

From the Editor's Desk

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APPRECIATION

First, let me express my appreciation on behalf of the editorial committee to all those who have given us such positive feedback about our efforts to increase the frequency and the value of the content in the *Journal*. We pay careful attention to the feedback you provide, and we hope that, as the *Journal* continues to evolve in consonance with the increasing needs of the Bahá'í community and of the world at large, you will continue to assist us with your suggestions. In addition, we hope that more of you will be encouraged to become active participants in the work of the Association for Bahá'í Studies and to submit articles to the *Journal*.

LOVE, LAW, AND JUSTICE

According to the Bahá'í teachings, justice results from the reciprocal interplay between love and law. As Shoghi Effendi explains, the evolving capacity and refinement of the Bahá'í model for global governance will in time lead humankind to an age of universal peace that will represent "the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society," at least "as

far as this planetary life is concerned" (*World Order* 163). In his article in Volume 23.1-4 of the *Journal*, Paul Lample notes that the administrative order created by Bahá'u'lláh is infinitely flexible and intended to evolve over time within the framework He created. It is in this context that Bahá'ís might feel that we should presently be able to see the glimmerings of light of this hopeful future dawning, inasmuch as the world is daily becoming contracted into a more interdependent and coherent community. And yet, while globalism increases, so that what happens in any part does indeed affect every other part, our present vision of a future world community seems beclouded by the smoke from many terrifying fires producing immense heat, but not much light.

It seems that one cause of this consternation is that the same modern systems of travel, transportation, communication, and technology that we presumed would make our lives more livable, our global businesses more efficient, and our collaboration more attainable, have simultaneously enabled relatively small and obscure self-proclaimed ideological/political entities to disregard all formerly recognized national or territorial boundaries and laws and threaten the entire world with chaos and terror.

Consequently, instead of sovereign states moving steadily toward a rational and benign global polity, we seem to be witnessing a decline in

the security of nations as the lines on the map are increasingly perceived by the lawless as nothing more than just that, lines on a map—as arbitrary and meaningless as impressions drawn in the desert sand.

Why then, one might well ask, does the Bahá'í community feel so optimistic about the future? After all, even though the Bahá'í teachings herald the incipience of world unity, Bahá'ís, no less than the rest of the peoples of the world, experience and suffer from terrorism, from unjust governance, and from emerging threats to any fundamental infrastructure for globalism. Clearly, faith, love, and good intentions alone are inadequate to bring about justice, order, and world peace—at least not without enforceable laws, not without some sort of unifying global systems and some collective sovereign authority that can gain sufficient respect and allegiance from the citizens of the world to achieve collective security for our increasingly small planet.

Even if every single individual in the world were suddenly overcome with love for others and determined to be kind towards all other people without concern for race, nationality, gender, religion, or any other incidental aspect of human reality—all levels of our body politic would still require laws, infrastructures, and recognized administrative institutions. We would still need public utilities, financial institutions, enforceable laws to protect

natural resources and govern all forms of human interaction—systems as microcosmic as traffic lights or as macrocosmic as international security based on a sovereign pact to secure all the nations and peoples of the world.

Surely this reality—this explicit need for law and guidance to be coupled with good intentions—is part of the rationale underlying the fact that Bahá'u'lláh calls the Kitáb-i-Aqdas—the Most Holy Book, the central repository of His own laws and administrative guidance—the “Mother Book” of His dispensation. And yet equally clear is the fact that laws and administration alone are entirely inadequate to provide a just, prosperous, and noble society unless the motive force underlying those laws and administrative systems is an equally powerful and authentic love for virtue and ethics—an ethereal or abstract force, to be sure, but nonetheless the essential energy without which the engine of society cannot run, or at least cannot take us where rational and well-intentioned people want to go.

This relationship between spiritual power and those ordinances and systems that transform power into positive action and progressive policies, might be usefully compared to the relationship between electricity and the complex networks that canalize and optimize it into the most essential force sustaining our contemporary infrastructure. Stated axiomatically, the power of electrical energy is of little

use to us until we can somehow constrain it and distribute it in regulated and systematic methods devised by increasingly complex and sophisticated engineering.

