you, O broken-hearted lovers of God, for you are born again! Blessed is the heart's blood shed in His path, for it is seed of the garden of immortality. Blessed are the copious tears poured forth for His sake, for they shall water the flowers of your own salvation. Blessed are you O sinners, for you have been led to the sanctity of your own soul. Blessed are you that have been fooled by love's false face, for while it led you to disgrace, you have found your true nobility.

## **Thank Them**

Thank those who broke your heart, for without them you would not be living in the Golden of Now, the consolation of the past and the cornerstone of new tomorrows. Thank those who hurt you, for the sum total of all your past experience has brought you here and now, to this moment that celebrates your deliverance and orients you on the path of present and future happiness.

## **Singing in Chains**

The dart in its breast causes the mythical thorn bird to sing its one lone song more sweetly than any bird on the face of the earth. If you find yourself in chains, sing like the thorn bird.

## **Blessed Illness**

Illness of body or soul is the precursor of divine compassion in the saint and creative genius in the artist.

## **Behind the Pain**

Behind the pain a reason awaits discovery.

## **Haunted by Ghosts?**

Haunted by ghosts? Unfinished business awaits our attention.

## **Our One Great Desire**

The many things we want amount to only one thing. We want one world. We want to be one race, one people, one family. We want one spiritual government. We want to be in Bahá'u'lláh's dream for world unity. This dream is not wish-fulfillment. It is a wondrous vision: the one, true, highest vision ever conceived for mankind. This vision establishes a living, organic Order of Reality, promised from the foundation of the world, an Order that will redeem both our ailing planet and all its peoples. This vision-in-action moves mountains, slays dragons, breaks seals, cuts Gordian knots, guards sanctuaries, preserves lives, reconstructs the world, builds the New Jerusalem in every land. We are making this vision a reality by the labor of countless hands, brick on brick, stone on stone, across the generations, until the mighty edifice is raised. The sanctuary that is being built constitutes the secure stronghold of all mankind down through the coming ages.

## **The Body of Tears**

The man sat weeping. The angel watched and said: "Man, why art thou weeping?" "I weep," replied the man, "because I must live in the body." Then the angel wept with him and said: "Yes, man, I weep because thou must live in the body. And it is a body of tears."

## **8. UNFOLDING DESTINY**

### **The Bright Open Road**

The open road stretches out before us, bright with the calling of a new day. Our destiny awaits us as surely as the snow-capped mountains that crown the way.

### **Destiny Written and Unwritten, Known and Unknown**

Our destiny is a script, both read and written. By the inescapable law of karma, past actions determine the future, but not all our future is already cast in stone. As the moving hand writes on, we cannot always decipher the meaning of the text, though we read the words, nor is it meet and seemly that we should know. Sometimes the lips of a saint will whisper a message. We see her lips moving, but we cannot hear the words. We write what we can, but we cannot avoid what is written.

### **Double Destiny**

We neither entirely follow nor create our own destiny. We both read and write it.

### **Fulfilling Destiny**

As we learn to live and move in the atmosphere of God's love and will, we fulfill our destiny. No greater guidance than this can be imagined.

### **Unshakable Destiny**

Although destiny has an elusive face, when she does reveal herself, she will galvanize our soul with indomitable energy and resolute purpose. Destiny has led the martyr to offer gladly that most precious of gifts—life itself.

### **Destiny Foretold**

We should not be anxious to know our destiny in advance. Some would rejoice with great gladness. Others would be crushed by grief.

### **Two Sides of the Paper of Life**

The Persian poet Nizami has written that the page of life has two sides. On one side, we write our desires. On the other side, God writes His will for us. The two scripts rarely coincide, but when they do, humans live blessed, fulfilling and prosperous lives.

## **9. TIME AND A HALF**

### **Sometimes**

Sometimes we dream it, but we just do not do it. Sometimes we think it, but we just do not say it. Sometimes we write it, but we just do not send it. Sometimes we want to, but we just cannot.

### **It, Here and There**

It will be here when it is here. We will be there when we are there. Now is where we are.

### **Very Big Magic**

Very big magic happens when it is precisely the right time, precisely the right place, precisely the right person, precisely the right event. Whether on the personal or world scale, history will be made.

## **Timing**

Almighty God closed hard the gate and shouted loud “Too soon!” “Too Late!”

## **10. RETURNING**

### **Perspective**

We return to where we came from to renew old friendships, to find closure, to gain a new perspective and to move on.

### **The Harvest**

We return to gather the fruits of our past labors.

### **Going Abroad**

Sometimes we go abroad to discover that we belong at home.

### **Going Home**

They say that once we leave it, we can never really go home, but if fortune smiles on us, we can.

### **Journey On**

We must journey on, even when we have learned to love the place we call home.

## **11. THE MANY FACES OF LOVE**

### **A Raging Flood**

Love is a raging flood that drowns all in its path.

### **Clarity**

Love is a crystal-clear realization, a calm, content and resolute perception.

### **The Perfection of the Morning**

Love is the perfection of the morning.

### **A Hollow Reed**

One of the highest expressions of love is to become a hollow and patient reed.

### **Martyrdom and Living Sacrifice**

Martyrdom has long been considered to be the highest expression of the love of God, but to *live* for God in sacrificial service is no less meritorious. The martyr dies either a slow or quick death, but those who truly live for God strive to make every moment a sacrificial offering.

### **Not for Trading**

Love is never for trading—only sharing.

### **Love Dares**

Alexander Pope wrote that fools rush in where angels fear to tread, but true lovers dare to go where others shrink in fear. Then angels march in the vanguard, while angels march in the rear.

### **Love Only**

There is only love in this life. It is only love that makes life possible.

### **Love's False Face**

Don't be fooled by love's false face. It will lead you to disgrace.

### **Impossible Love**

We must turn away from impossible love to embrace the possible.

### **Fortune's Fool, Fortune's Darling**

False love makes us fortune's fool, but true love makes us fortune's darling.

### **Sick Love According to William Blake**

William Blake reminds us that the love of a woman or a man can become an insidious little creature that devours our soul. This love may first strike us as being powerfully romantic—



seemingly beautiful and true. But if we become sore-sick at heart because of it, for the sake of our peace of soul, we must kill this little worm without a speck of pity.

### **Love as Pure Being**

True love is the purest form of being. Once love is purged of its selfish elements—control, envy, fear, greed, jealousy, need and passion—it becomes a wonderfully rich and satisfying experience, not just for minutes, hours or days, but for always.

### **Distinguishing Dross from Gold**

The fact that we do not experience love as pure being is because we have not yet learned to purify ourselves, nor to distinguish dross from gold.

### **Eros**

Those who seek eros with those who do not really belong to them will only break hearts—others and their own. Love only the one who really belongs to you.

### **Heat With Light**

Chastity is heat with light. Unchastity is heat without light.

### **At Home on This Earth**

Wherever there is love on this earth, there will we feel at home.

### **Love and Knowledge**

Knowledge without love is a bird without wings. Love without knowledge is a child lost in a storm.

### **Squandering Affection**

Do not squander the heart's affections in the vain attempt to love those who do not love you or those whom you cannot love. There is more than enough love to share.

### **The She-Trust**

You are wondering about the woman you love. Would you trust her to serve on the Board of Trustees, the Town Council, or the Board of Governors? Would you trust her to coach a soccer or football team? Would you trust her to be the prime minister or president of a country? Would you trust her to help you raise your child? If yes, then marry her.

### **Love in Motion**

Love sets the heart in motion. Like a raging wind, love whips the sea to fury. Behold the beauty of the storm!

### **The Fourth Time**

Looking once, I saw in the mirror of love's face, strange, mysterious places in my soul. Looking twice, I saw the image of myself. Looking thrice, the image disappeared. Looking the fourth time, I saw nothing but the traces of the traceless Friend in Whom all lovers reach their final end.

### **The Symbiosis of Love and Prayer**

The depth of our love determines the sanctity of our prayers. The sanctity of our prayers magnifies the depth of our love.

### **Love is a Sacred Wound**

Love is a sacred wound. When the scar heals, it bestows bliss, glad-tidings and everlasting happiness.

### **A Certain Kind of Love**

A certain kind of love requires a very great sacrifice. If we do not make this sacrifice, we imperil our own soul and deprive ourselves of the greatest blessings.

### **The Love that Was**

Even after all these years, when I open my eyes in the morning and think of her, there in that magic twilight zone between sleeping and waking, the love of her comes back to me, filling me with a bliss that will always remain a cherished remembrance, a bliss that is shorn of both desire and regret, the love of pure being.

## **The Fireflies of Love**

Even after we have outgrown all our false loves, they are still going to parade like fireflies across the horizon of our existence, these little loves that still glow in the dark.

## **Unconditional Love?**

These days people talk about “unconditional love,” as if no covenant bears on love. But has there ever been a love that expects absolutely nothing in return? Great love makes great sacrifices, but great sacrifice also makes great demands. God created us out of love. Does His covenant not demand that we love Him in return for the precious gift of life? When Christ died on the cross for the sins of mankind, did He not expect that His sacrifice would work our transformation?

## **Rediscovery**

Loving sincerely means we are trying to rediscover something we have lost or to keep what we have found: the most precious jewel in the world.

## **12. NATURE**

### **Pitiful and Pitiless**

Nature is both pitiful and pitiless. Watch the mother bird anxiously caring for her young, but see the baby bird lying dead on the road, the one she pushed out of the nest.

### **The Propagation of the Species and Creaturely Death**

Nature’s first task is to propagate the species, but in the natural order many of her creatures are stillborn or find an early death.

### **Nature’s Mysteries**

Not every seed that falls will split; not every flower that sprouts will blossom; not every blossom attains perfection.

### **No Discrimination**

Lust does not discriminate.

## **Nature Will Out**

Human civilizations will stretch into the unborn reaches of time. But nature will have her way in the end. She will eventually swallow everything on earth.

## **The Earth Mother Archetype**

Although the earth is mother of us all, she is not what people imagine. She is big-bosomed, good-humored, nourishing, playful and comforting. But when she is abused, the vengeance she exacts throws the earth into chaos and destruction.

## **Nature's Aspirations**

All things in nature reveal the partial pattern that points to humankind. The lower orders of the natural world bear the incomplete traces of the human form. They are the aspiration that culminates eventually in the human being.

## ***Unique en son Genre***

Of all the species in nature, man is the most widely differentiated, not only due to racial, class, linguistic, religious, ethnic or national differences, but rather because only the individual manifests such a rich variety of diverse character traits. Each one has a personal history that distinguishes her from all others. When the unity of mankind becomes universally recognized, humans will become superlatively resplendent in their diversity.

## **13. GOD**

### **God is the Supreme Paradox**

God is the source of all paradoxes and the Supreme Paradox, the Absolute and the Relative, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, the Temporal and the Eternal, the Cause and the Causeless, Being and Non-Being. ("Non-Being" means not the Being that humans imagine). God is the only absolute, unconditioned Being, yet He exists in the form of relative Truth in the subjective mind of each truth seeker who attempts to understand Him. A phrase from Bahá'u'lláh's prayer states well this paradox of the Divine Being: "...the most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden." Paradoxes are difficult to resolve intellectually, but they can be transcended in the mystical state. To attain this transcendence is the supreme purpose of the paradox.

## **God the Creator, God the Preserver, God the Destroyer**

Sometime in our life will God the Ravager, God the Destroyer, God the Judge, God the Just, God the Uprooter turn our brightest dream into our blackest nightmare. But sometime soon will God the Bestower, God the Creator, God the Most Merciful, God the Preserver transform our life by granting our most cherished heart's desire.

### **No Can Win**

To make spiritual progress, we must always struggle with self. That is the greatest jihad. But no man, no woman, no government, no regime will never win the struggle waged against God, even if they claim they are fighting in God's name. To do so will ultimately lead to defeat, humiliation, and profound regret.

### **When God Confounds the Scholar**

God confounds the scholar by his own foolishness, if and when he becomes perverted by his own ego. A snake in the grass may bite and poison a few, but once we know it's there, we remain alert for sneak attacks.

### **There is no God but God**

Everything that befalls us in life is to teach us that there is no God but God.

### **God and the Devil**

Both God and the devil are in the details.

### **When God is Not for Praising**

We cannot praise God while confessing our sins. We cannot rejoice in His love while rehearsing our faults.

### **The Pit**

No matter how deep, how wide the pit we have dug for ourselves, God will throw us a rope. But we shall still have to do the work of climbing out entirely by our own efforts.

## **No Way to Glorify God**

We do not glorify God by debasing man.

### **Agnosticism**

Agnosticism is practical atheism.

## **14. DREAMING**

### **The Opposites in Dreams**

In the dream, the short is sometimes long, the fat is sometimes thin, no sometimes means yes, always may mean never, and death sometimes means birth. All opposites are equally true. Dr. Freud was right in calling the unconscious “the kingdom of the illogical.”

### **Start From a Valid Premise**

Dream your fondest dream, but start from a valid premise.

### **The Interpretation of Dreams**

The interpretation of a dream contains layers. Sometimes years will pass before we fully understand the meaning of a dream. Tell your dreams to others. Have them tell theirs to you. Things will become clearer in the telling, perceptions that were not clear when you first interpreted them yourself.

## **15. PEAKS AND VALLEYS**

### **Ecstasy**

More than one state of ecstasy exists in the human soul. In one state, all things begin to flow and dance in time to the music composed by the Hand of God. But there is still another kind of ecstasy: to speak to one’s Lord with sacred and holy words, uttered from deep within the soul, in the most solemn of all places, where the humble servant bows low before the majestic and regal presence of the Glory of God. That place is the virginal point of the soul, the center of all centers, a holy spot that can never be sullied by the promptings of the lower self or the allure of the world.

## **Divine Contentment and the Life of the World**

Sometimes the soul experiences a divine contentment that will largely dispense us of the need for the company of others, the need for the love of either women or men, a contentment that will free us from our normally insistent needs and preoccupations. But the life of society and the nature of the human condition are such that they conspire against our remaining in this state of satisfaction for long. Humans are always questing, and the world is like a selfish child who is always demanding attention. While we are here, divine contentment does not mean withdrawal from the world. It means remaining content even when we must be busy creatures, up, doing, and building in the life of the world.

### **A Shared Passion**

Nothing is more beautiful and moving, nothing more sacred, than the meeting of two minds in the discovery of a shared and noble passion.

### **Universal Mysticism**

The love of God and man is the one great mysticism common to us all. Spirituals do not need extraordinary experiences to know this supreme fellowship that is at all times universally accessible.

### **Never So Sad**

Our sins and failings should never cause us such great sorrow that we are not made joyful by remembering the things of God.

## **16. TEMPTATION**

### **Still Tempted**

A thousand emphatic voices may cry out “No!” but still we are tempted by the rosy glow.

### **Temptation**

Although temptation is not in itself sin, it is a test, a sign of moral weakness. It signals the presence of a condition that is hindering our spiritual development. Rare is the soul who is not subject to temptation. Even the saints and holy souls must face it to the very last breath.

## **The Rebel**

Temptation is the rebel in us all.

## **The Magnificent Illusion**

The delight procured by a thing unlawful only *seems* more delicious than a legitimate pleasure. But it proves in the end to be as bitter as wormwood—just one more magnificent illusion.

## **The Most Delectable Delights**

The delights procured at the banquet table offered by the Hand of God are beyond compare.

## **Learning by Degrees**

If you cannot really stop thinking it, then think it. If you cannot really refrain from saying it, then say it. If you cannot really stop dreaming it, then dream it. If you cannot really refrain from doing it, then do it. In this way, you will eventually discover what you truly need, not what you think you want.

## **17. TROUBLES**

### **Our Troubles**

Much of the trouble that befalls us in life derives from our not being able to sit quietly and endure our pain without complaint.

### **Pervasive Pain**

Pain is as pervasive as breathing, as ever-present as consciousness itself. But our task must be to eliminate pain, to the extent possible, by all means legal, sane and spiritual.

### **Wake-Up Call**

A wake-up call is not always gentle. Have you ever been close to a rooster when it crows at dawn?



## **Toxicity**

Avoid like the plague the emotionally, intellectually and spiritually toxic, be they persons or things. Do this for your own sake, not for the love of God.

## **Hiding in Plain Sight**

It is strange but true that the solution is often hiding in plain sight.

## **The First Law of Human Relations**

The first law of human relations is this: if things are not working, then observe the law of God.

## **18. PERSONAL ZEN**

### **One Thing or Another**

If I am too tired to write, I read. If I am too tired to read, I think. If I am too tired to think, I sleep. If I am too tired to sleep, I walk. If I am too tired to walk, I rest. But sometimes simply enduring is the only way.

### **Grown Up?**

Most adults never really grow up. We are only a crisis away from childhood.

### **Last Night I Buried a Friend**

Last night I buried a friend. Her ghost had haunted me for years. I finally buried her when I realized that she had closed her eyes to the light and blocked up her ears. She did not want to live. She just stopped breathing.

### **The Quick Thrill**

Much human activity is like the lad who skips a flat pebble over the surface of the water. He enjoys a quick thrill, but soon the stone sinks to the bottom.

### **The Blessed Denial**

I am very thankful God did not give me what I wanted. By denying me what I thought I wanted, He has granted the very thing I need.

## **True Maturity**

We were happy as we once were, but it was the happiness of the innocent child, not that of the mature adult. Without the fires of tests, we would have remained children. The natural world has its inevitable changes, chances, growing pains and losses. The life of the spirit is not always lollipops, sunshine and roses. Sometimes it is just plain hell, but in the end, if we can weather the storms of the passing years, we will find moments of real satisfaction and content.

## **The Woman Shaver**

Sometimes a certain type of woman meets a certain type of man. This woman will cut his hair and shave his head. He will think he loves her. She will make him feel good for a time, but in the end, she will bring him to his knees. Then will the veil be removed from his eyes. He will wake up, look at himself in the mirror, and in time grow back his hair and feel free again, just like himself.

## **Patterns**

Some patterns we must learn to break or be broken.

## **On the Way to Looneyville**

It is passing strange that for some misguided souls driving at top speed to Looneyville is irresistible. For them it seems like the right thing to do. They will do it with all their heart and soul and attract others to the cause. But the momentary rebellious thrill of it all will in the end surely destroy their peace of mind and leave them bitter and defeated. It may even destroy life itself.

## **Till-a-Luna!**

So you want to resolve that conflict, fix that relationship, go on with the histrionics? Are you addicted to drama? If you really value your own happiness, just turn right now and walk away. Till-a-luna, till-a-luna, till-a-luna!

## **Destination Frustration**

A recurring dream. I am anxious. I am late for a very important date. Entire audiences are waiting to hear, but I cannot find the way. My students are waiting. Why can't I find the classroom? The bell has already rung. What keeps me from finding them? Such frustration!

### **Keeping Our Own Counsel**

If we keep our own counsel, we will be preserved from self-abasement. Although sooner or later our thinking manifests in behavior, thankfully by the grace of God, some secrets remain hidden.

### **Hearing Myself Think**

In order to function, I have to hear myself think. Except when I seek *la joie de vivre* with others, I abhor noise. Prayer, meditation and contemplation require the silence of quiet time. Silence is sacred.

### **Praying for Tests**

Once in my innocent youth, I sincerely prayed for tests. Till this moment, they have never let up. If you ask me now, late in life, if I would pray the same prayer, were I to do it all over again, I would not know what to answer.

### **The Covenant of Love**

I will love you for the faith you live. Love me for the faith I live. We will be stronger. I will love you for your own sake. Love me for my own sake. We will be stronger still.

## 7. FAMILY MATTERS

### My Grandparents William and Jessie Fallon Halsted

My maternal grandmother followed her daughters in recognizing the Faith in her senior years, as did her husband, my grandfather William “Will” Henry Halsted. I spent as much time with my beloved grandparents as circumstances allowed when I was growing up, learning what I could about their perception of spiritual realities and life experiences.

