

THE JOURNAL OF BAHÁ'Í STUDIES

La Revue des études bahá'ies/La Revista de estudios bahá'ís

Volume 28, number 1-2

Spring-Summer 2018



A Publication of the Association for Bahá'í Studies—North America

THE JOURNAL OF BAHÁ'Í STUDIES

LA REVUE DES ÉTUDES BAHÁ'ÍES/LA REVISTA DE ESTUDIOS BAHÁ'ÍS

Volume 28 Number 1-2 Spring-Summer 2018

Publications Mail
Registration No. 09448

EDITOR John S. Hatcher

POETRY EDITOR Peter E. Murphy

EDITORIAL COORDINATOR Nilufar Gordon

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE Roshan Danesh, Gwendolyn Etter-Lewis, Mehran Kiai,
Pierre-Yves Mocuais, Mary Sobhani, Bahhaj Tahezadeh

The Journal of Bahá'í Studies (USPS #013-468) is published by the Association for Bahá'í Studies–North America. The views expressed in this Journal are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Editorial Board or Executive Committee of the Association for Bahá'í Studies, or authoritative explications of Bahá'í teachings.

Periodicals postage paid at Champlain, NY, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster: Address changes should be sent to IMS of NY, 100 Walnut St. #3, P.O. Box 1518, Champlain, NY, USA 12919-1518. For details call IMS at 1(800) 428-3003.

Articles in *The Journal of Bahá'í Studies* are available on EBSCO Publishing's aggregated database. This journal is abstracted in *Science of Religion Abstracts*, *Religion Index One: Periodicals*, *Index Islamicus*, and *Index to Book Reviews in Religion*, and catalogued at the Institut de L'Information Scientifique et Technique.

Annual subscription fees (in Canadian funds):

Individual subscriptions: Canada \$50; United States: \$70; International: \$80.

Institutional subscriptions: \$90.

Single copies: \$20/issue.

Details available at <<http://bahai-studies.ca/subscription/>>

Correspondence regarding subscriptions should be addressed to Association for Bahá'í Studies, 34 Copernicus Street, Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7K4 Canada. E-mail: <[abs-na \[at\] bahai-studies.ca](mailto:abs-na@bahai-studies.ca)>. Tel.: 613-233-1903. Address editorial correspondence to <[editor \[at\] bahai-studies.ca](mailto:editor@bahai-studies.ca)>.

Printed in Canada on recycled paper.

ISSN 0838-0430

© Association for Bahá'í Studies 2018. All rights reserved.

French translation: Louise Mailhot and Juliette Goudreau

Spanish translation: Farah Khorsandian-Sanchez

Many articles published in the Journal of Bahá'í Studies allude to the institutions and central figures of the Bahá'í Faith; as an aid for those unfamiliar with the Bahá'í Faith, we include here a succinct summary excerpted from <http://www.bahai.org/beliefs/bahaullah-covenant/>. The reader may also find it helpful to visit the official web site for the worldwide Bahá'í community (www.bahai.org) available in several languages. For article submission guidelines, please visit <http://bahai-studies.ca/the-journal-of-bahai-studies-submission-guidelines/>.

ABOUT THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

The Bahá'í Faith, its followers believe, is “divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men.” The mission of the Bahá'í Faith is “to proclaim that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, that the Founders of all past religions, though different in the non-essential aspects of their teachings, “abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech and proclaim the same Faith” (Shoghi Effendi).

The Bahá'í Faith began with the mission entrusted by God to two Divine Messengers—the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Today, the distinctive unity of the Faith They founded stems from explicit instructions given by Bahá'u'lláh that have assured the continuity of guidance following His passing. This line of succession, referred to as the Covenant, went from Bahá'u'lláh to His Son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and then from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to His grandson, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. A Bahá'í accepts the divine authority of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh and of these appointed successors.

The Báb (1819-1850) is the Herald of the Bahá'í Faith. In the middle of the 19th century, He announced that He was the bearer of a message destined to transform humanity's spiritual life. His mission was to prepare the way for the coming of a second Messenger from God, greater than Himself, who would usher in an age of peace and justice.

Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892)—the “Glory of God”—is the Promised One foretold by the Báb and all of the Divine Messengers of the past. Bahá'u'lláh delivered a new Revelation from God to humanity. Thousands of verses, letters and books flowed from His pen. In His Writings, He outlined a framework for the development of a global civilization which takes into account both the spiritual and material dimensions of human life. For this, He endured 40 years of imprisonment, torture and exile.

In His will, Bahá'u'lláh appointed His oldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), as the authorized interpreter of His teachings and Head of the Faith. Throughout the East and West, 'Abdu'l-Bahá became known as an ambassador of peace, an exemplary human being, and the leading exponent of a new Faith.

Appointed Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi (1897-1957), spent 36 years systematically nurturing the development, deepening the understanding, and strengthening the unity of the Bahá'í community, as it increasingly grew to reflect the diversity of the entire human race.

The development of the Bahá'í Faith worldwide is today guided by the Universal House of Justice (established in 1963). In His book of laws, Bahá'u'lláh instructed the Universal House of Justice to exert a positive influence on the welfare of humankind, promote education, peace and global prosperity, and safeguard human honor and the position of religion.

THE JOURNAL OF BAHÁ'Í STUDIES

LA REVUE DES ÉTUDES BAHÁ'ÍES/LA REVISTA DE ESTUDIOS BAHÁ'ÍS

Volume 28 Number 1-2 Spring-Summer 2018

Contents

- 3 JOHN S. HATCHER From the Editor's Desk
Scholarship and the Bahá'í Vision of Reality
- 7 LAYLI MARIA MIRON Laura Barney's Discipleship to 'Abdu'l-Bahá:
Tracing a Theological Flow from the Middle East to the United States,
1900–1916
- 33 GREGORY C. DAHL New Directions for Economics
- 69 LINDSAY-ROSE DYKEMA Thankful in Adversity: Using Bahá'í Writings and
Benefit Finding to Enhance Understanding and Application of Mental
Health Recovery Principles

Poems

- 32 THERESE YOUNG KIM Arirang Lament
- 68 SHOLEH WOLPÉ Gratitude

93 *Biographical Notes*

Cover: OTTO DONALD ROGERS Wave Landscape

From the Editor's Desk

JOHN S. HATCHER

SCHOLARSHIP AND THE BAHÁ'Í VISION OF REALITY

Scholarship can be usefully defined as the study of reality. It is too early in the evolution of the Bahá'í Faith to think that we can accurately define "Bahá'í scholarship," nor would it be appropriate to designate a discrete group of individuals as "Bahá'í scholars." All Bahá'ís are urged to become "students" of the Bahá'í teachings, texts, and history. Furthermore, the discourses within and among virtually every field of study are of equal interest to Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís alike.

But perhaps we can make a few general observations that might prove helpful in examining the effect of how understanding the various aspects of reality in contemporary fields of study can be enhanced when approached from a Bahá'í perspective. And doubtless the most obvious advantage that a Bahá'í orientation to the study of reality offers is the belief that reality consists of at least two dimensions—the physical and the metaphysical. Of equal importance is the related Bahá'í proposition that these two dimensions interact, and that they do so with an exacting reciprocity. When combined, these two theories may be considered by many as a radical departure from

most contemporary materialist- and relativist-based scholarship.

Also relevant when discussing scholarship from a Bahá'í point of view is the further proposition that the metaphysical dimension is primary in this relationship—that physical reality is purposefully devised by the Creator to mimic the attributes and powers of the metaphysical realm. Allied to this premise is a foundational Bahá'í thesis that the explicit purpose of the physical dimensions is practical spiritual training in preparation for our birth into the next stage of our existence in the realm of the spirit, though such a view does not diminish the inherent value of fashioning an "ever-advancing civilization," the motivating force behind which is spiritual principles.

The tremendous challenge for Bahá'í scholars is thus quite clear—how to assess the effects of this reciprocal relationship at the heart of reality and apply the results of such study to their respective fields of expertise without forcing religious dogma into the examination of what non-Bahá'í scholars often believe to be a strictly material universe governed by laws that concern exclusively physical interactions.

It is in such a context that the scholars who are Bahá'ís must risk disdain or, worse, being ignored if they choose to apply these Bahá'í perspectives to their research and published work. Assuming such work would be accepted by journals in their respective fields, they run the further risk of being categorized as dogmatic rather

than academic, as chauvinistic rather than objective. Such responses might call into question the purely logical methodology of such studies, even if the logic of the discourse is sound.

This issue of the journal is particularly strong in demonstrating how scholars who happen to be Bahá'ís can introduce methods for assessing and sometimes reconceptualizing traditional approaches to their respective academic fields by considering them through a Bahá'í lens that allows them to present innovative insights into the major discourses in their fields of endeavor. By doing so, these authors are making significant headway in bridging the ultimately needless gap between science and religion that for too long has deterred advancement in the underlying verities that in time must emerge in virtually every area of study.

The first of these articles is by Layli Maria Miron, whose field is Rhetoric and Composition. In "Laura Barney's Discipleship to 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Tracing a Theological Flow from the Middle East to the United States, 1900–1916," Miron focuses not so much on the biography of this important figure (who is responsible for the crucial questions and answers in *Some Answered Questions*), but rather on how Barney employed 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings to influence social discourse as she taught the Bahá'í Faith in Europe and the United States. At the heart of Miron's study is an examination of how Barney effected what Miron describes as a "transnational channel of theological

knowledge," which one can discern in evaluating the particular forms of rhetoric Barney utilizes in her writing and teaching.

The second article, Gregory Dahl's "New Directions for Economics," also employs a Bahá'í lens to examine how a foundational principle in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh regarding eliminating the extremes between poverty and wealth has become of increasing global concern. He notes how guidance from the Universal House of Justice in recent years has inspired the Bahá'í community to become involved in the field of economics. For example, Dahl states that there is a confluence of guidance from the House of Justice regarding the need for local communities to be concerned with economic justice and the emerging openness of the profession of economics to "new directions of thought and research." This openness, Dahl observes, was confirmed in part by the demonstrated failure of macroeconomic models in the global recession that followed on the heels of the financial crisis of 2007–08, whereas the application of Bahá'í principles as manifested in microeconomic models demonstrates "the potential for useful contributions both by professional economists inspired by the Bahá'í teachings and by individuals and communities generating knowledge about how spiritual principles can be applied to economic life."

Next, psychiatrist Lyndsay-Rose Dykema's article "Thankful in Adversity: Using Bahá'í Writings and

Benefit Finding to Enhance Understanding and Application of Mental Health Recovery Principles” explicitly applies Bahá’í principles and methodologies to the field of mental health. Specializing in the treatment of individuals with schizophrenia-spectrum disorders, Dykema examines a mental health recovery model that can be constructed by discerning and applying appropriate salutatory spiritual principles to the recovery process. In particular, Dykema examines the applicability of the Bahá’í concept that adversity is virtually essential to most personal growth. She then observes how one can elucidate and apply this same principle of “benefit finding” both to understanding mental health recovery and to expediting this struggle for the patient to work toward “meaningful functional goals.”

We have placed the poem “Gratitude” by Sholeh Wolpé immediately before Dykema’s article because the theme of the poem is so apt to what follows.

We also are pleased to have the first contribution to the journal by Korean poet Therese Young Kim. “Arirang Lament” is inspired by a Korean folk-song, “Arirang,” beloved in both North and the South Korea—the same song that was sung at the opening of the 2018 Winter Olympics. “Arirang Lament” is sublimely touching and cryptic. In that sense, I find in its presentation a similar artistic effect as that of the cover art by Otto Donald Rogers. Titled “Wave Landscape,” Rogers’s painting demonstrates—as

so much of his work does—an evocative yet refined cleanness of style. An abstract painter and sculptor who has attained international repute, Rogers has often noted that much of his work reflects both the Bahá’í notion of unity in diversity and his reflections on the sweeping landscapes of rural Saskatchewan, where he was raised.

In conclusion, then, throughout this issue I think we can find important evidence of how studies of reality (especially the human reality) pursued with a Bahá’í perspective can begin to establish the logical validity of foundational Bahá’í postulates in every field. Of course, first the scholar or artist must possess the daring to venture into this synthesis of physical and metaphysical aspects of existence. Certainly, the recently released work *Religion and Public Discourse in an Age of Transition: Reflections on Bahá’í Practice and Thought* published by Wilfrid Laurier University Press (2018) demonstrates beautifully that scholarly rigor combined with a knowledge of Bahá’í study can contribute significantly to the advancement of the overall knowledge in every arena of scholarly endeavor.

Laura Barney's Discipleship to 'Abdu'l-Bahá: Tracing a Theological Flow from the Middle East to the United States, 1900–1916¹

LAYLI MARIA MIRON

1 A variety of individuals and institutions made this article possible. Tad Bennicoff of the Smithsonian Institution Archives provided me efficient and generous assistance by scanning and sending a number of manuscripts by Laura Barney. Penn State's Center for American Literary Studies funded my travel to the US National Bahá'í Archives, where, thanks to Lewis Walker, I encountered unpublished transcripts of Barney's 1909 speeches. My husband, Sergey Miron, applied his fluency in Russian to reading Isabella Grinevskaya's play *Bab* and synopsis-ing it for me so I could compare it with Barney's *God's Heroes*. Sarvar Dowhower likewise applied her native tongue in interpreting the introduction of the 1908 Persian edition of *Some Answered Questions* for me. Members of Penn State's Department of English, especially Dr. Cheryl Glenn's writing group, and my parents, Nura and Robert Amerson, gave valuable feedback on drafts. I thank all these contributors for helping bring this article to fruition.

Abstract

The discipleship of the young American Laura Clifford Barney to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the early 1900s resulted in a flow of spiritual teachings from East to West. After several years of intense engagement with her teacher in Palestine, Barney sought to disseminate in her Western homelands what she had learned. Her private and public writings demonstrate how she employed 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings in her efforts to influence social discourse by promoting the Bahá'í Faith in Europe and the United States. Examining these teachings and Barney's applications thereof in her rhetoric allows us to witness how a transnational channel of theological knowledge developed.

Résumé

Les années de présence de la jeune Américaine Laura Clifford Barney en tant que disciple de 'Abdu'l Bahá au début des années 1900 a entraîné la dissémination d'enseignements spirituels de l'Orient vers l'Occident. Après plusieurs années d'un engagement intense auprès de son maître en Palestine, Mme Barney s'est employée à propager en Occident les enseignements qu'elle y avait reçus. Ses écrits privés et publics démontrent comment elle a utilisé les enseignements de 'Abdu'l Bahá en vue d'influer sur le discours social en faisant la promotion de la foi baha'ie en Europe et aux États Unis. En examinant ces enseignements et la façon dont Mme Barney les appliquait dans son discours, nous pouvons observer la manière dont un canal transnational de savoir théologique a pu se développer.

Resumen

El discipulado de la joven estadounidense Laura Clifford Barney a 'Abdu'l-Bahá a

principios de los 1900s resultó en un flujo de enseñanzas espirituales desde el Oriente hasta el Occidente. Después de varios años de intenso compromiso con su maestra en Palestina, Barney buscó difundir lo que había aprendido en sus patrias occidentales. Sus escritos públicos y privados demuestran cómo ella empleó las enseñanzas de 'Abdu'l-Bahá en sus esfuerzos por influir el discurso social por medio de la promoción de la Fe Bahá'í en Europa y los Estados Unidos. Examinando estas enseñanzas y las aplicaciones de Barney en su retórica nos permite presenciar cómo se desarrolló un canal transnacional de conocimiento teológico.

The 1893 World Parliament of Religions in Chicago occurred at a uniquely receptive moment for unorthodox views of spirituality, mysticism, and universalism in the West. A widespread search for answers beyond mainstream Christianity had birthed movements in the United States such as Christian Science and Spiritualism. Perceiving degradation in their societies, some Europeans in the Romantic era turned to Asia for spiritual regeneration (Said 115). Syncretic creeds, such as Transcendentalism and Theosophy, incorporated teachings of religions from the Far East—a trend toward universalism that would continue into the next century. Indeed, in this era of colonialism, material resources were not the only imports from Asian territories. Spiritual knowledge crossed borders, too. Many Western Christian missionaries sailed eastward to proselytize, but religious rhetoric also migrated in the other direction,

with evangelists like the Hindu Swami Vivekananda traveling to the West from India (Koppedrayar 7). Some Westerners found in the scriptures of religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Daoism the promise of radical spirituality needed to pull their culture out of its consumerist morass.

At the 1893 World Parliament, Vivekananda spoke to attendees about Hinduism, facilitating the spread of Vedic teachings of the Far East to the West. This same parliament also marked the first recorded mention of the Bahá'í Faith in the United States, which occurred in the closing statement of Reverend Henry Jessup's speech on "The Religious Mission of the English-Speaking Nations." Jessup, a Presbyterian missionary who helped found the American University of Beirut, alluded to Bahá'ís, "who regard all natives as one, and all men as brothers." Unsurprisingly given his missionary purpose, of particular interest to Jessup was the Bahá'í acceptance of Christ and respect for the New Testament.

