

Spiritual Foundations for an Ecologically Sustainable Society

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Abstract

This paper takes a broad macroevolutionary approach to our changing relationship to Nature in light of the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. It suggests that humanity is perhaps, after all, not a delinquent species running out of control but is at the very centre of a vast growth process clearly approaching a tremendous transition. Drawing on the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith as well as on emerging knowledge in physics, ecology, and psychology, it suggests humanity is in a process of evolving consciousness that is leading to the birth of a new planetary culture. This process subsumes the development of a mature cooperative relationship between humanity and the ecosphere that gave it birth. This examination and synthesis will be accomplished in two parts. In the first part the basic attitudes to Nature that are contained within the Bahá'í writings will be explored and explicated. The second part will examine how the emergence of an ecological consciousness is linked to basic principles of the Bahá'í Faith. These principles will be related to tenets for an ecological society being advanced by contemporary social commentators. Implicit throughout is the Bahá'í view of the balance and cohesion of material and spiritual realities in approaching every question, whether it be environmental policy, agriculture, development, health, or peace. All areas of human endeavor are interrelated and require an integrated understanding of human purpose. This paper lays no claim to being an authoritative Bahá'í position and should be regarded as a preliminary attempt of one mind to grasp some of the deeper meanings latent in the voluminous writings of the Bahá'í Faith. Through this attempt it is hoped the reader will be led to a deeper understanding of current environmental dilemmas and will be offered a vision of profound change for which the current crises may be viewed as "forcing functions." As idealistic as this may seem, in this day only the visionary is pragmatic.

Résumé

Cet article prend une approche macro-évolutionnaire de notre relation changeante avec la nature à la lumière des enseignements de la foi bahá'íe. Il suggère que l'humanité n'est peut-être pas, après tout, une espèce délinquante en perte de contrôle mais qu'elle est au centre même d'un vaste processus de croissance qui visiblement s'approche d'une transition formidable. En se basant autant sur les enseignements de la foi bahá'íe que sur les connaissances émergentes en physique, en écologie et en psychologie, il suggère que l'humanité vit un processus de conscience évolutive qui la dirige vers la naissance d'une nouvelle culture planétaire. Ce processus présuppose le développement d'une relation mûre de coopération entre l'humanité et l'écosphère qui lui a donné naissance. Cet examen et sa synthèse seront accomplis en deux parties.

Dans la première partie, l'auteur explore et explique les attitudes fondamentales envers la nature qui sont contenues dans les écrits bahá'ís. Dans la deuxième partie, il examine comment l'émergence d'une conscience écologique est reliée aux principes de base de la foi bahá'íe. Ces principes seront mis en rapport avec les principes avancés par les commentateurs sociaux contemporains pour une société écologique. La perspective bahá'íe implicite est celle de l'équilibre et de la cohésion entre les réalités matérielles et spirituelles lorsqu'on aborde toute question, que ce soit la politique environnementale, l'agriculture, le développement, la santé ou la paix. Tous les domaines de l'effort humain sont intimement reliés et tous nécessitent une compréhension profonde de qui nous sommes et pourquoi nous vivons ici maintenant. Cet article ne prétend pas représenter une position bahá'íe d'autorité et devrait être considéré comme une tentative préliminaire d'un esprit qui s'efforce de saisir les significations profondes latentes dans les écrits volumineux de la foi bahá'íe. Par cette tentative, l'auteur espère amener le lecteur à une meilleure compréhension des dilemmes environnementaux du jour et lui offrir une vision de transformation profonde dont on peut considérer la crise actuelle comme étant le «facteur déclenchant». Aussi idéaliste que cela puisse paraître, on considère qu'en ces jours seuls les visionnaires sont pragmatiques.

Resumen

Este artículo toma una perspectiva amplia y macro-evolucionaria de nuestra relación con la naturaleza. Sugiere que la humanidad es, después de todo, no una especie delincuente fuera de control; sino que está en el mero centro de un proceso inmenso de crecimiento claramente acercándose a una transición tremenda. Basándose en las enseñanzas de la Fe Bahá'í, además de conocimientos recientes en la física, ecología y, psicología, sugiere que la humanidad esté en un proceso de evolución de conciencia que llevará al nacimiento de una cultura planetaria nueva. Este proceso implica el desarrollo de una nueva relación cooperativa entre la humanidad y la ecosfera que la dió a luz. Esta examinación y síntesis será llevada a cabo en dos partes. En la primera parte se explorará y se explicará las actitudes básicas sobre la Naturaleza contenidas en las escrituras Bahá'ís. La segunda parte examinará como la emergencia de una conciencia ecológica está ligada a principios básicos de la Fe Bahá'í. Estos principios serán relacionados con preceptos para una sociedad ecológica siendo avanzados por los comentadores sociales contemporáneos. En este ensayo, es implícito el punto de vista Bahá'í sobre el balance y cohesión entre la realidad material y espiritual al acercarse a cualquier cuestión, sea ésta la política ambiental, agricultura, desarrollo, salud o paz. Todas las áreas del esfuerzo humano están entrelazados y todas requieren un profundo entendimiento de quiénes somos y por qué estamos viviendo aquí y ahora. Este ensayo no pretende ser una posición Bahá'í autoritativa; debería de ser considerado como un esfuerzo preliminar de una mente por entender algunos de los profundos significados latentes en las escrituras voluminosas de la Fe Bahá'í. A través de este esfuerzo, se espera que él

lector/la lectora será llevadola a un entendimiento más amplio de los dilemas ambientales actuales y será ofrecidola una visión de cambio profundo que le permitirá ver la crisis actual como “funciones que obligan.” A pesar de lo idealizado que esto pueda aparecer, se puede ver que en estos días sólo lo visionario es pragmático.

From Environmental Awareness to Ecological Consciousness

The environmental/conservation movement of the past several decades has been a response to the growing awareness that the rich and abundant earth is being depleted and destroyed under the weight of growing population pressure and large-scale industrialization. Environmental action in industrialized countries has been significant in mitigating some of the worst forms of air and water pollution, protecting indigenous wildlife, and sounding the alarm on the ideology of consumerism and unbridled industrial growth. Environmental protection has now become part of the public policy agenda. However, many conservationists have come to realize that correcting environmental problems requires more than defensive actions on behalf of a beleaguered Nature. The cumulative breakdown of the relationship between the human species and the ecosphere has reached a point at which conventional remedies such as resource management amount to little more than “fine tuning” a continuing process of environmental degradation.