They both had the depth and wisdom that comes with the passing years and a pure-hearted, strong faith in God and belief in Jesus Christ. Their faith was based on sound knowledge of the holy scriptures, although grandfather’s reading went beyond biblical texts to include esoterica. I always looked forward to visiting my grandparents. Jessie and Will Halsted always gave me a warm and loving welcome. Their pleasant company and our inspiring spiritual conversations made each visit a delight.

Grandfather’s outspoken frankness contrasted markedly with grandmother’s milder wisdom, imparted with gentility and tact, yet I learned much from their very diverse teaching styles. Grandfather’s approach was at times dogmatic and emphatic; he would stress an important point by standing up and dramatically cautioning us with such phrases as “Now wait just a minute!” Thereafter a great pronouncement came to make his point.

Will Halsted enjoyed *le choque des idées* (“the shock of ideas”). His life was oriented, as was grandmother’s, by his belief system. Sometimes while standing to speak, he would add emphasis to his speech by striking the palm of his right hand with the fist of his left. Grandmother’s personal style was milder and understated, although she could also on occasion be quite firm, especially if she felt a fundamental Christian belief was being compromised.

She usually tolerated grandfather’s grandiloquent manner, but on occasion she would say, but not in an unkindly way: “O sit down, Will!” But all these exchanges were characterized by love and our common interest in discovering the kernel of truth in any spiritual matter. We listened carefully to one another, eager to learn what we could, while being all the while unafraid to express any disagreement with what might seem to be a false or questionable idea.

The Halsted home was like a transplanted corner of England, so delightfully old world and different from the modern, freshly built Canadian homes that I knew growing up. The kettle was always bubbling on the blue gas jet, followed by tea brewing in the “Brown Betty.” To be invited to a dinner of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, followed by a dessert of lemon meringue pie, was a special treat.

Grandma cooked with curry, an unusual habit for English people in those days, because she spent her early childhood in India, where her father served in the British imperial army.

Photos of their children and in-laws, English relatives and mementos of United Kingdom adorned the walls and dish cabinet of their home.

Grandfather used natural medicinal remedies. Their medicine cabinet contained small bottles of such medicines as eucalyptus oil, witch hazel, wintergreen and camphor in its raw state. They also used odorous liniments as massaging agents and mentholated cough remedies. These remedies were my first introduction to natural healing, along with mother's exposure to the research of the famous author and nutritionist Adelle Davis. As soon as you opened their door, you inhaled the scent of one or more of these medicines and the occasional strong smell of a commercial antiseptic. Our grandparents, like our mother, were great believers in cleanliness and the fundamentals of hygiene. The trace of any unpleasant odor was not tolerated, but rather found and eliminated as soon as possible. Nails had to be clean and clipped regularly.

### **Sayings of My Maternal Grandparents Halsted**

#### **Grandfather William Henry Halsted**

"Isn't it wonderful how the milk gets in the coconuts!"

"The grace of God is not idle."

"The world is going back to barbarism!" His judgment on the world spoken with emphasis circa 1970.

"Boy oh boy!" Expression of astonishment or surprise.

"Now wait a minute, wait just a minute!" A warning spoken with emphasis during a serious conversation, when he thought we overlooked an important point. For dramatic effect, he would stand up before making his point.

"I'll tell the world!" And he did just that when he felt it was necessary.

"Well if things don't alter, they'll stay as they are."

"He flipped her flopper and she flopped his flipper." A saying of his own invention heard through the bathroom door, and followed by laughter, as he splashed and soaked in the bath. I guess he thought he was a seal!

"Everything's lovely in the garden."

"Lovely weather for ducks." He said this when it was raining.

"It's good for the farmers." Grandpa said this when it was raining if we complained about the rain.

"Yeah, we had one but it died." His strange but humorous way of alerting us to the fact that death is ever-present in the midst of life.

“What about the old man? Throw him overboard!” A random, interjected saying also followed by laughter. I have no idea where grandfather got this saying; perhaps from a comic opera of Gilbert and Sullivan, the dramatist-composer team from the Victorian Era.

“John, don’t you know that there a lot of old people who want to die but they can’t!”

### **Grandmother Jessie Fallon Halsted**

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” A favorite Gospel verse (Matt. 6:33). Grandmother often repeated it.

“Oh well, dear, all the fruit doesn’t ripen on the tree at the same time.” When Grandmother asked my mother when she was a teenager if she wanted to join the church, mother refused. Although grandmother was hurt by the rebuff—mother said she looked as if someone had slapped her in the face—that was her gentle response.

### **My Parents**

#### **Allan James McLean**

“Jack, if you look after your stuff, it will last you a long time.”

“Remember that a dull razor blade will cut you just as easily as a sharp one.”

“Till kingdom come.” (Meaning we don’t know how long it will take).

“Fire and fall back!” said humorously.

“Here today, gone tomorrow.” His comment about death.

“When the long journey is over and we’re resting on the oars...” Said with a smile. He meant to say that rest would follow the long, hard journey. (I have been unable to track down the origin of this phrase).

“Jack, people will steal anything.”

“In the Great Depression we were *destitute*.” It was in this sentence that I intuitively learned the meaning of the word “destitute.” I didn’t have to look it up in the dictionary because I understood from the context exactly what father meant.

“Jack you will never have money.” Father was right. I have never had a lot of money because I am not a good money manager, but I have always had enough to get by. Neither have I cared enough about money to accumulate a great deal of it, although I do recognize that wealth is necessary for living, for providing for one’s family and for giving to the Bahá’í Fund.

“There she flows the mighty Humber.” Father used to say this when we drove over the Humber River in Toronto where we lived in Etobicoke. It was partially ironic because the Humber was anything but mighty. The only time it was really mighty that I recall was during Hurricane Hazel in 1954 when it flooded and carried away homes and people. Eighty-one people lost their lives in Toronto during the hurricane.

“She’s a handsome woman.” Father was the only person I knew who used the word handsome to refer to a woman. Usually it was said regarding a man, but it was an older usage of the word.

“In the lumber camps we were forbidden to talk about politics and religion because it led to fighting.” When Father was a young man, he worked for a while in a lumber camp in Ontario.

“It doesn’t matter where you go; you take yourself with you.”

“God only knows but He won’t tell.”

“Balderdash!”

“Go west young man! Go west!” Although in British English the expression “to go west” means to die, to be lost or destroyed, it was one of the main slogans beckoning young American men to expand westward during the nineteenth century. From the time we were children, Father talked about making a journey west to British Columbia from Ontario. That journey was finally made when we were young teens.

“Oh my shattered nerves!” Father always said this on a note of humor.

“Gone to his reward.” When someone passed away, dad would say, so and so “has gone to his reward.”

### **Joyce Mary Halsted McLean**

“All our time belongs to God.”

“Nature looks after itself.”

“I’m sick and fed up with it.” I am not actually sure which parent said this, but probably Mother.

“It burns me up.” An alternate expression to the one above. It was said in infrequent moments of frustration about some annoying situation.

“There aren’t enough hours in the day.”

“Don’t be so dogmatic.” Either mother to father or father to mother. Just like the word “destitute,” and although I was only a child, I understood intuitively what the word meant.

“It is a sin to steal a pin.” Mother heard this from her mother, my grandmother Jessie Fallon Halsted. It struck me as being very strict, but it reveals the strict Christian morality that defined our mother’s upbringing.

“As good as gold.” Praise expressed for a child’s good behavior or to describe a child’s character.

“Whatever your little heart desires.” A wonderful expression of approval for children.

“If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.” I assume this was before mother discovered the process of Bahá’í consultation.

“In the name of heaven!” This saying was usually spoken either to express doubt and/or to invoke divine assistance. For example: “Yes, we need a new car badly, but where in the name of heaven are we going to get the money?”

“Money doesn’t grow on trees!”

### **Silly Childhood Sayings I Remember**

“Hubba Hubba what a figure! Two more legs, you’d look like Trigger.” Trigger was the Palomino belonging to cowboy Roy Rogers. His wife and companion, Dale Evans, rode Buttermilk.

“Fat and skinny went to war. Fat got hit with an apple core.” This was one of many Fat and Skinny jokes/sayings that were circulating at the time.

“Teeter totter milk ‘n water, wash your face in dirty water.” That is the usual children’s rhyme, but we said it as “milk ‘n modder” which makes no sense at all.

### **EULOGY FOR ALLAN JAMES MCLEAN**

**(November 29, 1913-April 7, 1995)**

**United Church, Salt Spring Island, British Columbia**

**April 12, 1995**

Dear family, relatives and friends. Providence has called us here today to pay a final tribute to a stalwart and noble soul, our father Allan James McLean. I consider it an honor to be able, along with my brother Steve and my sister Mary Lou, to remember our father today. I know that our gathering here together, and the prayers that we have offered up for the progress of his soul, will bring joy to his heart and help to assure the continued progress of his soul in the worlds beyond, worlds which we, because of our human limitations, cannot even begin to dimly perceive.



As I have been reflecting on Dad's life and death over the past few days, several strong, heart-felt sentiments, some of them very sweet, others very sober, have kept coming to mind. Of course, there is the bitter anguish of losing Dad, an anguish which, like so many other things in life, comes and goes in waves. The first thought I want to share with you at this gathering is this: how swift life passes. When I think of Dad's life from the first days of his fatherly, tender care when he lifted us from our beds at night when we were children, to the last moment that I spoke with him just days ago, Bahá'u'lláh's scripture comes to mind: "The days of your life flee away as a breath of wind." (GWB 138).

The past memories of our father can be recalled now, and as they come to mind, it seems that time does not exist. We know that some of these memories are anchored in the distant past; and yet, when we remember them, they live in the present moment, as if it were just yesterday. I realize now, as I think of them, that time in the face of death ultimately proves to be nothing. For life, to be fully meaningful is not really about the passage of time, even though we are acutely conscious of passing time while we live.

The time that makes life possible is instead just a series of heartbeats, a parade of lovely moments of the things that really matter; the things that in the end make us happy and grateful. These memories produce a panorama of scenes in which love, above all other emotions, predominates. For it is love especially that makes life real. It is love that made our father's life profoundly real. Although he did not talk about the importance of love, his life amply demonstrated that he understood its import very well. It is love that produced the effect that our father had on his immediate family.

These realizations lead me to the following thought: what we need to do, let us do it today, if we are able. Whatever is urging us forward or demanding our attention, whether it be a postponed worthwhile project, a heartfelt desire, or if it be a time for reconciliation with an estranged one—now is the time to act.

I think Father would agree with me, if he were here to speak to us in person. He would say in that quiet, distinctive, resonating, reassuring voice of his: "Yes, go ahead with your worthwhile project; make that gesture of reconciliation while there is still an opportunity; lend that helping hand; make that contribution, whether it be great or small."

During the day following Mom's early morning fateful phone call last Saturday, I felt Dad's presence surrounding me all day long—a strong, calm, joyous presence, and above all a peaceful one, walking with me as I grieved my way through the day, comforting me with an unseen hand on the shoulder. On Sunday morning, I took a quiet little walk around our neighborhood in Gattineau. As I walked up and down Joannisse Street, I looked at a pine tree that once had been just a twig on a neighbor's lawn. Once a mere stick, it has by now grown up into the trunk of a much stouter tree.

And when I looked at that tree, I thought of Dad. I remembered that the sap will soon be flowing again in its veins, that surrounding nature will become verdant again with new life. As I continued walking, I heard in the melody of a bird trilling out its song, Dad's whistle—yes, his

own particular slow way of whistling when he whistled a happy tune. As I turned my steps toward home, I observed the tulips pushing up their first shoots in our back garden, tulips that we had planted with Mom one warm, bright day last fall.

The month of April that is slowly springing into new life also reminded me, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote, that the fruits of this uterine life, the life in this “womb-world,” are not to be found here, but there; not in this life, but in the next. Later, on Sunday afternoon, as I jogged by Scullion’s farm on the township road, not far from our suburban home, signs along the way spoke to me again of Father. Farmer Scullion had finished his spring ploughing; the fields had been harrowed to make the land ready for the seed that will yield the rich harvest that will soon follow.

That earthly scene reminded me that our father, who now lives in celestial form in an unseen world, is garnering the rich, bountiful fruits of the seeds of his faith and the many good deeds that he had sown throughout his earthly life. His life exemplified values, the things we hold dear. Above all, there the values of faith, honesty, loyalty, truthfulness, integrity, love, peace, and steadfastness.

Father lived by these things, especially steadfastness and loyalty. Allan McLean was stalwart. He was as steady as the proverbial rock. Values were not empty words to our father. Dad did not discuss the importance of values, just as he never talked about love. He never prescribed them, let alone preach them. But by the living example of his life, he was the embodiment in action of the values he lived by.

You know that what counts for the masses in today’s deluded world is mere appearance: the vanity-show of smoke and mirrors that is projected as reality by those seeking fame, influence, money, or power, be it in politics, business or in what is called entertainment. But it was not so in our father’s life. He lived simply without artifice or pretense. For one who had an eye to see, the integrity of the man who quietly went his way, without ever seeking to draw attention to himself, could not be missed.

The death of a loved one is often a time for regretting or wishing: the things we should have done or said, but perhaps did not do or say. I must tell you, though, that I have almost no wishes and regrets about Dad, and I do not think he died with any wishes or regrets in his heart, except perhaps that he surely would have avoided causing our mother grief, had it been in his power to do so.

Because our father was one of the contented, he did not spend his life wishing and hoping. His life was instead an expression of that saying of the Chinese sage, Lao Tzu: “The contented man cannot be ruined.” Dad knew how much I was grateful for all that he taught his children by the example of his own life. He knew that his children admired, loved and respected him. And now that he is gone, I realize that he was teaching me in ways that I did not consciously understand. For the life of a virtuous man is an ongoing lesson for others. I know that in the years ahead, I will go on learning from his example, even until the day I die.

On second thought... I do have one small wish all the same. It is not a wish for me, but for you. I wish you could have known Dad when he was younger and stronger. His tall, upright presence did not go unnoticed, but it was a presence, as I have said, that never imposed on others. As a member of the Bahá'í International Council seated in Haifa, Israel, Mr. Douglas Martin, wrote in the fax we received last Sunday morning: "The mention of his name brought back warm memories of the McLean family, and particularly of his quiet, gentle and sweet nature—all the more striking because of his impressive physical presence."

Yes, that physical presence. Dad was an accomplished athlete in his day and was touted by the newspapers as one of Canada's finest lacrosse players during the 1930's, when he played for the Orillia Terriers, the year they won Canada's Mann Cup in 1935, back in the days when lacrosse still rivalled hockey in popularity as Canada's national sport.

Some of you know that Dad was an accomplished amateur golfer in his day. His children still remember well the several trophies he brought home from the tournaments he entered and won. I recall very clearly the first time I witnessed Dad's prowess in driving the golf ball long distances down the fairway. One day I accompanied him to the nearest driving range to our home on Martin Grove Road, in the Township of Etobicoke in Toronto.

I was about ten years old and I had never seen Father drive a golf ball. He warned me to stand well back from the driving mound, placed his ball on the tee, took his stance, raised his club over his shoulder—then...Whack! I heard the crisp, hard smack of the driver as the small ball was struck and took off and up into the air at terrific speed.

I watched mesmerized as that tiny white globe made its rapid ascent over the driving green like a soaring rocket. My reaction was instant and complete. I was overawed by the strength of my father to drive that ball so far. To my young eyes, in that moment he became a Hercules. Much later in life, I accompanied him on a round of 18 holes that he played with a few other men. Although he was 65 years old at that time, he easily outwalked his much younger competitors, setting a quick pace as he left the tee, not waiting for the others, but pulled his golf cart with resolute determination to the next hole. He was a competitor. He liked to win.

It must have been, then, with a sense of growing discouragement that Dad realized that he was slowly becoming crippled with arthritis, at the same time as one hip was wasting away and his knees were being reduced to bone-on-bone. It must have been very hard for this active man, who valued his independence and took pleasure in his athletic skills, to be obliged, as his degenerative disease progressed, to be finally confined to a wheel chair.

I know that he did not want that wheel chair. The only personal fear that I ever heard our father express when he was fully mobile—a very atypical comment for him—was that he did not want to end up in a wheel chair. But sometimes God will test us with the very thing that we do not want, and that chair was Dad's test.

To be immobilized and confined to the house day after day, and to move only in pain with such great difficulty must have been for him a very trying experience. But in the end, he accepted his condition with the same uncomplaining magnanimity that he did for all the other things in his

life that he did not welcome. That he has finally been set free from the discomfort and pain that he had to endure for so long has been a consolation to our family.

Dad was a religious man, to be sure, but religious in his own way. For him religion was above all an attitude to life, a practical thing, an expression of concrete values lived, of relationships with others. He rarely discussed religious beliefs, unless the circumstances warranted it, although he was always a thoughtful listener.

Oh yes, he could surprise you on occasion, but his thoughts and opinions were rarely on display. Father once surprised me when he arrived to fetch me home and joined a conversation I was having with a stranger about the Bahá'í Faith. Briefly and cogently, Dad answered this man's objections to what he thought was a weakness in the way the Bahá'í Faith was organized.

Outside his Bahá'í prayer book and his daily readings, I do not think father read many books on spirituality or any other religious subject. But I know he had a reverence for life and spiritual matters, a reverence which went deeper than words. His heart had been opened to God when he was just a boy by a woman "with a club foot" who taught him Sunday school. We no longer know her name. What she taught him exactly we do not know. He kept the particulars to himself. But somehow she succeeded in opening Dad's heart to the reality of faith. She planted a seed that blossomed years later. The sight of this tall, strong man, praying at night beside his bed, on his knees with his head bowed is something his children cannot forget

Some of you know that our father, although he was raised a Presbyterian, became a Bahá'í in 1969 when he was 56 years old. We would be wrong, though, if we thought that father became a Bahá'í to please mother, although Mom had been praying for years for that great event to happen. Our father became a Bahá'í after 17 years of meeting Bahá'ís and quietly observing the Bahá'í community in action.

What finally prompted this independent-minded man to join the Faith was attending the regular Bahá'í fireside meetings held in our family home at 6 Emery Circle in Etobicoke, when Steve and I were in our late teens. Dad never joined the discussion at those meetings, but he served in the background supporting mother as she served the guests, listening carefully, imbibing the warm atmosphere that was generated by those fireside talks, and evaluating the Bahá'í teachings in his own mind.

Although he usually said nothing at those meetings, it was a great joy to observe the occasional contented smile cross his face, or the knowing look of agreement that showed that he was pleased with the stimulating atmosphere of search and discovery generated by those meetings. He was no doubt influenced by the spirit of the young people who were so enthused by those meetings that about 25 of them, over a few years, became new members in the youngest of the world's great religions.

Finally, Father came to the conclusion that what he was observing, hearing and reading was true. And one night, unceremoniously, as was his way, he declared his faith by placing the membership card on the dinner table without saying a word. It must have been hard for Dad to accept the fact that mother become a Bahá'í when we were children. The Bahá'í Faith, a religion

from the Middle-East, must have seemed like a strange cult to an Anglo-Saxon Protestant in Toronto in 1952. But father never interfered with mother's spiritual search. She, in turn, was wise enough not to allow her study of the Faith to become an issue in their marriage.

Not wanting mother to stand out in any peculiar way, he at first wondered why her own inherited religion was not good enough for her. Father was an independently minded man, but once he joined something, he was a lifer. And join he did, when after years of careful observation, listening and learning, he decided to throw in his lot with the Bahá'í world community.

