

# From the Editor's Desk

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We are pleased to present the second of two issues featuring authors who participated in a collaborative writing project, centering on the harmony of science and religion. For further background on the project, please see vol. 33 no. 3 of the *Journal*.

As with the previous papers in this collection, the theme of the social dimension of the generation of knowledge remains central. In “Justly and Without Bias’: Consultation as a Technique for Mitigating Cognitive Biases,” Andres Elvira Espinosa looks at the many and varied systematic shortcuts in our individual cognitive processes that often prevent us from reasoning accurately. Espinosa canvasses a wide range of studies on the kinds of interventions that can mitigate the tendency of cognitive biases to lead us astray, and argues that the components of successful bias mitigation are reflected in the ideal practice of Bahá’í consultation. In correlating scientific research with the revealed tool of consultation, Espinosa opens the path to seeing the inevitable shortcomings of our individual powers of reason not as flaws in the design of the mind or stumbling blocks in our aspiration to be perfectly rational, but as potential spurs impelling us to see rationality as

a collective as much as an individual phenomenon. Indeed, while “[f]irst and foremost among these favors, which the Almighty hath conferred upon man, is the gift of understanding” (Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings XCV), “[t]he maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation” (qtd. in *Consultation* no. 3).

Yet, observers of the Bahá’í community, and at times even Bahá’ís themselves, may understandably feel that the aspiration to “promot[e] the use of consultation for making decisions” in wider society is somewhat naïve (The Universal House of Justice, 30 December 2021)? In “Transformative Dialogue: A Key to Elevating Discourse,” Roger Neyman and Charlotte Wenninger tackle the challenge of the dysfunctional discourse that seems to be proliferating in many social spaces today, and ask how we might establish the basic kinds of relationships—ones rooted in “love and harmony” and “freed from estrangement”—that are necessary for true consultation to occur (qtd. in *Consultation* no. 10). They reconstruct “Transformative Dialogue,” a practical approach grounded in evidence from a wide range of experiences in building constructive relationships for discourse between people predisposed to see each other as “other.” This paper will be a valuable resource for those hoping, in the course of this Nine Year Plan, to deepen their understanding of the bases upon which Bahá’í consultation is built, and to extend them to ever wider and more diverse groups of people.

Finally, in “What Does Spirituality Look Like?” Robert Sarracino addresses a premise of all the papers in this collection: that the fruits of true discourse depend upon the expression of spirituality. This spirituality is not a mere abstract commitment to certain metaphysical truths; it is an approach to our life and work, as individuals, members of communities and institutions, that manifests itself in particular attitudes and practices appropriate to a given social context. Sarracino outlines what some of these attitudes and practices must be today, drawing on guidance in the message dated 30 November 2021 from the Universal House of Justice illuminating the characteristics of “the enkindled souls being raised up through the processes of the Plan” who are learning to apply Bahá'u'lláh's teachings “to the needs of their society.” He then brings us back to the underlying theme of science and religion, making a case for how the social sciences in particular might productively investigate the existence of a spiritual reality in human beings, not by treating this reality as a phenomenon to be directly measured, but by incorporating it as a background assumption whose validity can be progressively evaluated. In both of his central arguments, Sarracino provides a way of thinking about spirituality in eminently practical terms.

As a group, the authors featured in these two issues would like to acknowledge the following people:

We first must thank Michael Sabet, Matthew Weinberg, Nilufar Gordon, and *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* Editorial Committee. They devotedly and insightfully improved each of the papers and ushered the project to completion.

We would also like to thank the generous souls who participated in the Association of Bahá'í Studies workshops reviewing the papers, one held in 2022 at Louhelen Bahá'í Center of Learning and the other in 2023 at the ABS Annual Conference in Atlanta. We thank the Louhelen Center and the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of San Clemente for hosting us during these events.

We are grateful for the foundational learning that occurred through an ABS Science and Religion reading group in 2020 and the Wilmette Institute's Science and Religion reading group in 2020-2021. We thank the Committee for Collaborative Initiatives of the Association for Bahá'í Studies, especially in the person of Todd Smith, who provided crucial leadership.

In this issue, we are also pleased to feature the poem “Gratitude” by Tahereh Pourshafie and, by Janet Ruhe-Schoen, “Amina Speaks: Night,” the endpiece of a series of poems on Táhirih called “Rent Asunder,” that grew out of writing Ruhe-Schoen did during the decade she worked on her book *Rejoice in My Gladness: The Life of Táhirih*. Amina, a woman of deep

culture and education, was Táhirih's mother and mentor; the two were very close. Cover art features, once again, a piece by Alea Morren inspired by concepts of transcendence and spiritual transformation: "Winged Light."



Photo credit: Karim Ghantous