Overshadowing the incremental destruction of the ecosphere by any number of assaults is the threat of nuclear holocaust, a threat that stands, according to Schell at “the very centre of the ecological crisis” in that it symbolizes all the destructive power and madness that our technological might now allows us (Schell, *Fate* 111). Indeed, in the view of many ecologists, World War III has already begun—it is the war against Nature.

In the face of the apocalyptic disasters that await us if we continue to destroy the earth’s life support systems, many conservationists call for a “radically new metaphysic” (Livingston, “Ethics” 67-81). The search for a deeper reconciliation between humanity and Nature has come to be known as “deep ecology.” Rather than seeking primarily technical solutions, deep ecology penetrates to the core of our most deeply held cultural views of Nature and attempts to find common ground between the highest aims of civilization and the beauty, complexity, and mystery of Nature. Deep ecology is based on a critique of technocratic, economic growth society and, following the nonanthropocentric insights of figures such as St. Francis of Assisi, Aldo Leopold (an early American ecologist known as the proponent of a land ethic), Richard St. Barbe Baker, and Rachael Carson, asserts the idea of an “ecological consciousness.” St. Francis, in his life and in his ideas of organic wholeness and biocentric equality, could well be considered a patron saint of deep ecology.

The emerging paradigm of “ecological consciousness” is grounded in a perception of holism and a vision of nonexploitive science and technology. It calls for a transformation of consciousness away from seeing the world as a

collection of resources to be exploited and consumed, to one of humanity living as part of the ecosphere.

For deep ecology, the study of our place in the earth household includes the study of ourselves as part of the organic whole. Drawing on religious traditions as much as on the science of ecology, it asserts that beyond our "narrowly materialistic scientific understanding of reality the spiritual and material aspects of reality fuse together" (Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology* 66). For Naess, who coined the term *deep ecology*, its essence is to ask deeper questions—"We ask which society, which education, which form of religion is beneficial for all life on the planet as a whole" (quoted in Devall and Sessions, *Deep Ecology* 74).

In *Deep Ecology: Living as if Nature Mattered*, Devall and Sessions advance norms for deep ecological thinking (18). They include valuing Nature as having intrinsic worth; tolerance of diversity; decentralized, nonhierarchical, and self-regulating social structures; small-scale and community-based technologies and economies; simplicity of wants; and appreciation of spiritual/religious dimensions.

In a similar vein, Skolimowski calls for a new life-oriented "eco-philosophy," and describes its essential characteristics (*Eco-Philosophy* 30). In addition to being ecologically conscious it must be holistic and global; must be concerned with wisdom, quality, and health; and must appreciate society as one of humanity's modes of spiritual being. Instead of our current emphasis on objectivity and detachment, eco-philosophy emphasizes participatory commitment, compassion, and responsibility. Finally, eco-philosophy is spiritually alive in that it sees human beings as spiritual agents in an evolving world endowed with grace and meaning.

It is within this context of the search for new visions of metaphysical reconstruction that the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith have a significant contribution to make. In their emphasis on unity and evolutionary thinking, they offer a view of Nature that reflects both animistic wisdom and contemporary ecological understanding. At the same time these teachings affirm divine transcendence and a holistic understanding of the religious history of humanity. Furthermore, many of the tenets and principles for an alternative society based on ecological wisdom are also found within the writings and institutions of the Bahá'í Faith. This paper will go on to explore first the philosophical and then the social implications of the Bahá'í understanding of Nature and the role of humans on earth.

Relationship with Nature—A Bahá'í Perspective

In an examination of the principles of the Bahá'í Faith as they apply to agriculture, Hanley articulates a three-fold relationship between humanity and Nature involving principles of unity, detachment, and humility (Hanley, "Fundamental" 12-15). These same principles will be explored in depth here.

Unity with Nature: Wholeness and Cooperative Interrelationship of Creation

Bahá'u'lláh asserts that "all parts of the creational world are of one whole. . . . All the parts are subordinate and obedient to the whole. The

contingent beings are the branches of the tree of life while the Messenger of God is the root of that tree” (*Bahá’í World Faith* 364). A recognition of this essential unity is restated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in several passages:

You are well aware, praised be the Lord, that both interaction and cooperation are evident and proven amongst all beings, whether large or small. In the case of large bodies interaction is as manifest as the sun, whilst in the case of small bodies, though interaction be unknown, yet the part is an indication of the whole. All these interactions therefore are connected with that all-embracing power which is their pivot, their center, their source and their motive power. (*Bahá’í World Faith* 345)

Association, harmony and union are the source of life. . . . Shouldst thou reflect on all created things, thou wilt observe that the existence of every being dependeth upon the association and combination of divers elements the disintegration of which will terminate the existence of that being. (*Bahá’í World* 50)

Liken the world of existence to the temple of man. All the limbs and organs of the human body assist one another; therefore life continues. . . . Likewise, among the parts of existence there is a wonderful connection and interchange of forces, which is the cause of the life of the world and the continuation of these countless phenomena. . . .

From this illustration one can see the base of life is this mutual aid and helpfulness. . . . (*Star of the West* 8:138)

According to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the cooperative interrelations of creation are a manifestation of Love, which is “the secret of God’s holy Dispensation” (*Selections* 27). Through God’s love the world of being receives life.

Love is the cause of God’s revelation unto man, the vital bond inherent, in accordance with the divine creation, in the realities of things. . . . Love is the most great law that ruleth this mighty and heavenly cycle, the unique power that bindeth together the divers elements of this material world, the supreme magnetic force that directeth the movements of the spheres in the celestial realms. (*Selections* 27)

Further, the mineral, plant, and animal are seen to possess various grades and stations of spirit. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote in 1921:

. . . it is indubitable that minerals are endowed with a spirit and life according to the requirements of that stage. . . .

In the vegetable world, too, there is the power of growth, and that power of growth is the spirit. In the animal world there is the sense of feeling, but in the human world there is an all-embracing power. . . . the reasoning power of the mind. . . .

In like manner the mind proveth the existence of an unseen Reality that

embraceth all beings, and that existeth and revealeth itself in all stages. . . . (*Bahá'í Revelation* 221-22)

The prevailing view of Nature as environment made up of material components of air, water, soil, and organisms is therefore inadequate. The very word *environment* implies that which is external and peripheral to the central object of concern, human beings. This human self-preoccupation ignores the reality that life and spirit are properties of the whole of Nature and its reciprocal interactions.