Our brother Stephen wrote a letter to Dad from Memorial University in Newfoundland on that occasion, a letter which mysteriously just happened to flutter down from the bookcase the other day. Here is what Steve wrote from his student residence in Blackall on February 8, 1969: "There was never any doubt that my father was a Bahá'í. Whether he would eventually sign that little card or not, I was not really certain. I did know that he possessed many of the qualities that are spoken of in the writings: praiseworthy character, guarded in speech, steadfastness. How that word steadfastness is reflected in the life you have provided for your wife and family."

He was also not afraid to stand up for his rights when the occasion demanded. I recall a little incident on a bus in Toronto that gave a live demonstration of this principle. It was only a small thing, but like so many of the small things in life, it said much about the character of the man. On that particular day, Dad did not drive to work, but rode public transport instead. I was coming home from the University of Toronto when our paths crossed. I had boarded the Royal York Road bus heading north when Dad transferred onto the same bus from further down in New Toronto, where he was keeping accounts in the shipping department at Anaconda American Brass, later Noranda.

For some reason, the driver objected to Dad's transfer slip. I don't know exactly what the issue was, but the driver told my father that he could not ride the bus unless he paid another fare because his transfer slip was not in order. Father disagreed. From my seat near the back, and with tension mounting, I watched the driver and Dad exchange a few words. The driver, I suppose, was just doing his job. But father explained to him that he was within his rights to be there, without paying another fare. The driver was hard case and was not convinced by Dad's story.

The situation resolved quickly when Dad just turned away, walked toward the back of the bus and sat down beside me. I must admit that I was very relieved that the driver did not make a further issue of it. The sense of integrity that compelled him to stand up for his rights that day over a little thing, was the same sense of integrity that guided him in the larger decisions of life.

In moments of loss and grief, it is a consolation to know that in the world of the spirit there is no permanent separation. Separation is a physical thing, and that separation, as anyone who has lost a loved one knows, is painful enough. Although the loss of Dad's physical presence is sharply felt, it is nonetheless only momentary. This separation is not forever.

I cannot close this eulogy today without mentioning the person who has borne more than us all the brunt of Dad's death—for she was there when the end came. The McLean children

express at this sad time our gratitude to our Mother, Joyce Mary Halsted McLean. It was best said by her son Stephen, who wrote in that same letter to father already quoted: "I dedicate this letter to Mother without whose steadfastness we all may have led meaningless lives." Mom we have been bountifully blessed by your rock-solid faith, by your foresighted vision and the audacity you demonstrated when you embraced the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, at this date all those years ago in 1952.

Now I come to the end of this tribute. No one can fully capture such an exemplary life in words alone, but I hope I have been able to recapture some traces of the spirit of this man who was such a fine husband, father and Bahá'í believer. Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet-Founder of the Bahá'í Faith said it so well: "A good character is, verily, the best mantle for men from God. With it He adorneth the temples of His loved ones. By My life! The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun and the radiance thereof. Whoso attaineth unto it is accounted as a jewel among men." Good bye, Dad. We ask you to watch over those of us who remain behind. We rejoice in the thought that one day we shall be in your presence once again.

### **SCOTTISH TRANQUILITY**

**(Allan James McLean 1913-1995)**

Even in that final moment  
you knew the angel of death  
stood by your bedside,  
but your body still contested  
with the mighty winged creature  
who had summoned you.

In that last, momentary struggle,  
agitated, moaning with the pangs  
of birth and death, you were loathe  
to leave the one who called you darling  
till the last breath, with a love  
few have seen and some have envied.

You died as you had lived,  
graced by a dignity

that magnified your presence,  
attractive in its simplicity,  
never imposing, or seeking the lime-light,  
a man who craved not affection nor approval.

We sought to rest our hearts in you,  
as sailing vessels steer for port,  
let anchor down in the depths of the tranquil sea.

The homecare workers fell in love with you.  
They mourned your passing as their own fathers,  
one sorry soul bereaved now twice in recent days.

Wonders were told in transit.  
The accidental tourist who fled churches  
for more than a decade, abhorred funerals,  
but came straightway off the street,  
and told us how you had changed her life  
in mere days.

You helped her over hurdles,  
even in your passing.  
“The church,” she said,  
“was flooded with so much joy  
and love when I came in.”  
“Allan was always in my face,”  
words spoken in her own tough-tender way.

The once stern provincial judge stood trembling  
as a leaf at your remembrance.

The canon learned a lesson in divinity that day.  
The eulogy's strain relieved by the odd,  
yet welcome laughter that once gave you  
raucous moments, your faint smile  
slightly impish with the wit and fun of it all.

Tears and sniffles melted in sunshine memories.

Schooled in the Great Depression,  
I knew precisely what it meant  
the first time you used the word "destitute,"  
a tough kid from the north end of Weston,  
feared in the neighborhood, even by the tough guys  
who were afraid to fight you.

You became a gentle man and courteous,  
athlete *extraordinaire*, linksman, lacrosseman.  
You were the commoner who became a prince.

When the pipes droned out "Scottish Tranquility,"  
in the spirit of "Virtue Mine Honour,"  
for all the McLeans of Mull and Duart,  
my inner eye caught a vision of you  
dancing before your casket,  
after you left your wheelchair behind,  
hands and feet, rising, falling,  
beating out the slow rhythm of the chant,  
celebrating your newfound freedom,  
keeping time.



For time in your world can now be truly kept,  
while it flies away here, water through our fingers.

I saw you in that moment as I had never seen you,  
and the view did seem a little strange.

Scarcely a man I saw in the vision,  
but a gangly, capped duffer in plus-fours,  
ready for the fairways again,  
a youth in other realms, growing...

All of it cannot be told.

For words so multiplied can never span  
the breadth of such a life, draw a picture,  
paint a scene of the soul's rare mystery.

Rain fell as we lowered your coffin into place.

After prayers I hurried back to steal a rose  
once the others left, but missed the lot.

I garnered instead one white carnation  
from among the spray.

In the luxury of limousine appointments,

I sat reflecting as we drove away,  
looked back at the humble pile of earth,  
embellished by the perfumed bouquets  
that marked your resting-place.

Two faithful pilgrims lingered by the grave to pray.

How small it seemed, your last abode,

the mound of brown earth,  
set against the mountain of your life.

I raised the flower to my face,  
to enjoy again the final fragrance  
that was you, when the sudden sense  
of droplets falling on my palm  
startled me, a thimble-full of water,  
trapped seconds ago, released from the folds  
of the crinkled flower.

The drops trickled down,  
a sea of generosity,  
the living water in my hand,  
mercy from a loving presence,  
sure symbol of a life beyond.

## **EULOGY FOR JOYCE MARY HALSTED MCLEAN**

**(July 14, 1920-November 28, 2001)**

Dear Family and Friends! Providence has called us here once more to celebrate the life and to mourn the death of a great lady and luminous soul, Joyce Mary Halsted McLean. In the later years of her life, after the death of her beloved spouse Allan, she often remarked how God had blessed her with the loving friends she had made on Salt Spring Island. The quality of Joyce's friendship was such that she succeeded in creating reciprocal love and loyalty in the hearts of her friends. She was both loyal to and proud of those whom she loved.

### **Her Life**

Our family would like to tell you today something of the life of our mother. We say "something" because what Joyce was and is, what she represents, especially for her family can never be encapsulated in these brief remarks. Born Joyce Mary Halsted in Toronto on 15 July, 1920, Joyce was the eldest of five children. They included the twins Ruth and Frank, and her other sisters Hope, called Babes, later Hubbert, and the baby Edna, later Nablo, eleven years Joyce's junior. I remember when I was a child that Edna used to call our mother "Joy."

Joyce was born the same year that her parents William Henry Halsted and Jessie Fallon Halsted emigrated from Sheffield, England after the First World War. Joyce attended school in Toronto, first at John English Elementary School and later Mimico High School in the town of Mimico, which eventually became part of the township, later borough of Etobicoke.

Mother continued her education by attending Shaw's Business School in Toronto. She found her first job at eighteen years of age at Peckovers in Toronto, a manufacturer and distributor of metal products. Over the years, she became a first-rate clerk-stenographer for various companies in the days when shorthand was used for taking dictation. In mid-life when she was employed by Air Canada in "Operations," Joyce performed high-level managerial tasks for her bosses when they were away on business or vacation. These tasks included business analysis, compiling complex reports and chart-making. Although these male managers always thanked mother for her top-flight work, she was never promoted commensurate with her abilities. It was the era of male domination when there were very few women managers.

When Joyce was 14 years old in 1934, she broke her back in a tobogganing accident and underwent one of the first spinal fusions in Canada performed by Dr. MacKay. A piece of her tibia bone was grafted onto the spinal column. During the post-surgical phase, the healing process had been slow to engage. While Joyce was laid out flat on a stretcher-bed, she overheard the doctors saying they thought she would never walk again.

Although later in life she wondered if they deliberately let her within hearing range, there and then she became fiercely determined that she would prove the doctors wrong. It was not long after that the bones finally began to knit; fusion was happening. Dr MacKay walked into her room one day holding the X-rays in his hand and declared the good news: “The bones are knitting like wildfire!”

Walk she did, but only after a trying recovery period of a year while she lay flat on her back, wearing a heavy body cast. She was instructed to drink copious amounts of milk to make her bones strong. Our maternal grandmother’s sister, Aunt Violet Fallon Halsted, “Auntie,” and her husband Stewart Halsted, grandfather’s brother, took her in and cared for her during this time because her parents were fully occupied in raising the younger children. What was more serious was the development of tuberculosis in her spine.

Normally Mother would have been required by law to be cared for in a sanatorium, but she cried and begged her parents not to send her there because she feared she would not come out alive. Great uncle Stewart Halsted, one of the top sales managers at Anaconda American Brass (later Noranda), had influence with the mayor of Toronto, who granted the Halsteds a special medical permit to allow them to care for Joyce in their home, on condition that they provided her with a hospital bed. When her cast was finally removed, mother had to learn to walk all over again because her muscles had atrophied considerably during the twelve months spent in bed. She wore high-heel shoes to strengthen her calf muscles.

Uncle Stewart performed two other services that changed the lives of our parents. He found a job for our father at Anaconda in the “time office”; he also introduced our parents to one another. While mother was still bound in a cast, Uncle Stewart invited Dad to the house to meet Rita, a girlfriend of Joyce’s, who was interested in the handsome lacrosse player. As it turned out, destiny determined that it was Joyce not Rita who would marry Allan McLean.

It was a classic story of love at first sight. Mother said that the first time that she looked into Dad’s eyes, she had something akin to a spiritual experience; she saw all the goodness of his character mirrored on his face. Joyce knew this was the man she intended to marry. It was in the township of Etobicoke, first at 156 Hay Avenue in Mimico, then on rural Martin Grove Road, where they built their first home in the country, and later in a modern split-level suburban home at 6 Emery Circle, that Joyce and Allan raised their three children: Mary Lou the eldest, and her younger brothers Stephen and Jack.

At the time of her passing in 2001, Joyce and Allan McLean had eight grandchildren: Brent Brodhurst and Cathy Coe Duke, Mukina and Leah McLean and Sharon, Lisa, Jessica and Kelly McLean and five great grand-children: Michael, Olivia and Brenden Brodhurst and Lyndon and Joel Duke.

Joyce finished her working career in the Operations Department of Air Canada at Toronto’s Pearson International Airport, not far from the location of its more modest predecessor, Malton airport. Following Allan’s retirement, the family home at 6 Emery Circle, Etobicoke was

sold. A few moves in their retirement years followed, which culminated in their relocation to Salt Spring Island in 1978, where they lived until the end of their lives.

Joyce and Allan moved to the island to assist the Local Spiritual Assembly to bring its number of members to nine, a requirement according to Bahá'í administration for the formation and functioning of any Local Assembly. Before moving to Salt Spring Island, there were shorter stays at their cottage in Marmora, Ontario, west of Ottawa on highway #7 and a few winters in Martinique and Guadeloupe in the French Antilles, where they assisted the local believers in community-building and promoting the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith.

Salt Spring Island proved to be the last home of Joyce and Allan McLean, a place she grew to love, an island on which, as she sometimes said, she experienced her greatest joys and more lately her greatest sorrows, especially after Dad passed away. Joyce served on the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Salt Spring Island as a capable and efficient secretary. She always reminded the Bahá'í friends of the urgent needs of the current plan for the expansion and consolidation of the Bahá'í Faith. She was reluctant to compromise when it came to a question of principle; she felt that principles took priority over convenience, expediency and personality. One repeated saying the children heard as they were growing up was: "It's the principle of the thing."

Joyce McLean was the first paid, full-time secretary of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada. That institution remarked more than her once that her organizational and administrative skills were second to none. In her day, Joyce was a phenomenal typist. She was known to wear out a typewriter well before its time. She served on the first Counseling Committee formed by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada.

For a few years she was elected as one of the regional delegates from Ontario to the Bahá'í National Convention, whose task it was to elect the National Spiritual Assembly. She also helped to compile the original Assembly Resource Compilation, a very useful handbook for secretaries, which is widely used by Local Spiritual Assemblies in the Bahá'í community today, although it has been much edited since it was first compiled.

### **Her Spiritual Legacy**

Joyce McLean was a woman of several talents and abilities. Although she had no formal training in interior decoration, she had a fine artistic sense of proportion, which she inherited from her father, William Henry Halsted, a house painter who on occasion also did interior decoration. She showed her children by example to be smartly dressed and to be color-coordinated in the choice of clothing. Although our mother could not be called an intellectual, she was a deep thinker, a very skillful writer in both poetry and prose, a loving and devoted wife, a dedicated parent and faithful friend for those who sought her company. She played the piano, loved music and had a pleasant singing voice.

When she was still in elementary school, she tried her hand, like her father, at sketching. She could both knit and crochet well. Some of her finest pieces were sweaters and blankets made for her children and grandchildren. When she had finished each hand-knit sweater, she took care to label the name of the owner.

But perhaps the most outstanding gift of Joyce McLean was her ability to teach the merits of the Bahá'í Faith and to serve as a spiritual mentor and guide to those who sought her counsel. She confirmed many souls in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh in her lifetime. Some of them have already passed on; those who are still living are now in mid-life, and scattered across Canada and the Americas. More than one Bahá'í considers Joyce McLean to be a “spiritual mother,” a phrase used in Bahá'í parlance to honor the individual who guided them to the Faith.

The McLean children feel especially grateful for the spiritual training she gave both by word and deed. This training included prayers taught in early childhood, admonition and personal counsel that she gave freely, spiritual instruction as well as answers to questions raised. For most questions, whether from her children or friends, she did not leave the questioner disappointed, but even if she did not have a ready answer, she was always able to offer some comment or insight to throw light on the discussion.

She was a warm and gracious hostess to the many friends who passed through her doors over the years, especially during the dynamic firesides that she hosted with Allan at 6 Emery Circle in Etobicoke, while her sons were in high school and university. One of the “graduates” of those firesides was her own husband, an event for which she had long waited and that gave her the greatest joy. Her charming presence, thoughtful conversation, warm smile, her freely ringing laughter will be sorely missed. It was wonderful for those closest to her to hear Joyce laughing and singing in her final years, as she did when her children were young. Our mother did not seek any honor or praise for her service. She felt that she was only passing on the gifts that she had gratefully received from other hands.

### **Her Last Days**

Following several strokes, it became increasingly hard for our mother during the last phase of her life to expedite what formerly she had been able to do so easily. It frustrated her and pained her family to see her struggling: “Oh, it takes me a whole day now to do what I used to do in an hour,” she used to say. Having been endowed all her life with abundant energy, she often repeated her frustration at not being able to perform the tasks she once tackled with ease. Yet it was wonderful to watch her doing the same old things she had always done, albeit more slowly—mending an article of clothing, mopping the kitchen floor, fixing a shelf, or helping Jack paint a door. She liked “to keep my hand in” as long as she could. She drove her car, did her own shopping and took care of all her own affairs until age got the better of her.

Sometimes she would take her disabilities more lightly and say on a note of humor: “Oh, things aren’t that bad after all. I’ve still got half a brain left anyway.” Yet despite her failing strength, she attempted the things she loved to do with the same tenacity that was characteristic of all that she did in her younger years. Mother derived much pleasure from writing during her latter years. She was a master at expressing precisely what she wanted to say. Her booklet *Midwives of the Spirit* is an inspiration for all those who are involved in the Hospice movement.

These vignettes vividly describe the moving interactions she had with the dying patients that she cared for in Hospice. Each story leaves the reader with that sense of hope that comes with knowing that workers in Hospice are able to assist those in their care to accept gracefully and peacefully their ultimate end. Her *A Wedding for the Book*, the 1990 account of the marriage of her niece Coral Nablo and Ovideo Gomez in Haifa, is a delight to read and a valued remembrance for Coral and Ovideo. With the passing years, it should become a historical document for their children.

Happily, in her final days, Joyce received some medical relief from the weakness caused by polymyalgia rheumatica and enjoyed for a time a new-found sense of energy. This freed her up to accomplish a few last household indoor and outdoor projects. One of these occurred the day that her dear friend Roberta Elliott came and planted a rose-bed in the plot behind the house. Allan had planted her a rose bed when they had first moved to the island in 1978, but it had since died with the repeated heavy downpours of winter rain. With a raised bed in place as a solution, Joyce enjoyed sitting out on her back bench on sunny mornings, sipping her coffee and smelling the roses. Joyce McLean was not one to be ungrateful. The special loving meetings with family and closest friends constituted one of her very special treats in those latter days. Expressions of gratitude for all that she had received in life, both materially and spiritually, were often on her lips.

### **Her Friends**

We should pay tribute here today to a special friend of mom’s, Dolly Warohl. In those years following Dad’s death, Dolly used to phone Mom every morning to see how she was doing. These calls were especially important to Mom after Dad died. Mother and Dolly didn’t talk for long on many a day, but merely greeting one another, and talking about the ordinary, everyday simple things of life brought to mother a measure of comfort that brightened her day. Rain or shine, winter or summer, like a daily ritual, the phone would ring and mom would hear: “Hi, Joyce. It’s Dolly. I’m outside walking. How are you feeling today?” Thank you, Dolly, for being such a faithful friend to our mother in the days following our father’s passing.

There are of course other people that we should mention whom Mom loved and appreciated. Chu Anne Lam and her family were a great assistance to Mom and Dad over the years, with many services rendered, such as trips to Victoria and help on shopping expeditions.

Chu Anne, you know that Mom appreciated so much everything that you did for her. Roberta Elliot was a special friend of Mom's who was there for her during a trying time in her life.

Mom also loved Val Fraser; she would sometimes say with a note of pride in her voice, "She is my friend." She said the same thing about Amy MacLeod whom Mom valued very much as a close spiritual companion. Sam Graci and his wife Elvira were also loved by Mom. "Those two are the essence of love," she once said. Joyce appreciated all her neighbors on Mt. Baker Crescent. I should say that the members of the Bahá'í community have not been taken for granted in this tribute. These friends served alongside her as co-workers and collaborators for the whole time she and Dad lived on the island. They were the familiar face of her spiritual home community. Mom loved each one of them, and that love was returned in equal measure.

### **Her Gifts and Talents**

When she was young, Mother used to sing the popular musical standards of the day at the Army and Navy clubs for service men during World War Two. I have already spoken of her writing and counselling skills, which included an ability, whether in informal fireside talks or public meetings, to present her chosen topic convincingly. Our Mother loved people. "I am a people person," she freely admitted. For Joyce each person had his or her own story that she followed with interest.

When times were tough, she commiserated with her friends and family and tried to console them with useful advice. One of her friends, Joe Graci, Sam's brother, Mom met only once in person. Yet for several years right up until the time that she went into care, Joe would phone her regularly from his home outside Toronto; they would chat as if they had been friends from childhood. Outside of Bahá'í circles, our mother possessed the ability to win the confidence of strangers. This occurred ironically enough for the former Air Canada employee more than once on an aircraft.