Today, 125 years after Jessup, Vivekananda, and other religious representatives conferenced in Chicago, intercultural, international, and interfaith collaborations face hostility from nationalistic movements in the United States and Europe. Thus, it is exigent that we study discursive flows of theology from the Middle East to the West. To demonstrate the fruitfulness of such study, I take as a case study the influence of an Iranian exile, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, on an American

expatriate, Laura Clifford Barney. Scholars more often study flows of knowledge from the Western metropolis to “the periphery.” This is not just a flaw of academia. Reflecting historical inequalities, knowledge and theories travel more easily from the Global North to the Global South than vice versa (Thayer 229). This tendency is especially troubling when applied to the Middle East, a region with which the United States has engaged in an endless battle, because perceiving it as a mute container for Western development justifies its exploitation. Nearly forty years after Edward Said’s scathing critique of Western writers processing the Middle East for their own self-aggrandizement, the United States has yet to find the humility needed to enter into productive intellectual engagement with this region (Abu-Lughod 247). Due to my focus on communication, I situate my study in the field of rhetoric, which typically investigates how humans shape public discourse. Viewing religion through the lens of rhetoric renders perceptible the features of social discourse that affect its development. Globalizing our point of view—the challenge for the contemporary study of social discourse—entails shifting “rhetorical studies away from traditional, imperialist perspectives of rhetorical performance and knowledge to a more democratic and more inclusive one that recognizes *transnational constructions of rhetorical enterprises*, not just Western ones” (Royster and Kirsch 111; emphasis added). There have

been significant rhetorical enterprises constructed in the East and translated to the West in recent times, which are obvious to Bahá’ís, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, and other followers of Asian religions residing in the West. Yet, studies of Eastern religious rhetorics (e.g., Lloyd on Hinduism; Stroud on Buddhism; You on Daoism and Confucianism) tend to focus on their influence within Asia rather than on their global circulation (see Wenger for an exception). Little has been done to trace such rhetoric’s infiltration into Western discourse. If scholars overlook these East-to-West flows, we miss an opportunity to explore a rich discourse that often employs words to induce spiritual awakening and the transcendence of materialism, ultimately for civic progress.

The discipleship of Barney to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the earliest years of the twentieth century resulted in one such East-to-West flow. After several years of intense engagement with her teacher, Barney sought to disseminate in her Western homelands what she had learned. Her private and public writings demonstrate how she employed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s teachings—in particular, His teachings about spiritual communication—in her efforts to influence social discourse by promoting the Bahá’í Faith in Europe and the United States. Examining these teachings and Barney’s rhetorical applications thereof allows us to witness how a transnational channel of theological knowledge developed.

A PERSIAN RELIGION MAKES
LANDFALL IN THE UNITED STATES

In the years following that first mention of the Bahá'í Faith on American soil, the new religion began to attract converts there, a development guided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921), son of Bahá'u'lláh and leader of the Bahá'í community. One such convert was Laura Clifford Barney (1879–1974), daughter of the artist Alice Pike Barney and sister of the writer and salonist Natalie Clifford Barney. Laura Barney's deep-seated feminist beliefs and devotion to social causes—commitments she had formed in childhood and developed in adolescence (Jay 2; Rodriguez 63)—resonated with the progressive teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, which include eliminating divisions based on race, religion, and sex. Converting to the Bahá'í Faith around 1900, she became the object of public scrutiny due to her family's prestige in Washington, DC; one newspaper derided her decision as a mere “fad” for Oriental mystique (*Washington Mirror* qtd. in Kling 169). For the majority of her post-conversion life, she lived in the more tolerant environment of Paris, making several extended visits to 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Palestine and occasional global travels.

Barney arguably became 'Abdu'l-Bahá's most prominent Western disciple, working to collect His spiritual guidance and make it accessible to other Westerners. Her most crucial visits to Palestine, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá was imprisoned in the penal colony of Acre

(also spelled 'Akka), occurred between 1904 and 1906. 'Abdu'l-Bahá became her spiritual mentor, and according to one witness of their conversations He “greatly favoured her,” complimenting her zeal by joking, “In the heat of this summer season you should be living in the beautiful mountains of Switzerland in a palace or a mansion. What are you doing in this dilapidated city of 'Akka spending time with us prisoners?” ('Abdu'l-Bahá qtd. in Afroukteh 315). Since 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His family were natives of Iran, they spoke Persian, which Barney learned. At mealtimes she conversed with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, collecting His responses to her queries about diverse religious topics and publishing them in 1908. Barney prepared the Persian volume and the English translation of this collection, titled *al-Núr al-abha fí mufáwádat 'Abd al-Bahá* and *Some Answered Questions*, respectively. This book entered the canon of sacred Bahá'í literature, so Bahá'ís remember Barney primarily for her work as its compiler. After 'Abdu'l-Bahá was released from imprisonment following the Young Turk Revolution, He traveled to Europe and North America to solidify the nascent Bahá'í communities there. Barney and her husband, Hippolyte Dreyfus, supported legs of His European travels by interpreting and hosting talks. Barney assisted with the 1912 publication, as well as the later French edition, of a resulting compilation, *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1911* (Khademi 24).

Barney's discipleship to 'Abdu'l-Bahá is worth studying from a rhetorical perspective for several reasons. The influence of His teachings—a westward flow of knowledge—can be studied in the texts she composed during her early stage of discipleship. These texts, which include speeches and plays, have been nearly forgotten, yet they furnish a unique record of the thoughts and aspirations of a convert to a new religion because she was actively writing during her time of conversion. Thus, Barney's texts serve as a case study of a key moment for the diffusion of a set of spiritual teachings beyond their birthplace in the Middle East. To reveal the foundation of Barney's discipleship, *Some Answered Questions* and *Paris Talks*—explored in the next section—furnish Bahá'í tenets as explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Although these two books do not provide a complete picture of Bahá'í theology, they encapsulate and clarify key objectives of the young religion in a style aimed at an audience hailing from Western Christendom.² At the time of Barney's conversion, few Bahá'í scriptures were available in English, so the guidance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá assumed great weight for her and other Western adherents. It seems safe to surmise that her

involvement in the production of *Some Answered Questions* and *Paris Talks* influenced her religious development. The best instruments for tracing this influence are her own writings from that period, so several sections are devoted to analyzing these works in conjunction with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's rhetorics for spiritual communication.

RHETORICS FOR SPIRITUAL
COMMUNICATION:
THE TALKS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ

Miss Barney said she had met pilgrims from all the countries, all the different stations of life and all the different religions, but she had never seen or heard Abdul-Baha speak exactly the same way to any two persons. By that way He seems to illustrate that beautiful Oriental saying, "that the roads to God are as many as there are souls." And He always takes a person's attitude where they are standing.

—Letter to Corinne True dated
11 July 1909

In calling *Some Answered Questions* and *Paris Talks* 'Abdu'l-Bahá's "rhetorics," I point to their practical purpose: like handbooks of rhetoric, they intend to guide the reader through the process of improving their communication. The communication 'Abdu'l-Bahá recommends is spiritual, concerning both the individual's interactions with the indwelling spirit and with other people. Since these two compilations

² A full overview of Bahá'í spiritual rhetoric would necessarily examine texts by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh too—not to mention their uptake by adherents worldwide who have delivered talks and written books inspired by this scripture—but that is not my purpose here.

cover many of the same themes, I will discuss them together, sampling from a large number of the short talks each contains. In order to detail the teachings in these two collections that Barney likely knew most intimately, this section diverges from the essay's overall focus on transnational flow to pause upon the theme of communication in *Some Answered Questions* and *Paris Talks*. First, I explicate 'Abdu'l-Bahá's concept of the human spirit (i.e., the soul) and its relationship with the Holy Spirit as the bedrock of communication. Next, because humans must acknowledge the spirit as their fundamental identity to attain the ideal orientation to communication, I turn to the basic method of reforming the spirit—the independent search for truth. Finally, I sketch the ultimate social purpose of such reform, which is to move humanity from material community to spiritual communion. Simply put, the soul's necessary evolution toward becoming a catalyst for unity involves recognizing the link between itself and the Holy Spirit, realizing that the Holy Spirit has many manifestations, and becoming freed from self-righteous prejudice and thus gaining the capacity to unite other spirits regardless of superficial differences. Although I narrate this process sequentially in an effort to maintain the pragmatic style of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's guidance, the spirit's evolution, in the Bahá'í perspective, actually is eternally unfolding after physical birth. This section primarily synthesizes 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ontology,

offering a summary of His teachings.³

According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the spirit of the individual is transcendent of time and place and deathless in nature, but it must work to realize its divine nature and overcome its attraction to worldly pleasures. A human being's true nature is the spirit (*Some Answered Questions* 16:3). In a human's earthly life, the spirit associates with a body, but the body is not true existence because the spirit persists and continues to develop after bodily death (chapters 60 and 61). The spirit, with its "power of discovery," distinguishes humankind from animals, which lack eternal souls (48:7). Every human has a spirit, and all enjoy that power of discovery through extrasensory faculties of imagination, thought, comprehension, and memory (56:2). Every spirit seeks the truth (which "has many aspects, but . . . remains always and forever one" [*Paris Talks* 15:9]) and experiences "spiritual longing and perception" (*Paris Talks* 23:7). However, human nature also incorporates animalistic features: the material side desires only things of the material world, while the spiritual side aspires toward God (18:2). Indulging in the brute aspect causes the spiritual errors of humanity; the dual spirit "is capable of both the greatest perfection and the

3 Ontology, the theory of being, has some overlaps with epistemology, the theory of knowledge. For a useful overview of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's epistemology, see Mikhail Sergeev's "Reflections on the Epistemological Views of 'Abdu'l-Bahá."

greatest deficiency" (*Some Answered Questions* 36:5). The spirit is thus *divine* in nature, but the human must work on the spirit for it to become *good*; such development is the purpose of physical existence.

The instrument through which humans sense their connection to God is the spirit. The more progress made toward their development of godly attributes, the clearer this connection becomes. Individual spiritual progress is the only true distinction between one human and another; all physical differences are spiritually irrelevant (*Paris Talks* 40:10). Spiritual maturation cannot occur independently; humans require divine education (*Some Answered Questions* 3:7). The "Holy Spirit" is this instrument of divine guidance, which guides individuals on their spiritual evolution: "Man cannot free himself from the onslaught of vain and selfish desires save through the confirming grace of the Holy Spirit" (19:7). Yet humans might not naturally recognize the presence or need of this divine intermediary. Spirits that perceive their divine nature intuit the existence of the Divine, but others stand in need of persuasion: "when man feels the indwelling spirit, he is in no need of arguments for its existence; but for those who are deprived of the grace of the spirit, it is necessary to set forth external arguments" (2:8). Certainly, humans can experience material success without opening themselves to the Holy Spirit, utilizing the spirit's perceptive powers to investigate phenomenal reality. Perceiving "the divine

mysteries and the heavenly realities," however, requires cooperating with this intermediary (55:5).

Recognizing the necessary reliance on the Holy Spirit does not excuse humans from conducting work on their own spirits. Rather, the two are collaborators, and humans need to make their spirits receptive to the Holy Spirit: "Men should hold in their souls the vision of celestial perfection, and there prepare a dwelling-place for the inexhaustible bounty of the Divine Spirit" (*Paris Talks* 31:10). Preparing this spiritual dwelling place entails developing divine attributes. Raising thoughts toward the divine is a crucial method toward this end, which can be accomplished through inward contemplation and silent meditation (54:8). Indeed, thoughts should be realigned away from the "finite" self: "We must look higher than all earthly thoughts; detach ourselves from every material idea, crave for the things of the spirit; fix our eyes on the everlasting bountiful Mercy of the Almighty" (51:14, 9:27). Concentrating thoughts on the future instead of present problems and on "the unity of mankind" are routes toward such reorientation (53:5, 42:2). Transcendent thoughts like these influence earthly action through a kind of positive contagion: "If you desire with all your heart, friendship with every race on earth, your thought, spiritual and positive, will spread; it will become the desire of others, growing stronger and stronger, until it reaches the minds of all men" (6:11). Indeed, like a virus,

“character [is] highly communicable in the realm of hearts and spirits” (*Some Answered Questions* 57:8)—for better or worse. For this reason, spiritual communication has a significant influence on society. Through the transmission of attributes from spirit to spirit, it can uplift or degrade communities. If people reorient their spirit toward divinity through the careful direction of thoughts, they will form an alliance with the Holy Spirit and, with this collaborator, work more effectively toward social transformation.

A critical method of reforming the spirit posited by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the search for divine truth. Although seeking the truth should constitute a constant practice, it also forms a first step toward spiritual action. This search is the pursuit of the oneness of divine truth and thus the unity of human spirits: “If only men would search out truth, they would find themselves united” (*Paris Talks* 40:8). In one of His talks, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá distilled the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh into eleven principles, beginning with “The Search after Truth,” which mandates the renunciation of all superstition and prejudice:

If five people meet together to seek for truth, they must begin by cutting themselves free from all their own special conditions and renouncing all preconceived ideas. In order to find truth we must give up our prejudices, our own small trivial notions; an open receptive mind is essential. If our chalice

is full of self, there is no room in it for the water of life. The fact that we imagine ourselves to be right and everybody else wrong is the greatest of all obstacles in the path towards unity, and unity is necessary if we would reach truth, for truth is *one*. (41:6)

The most problematic “special conditions” are religious prejudices, arising when any sect boasts that they are “the only guardians of the truth, and that every other religion is composed of errors” (41:2). This prejudice is endemic in members of all the major religions. Jews, Zoroastrians, Buddhists, Christians, and Muslims all suffer the bondage of “tradition and dogma,” depriving themselves of finding truth in other traditions. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá critiques the faulty logic underlying the belief in an exclusive truth: “All contradicting one another, all cannot be true” (41:3). Are all religions false? No; rather, the premise is incorrect, and the corrected enthymeme is, *all religions agree; therefore, they can all be true*.

This universalist tenet relies on the belief that religions all share a fundamental purpose. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá repeatedly stresses in other talks, this purpose is achieving spiritual unification. If, however, religion becomes a cause of division, then its followers have perverted its intent. The tendency of religions to accumulate distinctive rituals and rites disguises the oneness of truth by training adherents to venerate these accretions.

Clergy sometimes contribute to this divisive process by becoming involved in politics when they should instead “endeavor to awaken spiritual aspiration, and strive to enlarge the understanding and knowledge of humanity, to improve morals, and to increase the love for justice” (*Paris Talks* 49:11). Religion is useful insofar as it supports the spirit’s progress toward truth, to which ossified “customs and traditions” are irrelevant (*Some Answered Questions* 14:9), but it can prove detrimental because these “outward practices” distract followers from the “simple, underlying truth” of spiritual oneness (*Paris Talks* 39:13). Similarly, reading scriptures only yields spiritual meaning when conducted “with a clean heart and a pure mind” (16:8). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recognized every “Manifestation” of God—the divine messengers to humanity who arrive in times of spiritual famine—as sharing the same purpose, but He critiqued the followers of the religions they founded for deviating from the original intent.

As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains in “The Search after Truth,” the truth seeker must release all the distracting trappings fastened to religions over the ages. Only then, detached “from the external forms and practices of religion,” will the seeker realize the fundamental agreement of all religions (*Paris Talks* 41:3). The trope of detachment recurs throughout this talk, accentuated through verbs such as “abandon,” “relinquish,” “cut free,” “renounce,” “give up,” and “clear away.” As this trope indicates, the search after

truth depends on discernment. To detect spiritual reality, seekers must use their mind to distinguish the truth from convention: “Unless we make a distinction in our minds between dogma, superstition and prejudice on the one hand, and truth on the other, we cannot succeed” (41:9). Making such a distinction could entail releasing “all that we have previously learned,” potentially even “beginning our education all over again” (41:10). Although this radical departure from comfortable routine might be alarming, the alternative is worse—to remain shackled. Discernment frees the seeker to discover the truth everywhere, finally perceiving “truth in all religions, for truth is in all and truth is one!” (41:11). Aware of this fundamental truth, the seeker’s inward vision effects societal transformation.

Perceiving the oneness of truth—that adherents to all creeds actually pursue the same divine purpose—enables humanity to realize its spiritual oneness. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, although human spirits are individual, they are “mutually connected” and “mutually influence one another” in an “intimate relationship” (*Some Answered Questions* 69:4). While oneness is the spiritual reality, divisive opinions and feelings occlude it (83:3). Indeed, humans have the potential to achieve love for family, nation, race, party, and community of interest—yet, unaided, they cannot accomplish the ultimate step to universal love “for humanity . . . bounded by none of these imperfect, semi-selfish bonds” (*Paris Talks*

9:15). To experience this all-embracing, selfless love, they must recognize the Holy Spirit, for “[n]o worldly power can accomplish the universal love” (9:15). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá elucidates the spiritual nature of oneness thus: “We should rise from the individual to the whole. The [Holy] spirit is as one great ocean and the waves thereof are the souls of men” (28:2). So, to see their unity with other waves, their fellow humans, people must realize their true nature as single waves in a vast ocean. Humans must utilize the Holy Spirit to execute their mission during their physical lifetime—working toward the unification of humanity.

Although this theory resembles that of cosmopolitanism, defined by Martha Nussbaum as the understanding that one’s “primary allegiance is to the community of human beings in the entire world,” it differs in hinging the success of the universalist project on the recognition of the Holy Spirit (3). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s philosophy detailed in this section claims that without recognizing that oneness has a spiritual source, cosmopolites will struggle to transcend the myriad material distinctions between humans in developing their universal love. Nevertheless, most secular cosmopolites and spiritual universalists would likely concur on the necessity of applying their global outlook in their actions.

The ultimate outcome of spiritual realization is active involvement in the life of society. Returning to the nature of the spirit, its progress toward divinity requires both a reorientation

of thought and the expression of this spiritualized thought in action. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, if thoughts are communicated only in words, “these alone are without effect” (*Paris Talks* 9:2). Moreover, “[i]f actions took the place of words, the world’s misery would very soon be changed into comfort” (1:11). Intriguingly, He even suggests that for true Bahá’ís, “speech is not needed” because “patient lives of active service” furnish a convincing example (26:6). To say, “I love all of humanity” while avoiding relationships with people unlike oneself, for example, would not suffice to create social change. Instead of announcing principles without enacting them, people should quietly make efforts in their daily life toward eliminating prejudices and fostering unity. This would more likely result in awakening the spirits around them to their oneness with all other humans, creating a ripple effect of recognition and action. Rhetorical efforts, I argue, constitute a valid form of action when combined with a rhetor’s constant work toward promoting oneness. In short, integrity of ethos matters.