Spiritual Detachment from Nature: A Requirement of Conscious Spirituality

Humanity is part of the whole of creation which in turn reflects, in its harmony and unity, a divine and unseen Reality. At the same time, paradoxically, human beings occupy a unique station that can only be consciously realized through detachment from Nature. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that the human being "is in the highest degree of materiality, and at the beginning of spirituality" (*Some Answered Questions* 235).

It is through the reasoning power of the mind that human beings mediate between the material and spiritual dimensions, and it is by the development of the mind that a conscious spirituality is possible. This is the unique distinction and potential of human beings that is realized through detachment from the physical world.

Thus, numerous references are made in the Bahá'í writings to the necessity of separating oneself from the influences of the world of matter. In this context Nature is often referred to as the world of darkness. However, neither human beings nor Nature in and of themselves is evil. Rather, life is seen as a progression of increasingly complex orders from the mineral kingdom to vegetable and animal life to human beings. Humanity, however, has the capability and the power of spiritual advancement, our very purpose being to advance towards God. As stated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

God has created all earthly things under a law of progression in material degrees, but He has created man and endowed him with powers of advancement toward spiritual and transcendental kingdoms. (*Promulgation* 302)

All other created things are "captives of nature and the sense world," but human beings created in the "image of God" occupy a unique station in creation. We have evolved through all the physical kingdoms and contain all of their capacities plus the distinguishing capacity for rational and self-reflective thought. The development of this capacity has required us to separate ourselves from Nature both externally and internally. Through this separation we have gained the means to look at and know Nature from the outside and to unravel its secrets. In an internal sense we have detached from the physical and instinctual responses that guide all other life forms and have developed conscious faculties of judgment and volition.

The freedom these capacities give us involves a commensurate responsibility to recognize the “unseen Reality that embraceth all beings” (*Bahá’í Revelation* 222). Our spiritual evolution depends on the degree of our attunement to that greater reality, which is described by Bahá’u’lláh and all the great prophets as limitless. Thus, to truly awaken to our full potential we are called to sever our identification with the physical dimension of Nature. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá discusses this concept:

And among the teachings of His Holiness Bahá’u’lláh is man’s freedom, that through the ideal Power he should be free and emancipated from the captivity of the world of nature. . . .

. . . the world of nature is an animal world. Until man is born again from the world of nature, that is to say, becomes detached from the world of nature, he is essentially an animal, and it is the teachings of God which converts this animal into a human soul. (*Bahá’í World Faith* 288-90)

The development of human consciousness remains limited if it is oriented only to the material reality. Thus Bahá’u’lláh exhorts us to “esteem as nothing the world, nay, the entire creation” (*Bahá’í World Faith* 65). In this context He clarifies that “by ‘the world’ is meant your unawareness of Him Who is your Maker, and your absorption in aught else but Him” (*Bahá’í World Faith* 134). The physical world is problematic only if it is seen as an end in itself. Thus detachment from the physical world is a means of gaining conscious access to the spiritual realities that lie behind and beyond the physical. Paradoxically, this detachment allows us to see that the physical world perfectly and fully reflects the spiritual world. This is demonstrated, as John Hatcher points out, in our growing awareness of ecology (“Purpose” 69). As we begin to understand the ecological principle that everything is connected to everything else in the physical world, we are learning the truth of the essential spiritual law of unity that pervades and animates all of creation.

The paradox between our unity and our detachment can be seen on deeper reflection as representing the multidimensionality of our humanness. The recognition of our unity with the earth, which in a very real sense gestated us, reflects both animistic wisdom and contemporary ecological understanding. At the same time, as earlier Revelations emphasized, we must reach beyond the material world to discover our spiritual nature and to fulfill our destiny as conscious beings. That potential and destiny, which has been reflected to us by a progression of divine Messengers, is an unfolding one in an ongoing creation. Ultimately, knowledge of the Divinity is impossible and unattainable. However, faith in and vision of our perfectibility gives us the strength to progress towards fulfillment of all our potential and to participate in spiritualizing our social existence.

The Bahá’í Faith is certainly not the first belief system to recognize this tension between the material and spiritual dimensions, but it does offer perhaps the most balanced view of this relationship. Matthew Fox, a Dominican scholar, seeks just such a balance in his call for “pantheism” (Fox, *Original* 90). Like

pantheism, panentheism sees the spirit of God as present in all things. At the same time, God is an independent Being above and beyond all things. This would seem to describe the Bahá'í view. As Bahá'u'lláh has written: "The whole universe reflecteth His glory, while He is Himself independent of, and transcendeth His creatures. This is the true meaning of Divine unity. He Who is the Eternal Truth is the one Power Who exerciseth undisputed sovereignty over the world of being, Whose image is reflected in the mirror of the entire creation" (*Gleanings* 166).

Humility

In this balance between unity and detachment, we are called on to honor creation, to recognize its sacredness, and to humble ourselves before it. In the miracle of life's evolution, God has acted through Nature in an "emergent" way. Creation is intrinsically endowed with meaning and purpose, and reflects the unity, beauty, and ultimate mystery of God. The earth is itself a revealer of God as Bahá'u'lláh affirms in several passages:

Know thou that every created thing is a sign of the revelation of God. . . . (*Gleanings* 184)

Whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that Most Great Light. (*Gleanings* 177)

How all-encompassing are the wonders of His boundless grace! Behold how they have pervaded the whole of creation. Such is their virtue that not a single atom in the entire universe can be found which doth not declare the evidences of His might, which doth not glorify His holy Name, or is not expressive of the effulgent light of His unity. So perfect and comprehensive is His creation that no mind nor heart, however keen or pure, can ever grasp the nature of the most insignificant of His creatures; much less fathom the mystery of Him Who is the Day Star of Truth, Who is the invisible and unknowable Essence. (*Gleanings* 62)

"No thing have I perceived, except that I perceived God within it, God before it, or God after it." (*Gleanings* 178)

'Abdu'l-Bahá describes creation as one of the "two Books" of God. "The Book of Creation is in accord with the written Book"—the sacred Revelations of all the prophets of God. Like the written book, "The Book of Creation is the command of God and the repository of divine mysteries" (*Makátib* 436–37).¹

1. This quote from the Persian book *Makátib* (unpublished in English) was cited by Bahíyyih Nakhjavání on page 13 of her book *Response*.

The spirituality of the world's aboriginal cultures is based on understanding the primary scripture of the Book of Creation. Even in the revealed religions symbols of Nature such as trees, water, and mountains carry spiritual meaning. The human soul is refreshed and revitalized by contact with the beauty, mystery, and grandeur of Nature. This contact is the basis of recreation as "re-creation." (In this vein we can understand the love for Nature demonstrated by Bahá'u'lláh and Shoghi Effendí. See Appendix.)