Perfect strangers would share their personal problems with Mom and seek her advice. It sometimes happened that affluent entrepreneurs or corporate executives would confide in her on these journeys. Although these men—for they were mostly men—were involved in the commerce of secular society, some of them somehow sensed that Joyce possessed the capacity to awaken any latent interest they might have had for matters spiritual. And so in these brief moments of transition, she would freely share with receptive souls her spiritual insights and wisdom.

Joyce McLean had a firm belief in life after death, but she was, as we all are, puzzled by that great mystery, by the unknown condition of that which awaits us after we close our eyes for the last time. She told her family that as long as she was not in pain, she was not anxious to leave this world. But if our mother had any fears about what awaited her in the life beyond, she finally let them go. As her bodily powers increasingly began to fail, she looked forward to death, as



‘Abdu’l-Bahá once said, as one who is on a long journey looks forward to going home. She had grown tired of “this old lump of flesh” as she called it. She was especially looking forward to being reunited with our father.

In closing this tribute, the McLean children ask for your prayers for our mother’s continued happiness and the progress of her soul. Finally, we urge you to continue to be her collaborators in the spiritual tasks that she so efficiently and enthusiastically discharged. Thank you dear friends!

## **8. TRAVEL TEACHING IN THE FORMER SOVIET UNION AND UKRAINE (1990)**

One of the more remarkable travel-teaching experiences of my life took place when I was 45 years old. Our daughters Mukina and Leah were respectively seventeen and fifteen years old at the time. Brigitte showed her usual magnanimity by staying home with our girls, while I went abroad to serve the Faith. I am reproducing here an edited version of the journal I kept of my experiences.

My fellow members of the Quddus team were Ann Clavin, Leo Misaghi and Shamsi Sedaghat (USA). Shamsi was not part of our team as a travel teacher; she was returning to the Soviet Union as a pioneer, after having left there in her youth. Ann is eleven years younger than I am, while Leo was about 60 years old and Shamsi a little older. Ann and I have kept in touch through social media more regularly as of late. I have lost touch with Leo. If he is still alive, he must be about 90 years old.

Only recently, I was pleasantly surprised to hear from an elderly Shamsi Sedaghat again, who is living temporarily with her sister in the United States, but true to her very keen pioneering spirit and devotion to the Faith, Shamsi is attempting to return to Ashkabad/Ishqabad, where she still has a home that is being looked after by the Bahá'í community!

### **DEPARTURE**

#### **Leaving Gatineau, West Quebec, via Ottawa: 4 August, 1990**

I arose at 5:00 a.m. having had little sleep during the night. I was quite keyed up at the prospect of visiting the Soviet Union. This is a favorable time to be travelling to the land that had witnessed the Russian revolution of October 1917, with the victory of the Bolsheviks and the establishment of the Communist party. The country has been engaged in a decade long experiment with *Perestroika* (restructuring), an ambitious project that has included the initiation of major economic and political reforms and the overhaul of the government's Central Planning Bureau. President Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of *Glasnost* (openness) means that the Soviet Union has been breaking out of its isolation and is forging new ties with the West.

I was driven to the Ottawa International Airport from Gatineau, Quebec, just across the Ottawa river from Canada's capital, by my younger brother, Stephen McLean, who was visiting with his Inuk wife Zippie and family of four daughters from Happy Valley/Goosebay Labrador. We cleared US customs and flew to New York via Toronto, since there was no direct flight from Ottawa to New York.

We were delayed in Toronto when the maintenance crew had to change an oxygen hose. Although we were still on the ground, suddenly all the oxygen masks dropped down from their hidden compartments, taking us all by surprise. We had to change planes because it would have taken the crew one and a half hours to return the masks to their original positions. While we waited for our new aircraft, we were treated to a complimentary snack courtesy of Air Canada. Our flight landed in LaGuardia airport, but the Pan Am flight I had booked for Moscow was scheduled to take off from the John F. Kennedy airport (JFK). Changing airports would require a shuttle bus ride of about 45 minutes.

After asking directions, I easily located the shuttle bus area on the ground level. Off we went. In the pre-boarding area, I spoke to a priest sitting beside me who was reading the Psalms of David from his Latin breviary. I tried to engage him in a conversation on a theological theme when he was finished, but he was apathetic, showing little interest in making conversation.

### **Barbara C. Jessie: Minnesota Council of American-Soviet Friendship**

Before taking off from JFK, I had been scheduled to meet the polite and soft-spoken Barbara Jessie, Chair of the Minnesota Council of American-Soviet friendship. Barbara was a modest, self-confessed, radiant American communist and atheist. She had been raised in a religious family, but during her teenaged years, she had experienced a “conversion” to atheism (her word). Yet there was no evangelical fervor in her espousal of Communism.

Barbara strikes me as one who loves humanity. Her desire to build bridges of friendship with the Soviet Union is committed and sincere. We had a long, engaging conversation over lunch during which I told her about the Bahá’í Faith. I mentioned in particular the comprehensive Peace Statement by the Universal House of Justice, *To the Peoples of the World* (1986), that I promised to forward by mail once I returned home.

Despite her professed atheism, Barbara was open to the spiritual dimension, at least in humanistic terms. She was particularly responsive to the Bahá’í teachings on world peace, economic and social justice, and on the necessity of narrowing the gap between the grotesquely affluent one percent of capitalists and the suffering masses of the world’s poor.

Although I did not have time over lunch to enter into an elaborate explanation, she seemed impressed with what she had heard of the concrete and practical methods for achieving world order offered by the Bahá’í Faith. I asked her if she had experienced any serious doubts about the ability of Communism to accomplish its goals because of the widely perceived failure of the government to bring about prosperity in the Soviet Union. She replied that she had not yet lost faith in the system because real “Socialism”—that is a common synonym for Communism used by Americans, although Socialism and Communism are by no means identical—had not yet been given a chance.

This response reminded me of the current believing proponents of the Progressive Christianity movement which, after the almost 2,000 year long history of Christianity, is still attempting in our time to rewrite Christian theology to make it coherent with the modern scientific mindset that has greatly eroded the traditional belief system of fundamental biblical Christianity.

### **Meeting Ann Clavin and Leo Misagi: Two More Members of the Quddus Team**

Linda Godwin was one of the names involved in organizing the departure of the teaching-teams from the United States. Net East in Canada with Allan Fuller, Jim Milne and Don and Diana Dainty was also performing the same function in this new pioneering adventure. But it was Joan Rankin of the Soviet-American Cooperation Society (SACS) who told me that I would rendezvous with my three other team members close by the departure gate of the Pan Am flight, but they were nowhere to be seen. I began to worry when they did not appear one half hour before boarding time.

Finally, I spotted them standing up against a wall. They had actually arrived earlier. Leo was wearing a back-to-front backpack with the word “Quddus” attached to it in Russian and English. Here was the sign that Joan had told me to look for. I introduced myself and embraced them both. They did not recognize me immediately because I did not look like the man in the passport photo they had received from the Soviet-American Cooperation Society. I had shaved off my beard, a sometime summer ritual, and instead of glasses, I was wearing contact lenses. (The experiment with contact lenses proved to be of short duration. I found them too uncomfortable).

Shamsi was nowhere in sight, but we had been notified by Joan Rankin of the possibility that she might not be able to make our flight on time because of the difficulty in making connections. I phoned Joan at SACS to see whether or not there had been any last-minute information about Shamsi. Joan said that there had been a change in plans: Shamsi would take the next flight to Moscow if she were unable to connect with us at the JFK airport.

The Quddus Team had not thought in advance of booking our seats together on the plane. Getting to know one another would have to wait until Moscow. My seat was located directly behind the in-flight movie screen. We had a short delay before take-off when a passenger was ordered deported; his bag had to be found before he could board another plane. We took off at 6 p.m. and the flight to Moscow lasted seven and a half hours. The atmosphere did not reflect the more usual quiet decorum of the international flight. The Pan Am passengers were in a lighter, party mood.

## **MOSCOW (5-8 August, 1990)**

### **Going Through Customs**

After having slept little for 24 hours, we landed in Moscow. The unusually quiet and somber atmosphere in the Moscow airport enveloped me immediately. Compared with the hustle-bustle of North American airports, there was little pedestrian traffic and no sign of the usual comings-and-goings and rushing about in North American or European airports. No bright shops to entice passengers to enter and to make purchases appeared to be in sight. The airport was only dimly lit and the acoustics were poor.

The first order of business was to pass through the passport-visa control. We lined up accordingly. What appeared to me to be a young soldier—actually he may have been a customs agent—with a serious, deadpan face was seated ahead of us in a narrow control booth. He was definitely in no rush to expedite the process, taking his time to verify our visas. He asked no questions.

There were long moments of silence, unbroken by any friendly chat. From his elevated position in the booth, only the passenger's upper body and face were visible to him. Leo gestured silently to alert us to the fact that a mirror was placed above and behind the incoming passengers so that their backsides would be visible to the customs agent. We wondered to ourselves why customs agents would want to see our backs. We surmised that it was probably so that the agent could see your hands and lower body in case you were trying to smuggle through illegal goods. I had the vague impression that the agent may have spoken English, and that he was waiting for me to say something to Ann or Leo, but I kept silent throughout. Finally, after a long delay, he handed each one of us our papers and we went through.

### **Meeting Sasha and Igor**

Once we had cleared customs, we were met by Sasha, Bill Mahoney's main man for the Soviet-American Cooperation Society, Sasha's girlfriend Maria, and driver and travel-agent Igor, Bill's new employee. Igor spoke English fairly well, and during the few days we spent in Moscow, he looked after us enthusiastically, helping with baggage, getting us checked into the hotel, escorting us on day trips, and driving us around town when necessary. Igor was an open and honest communicator.

He seemed to have no fear of speaking his mind, perhaps because the country was now in the midst of *Perestroika* and *Glasnost*. I quickly grew to quite like Igor, not only because he did not seem to fear the ever-watchful eye of the State, but also because he worked very hard for us,

applying himself with great energy, showing himself to be willing and able to assist us at any time.

He told me that he had been making \$18.00 dollars a month working in the Civil Guard, but he quit his job to take a position with Bill Mahoney, who was paying him double his former salary. Igor did tell me that travel-agents in Moscow working for other companies were making more money than Bill had offered him, but he confided that he was content with his salary for now because it was a vast improvement over what he had been making previously. Igor worked very hard to please, an effort that earned him both our respect and complete satisfaction.

### **Igor the Speed Demon**

In the exercise of his professional functions, Igor's one drawback—and it was serious enough—was his driving. He was a speed demon. When we got into his Lada, Igor warned us that he wanted us to arrive at the Salut Hotel in time for lunch. To arrive on time, Igor treated us to our first experience of mad driving Soviet style. After an exhausting trip on the plane, and a full day of being awake, except for brief snatches of uncomfortable sleep, we were not prepared for the further fraying of our nerves by a wild ride through the cobblestone streets of Moscow.

In Moscow the police seem to be confined mainly to street corners and foot patrol. I rarely noticed any squad cars, those normally visible deterrents for speeding drivers. By North American standards, had Igor been spotted by an on-duty police officer, he would have been arrested for excessive speeding or even dangerous driving.

I do not know about Ann and Leo, but he scared the life out of me. A serious fear of dying at the relatively young age of 45 caused me to protest—I just couldn't help myself—but Igor was not listening, telling us that there was no danger. He just kept driving at speeds in excess of 120 kms. an hour along the boulevards of Moscow. He was determined to arrive at the hotel in time for lunch!

### **The Salut Hotel: The Marion Jack Tour, Bill Mahoney of SACS, Bill and Esther Bradley-DeTally**

It was a grey, overcast day as we sped through the streets of the capital. You soon became aware that the rhythm of business is considerably slower in the Soviet Union. It took us longer than we had anticipated to check into the Salut Hotel. All the same, we were happy to have reached our destination. Leo told me that employees in the tourist and service industry are in no hurry to please the customer since employees are rarely fired. They know no such business ethic as "the customer is always right." According to the Russian employee's logic, this makes sense

because employees are in a position to deliver the sorely needed, usually rare, consumer goods and services. With so few retail outlets available, a lack of competition provides little incentive to please the customer.

We checked into our rooms—I took room number 1405—and we went down for lunch. At this point the Quddus Team was quite tired since we had been awake for about 24 hours, with only snatches of fitful sleep to be had on the plane. At the hotel, we had our first taste of the Russian diet: a salad consisting of tomatoes, chopped onion and oil, a salad that was to become staple fare during our trip. A ham and potato soup, bread, and a main dish consisting of a large portion of beef and coleslaw completed the meal.

I was grateful to enjoy a decent repast. When we first entered the hotel lobby, we met one lone remnant of the Day Star Tour that had come from the Bahá'í World Center in Haifa. This pleasant American young woman in her late teens told us that the Marion Jack Tour from California was still there. The Marion Jack Tour had made a long trip into Siberia, including Ulan-Ude, where about 25 souls had reportedly entered the Faith. (That was the number as near as I can recall).

It looked as if there were about 15 members of the Marion Jack Tour there for lunch each day, all of them bright, impressive and dedicated Bahá'í youth. Here we met Bill Mahoney, the owner and manager of the Soviet-American Cooperation Society and Esther and Bill Bradley-DeTally from Seattle, advisors to the Marion Jack Tour, who debriefed us on the activities in the teaching field prior to our arrival. Esther told me that they had to return to the US shortly because her brother-in-law was seriously ill with cancer.

### **A Change of Plans: Destination Lyviv**

Bill and Esther inquired about our itinerary. Although we were not scheduled to go to Lyviv, but rather Charnovtsy, they asked us if it would be possible for us to go to Lyviv in the western Ukraine instead because the Day Star Tour had done a proclamation there. Bill and Esther thought that Lyviv held more promise than Charnovtsy because there were more Bahá'í contacts there.

Ann Clavin and I had been scheduled to go to Tallin, Estonia instead of Charnovtsy to give some feedback on a peace education curriculum to Dolores Lindsay, but we felt that we could not make such a sudden change in plans without consulting Dolores. I phoned Dolores and she suggested that it would be better to go to Lyviv because no changes could now be made to the first-year curriculum that had already been written by Betty Reed from the UK. We had brought Dolores some teaching materials that we could send her by mail. Based on our consultation with Esther, Bill and Dolores, we decided that Lyviv would be the better choice.

## **The Feast of Kamal Hosted by the Moscow LSA: Meeting the Hainsworths**

After lunch we went straight to the Nineteen Day Feast which was held in a rented facility close to the Tretyaskovskya metro station in the center of town. It was used by the local friends for Holy Days and Feasts. The Feast was chaired by Richard Hainsworth, son of writer and pioneer Philip Hainsworth from the UK, and his congenial and lively Welsh wife Corinne. The Hainsworths and their young children have been pioneering in Moscow for the past seven years, making sacrificial services toward the challenging goal of advancing the Faith in the capital.

I was told that about 50 believers were residing in Moscow. The Local Spiritual Assembly was reformed on 21 April earlier this year in the presence of the Hand of the Cause of God, Mr. ‘Alí-Akbar Furútan, who had lived and studied in the Soviet Union during his student years. (The LSA had been banned formerly by the Communist regime). Since arriving in this country, it has not taken me long to begin to appreciate the work of the Hainsworths here, who are living in the challenging conditions of life in Moscow.

Richard Hainsworth works for a publisher, and I was told that he is not allowed to leave the capital because he is a foreigner. At the Feast, I also met Mrs. Hainsworth senior, Richard’s mother, and spoke with her briefly. The Feast of Kamal was attended by the Hainsworths, members of the Marion Jack Tour, a few Russian members of the Moscow community, among them Leo Evgrafov, cellist and artistic director of “Rossisyskata Camerata,” who gave a very moving speech of welcome and appreciation of the guests at the Feast, including the Quddus Team or Quddus Consolidation Project as they called us.

I spoke with Leo Evgrafov during the social part of the Feast. I told him that I had seen the great Russian cellist Rostropovitch in concert at Massey Hall in Toronto when I was a student. He told me that Rostropovich had once been his teacher. Richard Hainsworth conducted the Feast in both Russian and English. His Russian seems to be very fluent and his pronunciation excellent.

Members of the Marion Jack Tour sang the “Queen of Carmel” with its moving refrain “circle round in adoration, circle round your Lord.” Ann Clavin who was sitting beside me and a few others spontaneously joined in the singing. We were very conscious of the uniqueness of the occasion that we were privileged to be witnessing. The history of a vital new stage in the development of the Faith in Russia was being created before our very eyes, with our grateful participation. Tears came into my eyes at the wonder of it all. Toward the end of the Feast, the members of the Marion Jack Tour left to return to the hotel. They would soon be leaving to return to the United States, after an unforgettable summer of proclamation and teaching in the Soviet Union.



## **The First Bahá'ís in Kyiv: Marina Pavlova and Husband Victor Pavlov**

Although Marina and her husband Victor lived in Kyiv, Marina was there to welcome us to Moscow. I had already heard about Marina from Darlene Cameron of Gatineau, formerly Aylmer, West Quebec, who stayed with the Pavlovs during the earlier Cathy and Red Grammar Tour. The Pavlovs were originally members of an organization called “World Family.” Marina and her husband Victor had served as Darlene’s host family.

Marina had become a Bahá'í during Darlene’s stay and Victor declared his faith a short time later. (The expression “declared his faith” was actually used by Shoghi Effendi, as cited by Rúhíyyih Khánum in *The Priceless Pearl*, but it seems to have been replaced now by the expression “enrolled in the Faith”). Darlene told me before I left Gatineau how Marina had invited her to speak to the students of Marina’s adult English conversation class about her trip to the Soviet Union with the Cathy and Red Grammar Tour.

Darlene told them that she was a Bahá'í and shared with the class a brief outline of the Bahá'í Faith. When it was Marina’s turn to speak to the class again, she suddenly announced: “And I am a Bahá'í too!” Darlene said that Marina’s declaration of faith had taken her completely by surprise because Marina had not yet told Darlene of her decision to become a believer. It would appear that Marina decided on the spur of the moment that she was also a believer.

Because of her unusual spiritual depth and wisdom, despite the fact that her declaration of faith occurred only a few months earlier, and because she was chronologically the first woman believer in the Ukraine, it seems quite appropriate to call Marina the spiritual mother of the Ukraine. According to our fellow team member, Leo Misagi, who prepared a travel-teacher’s report for the Quddus Team, Marina is the first female believer in the Ukraine. Marina and her husband Victor are to be counted, then, among that first nucleus of believers in that region.

The Pavlovs serve the Faith in exemplary fashion in Kyiv by acting as tireless hosts for the successive teams of travel-teachers coming from North America and other places, and by serving on the Local Spiritual Assembly that was formed during our visit and by helping to organize local Bahá'í activities. Marina was later elected to the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Soviet Union.

I sat beside Marina on the bus on the way to the Nineteen Day Feast. Marina is a talented folk dancer of Armenian descent who possesses both spiritual and natural beauty. I found that she was even more striking in appearance in person than the positive impression her photographs convey. I referred above to Marina’s great spiritual depth and wisdom. She has a truly remarkable grasp of the teachings and a great love for the Faith, qualities that one sees normally only in believers who have been Bahá'ís for many years.

She was no doubt a prepared soul, a lively spark just waiting to be set aflame by the friends who passed her the torch of Faith. When I returned home, I gave Marina’s love and

greetings to her teacher Darlene Cameron. When I left Canada, I carried a gift package to Marina from Darlene and letters from friends in Canada who had been to Kyiv on previous trips, either with the Cathy and Red Grammar Tour or through Net East.