Allied to this analogy, then, is the verity that the more sophisticated and refined we become at learning how to utilize that same power—first by establishing simple grids to provide light, and subsequently by developing intricate processors that now enable us to emulate some of the capacities of human thought—the more we are able to accomplish with ever more discreet bits of that energy. In short, the more refined our systems become, the more efficiently we can leverage power into positive action.

By analogy, religion—or the spiritual impetus that the Bahá'í teachings view as the foundational source that has enabled religion to become the central force impelling history forward—must become more progressive, more refined, and more flexible to be capable of transforming love and good intentions into intelligent forms of action. And from the Bahá'í perspective, the spiritual force of love unleashed with the advent of Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God, while available to all alike, can become globally transformative only when humankind understands how to create from the ground up those systems that convey that spiritual force into specific patterns of action by means of the framework which Bahá'u'lláh also devised.

It is in the context of this reciprocal relationship between love and law that justice emerges, and it is in the context of this same axiom, Bahá'u'lláh asserts, that the relationship between the recognition the Manifestation and obedience to His laws are inseparable, reciprocal, and indispensable in such a way that “Neither is acceptable without the other” (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* ¶1, 19). For while love and good intentions are the driving force underlying all positive personal and social advancement, that same energy accomplishes relatively little without optimal conduits for transmitting that force.

It is about this central and subtle relationship between love and respect for law that the articles in this issue are composed. Layli Miller-Muro's article—based on her Hasan M. Balyuzi lecture in 2013—is titled “Knowledge into Action: The Bahá'í Imperative to Serve Humanity.” This revealing narrative explains the process by which an individual Bahá'í lawyer, applying her capacity gained from studying law, instigated the creation of a thriving service agency, the Tahirih Justice Center. This agency—now with offices in Washington, D.C.; Houston, Texas; and Baltimore, Maryland—had the seeds of its beginning from one Bahá'í taking leave from her legal firm to come to the aid of a single individual in order to protect her from abuse. Of particular interest in this presentation are the major lessons learned as this organization dealt with

how to integrate the Bahá'í principles into an enterprise where the majority of workers are not Bahá'í. The end result of this process is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to protecting immigrant women and girls from gender-based violence through legal services, advocacy, and public education programs, and which has been recognized by a number of major awards, such as the Goldman Sachs Top 100 Most Intriguing Entrepreneurs, Newsweek Magazine's Top 150 Fearless Women, and the Washington Post Award for Non-Profit Management.

"Some Reflections on the Concept of Law in the Bahá'í Faith," by Roshan Danesh, focuses on expanding and exploring the notion, stated by Bahá'u'lláh Himself at the beginning of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, that He has not so much revealed a "mere code of laws" as He has created a system or mechanism by which laws can be made or changed according to an ever-evolving social dynamic.

The third article, "Abdu'l-Bahá and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution" by Mina Yazdani, concerns the concept of Bahá'í law as it relates to the principle of non-involvement in partisan political issues, even though, as the first article demonstrates, Bahá'ís individually and the Faith as an institution is extremely concerned with justice at every level. In particular this scholarly and extremely well-researched study focuses on whether or not 'Abdu'l-Bahá advocated that

Bahá'ís become involved in the Iranian constitutional revolution and what lessons we can presently derive from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's guidance regarding this historic milestone.

This issue contains two book reviews, for even though it is our intention—as expressed in the previous issue—to have book reviews eventually appear on our new web site, the revised web site itself is not yet completed. The first one is Janet Ruhe-Schoen's review of *Lighting the Western Sky: The Hearst Pilgrimage and the Establishment of the Bahá'í Faith in the West*, by Kathryn Jewett Hogenson. The second is Deborah van den Hoonaard's review of *Life Histories of Bahá'í Women in Canada: Constructing Religious Identity in the Twentieth Century* by Lynn Echevarria. Both reviews are very helpful in stressing for the reader how these works provide insight into the role and importance of women in the advancement of the Bahá'í Faith, particularly in the West. Finally, we include our first poem, "The Divine Springtime," by Shirin Sabri.