An attitude of awe and gratitude towards the earth is part of attaining spiritual humility. Humility means literally of the ground or humus. Bahá'u'lláh describes this relationship:

Humility exalteth man to the heaven of glory and power, whilst pride abaseth him to the depths of wretchedness and degradation. (*Epistle 30*)

Every man of discernment, while walking upon the earth, feeleth indeed abashed, inasmuch as he is fully aware that the thing which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation, his advancement and power is, as ordained by God, the very earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men. There can be no doubt that whoever is cognizant of this truth, is cleansed and sanctified from all pride, arrogance, and vainglory. (*Epistle 44*)

Our spiritual sensitivity depends on understanding our dependence on the earth.

A New Vision of Wholeness in Our Relationship to Nature

The conservation of Nature requires first of all a vision of wholeness in our relationship to Nature. This requires a perspective of human evolution and human purpose that unifies material and spiritual realities. The focus on transcending Nature, which has characterized Western civilization in particular, is reflected in the current species' self-centeredness of the human race. The divorce of human destiny from the reality of physical life on earth now requires a reconciliation. Thus, deep ecologists are right in suggesting we need an understanding of ourselves and our society as parts of ecological systems subject to ecological laws. However, this cannot be achieved through the replacement of our anthropocentrism by a biocentrism. Rather, our separation and detachment from Nature and our unity with Nature must be understood as a creative dialectic in the development of human consciousness.

Without this understanding we remain stuck in a position of alienation from Nature and from a holistic connection to the unifying and creative force that animates existence. The process of becoming conscious beings has required us to sever ourselves from our unconscious roots in Nature and to identify with a vision of our potential that transcends the physical. This severance has left us with no secure grounding for who we are and no clear vision of our wholeness. We retain only a dim memory of our unconscious wholeness with Nature (before

we gained self-consciousness and broke the primal harmony of Eden) and a vague hope for the restoration of peace and wholeness in an abstract heaven or a future Kingdom of God. The negative self-concept of ourselves as fallen creatures itself breeds guilt, despair, and abasement of both ourselves and creation. However, the Bahá'í writings make it clear that we came into being in a perfect creation and that our station in creation is a noble one. We are the "fruit of creation," conscious beings given the responsibility of fulfilling creation by reflecting its perfections. 'Abdu'l-Bahá addresses this situation as follows:

One of the things which has appeared in the world of existence, and which is one of the requirements of Nature, is human life. Considered from this point of view man is the branch; nature is the root. Then can the will and the intelligence, and the perfections which exist in the branch be absent in the root? (*Some Answered Questions* 4)

He further states that humanity ". . . in the body of the world is like the brain and mind in man. . . . man is the greatest member of this world, and if the body was without this chief member, surely it would be imperfect. We consider man as the greatest member because, among the creatures, he is the sum of all existing perfections" (*Some Answered Questions* 178).

Bahá'u'lláh addresses the same theme:

To a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed. (*Gleanings* 177)

We are, in other words, Nature becoming conscious of itself; but the gift of consciousness lifts us into another dimension. Nature is perfect in itself because it is governed by laws and rules ordained by God. This perfection is reflected in all the metaphors of Nature used in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and earlier prophets. The perfections of human beings, however, are unrealized. We must *choose* to realize them. Our capacities to reveal the "attributes and names of God" are always evolving and are reflected to us by a series of divine Messengers and their Revelations. In the evolution of humanity towards conscious wholeness the Messenger of God is the key to the union of material and spiritual realities. Thus the centre of existence is neither humanity nor Nature (neither anthropocentrism nor biocentrism). It is God through his Manifestation that is the "root" of the "tree of life" (*Bahá'í World Faith* 364). In this era, the unification manifested by Bahá'u'lláh has released the potential for us to transform ourselves towards a more complete reflection of the perfections of God and the wholeness of creation.

In this light, the deepening crises of planetary destruction must be seen not as the inevitable failure of fallen humanity but as a crucial stage in the evolution

of human consciousness towards greater wholeness. In this time, we are called to reflect on the incompleteness of our current vision and respond with urgency to the forces of transformation. The second part of this paper will explore the social dimensions of this spiritual process of transformation.

Towards a Global Civilization: The Spiritual Evolution of an Ecologically Sustainable Society

Understanding creation as sacred and whole and seeing the role of human beings to be conscious, compassionate, and creative participants in the evolution of life is the ultimate requirement for an ecologically sustainable society. However, achieving this society will require not only a transformation in our individual attitudes and values but also a complete re-ordering of our social institutions.

Most of the socioeconomic institutions of modern industrial societies are based on the pursuit of material progress through the exploitation of Nature. Nature is viewed primarily as a storehouse of resources to be managed, harvested, and industrially processed for unmoderated human consumption. This resource appropriation has become the basis of economic growth, which in turn has become the dominant measure of social advance. The limits of this materialistic philosophy are now clearly demarcated in the accelerating destruction of planetary ecological systems. Yet our prevailing political, social, and economic institutions are powerless to halt this destruction because they are implicitly based on the very same values of separation from and conquest over Nature.

This separation denies individuals and society a meaningful relatedness to the whole of creation and thereby denies holiness and sacredness to life. The loss of meaning and the ensuing emptiness fuel, in turn, the search for fulfillment through consumption, competition, and other addictive behaviors. This separation from Nature underlying modernism corresponds to a division in ourselves between mind and heart, because we too are part of Nature. As has been delineated earlier, our spiritual origin and destiny are not separate from the whole evolution of life on the planet. Spirit is not separate from matter but rather finds expression in all the stages and processes of existence, and seeks realization through the distinctive consciousness of human beings. Therefore, the organization of society based on the separation of church and state, the spiritual and secular, is inevitably contradictory and destructive.