CHANNELING KNOWLEDGE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST TO THE NOVICE WEST

A thing that struck Miss Barney in a most marked way was Abdul-Baha’s absolute wish to make a person understand what He is saying. When she first began to know Persian, her vocabulary was very limited. It was very difficult

for a man of such wonderful scope of language as He had to confine Himself to the few words she knew, but He was perfectly willing to express what He wanted to express in these few little words to get it clear, straight and direct.

—Letter to Corinne True dated
11 July 1909

If one compares the impressive record of public service performed by Barney to her short list of publications, it appears she followed 'Abdu'l-Bahá's directive to prioritize action over words. In the civic sphere, she won acclaim in her lifetime for her humanitarian work and her efforts on behalf of women. For example, she was rewarded for her service to France during World War I—including volunteering with the American Ambulance Corps, the American Red Cross, and the Refugee and Repatriation Service, and helping found a children's hospital (Rodriguez 219)—with induction into the Légion d'Honneur. In the interwar period, she served the League of Nations on its Commission of Intellectual Co-operation. During World War II, she was the convener of the International Council of Women's Peace and Arbitration Committee. After the war, she participated in the United Nation's Economic and Social Council (Giachery 538). She further engaged in civic discourse through public addresses. In 1909, she delivered lectures on her experiences in the Middle East, and later she undertook travels "lecturing on the impelling necessity of a united

world," drawing material from her global experiences (Giachery 535). In 1932, her lecture topics included "The Conference for the Reduction and Limitation of Armaments," "Co-operation of Nations or World Disaster," "Constructive Uses of the Cinematograph and Radio," "Intellectual Co-operation," and "Customs and Ideas of Other Lands" (Flyer)—subjects that demonstrate her globalist values.

Barney was surely consistently creating texts to serve the demands of her various posts, but besides the compilations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks, she published only one other work. This was the script for her play *God's Heroes: A Drama in Five Acts* (1910), printed as a lushly illustrated volume. Her second play, "The Opium Pipe—in the Land of Persia" (1912), was staged but not published. A book-length travel memoir, "From the Peace of the East to the War of the West" (1916), and an undated collection of short stories and poems, "Outlines and Shadows," apparently remained in her private papers. While all these works bear the imprint of her religious beliefs, the speeches she delivered in 1909 provide the most direct evidence of her uptake and diffusion of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's guidance. She delivered these speeches during a period of intense engagement with the talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, after completing *Some Answered Questions* and before assisting with *Paris Talks*. Because of the expository nature of the speeches, which resemble brief memoirs, they most explicitly describe her observations as a disciple. In this

section, I will discuss her speeches; the next section provides an overview of the other works she composed during her early period of discipleship because they disclose her powerful sense of purpose as a writer—a purpose impelled by her spiritual mission.

Barney delivered a series of lectures in the United States in 1909, temporarily returning from her home in Europe and giving talks in New York City and Chicago and perhaps in other cities; a few of these talks were preserved and are held in the US National Bahá'í Archives. Their preservation results from their circulation among the network of early Bahá'ís, indicating that Barney served as a significant conduit of knowledge from Acre to the West. Two speeches delivered on May 16, apparently in New York, were transcribed, passed from friend to friend, and eventually entrusted to an archive.⁴ According to a note on the first page, the transcript was given to one “L. C. Sweden by Julia Grundy October 1933”⁵; eventually it ended up with the papers of Frank Osborne (both Grundy and Osborne were American Bahá'ís). The scribe indicates that these speeches were

4 The second speech was recorded at “Lockwood Academy,” presumably the small school in Brooklyn, New York, operating from approximately 1870 to 1926 (Spellen).

5 This note’s handwriting differs markedly from the more legible cursive of the speech transcripts. Due to the note-writer’s penmanship, the name before “Julia Grundy” is difficult to distinguish, so “L. C. Sweden” is a guess.

among “Miss Barney’s First Talks” (1)—implying that she delivered others.⁶ According to a letter addressed to the prominent Bahá'í Corinne True, Barney arrived in Chicago on July 8 and immediately commenced giving talks. The unnamed writer attended one talk by Barney that day, which she or he summarizes in the letter, beginning with the following reflection:

It was suggested that Miss Barney tell us about Abdul-Baha and Acca and she complied with the request most beautifully. She is a very fine speaker and spoke with much earnestness and power. She has a fine intellect and is without a doubt a powerful instrument in this great Cause. There is a great work for her to do and she is doing it. She has a broad view of the Revelation and is practical, sensible—not emotional. (Letter to Corinne True dated 11 July 1909, 1–2)

From this description of Barney, the inference can be drawn that she took seriously her responsibility to convey ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s spiritual guidance to her compatriots. The letter, which is typewritten, appears to have been designed for distribution beyond its stated recipient, given its dittoed appearance and lack of signature. Again, this indicates that Barney’s

6 The scribe could have been Julia Grundy, an early American Bahá'í; in any case, the notes were certainly not written by Barney—her sharply italic handwriting is distinctive.

talks circulated beyond the confines of her original listeners.

In the summary of the July 8 speech and the fuller transcriptions of the May 16 speeches, the freshness of Barney's contact with 'Abdu'l-Bahá is apparent. She relates various anecdotes of His friendliness toward all in Acre—especially to those who spurned Him, including everyone from governors to nuns—and provides her own observations. These observations come across more completely in the May 16 speeches; it appears the scribe attempted to record Barney's original words, and it is from this transcript of talks that the following quotations are drawn. Barney's introductory remarks indicate that she was addressing audiences of Bahá'ís and their friends—listeners who already “know much of the Bahá'í cause” (9). In the first talk, Barney reflects on her 1906 visit to Persia; in the second talk, she describes 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

In the first talk, Barney praises the Bahá'ís of the Middle East, who have, she contends, undergone a spiritual revolution because of their adherence to the young religion. After she came to Acre, she explains, 'Abdu'l-Bahá observed that she had much to learn about the Bahá'í Faith, and “little by little [she] received a fuller realization of his teachings” (1). Apparently, part of her education involved becoming “familiar with the past and existing conditions of Persia” in preparation for visiting that country, where 'Abdu'l-Bahá hoped she would “see how the love of Bahá'u'lláh had enkindled the hearts of men” (1). So, her visit to Persia, which had the

largest and oldest Bahá'í community, would permit an empirical study of the spiritual transformation wrought by the religion. According to her talk, her trip served its intended purpose. She felt moved by visiting the sites of her religion's early development, including sites associated with prominent figures, such as the “sacred ground” of the Báb's martyrdom in Tabriz and the birthplace of His apostle Táhirih in Qazvin (6). Reflecting on another martyr, she remarked, “The lesson teaches us the reasoning of the minds of these simple people, how they are filled with spiritual illumination” (4). Although her comment on “simple people” could smack of condescension, her attitude toward working-class Persians is primarily admiring:

It was also wonderful to find these people so advanced in the great economical and ethical questions of the present day. Such as universal Peace and other social problems which proves that they are more advanced than we are in social conditions. This proves how great the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh [are] to them to turn these people into true philosophers and religious men. (6)

She finds Persian Bahá'ís “more advanced” than Westerners—progress she credits to the universalistic orientation promoted by their religion. After she and her fellow travelers return to “our home Acca” and debrief on the visit with 'Abdu'l-Bahá (7),

Barney asks Him when the United States would become like Persia and when there would be world peace. He responds that it would happen when people of West and East unite, which will occur “when love and unity is established in the hearts of the People” (8). As Barney’s question reveals, she views Persia as the United States’ superior—even role model—in spiritual advancement.

While Barney’s vision of Persian Bahá’ís might seem naively utopian, she does acknowledge some special challenges in the region. When she visited Ashgabat (in what is now Turkmenistan), she observed that the women of the community did not participate much in public affairs: “The Persian women have had very little opportunity to understand the principles of our day” (2). Barney makes a comment that she repeats later in the talk about the pragmatism of the Bahá’í Faith, through which “we are not only practical but spiritual,” and then describes how she “asked the men to have a real large meeting at the Temple to have their wives and daughters and children attend” (2). They obliged, and of the ensuing meeting she says, “I will never forget the love witnessed there” (2). Because this transcript sometimes lacks transitions, some guesswork must be done to piece together her reasoning: What is the connection between her advocacy of spiritual practicality and her decision to intervene in the Ashgabat community? Taken together, the two comments imply that her request for gender mixing

represents a practical application of a Bahá’í spiritual principle—in this case, the equality of women and men. In a similarly abrupt digression later in the talk, she remarks, “I am now beginning to realize the wonderful love that Abdul Bahá reflects for humanity” (5). Was this statement an unplanned outburst of devotion? That this statement is found in her memoir of her journey to Persia suggests that Barney’s interactions with the Persian community enabled her to perceive ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s universal love—a model of the kind of love He asked Bahá’ís to cultivate.

Such an inference would align with the warm observations of her teacher related in the second talk, in which she places herself more in the background because, as she says, “It is not what I think, [that] is of much importance but what I saw” (9). Bahá’ís understand ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as exemplifying ideal conduct; this concept arises in Barney’s speech, as she explains that Acre serves as a spiritual nexus “owing to the Example set by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s life which radiates to all Bahá’í centers in all parts of the world” (9). As He shows qualities including “toleration and vigilance,” so should the Bahá’ís “be tolerant to all mankind and vigilant not to harm” (14). His followers reflect His qualities, as “He seems to focus all that is in us so that we are a mirror to him” (11). According to the letter passages used as epigraphs above, in her July 8 speech, Barney explains how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá accommodates His speech to each listener—a point she also makes in this May 16

talk. It seems that in modeling universal love, He draws attention to the significance of caring for diverse individual needs, particularly in spiritual communication:

When he is about to answer a question he is calm and meditative, and seems to be looking out on nature. He seems to forget your presence, and by and by when he answers all that which seemed difficult [for] you to comprehend becomes easy to understand. All mysteries are imparted unto you. (13)

Yet, despite this illumination, other meanings remain “for you to investigate and discover” (13). He advises His followers “to reflect deeply and all meanings will become clear” (13). It appears that even in receiving His messages, His followers still must search after truth to arrive at spiritual comprehension. Perhaps ‘Abdu’l-Bahá frames His responses inconclusively to train His interlocutors to consistently investigate, rather than unthinkingly accept, messages—even those from a revered source.

Returning to the concept of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s universal love, Barney explains that although His love is given to everyone, it is still the duty of the individual to accept it. If individuals disconnect themselves from divine love, then they become stagnant like still water; instead, they must keep the channel open, to “be connected with God and always fill that Connection

and then we will always be attuned with the infinite” (12). This simile of ocean, channel, and pools was apparently a favorite trope, as Barney used it also in the July 8 talk. Growing in spiritual love will enable the Bahá’í community to develop, continuing to find unity in diversity. “Not only [in Acre] do we feel that bond of unity. It is everywhere we meet the Bahá’ís. They are all connected with one another and like one great happy family. This bond of sympathy creates beautiful actions” (14), Barney comments, reflecting on the diverse backgrounds of Bahá’ís.

In these speeches, Barney depicted her experiences in the Middle East through the lens of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s guidance on spirituality. His teachings on the divinity of the spirit, the need for divine education to guide the spirit, and the impetus provided by such education toward universal love are markedly apparent in her addresses, which underscore the oneness of the multicultural community convening around the spiritual teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. Moreover, by addressing American Bahá’ís—in 1909, still a very young community struggling to organize itself and to fulfill the religion’s teachings on racial and gender equality—Barney propelled the circulation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s guidance into the West, as she had already done through her work compiling and preparing the English translation of *Some Answered Questions*, published the previous year. Her encomia to her Middle Eastern coreligionists furnished a role model

for the American converts, demonstrating to them that achieving similar progress is indeed possible, pending reforms that would promote love, unity, and transnational collaboration. As she noted in the July 8 talk, “The Orientals have such a strong love for us. They look upon us as younger children” (6). If these younger siblings—Western converts—imitated the Middle Eastern Bahá'ís, apparently more practiced at spiritual discernment and connecting with the Holy Spirit, they could mature spiritually. Although Barney was typically ensconced in Paris, she kept Persia consistently at the forefront of her texts, both rhetorical and literary, reaffirming her admiration of its Bahá'í minority.

SOCIAL REFORM RHETORIC:
“BRINGING PEACE AND HOPE TO
EXPECTANT HUMANITY”

The year after her United States lectures, Barney published her first play, *God's Heroes*, with a clear purpose—to broadcast the news of spiritual revolution. This drama and “The Opium Pipe” are openly didactic, seeking to inspire the audience to search after truth. *God's Heroes* attempts to awaken readers to the new revelation, while “The Opium Pipe” evinces concern for addiction. Barney had a history with performing arts; she had studied dramatic arts, as well as sculpture, in Paris, and occasionally participated in shows orchestrated by her mother. *God's Heroes*, which portrays episodes from 1848 to 1852 in the life of

Táhirih, was presumably inspired by a similar play, Isabella Grinevskaya's *Bab: A Dramatic Poem of the History of Persia* (1903), first performed in Russia in 1904.⁷ This play was translated into French (Hassall 6), and it is possible that Barney encountered the translation. *God's Heroes* was published in London and Philadelphia, but I have found no evidence that it was staged, although it had a readership for a number of decades.⁸ Neverthe-

7 The inspiration of *God's Heroes* emanates from Persia in 1844, the year when a young man named Siyyid 'Alí-Muhammad, titled “the Báb,” claimed that He had brought a new revelation from God. He attracted followers among Shia Muslims, including a woman, Fátimih Barágháni (c. 1814–52), who came to be known by the titles Qurratu'l-'Ayn and Táhirih. This poet and theologian zealously advocated the Báb's cause and gained notoriety for her “heretical” act of publicly appearing unveiled in 1848.

8 Some evidence for the play's circulation comes from Martha Root, who twice cites *God's Heroes*, “the beautiful drama,” in her 1938 biography of Táhirih (83). She relates her interaction with a German scholar who requested a loan of the play and was “delighted” with it (84). While this reception history is admittedly meager, it indicates that Barney's play had a readership for at least a few decades after its publication. In fact, the play appears to have been translated into Persian and published in Iran in 1977 as *Daliran-i Rabbani* (“Those Possessed of Divine Courage”), testifying to its staying power and its international appeal.

less, Barney's purpose was explicitly evangelical—to convey “a glimpse of Eastern glory, and to awaken your interest in this great movement, the universal religion—Baháism, which is today bringing peace and hope to expectant humanity” (*God's Heroes* viii). In the preface, she tries to whet her readers' thirst for spiritual knowledge, encouraging them to assume the role of “heroic investigator” over “reader of little patience” (v). For the latter, she synthesizes her objective, enticing them to keep reading by underscoring the superlative nature of her subject: “this work portrays but a fragment of one of *the most dramatic periods* in history, and is but a limited presentation of *the most vast philosophy* yet known to man” (v; emphasis added).

It is worth lingering on the preface, because here Barney explains her choice of drama as the instrument for awakening. Theater, “a mighty instrument for spreading ideas broadcast,” is a uniquely effective tool for bringing “before the public some of the most inspiring events of our epoch” (*God's Heroes* vi). Therefore, she decided, “the wave of regeneration, which is sweeping over the world, should take form also on the stage” (vi). Looking back to antiquity, she explains that two types of theater have coexisted since then—sacred theater and theater of passions. She favors sacred theater of the sort that “contributes . . . to the moral development of society,” although today the latter predominates, irresponsibly prettifying vice (v). Conversely, she aims to hold up “the mirror of truth”

to the onlookers to stir them into seeing the truth of human faults (vi). She praises playwrights, who serve as “true psychologists” and “genuine moralists” (vi). The audience should relate to her drama (despite cultural difference) because of a uniting spiritual impetus: the characters' “aspirations . . . are of all ages and of all lands” (vi). Táhirih “stands forth in history as an example of what the disciple of truth can accomplish despite hampering custom and violent persecution”: she embodies the search for truth, with the play depicting her defying family and religious mores to support a new message from God (viii). The play's preface thus constitutes an invitation to transformation: to mirror the characters like Táhirih who threw away social convention—and ultimately life—in pursuit of transcendent truth.

There are, however, states that might feel like transcendence but contain no spiritual truth—states like intoxication, which Barney decries in “The Opium Pipe.” The drug-related death of her sister's former lover Renée Vivien may have provoked Barney into writing this play (Kling 244).⁹ Staged in 1915 to an enthusi-

9 The Barney sisters, Laura and Natalie, lived near each other in Paris for decades, with Laura's home at 74 rue Raynouard and Natalie's at 20 rue Jacob. Similarly modern blood flowed through their veins, driving them both to spurn convention: Laura in her embrace of feminism and the Bahá'í Faith, Natalie in her devotion to lesbianism and a Sapphic ethos. They share a headstone in their adopted hometown's Passy Cemetery.

astic reception in Washington, DC, the drama traces a Persian king succumbing to drug addiction and its fatal consequences for his marriage and sovereignty (Kling 246–47). After the king starts using opium, he adheres to an intense individualism in which he chases desires, sweeping duties aside and declaring, “Seek not the illusive, beware of idealism. . . . Grasp life in its fullness” (“Opium” 5). He falls in love with “the world of the senses” and believes he merely obeys the “decree of Fate” (16). At the end of the play, following his wife’s suicide, he rejects his addiction, throwing his pipe down and proclaiming, “I know now whither my unbridled senses can lead me; through the fumes of opium I have seen my vanquished self” (32). Sensuality, he finally realizes, brought transient pleasure and lasting failure. The play’s message seems simple: substance use demoralizes even the most powerful. It is easy to overlook Barney’s nuanced diagnosis of the spiritual etiology of addiction. There is, first, the spiritual sterility of the king’s treacherous regent, who induces him into using opium: a social illness ensnares the victim. Once he is trapped, the king’s animal nature seals his fate, relishing its release: “It is natural; in the opium den he met his lower self, and his lower self pleased him; and when man is pleased, conscience may go a begging, and never gratification will it receive to keep it alive” (12). With the lower spirit unleashed and fed, the higher spirit wilts. Barney’s analysis hearkens directly to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s teachings

about the dual nature of the human spirit and the abhorrent results of letting the animalistic element lead.