As we sat together on the bus, I noticed that Marina seemed subdued and reflective. When we began to talk, Marina's mood clearly conveyed a certain discouragement. I sensed that Marina was being too hard on herself, a quality that one often sees in conscientious believers. She shared her anxieties, telling me that she felt her English was not as proficient as she would like it to be. I replied that her English was really excellent for someone who had not yet visited an English-speaking country.

She was also feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of the task facing the Soviet believers in teaching the Faith in that vast country. Marina feels the obligation of teaching the Cause as a very personal and sacred responsibility. If only each and every new believer took this sacred duty to heart as seriously as Marina does! She was also concerned that the less than ideal economic and social conditions in the Soviet Union, conditions that the government under President Gorbachev was attempting to ameliorate, would hinder the more rapid growth that the Faith potentially could have here.

I did what I could to cheer Marina up by paraphrasing a remark of the Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, that the Bahá'í Faith would eventually sweep across the Soviet Union like wildfire. I also felt, although I cannot remember now if I shared this thought with Marina, that it must have been quite taxing for Marina and Victor, as pillars of the community in Kyiv, to receive the successive teaching teams that came from North America every few months. This "gearing up" for each new team may have in part explained Marina's fatigue.

### **Good News and Bad News: 6 August, 1990**

Today we received the good news that the first LSA of Kyiv was formed with representatives of the Moscow LSA acting as assistants and witnesses. The Iranian pioneers, Iraj and Jinous Victory, who had been living formerly in my home community of Etobicoke (Toronto) were also present. Iraj and Jinous had lived in Etobicoke at the same time as my parents Joyce and Allan McLean, before my mother and father moved to Salt Spring Island, British Columbia after their retirement. By this time Shamsi had been able to join the three of us. We were not to be a complete team of four for long however. Shamsi had planned to continue her journey directly on to Odessa, the port city on the Black Sea in southern Ukraine and to settle there as a pioneer.

The Quddus Team did what most tourists do in Moscow: we visited Red Square including St. Basil's church. Nadia, one of Bill Mahoney's employees, acted as our guide. We intended to visit Lenin's tomb where his remains are on display, but the mausoleum was temporarily closed.

Lenin's corpse requires periodic maintenance, an activity that necessitated the temporary closure of the tomb.

The bad news came at the subway/underground entrance in Red Square. We had a decidedly unpleasant encounter with a young family of beggars: a mother, her boy child aged about eight years and a sleeping baby. The boy was placed strategically at the subway/underground entrance to beg from the passers-by who were entering the subway. The mother waited at the bottom of the stairs to collect money from her son, while her well-wrapped baby slept on a blanket on the floor of the subway. I was told by one of our Russian friends that these beggars sometimes drug their babies so that they will sleep all day while the others are left free to beg.

I was shocked at the pallid color of the infant who did not appear to be more than six months old. The baby's face had such a sickly, pale color that I thought the child was comatose rather than sleeping. The boy approached me, wrapped his arms around my leg, and in well-practiced mock pity, laid his head on my knee to gain my sympathy. Then he held out his hand for the money.

I was not only not impressed by these theatrics, but I was positively alarmed at the sickly color of the infant. It occurred to me that the child needed emergency medical care, but there was little that I could do under the circumstances. When the mother saw that her son had been unsuccessful in begging money from me, she gave him several hard slaps on the head, while she harangued him with a good screaming for being unsuccessful in his attempt.

We returned to the Salut Hotel for lunch. I took a much-needed nap in the afternoon, while the others went to the Bahá'í Center to consolidate our stock of Bahá'í literature in Russian. We ended up being quite successful in stocking up. In addition to the small amount of literature that we had brought with us, we accumulated enough material to fill a large duffel/kit bag. Half of it was destined for Kyiv and the other half for Lviv. We began our journey well-armed for seekers. By the end of our two-week travel-teaching trip, the entire quantity of our teaching material had been distributed. That night we had supper at the Salut Hotel and retired early.

### **The Delighted Little Blonde Girl in the Subway/Underground Train**

During the few days that we had spent in Moscow, and considering the brevity of our projected stay, I felt that I had not been doing enough to teach the Faith in the capital. I had come to the Soviet Union to spread the Faith after all, but I had done very little teaching so far. I had talked briefly to Nadia, our tour guide about the Faith, but until then I had given away only a few bilingual Russian-English "One Family Bahá'í Faith" buttons.

As we continued our journey, sitting opposite me in the subway/underground train, was a young mother and her blonde child, a little girl about seven years old. The little girl wore thick

glasses and her right eye was heavily bandaged. I could not engage them in conversation because I speak no Russian, but I said a few words to them in English. To the mother I gave a pamphlet in Russian and to the little girl I held out a One Family button.

That moment in the subway train became one of the memorable highlights of the entire trip. When I handed the little girl the One Family button, a transformation occurred. Her whole face lit up in a bright smile. Her sad expression turned to one of joy. I never thought that such a small thing could bring a child such delight.

### **Fireside with Stan Smith, Professor of Peace Studies and the African-American Sociology Professor**

In the afternoon, Esther Bradley-DeTally asked if anyone had the Peace Statement of the Universal House of Justice, *To the Peoples of the World*. I replied that I had several copies of the Canadian edition. Esther said that she had met a man named Stan Smith who was teaching peace studies at the Boyd and Grace Martin Peace Institute of the University of Idaho. Esther had arranged a fireside with him. She asked if I could replace her and meet him at 10:15 p.m. upstairs in the Salut Hotel.

I readily agreed to her request. I went up at the appointed time and knocked on the door. Stan introduced me to his roommate, an African American sociology professor who was quite vocal in his beliefs, although we had just met. He let me know straight away that he deplored the neglect of social justice in religion and the hypocrisy of the religious. The professor was not your usual polite academic. He frankness bordered on verbal aggressivity, but he spoke straight from the heart.

His rhetorical strategy seemed to be “the best defense is a good offense.” Without hesitation, I responded to his challenge, taking a direct but rational approach, rather than a personal, defensive one. I had a spontaneous and lively fireside with both men, making a vigorous case for the Faith’s promotion of social justice and its involvement with the peace process.

Stan and I went out to the lounge while the sociology professor got some sleep. I presented Stan with the Peace Statement. Stan did something unusual during our exchange that I had never seen before. He wasted no time, reading the entire statement immediately out loud, summarizing the text as he read. He asked for feedback, I suppose to ensure that his summary was accurate. Stan told me that he was a member of the Unitarian church and that he had written a curriculum on peace education, which I assume he taught at the University of Idaho. He offered to send it to me, an offer that I readily accepted.

When the evening was over, I felt satisfied with the fireside because an honest and informative exchange of views had taken place. Our conversation had been a two-way street. I had been learning as well as teaching. Stan certainly seemed keen on learning about the Bahá’í

view of peace. When the fireside ended, we shook hands and said goodbye. I intended to follow up with Stan once I returned home.

### **Arbot Street, the Artists' Quarter: 7 August, 1990**

In the morning, we visited Arbot Street, the artsy part of town. Like all artistic quarters in any large city, Arbot Street attracts a good influx of tourists. At noon, Ann and Shamsi returned to the hotel, while Leo and I stayed on. I had my portrait done in colored chalk by an artist named Vladimir who charged me the very meagre sum of 6 rubles, approximately one Canadian dollar at that time. (A similar portrait by a street artist would have cost about \$30.00 dollars in Canada).

Vladimir worked quickly, but the quality of the sketch was excellent. I left Vladimir a pamphlet in Russian as he went on to sketch his next subject, a West German girl. In the afternoon, Leo and I wanted to visit a few bookstores, but they were not open yet. We met an English tourist named Nicky Fisher who lived in Crouch End, north London. While we waited for the bookstores to open, we sat outside chatting at a café. We told her about the purpose of our visit, and when I returned to Canada, I sent her the Peace Statement.

When the bookstores opened, I bought a two-volume edition of Pushkin in English translation, a German grammar book and two philosophy books in English by Russian authors: one on Aristotle and the other called *The Principles of Philosophy*. Because he had lived in the Soviet Union until his mid-teens, Leo informed me that the philosophy would be influenced by Marxist ideology. It turned out that Leo was right, but I bought the book anyway, staying alert to filter out any overtly Marxist interpretation that I could detect.

Not being familiar with Russian business practice, I asked the middle-aged salesperson if she would not mind wrapping my portrait. (I made my request cautiously because I had not purchased my portrait there). She responded eagerly in a friendly, obliging spirit of service, using light brown carton paper as an inner protective layer and an outer layer of dark brown wrapping paper. She brushed on glue to close the open edges. To finish the job, she tied the package securely with a piece of twine. Her spirit of service was so keen that it became a virtual performance, an act of grace. How it lifts one's spirit to witness such generosity of heart! She was adamant in refusing the gratuity I offered.

### **Leonardo and Jack Entertain the Italian Tourists on the Bus: 8 August, 1990**

The Marion Jack Tour left Moscow on 7 August. The Day Star Tour that had originated in Haifa left on 5 August. For our daytrip on 8 August, we decided to travel to the ancient, imposing Russian Orthodox monastery complex of Zagorsk, alternately called Sergiyev Posad, founded in

the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Zagorsk is located about 75 kms/47 miles or an hour's slow bus ride north-east of Moscow.

The happy threesome consisting of two Americans and one Canadian ended up taking a bus filled largely with Italian tourists. On the bus we met a young woman from German-speaking Switzerland who had moved to Italy as a youth. I spoke a little *hoch Deutsch* with her since I don't speak any Swiss German. This ride turned out to be great fun when a Florentine whom Ann nicknamed "Leonardo," decided to amuse his fellow-travelers by acting as the group's funnyman.

Leonardo's impromptu comedy sketch triggered the latent comedian in me, something that my family and friends rarely see, even though I have a good sense of humor. This zany side of my personality sometimes will inexplicably emerge when a light-hearted atmosphere prevails. I joined him at the front of the bus. Although Leonardo spoke very little English, I engaged him in a conversation.

To join in the fun, I did an imitation accent of an Italian speaking English, gesturing with my hands *à l'Italienne*. It made an immediate "hit" with the Italian tourists. Leonardo and I were able to entertain the friendly travelers with a mixture of Italian, German, French and English. I joked that I spoke very good Italian. To prove it, I trotted out all the names of Italian dishes that I knew from Canada, such as *pizza, spaghetti, lasagna, vino, fettucini alfredo, pasta fazool, zuppa* and some other words such as *dollari* and so on. The Italians who are known for their love of life and good sense of humor responded with smiling faces and laughter, as long as Leonardo and I continued on with our antics. It was an enjoyable moment of comic relief.

### **Teaching the Two Cranky Monks at the Monastery Complex at Zagorsk/Sergiyev Posad: 8 August, 1990**

The name Zagorsk dates from the Communist era. It reverted to its original name in 1991, a year after our visit. Although the expansive grounds of the Holy Trinity Monastery complex of St. Sergey is a much-frequented tourist destination, for centuries it has been an authentic place of pilgrimage and retreat for devoted Russian Orthodox Christians. It is the most sacred of Russian monasteries and the principal spiritual and administrative center of the Russian Orthodox Church.

I imagine that Zagorsk has been enjoying something of a revival since the inception of *Glasnost*, giving citizens of Western Europe, North America and other places access to these holy sites that have been rarely visited by those living outside the Soviet Union. An atmosphere of serenity pervaded the flower-dotted green precincts, with its magnificent assemblage of colorful churches, chapels and seminary, crowned by the bright blue and gold, bulbous, tapering domes.

Inside the main entrance to the Cathedral of the Assumption, two monks were rather reluctantly serving tea. They looked as if they had been ordered by the Abbot to provide this service to tourists, but their body language appeared to begrudge the task they had been assigned. Perhaps they regarded tourists as an invasion of their monkish privacy, peace and quiet. In such a spot, so holy and sacred to Russian Christians, wisdom should have dictated that I pass them by. But after a few moments of deliberation, as I recalled Bahá'u'lláh's counsel to be "unrestrained as the wind" (GWB 339) while carrying the Divine Message, blowing on all regions without distinction, I decided to present them with two yellow pamphlets in Russian on the Faith.

I had a quick consultation with Ann and Leo who discouraged me from my intention. They walked away from me, no doubt fearing a confrontation, if not an explosion. They thought the gesture might provoke the monks. When I handed the monks the pamphlets, something curious occurred. As Leo and Ann had anticipated, both men immediately began to castigate me. I could not of course understand their vociferous protest in Russian, but there was no mistaking their offence. One monk reacted angrily as he handed back the pamphlet. The other monk, however, took his pen and crossed out the name Bahá'í Faith, but left the inscription "One Family." I held out my hand and said: "Well, if you don't want it, give it back!" Strangely enough, the monk would not.

For whatever reason, whether to read it out of curiosity, destroy it or report the Bahá'is to the ecclesiastical authorities, he decided to keep the pamphlet. I could not help but to feel a small sense of satisfaction, despite their negative reaction, that I had acted according to the Blessed Beauty's instructions to teach—deep within a bastion of the Russian Orthodox church.

### **Shamsi Sedagat: Lone Pioneer to Odessa**

In the late afternoon, the Quddus Team headed for the railway station to see Shamsi off to Odessa, where she would become the lone pioneer. The Victorys had been living there previously, but they had moved to Kyiv. Like Leo Misagi, Shamsi had been born in Russian Turkestan. (I suspect that Shamsi like Leo had been born in Ishqabad but I cannot be sure). She spoke Russian as well as Persian growing up, but at age 16 she and her family and the other Bahá'is had been deported to Iran by Stalin.

Unlike Leo, who had been able to keep his Russian fluent over the years, Shamsi had forgotten hers, but some Russian words were already starting to come back to her. (It would be just a matter of a short time until she became fluent again). Shamsi is one of those very exemplary senior Bahá'is who has been a pioneer at this writing for over 40 years. She had the very great blessing of making the pilgrimage during the days when Shoghi Effendi was head and Guardian of the Faith.

In Tihrán she attended the first deepening institute in which she and other believers were taught by the prolific and distinguished scholar, Jenabi Fazeli Mazandarani, who had been sent to

the United States to deepen the friends in the Covenant at the command of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and later by Shoghi Effendi during the early 1920’s. The Hand of the Cause, ‘Ali-Akbar Furútan, and other eminent teachers had also instructed the friends at this same institute.

Shamsi is a woman of action, an energetic believer who puts the Faith first in her life. She is assertive and very determined, without being aggressive or overbearing. Here she was at a time in her life when most people would be looking forward to a quiet retirement, but instead of retiring, she pulled up stakes from her home in California to bring the light of this New Day to the faraway city of Odessa.

Formerly, she served on the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá’ís of Trinidad and Tobago. In those twin island nations, she led a well-known doctor to the Faith. The story of his conversion was unusual as it was fascinating. She had been bitten by a dog and had gone to the doctor’s clinic for treatment. The conversation turned to things spiritual when a friendly debate ensued. The doctor told Shamsi that he was a confident devotee of meditation, while Shamsi told the doctor that she put her faith in the Bahá’í prayers, notwithstanding the fact that Bahá’ís also meditate.

The conversation came to a head when they reached a point of challenging one another right there and then. The doctor sat and meditated while Shamsi prayed the prayers of Bahá’u’lláh. During their spiritual contest, the doctor was completely taken over by the Spirit of Bahá’u’lláh. It was such a decisive experience that he immediately became a Bahá’í! The doctor was also elected to the first NSA of Trinidad and Tobago.

After she told me the story, I reminded her of those verses in the Qu’rán that recounted one of the battles of the Prophet: “...those shafts were God’s not thine,” (Surah 8:17), but in jest I changed them to “That dog bite was God’s not thine.” Shamsi smiled knowingly. Shamsi came prepared to live in Russia. She brought two fax machines, one of which she gave away, I think to Bill Mahoney, and a slide projector.

The seven suitcases she brought with her well exceeded the weight restriction; she was charged an extra \$500.00 dollars by Pan Am Airlines. We were very concerned how Shamsi, with her seven pieces of luggage, was going to get all her belongings onto the train. Most Russians travel with a small bag, or a few small bags, or nothing at all, depending on the distance to be covered. We knew that there would not be enough room in Shamsi’s compartment to accommodate all her luggage. We were all saying the Greatest Name as Sergey, one of Bill Mahoney’s agents, talked to the female conductor. After a brief conversation, she agreed to put some of Shamsi’s things in her own compartment. The rest of it would be packed in Shamsi’s berth.

With a sigh of relief, we helped her on the train, and after thanking the conductor repeatedly, we said goodbye to this exemplary soul who has served the Cause with such great dedication for so many years. Her linguistic competence in Russian, English and Persian, along with her spiritual assets, will surely enable this steadfast pioneer to assist the Faith admirably well in the Soviet Union.



## **The Love of Shoghi Effendi: A Mystical Experience in Shamsi's Presence**

As I traveled on a bus with Shamsi in Moscow, I was suddenly possessed by that same magnetic, heavenly love of Shoghi Effendi that I felt circa 1965 in Toronto when Hand of the Cause, Mr. Zikrulláh Khádem, spoke to the Bahá'í youth at a National Convention at York University. (I have already described this unusual experience in more detail in chapter five above). Unusually rare in this world, and like all mystical experiences that are difficult to describe, this love was qualitatively and quantitatively different from any other form of human love that one may feel for loved ones, whether friends, family or fellow believers or spouse.

What struck me suddenly at York University was an experience of much greater magnitude, but nonetheless, the spiritual magnetism that I felt sitting beside Shamsi came no doubt from the same source—the “Sign of God” on earth, the beloved Guardian, Shoghi Effendi. As she spoke about the Guardian, just as Mr. Khádem served as a vehicle for his love on that day in my youth, Shamsi too, unbeknownst to her, became the channel conveying the overflowing love of Shoghi Effendi.

I did not feel that heavenly love in the presence of those few pilgrims I have met who made the pilgrimage during the days when Shoghi Effendi was Guardian. But it overwhelmed me entirely in the presence of Mr. Khádem, and then again some 25 years later, this time without the same full force of it, sitting beside Shamsi Sedagat on a bus in Moscow, the very person who had once sat in Shoghi Effendi's presence.

We know that the love and prayers of the Guardian accompanied each and every pioneer on his or her journey, for each pioneer was the prized means of winning the goals of the Divine Plan, a plan which he directed and to which he was entirely consecrated. To see its goals accomplished was “the one joy and yearning” of his life (UDBBC 29).

### **ON THE TRAIN FROM MOSCOW TO KYIV**

#### **Immediate Response: Elena Seyfoulina from Siberia: 9 August, 1990**

Ann, Leo and I continued our train ride south to Kyiv after saying goodbye to Shamsi. Since it was an overnight journey, we took a sleeping car that had four berths. Because we were only three travelers, one berth was left empty. We were joined by a tall, blond, Soviet traveler named Elena Seyfoulina, who was about 21 years old. Elena boarded the train at a close distance to our windows. We could see that she had been accompanied to the station by another young

woman who was clearly a close friend. As the train pulled away, Elena's friend engaged her in making funny faces, as they laughed and waved goodbye to one another.

We welcomed Elena to our compartment and helped her to offload her luggage. Leo was able to speak with her in Russian, but like many Soviet students, Elena spoke English fluently. Speaking mainly in English would mean that Leo would be relieved of providing a running translation, but he was able to clarify certain points in Russian from time to time, so using both languages worked well.

Elena told us that she was studying to become a "philologist"—she may have meant linguist—but in the meantime she was also working as a tour guide to earn a living. Although Elena was originally from distant Siberia, the largest land mass in Russia, known for its harsh, long, northern winters, she was now living in the warmer region of Crimea, with its milder continental climate, on the northern coast of the Black Sea.