Incorporating a new vision of wholeness in our relationship to the earth requires a reincorporation of the spiritual dimension that was cast out with the dissolution of religious cosmologies in the modern era. We cannot return to these older cosmologies. Science, secular humanism, and the profusion of modern institutions based on them have brought society to a completely new level of advancement. However, this outer material advancement has blinded us to the loss of the spiritual or inner dimension of human life. We cling, says Skolimowski, to our ideals of "secular salvation" because our successes seem too hard-won to betray (*Eco-Philosophy* 71). Despite this resistance, the prevailing worldview of secular materialism is being undermined both by the

proliferation of its problems and contradictions and by the emergence of more inclusive cosmologies that account for the contradictions and provide new organizing principles. The unification of the material and spiritual dimensions is just such a principle that provides a foundation for a vision of humanity in relation to the whole of creation. Discoveries on the new frontiers of science point to such a cosmology and provide analogies such as in physics where, for example, light is understood as both a wave and a particle. The emerging cosmology must similarly account for human beings as both biological and spiritual beings by seeing both aspects as part of life's evolution. Skolimowski asserts that

humans are custodians of the whole of evolution and at the same time, only the point on the arrow of evolution . . . the sacredness of man is the uniqueness of his biological constitution which is endowed with such refined potentials that it can attain spirituality. (*Eco-Philosophy* 75)

The Bahá'í Faith is based on such an evolutionary perspective. It views the development of civilization as a progressive process in which all the great religious revelations and now science are a part. This dynamic and holistic understanding can help us pierce the duality of humanity vs. planet to see our current situation as a crucial stage in the birth of a new world order. It is within this context that the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith have extreme relevance, for they not only delineate the past and future dimensions of this progressive historical process but also offer values, principles, processes, and institutional forms that can guide us through the transition to maturity and the development of a global civilization. These principles and processes will now be related to the requirements for an ecological society, along several dimensions.

Evolutionary Perspective

In the early or "childhood" phase of the human journey, in aboriginal cultures all over the world, humanity lived closely bonded with the natural world. Individuals and cultures existed in a state of unity and balance with the earth and the cosmos. The degree of dependence on the forces of Nature was a visceral experience. Nature was often conceived of as an all-embracing "Mother Earth," the nourishing matrix of all life. This is illustrated by Chief Luther Standing Bear in describing the Lakota tribe's beliefs about Nature:

The Lakota was a true naturalist—a lover of nature. He loved the earth and all things of the earth. . . . Kinship with all creatures of the earth, sky, and water, was a real and active principle. . . . Wherever the Lakota went, he was with Mother Earth. No matter where he roamed by day or slept by night, he was safe with her. This thought comforted and sustained the Lakota and he was eternally filled with gratitude. (McLuhan, *Touch the Earth* 6)

The degree of control over natural events was limited, and natural forces were understood in terms of magical or mythological powers. Ceremonies

symbolized and celebrated human relationships with the elements of creation and the Creator. A sense of cyclical order predominated. This was often closely associated with appreciating the power and mystery of the “feminine” and the role of women as the guardians of the forces of generation and nurturance of life.

In the emergence of the great axial civilizations of recorded history, there is increasing emphasis on the rational mode of consciousness. In these civilizations the drive is towards greater independence, order, abstraction, and the primacy of “masculine” energies. While these qualities are often identified as the cause of our extreme separation from Nature, they can also be understood psychologically as the requirement for developing human consciousness. Just as in adolescence, when individuation requires the fragile ego to emerge and assert itself against the regressive urge to be drawn back into the unconsciousness and dependence of childhood, so too the human race has had to break away from the primordial unity of our original unconscious wholeness with Nature.

Human transcendence was also emphasized in the successive monotheistic revelations of the axial civilizations. In the process Nature was demythologized, earlier animistic and pantheistic views were abandoned, and spiritual pursuits abstracted from the world of Nature and its instinctive primal energies. Nature began to be subsumed as a resource for the development of larger collective units of social organization. Trade, commerce, artistic and intellectual pursuits were associated with urban dwelling and thus an increased physical separation from Nature compared to rural life.

Western science developed in this context and established as its basic operating assumption the radical separation of subject and object, humanity and Nature. The earth ceased to be a community to which humanity belonged and was seen instead as a commodity for use and possession. The mechanistic paradigm that emerged out of the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century saw a clockwork universe of “hard” particles arranged and set in motion by God. This universe obeyed absolute laws which could be viewed and determined objectively by human beings. Nature, devoid of spirit, became matter² with all sense of its mystery and numinosity lost.

The expansion of the power of human knowing has allowed us to reduce the material world into its component parts devoid of mystery and power to affect us. Our original dependence on the natural world has been replaced by alienation from Nature and power over a meaningless material world. As destructive as this has been in terms of the domination of Nature, this mind-set can be understood in the larger evolutionary context as a necessary condition of humanity’s maturing consciousness. Science can be viewed as humanity’s collective ego asserting human will, creativity, and independence, breaking the limitations and superstitions, which bound us in previous ages, and penetrating and commanding the world of Nature that previously encompassed us.

2. The word for mother in Greek is spelled *meter*; in Latin, *mater*; and in Sanskrit, *matr*. Our concept of matter evolved from our original understanding of earth as being “Mother Earth.”

However, to continue to assert the extreme degree of independence and “false sense of omnipotence” given us by our mastery of Nature now threatens to destroy all life (William Hatcher, “Science” 16). Our evolutionary imperative is to leave this adolescent phase and progress to a more mature understanding of our true relationship with Nature. To know our place in the universe, we must consciously relinquish our illusions of separateness and control that alienate us from life. Knowing our unity and learning to accept a mature and conscious interdependence will be the hallmarks of our adulthood.

The full extent of this interdependence (felt and recognized by tribal societies) is now coming to light in many areas of inquiry, as the emergent paradigms in ecology, quantum physics, neurology, and psychology now demonstrate. Ecology has demonstrated to us that even if we no longer see the planet as sacred, the ecological systems of the earth are all connected to each other and to us. In effect, the ecosphere exhibits the behavior of a single living organism, an organic evolving system with intentionality and purpose that can be recognized in its wholeness, as James Lovelock proposes in the “Gaia Hypothesis” (*Gaia* 127). This level of interrelatedness not only is true at the level of large systems but also applies right down to the atomic and subatomic world. According to contemporary quantum physics, the material world is not a mechanical system made up of separate objects; rather it appears as a complex web of relationships (Capra, *Turning Point*). The fundamental simile for the new view arising from theoretical physics is that of the musical symphony. With the symphony we are compelled to begin with the wholeness of the music before we attempt any analysis. In an analogous manner, subatomic particles cannot be seen except in their interconnectedness with everything else, including the observer.

The human mind is also part of this interconnectedness, this unity. The quantum phenomenon of nonlocality shows that the connection between supposedly separate subatomic particles is instantaneous. In effect, they behave as a single entity, part of an unbroken whole. We are led to consider that “if our brains are made up of the same subatomic particles as the rest of the universe, then they’re totally interconnected with the rest of the universe” at this very deep structural level (Ray, “Changing” 14).