Barney’s moralistic plays attempt to guide the audience toward the principles expounded by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. *God’s Heroes* is clearly evangelical in intent, but even “The Opium Pipe,” which never explicitly mentions the Bahá’í Faith, expresses certain teachings found in *Some Answered Questions* and *Paris Talks*. Although her plays never seem to have reached as massive an audience as she hoped, they still influenced some readers and viewers, extending the scope of her work as a disciple to reach audiences ranging from Washington theatergoers to a German scholar. Her choice to dramatize her spiritual beliefs indicates that she viewed theater as an effective medium for conveying a message to a receptive audience—indeed, she says as much in the preface to *God’s Heroes*. But what would make a theater audience particularly receptive—and what were they to receive, besides entertainment and perhaps intercultural empathy with the Persian characters?

Barney’s plays also seek to attune the viewers to the Holy Spirit by inducing contemplation. Recall that in *Paris Talks*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes meditation as a method for raising thoughts toward the divine, thus preparing the human spirit to host the Holy Spirit. In the talk in which He describes such contemplation, delivered in London in 1913, He opens with the story of a mystical congregation in Iran, “who gathered together for silent

communion with the Almighty" (*Paris Talks* 54:1). At these silent gatherings, "their leader opens with a certain proposition, and says to the assembly 'You must meditate on this problem'" (54:3). Turning themselves toward the Holy Spirit, the meditators seek and receive the solution to the spiritual question at hand. Concluding the story, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that meditation must be done without speaking aloud because "while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit" and "you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed" (54:9). Moreover, this communion is not only internal but also involves receiving the Holy Spirit's inspiration: "Through the faculty of meditation man attains to eternal life; through it he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit—the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and meditation" (54:11). 'Abdu'l-Bahá compares meditative reflection to a mirror, which spirits should keep "rightly directed—turning it to the heavenly Sun and not to earthly objects" (54:19). A mirror metaphor also appears in Barney's preface to *God's Heroes*. Commenting on the moral lessons taught by drama, she writes, "[W]hen the mirror of truth is held before the gaze, he is blind indeed who can turn away uninfluenced by the sight of a disorderly reflection" (*God's Heroes* vi). In her plays, Barney tries to stimulate reflection in the audience. Empathizing with the characters onstage, the theatergoers would be prompted to examine their

own spirits for resemblances. Barney envisioned theater as mystical, harkening back to Greek drama staged "in antiquity at the foot of the altar of the Gods, whose will was there shown forth to mortals in sacred performances" (*God's Heroes* v). She connects this ancient drama to Christian mystery plays, thus constructing a lineage of sacred theater—to which she affixes herself. Admittedly, the sensory intake of viewing a play does not allow for the silence 'Abdu'l-Bahá advises for meditation. However, the theatergoers are unspeaking, provided by the play with a prompt to consider spiritual dilemmas rather than their daily affairs. Thus, I suggest that Barney positions herself as the meditation leader in a mystical circle of theatergoers, leading them gradually into opening their spirits to the Holy Spirit.

BARNEY AS TESTAMENT TO
RELIGION'S TRANSNATIONAL
PERSUASIVE POTENTIAL

Women must make the greatest effort to acquire spiritual power and to increase in the virtue of wisdom and holiness until their enlightenment and striving succeeds in bringing about the unity of mankind.

—'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*

There is no better evidence of the effect of Barney's spiritual investigations than her own testimony. Turning to Barney's experiences aligns with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's firm emphasis on the

importance of *living* the message, not just speaking it. So, in this final section, I examine Barney more closely, employing her memoir, titled “From the Peace of the East to the War of the West,” which documents a journey from New York to East Asia that she undertook with Hippolyte in 1914 and her experience with the outbreak of World War I that year. Her purpose in composing the memoir, beyond preserving her memories, is unstated; it was never published.¹⁰ Perhaps freed by its private nature, Barney reveals her opinions and reactions, permitting some insight into the way she viewed the world.

The desire to travel permeates the manuscript, as she reflects on her attraction to diverse countries. In the foreword, she writes:

Can one really know any man?
Can one really know any country?
I am drawn to nations as others
are attracted to individual beings.
I find them complex, both lovable
and imperfect, and I am made to
realize that alone an intermingling
of certain racial customs,
of certain social aspirations can
form a civilization worthy of life
and of the genius of man. (“From
the Peace” 3)

Although she does not mention religion here, the relinquishment

10 Copies of this memoir are held by both the Smithsonian Institution Archives and the Bibliothèque Baha'ie de France.

of divisive prejudice advocated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seems to motivate her approval of “intermingling.” This is not to say that Barney had ascended above all prejudice; her memoir occasionally reflects prevalent stereotypes, and sometimes the foreignness of her surroundings overwhelms her, as in a noisy Chinese city when she longs to escape “this strangeness” (99). Overall, though, her memoir demonstrates her enjoyment of travel: “What is this craving for distant lands which urges me away from the known and the loved?” (12). She asserts that tourism that fails to spend time in a locality lacks purpose, critiquing several Western travelers for their attitude toward seeing Japan and China, wondering, “Why . . . had they left their homes at all?” (30). To have a valid experience, “one must live on the soil to hear the voice of Japan. . . . listen to all these sounds foreign to your ear, and rejoice in your experience” and “linger on, become absorbed by the mysterious influence of the threefold walled city [of Peking]” (31, 71). She proclaims, “Let every man who feels cramped individually stretch out, let the globe be his home” (112). Moreover, she celebrates the unifying benefits of international travel, praising, for instance, an arrangement to have Chinese students study in the United States. As she asks a Chinese interlocutor, “Don’t you think that intercourse between nations brings understanding?” (73). (Little surprise that she later served with the League of Nations and the United Nations.)

As much as her memoir is an encomium to the beauty of unfamiliar locales and cultures, it is also a critique of human folly, taking Western society as its primary target. Even before her chapter on World War I—the most condemnatory section of the manuscript—she comments on the misplaced egotism of warfare. Visiting Mexico during its civil war, she contemplates the peasants willingly going to fight, reflecting, “[T]hey do not know that brains, and not gunpowder, can best solve national and interstate problems” (8). She also reproaches Western powers for the imperialism she witnesses from Hawai‘i to China, repeatedly pointing out the irony of calling colonialism “civilization” given its deleterious social effects such as industrial thralldom and addiction (20, 22, 74, 52, 77). Denouncing the cupidity of factories in Osaka, she laments that Japan “is invaded by our [Western] social and economic difficulties” (50). Missionary work to her seems hypocritical; Christians have not demonstrated their spirituality in their imperial actions, and she commends the Chinese person who, confronted by competing sects, “does not take the trouble to decide” (89). Commenting on concessions China made to compensate for missionaries’ murders, she notes sarcastically, “No wonder that Christian countries encourage foreign missions; they are certain of material success, even if they fail in spiritual results” (100). To discomfit a French “bigot,” Barney declares, “I had lived long in Islamite countries,

and . . . loved them best where the missionaries were excluded” (126). She repeatedly identifies hypocrisy in Westerners who claim to be religious and civilizing.

Barney brooks no ethnocentrism or religious bigotry; she critiques people who lack the desire to “know”—presumably, to know the truth—observing that “few people know, and even fewer care to know!” (“From the Peace” 11). In her chapter titled “Turning Backwards,” her disgust with the ills of Western civilization bursts forth as she recounts her journey to France to aid its defense efforts by nursing soldiers. The chapter churns with her revulsion at the absurdity of the war—how it artificially generates “irreconcilable enemies” by nationality (105–06); how “flesh and nerves were given as targets to copper and steel” (117); how merely at “the lifting of an imperial degenerate shriveled little arm . . . these millions of splendid beings are being crippled and killed!” (120); how massacres result from “the willful work of man!” (122); how “the many have to suffer for the criminality of the few” (125); and how “our civilization has been too sluggish to find a peaceful solution to national problems” (128). Her litany of woes for her adopted homeland and anger at the aggressors demonstrates that although she abhorred the injustices of Western powers, she did not reject fellowship with her compatriots; rather, she embraced it, throwing herself into the French war effort—though she could have waited out the war in the United States.

Barney's meditation in this memoir on establishing peace demonstrates her effort to apply the teachings she learned from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the current situation, because her proposal for social reform conforms closely to His guidance on spirituality. She perceives the war as a blight with spiritual causes, such as selfish leaders manipulating people's lower natures into antagonism: "There is no such reality as 'race hatred'; it is a fabrication made and exploited by the vampires of greed" ("From the Peace" 125). Quoting Woodrow Wilson's 1914 plea to pray for European peace, she remarks that, facing such madness, "a greater power was needed to check oppression, to stay suffering" (113). This comment on the needed "greater power" aligns with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's admonition that only in collaboration with the Holy Spirit can humanity experience universal love. Moreover, her valuation of women's role in peacemaking conforms with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's praise for the spiritual qualities of women (e.g., "She is more tenderhearted, more receptive, her intuition is more intense" [*Paris Talks* 50:6]). Barney comments frequently on the maternal, life-giving nature of women, with proclamations such as, "Can not woman, who brings forth life, exterminate war? . . . let her join in directing the affairs of State" ("From the Peace" 8). In her conclusion, she appeals to soldiers, asking them to help heal society, establish "obligatory arbitration," and collaborate with women: "Let women have the stimulus of responsibility, let her influence spread beyond the family circle, beyond

the town, beyond the country, into the whole world!" (130). Her support for women's leadership echoes her choice to place Táhirih at the center of *God's Heroes*. The peacemaking proposals she lays out in her memoir—written as she labored to defend France—indicate her active application of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings to civic life in both her intellectual and physical contributions.

In the speeches Barney delivered several years earlier, she presents herself as a woman learning about the world, both phenomenal and spiritual, from Middle Eastern coreligionists, especially from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Through her plays, she demonstrates her desire to spread what she learned as a disciple to wide audiences in need of spiritual growth. Her memoir portrays an active woman still learning, shocked by the violence of her fellow humans but confident that the solution to social ills would come through spiritual transformation. I have employed Barney as a case study because her texts shed light on the transmission of concepts from one continent to another—demonstrating in particular how religious belief can activate and facilitate transnational flows in directions that might be unexpected and certainly are underrepresented in existing scholarship. Barney is just one Western disciple in one Eastern religion. Much work remains to be done to trace the purposeful diffusion of universalistic concepts through rhetorical discipleship.

WORKS CITED

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *al-Núr al-abha fí mufáwádat 'Abd al-Bahá: Table Talks*. Compiled by Laura Clifford Barney, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., Ltd., 1908. *HathiTrust.org*, <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009035006>. Accessed 1 Apr. 2016.
- . *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1911*. Unity Press, 1912. *Bahá'í Reference Library*, <http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/paris-talks/>. Accessed 1 Mar. 2017.
- . *Some Answered Questions: Collected and Translated from the Persian by Laura Clifford Barney*. 2nd ed., Bahá'í World Centre, 2014. *Bahá'í Reference Library*, <http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/abdul-baha/some-answered-questions/>. Accessed 1 Mar. 2017.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Orientalism and Middle East Feminist Studies." *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, edited by Carole R. McCann and Seung-Kyung Kim, Routledge, 2017, pp. 245–53.
- Afroukhteh, Youness. *Memories of Nine Years in Akka*. Translated by Riaz Masrour, George Ronald, 1952. *Bahá'í Library Online*, http://bahai-library.com/afroukhteh_nine_years_akka. Accessed 1 Mar. 2017.
- Barney, Laura Clifford. "From the Peace of the East to the War of the West." 1916. TS. Record Unit 7473, Box 30, Folder 2. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, DC. Accessed 22 Apr. 2016.
- . *God's Heroes: A Drama in Five Acts*. Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, & Co., Ltd., and J. B. Lippincott Company, 1910. *Archive.org*, <http://archive.org/details/godsheroesdramai00barn>. Accessed 1 Apr. 2016.
- . "The Opium Pipe in the Land of Persia." 1912. TS. Record Unit 7473, Box 10, Folder 3. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, DC. 26 Feb. 2016.
- . "Outlines and Shadows." TS. Record Unit 7473, Box 30, Folder 3. Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, DC. Accessed 23 Feb. 2016.
- . Transcript of talks. 16 May 1909. MS. Frank Osborne Papers, M-453, Box 1, Folder "Talks: Laura Dreyfus-Barney." National Bahá'í Archives of the United States, Wilmette, IL. Accessed 21 Jul. 2016.
- Flyer. 1932. Bosch Papers, M-289, Box 12, Folder "Literary—Subject File: Laura Dreyfus-Barney." National Bahá'í Archives of the United States, Wilmette, IL. Accessed 20 Jul. 2016.
- Giachery, Ugo. "In Memoriam: Laura Clifford Dreyfus-Barney." *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 16, compiled on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'í World Centre, 1978, pp. 535–38. *Bahá'í Library Online*, http://bahai-library.com/uhj_bahai_world_16. Accessed 1 Apr. 2016.
- Grinevskaya, Isabella. Баб: Драматическая поэма из истории Персии в 5 действиях и 6 картинах [*Bab: A Dramatic Poem of the History of Persia*

- in Five Acts and Six Parts*]. 2nd ed., ImWerden, 2007. *Imwerden.de*, http://imwerden.de/pdf/grinevskaya_bab.pdf. Accessed 1 Apr. 2016.
- Hassall, Graham. "Notes on the Babi and Bahá'í Religions in Russia and Its Territories." *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1993, pp. 1–26, <https://bahai-studies.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/5.3-Hassall.pdf>. Accessed 1 Apr. 2016.
- Jay, Karla. *The Amazon and the Page: Natalie Clifford Barney and Renée Vivien*. Indiana UP, 1988.
- Jessup, Henry. "The Religious Mission of the English-Speaking Nations." *Neely's History of the Parliament of Religions and Religious Congresses of the World's Columbian Exposition*, by F. Tennyson Neely, 1894, pp. 637–41. *Bahá'í Library Online*, http://bahai-library.com/jessup_neelys_history_religions. Accessed 1 Mar. 2017.
- Khademi, Mona. "Laura Dreyfus-Barney and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Visit to the West." *Abdu'l-Bahá's Journey West*, edited by Negar Mottahedeh, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, pp. 15–38.
- Kling, Jean L. *Alice Pike Barney: Her Life and Art*. National Museum of American Art in association with Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994.
- Koppedrayar, Kay. "Hybrid Constructions: Swami Vivekananda's Presentation of Hinduism at the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893." *Religious Studies and Theology*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2007, pp. 6–34.
- Letter to Corinne True. TS. 11 July 1909. Gertrude Buikema Papers, M-296, Box 7, Folder "Subject Files: Laura Dreyfus-Barney." National Bahá'í Archives of the United States, Wilmette, IL. Accessed 21 Jul. 2016.
- Lloyd, Keith. "Culture and Rhetorical Patterns: Mining the Rich Relations Between Aristotle's Enthymeme and Example and India's Nyáya Method." *Rhetorica: A Journal of the History of Rhetoric*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2011, pp. 76–105.
- Nussbaum, Martha. "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism." *Boston Review*, vol. 19, no. 5, 1994, pp. 3–6.
- Rodriguez, Suzanne. *Wild Heart, A Life: Natalie Clifford Barney's Journey from Victorian American to Belle Époque Paris*. Ecco, 2002.
- Root, Martha L. *Táhirih, the Pure, Irán's Greatest Woman*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Pakistan, 1938.
- Royster, Jacqueline Jones, and Gesa E. Kirsch. *Feminist Rhetorical Practices: New Horizons for Rhetoric, Composition, and Literacy Studies*. Southern Illinois UP, 2012.
- Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. Anniversary ed., Vintage, 2003.
- Sergeev, Mikhail. "Reflections on the Epistemological Views of 'Abdu'l-Bahá." *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1–4, 2012, pp. 89–104.
- Spellen, Susan. "Past and Present: The Lockwood Academy." *Brownstoner*, 11 July 2014, <http://www.brownstoner.com/history/past-and-present-the-lockwood-academy/>. Accessed 1 Mar. 2017.

- Stroud, Scott. "Pragmatism and the Pursuit of Social Justice in India: Bhimrao Ambedkar and the Rhetoric of Religious Reorientation." *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, vol. 46, no. 1, 2016, pp. 5–27.
- Thayer, Millie. "Traveling Feminisms: From Embodied Women to Gendered Citizenship." *Global Ethnography: Forces, Connections, and Imaginations in a Postmodern World*, edited by Michael Burawoy et al., U of California P, 2000, pp. 203–33.
- Wenger, Christy I. "Creating Contemplative Spaces: Ethos as Presence and the Rhetorics of Yoga." *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric*, edited by Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones, Southern Illinois UP, 2016, pp. 237–56.
- You, Xiaoye. "Memorials on the Imperial Integrity." 2010. Unpublished manuscript.

Arirang Lament

THERESE YOUNG KIM

Once I was born in the Land of Morning Calm
where, they say, tigers used to smoke.

Could I ever free myself from the laughable
state of living where one never utters
“I love you” even if dying of love,
which could also mean “I hate you.”

Laughable to say as it may, the story is sung
in one hundred versions of the folksong,
Arirang.

Arirang, arirang, ara~ri~yo~~

Trudging away you're o'er the hills of Arirang~
If you so leave, leaving me forsaken, my love,
suffer you will from the pain in your legs
before you make the first li for your journey~

Arirang, arirang, ara~ri~yo~~

So goes the legend, undressing the hearts
and minds of lovers abandoned and abandoning
in the peaks and valleys of love – of life.