Elena cultivated a spiritual interest because she had also been studying philosophy and eastern religions; these latter subjects provided a convenient and natural connection to a conversation about the Bahá'í Faith. Once she asked what had brought us to the Soviet Union, it led immediately to an introduction of the Faith. (As mentioned, we brought along a kit bag jam-packed full of literature in Russian that was heavy enough that it had to be carried by both Leo and myself). Leo presented Elena with a pamphlet entitled "Bahá'ism" which had been just newly translated from the Canadian pamphlet "The Bahá'í Faith."

I had heard from Darlene Cameron of Gatineau, West Quebec, that the Soviet people, having been deprived of religion for decades under Communism, had such a deep thirst for spiritual truth that their interest in the Bahá'í teachings could be susceptible to immediate response. I saw a living example of this ready interest as we watched Elena take the pamphlet and begin to read it earnestly on the spot. This immediate response one would almost never see in Western Europe or North America. Most people would set it aside, either to read it later or to discard it. Stan Smith, the American professor of peace studies, mentioned above was a welcome and notable exception.

We sat in a hushed silence of anticipation, as Elena read through the pamphlet. A few moments later, she looked up and said with conviction: "I'm interested in the Faith." This positive response to the Bahá'í teachings was something we would witness several times during our two-week stay in the USSR. That same evening, we had a very warm, engaged, bilingual fireside with Elena in our train compartment.

We told her that we would be giving a fireside at the Pavlovs in Kyiv. We gave Elena the phone number and invited her to attend. Just as the train was pulling into the Kyiv station, Elena introduced us to a Russian journalist who had travelled to the USA, a man who had written a series of articles on his visit. He told us how much he had grown to like the American people during his stay there. I gave him a copy of the Peace Statement in Russian and the *Hidden Words* in English. When it came time, we said goodbye. We all hoped especially that Elena would be able to attend the fireside at the Pavlovs.

## KYIV

### **Meeting Marina and Victor Pavlov and our Hostesses in Kyiv: 10 August, 1990**

At the station in Kyiv, we were met by Marina and Victor Pavlov and our two hostesses, Irena Andreyeva, in whose family Leo and I would stay and another Elena, in whose family Ann would stay. Our hostess Irena, who preferred to be called by the diminutive Ira, was a 17-year-old student from Kyiv who is studying at the Economics Institute. (We would meet her mother and sister later). It was important for Ira to remind us that she was almost 18 years old.

Compared with youth of the same age in Canada, I found Ira to be quite responsible and mature. Ira had been born with half of one forearm missing. She had been scheduled to have an artificial limb fitted during an operation in East Germany, but when the political impetus for the reunification of the two Germanys accelerated and negotiations were underway, many agreements between the two countries were simply canceled. Unfortunately, Ira's operation was one of them.

As we drove through Kyiv from the train station, I got my first morning look at the capital of the Ukraine. The taxi wheels droned out a dull rumble on the cobblestone streets, a familiar lulling sound I had not heard since my student days at the Sorbonne in Paris, during the late 1960's. As we drove along, I wondered aloud where the "great gate of Kyiv" was, the title of the triumphant 10<sup>th</sup> piece of Mussorgsky's "Pictures from an Exhibition," his 1874 showpiece piano composition.

Ira answered that the great gate in Mussorgsky's piece was probably synonymous with the city itself because Kyiv is the gate to the Ukraine. Her answer seemed entirely plausible, but I have since discovered that the Great Gate of Kyiv or Golden Gate was actually the southern gate. The original fortified gate was built in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. In the modern era only vestiges remained, but it was completely rebuilt by the Soviet authorities in 1982.

Ira's home on 6 Cheluskincev Street, apartment 53, was located not far from the main square of Kyiv with its several fountains. Once we deposited our luggage inside, we were greeted heartily and then introduced to the family. We met Grandma, Darya Aleksandrovna Posevkina, then Ira's mother, Katerina or "Katya" Andreyeva, and Ira's older sister, Albina, who is seven months pregnant with her first child. Later we met her husband, Arturo, an engineering student at the Institute.

### **The Heritage Ukrainian Village: Invitation from the Smiling Lady on the Bus**

The family served the Quddus Team lunch at home, a meal that provided us with the opportunity to chat further and to share information about our respective backgrounds and family life in Canada and the United States. We found Grandma Posevkina to be especially friendly and open, uninhibited by the cautious reticence before strangers that we had experienced in some of the Soviet citizens whom we had met. Grandma was a free spirit, a true original. Not only was she welcoming, but she was clearly enjoying and even amused by the experience of meeting “Amerikantski” strangers from so far away.

In the afternoon, Ira escorted us by bus to visit a multi-hectare/acre heritage Ukrainian village. As we sat on the bus, chatting in English, and looking like the tourists that we were, a friendly, well-groomed woman who appeared to be in her late forties approached us, a light-haired brunette with matching brown eyes, who wore loosely braided hair tied back in a bun. Engaging Leo in Russian, she told us that during the more recent period of *Glasnost*, we were the first foreigners that she had ever seen in Kyiv. Although her comment was meant to welcome us, it inadvertently reminded us of the severity of the previous closed-door policy of the Soviet government.

This stranger with the smiling face spoke to us with an engaging courtesy and winsome personal charm. She extended an invitation to visit her home. Although I could not understand her Russian, the dignity of her bearing and the warmth of her personality needed no translation. We would have been happy to accept her kind invitation, but there was no time to fix an appointment because in mid-conversation, the bus suddenly arrived at our destination. Cutting the conversation short by necessity, we thanked her as we hurried off the bus.

After a short walk, the property that we entered featured several models of white-washed Ukrainian farmhouses as they appeared over the centuries. A church, wooden windmills and fields of golden grain now ripe in the summer sun also greeted us. The cottages had been furnished and decorated with samples of period Ukrainian weavings, wall-hangings and handmade rustic furniture. The interior of the cottages was pleasantly scented with herbs and flowers from the surrounding fields and gardens. It struck me that the model village was an idyllic, romanticized representation of what was most certainly harsher times in the Ukrainian rural life of centuries past.

### **The Remarkable Dream of Oleg Fulfilled at the Drinking Fountain**

Ann, Leo and I decided to go our separate ways to rendez-vous later on. After walking through the Ukrainian village during the summer afternoon, I became thirsty. I was directed to a drinking fountain where two men in their early thirties sat on the bench opposite. One of them noticed my Bahá'í button and asked me in English where I was from. These men were Oleg and his brother Sergey. We began to converse freely. Oleg told me that he had lived in the United States for two years. He wasted no time, probably taking his cue from my Bahá'í button, in telling me that he was a seeker of truth.

I was delighted, of course, to have a spiritual conversation with Oleg. Based on my limited experience in the USSR, I found that the immediacy, intensity and earnestness of these spiritual exchanges take place at a much deeper level where one feels less resistance in teaching the Faith than one has in conversations with citizens of Europe or North America.

Without hesitation, Oleg began to describe a life-altering mystical experience and the great joy that he had felt in “finding God.” He said that he knew he was going to meet us here because he had dreamt that something significant was going to happen to him today. When I began to share with Oleg and Sergey the teachings of the Bahá’í Faith, Oleg told me that these principles were what he had been searching for.

As the discussion continued, I introduced the concept of progressive revelation. He affirmed that he believed already in the unity of the world’s religions. Oleg had seen Ann earlier at the bus stop and some force had attracted him to her. He waved to Ann but she didn’t respond. Ann told me later that she had seen Oleg, but she had been advised not to make easy contact with Soviet citizens. During the more open period of *Perestroika*, to improve their economic situation and way-of-life, many Soviets were seeking to leave Mother Russia for other countries in Europe or North America.

Oleg felt comfortable enough to share with me some personal details about his life in America. He had been married to a Soviet woman in the US, but his marriage had ended in divorce. He said that his wife wanted to pursue an independent lifestyle—I am not sure what he meant by this, and I did not inquire further—and this desire on her part was not acceptable to him.

He had a young daughter there, and it was clear to me that Oleg was suffering from this separation; he missed his child very much. He was, he said, very concerned about his child’s spiritual and moral development. He confided that his daughter never answered the letters that he sent, and he suspected his ex-wife withheld the correspondence. He asked me if I would send his daughter a teddy bear that would serve meanwhile as a substitute for the Russian black bear that he promised to send her. I assured him that I would do so.

I carried out Oleg’s request once I returned home. Well unbeknownst to Oleg, I also had a premonitory dream about meeting *him*. In retrospect, the meeting with Oleg in Kyiv was foreordained; both of us had had dreams about meeting one another. Before leaving Gatineau, I dreamt about a stout-looking man who said to me: “I believe in the teachings; why do I have to believe in Bahá’u’lláh?”

Now Oleg is rather slim, but in dreams reality is sometimes reversed. In this case, the portly man in my dream was in reality slim. I invited Oleg and Sergey, who did not speak much English, to the upcoming fireside at the Pavlovs; they said that they would attend. Later that night as we walked through the streets of Kyiv, Oleg admitted that he was the man I had seen in my dream. He said yes that he did accept the Bahá’í teachings, but he did not see why he had to accept Bahá’u’lláh. He said that he still had some investigating to do.

I encouraged him to investigate further until he was completely satisfied, and yet, despite his confessions of finding inner peace and the joy of God, I still sensed in Oleg a state of spiritual struggle and perturbation, a state that is for some seekers part of the natural process in the search for God. (The follow-up to Oleg's spiritual journey can be found at the 12 August entry).

### **Leo Boosts Katya's Sagging Spirits**

That evening Ira and I, Leo and Katiya, Ira's mother, went for a walk down to the Dnieper River. I was the only one who wanted to go for a swim. The water was quite chilly, even during the month of August, but once you got in and swam around, it was quite invigorating. We were joined later by Ann's hostess, Elena, and a friend of hers, Ina, a teacher of young children. Ina had been deserted that very day by her alcoholic husband.

Ann joined us later. I was glad to see Ann again. She is always a joy to be with and we shared many hearty laughs and a few tears during our travels. Leo spent a good part of the evening on a bench with Katya listening to her recount the trials of her life which were real enough. Leo proved himself to be a very patient listener. Katya had had cancer which was in remission. Her husband had walked out on her some years ago. She became, consequently, the main caretaker and economic support for the rest of the family.

Katya earned her living as a seamstress during the day and worked in the evenings at a second job to make ends meet. In her charge were Grandma Posevkina, Ira and her sister, Albina, who was expecting a baby, and Katya's son-in-law Arturo. Katya was able to manage the household with about \$1,200 dollars annually, an amount that seems pitifully low by North American standards, but which is quite lucrative compared to the poverty of many Soviet households.

Leo tried to boost Katya's spirits by gently encouraging her with thoughtful spiritual counsel that came to mind during their conversation. He had hoped that what he had to offer her would be at least a momentary source of encouragement, but when someone is submerged in what seems like a sea of adversity, even heartfelt encouragement such as Leo offered presents only momentary relief. Nonetheless, Leo showed himself to be a compassionate listener who offered encouraging advice.

After the swim, the walk and the talk, Leo headed home with Katya while Ann, the others and I climbed the hill to the great arc overlooking the Dnieper that symbolizes the friendship between the Soviet and Ukrainian peoples. Ann and I leaned back on the stone retaining wall that runs like a vein along the crest of the hill, talked and admired the view of the summer scene of the illuminated city below. It was here, under the arc, they told us, that the Daystar Tour had performed a proclamation concert some weeks before. In that very spot, Ann and I told a small group of Ukrainian youth about the Faith and gave them pamphlets. Then we headed home.

## Visiting Kyiv and the Fireside at the Pavlovs: 12 August, 1990

In the morning we visited Kyiv, while we did a bit of sightseeing and bought a few goods in the local department store that we intended to offer as presents. The goods reminded me of the items that were stocked in stores during the 1950's in Toronto when I was growing up, particularly the style of clothing. The next evening, we had our first consolidation fireside at Marina and Victor Pavlovs.

Much to our great delight, Elena whom we had met on the train on the way down to Kyiv, appeared in the doorway halfway through the evening. Oleg also came with his brother Sergey, as did Ann and her hostess, the other Elena and Elena's friend, Ina. A Bahá'í named Misha acted as a translator and did a very admirable job. A professional artist, Giorgi Lyviv, also attended.

The fireside did not unfold as smoothly as I would have liked. The three of us took turns in speaking, a strategy that did not serve us well, because each speaker had to be translated. During the discussion, we took questions about politics as best as we could. Leo wanted to discuss the principle of consultation as well as the ideology of atheism which he felt still had a strong hold over the Soviet people.

During our post-fireside talk, Oleg told me that he felt that Soviets and Ukrainians became Bahá'ís too quickly, a point of view that fit with his feeling that he needed to study the Faith further before he accepted it, a perfectly reasonable conclusion. When I left Kyiv, I felt that if Oleg continued to frequent the Pavlov's Firesides, and with their help to investigate the truth, that he would eventually overcome the obstacles that stood in his path because he was an alert man, possessing both spiritual and intellectual capacity. After I returned home, Oleg and I continued to correspond for some months, but the correspondence eventually petered out. In the meantime, I have not been able to discover the outcome of Oleg's spiritual journey.

### Grandma Posevkina Becomes a Bahá'í

Much to our great joy, during our home-stay at the Andreyevas in Kyiv, Grandma Darya Aleksandrovna Posevkina, declared her faith. Leo and I had given her some literature to read. Thank heaven Leo possessed a good command of Russian. He spent several sessions with Grandma in a *tête-à-tête* explaining the teachings. Grandma was a survivor. She had survived the horrible ordeal of World War Two in Russia; she was living through widowhood, although well surrounded and supported by her family. Despite the challenges of her past and present life, Grandma retained a joyful and enthusiastic outlook. Her buoyant sense of humor was subtle, but ever-ready to break through the present moment to put a smile on the faces of her friends and family. Her delight at meeting *Amerikantski* strangers from the West, a rare phenomenon in Kyiv, was clearly manifest.

Our visit injected a note of hope into the monotonous routine of her life in Kyiv. Each time I left the apartment, Grandma would give me a hug and a kiss on the cheek. I felt very close to her, although each of our conversations had to take place with the aid of translation. In Grandma's home, the slogan on our Bahá'í button was fully realized: we were one family. Grandma declared her faith to Leo in the morning. Her declaration came with that familiar refrain we heard more than once during our visit. She had always believed in these teachings, she said, but she did not know that such a religion existed.

Grandma accompanied us to the fireside the following evening at Eugene and Irene Ivchenkos and told us later how much she loved it. Her enthusiasm for her newfound faith was such that she told Leo she was going to move out of the family apartment and set up a place just to receive Bahá'ís from the West! Grandma Posevkina had really caught the spirit of teaching.

### **Evaluating our Fireside Technique**

During the same momentous morning when Grandma declared her faith, Leo and I did an evaluation of the fireside that took place at Marina's and Victor's the previous evening. Then Ann and Leo went off after breakfast to a local park to consult and do their own evaluation. We felt that we had performed somewhat shakily at the Pavlovs. Basically, we wanted to improve the flow of our fireside technique, and by planning more carefully, to make a more effective presentation at the next one. After these consultations, the three of us visited downtown Kyiv to see the sights and buy a few souvenirs. Ann ended up by having her portrait done in chalk pastels in an underground passageway. Unlike Moscow there is no subway/underground in Kyiv. Her portrait took about 45 minutes.

### **Comic Relief: Jack does Laundry with the Andreyeva Family**

This day produced the most comical incident during our entire two-week travel-teaching trip. Goodwill, enjoyment and friendship characterized the entire visit of the Quddus Team to the Andreyeva family apartment, but the day-trip to the laundromat produced some genuine laughter. Most Ukrainians and Soviets wash their clothes daily and hang them up overnight to dry. Once in a while, they go to a laundromat to wash the heavier or larger items—sheets, towels, table cloths, etc.

Because we were on the move, Ann, Leo and I really did not have the opportunity to wash our clothes. I told Ira that I wanted to wash all my clothes at a commercial laundromat. Ira responded that laundromats existed in the Soviet Union, but they were few and far between; one has to make an appointment to use them. The family found it quite amusing that I wanted to wash my clothes at the laundromat, but Ira went ahead and made an appointment at a local facility. (I in turn found *it* amusing, that you had to make a reservation to use a laundromat).



As it turned out, the place was almost empty. Despite being slightly amused at my proposal, the family decided to join me. Mother Katya, her two daughters, Ira and pregnant Albina and I all piled into a taxi, loaded down with our suitcases and bags full of dirty laundry and headed for downtown Kyiv. Despite my attempt to explain that Canadians were a separate nation from the United States, they sometimes referred to me in the third person as the *Amerikantski*.

### **The Laundromat: A Moment Back in Time**

The taxi pulled up before the grey, bleak-looking, low brick building. We all piled out with our laundry. The equipment inside was of heavy-duty, Soviet manufacture that looked as if it had been in operation since 1945, the end of the Second World War. The bulky machines had external gauges to regulate the water temperature and to allow for drainage. When you wanted to empty the dirty water after the rinse cycle, you pulled a lever at the side of the washing machine and the water ran down into a stone trough, where it was carried away into the sewer system.

I set the temperature gauge to lukewarm because I wanted to wash the colors and whites together. After the wash and rinse cycles were done, you transferred your wet laundry into a shopping cart and wheeled the cart over to the truly redoubtable spinning machine. Once your clothes were loaded inside and the door closed, the spinning machine spun into action.

The spinner was a type of high-performance machine that I had never seen in Canada. It was so efficient that when the spin cycle was finished, the clothes were only slightly damp. The laundromat did have a drier, but it appeared to be out-of-order. The Andreyevas explained to me that I could proceed right to the pressing stage; there was no need to dry the clothes first.

To dry and press your damp laundry in one operation, you carted your laundry either to the hot roller press, which was about 5 feet/1.5 meters wide for the larger items, or to two swiveling, ironing boards for such things as shirts and trousers. The boards were extra-large and they rotated from front to back. You placed your clothes on the board as straight as you could, because when you pressed the red button, the boards and the iron went into sudden operation. The hot steam iron came down on them with full force, sandwiching the clothes in-between the ironing boards, and pressing them dry under intense heat.

Too bad for you if you did not get your trousers straight enough, because no matter how you arranged them, they were guaranteed in short order to come out with beautifully pressed creases. I had never seen my trousers looking so flat and neatly pressed! The whole efficient operation reminded me of the old Warner Brothers' "Looney Tunes" television cartoons from the 1950's and 1960's when Daffy Duck got run over by a steam roller and squashed into a layer that made him as flat as a pancake.

## **The Dance of the Sheets and Towels**

One person alone could not handle the large sheets to make them ready for the pressing phase, so Albina and I helped one another to accomplish the task. We both grabbed the end of the sheet and in sync we pulled it a few times in a quick motion to smooth out the creases. This rhythmic pulling and stretching movement of the arms and hands somehow reminded me of the motion of a strange minuet. Although we were only preparing sheets for ironing, a mundane enough task, it struck me, there in the damp surroundings of a laundromat, that we were both taking on graceful and aristocratic airs, as if we were dancing. I spontaneously did a quick imitation of a dance gesture. Albina got the point immediately, and we both shared a laugh. (The comic relief required no translation).

Katya and Albina said later that they felt that it was in the laundromat that we all worked together as “one family.” So for them, our unity was created by carrying out a common household task. To describe the situation, it seemed appropriate to change a line from the poem by William Cowper “God works in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.” to God works in a humorous way, His wonders to perform.

## **Visit to Giorgi S. Lyviv’s Art Studio**

We received an invitation from Giorgi, whom we had met at the fireside at the Pavlovs, to visit his art studio the next day. Giorgi Lyviv, whose last name was coincidentally the same as the city we were to visit next, was an unassuming, quiet man, but he was a living example of the saying “still waters run deep.” Although he lived alone in his studio to accomplish his life’s work, Giorgi was not an anti-social person. He felt comfortable enough to invite us to his home and to extend his warm hospitality.