Furthermore, all systems (from the subatomic to the planetary) exhibit inherent capacities for self-organization and self-renewal—in other words, for restoring wholeness. We cannot go back to unconscious unity, but awakening to the fundamental wholeness of which we are a part can allow us as human beings to become sensitive and conscious participants in planetary healing. By placing humanity inextricably within the web of life’s continuous creation, the holistic worldview allows human beings to realize both their God-like power and their child-like dependence with respect to the natural world. Instead of freezing humanity’s quest for purpose and meaning into a position of hubris, human beings can be freed to appreciate the wealth, meaning, and responsibility that the evolution of life has given them. We can become co-creators with Nature. The journey through duality, the capacity for division and separation—for

taking the world apart—has been a necessary part of our development as conscious beings. The price that has been paid in terms of loss of meaning, fragmentation, and conflict has been a heavy one. But the intuition that there is unity and cohesion at the heart of life has remained within us. In the nineteenth century Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed that his role (like Christ, Buddha, and other earlier Manifestations) was to reflect this unity to us for our day. Moreover, Bahá'u'lláh claimed his Revelation was the inauguration of the era of fulfillment, and He assured us that, as part of a much larger progressive evolutionary purpose, we now had the spiritual and physical capacity to attain to that unity within us and our world. Recognizing and facilitating this unity gives us the true basis for compassion, peace, and justice in the world. Now, in the closing decades of the twentieth century, our own empirical investigations in physics, ecology, cybernetics, and many related fields confirm the validity of that essential unity. The great currents of thought and inquiry that we denote as religion and science are now converging.

The Unity Paradigm: Precondition for an Ecologically Sustainable Society

Our social evolution is reaching a critical stage in the progression from adolescence to maturity. In this process the limitations of competitive individualism, racism, sexism, nationalism, and all other forms of division are being brought to light in all the problems of conflict, war, and abuse, whether of people or ecological systems. These punishing consequences of the emphasis on separation are in themselves teaching us that unity is the underlying reality of existence. When, for example, chemical toxins from industry return through the web of life to contaminate human tissue, we learn the principles of ecological interconnectedness the hard way.

As the principle of unity is understood and manifested in our lives and as institutions based on this principle come into existence, a new world order can unfold. Thus, recognition of the price of disunity and the truth of unity is a crucial stage in social transformation. This is occurring as issues of ecological stress, war, and inequality are beginning to be seen as parts of one interlocking planetary challenge (World Commission, *Our Common Future*). For instance, the degradation of ecological systems and the resulting resource shortages are both a cause and a result of war. Furthermore, the inequitable distribution of wealth and human rights not only results in untold human suffering but also precipitates stress on fragile ecosystems. This is apparent in Africa where food export-dependent countries facing trade barriers and low commodity prices overuse their fragile soils to feed burgeoning populations and pay mounting foreign debts.

Despite these problems, militarism continues to consume a grossly irresponsible share of the earth's resources. The expenditure on weapons research and development worldwide exceeds the total combined spending on developing new energy technologies, improving human health, raising agricultural productivity, and controlling pollution (World Commission, *Our Common Future* 298). War and the pursuit of power are direct examples of disunity between classes, races, religions, and nations. At the same time, the tension of many other

inequities in social and economic relationships has been deflected by our disunity with and pursuit of power over Nature. As growing technological might, often developed from military research, has been applied to exploiting the earth's resources, the promise of unending economic growth has been used to divert attention from the inequality of prevailing social orders. (In the process, irresponsible consumption and ever-expanding expectations of material benefits have been fostered. As the world's major industrial nations have pursued this path, they have come to consume as much as 80% of the world's resources for 20% of the world's population.)

The call for an integrated global ethic and policy of sustainable development raised in *Our Common Future* represents a tacit acceptance of the need for unity in solving global problems. However, there is little guidance about how this change in attitude and motivation is to be achieved. The Bahá'í view is that unity is a spiritual condition, although even a materialistic view will ultimately lead to the reality of unity because the physical world reflects the spiritual (John Hatcher, "Purpose" 69). Thus an a priori acceptance of unity is the means to transforming the current world order with the least disruption. The teachings and institutions of the Bahá'í Faith can be understood as nothing less than the vision and nucleus of a world order based on the central spiritual principle of unity. Only the complete acceptance of this organizing principle can release the constructive energy and will needed to make the far-reaching requisite changes.

Globalism and Decentralism

The environmental problems confronting us are increasingly global in scope. Acid rain, tropical deforestation, toxic waste, atmospheric change, nuclear contamination, and many more crises threaten the future of humanity and the planet as a whole. Political entities, each dealing with incremental degradation within their artificial boundaries, are unable to perceive or deal properly with this global degradation. There is growing recognition that we need a global environmental policy or strategy to achieve the major requirements of ecological sustainability (World Commission, *Our Common Future* 1-4). The assessment role of the United Nations Environment Programme is salutary in this regard, but its effectiveness is drastically reduced by national self-interest.

Bahá'ís believe that the establishment of a "world commonwealth" to assert primary control over resource use and distribution issues is an inevitable and necessary concomitant of the unity paradigm at the planetary level. The international systems of commerce, trade, and communication must be reshaped within a cooperative framework oriented to justice, wherein the advantage of the part is best served by the advantage of the whole.

The call by deep ecologists for decentralized, small-scale, community-based technologies and economies, at first glance, seems to represent the opposite extreme of this "planetization." "Ecological consciousness," it is reasoned, has mostly developed within a "minority tradition" that includes tribal cultures, utopian communities, and many religious communities such as the Benedictine Order and Taoist and Buddhist communities. It is on a small scale that

individual responsibility can be upheld within a participatory community democracy, and this is the level at which technology can be humanized and made more environmentally appropriate. These ideas are developed much further by Roszak (*Person/Plant*), Schumacher (*Small is Beautiful*), and Devall and Sessions (*Deep Ecology*). Among theorists in this area there is a concern that a global society would become just a more effective superstate for the conquest of the ecosphere. What is needed, they suggest, is to develop communities on an ecosystem-specific basis (bioregionalism) with people committed to “reinhabiting” and restoring that ecosystem and developing a renewed sense of place.

Some important human and ecological values are implicit in these ideas. Ecological systems are living systems to which we should adapt, rather than continuing our current approach of making land and people adapt to the technology. In agriculture the latter approach has resulted in the imposition of single-purpose, monocultural cropping systems, regardless of the biophysical and cultural contexts.