New Directions for Economics

GREGORY C. DAHL

Abstract

Recent developments in both the Bahá'í community and the field of economics have opened up new vistas in the application of Bahá'í principles to economic questions, both in theory and in practice. The Bahá'í community has grown enough that the Universal House of Justice, in its 1 March 2017 message, has called on Bahá'ís to concern themselves increasingly with the inequalities in the world and to bring their personal lives and the actions of their Bahá'í communities more in line with the high moral standards and principles of compassion and service in the teachings of their Faith. At the same time, the economics profession is more open to new directions of thought and research following the financial crisis of 2007–08 and the subsequent global recession, which exposed the shortcomings of the macroeconomic models that the profession had spent the previous several decades constructing. Some of the fields that appear most fertile for the application of Bahá'í principles to current economic problems are reviewed in this article.

Résumé

Des développements récents, tant dans la communauté bahá'íe que dans le domaine de l'économie, ont ouvert de nouvelles perspectives pour l'application théorique et pratique des principes bahá'ís aux questions d'ordre économique. La communauté mondiale bahá'íe ayant atteint un niveau de

croissance suffisant, la Maison universelle de justice a, dans un message qu'elle leur a adressé le 1er mars 2017, exhorté les croyants à se préoccuper de plus en plus des inégalités dans le monde et à veiller à ce que leur vie personnelle et les actions de leurs communautés bahá'íes soient de plus en plus au diapason des normes morales élevées et des principes de compassion et de service enchâssés dans les enseignements de leur foi. En même temps, depuis la crise financière de 2007–2008 et la récession mondiale subséquente, qui ont révélé les lacunes des modèles macroéconomiques que la profession avait construits au cours des décennies précédentes, la profession d'économiste s'ouvre davantage à de nouveaux courants de pensée et de recherche. L'auteur examine ici certains des champs les plus fertiles pour l'application de principes bahá'ís aux problèmes économiques actuels.

Resumen

Los desarrollos recientes tanto en la comunidad bahá'í como en el campo de la economía han abierto nuevas perspectivas en la aplicación de los principios bahá'ís a las preguntas económicas, tanto en la teoría como en la práctica. La comunidad bahá'í ha crecido lo suficiente para que la Casa Universal de Justicia, en su mensaje del 1 de marzo de 2017, pidió a los bahá'ís que se preocupen cada vez más de las desigualdades en el mundo y traigan sus vidas personales y las acciones de sus comunidades bahá'ís más en línea con los altos estándares morales y los principios de compasión y servicio en las enseñanzas de su Fe. Al mismo tiempo, la profesión de la economía está más abierta a nuevas direcciones de pensamiento e investigación después de la crisis financiera de 2007–08 y la posterior recesión global, que expuso

las deficiencias de los modelos macroeconómicos en la cual la profesión duro décadas construyendo. Algunos de las áreas que parecen más fértiles para la aplicación de los principios bahá'ís a los problemas económicos actuales se revisan en este artículo

BACKGROUND

Since I first attempted a survey of the Bahá'í teachings on economics more than 40 years ago (“Economics and the Bahá'í Teachings”) and some of the areas within economics where the Bahá'í teachings could be fruitfully applied (“Evolving Toward a Bahá'í Economic System”), there have, of course, been many changes in the Bahá'í community as well as in the field of economics. The Bahá'í community has grown substantially both in numbers and in visibility. In those earlier years of the Faith, Bahá'ís necessarily had to concentrate primarily on building their Bahá'í communities rather than concerning themselves with the problems of society around them. Working to bring the teachings of their Faith to mankind held out the hope and expectation of addressing the causes of the problems afflicting the human race, while, owing to their small numbers, any endeavors in direct social action would have had only minimal effect. Despite a few notable efforts—for instance, in the establishment of schools and in medical services—progress with social and economic development initiatives was limited. In more recent years, however, the Universal House of Justice has been gradually calling

on Bahá'ís to engage in the discourses of society and has encouraged them, as a natural result of their growth as local communities, to address social issues (Riḍván 2008; Riḍván 2010). Indeed, a major theme of the junior youth spiritual empowerment program pursued by Bahá'ís around the world is to sensitize youth ages 12 to 15 to the needs of their local communities and to encourage them to take initiatives aimed at improving the societies in which they live.

Recently, the Universal House of Justice has addressed a significant message to the Bahá'ís of the World dated 1 March 2017 regarding the “extremes of wealth and poverty in the world [that] are becoming ever more untenable.” They call on Bahá'ís to identify ever more strongly with the plight of their fellow human beings, as “[t]he welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole,” and to increasingly “make their own individual and collective contributions to economic justice and social progress wherever they reside.” This call builds upon a view enunciated in their earlier messages, notably the Riḍván 2010 message, that social change should involve everyone in society in a cooperative endeavor and can often be initiated at the level of the local community. Theirs is not just a simple call to charity but rather to “addressing the root causes” of poverty, a far more profound challenge.

How are Bahá'ís to meet this challenge? There is no specific economic

system prescribed in the Bahá'í Writings, but many of the teachings—some of which are discussed below—bear directly on economic issues. It would not be realistic to expect, however, that the mere exposition of ideas will result in significant reform of economic systems. Humanity has become too cynical and too distracted by petty conflicts and the clamor of opinions to pay much attention to idealistic pronouncements. And any effort at systemic reform, even with a well-conceived plan of action, requires an enormous social impetus to overcome existing power structures and vested interests.

The Universal House of Justice has been calling Bahá'ís to an entirely different approach to social progress, one involving community building at the local level. They are now asking that this process of learning about community building be expanded to include considerations of economic justice. Bahá'ís are at an early stage of engaging with such broad social issues, but they may well find that there are many opportunities for individuals and local communities to begin addressing the causes of inequities at a practical level, starting not with economic or political theories but with their own actions based on their observations of those causes and motivated by their desire to serve their communities. As a result of experience gained in this way, new methods of tackling social problems may emerge. These methods may involve intangible factors such as social attitudes and prejudices, rather than

material factors such as the lack of income or wealth, and may spring from the grass roots rather than emerging top-down through government programs.

Indeed, Bahá'ís view all aspects of life as one interrelated whole, whether considered from the perspective of the individual or the society, the spiritual or the material, the local or the global.¹ Economics is only one aspect of, or perspective on, this whole, inseparable from the rest, and solutions to “economic” problems may well be found in what we normally view as other aspects of life, such as religion, ethics, morality, and community building. Needless to say, this approach is quite different from the usual practice in the academic field of economics.

In his keynote address to the 2016 annual conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies, former member of the Universal House of Justice Dr. Farzam Arbab suggested that Bahá'ís in every field of endeavor should examine the work of their discipline and begin a process of identifying which aspects might be seen as useful in the context of the Bahá'í teachings and which might not (15). Given

1 For example, the Universal House of Justice warns against thinking in terms of “false dichotomies” and quotes a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi in which he states “[w]e must take the teachings as a great, balanced whole” (Message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors dated 28 December 2010).

that social and political structures in the world appear to be crumbling, it would not be surprising if a large part of the intellectual underpinnings of the present (dis)order, including the field of economics, might need to be rethought, or even replaced.

While the Bahá'í community has been gradually increasing its involvement with economic issues, there has simultaneously been turmoil within the field of economics. When I began my doctoral studies in economics at Harvard in 1969, computers were new and the ability to analyze data and draw conclusions about relationships between different variables was exciting. I was coming from an undergraduate major in electrical engineering, and although I was not the most outstanding student as an undergraduate, the Economics Department evidently was looking for students with my background. Macroeconomics was beginning what would prove to be several decades of development of econometric models attempting to measure and then predict the relationships between influences on the economy and how the economy would respond to those influences. The modeling, and thinking, was of an engineering mindset: in terms of mechanistic systems or "black boxes" whose internals were unknown but which had inputs, such as "policy levers," and outputs, such as employment levels and prices, that could be observed and predicted, much like the electrical circuits I had been studying.

Coming from my engineering background, this approach struck me at the

time as misguided, and nothing that I have encountered since has changed that view. Human societies are not like machines. They are highly complex and unpredictable, and they evolve, sometimes with sudden changes.² In electrical engineering, one works with actual black boxes (integrated circuits are almost always encased in black plastic boxes), but the way circuits behave is well understood and quite precise, so the relationship between inputs and outputs is highly stable and predictable.³ Economic systems,

2 Economist Paul Ormerod emphasizes this viewpoint in his 1994 book, *The Death of Economics*, in which he writes: "We need to abandon the economist's notion of the economy as a machine, with its attendant concept of equilibrium. A more helpful way of thinking about the economy is to imagine it as a living organism" (151). He also points out that, like natural systems, economies are subject to unpredictable external shocks and sudden changes (211).

3 Tellingly, in contrast to engineering, with its calculations that include known margins of error, e.g., 232 ± 5 , there is no effort in the mathematics of economics to explicitly take into account the often very large margins of error of the data that are used as inputs. Economic data usually derive from heterogeneous sources and are subject to wide variations in quality and accuracy. Anyone working with economic statistics understands the uncertainties involved, but that understanding is often not preserved as the data are reported on by the press or used in models or as the basis of policy decisions.

however, are not natural phenomena. They are created by human beings as part of our social systems. In this sense, economics could be considered as overlapping with law, as many of the parameters of modern economic systems are prescribed in laws and regulations and administered by institutions that have legal charters. Just as people often fail to obey other laws and regulations, they often fail to obey economic “laws,” such as those governing rational behavior. When economics is viewed in this way, it is clear that economies are not smoothly functioning machines; rather, they reflect the characteristics of humans, including emotions, irrationality, herd behavior, and the need to understand complex realities through simplifications.

In fact, the economic system, including modern money, doesn’t exist at all except as social contracts and mental constructs. As member of the Universal House of Justice Paul Lample has noted, “most of what we perceive to be reality—the world with which we interact every day—is not physical reality at all. It is social reality” (7). ‘Abdu’l-Bahá remarked that “[t]he reality of man is his thought” (*Paris Talks* 9). Indeed, almost all the problems and issues that humanity is facing in today’s world are created by humans and are thus part of “social reality.” This reality, having been created by humans, is not immutable and can be changed or even completely remade by them. So, the most important questions about economic systems are not about their internal parameters

but about how they change and can be improved.

Another problem I saw with economics as a discipline was that it was becoming far too isolated and concerned only with its own models. Macroeconomists tended to see the sometimes abrupt and unforeseen shocks to economic systems as simply “exogenous,” that is, outside the scope of their analysis and models, preferring to focus on the beautiful equilibria predicted by their models. Essentially, their view was that economics is a separate discipline from political science, psychology, medicine, anthropology, or any other discipline, and economists could not be expected to take all these other factors into account. This rather isolationist attitude was a major departure from the earliest practice of macroeconomics, which was often called “political economy” and which took a much more holistic view of human society.⁴

4 Adam Smith, who is primarily remembered today for the assertion that self-interested behavior would lead to economic prosperity through the “invisible hand” of the market, was also famous in his time as a philosopher and for his book *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Ormerod 212). Nava Ashraf has written about the parallels between his views and the findings of both modern psychology and behavioral economics, pointing out that, in *Moral Sentiments*, “Adam Smith’s world is not inhabited by dispassionate rational purely self-interested agents, but rather by multidimensional and realistic human

My reactions to the field were also informed by my Bahá'í upbringing. As a Bahá'í, I saw the human experience as a highly integrated whole, with spiritual dimensions as well as material ones. Thus, like other people professing religious values, I saw analysis of economies as normative and not just positive. For me, the interesting questions were what an economic system *should* look like, not so much what the present systems looked like, although understanding the latter would naturally be a prerequisite and basis for conceptualizing possible futures and how such futures could be achieved in practice. And any consideration of economic problems would need to include questions such as whether material consumption is really the main source of human happiness and how moral and spiritual values should be reflected in economic systems, going far beyond simple questions of the level of economic output and its distribution.

Given these various misgivings about the field of economics, I was very happy to be able to pursue a career as an economist at the International Monetary Fund (IMF), engaged in real-world policy issues facing countries—issues usually more political than economic in nature, involving simple accounting relationships rather than complex economic relationships. In this way, I was able to avoid what I felt was a relatively fruitless

digression in the work of most academic macroeconomists.

While the mainstream of macroeconomics was moving in a different direction, a few isolated voices maintained a social consciousness perspective within the field over these decades, emphasizing the inequalities and injustices that are inherent in the capitalist system. For example, Stephen Marglin has been teaching an alternative (or “heterodox”) economics course for undergraduates at Harvard for some years and has written a book titled *The Dismal Science* that emphasizes the importance of community, a direct challenge to mainstream economics.^{5,6} The principal shortcoming of such critiques of capitalism, however, has been the lack of convincing alternatives, given that the socialist experiments of the twentieth century collapsed spectacularly from serious inefficiency and corruption and that capitalist systems have already incorporated many socialist elements of social protection and welfare. Tearing down one intellectual structure is not the same as building a new one.

During this time, more and more economists also began examining the

5 See also his talk “Heterodox Economics”.

6 I am personally indebted to Professor Marglin for his required microeconomics course, one of the first I took as a graduate student at Harvard, which helped protect me from the 40-year detour into mathematical abstractions upon which the field of economics was embarking at that time.

beings” (Ashraf, Camerer, and Loewenstein 142).

weaknesses in the “orthodox” or “neo-classical” economic theories and made efforts to modify or extend those theories—for example, by introducing the possibility of multiple equilibria in their models. Younger economists tended to move into microeconomic fields of inquiry such as health, education, and behavioral economics, where the restrictive assumptions of the neo-classical view of economic man as a utility-maximizing machine didn’t apply and greater integration with other disciplines was possible. Perhaps as a result of the obvious weaknesses in the neoclassical framework for addressing current economic problems, the field of economics has also been moving away from pure theory, or theory with simulations, and toward more empirical work (Hamermesh 168). Economists have taken the analytic tools of their profession and applied them to a wide variety of interesting but narrower questions, as popularized in the 2005 book *Freakonomics* by Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner. However, the result has been that less attention is being paid to the big structural and policy questions of macroeconomics that used to be the main focus of the field, such as economic justice, employment, growth, trade, global integration, economic and financial stability, and curbing abuses of the free market economy such as monopoly power and pollution.

Then, in 2007–08, events gave a big impetus to these trends. The global financial crisis, with its collapse of important financial institutions and

credit and the concomitant contraction in economic activity, revealed for all to see that many of the assumptions underlying macroeconomic models were unrealistic and that reliance on these models and similar methods of financial analysis based on historical data, such as value at risk (the statistical method by which banks would assess the riskiness of their assets), had failed to anticipate or prevent an enormously costly economic downturn. Illustrating the hit to the reputation of the economics profession generally, Queen Elizabeth, after hearing a briefing on the financial crisis in November 2008, famously asked, “Why did no one see it coming?” (Giles).

This obvious failure has prompted a certain amount of soul searching among leading economists and policymakers. In March 2013, at a London School of Economics seminar in honor of Mervyn King, the retiring Bank of England governor, Olivier Blanchard, economic counselor of the IMF, said, “Humility is in order,” and Professor Lawrence Summers of Harvard University, former Treasury secretary of the United States and former president of Harvard, said, “This crisis will force a substantial reconstruction of macroeconomics” (London School of Economics). It had become apparent that the macroeconomic models economists had spent most of their time formulating had been calibrated with data covering a period of relative financial stability, that financial crises were actually much more frequent and severe than assumed (Taleb), and that

most models failed to incorporate the financial sector at all, although problems arising from finance turned out to be a much more important cause of economic shocks and decline than the loss of output due to imperfect fine-tuning of economic cycles (Broadberry and Wallis). While econometric models are now still being used, they are being treated with more caution in policy circles. Of course, it is still useful to study macroeconomic relationships in terms of cause and effect, such as what the likely impact on an economy would be from raising interest rates or adjusting tax laws. People respond to incentives as well as laws, and this is the essence of public policy. But it is now increasingly recognized that these relationships are not as stable and predictable as previously thought, that there can be huge gaps between economic models—both calculated models and those mental frameworks by which we make sense of the world—and real-world outcomes. For example, a current issue of considerable importance is that the models used by Western central banks to guide their policy decisions—regarding the links between monetary policy and the response of prices and economic activity—are not yielding the expected results, calling into question the entire framework of monetary policy (Yellen). The realization that the existing models may not be correct presents a fundamental challenge to the accepted concepts in the field of macroeconomics, and while the field has already started to move in

new directions, a space has opened up for more innovative approaches.

Perhaps the solution to these problems in the economics profession lies in the recognition that economic systems cannot be fruitfully studied as isolated from other aspects of human society (Etzioni). The barriers between economics and other fields of study, and between economists and the general public, need to be further demolished. There seems to be a natural tendency for specialists in every field to develop their own vocabulary, perhaps as an insecurity-fueled defense mechanism, to keep others from seeing clearly the weaknesses of the discipline (as when doctors refer to “nosocomial infections,” diseases that are contracted primarily in hospitals). Certainly, economics has its share of such specialized language. Although it is hard to know whether this phenomenon is greater in economics than in other fields, perhaps the resentment of outsiders to the sense of superiority many economists exhibit may be due to the fact that everyone is directly affected by economic policies and therefore naturally wishes to understand better the forces that are affecting them. This effect would be much less noticeable in, say, archeology or astronomy, but it is clearly visible in fields such as medicine that are similar to economics in their relevance to daily life.

While the field of economics has been facing internal challenges, on a larger stage recent turmoil in national politics in a number of important

countries, resulting from growing dissatisfaction with the status quo on the part of large segments of the population, is also providing an impetus to question current economic and political systems and to consider far-reaching reforms. As the respected chief economics commentator of the *Financial Times*, Martin Wolf, wrote recently, "It is time for re-thinking along many dimensions" (11).

Against this background of a general questioning of existing social structures, and of the need to break down the barriers between economics and other disciplines and to work toward an inclusive process of the generation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, this article is addressed to anyone interested in the issues discussed, not just to professional economists. What I will attempt below is a brief and somewhat superficial review of a few of the numerous areas in the fields of economics and public policy that are the subject of current debate—areas where fresh work and innovation benefitting from a Bahá'í perspective could make a positive contribution. The focus is on topics with a potential for immediate applicability or experimentation, rather than subjects, intellectually interesting as they are, such as the outlines of the Bahá'í World Commonwealth of the future, for which new political structures will be necessary. Before turning to this endeavor, however, let us summarize a few of the relevant Bahá'í principles, which may serve as a rich resource and source of inspiration.

