

From the Editor's Desk

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THE MIND, THE HEART,
AND THE INFINITE

The two articles in this edition of the *Journal* complement each other in their treatment of two themes: the nature of the Manifestation's engagement with the prior religious Dispensation, and the interplay between mind and heart in the human being's efforts to know and worship God.

On the first theme, each article sheds light on some of the uses Bahá'u'lláh chooses to make of the fruits of the Islamic Dispensation. In "Bahá'u'lláh's 'Long Healing Prayer' (*Lawḥ-i-Anta'l-Káfi*) in light of a Metaphysics of Unity," Dr. Daniel Pschaida explores the ways in which Bahá'u'lláh deploys a central trope in Islam—the divine names—in ways that resonate with, and build upon, the tradition. In "Bahá'u'lláh and the God of Avicenna," Joshua Hall demonstrates how Bahá'u'lláh, speaking from His privileged insight into metaphysical reality, affirms to a remarkable degree the clear-sighted rational theology of the seminal Islamic philosopher Avicenna (Ibn Síná, 980-1037). Each article gives us a glimpse into the method of the Manifestation of God. Moving from a pre-existent condition into a human form, at the historical

moment in which the forces and potential of the previous Dispensation have been fully expressed, the Manifestation selects from amongst the many threads that human minds and hearts have spun out of the Stuff of the prior Revelation. He chooses the most excellent amongst them, and weaves them, together with those new threads sprung from His mind, into a novel, mould-breaking design. The result is a fresh tapestry, an original composition of the Mind of the Manifestation that nonetheless resonates with what has come before. In studying the placement of those older threads in the new tapestry, both articles provide insight into the phenomenon of Progressive Revelation.

The other major link between the two articles is that each, in its own way, illuminates the inextricable interplay of the heart and mind, those two facets of ourselves which we so often hold in tension with each other, but which both exist to strive towards the divine.

Pschaida elaborates on how the device of the divine names has been, and continues to be, a path to knowing the Unknowable. The author flows freely between approaches to his topic, moving from a sober analysis of syllabic counts and historical contexts to a meditative reflection on the relationships between the Names of God. Trust is on display here—trust that when the mind is illumined by the heart, it can uncover some of the innumerable levels of meaning layered within the rhymes and repetitions of the Long Healing Prayer.

With renunciation, not with grammar's rules, one must be armed:
Be nothing, then, and cross this sea unharmed. (Bahá'u'lláh, *The Seven Valleys*, quoting a verse by Rumi)

The reader, likewise, is invited to rely on intuitive insight, the vision that seems to arise when we cease to live in heart or mind alone, but experience them as one, and ourselves as whole.

Hall's exploration subtly follows a similar course, even as it lucidly lays out the intricacies of Avicenna's philosophy. As he iterates the logical consequences of the Necessity of God's existence, Hall shows how the philosopher Avicenna, the rational mind *par excellence*, falls into rhapsody; at some point, the mathematics become music. As we follow the philosopher's reasoning, the profundity of the implications of the descriptions given to God by Bahá'u'lláh is gradually revealed. The reader's mind is led to a fuller appreciation of the significance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's confirmation that Bahá'í theology is apophatic, or negative: the names ascribed to God can only ever tell us what He is not, without hinting at what He is (*Some Answered Questions* 37). A Singleness that is beyond singleness; an Existence, compared to which nothing else exists. To call our being even a shadow of that Being overstates us. The mind's logic points down the path that must end with its own acknowledgment of its incapacity to glimpse this Beyond.

This confession of helplessness which mature contemplation must eventually impel every mind to make is in itself the acme of human understanding, and marketh the culmination of man's development. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 83:4)

Somewhere in the reading—perhaps right at the point where the mind begins to reel as the implications of God's unknowability crystallize—a feeling of awe dawns in the heart. The heart, which can be awed at even a sunset, or a human act of selflessness, awakens to the true possibilities of awe:

Ye shall be hindered from loving Me and souls shall be perturbed as they make mention of Me. For minds cannot grasp Me nor hearts contain Me. (Bahá'u'lláh, *Arabic Hidden Words* 66)

As always, the articles in this issue are complemented by art—that human reaching toward what the mind cannot grasp, nor the heart contain. The cover features a photograph by Shahriar Erfanian, highlighting the minimalist elegance of some corners of the Holy Places. Inside the issue, photographs of a venerable tree at Bahjí accompany Selvi Adaikkalam Zabihi's poem, "Sycamore Fig," which gives voice to the unspoken thoughts of generations of pilgrims who have touched the tree's bark, looked up at its foliage, and thought about "Who may have passed / or paused in its shade."