While no specific response can be made to all of these decentralist ideas, there are several aspects of the Bahá'í approach that relate to them. First and foremost the Bahá'í concept of globalism is highly cognizant of the importance of traditional cultures and religions, while recognizing the need for global order and regulation. The Bahá'í concept of globalism “repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity . . .” (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* 42).

The present structure of the Bahá'í international community offers some guidelines for achieving a worldwide society whose vision is world-embracing but whose members and activities are exceedingly diverse. While following uniform guidelines for spiritual and social development, each community must adapt itself to the exigencies of its cultural and ecological context. Each community perceives itself as a “cell” in a “global organism,” which itself is a prototype for a future world community. Within that community Bahá'ís are encouraged to disperse and decentralize.

The Bahá'í concept of “planetization” does not discount the necessity for rediscovering what Berry calls “the most primitive genius of humans”—the ability for subjective communion with the earth and the cosmos (Berry, “Spirituality” 46)—for it fundamentally respects the earth and aboriginal cultures, but it views the current transition to globalism as the passage through “the eye of the needle.” The breakdown of prevailing cultural, national, and religious barriers is a requirement for our spiritual evolution towards reunification. To reinhabit our place on the planet fully, we have to recognize our birthright and our destiny consciously and to forge a new mode of earth-human communion based on all our spiritual and technical capacities.

According to Huddleston, the idea that “society will be more decentralized in future is strengthened by statements in the Bahá'í Writings to the effect that agriculture with its associated activities will reassert itself as the first industry

of society and that man's occupations and way of life in general will become more harmonized with nature" (*Earth* 131). It is suggested, in the case of agricultural reform that "village reconstruction" is the initial stage of economic development. Principles for the establishment of central community institutions to facilitate community self-reliance and development are also outlined in the Bahá'í writings. The key principle is that development should support and benefit whole communities rather than allow individuals or ruling elites to monopolize wealth. Thus the Bahá'í view of a global society is one based on individual, family, and local self-reliance, paired with sophisticated interdependence on the national and global levels.

Science and Religion: A Necessary Unity

The idea that both religious revelations and science are progressive forces in the evolutionary process of our maturation has been introduced above. However, the continuing separation between these two great areas of endeavor keeps humanity from pursuing a truly holistic and integrated approach to solving our ecological crisis. The division between science and religion began with the great seventeenth-century European philosophers and resulted not only in separate religious and secular worlds and institutions but also in a vast gulf and antipathy between faith and reason, vision and technique, the longings of our hearts and the logic of our minds. The success of science in objectifying Nature and making it the object of analysis and resource appropriation has forced the means for divine communion into a retreat to a peculiarly subjective realm separate from physical existence. No wonder then that the earth has become, in the minds of many, a shoddy way station en route to salvation in a nonphysical world.

Bahá'u'lláh's vision of our role in serving an ever-advancing civilization transcends this destructive division. In seeing both scientific knowing and Revelation as relative and not absolute, any apparent contradiction between these two dimensions of existence is released into an openended process of discovery in the progressive development of consciousness. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that "being one, truth cannot be divided. . ." (*Paris Talks* 129). There is only one reality. However, in practicing science we approach reality through observation and analysis as an external; whereas, in religion we endeavor to understand our relatedness to the whole of reality as an inner experience. Since the "two Books"—Creation and Revelation—are totally complementary, the forces propelling us to a consciousness of their unity are invested in the very structure of reality. The "realities of all created things are inebriated" and the "atoms of the earth have been illuminated" writes Bahá'u'lláh of the transformational energy released by his Revelation (*Gleanings* 324).

The instrumentality of science is now confirming the oneness and unity of life, in which Nature is seen as a dynamic configuration of one energy with the ability to organize itself in ever more complex and subtle forms. This knowledge may itself help release and confirm deeper intuitions within us of the essential humanity-Nature bond that have been repressed in our cultural

development. However, Bahá'ís believe this knowing can only be ultimately understood and celebrated within the birth of a mature religious consciousness. As William Hatcher points out, humanity awoke to its self-awareness, and through that we know the force of growth acting through creation is capable of subjectivity and intelligence because we are configurations of energy possessing those qualities ("Science" 22). The facts remain, however, that we did not create ourselves and that there is an ultimate mystery and question of meaning behind life. The role of religion is to render accessible to the individual the "experience of self-transcendence and mystic communion" with this mystery—to connect us to our Source and individually unfold our purpose within the vast collective enterprise of evolving consciousness (Hatcher, "Science" 24). In our willingness to trust and respond to the forces of growth and transformation, we become part of an organic process that is encompassing and organizing the collective life of humanity yet is centered in each human heart. In this sense religion is the "science of the love of God" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Seven Valleys* 52).

The unity between science and religion is well expressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Religion and science are the two wings upon which man's intelligence can soar. . . . Should a man try to fly with the wing of religion alone he would quickly fall into the quagmire of superstition, whilst on the other hand, with the wing of science alone he would also make no progress, but fall into the despairing slough of materialism. (*Paris Talks* 143)

It is through the balanced combination and cooperation of science and religion that humanity can be allowed to acquire a genuine humility and respect for Nature and for God as the creative force of the universe, while applying the skills and technology needed to meet the physical needs of civilization. In terms of our spiritual growth and our physical dependence on the ecosphere, we are called by God to be fully and consciously citizens of one earth home. Our total dependence on the air, sunlight, water, and other lifeforms parallels and reinforces our dependence on God. Paradoxically, our detachment gives us the spiritual capacity to participate consciously in this role without being caught in a purely material existence.

Male and Female: Equality and Balance

Our prevailing social order is the symbolic expression of the male ego and its tendencies toward rationality and competitiveness. However, qualities of nurturance, intuition, and emotional sensitivity, which are more associated with the feminine principle, are the qualities most needed in our relationship to Nature. The emergence of environmental awareness and the equality of women have been parallel developments. Ecology derives from the Greek *oikos* meaning "house." Ecology is study of the earth's household, and for ecologists and women the collective earth home and the individual family home are habitats to be honored and cherished.