SOME BASIC BAHÁ'Í PRINCIPLES

A central principle of the Bahá'í Faith, "the pivotal principal and fundamental doctrine of the Faith," is the principle of the oneness of the entire human race (Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* 281). Bahá'u'lláh declared that "[t]he fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch . . . So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth" (*Epistle* 14). This principle has many dimensions and ramifications. As the Universal House of Justice has observed:

For the principle of the oneness of humankind, as proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, asks not merely for cooperation among people and nations. It calls for a complete reconceptualization of the relationships that sustain society. . . . [T]he concentration of material wealth in the hands of a minority of the world's population gives an indication of how fundamentally ill-conceived are relationships among the many sectors of what is now an emerging global community. The principle of the oneness of humankind implies, then, an organic change in the very structure of society. (*Message to the Bahá'ís of Iran*)

In this light, can we study economics without considering economic justice?

Aside from socialists, Western economists have traditionally separated the question of maximizing output,

considered the main objective of economics, from the question of the distribution of that output of which, as mentioned above, they prefer to think as a political rather than an economic issue. The concept of the oneness of humankind, on the other hand, emphasizes the need of a social structure that encourages each individual to realize his or her own potential and to be a contributing member of society, which in turn will augment the general happiness and prosperity of society as a whole. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated, "Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy" (*Secret 8*). The question then becomes: What might the economic system of such a society look like? When we consider this question, can we avoid falling into the trap of framing the debate in terms of socialism versus capitalism or as a struggle between classes? Can we imagine a new type of society, one characterized by reciprocity and mutual help?

In the Bahá'í view, and in keeping with this principle of the oneness of humanity, efforts to improve human welfare must be seen as a collective enterprise, with everyone participating in some fashion, and thus the establishment of a sense of unity must be a first step. As the Universal House of Justice communicated in its 20 October 1983 message to the Bahá'ís of the world, "The key to success is unity in spirit and in action." This theme was also stressed in its annual *Riḍván* message to the Bahá'ís of the world in 2010: "Justice demands universal

participation. Thus, while social action may involve the provision of goods and services in some form, its primary concern must be to build capacity within a given population to participate in creating a better world. Social change is not a project that one group of people carries out for the benefit of another."

This theme of capacity building⁷ is also developed at length in the document "Social Action," prepared at the request of the Universal House of Justice in 2012, in which they state: "What appears to be called for . . . is the involvement of a growing number of people in a collective process of learning Such a process would allow its participants to engage in the generation, application, and diffusion of knowledge, a most potent and indispensable force in the advancement

7 An example of the importance of capacity building is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's encouragement early in the twentieth century of the Bahá'ís in North America to build a house of worship, not primarily because such a building was needed at that time (it took many years to construct), but because it was a project around which, He insisted, the whole community needed to unite, learning to work together toward a common objective. The committee charged with overseeing the project was called the Bahá'í Temple Unity. The spirit in which the project was conducted and the motives of the individuals involved were as important as the outward form of the project, and the main purpose was capacity building in the community.

of civilization” (OSD 6). Furthermore, in the 2010 message of the Universal House of Justice quoted above, they state: “Access to knowledge is the right of every human being, and participation in its generation, application and diffusion a responsibility that all must shoulder in the great enterprise of building a prosperous world civilization—each individual according to his or her talents and abilities.”

So what, then, is the role of experts and intellectuals in the Bahá’í view? Bahá’u’lláh writes that those who acquire knowledge should be respected (*Gleanings* 128; *Tablets* 96–97), but the Bahá’í teachings see the generation and acquisition of knowledge, like other human activities, as something in which everyone should take part, not as the exclusive domain of experts or a particular social class. Bahá’u’lláh further states: “Knowledge is one of the wondrous gifts of God. It is incumbent upon everyone to acquire it” (*Tablets* 39). And again: “Knowledge is as wings to man’s life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone” (*Tablets* 51). Universal education open to all is a central principle of the Faith, applied since the earliest days of the Faith in Iran and in the present day in many areas of the world through the founding of local schools if none are provided by the state. The Bahá’í vision, then, is one of individuals acquiring whatever knowledge they can, given their abilities and access to education, as long as that knowledge “can profit the peoples of the earth” and does not “begin with

words and end with words” (*Tablets* 52).

Intellectual accomplishment, however, should not lead to a sense of entitlement or superiority (Arbab 17). Economists, like other intellectuals, tend to see themselves as playing a central role in society. In the case of economics this may be true, because economies are defined by rules, and those rules, or government policies, are often based on the theories or influence of economists. But just as one wants a highly trained surgeon working in a well-equipped hospital to perform open-heart surgery, and it is also desirable for the general public to be well-informed about health, nutrition, and disease and to have ready access to information in these fields, so well-trained economists are needed to address complex problems of public policy and the functioning of financial institutions, while the general public should understand the principles of economic life and should be encouraged to take initiative if they are so inspired. Knowledge should be available to all, not confined to a privileged few. The challenge, of course, is how to get different groups to communicate effectively with each other and to benefit from each other’s perspectives (Ashraf).

It is notable in this context that the 1 March 2017 message of the Universal House of Justice calls on all Bahá’ís, as individuals and in their communities, to consider the problems of inequity and injustice around them and do what they can to address those problems “using the opportunities their

circumstances offer them” (Message to the Bahá'ís of the World). There is no mention of waiting for an expert to tell them what to do. But there is also no reason why they shouldn't consult with an expert if it would be helpful. As the Office of Social and Economic Development (OSED) at the Bahá'í World Center has observed, “Social and economic development requires the flow of resources, both material and intellectual” (11).

As an aide in understanding the dynamics of social progress, the Universal House of Justice has also introduced the concept of three protagonists in development: the individual, the community, and institutions (Message to the Bahá'ís of the World dated 26 November 1999 1). Each has an essential role to play. As explained in the OSED document on “Social Action” mentioned above, “the increase of capacity in each of these three protagonists does not occur in isolation; the development of any one is inextricably linked to the progress of the other two” (8). The House of Justice has emphasized, in particular, that those who have previously been excluded must now be included and should become empowered to contribute to this process:

Many who have long suffered are finding their voice and becoming protagonists of their own development, resourceful and resilient. From villages, neighbourhoods, towns and cities are arising institutions, communities, and

individuals dedicated to labouring together for the emergence of a united and prospering world that might truly deserve to be called the kingdom of God on earth. (Message to all who celebrate the Glory of God dated October 2017)

The message of the Universal House of Justice of 1 March 2017 also highlights the “foundational concept” in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation of “the spiritual reality of man,” namely “the nobility inherent to every human being” (Message to the Bahá'ís of the World). Like other religions, the Bahá'í Faith views man as having a higher, nobler nature characterized by altruism, integrity, generosity, forgiveness, and many other virtues, a view that emphasizes man's character and role in society. Importantly, in this view human behavior is not, and should not be, something static. On the contrary, it sees human beings as able to learn, progress spiritually, and strive to become better by developing inherent qualities. Even if, for the individual, the ability to develop slows with age, society can progress through education so that each generation is more developed and capable than the previous one, and mankind thereby fosters “an ever-advancing civilization” (Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings* 215).

Thus, a Bahá'í view of the economic dimension of human society contrasts starkly with the view central to most economic thinking—namely, that human motivation is primarily based on

self-interest and that this condition is static and simply “human nature.” It sets forth a concept of the individual as an inherently social being, one thus influenced by social context and collective incentives, but always in a condition of changing and growing, potentially serving as an agent of social change in a reciprocal relationship with society.

This brings us to the importance of trust. The glue that holds society together is trust. No society can long function successfully without trust and altruism.⁸ There is now a growing concern in the world regarding the decline in trust in social institutions. Unfortunately, we nevertheless see untrustworthy people rising to positions of great power and influence in society, notably in the political, financial, and business worlds. Hardly anyone actually expects politicians to speak only the truth these days. Young people might thus quite reasonably assume that being dishonest is the easiest path to success. In contrast, there are many passages in the Bahá’í writings regarding the importance of trustworthiness and truthfulness, such as the following exhortation of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to those in public service positions: “In discharging the functions of the office to which thou hast been appointed, thy conduct and actions should attest to the highest standard of trustworthiness and honesty, to a degree of sincerity that is altogether above suspicion, and

to an integrity that is immune to the promptings of self-interest” (*Compilation of Compilations* 342).

More generally, Bahá’ís and the followers of the other major faiths believe that personal or spiritual qualities such as honesty, integrity, humility, selflessness, commitment to stable family relationships, a desire to serve others, a dedication to peaceful resolution of conflicts, and a consciousness of spiritual preparation for the next life as opposed to material rewards in this one are of central importance to the successful functioning of human society, including its economic aspects. In the Bahá’í view, the detachment of modern societies from these core spiritual truths is the main reason for the breakdown in social structures and cohesion and to the successive crises being faced by humanity.

An important general principle here is that man is a social creature and society depends on cooperation and reciprocity, not competition. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains: “man cannot live singly and alone. He is in need of continuous cooperation and mutual help. For example, a man living alone in the wilderness will eventually starve. He can never, singly and alone, provide himself with all the necessities of existence. Therefore, he is in need of cooperation and reciprocity” (*Promulgation* 102.2). In the Bahá’í view, the emphasis in much modern economic and social science thinking on competition as the key to prosperity is entirely misplaced (Karlberg). Rather, prosperity comes from

8 This theme is developed in my article “Trust and Trustworthiness.”

collaboration and from a sense of reciprocity resulting in equitable sharing. In this view, for example, economic structures should emphasize the mutual interdependence of labor and capital, with the interests of each, as well as the broader social interest, taken into account ('Abdu'l-Bahá, *Promulgation* 102.33).

In this regard, a key practical approach enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh is the principle of consultation. For Bahá'ís, consultation means sharing one's ideas in a group while being detached from them and listening closely to what others contribute so that the truth can be found and agreement can be reached on the best way forward. Bahá'u'lláh writes: "Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding" (*Tablets* 168). 'Abdu'l-Bahá exhorts: "Settle all things, both great and small, by consultation. Without prior consultation, take no important step in your own personal affairs. Concern yourselves with one another. Help along one another's projects and plans" (Research Department). And the Universal House of Justice has written that decision-making can

benefit from a diversity of perspectives through a consultative process which, understood as the collective investigation of reality, promotes detachment from personal views, gives due importance to valid empirical information, does not raise mere opinion to the

status of fact or define truth as the compromise between opposing interest groups. (Message to the Bahá'ís of Iran)

Beyond simply recognizing that human beings are social creatures, the Bahá'í teachings take the Golden Rule a step further and emphasize service to others as being the path to individual spiritual growth as well as the progress of society. As Bahá'u'lláh writes, "Man's merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches" (*Tablets* 138). 'Abdu'l-Bahá further declares: "And the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good" (*Secret* 1).

Part of being a productive member of society is to have an occupation and earn a living, within the means and opportunities available. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes: "Every person must have an occupation, a trade or a craft, so that he may carry other people's burdens, and not himself be a burden to others" (qtd. in Universal House of Justice, Message to the Bahá'ís of the World dated 1 March 2017). In fact, we read in Bahá'u'lláh's book of laws that: "It is incumbent upon each one of you to engage in some occupation—such as a craft, a trade or the like. We have exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship of the one true God" (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* ¶33). In a note, the Universal House of Justice explains that the implementation of this law is "the mutual responsibility of the

individual and society” (Kitáb-i-Aqdas note 56). So work is seen not only as a material necessity, but as a spiritual exercise as well, in that it confirms the individual’s dignity as a contributing member of society, no matter how lofty or meagre one’s particular role or station might be. Bahá’u’lláh has poetically summarized this principle in *The Hidden Words*: “The basest of men are they that yield no fruit on earth. . . . The best of men are they that earn a livelihood by their calling” (Persian nos. 81–82).

In the Bahá’í teachings, in contrast to the attitudes and practices of many other faiths, money and wealth are not seen as in conflict with a spiritual life but rather as part of a coherent life—that is, if one’s wealth is “acquired by an individual’s own efforts” and is “expended for philanthropic purposes” or “upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Secrets* 8; Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian no. 82). As the Universal House of Justice states, “The oneness of mankind, which is at once the operating principle and ultimate goal of His Revelation, implies the achievement of a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth” (Message to the Bahá’ís of the World dated 20 October 1983 602).⁹ Thus,

in the Bahá’í view, no material or economic act can be separated from its moral and spiritual implications, and economic systems need to be viewed in the light of spiritual standards and objectives. As the Universal House of Justice affirms: “The teachings of the Faith leave no room for doubt: there is an inherent moral dimension to the generation, distribution, and utilization of wealth and resources” (Message to the Bahá’ís of the World dated 1 March 2017).

One example of this perspective is the unique and interesting law of Huqúqu’lláh ordained by Bahá’u’lláh in his Most Holy Book (Kitáb-i-Aqdas ¶ 97). In addition to extolling charity, He decreed that those Bahá’ís whose income exceeds their needs must pay nineteen percent of the excess to the Center of the Faith, in a spirit of “the utmost joy and radiance” to be expended for the betterment of humankind (*Huqúqu’lláh* no. 5). Bahá’u’lláh has stated that these payments of Huqúqu’lláh “purify” one’s wealth (Kitáb-i-Aqdas ¶ 97). Thus, the individual can feel at peace spiritually if he prefers to keep the remaining 81 percent. The law encourages Bahá’ís to think of wealth as a means of promoting social good while helping them be detached from such wealth, and it focuses their attention on what is truly “needful” materially in their lives.

As another example of how practical matters intersect with spiritual principles in the Bahá’í teachings, Bahá’u’lláh has specified that the charging of interest is permitted, in

9 For an excellent statement on coherence between the spiritual and the material, see <http://www.bahai.org/beliefs/god-his-creation/ever-advancing-civilization/coherence-between-spiritual-material>.

contrast to other faiths, but He warns against “illicit gains obtained by usury” and counsels “moderation and fairness,” “justice,” and “tender mercy and compassion” (*Tablets* 133–34). Similarly, in many passages He extolls forbearance, presumably using the word in its broader sense of showing patience and resignation and not always insisting on one’s rights but perhaps also in its narrower meaning of being lenient regarding the repayment of loans if repayment would entail hardship. He has also prohibited gambling but did not elaborate (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* ¶ 155). Therefore, it is for the Universal House of Justice to determine in the future whether this prohibition might include speculation in financial markets (*Kitáb-i-Aqdas* note 169).

Although there are some specific teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, such as those mentioned above, that could be considered economic in nature, there is no economic system *per se* envisaged in the writings of the Faith. In a letter written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi states:

There are practically no technical teachings on economics in the Cause, such as banking, the price system, and others. The Cause is not an economic system, nor can its Founders be considered as having been technical economists. The contribution of the Faith to this subject is essentially indirect, as it consists in the application of spiritual principles to our present-day economic

system. Bahá'u'lláh has given us a few basic principles which should guide future Bahá'í economists in establishing such institutions which will adjust the economic relationships of the world. (Hornby 551)

Economists inspired by the Bahá'í teachings may study such issues as taxation, trade, the financial system, and public policy in general, about which some thoughts are presented below. However, they might be well-advised to keep in mind that there are already many worthwhile ideas for improving economic systems, but vested interests and the failings of political systems stand in the way of implementing them. Although it might be useful to prepare the ground intellectually for reforms, most have little prospect of being implemented any time soon. In this context, the emphasis placed at this time by the Universal House of Justice on individual and community action is most interesting. As they explain in their message to the Bahá'ís of the world dated 1 March 2017, “The aim is to learn about how to participate in the material affairs of society in a way that is consistent with the divine precepts and how, in practical terms, collective prosperity can be advanced through justice and generosity, collaboration and mutual assistance.”

There is much work to be done to better understand how this process might unfold.

PROMISING NEW DIRECTIONS

Let us now turn to some specific areas that are currently the subject of intense policy debate because the shortcomings of the present system are becoming apparent, areas where innovations, experimentation, insights, and research, informed by Bahá'í principles, might be particularly fruitful.

NEW PERSPECTIVES ON HUMAN NATURE

As mentioned above, the foundations of modern macroeconomics have been increasingly called into question, leading to more attention being paid to microeconomics, or the study of the behavior of individuals and firms, and in particular to drawing conclusions from observing actual behavior. Important work has been done in many areas, such as game theory and bargaining, limited information, and agency theory, that challenges the restrictive assumptions of the neoclassical models of human behavior. This shift in emphasis has moved what is now called behavioral economics to center stage, with four Nobel Prizes in the past 15 years being awarded to pioneers and contributors to this field.¹⁰ Nava Ashraf, a young Bahá'í behavioral economist previously at the Harvard Business School and now

¹⁰ These Nobel Prize winners include Daniel Kahneman (a psychologist) and Vernon Smith in 2002, Robert Shiller in 2013, and Richard Thaler in 2017.

at the London School of Economics, has contributed to this field through high-profile empirical research confirming a theory that people may voluntarily choose to limit their own options—for example, through a bank savings product that would restrict their withdrawals until they reached a given level—contradicting a basic premise of neoclassical economics that people know what they want and that choice is always better.¹¹

Ashraf has more recently been doing pioneering work in her study of altruistic behavior, confirming a view of human behavior in line with Bahá'í principles but startlingly different from the one traditionally assumed in the economics profession. She has shown that altruism not only is important, but can be a greater motivation than monetary reward (Ashraf, Bandiera, and Jack). While economists in recent years have extended the idea

¹¹ See in particular “Tying Odysseus to the Mast: Evidence from a Commitment Savings Product in the Philippines.” Behavioral economics is now perhaps most famous for the idea that people can be encouraged to make choices that are better for themselves and/or society by adjusting the way choices are presented to them, e.g., by making the default option in their paycheck involve putting part of it into a savings plan, rather than requiring them to opt for such an option. This idea was popularized in Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein’s 2008 book, *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness*.

of human preferences to include various aspects of altruism, fairness, and values, these preferences have been assumed to be fixed in line with the neo-classical model of behavior. Ashraf has now introduced the notion, in a formal model, that altruism can be developed, which, from the perspective of ethics and moral philosophy and of the Bahá'í teachings, is, in fact, of central importance (Ashraf and Bandiera 70–75). Her work is an excellent example of how someone approaching a field of study with a different perspective can see a different reality and cast new light on important issues.