The quality of Giorgi’s art would rank him as being on par with the best professional artists in Canada. He had been commissioned to paint murals on some public buildings in the Ukraine. The public contracts that Giorgi secured usually consisted of utilitarian art that glorified the events of the Russian Revolution or celebrated the industry of the proletariat. The human figures featured in his personal, as distinguished from his commercial art, are somewhat reminiscent of those painted by William Blake to illustrate the great English artist and poet’s verse.

Giorgi’s art depicts an innocent, etherealized vision of men, women and children, except that his figures do not have as much of the airy, pure quality of some of the mythological creatures who inhabit Blake’s world. Like Blake’s, Giorgi’s subjects have an innocent or angelic quality, but being more impressionistic, they are not rendered as the bright figures we find in Blake. Giorgi makes symbolic use of his human figures, he told me, to convey a message, but he

seemed reluctant to tell me more, intending perhaps to let his art speak for itself. Giorgi also paints nature as a healing, wholesome force.

### **Humor at Meal Time and Replenishing the Soviet Diet**

Meal time was always a pleasure since we had a chance to chat and to share some lighter moments. Both Ann and Leo have a keen sense of humor. Ann is always ready to laugh. Her sense of humor is direct and open, while Leo's is subtler and more understated. During our mealtime conversations, Leo did an excellent job of translating our jokes and stories with his usual patience.

We laughed a lot during our trip; in fact, it was suggested to us in Kyiv that we should tone down our laughter because Russians and Ukrainians were not used to so much humor, and our excessive laughter risked making them feel uncomfortable. We appreciated the observation and acted accordingly when interacting in public.

One morning Ira and I went downtown to the market to buy some provisions for lunch. Because the Soviet diet tends to be heavy in salt and fat, by this time I had begun to crave some fresh fruits and vegetables. Although they were scarce, we bought carrots, parsley, grapes, apricots, honey, tomatoes, and cabbage. Some of these foods, especially grapes, apricots and honey are not part of the regular Soviet diet.

Although I felt somewhat conspicuous grocery shopping with Ira, much like a city dweller, who on a rare visit stocks the larder of his poorer country cousins, my appetite and nutritional needs drove me to it. I also wanted the Andreyeva family to enjoy a bit of variety in their diet. What I did enjoy in the Soviet diet was the dark, fermented grain beverage called "Kwass" and also "compote." Compote for the French means any finely mashed fruit, but in the Soviet Union it means any boiled fruit that has been allowed to cool. I especially liked compote that had been boiled with plums. I also liked "Kafir," a drink that tastes like a mixture of yogurt and buttermilk. Because of its bacterial qualities, Kafir aids digestion and promotes intestinal health. Soviets rarely drink milk from the bottle; they usually boil it in cereal.

### **Fireside at the Ivchenkos: A New Believer Consults the Group About Difficult Family Relations**

One evening we held a fireside at Eugene and Irene Ivchenko, a young married couple who lived in a comfortable apartment on the ground floor. Irene looks to be about 21 years of age and Eugene appears to be a few years older. When we entered the spacious living room, we saw

that the Ivchenkos had posted the principles of the Faith conspicuously in a beautiful, stylized Cyrillic script.

This Fireside had been better organized than the one we had held at the Pavlovs because we had planned it in advance, with each of us choosing a suitable topic. Ann was to speak on the 1986 Peace Statement; Leo on consultation; myself on the station of Bahá'u'lláh. Leo and Ann spoke during the first half of the fireside, but they had to leave during refreshments because another fireside had been planned at the home of Ann's hostess, Irene, where they were scheduled to speak.

During the break, tea was served. Leo asked me if I would be willing to forego my presentation because an "emergency" had come up. One of the new Bahá'ís, a young man in his late teens, felt both confident and upset enough to consult the group, which included a few non-Bahá'ís, on the problems he was having at home since he had become a believer. His parents were active and dedicated members of the Communist party. They had forbidden him both to speak about his newly discovered faith and to attend Bahá'í meetings.

This *diktat* had created a very tense situation at home with frequent arguments occurring. He was naturally very frustrated and looked visibly upset. After hearing him out, and offering its sympathies, the group advised him to refrain from discussing the Faith with his parents. We concurred with him that being unable to share the Faith with those whom you love because they have rejected it is one of life's most difficult tests.

The new believer's consultation had not taken more than 30 minutes. It turned out that there was still enough time and interest for my talk on the station of Bahá'u'lláh. During my presentation, I stuck to short declaratory sentences so the translation could proceed simply and quickly without fatiguing Misha the translator. Misha, who was an excellent translator, is going to study computer science in Seattle, Washington.

This manner of presentation allowed me to make a number of important points in succession, rather than constructing a convoluted argument that might be more difficult to translate and to follow. To lighten the presentation, I made a few humorous remarks in passing, which the Soviet friends seemed to enjoy. I had been mindful of the advice we had been given in Kyiv that citizens in the Soviet Union found that North Americans laughed too much and too loud, but I did not want to completely avoid any note of humor during my talk. Someone commented after the presentation that the *Amerikantsi* had a well-developed sense of humor. It is true, of course, that North Americans do laugh more often than Soviets, but they have had very little to laugh about in their recent history.

### **Grandma Posevkina Dashes Ahead in the Streets of Kyiv**

Before we left the Ivchenkos, Eugene and Irene presented me with a finely hand-crafted leather pouch for glasses. We exchanged addresses and I promised to send them photos of our

visit. Grandma Darya Aleksandrovina Posevkina, who had accompanied us to the fireside as a newly declared Bahá'í, was anxious to get me home on time. I had reserved a telephone line to call Canada at 11 p.m. the same evening.

When we emerged from the apartment building, Grandma took off through the dark streets of Kyiv at a surprisingly fast pace for a woman of her age. I called out to her in an attempt to slow her down, saying we had lots of time, but she would not hear of it. Although I jog for fitness in Canada, I could scarcely keep up with her myself, and I was also worried about her crossing the dimly lit streets at that time of night.

During the bus-ride home, I was approached by a smiling woman who appeared to be in her mid-thirties, who said she was an actress and a singer. She was hoping to immigrate to America. She began to recount her troubles in Russian and broken English. After listening to her tale of woe, I did finally give her my address, although the two young men who had accompanied Grandma and me from the fireside tried to dissuade me from doing so.

Once we arrived back at the Adreyevas, I discovered that I had missed the appointment because the operator had phoned one hour earlier at 10:00 p.m. Kyiv time. I had forgotten that the telephone service runs on Moscow time. I discovered later when I returned home that Brigitte had not yet returned from her family visit to Quebec's Gaspé Peninsula. I would have been unable to reach her in any case.

### **Tosha the Singing Dog: 13 August, 1990**

On the morning of our departure, Leo and I packed up while Ira ordered a taxi well in advance so that we could reach the train station without rushing. In the bedroom that Leo and I had shared, we were treated to one of the most amusing scenes I had seen in a while: Tosha the singing dog. Tosha, the family pet, was a small, white, flop-eared dog who looked, at a guess, like a cross between a Pekinese and a Poodle.

Katya, Ira's mother, brought a piano stool into the bedroom and set it on the floor in front of the bed. Then she fetched a small accordion "squeeze-box" and stood in front of the stool. As if on cue, Tosha jumped up on the stool and sat alert in position ready to perform. Katya began to play the accordion. I write "play," but it was not the melodious playing one would normally expect, but rather the sounding out of some discordant notes to prompt the dog to sing.

As soon as Katya began to squeeze the accordion, little Tosha raised its head and began to howl. It was a strange howl and struck me as being more painful than the baying of a dog at the moon. Since I had my micro-cassette recorder handy, I was able to capture a few moments of the unusual scene. When Tosha had finished "singing," Albina spontaneously recorded an appreciation of our visit in Russian—since Leo spoke no Ukrainian, the family used Russian—

saying that we had all become one family in the short time that we had been in Kyiv. Ira gave a simple summary in English of Albina's appreciation on the spot, but later I shall have someone fully translate her kind farewell.

### **Departure for Lyviv on the Night Train**

As we sped away in the taxi, Albina blew the Quddus Team a kiss. As I watched her recede into the background, I wondered what kind of life the young mother-to-be would face during *Perestroika* with the years of economic uncertainty that lay ahead. We boarded the night train at the Kyiv station, heading south-east to the formerly ethnic Polish city of Lyviv, the largest city in western Ukraine.

Because it had not been possible for the ticket agent to book the three of us in the same compartment, we hoped to make some further arrangement once we got on the train, not knowing if it would be possible for us to share the same space. We were pleased when the female attendant proved to be very cooperative in arranging for us to be together. The attendant gave us our bedding and a light linen towel at the same time as she took our tickets.

To stretch my legs and to take a look at a Soviet train, I walked through several cars. Train travel provided a fruitful opportunity for teaching the Faith. When traveling during our waking hours, we were able to teach the Faith virtually non-stop, as curious travelers inquired about the purpose of our visit. That night was the first time I had ever slept in a berth. Contrary to expectation, I found the firm bed to be very comfortable. The rocking, swaying, back-and-forth motion of the train, along with the clickety-clack of the steel wheels, produced a pleasant, hypnotic effect that helped to lull me to sleep.

## **LYVIV**

### **Our Excited Young Hostesses Meet Us: 14-16 August, 1990**

Lyviv for me was the highlight of our Russian and Ukrainian tour. Before we arrived in the Ukrainian city, the Day Star Tour from Haifa had passed through Lyviv a few weeks before and held a proclamation there. Between the efforts of the Day Star Proclamation Tour and our consolidation team, after just two days of intensive teaching, we left behind a fledgling community of six believers.

As the train glided slowly into the central station and made its stop, I was the first one of our team to alight from car number 38, bag-in-hand and barely awake. Even before I had time to

react, my bag was suddenly snatched from my hand. I looked around and saw a young woman standing before me, virtually bouncing up and down with excitement, who said to me in English: “Are you from America?”

I looked again and saw three young women standing before us on the platform, two of them almost frantic with excitement. It was almost as if we had just landed from another planet, but I imagine that during their lifetime, and thanks to *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*, we were probably the first visitors they had seen in person from the mythical continent of *Amerika*.

Our enchanted eyes beheld two of our hostesses holding up two lovely bouquets of red roses wrapped in cellophane. There stood two of Ann’s hostesses, yet another Irena and her twin sister and Gallina, a slightly older young woman, who was to act as hostess for Leo and myself at her parents’ flat. As our hostesses swept along the platform and introduced the Quddus team to the greeting party, we did our best to look refreshed and awake after the night journey, and to accept cheerfully the bouquets of flowers, while we grappled with the rest of our baggage—all at the same time.

### **Ann’s Host Family: The Twins, Their Mother Nellie and Grandma Maria**

We took a taxi to the home of Ann’s hostesses, the irrepressible Irene and her twin sister, their mother Nellie and Grandma Maria. The usual copious Ukrainian/Russian breakfast was already laid out on the table before us. The apartment was spacious and luxurious and contained several items from America that had been provided by Nellie’s sister in the USA: telephones, two VCR’s (video cassette recorders), and stereos, items that are at this time a fairly rare commodity in the Soviet Union.

Unlike the households of Ina and Katya, whom we met earlier, a husband and father was indeed living with this family, a building contractor who was away on business. (We met him only once during our stay when he drove us to the train station for our departure). We talked as we ate, using mainly question and answer during the conversation to discover the basic facts about one another’s lives.

Now that I had a chance to look at them more closely, the twins appeared to be in their late teenage years. Irene and her twin sister revived my belief in the innocence of youth. They were sweet girls, a type of fresh young woman that you rarely meet in the more worldly atmosphere of North America, a much younger continent that has all the same long since lost its innocence.

The twins who were both studying at the Faculty of Medicine were sincere, solicitous and charming. Their mother Nellie, a slightly dramatic woman who was friendly and hospitable, I estimated to be in her mid-forties. Nellie taught music theory at a music institute in Lyviv. Grandma Maria was mild-mannered and pleasant, and by contrast, much quieter than her

daughter. She told us that she had already been to the United States because Nellie's sister was living and working there.

The family was highly motivated to emigrate to the USA, a desire that became the driving factor, especially for the twins, in their efforts to master English. It explained their positive delight when meeting anyone from North America. The rules of English grammar with examples were posted in all the rooms throughout the apartment, even the bathroom. One of the posters I recall detailed the rules for forming the collective noun.

During the conversation, we discovered that the family was actually Jewish. Leo asked Grandma Maria in Russian why she had a Christian name. Grandma responded that Lyviv had once been rife with anti-Semitism; for their own survival, the family had to conceal their Jewish identity by adopting Christian names.

When I found out that the family was Jewish, I spoke some words in German to Grandma, hoping that she would understand because most European Jews of Grandma's generation spoke Yiddish, a dialect of low German. Her face lit up when I told her that my family and I were planning a pilgrimage to *das heilige Land* (The Holy Land) in 1992, a phrase that she recognized immediately.

### **Leo and I take the Bus to Gallina's Parents' Apartment**

After breakfast, Leo, Gallina and I took the bus to the apartment of Gallina's parents, who lived in the suburbs of Lyviv. Leo and I presented her mother and father, Maria and Vassily, with some small gifts which included beauty soap and an umbrella. We had not been there long when Vassily, who is close to retiring from his job as a driver of heavy transport trucks, told us his frustrating story of working under the "Soviet system," a phrase I had heard before. He told us that the firm that employed him owned a fleet of some 500 trucks, but these 500 trucks had something like 370 managers. He was doubly frustrated because he had learned that truck drivers in Belgium earned in one month what he made in an entire year.

Gallina is in her early twenties and employed by the Red Army in the war museum in Lyviv. She is married to a captain in the Red Army who is stationed in the Kamchatka Peninsula in the Russian Far East. They have a very cute little son named Maxim, who is two-and-a-half years old. Gallina proved herself to be a remarkable and cheerful hostess. In the morning she would wake up singing and go about her daily tasks with alacrity.

She has undergone physical training in the Red Army and has become quite fit. Her fitness combined with a slim figure enables her to move through the streets and climb subway/underground stairs quickly. Her energy, open and frank manner lead Gallina to tackle any challenge head-on with confidence.

She loves music and is able to sing the words to a few pop songs of the Beatles, the British rock band, but she has not been able to master all the English lyrics. I was happy to help



her out. At the bus stop or even in the elevator—her parents’ apartment was on the 28<sup>th</sup> floor—we would break out spontaneously into Beatle songs. She quite enjoyed my singing “Michelle” and “Yesterday” for her.

One morning as we traveled to town on the bus, I handed to the passenger beside me one of the many pamphlets we brought with us. It was again our ever faithful, much used pamphlet “One Family.” The pamphlet had been designed in Chelsea, West Quebec, by the very resourceful Laurie Zrudlo, who had copied and pasted excerpts from the Russian edition of *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era*, along with a few photos and had it printed as a pamphlet. We gave away generous amounts of One Family during our tour.

When Gallina saw me give the pamphlet to my fellow passenger, she asked me for more copies. I passed her a handful of One Family pamphlets, when much to our pleasant surprise, she stood up and went down the aisle of the bus with her characteristic confidence and determination, while calling everyone to attention to tell them about the purpose of the Quddus Team’s visit. She then proceeded to give everyone on the bus a pamphlet which they readily accepted.

What a courageous spirit Gallina showed that day! Her spontaneous gesture in support of our efforts indicates another noteworthy feature of the spread of the Bahá’í Faith in the Soviet Union—and this is true of pioneering generally. The distinction between who is and who is not a Bahá’í becomes much less significant when teaching the Faith. Friends and seekers often assist Bahá’ís in their efforts to promote the Faith in foreign lands. This has been my experience in more than one county, and many other pioneers and travel-teachers have also experienced this same assistance from those who have not officially joined the Faith.

### **Visit to the Soviet War Museum and the Tour by two old Veterans**

This morning Gallina took Leo and me to meet her army bosses at the Red Army Museum in Lviv. While we were there, she arranged a tour by two old veterans of World War II. They led us, the only two tourists in the entire museum, through the exhibits of the war, which included a pictorial history that highlighted “the brave acts of the Soviet patriot army” and its victories over the Nazi armies of Hitler.

While these veterans were undoubtedly proud of the sacrifices made by Soviet citizens and soldiers in combatting Nazism, I found the tour of the war museum depressing, especially because we were there to teach the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, with its superlative message of harmony, peace and unity. I had up to that moment been feeling exhilarated and uplifted because of the many opportunities we had found to teach the Faith with its healing message.

Nevertheless, the tour of the war museum ended on an uplifting note of optimism. When the tour was complete, one of the veterans said to us: “Now it is up to you to keep the peace for us. Please come back to the Soviet Union. We need such gestures of friendship here.” As we

thanked these two kind, elderly gentlemen, I said: “Let us hope that mankind will never again have to suffer the terrible ordeal of another world war with the bloody sacrifice of so many innocent lives.” As we left the premises, Leo shared the observation that Soviets are not at all interested in the war museum these days; it is practically deserted.

### **Olga Kovatch, A Spiritual Daughter is Found: The Principle of Sacrifice**

I mentioned above that Lyviv was the highlight of our travel-teaching project. Our teaching efforts flowed smoothly and without incident in Lyviv. The doors of celestial confirmation, as emphatically promised by the Center of the Covenant, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, were wide open. We handed out Bahá’í literature in the café on Armenian Street, and in the park beside the former Dominican cathedral, an imposing, solid structure that was later reconsecrated from the Latin to a church of the Greek Catholic rite. The church had been converted in the 1970’s to a museum of atheism, but the adjoining monastery still serves as a museum of the History of Religion. We could read the inscription *Solo Dei* (For God alone) on the dome.

We distributed pamphlets on buses, trolley cars and in the street. The Bahá’í youth group from Haifa, the Day Star Tour, had done a musical proclamation in the little square in the front of the church doors, very near the little park where we continued to teach and proclaim the Faith. Thus it happened that our little consolidation group followed in the footsteps of the those who preceded us, even as Ann and I had distributed some Bahá’í literature to a group of Ukrainian youth in Kyiv, just below the huge arch overlooking the Dnieper River, where Day Star had also held a proclamation.

One of the great joys of the Soviet trip was that we found in Lyviv a spiritual daughter, Olga Kovatch. Olga is a native of Lyviv, but during the year she studies at the Faculty of Medicine in Leningrad, where she is currently in third year. We met Olga on a bus going into town. Leo and I were standing up, chatting. Olga was standing right beside us. When she overheard me talking to Leo, she spoke to me in English in an open and friendly manner.

Olga asked the usual question of what had brought us to the Soviet Union. After we told her, we spontaneously asked if she had time to join us in meeting the Bahá’ís we were scheduled to contact. Olga agreed. Quite remarkably, within the span of twenty-four hours, on the following afternoon, following a teaching moment, when she sat with Leo on a park bench, in the little park close to the cathedral, Olga declared her faith in God’s latest Revelation.

Later that day, as we walked through the streets of Lyviv, Olga took me by the arm and in a touching gesture that I did not expect said: “Jack, you are my spiritual father.” It astonished me that a brand new Bahá’í would already have the concept of a spiritual parent, but I had no doubt that Leo was just as much Olga’s spiritual father as I was.

Olga’s find words generated immediate joy. We had known one another for only twenty-four hours and yet we had already established a strong bond of love and unity. Later when we

were sitting in the same park, on the same bench, Olga asked us: “I would like to know. Did I find you or did you find me?” This remark was another indication of the spiritual depth and maturity that exists in the Soviet and Ukrainian peoples.

