

# From the Editor's Desk

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GOVERNANCE AND THE GOVERNED:  
LEADERSHIP, CONFLICT, RESILIENCE,  
RESOLUTION, AND HOPE

In the decades since the Second World War, the essential relationship between governance and the governed has undergone several global attitude shifts. That war's utter horror in terms of death and destruction resulted in the emergence of a nearly unanimous resolve to secure our planet against widespread injustice and tyranny. The creation of the United Nations in 1945 held out the hope that global interests and a universal concern for the health, freedom, and wellbeing of humankind would supplant the extreme nationalist fervor that had instigated two worldwide conflagrations.

Of course, the polarization of capitalist versus communist ideologies soon brought about the Cold War, in which the imminent threat of a nuclear holocaust haunted our individual and collective consciousness with every emerging conflict. Nevertheless, globalism seemed to be a universally accepted objective, spurred on by a variety of international alliances, a burgeoning global economy, and the vigorous support of the United Nations, demonstrated, for example, by its assistance of the disenfranchised

populations in developing countries.

For the last decade or two, however, we seem to have pulled back into our shells, on both the individual and the collective level. The gated community has replaced the neighborhood as the American Dream, even as the walled country seems to have replaced the concept of world unity. The humanitarian impulse, so widely touted, has had to confront the reality of putting laudable concepts into action, especially caring for the displaced, the homeless, and the masses migrating from crime, poverty, conflict, and institutional chaos.

When theory is tested in the fire of social reality, the lovely dream of unity and harmony is drowned in the unexpected details of how to bring it about. Thus, the pious wish to house, feed, and care for those who have no resources of their own quickly becomes burdensome and yields to the desire for an orderly and secure life unperturbed by the needs of others.

It is at such a point that discourses about leadership, constructive reflection, and strategic action should become uppermost in our daily lives. If the purpose of governance and leadership is to respond to the needs of the governed, then what attributes and methodologies should characterize the process of those in positions of authority? Where is the balance? What is the standard? What must change if we are to succeed in this human experiment that is our globalizing world?

In this issue of the *Journal*, the diverse array of articles and poems

has been arranged to take the reader on a journey into these paramount concerns and our authors' responses to them. First, in "Constructive Resilience"—an edited transcript of Dr. Firaydoun Javaheri's address at the 42<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies—we glimpse how the perseverance of the Bahá'ís in Iran has resulted in the generality of the Iranian people beginning to admire and, in numerous cases, arising to assist the Bahá'ís. Rather than being combative or responding with passive resistance, the Bahá'í community—with the guidance and support of the Universal House of Justice—is choosing to be loving, faithful, and resilient citizens—a distinctive and ultimately transformative response to oppression.

Put them in prison, and they write poems and uplift the spirits of their fellow inmates. Push them out of schools, and they create their own. Deprive them of property, desecrate their cemeteries, and holy places, and still they remain dutiful, reliable, and stalwart neighbors, honest businessmen, while, above all else, refusing to deny allegiance to their Faith or to rebel against the very powers that wish to destroy them.

Preceding Dr. Javaheri's presentation is a poem, "Nine for Peace," about another moving response to government oppression. This lyric, originally written in Welsh, is by award-winning poet Menna Elfyn. In her poem, she commemorates the courage of the "Catonsville Nine"—nine Catholic

activists who, in 1968, took 378 files from the draft board in Catonsville, Maryland, and publicly incinerated them with homemade napalm. Their bold actions were intended to protest the destructive use of napalm by American Forces during the Vietnam War.

The second article is "The Power of Reflection: Advancing Governance and Dispute Resolution Systems through Devolved Reflection and Shared Knowledge Generation" by Dr. Shahla Ali, Professor and Associate Dean at the University of Hong Kong's Faculty of Law. In her paper, she applies research to questions of governance as a means to improve government's function. This fruitful examination of the relationship between government and the governed explores an emerging approach she calls "devolved reflection," a process in which local communities "engage in earnest deliberation to arrive at a greater understanding of existing circumstances, celebrate accomplishments, analyze challenges, learn from experience, and plan next steps." While emulating some of the same steps that characterize the "reflection gathering" employed by Bahá'í communities worldwide for more than a decade, this same process, Ali explains, can be utilized for "progressive advancement within governance and dispute resolution systems" as well as in "cross-border arbitration, or post-disaster governance initiatives."

In a similar vein, the third article by Dr. May Khadem also focuses on innovation in governance, this time among

doctors trying to combat blindness on a global scale. In "Learning about Leadership," Khadem traces her personal journey as she discovers new understandings about sound leadership and its implementation. In particular, her narrative examines "how individual health professionals and institutions struggle to address the health disparities in the world." Detailing how her own approach to leadership evolved as it applies to health services management, Khadem concludes that the ingredients which constitute effective leadership "require a complete change in thinking, orientation, and behavior that includes ourselves."

Not coincidentally, following this article is our second poem, "The Ministry of Happiness," by Nina Israel Zucker. As the epigram for the poem explains, the ironic title plays off the appointment of a Minister of Happiness in the United Arab Emirates whose task is to improve the wellbeing of all people. The poem, however, demonstrates a natural resilience arising as a response to both personal and collective tragedy—something that a government agency is not likely to achieve, especially in a country where human rights are stringently overseen by autocratic governance.

The last article, co-authored by Dr. Abdu'l-Missagh Ghadirian and Shadi Salehian, explores our global response to another sort of conflict—not the external conflict between governments and the governed, but the internal conflict between our desire for rational self-control and our simultaneous

drive for sensual pleasure or affective relief. Examining the present-day war against drugs, this article examines numerous studies on the subject of addiction. Ghadirian and Salehian attempt to answer the question posed by the title—"Is Spirituality Effective in Addiction Recovery and Prevention?" Not only do the statistics they cite from numerous studies seem to demonstrate the efficacy of spiritual practices in both recovery from addiction and preventing it in the first place, but the authors also note how the most widely used and perhaps most successful support program for alcoholism (Alcoholics Anonymous) is based on the fundamental assumption that there is a "Higher Power," a power greater than self. Without acknowledging this power, a person struggling with addiction may well be incapable of finding a sustainable path to recovery.

Finally, we include two pictures from the remarkable body of work by Bahá'í professional photographer, David Smith. In addition, we are most pleased to use for our cover the powerful work of Chicago-based artist, Paula Henderson.