Related to the concept of altruism is the Bahá'í principle mentioned above that the purpose of human life is “service and virtue,” and that happiness and fulfillment lie not in material possessions and pursuing self-interest but in service to others and leading a meaningful life. The new field of “happiness economics” addresses questions of this nature, such as whether wealth increases happiness and what other factors might produce happiness and a sense of well-being. In his 2005 book *Happiness* surveying the subject, Richard Layard emphasizes man’s social nature—that happiness comes from social connections such as friendship and marriage—and also observes that “happiness depends on your inner life as much as on your outer circumstances,” on “feel[ing] more for others” and on our “inner strength of character” (230). While there has been some effort to make happiness an official objective of government policy

alongside GDP and economic growth, and there is even an OECD Better Life Index, the difficulty of defining and measuring happiness has proven an obstacle, and little practical progress has been made. This field appears ripe for further investigation, perhaps drawing on data from the experience of Bahá'í communities.

THE ELIMINATION OF PREJUDICE
AND THE RECOGNITION OF GENDER
EQUALITY

Prejudices of all kinds that divide society into distinct groups and treat different groups unequally are the antithesis of the Bahá'í principle of the oneness of humankind. So too are barriers to the full participation by women in both economic activity and in social structures the antithesis of the Faith’s teaching that women and men are equal in the sight of God. Despite the progress that has been made in recent decades, pernicious prejudices are still rampant in the world and not only perpetrate injustices, but also impede the general progress of humanity. Bahá'ís, with their vision of a society characterized by unity in diversity (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 41–42), should be trailblazers, as individuals and in their communities, in demonstrating how divisions can be overcome and unity firmly established. This is the essence of the community-building projects in which Bahá'ís and their collaborators are engaged and which surely will yield lessons for the path toward

the economic prosperity and social progress of humankind.

INEQUALITY

Economic inequality, and in particular the startling increase in affluence of the very rich at the expense of the middle classes in recent years, has moved center stage in political and economic debate in many Western countries. Oxfam announced during the 2017 World Economic Forum that their research showed that eight individuals owned as much wealth as the poorer half of mankind (“Just 8 men”). Although one can question their methodology, the overall picture is of profound concern. French economist Thomas Piketty, after fifteen years of research, published his long academic study *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* in 2014, and it reached number one on the *New York Times* best seller list for hardcover non-fiction, reportedly selling over 2.5 million copies and presumably breaking records for the sale of any 700-page academic tome (“Hardcover Nonfiction”; Irvine).¹² The rise in inequality is often mentioned as one of the causes of the loss of public confidence in political leadership in some countries, and there has been concern that it is leading to greater social instability.

Piketty’s proposed solution—typical for an economist—is to impose new taxes on the rich to promote equality.

¹² Another influential writer on inequality is Branko Milanovic. See in particular his book *Global Inequality*.

Of course, this seems highly unlikely to happen any time soon. There is also the issue of whether the resources thus raised would be effectively used to alleviate poverty. Redistribution schemes and foreign aid have a poor record of actually promoting equality or development. Many social programs in wealthy countries, although well-intentioned, have been found to perpetuate poverty or to have other negative social effects, and foreign aid programs have been widely criticized as both ill-conceived and supportive of corruption in recipient countries.

With regard to the question of how best to provide support for the poor and needy, an option that is being increasingly discussed is the idea of a universal basic or minimum level of financial support for all citizens. Because of the difficulty of targeting income maintenance schemes only to those truly in need, and without undermining incentives to seek gainful employment, the universal basic income would simply be given to all citizens. It was put to a public vote in Switzerland in 2016 (but failed by a large margin), is being pilot-tested on a limited scale in a number of places such as Finland and Ontario, Canada, and is being promoted elsewhere, including by politicians. However, such schemes do not currently appear affordable even in most of the richest countries, as compared with targeted assistance, although the experiments with this approach are worth following (OECD, “Basic Income” 4, 6).¹³

¹³ For a detailed treatment of this

All the above approaches to inequality are what is often called “top down” rather than “bottom up,” i.e., directed from a central authority rather than springing from the grass roots. To succeed, approaches to inequality may need to give much greater weight to building a spirit of community at the local level, like the small, intimate “study circles” in which Bahá'ís of different levels of experience read the Bahá'í writings together and share their understandings as equals, in sharp contrast to the format of sermons, lectures, or the use of media typical in other religions and institutions of learning. It is noteworthy that an anti-poverty scheme incorporating some of these community-based elements, with local communities identifying those in need and targeting appropriate assistance to them, is being implemented successfully on a large scale in China (“China’s New Approach”). Indeed, it has been my observation that in many cultures where there is widespread poverty, anyone doing better than the rest is expected to give support to relatives and friends, whether in the form of food at traditional feasts or direct financial support, as an important element of community solidarity and social cohesion.¹⁴

subject, see Van Parijs, Philippe and Yannick Vanderborght, *Basic Income: A Radical Proposal for a Free Society and a Sane Economy*. Harvard UP, 2017.

14 A Bahá'í PhD student at Cornell, Vesall Nourani, is researching this phenomenon.

In the same vein, the 1 March 2017 message of the Universal House of Justice puts the issue in an entirely different light as compared with the normal view of economists, framing it as a moral, and thus personal, imperative and not just a political or economic question to be addressed by social institutions or public policy.¹⁵ Individuals and small communities motivated by a moral standard taught by their religion can improve their behavior even before the political structure or economic incentives to do so are changed. As urged by the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'ís can attempt to identify local causes of inequality and address them with the means at their disposal. In a village setting, such causes might include an inequitable irrigation scheme, health issues such as malaria or the need for a clinic or clean water, lack of access to or the quality of education, local social divisions such as caste or rivalries between families, or the corruption of local officials. In any setting, Bahá'ís can just simply show more personal compassion and care for those in need, following the life-long example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

A skeptic might say that relying on people to feel more compassion for others is just wishful Pollyanna thinking. For example, in his recent book *Creating Freedom* (2016), Raoul Martinez presents a fairly standard critique of capitalism and the inequalities and

15 See, for example, the passage quoted above that “there is an inherent moral dimension” to inequality.

waste it produces. His main prescription, at the end, is that people should be made to realize, when they spend on non-necessities, that they are actually wasting resources that could be used to save the lives of people in desperate need. One criticism of the book is that his exhortation is unlikely to have any practical effect. Having posed a problem, he hasn't offered a realistic solution. But what he proposes bears a striking resemblance to the Bahá'í law of Huqúqu'lláh mentioned above—the “profoundly private act of conscience that promotes the common good”—which Bahá'ís are obeying with enthusiasm and devotion (Universal House of Justice, *Riḍván 1991 Message*).

EMPLOYMENT AND TRADE

The inability to provide adequate employment to those willing to work is a major failing of modern capitalism and an issue underlying much of the anger currently being expressed in politics. Unemployment, along with the corollaries of wage levels and job security, is a critical issue in the world, especially as it tends to be concentrated in areas of economic decline and among disadvantaged populations and rises abruptly when there are economic or financial crises. In the euro area, for example, overall unemployment reached 12 percent in 2013 and was still 10 percent in 2016, with much higher rates in some countries (Greece at 24 percent and Spain at 20 percent)

and among certain segments of the population, such as young people (“Total Unemployment Rate”). In the United States, at the time of this writing, although overall unemployment is low, wages are stagnant, many discouraged workers have stopped seeking employment but are not counted as unemployed, and there are serious regional problems.

Obviously, prolonged unemployment can do permanent damage to one's self-esteem and productivity and make reentry into the workforce increasingly difficult. Those of us whose grandparents lived through the Great Depression of the 1930s heard many stories of people whose lives were crushed through a loss of their sense of self-worth when they became unemployed. In light of the emphasis placed by Bahá'u'lláh on the importance and value of each individual making his or her contribution to society, Bahá'ís would give high priority to finding solutions to this issue.

Americans, especially, like to refer to their “free enterprise system,” but one never hears about a “free worker system.” The current economic and political system of “free market” countries encourages and supports business, which in turn is expected to provide jobs, but only in that order, and with the jobs being a residual and an indirect result after other policies are implemented. Although in theory a group of unemployed workers could hire a capitalist to employ them, this never happens in practice (although there are other models such

as cooperatives and worker-owned businesses that have a mixed record but are worthy of study). While in principle anyone in America can start a business, and new, small businesses are a very dynamic portion of the economy, to start a business one needs both know-how and access to capital, which excludes a very large part of the total population.

The solution to unemployment is not protectionism—the raising of barriers to trade to “protect” domestic industries and jobs. Protectionism engenders retaliation by trading partners and can lead to a trade war, damaging all countries involved. It also effectively freezes the status quo, leading to complacency in protected industries and killing the dynamism of an economy. On the other hand, free trade can increase inequality. While there may be significant economic gains from trade, the way those gains are divided is subject to negotiation, and the stronger partner is likely to capture the larger share. Also, while proponents of free trade argue that the gains are big enough to compensate those who lose, it is challenging to find appropriate ways to effect such compensation. Because many of the long-term unemployed are likely to be poor as a result of their joblessness, some of the practical considerations relating to addressing inequality also apply to trade policy. Thus, while protectionism is a crude tool applied, and often misused, in a world of sovereign nation states, a fairer structure for regulating international trade and dealing

with its consequences is called for.

Although protectionism is not the answer, ways need to be found to improve the resilience of industries that are subject to competition, whether foreign or domestic, or to find alternative employment for those who find themselves displaced. The concern now is not only with manufacturing jobs, but also white-collar jobs that appear in danger from developments in artificial intelligence and other information processing technologies. However, if we step back from thinking only in terms of the present economic structure, we can see that the world is far from having run out of things that need to be done to improve our lives and our environment. Whether caring better for the elderly and the sick, beautifying our cities and our homes, enjoying more live music and drama, reading more creative writing, reversing the degradation of nature, improving and extending education, or other vistas opening before humanity that we cannot now even imagine, there should be an infinite amount of productive work for humanity.

The problem, then, originates in the economic structure, in the difficulty of finding ways to pay people for new types of work. It has been proposed that government programs be established that would provide work when the private sector fails to adequately fill this need, like the Works Progress Administration (WPA) program in the United States during the depression of the 1930s (Tanden et al.). But a more effective, or perhaps

complementary, approach could be to harness and encourage capacity at the local level for social compassion and support, as mentioned above, through personal interaction with each individual leading to a knowledge of their needs and abilities, which likely would include questions of education, training, and health care. The lack of such compassion can often be traced to prejudices of all kinds, including class, race, and gender; to biases in the education system and in hiring practices; and to a legal and economic system that favors and extols the rich and powerful. Perhaps a greater sense of compassion in communities and a breaking down of the barriers created by prejudice will motivate people at the local level, on their own initiative, to find ways to employ the needy. In this way, the needy could contribute something valuable to the community, as opposed to simply receiving charity, and community solidarity would be enhanced.

THE ORGANIZATION OF BUSINESS ENTITIES

For businesses attempting to behave ethically, it is difficult to know how to balance social and moral objectives with the profit motive. At a personal level, an individual can try to choose a profession that maximizes social welfare and minimizes conflict with his or her values. But in societies that are riddled with corruption and perverse incentives, it can be very hard to avoid difficult moral choices. In the many

countries with weak institutions, government regulations and corruption go hand in hand, and dealing with officials is the greatest challenge an entrepreneur faces. It can be very hard for a small business to survive when competitors who pay bribes or use inside connections enjoy overwhelming advantages. Principled entrepreneurs in such an environment may simply have to give up that line of work and move to something else that may be less remunerative but can help to better align their working life and their values.

When someone is starting a new business or is working in a very small business, it is important to think clearly about objectives, priorities, and incentives. Fortunately, the current legal structure in most countries allows for many types of business entities, including corporations of different sizes, family-owned businesses (the predominant business form in many countries), cooperatives, and sole proprietorships, with a lot of flexibility in internal organization. And there is already a great deal of experimentation specifically aiming to address the needs of all stakeholders, including workers, customers, and the broader society, as well as managers and investors, in the field called social entrepreneurship, a field in which Professor Ashraf is active.¹⁶ But these experiments are still

16 One of her roles at the London School of Economics is serving as research director of the Marshall Institute for Philanthropy and Social Entrepreneurship.

limited, with social and environmental impact objectives being mostly a matter of public relations and spin rather than true aims of corporate policy.

The behavior of large and financially powerful enterprises is another central issue in many countries. The culture that primarily values profit and outsmarting competitors can lead organizations into behavior that is extremely damaging to society and even illegal. Witness the recent scandals over emissions produced by Volkswagen automobiles. The general culture is likewise greatly affected by the resultant emphasis on overconsumption, outward appearances, and a superficial, materialistic view of life. Individual workers or managers in such enterprises have to deal with an internal culture as well as an external environment that might not accord with their values. Even the most well-meaning people are affected by the culture and incentive structure in which they find themselves and can face difficult moral challenges.

So the question is, how do we change this type of business behavior? A Bahá'í-inspired organization called ebbf (ethical business building the future) has been serving for twenty-seven years as a forum and organizer of conferences for businesspeople and anyone interested in ethical business practices, helping to meet a need for the exchange of ideas, best practices, and moral support.¹⁷ It seems to

accord with the vision of the Universal House of Justice in its 1 March 2017 message regarding innovation at the working level. There is certainly plenty of scope for experimentation in the way businesses are run, and there is also a clear role for academic researchers to study different models using rigorous methods as part of the learning process.

THE ORGANIZATION OF PUBLIC SERVICE AND THE SIZE OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Governments are a very large part of modern economies. There is a never-ending political battle over the proper size and scope of government and the taxes that support it. The private sector is subject to many shortcomings, prompting the need for regulation, but the public sector suffers from its own afflictions, primarily those of perverse incentives. So one aspect of the policy challenge is how to make public service entities work better.

In a bureaucracy, to protect and expand one's domain it is usually necessary to spend all of one's budgeted resources and find justifications for an increase in the next budget cycle. If one's budget is under threat, a common tactic is to cut or threaten to cut the most visible and important activity. A true effort to eliminate waste and improve efficiency is rarely rewarded. Innovation is almost absent. Armies, schools, police and fire departments, and so forth operate now more or less

¹⁷ For more information, visit their website at <http://ebbf.org/>.

as they did a century ago. How, then, do we create incentives within large bureaucracies to improve performance while minimizing costs? How do we introduce a more consultative and service-oriented culture? How can organizations, and indeed whole societies, bring about moral and altruistic behavior?

In Western countries it is widely believed that the rule of law, with appropriate institutions (police and courts), are a chief source of motivation for citizens to behave well. It is also recognized that a “capitalist” system based on the incentives of profit and personal enrichment produces many “negative externalities” (negative effects on others and society), and that such tendencies need to be curbed through laws and regulations imposed by the government. In reality, however, laws and regulations and the institutions that enforce them can only affect marginal behavior, i.e., the most extreme cases of deviation, while the behavior of the general population is guided more by unwritten cultural norms. Furthermore, people are clever in finding ways around laws and regulations. A modern economy is complex and changing, and the challenges of responding to problems as they arise through new laws and regulations means they proliferate, eventually strangling economic activity and innovation. The US domestic tax code (Title 26), for example, contains 100 chapters and almost 10,000 sections, each having up to four layers of subsections. It is so poorly written

and dense, with so many cross references, sometimes circular, that it can be difficult to discern the intent even after careful study. Although it is an attempt to produce a just system based on clear rules, it ends up becoming an enormously expensive, time-consuming disaster. And that is just the US federal government. There are also state and local codes. For example, the California code covering general education (public schools) has more than 8,800 articles, some of which are quite lengthy and contain numerous subsections. The situation is so extreme that it has become absurd.

Perhaps the solution to this central dilemma of economic policy—how to achieve economic justice through fair and enforceable rules—is to look at the problem from a different perspective. As mentioned above, instead of assuming that individuals are mainly motivated by self-interest and greed that needs to be constrained, greater reliance needs to be placed on the moral development of the individual and the moral standards of society. It is here that Bahá’ís and those who sympathize with Bahá’í principles must increasingly demonstrate the power of individual commitment to moral behavior, while eschewing the religiosity, closed-mindedness, and sense of superiority that many people find so objectionable in the attitudes of organized religions. In organizations as well as in society as a whole, this approach may entail having fewer meaningless rules and regulations and relying more on a common sense of what is decent and

moral behavior. How such an approach can be implemented in practice, however, is probably a question of learning from experimentation, much the same process as innovation in businesses.

THE FINANCIAL SYSTEM

The financial crisis of 2007–08 demonstrated that problems with the financial system can be extremely costly and damaging. The average employment rate of developed countries only recovered to the pre-crisis level nine years later (OECD, *OECD Employment 22*), prompting political backlash and efforts to make the financial system more stable through increased regulation and higher capital requirements. However, heaping more regulations on an already highly regulated sector brings costs with it, and highly paid, highly incentivized bankers and their lawyers continue to find ways to avoid or exploit regulations and maximize their profits. In this regard, it is instructive to look at the outsized proportion of total corporate profits in America earned by financial sector companies. In the 1970s and 1980s they earned on average 17 percent of all domestic corporate profits. The figure jumped by 10 percentage points in 2001 and reached over 37 percent in 2002. Even after the financial crisis of 2007–08 and the scaling back of some of the speculative and exploitative activity in the sector, the industry still captured 27 percent of all corporate profits in 2016 (US Bureau of Economic Analysis). Few could seriously

argue that the contribution of the financial sector to the welfare and productivity of the US economy actually warrants over one-quarter of all domestic corporate profits. It is quite clear that the sector is still capturing extraordinary benefits because of its position of power and access to information, often by blatant exploitation and even corruption (Kotlikoff 1–122).