I ventured that we found one another because while she was looking for us, we were also looking for her, and that in creating our spiritual connection, we were all of us seeking Bahá'u'lláh. Leo wisely said that our experiences in the Soviet Union proved what is sometimes said among the friends: Bahá'ís are not made but found.

One morning we visited an exhibition of fiber art and hand-sewn Ukrainian folk dresses, where Olga's mother had one of her dresses on display. Ann, who is herself an excellent fiber artist, tried on a dress that I thought suited her well, but she did not buy it.

Later Olga gave me a hand-painted Easter egg made in the Carpathian Mountains which bore the inscription “Christ has risen.” Soviets and Ukrainians understand very well the principle of sacrifice. Not only do they understand sacrifice, but they demonstrate it. Olga told me the only reason she was giving me her gift was that she was very attached to it—a conscious decision on her part. She added that she did not like to offer a gift unless she was attached to it, because parting with it imbued the offering with real value; otherwise, it did not. Olga's hand-painted egg now sits in my study in a cotton wool nest in a small glass bowl, as a reminder of our encounter and her sacrifice.

### **The Youth in the Coffee House on Armenian Street**

We called it Armenian Street, a translation from the Russian. The street is a narrow one, not far from the cathedral. Here on Armenian Street, some of the more progressive youth in Kyiv gathered. Within this gathering of questioning youth, experimentation with drugs was for some also included in their search. Most of the youth who frequented the café on the corner were engaged in meaningful discussions, asking questions, looking to invest their lives with meaning, and seeking new solutions to old problems. As the world turns, so it has ever been with questioning youth.

Across the street, I saw a young woman who was under the effect of what I assumed was a narcotic drug. Her male friend was attempting to waken her, and I knew his real fear was that she might not wake again if she went to sleep. I crossed the street to give her a drink. She took a few sips from the glass of sweet water I offered her, but refused the rest. I spoke to her, hoping to keep her awake, but she nodded off again. After this brief intervention, I left her there in the care of her friend.

We came to the coffee house on Armenian Street at least twice. We gave out pamphlets in the café and the street. We held mini-firesides both in the coffee house and on the street. In the same park, I gave the ubiquitous “One Family” pamphlet to a young couple sitting on the bench beside me. They read it quickly and said they were students at the Polytechnic Institute. They

offered to organize a lecture for us at the Institute if we were still in Lyviv when school reopened.

Their offer was just another example of how non-Bahá'ís assist the friends in promoting the Faith, just as Gallina had stood up to voice the announcement of the purpose of our visit and distributed Bahá'í pamphlets to all the passengers on the bus. Unfortunately, we could not take advantage of their generous offer because of our tight schedule.

### **Sergey: The Moth Circles Around the Flame**

On Armenian Street we met Sergey, an engaging, sociable man with dark black hair who smoked heavily. Sergey was a little “rough around the edges”; he resisted the teachings more than the others we met in the Ukraine. He was an expert conversationalist, even though English was not his mother tongue. Like many Soviets and Ukrainians, he was not averse to a good theological discussion.

Somehow Sergey and Leo got into a discussion in Russian about the fine points of one of the fundamental Christian dogmas, the trinity. When Leo and Sergey reached a pause in the discussion, the conversation continued with me through Leo's translation, a feasible but less than ideal arrangement for understanding such an abstruse theological question.

As Sergey learned more about the Bahá'í Faith, his main objection, which he kept repeating, was that there was nothing new in our teachings. He could find these teachings in other religions, he insisted. He said this as he perused *The Hidden Words*. We could readily understand how Sergey came to this conclusion. Bahá'u'lláh asserts in the prologue to that revealed work that His teaching encapsulates “in the garment of brevity,” the main ethical teachings of the world's religions.

We did our best to enlighten him by referring to some other social and spiritual teachings that have been developed in an entirely new form in the Faith, such as the cornerstone teaching of the organic unity of humanity and the abolition of all forms of prejudice—and others—although we readily agreed that the seed concepts of these teachings may have existed in other scriptures or in enlightened and perceptive minds in other religions.

I had the impression that meeting the Quddus Team had become a potential turning-point in Sergey's life. My intuitive feeling was that in his heart Sergey wanted to become a Bahá'í, but something was preventing him. I sensed that he had been hurt or disappointed by an incident(s) earlier in his life and that he remained disturbed by it.

Because our departure was imminent, I took a frank approach and shared with him, as tactfully as I could, my intuitive impression about the struggle I perceived was taking place inside him. I took a lighter tone with him, mentioning that he was like a moth circling around the light, a moth that was afraid to get too close because it might singe its wings.

Sergey was not offended by my frankness. My observation led us further into a little poetical conversation about the metaphor of the moth being entranced by the flame, finding the truth and being willing to be consumed by its flame. We both enjoyed the exchange. In spite of his resistance to our teachings, Sergey wanted to join us wherever we went.

On the afternoon that we left Lyviv, our friends accompanied us to the train station. I was disappointed that Sergey was not in the group when we arrived at the station, but he joined us later on the platform, running out of breath to find us. I asked him if he had been afraid of missing his train. “No,” he replied. “I was afraid of missing you.” Like the moth entranced by the light, Sergey remained drawn to us for the brief time that we knew him. Despite theological differences, in a short lapse of time, we established close bonds of friendship with Sergey. Hopefully, the seed that we planted in his heart will be tended by other gardeners who will help nurture that seed into a beautiful flower.

### **Bogdana “Donna” Zlenko: Leo Confirms Donna in the Faith**

One of the “spark plugs” of the Bahá’í community in Lyviv is Donna Zlenko and her friend Igor. Donna speaks English well; she is a solid, able teacher of the Faith. She loves discussing the principles and engaging others in exploring the teachings. Donna said she had always believed in the teachings, but she did not know that such a religion existed. Like an echo, it was the same remark we had from Grandma Posevkina in Kyiv and others.

One afternoon we were sitting on that same park bench when Leo spontaneously offered Donna his English prayer book. His kind gesture, offered sincerely from the heart, produced a confirmation in Donna’s faith. Unbeknownst to us, until that moment, she had not been sure if becoming a Bahá’í was the right decision. Leo’s heartfelt generosity helped to confirm Donna in her faith because she knew how precious Leo’s prayer book was to him. I admired Leo’s spirit of sacrifice in offering his prayer book. Since my mother had given me a prayer book dedicated by her, and since my mother was both my biological and spiritual mother, I do not think I could have matched Leo’s kind gesture.

Donna’s Bahá’í friend Igor, also a new believer, was less vocal than she was in explaining the teachings, but Igor accompanied and assisted us during the time we were in Lyviv. We also met Donna’s mother, Olga Sidorenko, who is sympathetic to the Faith. Olga is a psychologist who works as a therapist for alcoholics. Therapy programs for alcoholics are relatively new in the Soviet Union. Olga requested any Bahá’í literature that deals with the treatment of substance abuse, as well as any information on Alcoholics Anonymous. We assured her that we would send her some information once we returned home.

## Visit with Eugene and Olga Yarosh

We met Eugene and his wife, another Olga, because they had been contacted previously by Bahá'ís; they were on our list of contacts when we got into Lviv. Eugene had been Irena's (Ann's hostess) school teacher in the past. Eugene taught German and other subjects in the humanities. Now that he was retired, Eugene and his wife were enthusiastically looking for ways to emigrate from the Soviet Union.

Eugene met us at the tram stop and greeted us warmly. He was wearing a light, powder-blue, tropical Mexican shirt that had two large pockets on the lower front part of the vest. (His shirt was identical to one my parents had bought for me during their vacation to the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico). Eugene was originally from Argentina's large cosmopolitan capital, Buenos Aires. His father was Ukrainian and he and Olga, who were the parents of grown children, had lived in the Ukraine for many years.

He questioned us about emigrating to South Africa, a topic about which we had virtually no information other than the common knowledge that the climate would be more favorable than the Ukraine's. He told us that South Africa was the only country that offered financial assistance to *émigrés*; for other countries you needed both sponsors and financial resources. The Yaroshes were lacking both.

We told him that although the offer of financial assistance was an attractive feature, the political climate at that moment in South Africa was uncertain. I told him that once I returned to Canada, I would inquire as to whether or not the Russian Orthodox church in Ottawa would sponsor a move to Canada. Eugene questioned each one of us in turn about our profession, then translated Ann's and my comments into Ukrainian for his wife.

We spent most of the conversation discussing his emigration project. Toward the end of our conversation, the purpose of our being in the Ukraine came up. He said that he accepted the Bahá'í teachings because he had had some of these ideas when he was a young man. I assumed that Eugene was referring here to the progressive, social principles of the Faith, principles that would have been accepted by liberally minded people everywhere, including humanitarian motivated Communists. He did not question us further about the teachings.

## Climbing Lookout Point in Lviv

One afternoon we climbed what I am calling lookout point. It is an ancient hill crowned with a monument which has a lovely vantage-point of the whole city. At the base of this hill, peasants built their first rustic dwellings in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Our guide Gallina and I climbed ahead of the others. We purposely avoided the footpath and chose to climb the tree-studded flank of the hill so that we might have a bit of a fitness workout. We very much enjoyed the challenge of climbing the high, steep hill.

For the convenience of pedestrians who are closer to the top, a stone path leads up to the monument, but I stuck to the flank of the hill, climbing over a stone and earthen wall. The slope of the hill was very steep and because it was in rough condition, I was able to get my hands and feet into nooks and crannies and so climb right to the top. We got lots of exercise that afternoon. I noticed by the next morning that the “bug” I had caught in Kyiv had disappeared, possibly because I had been able to sweat it out of my system with exercise.

### **The Departure: 16 August, 1990**

The departure from Lviv was memorable. The Quddus Team felt that something quite significant had taken place in the city, and we wanted to ensure that we all gave one another a fitting *au revoir*. Gallina, Olga, Sergey, and Donna and others came out to see us off. We met with the usual delays, but we welcomed them, because it meant that we could spend a little longer in one another’s company.

We must have been quite the sight standing on the train platform. We stood in a circle, told funny stories, enjoying one another’s company in the brief time that remained to us. We sang Beatles songs to enliven our spirits, one of which was “Yellow Submarine,” a song that is quite familiar to Russian and Ukrainian young people, especially the refrain “We all live in a yellow submarine.”

Even during our departure, we found opportunities to teach the Faith. I gave a pamphlet to a thoughtful-looking young woman who had caught my eye while she was reading a newspaper. Every few moments, she would glance over at our group with an intrigued look on her face. Other passengers would occasionally glance over at the happy group of Russians, Ukrainians, two Americans and one Canadian who were attracting attention by their joviality.

While we waited, our friends enjoyed listening to Ann’s “Walkman,” to the selection of cassette tapes of Bahá’í musical groups from the United States like Do’a and others. I sang Richie Valens’ hit from 1958, “Oh Donna,” for Bogdana, aka Donna, written for his high school sweetheart, Donna Ludwig, whose prejudiced parents forbade her to date Richie because he was Latino, even though he did not speak Spanish. (They went out together secretly until his tragic death in a plane crash at age 17).

When we were about to board the train, we tightened our circle of unity, kept singing and said our goodbyes. At the last moment, I showed some of our friends the now popular “High Five” and “Low Five” gesture, made by slapping palms of the hands together with arms high in the air or “down low,” a greeting that has been popularized by African-American basketball players.

After we boarded, I found the first window I could open and leaned out. As the train pulled out of the station, I put my arm out of the window, extended my hand and slapped a few other hands of our friends in a “low five.” Ann was alarmed and reminded me that I should not

be doing it because the train was in motion and our friends were too close to the moving car. As our train gradually picked up speed, I continued to wave to them as long as I could. Then we were gone. Gone perhaps in one sense, but Lyviv would live in our hearts for a long, long time.

### **The Return Trip Lyviv-Moscow: Bogdana Joins Us**

Donna decided to accompany us to Moscow along with Gallina's friend Taras. I suspected Gallina invited Taras that day mainly because he played guitar and knew the melodies of those ever-popular Beatle tunes, but not necessarily the lyrics. We walked through a park to a hotel so that I could buy some rolls of film, but there was not a roll to be purchased that we could find anywhere in Lyviv.

Ann also had back luck with her camera. Her film did not engage properly, leaving her with no photos of Lyviv. The distance back to Moscow from West Ukraine is about 800 miles/1287 kilometers. It took us 24 hours. We continued teaching on the train. Donna and I taught a threesome in our compartment who were travelling to Moscow. The gentleman was an athlete dressed in a tracksuit who was travelling with his wife and a friend. We noticed that other athletes were on the train.

He was less receptive than other Soviets and Ukrainians whom we met. He took a skeptical materialist's stance and reflected in his responses the widespread atheistic ideology that Leo had been concerned about during his fireside talk in Kyiv. Atheism still holds a wide sway here. It needs to be combatted in the wisest way because of the long years of indoctrination under Communist rule.

On the train Leo taught a few ladies from one of the port cities that maintains a submarine base for one of the several Soviet fleets. One of the ladies mentioned that the city had once been closed to foreigners, but it was now beginning to open up. They said that they would like to form a Bahá'í group there too. Leo also introduced me to two Muslim women, one of whom was a teacher, who were from one of the Asian republics. They also expressed an interest in the Faith.

Leo said they were pleased that he spoke of the Prophet Muhammad with so much respect. Throughout our whole trip, whenever he could, Leo being the organized engineer that he is, systematically took the addresses of those whom we taught, so that he could follow up once he returned home. All our contacts were given Bahá'í literature in Russian.

### **The Return of Igor: At the Train Station in Moscow**

When we rolled into Moscow after our 24 hour trip, we were quite tired. I had been sick for two days in Kyiv, but had by then recovered. Now it was Ann and Leo's turn to be ill. Leo



had brought his trusted stomach remedy, *Pepto Bismal*, while Ann relied on her homeopathic medicine kit, which she took for everything. I used Ann's kit for both nausea and nosebleed, but without much success.

We were counting on Bill Mahoney's driver, Igor, to meet us again—and there he was, one of the first people whom we saw after alighting from the train! We were very relieved to see Igor again, despite his dangerously fast driving, because we had no idea where we were going to stay overnight. Igor checked us into a hotel near the airport.

We all had to share one room, something we would not normally have done, but there were three beds in the room. Ann went to bed right away to recover while Leo, Igor and I went to the cafeteria at the airport terminal to stand in a long line for a meal. It was the only restaurant in the whole airport that was open. When we returned to the hotel room, we were very quiet so as not wake Ann.

## **HOMeward BOUND**

### **Moscow-New York: Delay in Trying to Send a Message Home**

Igor came to see us off the next morning. Unfortunately, we were not able to connect with Donna who had wanted to say goodbye in person. I embraced Igor, thanked him for all he had done and told him that I would recommend that Bill Mahoney give him a raise! Igor laughed out loud and we all laughed together. Nonetheless we were hopeful that Bill would do just that.

The custom's officer waved us right through. No delays this time. Our Pan Am Jumbo Jet was scheduled to leave at 1:00 p.m. (flight #031), but they discovered a defective fuel pump that had to be replaced. We were not able to leave until 6:00 p.m. a five-hour delay. All passengers were treated to a free meal, cafeteria style. The Moscow Pan Am representative announced to the passengers that their agents would get in touch with our families to notify them of the delay, since many of us had connecting flights to make or had immediate family, relatives or friends who would be waiting at the airport at the scheduled time.

We all wrote down our messages with names and phone numbers, but as it turned out Brigitte never received mine. (This was just before the Internet age opened up the World Wide Web). I had to wonder if the whole thing was just a publicity stunt. Despite its being 1990, the age of modernity and international communication, the phones were connected only within Moscow and the telegram office was on the other side of customs. We did not have access unless we exited the boarding area and returned again. No one seemed to be in the mood to do that. Finally, after the long delay, we took off. For some reason, the flight home was more orderly and quiet than the flight over. The aircraft appeared to have been groomed more carefully.

## **New York-Toronto-Ottawa-Gatineau: Reverse Culture Shock**

The Quddus Team decided that we would say goodbye on the plane, rather than in the airport. Our threesome had grown very close during our two weeks together, and we wanted to make our parting as easy as possible. We just did not have it in us to indulge in any emotional goodbyes. I was also in a rush to get a connecting flight. In spite of the five-hour delay in Moscow, I was able to catch a taxi from LaGuardia to JFK airport in time to make an Air Canada connecting flight to Toronto. From Toronto, I took a short fifteen minute flight to Ottawa where Brigitte met me at the airport with Mireille Côté, our friend and neighbor. Brigitte had had car trouble and Mireille had offered to drive her. We arrived home at 12:20 a.m.

For about a week following my return, I felt depressed. I longed to return to the Soviet Union where at every turn, I could be teaching the Faith again. I was experiencing reverse culture shock. While travel-teaching, you experience such joy and make close friends, even if only temporarily. My soul had reached a spiritual peak during my brief time there, but now I was momentarily back down in the valley of the materialistically oriented consumer culture in which I lived.

It was hard to return; hard to return to material comfort without spirituality; hard to return to stores that are well-stocked with goods and food, but souls who are so poorly stocked in things divine; hard to return to a place where there is so little interest in God, in spirituality and in His latest revelation. Yes, it seems strange to say, but it was hard to return to this great country of Canada where materialism acts as a drug and distraction to the soul.

## **RETROSPECTIVE AND REFLECTION**

Teaching the Faith in the Soviet Union and the Ukraine provides a foretaste of the Kingdom of God on earth where souls relate to one another in an intense, intimate and loving dynamic, where the knowledge and love of God are shared, and where you participate fully in the greatest activity on earth with eager and thirsty souls.

Shoghi Effendi has written that in the future the Faith shall sweep across Russia like a prairie wildfire. That metaphor, if it were stepped down to a slow-burning flame, describes accurately what our team saw and experienced. I felt that if there were enough Bahá'í teachers there, we would easily witness "entry by troops". I hope that if and when I am able to return, I may meet with the Local Spiritual Assembly of Lyviv.

After returning to Canada, I began writing to the friends we made in the Soviet Union. I want to keep in touch with Olga Kovatch, who became a believer in Lyviv, and who has since returned to her medical studies in Leningrad. Olga told me that she was an only child and feared

being the only believer in Leningrad. I was able to assure her that as far as I knew, there were Bahá'ís in Leningrad and that I would put her in contact with the friends there. Linda Brown, Linda Godwin's assistant, gave me the names of two key people in Leningrad whom I presume are believers. I have forwarded these names to Olga.

On the one hand, travel-teaching in the Soviet Union and the Ukraine has been a unique experience and one of the highlights of my travel-teaching activities since I first became a believer in 1962. On the other hand, it has given me a clearer understanding of the drug-like, lulling effect of consumer materialism in North America.

I find that the material and spiritual suffering of the Ukrainian and Soviet peoples has paradoxically strengthened their spirit and prepared them to receive God's latest revelation. Shoghi Effendi's phrase, "while there is yet time," has taken on a new meaning for me. The doors are still open, but who knows how long we shall be able to continue to teach the Faith there, before the lives and energies of the Ukrainian and Soviet peoples become preoccupied by some adverse political movement, catastrophe, or by the slowly engulfing wave of materialism that is sweeping the globe. Still, I remain optimistic for the future. But only under a regime that allows "free and fair elections" will Bahá'í elections be able to take place.

Actions performed for the Faith in those vast lands seem to be multiplied in strength and compressed in time. Activities that take months or even years in North America take only days there. Leo made a noteworthy observation while we were there. He said that he had done more teaching in Russia and the Ukraine in two weeks than he had done in 28 years living in the United States, although he was living for some of that time as an isolated believer.

You may be able to judge from this remark with what relative ease one can find believers-in-waiting in those countries. May we all live to witness the day when Shoghi Effendi's prophecy about the burning flame of the Faith sweeping across that vast northern land comes true!