For Bahá'ís, the equality of women is seen as an essential objective and a precondition for the establishment of a just and peaceful world. As long as women are prevented from reaching their full potential, society is unbalanced. In 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá advanced the following proposition on this important theme:

. . . man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the scales are already shifting—force is losing its weight and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine, and more permeated with the feminine ideals. . . . (*Star of the West* 3.3:4)

A New World Order

The overriding vision for all the foregoing is the concept of a New World Order. The Bahá'í Faith is nothing if not realized eschatology—the belief that we are meant to transform this reality and not to endure it for the promise of salvation. For Bahá'ís the establishment of a new spiritualized world order is seen as the goal and the purpose of human life in this era, for we are the carriers of evolution towards the Kingdom of God. William Hatcher reminds us the Bahá'í writings make it clear that, just as the individual has a basically spiritual purpose to his or her existence, so society has a spiritual *raison d'être*:

The spiritual purpose of society is to provide the optimal milieu for the full and adequate spiritual growth and development of the individuals in that society. In the Bahá'í view, all other aspects of social evolution, such as technological innovations, institutional structures, decision-making procedures and the exercise of authority, group interactions, and the like, are to be judged positive or negative according to whether they contribute to or detract from the goal of fostering a favourable milieu for spiritual growth. ("Spirituality" 26)

From this standpoint, the development of a society that seeks power and dominance, either over other people or over Nature, is clearly not satisfactory. Structures based on competition, conflict, and power are destructive to spiritual growth. Reshaping the world to gratify humanity's misconceived wants is clearly a violation of our spiritual purpose. It is, in fact, the view of society as primarily a vehicle for organizing economic activity to exploit Nature for the provision of material goods that prevents us from realizing any real satisfaction in their consumption. We are driven to produce and consume more in the hope of satisfying our essentially insatiable wants. In a Bahá'í view, our real needs are spiritual, and spiritual growth can only occur when we begin to relate to all people and our earth home in a spirit of unity and cooperation. Given the total interconnectedness of humanity and Nature, it would be impossible for humans to attain spiritual perfection at the expense of Nature.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to relate some of the writings and principles of the Bahá'í Faith to the current environmental "problematique." It is in no way an exhaustive account of these Writings, nor can any claim be made that the Bahá'í writings contain specific answers for the multitude of social, economic, and biological aspects of solving environmental problems. What these Writings do offer is a vision and a promise of societal transformation and a claim that the religious impulse they contain is the most complete source from which the spiritual, social, and intellectual resources we will need to solve these problems can flow. As deep ecologists recognize, the transformation called for is both an inner and an outer one.

The transformative power of the Bahá'í vision rests in its conception of the unity of material and spiritual evolution. Within this vision, the ecological interdependence of life on earth can be understood as the physical representation of a unifying spiritual reality. Humanity is part of this communion of life, and the material and spiritual development of civilization is part of a collective planetary process. The long historical process of becoming conscious beings through separation from Nature is culminating in the scientific understanding of life's profound interrelatedness.

It is in this unifying context that humanity's current destructive relationship to Nature must be placed. The prevailing social order is based on separation from and control over Nature, because it represents an adolescent phase in the progressive development of civilization. Having passed from the dependence of childhood through the impetuous autonomy-seeking stage of adolescence, humanity is now at the point of transition to conscious maturity.

In this transition, the perception is beginning to dawn that our individual and social existence has involved a tremendous sacrifice by the rest of creation. If we can accept how much we have been given, we can accept the responsibility of our position and give gratitude in return. This reconnection of humanity and Nature, then, is both a scientific and a religious process. Through the rapid growth of scientific understanding we are being led to recognize that we are children of "Gaia." Through the development of our religious consciousness, we can appreciate that "earth healing is the new sacrament, a celebration of gratitude to the earth for its sacrifice" (Grainger, "Doom" 23). Our work will truly become worship when our spiritual and technical capacities are consecrated to serving the whole of life. With this consciousness, human beings will become co-creators with Nature of the Kingdom of God.

This vision of transformation is no longer idealistic or utopian—in the face of the disastrous ecological and human consequences that face us if we continue with "business as usual"—this is the new realism. This transformation is possible because the forces of growth that propelled life's evolution from the beginning are still operating within human society. This concept is reiterated by the theologian Thomas Berry, who echoes the visionary Teilhard de Chardin. There is reason to believe that the mysterious forces that have "shaped the planet under our feet" and "guided life through its bewildering variety of expression"

in natural ecosystems and human cultures "have not suddenly collapsed under the great volume of human affairs in this late twentieth century" (Berry, "Ecological Age" 10-11).

Restoring a vision of wholeness in our relationship to Nature and of spiritual purpose in the whole evolution of life gives a basis for creating a life-affirming culture. It gives a reason to trust life and human capacities for faith and creativity. It gives a positive context for the design of life-sustaining rather than life-depleting production systems. It encourages the release of spiritual potential in individuals so that they can become agents of transformation in the world while furthering the evolution of their own souls. All of these are aspects of the integration of inner spiritual and outer material realities, and all are involved in developing an ecologically sustainable society.

Appendix

This paper concentrates on the basic principles of the Bahá'í Faith as they reflect on our relationship to the natural world. In addition to the ideational level, a positive relationship is enhanced by both symbology and practice. At the symbolic level innumerable references are made throughout the Bahá'í writings and prayers to organic analogies, such as trees, gardens, orchards, and the body. 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke of "this earthly paradise," the "ocean of God's mercy," the "invigorating breeze of love and fellowship," and the "living waters of friendliness." Humanity's unity is represented as the "waves of one sea, as the leaves of one tree." Revelation itself is referred to as a "divine springtime" through which the earth becomes "verdant and blooming." In speaking of the principle of unity in diversity 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

Consider the flowers of the garden: though differing in kind, color, form and shape, yet, inasmuch as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increaseth their charm and addeth unto their beauty. (*Bahá'í World* 54)

These metaphors are used to illustrate spiritual principles and invoke a particular feeling that the Founders of the Faith associated with Nature. They represent the fact that all the central figures of the Bahá'í Faith had a fond love and a strongly expressed need for contact with the beauty of Nature and the countryside. Bahá'u'lláh throughout his long years of exile suffered isolation from people and the countryside He loved so much. Knowing his love for plants, many of the Bahá'ís who travelled from Iran to visit Bahá'u'lláh in 'Akká brought plants with them, refusing to drink the little water they carried across the desert and saving it for the plants. Denied access to the city, they made a garden with these flowers outside of 'Akká. In the latter years of his life, when Bahá'u'lláh was allowed out of 'Akká under the conditions of house arrest, He lived in Bahjí. Beautiful gardens were created at Bahjí and have been further

developed today, as have elaborate gardens at the Bahá'í World Centre. 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi also maintained a deep love for gardens and Nature. Shoghi Effendi, who was fond of taking solitary treks in the mountains of Europe, personally designed most of the gardens of the Bahá'í World Centre.

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