From the Editor's Desk

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The Master Key

The unique status of the Word of God—its nature and influence—is a theme threaded throughout the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. At the highest level, the term seems to be used to describe an ontological reality at the very foundations of creation: "It is the Word of God that standeth supreme over all things. It is the begetter of the world and the educator of its people" (*Additional Tablets*). Simultaneously, the Word's role as "educator" points to both its inextricable association with the Manifestations of God, and to its embodiment, in some sense, in the Revelations that they impart to humanity.

We might conjecture, then, that the very Force responsible for existence itself animates the Revealed Word of the Manifestation. While the precise nature of this relationship must remain mysterious to us, it helps explain the stupendous power attributed to the Word of God as a spiritual and social force in the lives of individuals and communities. In the Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd, Bahá'u'lláh states:

> O friend of mine! The Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable. It hath ever dominated and will continue to dominate the realm of being. The Great Being saith: The Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked. (*Tablets* 173)

The Word's capacity to unlock "the doors of the hearts of men" has clear implications for the responsibility entrusted to the Bahá'í community: "to raise up the Word […] to spread the sacred verses abroad, reveal the splendors, and make the morning's light to dawn in the hearts of the righteous." (ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 203). While Bahá'ís of all backgrounds readily accept the appraisal of Persian and Arabic speakers as to the beauty and power of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb in these original languages, ultimately "[t]hat which is desired of a language is that it convey the intent of the speaker" (Bahá'u'lláh, *Tabernacle* 55). The Word must be cast into a form that allows the hearer to understand its meaning; thus, Bahá'ís have, since the time of ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, been intent on translating their sacred writings into the multitudinous languages of the peoples of the Earth.

In "Translating the Bahá'í Writings into Languages other than English," Craig Alan Volker and Mary Noguchi offer insights from their extensive experience in this vital field of service. Their article both presents a valuable framework for thinking about the

translation work as a whole—reflecting, for instance, on the different roles translations can serve and how these impact the translator's choices—and delves into practical challenges facing the translator. The authors skillfully move from the general features of language that tend to generate these challenges, to a grounded exploration of specific examples, anchored in the practical case study of translating a passage from *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf* into Tok Pisin and Japanese. This article is sure to be of great value to those engaged in the translation work, not only by presenting approaches to specific issues they encounter, but by suggesting ways in which the community of translators can advance its work of bringing the Word of God to the masses of humanity.

In considering the power of the Word of God, it seems clear that attraction to beauty plays some role. In "Turning a Somersault to Land at the Feet of the Báb: The Spiritual Journey of Ross Woodman," Chris Lowry gives us a story of this attraction. Many readers will see something of themselves in his account of Ross Woodman, a prominent Canadian professor of English Literature and member of the first National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Canada, whose richly self-reflective accounts of his journey with faith and with art beautifully illuminate questions that many Bahá'ís encounter on their own paths. Having experienced a profound dream of the Báb after his first encounter with the Bahá'í Faith, Woodman was captivated, and became "a Bahá'í for life" (76). Then, as is the case for every wayfarer who traverses the Valley of Love, the point of arrival became the start of a new journey, one shaped by tensions. On the one hand, Woodman quickly found that sharing his newfound Faith with his students went against "the rules of the game" of academia (74). On the other hand, his ecstatic, aesthetic way of relating to the Faith created challenges in his interaction with the community. Yet even while he made no mention of the Faith in his university teaching, he "was also, on another level, lecturing on the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh" (74); and even during the years in which he withdrew from community life, he grappled with the claim that the Faith—and his dream—made on him**.** Lowry's account shows us a man who, pulled between a professional life that disapproved of overt religiosity, and a young Bahá'í community still at the early stages of learning to accommodate the diverse approaches to understanding an unfathomable Revelation, found a way to make remarkable contributions in both of these worlds, with self-reflective honesty and good humor.

The central theme Lowry explores is the transformational challenge that religion poses to the believer. When the Word penetrates the human heart, it brings it a delight that can take it away from the world, as the Báb Himself beautifully expresses in a prayer:

> Number me, O my God, with those who are privileged to fix

> their gaze upon Thy Beauty and who take such delight therein that they would not exchange a single moment thereof with the sovereignty of the kingdom of heavens and earth or with the entire realm of creation. (*Selections* 216)

Yet delight is not sufficient; the heart, it seems, must transform, and the Word flow back out of it to effect change in the world. In Todd Smith's "Comments on power and authority, historical consciousness, and modes of communication," originally written as the preface to June Manning Thomas' *Planning Progress*, 2nd edition, we find insights into facets of the process of social transformation, rooted in the Revealed Word, that Shoghi Effendi shepherded the Bahá'í community to undertake in its own ranks, and that today, under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, directs itself to the rebuilding of the world. The seed of this expansive process is "divine love, ignited by the Word of God, [and] disseminated by enkindled souls through intimate conversations" (Universal House of Justice, qtd. in Smith 131). Smith shows how this seed is organically connected to the ever-diversifying activities and processes of a growing community, all of which express a vision for humanity's collective future informed by a new historical consciousness, a reconceptualization of power and authority, and a commitment to modes of communication that unite and ennoble. (These themes emerge even more expansively in Manning's book, which is now available in paperback and e-book format).

We are also pleased to present three new book reviews in this issue. Robert Stockman reviews Brendan McNamara's *The Reception of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Britain*; Douglas Perry reviews Bryan Donaldson's *On the Originality of Species: The Convergence of Evolutionary Science and Baha'i Teachings*, and Christopher Buck reviews the new edition of Nader Saiedi's *Logos and Civilization: Spirit, History, and Order in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh***.**

Finally, as a special offering in this issue, we are delighted to include a provisional translation of Bahá'u'lláh's "Mathnaví of the Blessed One," revealed during His stay in Constantinople. In addition to translating the poem, John S. Hatcher, Amrollah Hemmat, and Ehsanollah Hemmat provide a brief introduction to the poem, and helpful annotations on the text.

Works Cited

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