As a result of the crisis, some economists and former bankers have spoken out about the need for a fundamental rethinking of the structure of modern banking and finance, among them former governor of the Bank of England Mervyn King.¹⁸ Perhaps most interestingly, a proposal known as the Chicago Plan, first made in the 1930s and supported by the famous Yale economist Irving Fisher, has been revived. Rather than allowing banks to create money whenever they make a loan, subject only to general restrictions on their level of capital and reserves, the plan proposes that only the government be allowed to create money and that banks be restricted to managing it. This idea, which comes in different flavors and is now often referred to as “narrow banking,” “full-reserve banking,” “100% reserve banking,” or “limited purpose banking” has been supported and elaborated recently by a number of respected economists¹⁹

18 See King's book *The End of Alchemy*.

19 See, for example, John Kay's article “Should We Have ‘Narrow Banking’?” and his book *Other People's Money*; Laurence Kotlikoff's *Jimmy Stewart Is Dead*;

and other writers (Jackson and Dyson) and in an IMF working paper (Benes and Kumhof). One virtue of such a system is that it would eliminate the largest source of instability in the current financial system by reducing or eliminating financial risk-taking by government-backed financial institutions (which leads to “moral hazard” or excessive risk-taking) and forcing investors to accept such risk directly.

The fact that Bahá’u’lláh has permitted the charging of interest does not necessarily imply that the government should assume a major part of the risk in the banking system, as is currently the case. Because the ups and downs in finance generally benefit “insiders” who can make fortunes at the expense of the general public, greater financial stability would also reduce the inequities in the present system and would likely encourage capital to flow into more productive and less speculative investments. This is a topic that could benefit from further study.

NATURAL RESOURCES AND PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Protecting the natural environment and enhancing the manmade environment are natural priorities for a community that emphasizes the common good. Environmental pollution, often caused by actions that might benefit one individual or company but negatively affect society, is

and Adair Turner’s *Between Debt and the Devil*.

the classic example in economics of negative externalities. The usual prescription is government regulation, although, as noted above, the actual implementation of regulations can be highly problematic, and in this arena there are large and continuing political battles. But pollution, or simply trash or lack of maintenance, can be an important local issue as well, amenable to local solutions. Progress in reversing environmental degradation may also depend in large part on education, increasing the public’s awareness of the nature of the problem. In this context, it is noteworthy that Bahá’í junior youth groups in different parts of the world often choose, on their own initiative, a local cleanup, park beautification, or gardening project as a first service project. The benefits can often far exceed the stated goal of the project itself or the education of the youth, as the community sees the interest of the young people in improving their surroundings and begins to question its own indifference and inaction. When a junior youth gardening project in a blighted neighborhood of Baltimore was mowed over by a city worker, the youth involved turned to social media to publicize the incident and soon the local television station was on location filming, resulting in the deputy mayor helping to replant the garden amid more publicity for this public-spirited initiative by the youth (Sobhani). In this process, the youth also develop an important capacity for positive social action.

Of course, although drawing the attention of youth to environmental problems and encouraging them to take action, however modest, is an important educational step and may have broader impacts, social structures that lead to the despoiling of the environment are often linked to the exploitation of populations, not just of natural resources, and thus are related to the issues of prejudice, class divisions, and inequality discussed above.

CORRUPTION

Corruption, broadly defined to include privilege, injustice, exploitation, and organized crime, is arguably the most important economic and political problem of our time. In Western countries, public trust in institutions of all kinds regularly hits new lows. For example, in recent Gallup polls only 8 percent of Americans rate congressmen as highly ethical, below 9 percent for car salesmen (“Honesty/Ethics”). And President Barack Obama, in his first State of the Union address, declared: “We face a deficit of trust.” Economists can argue about the relative merits of different economic systems such as capitalism and socialism, but the reality, as we can see plainly in the world, is that any system can be more or less corrupted, and the degree to which it is—more than any other variable—explains success measured in terms of the general welfare of the population. Corruption has thus moved to the center stage in much of the political struggle of our time.

When moral consensus in society breaks down, corruption flourishes. Corruption requires access to power. The corrupt are therefore in a position to protect themselves very effectively and can only be constrained when a broad social movement arises in opposition, such as the non-violent movement spearheaded by Gandhi in India and the many color movements that started with Solidarity in Poland.

Thus, although studying techniques for curbing corruption is useful, the broad political will to actually stop corruption will only arise when populations can rally around a moral consensus, a “shared ethic” (UHJ, Message to the Bahá'ís of the World dated 1 March 2017). For Bahá'ís, then, the priority is to work on awakening and developing the moral consciousness of the population, and this effort is most effective when starting with children and youth. Individuals can also lead by example. As the standards in public service decline, the need for people who establish a reputation for competence, integrity, and dedication to service increases, and their example can help raise the expectations of the public regarding the qualities required for such service. As always, actions speak louder than words.

The impact of dishonesty and selfishness on economic prosperity is particularly pernicious, as can be seen in the growing reaction against corruption worldwide. Whether or not corruption is actually getting worse, however, is an interesting question, given that human beings have been

exploiting their fellow man at least as long as recorded history. It may be that it has merely become more visible and harder to hide as technology has greatly enhanced the general public's access to information and increased the ease of and incentives for leaks of confidential information. The reaction to corruption may also reflect a declining public tolerance for such behavior and a stricter enforcement of laws against criminal behavior, money laundering, theft, embezzlement, blackmail, illegal resource exploitation, etc., with the resultant heightened publicity of such wrongdoing, giving an appearance of an increase in the underlying activity. In any case, it is encouraging that the public is becoming more aware and less tolerant of corruption, raising hope that this central problem of modern governance will be increasingly addressed.

INTEGRITY IN SCIENCE AND PUBLIC DISCOURSE

Corruption in the broad sense is also eroding the foundations of public discourse and scientific endeavor. Scientific method involves the publication of experimental results so that they can either be confirmed or rejected by the scientific community. Unfortunately, the number of scientific papers published in the leading journals that cannot ultimately be confirmed by other scientists is creating "growing alarm" ("Challenges"; Baker; Nosek et al.). Presumably, this trend partly reflects the pressure on scientists

to publish, but it also likely reflects financial and other incentives to produce the results desired by interested parties, as well as the general decline in moral standards in society. Such an erosion of ethics strikes at the heart of a process of discovery of the truth that has been central to the leap in human welfare in modern history.

An extreme, but instructive, example of the forces at work is the case of David Kelly, a Bahá'í scientist and authority on biological warfare who was asked by the British government to investigate the existence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq in 2003, when this was a high-profile political issue. He reported honestly that he found none, but his findings were in direct contradiction to a public statement on the subject by the British prime minister and were ignored, although later proven correct ("Dr David Kelly"; Gilligan). Other examples of the overwhelming influence of vested interests, from industry and the field of nutrition and public health, are recounted by Dr. T. Colin Campbell (in part 4 of *The China Study*) and Gary Taubes (in *The Case Against Sugar*).

More recently, concern is rising that public discourse is being corrupted by political propaganda, including "fake news" and "alternative facts," and undermined by a tendency in the Internet age for people to listen only to opinions and news that they want to hear.

In economics, there has already been a welcome move to publish the datasets underlying studies and publications,

leading to useful debates—for example, debates about Piketty's methodology and whether his conclusions are justified. However, we should not underestimate the difficulties that an economist may face if he or she challenges the accepted wisdom of the field or of public policy or threatens vested interests. Those approaching economics from a Bahá'í perspective will need to rise to the challenge of trying to harmonize their work with high principles of integrity, honesty, and an unbiased perspective.

CONCLUSION

The principle of the unity of mankind has far-reaching implications. It encompasses the need to break down the barriers between groups of people, including between intellectuals and the general public, and to involve everyone in the process of knowledge creation and social and economic development, empowering people to become the protagonists in their own development within a social context characterized by reciprocity and mutual support. A view of God's creation as one whole also implies the breaking down of barriers between fields of study. It implies viewing human society as a single system, one which we choose to view and study from different perspectives, while becoming increasingly aware of the interrelationships within the whole. It presents enormous intellectual challenges but also great opportunities.

It can be difficult to conceive of a society based on very different principles

than those favored at present, even assuming that social structures can be transformed over time by the positive influence of a new religious revelation and by the destructive breakdown in the present order that, in the words of the Shoghi Effendi, "welds the limbs of humanity into one single organism, indivisible, purified, God-conscious and divinely directed" (*Messages* 45). It is also challenging to visualize how noble spiritual principles can be applied through the actions of individuals and communities in the context of today's fractured, disoriented societies. But the Universal House of Justice is now calling upon Bahá'ís to increasingly face this challenge of making their actions coherent with their principles. This article has been a reflection on what form such efforts might take and on the possible relationship between the academic field of economics and the actions of individuals and communities within the circumstances in which they find themselves.

When examining some of the areas of current debate and concern about the functioning of the economic systems of the world, it becomes apparent that the Bahá'í teachings have a great deal to contribute on these subjects, opening up the potential for useful contributions both by professional economists inspired by the Bahá'í teachings and by individuals and communities generating knowledge about how spiritual principles can be applied to economic life. Indeed, one could conclude that from the point of view of the Bahá'í teachings, much of

the present field of economics needs to be rethought. The process of generating knowledge at the individual and local level holds out the promise that as Bahá'ís endeavor to act in accordance with their principles in diverse

life situations, with integrity and a desire to be of service to others, they may well find ways not only to change their own lives, but to influence those around them and gradually transform the structures of society in general.

WORKS CITED

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Paris Talks: Addresses Given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1911*. Bahá'í Publishing, 2006.
- . *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'lBahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912*. 2nd ed., US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982.
- . *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990.
- Arbab, Farzam. "The Intellectual Life of the Bahá'í Community." *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2016, pp. 9–21.
- Ashraf, Nava. "Co-Generating Knowledge through Action-Research: Field Experiments in Behavioral Economics." *Vimeo*, uploaded by the Association for Bahá'í Studies, 2014, <http://vimeo.com/85871638>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- Ashraf, Nava, Colin F. Camerer, and George Loewenstein. "Adam Smith, Behavioral Economist." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2005, pp. 131–45.
- Ashraf, Nava, and Oriana Bandiera. "Altruistic Capital." *American Economic Review: Papers & Proceedings 2017*, vol. 107, no. 5, 2017, pp. 70–75.
- Ashraf, Nava, Oriana Bandiera, and Kelsey Jack. "No Margin, No Mission? A Field Experiment on Incentives for Public Services Delivery." *Journal of Public Economics*, vol. 120, 2014, pp. 1–17.
- Ashraf, Nava, Dean Karlan, and Wesley Yin. "Tying Odysseus to the Mast: Evidence from a Commitment Savings Product in the Philippines." *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, vol. 121, no. 2, 2006, pp. 635–72.
- Bahá'u'lláh. *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1962.
- . *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. Translated by Shoghi Effendi, rev. ed., US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1952.
- . *The Hidden Words*. Translated by Shoghi Effendi, US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2003.
- . *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*. Bahá'í World Centre, 1992.
- . *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. Edited by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, translated by Habib Taherzadeh et al., Bahá'í World Centre, 1978.
- Baker, Monya. "1,500 scientists lift the lid on reproducibility." *Nature*, vol. 533, no. 7604, 25 May 2016.

- Benes, Jaromir, and Michael Kumhof. "The Chicago Plan Revisited." *IMF.org*, 2012. PDF, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2012/wp12202.pdf>. Accessed 3 October 2017.
- Broadberry, Stephen, and John Joseph Wallis. "Growing, Shrinking, and Long Run Economic Performance: Historical Perspectives on Economic Development." *National Bureau of Economic Research*, April 2017. PDF, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w23343.pdf>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- Campbell, T. Colin, and Thomas M. Campbell II. *The China Study: The Most Comprehensive Study of Nutrition Ever Conducted and the Startling Implications for Diet, Weight Loss, and Long-Term Health*. Rev. ed., BenBella Books, 2016.
- "Challenges in irreproducible research." *Nature*, <http://www.nature.com/news/reproducibility-1.17552>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- "China's new approach to beating poverty." *The Economist*, 29 April 2017, <http://www.economist.com/news/china/21721393-after-decades-success-things-are-getting-harder-chinas-new-approach-beating-poverty>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- Dahl, Gregory C. "Economics and the Bahá'í Teachings: An Overview." *World Order*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1975, pp. 19–40, <http://gregdahl.net/wp-content/docs/wo1975.pdf>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- . "Evolving Toward a Bahá'í Economic System." *Journal of Bahá'í Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3, 1991, pp. 1–15, <http://gregdahl.net/wp-content/docs/jbs1991.pdf>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- . "Trust and Trustworthiness." *Trust and Trustworthiness*, European Bahá'í Business Forum, 2012. Available at <<http://gregdahl.net/wp-content/docs/trust.pdf>> Accessed 17 October 2017.
- "Dr David Kelly: Controversial Death Examined." *BBC.com*, 17 December 2011, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-13716127>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- Etzioni, Amitai. *The Moral Dimension: Toward a New Economics*. Free Press, 1988.
- "Total Unemployment Rate." *Eurostat*, 8 November 2016, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=ts-dec450&plugin=1>. Accessed 12 May 2017.
- Giles, Chris. "The economic forecaster's failing vision." *Financial Times*, December 15, 2008 <https://www.ft.com/content/50007754-ca35-11dd-93e5-000077b07658> (by subscription). Accessed 17 October 2017.
- Gilligan, Andrew. "The betrayal of Dr David Kelly, 10 years on." *The Telegraph*. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/10192271/The-betrayal-of-Dr-David-Kelly-10-years-on.html>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- Hamermesh, Daniel S. "Six Decades of Top Economics Publishing: Who and How?" *Journal of Economic Literature* 51(1), 162–72, March 2013. <<http://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jel.51.1.162>>. Accessed 14 October 2017.

- “Hardcover Nonfiction Best Sellers.” *New York Times*, 18 May 2014. <https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/2014/05/18/hardcover-nonfiction/?_r=0>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- “Honesty/Ethics in Professions.” *Gallup.com*, http://www.gallup.com/poll/1654/Honesty-Ethics-professions.aspx?g_source=honesty%2c+ethics&g_medium=search&g_campaign=tiles. Accessed 11 May 2017.
- Huqúqu’lláh—The Right of God*. Edited by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, rev. ed., 2009.
- Hornby, Helen. *Lights of Guidance: A Bahá’í Reference File*. 6th ed., India Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1999.
- Irvine, Jessica. “Increase property taxes to curb rising inequality: Thomas Piketty’s warning for down under.” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 October 2016, <http://www.smh.com.au/business/increase-property-taxes-to-curb-rising-inequality-thomas-piketlys-first-australian-interview-20161008-gry23l.html>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- Jackson, Andrew, and Ben Dyson. *Modernising Money: Why Our Monetary System Is Broken and How It Can Be Fixed*. Positive Money, 2012.
- “Just 8 men own same wealth as half the world.” *Oxfam*, 16 January 2017, <http://www.oxfam.org/en/pressroom/pressreleases/2017-01-16/just-8-men-own-same-wealth-half-world>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- Karlberg, Michael. *Beyond the Culture of Contest: From Adversarialism to Mutualism in an Age of Interdependence*. George Ronald, 2004.
- Kay, John. “Should We Have ‘Narrow Banking?’” *JohnKay.com*, 2 June 2011, <http://www.johnkay.com/2011/06/02/should-we-have-narrow-banking>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- . *Other People’s Money; The Real Business of Finance*. PublicAffairs, 2015.
- King, Mervyn. *The End of Alchemy: Money, Banking, and the Future of the Global Economy*. Norton, 2017.
- Kotlikoff, Laurence J. *Jimmy Stewart Is Dead: Ending the World’s Ongoing Financial Plague with Limited Purpose Banking*. Wiley, 2010.
- Lample, Paul. *Revelation & Social Reality: Learning to Translate What Is Written into Reality*. Palabra, 2009.
- Layard, Richard. *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*. Penguin, 2005.
- London School of Economics. “What should economists and policymakers learn from the financial crisis?” 25 March 2013, <http://www.lse.ac.uk/web-site-archive/newsAndMedia/videoAndAudio/channels/publicLecturesAndEvents/player.aspx?id=1856>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- Marglin, Stephen. *The Dismal Science: How Thinking Like an Economist Undermines Community*. Harvard UP, 2010.
- Milanovic, Branko. *Global Inequality: A New Approach for the Age of Globalization*. Belknap, 2016.

- Nosek, B. A., et al. "Promoting an open research culture." *Science*, vol. 348, no. 6242, 26 June 2015, pp. 1422–25.
- Obama, Barack. "Remarks by the President in State of the Union Address." *The White House: President Barack Obama*, 27 January 2010, <http://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/photos-and-video/video/2010-state-union-address#transcript>. Accessed 10 October 2017.
- Office of Social and Economic Development (OSED), Bahá'í World Center. "Social Action." 26 November 2012 <http://universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org/involvement-life-society/osed-2012-social-action>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). "Basic Income as a Policy Option: Can It Add Up?" *OECD.org*, 24 May 2017, <http://www.oecd.org/social/soc/Basic-Income-Policy-Option-2017-Presentation.pdf>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- . *OECD Employment Outlook 2017*. OECD Publishing, 2017, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/empl_outlook-2017-en. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- Ormerod, Paul. *The Death of Economics*. Wiley, 1997.
- Piketty, Thomas. *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Belknap, 2014.
- Research Department of the Universal House of Justice. "Consultation: A Compilation." Rev. ed., Bahá'í World Centre, 1990. PDF, <http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/compilations/consultation/consultation.pdf?fe088a5d>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- Shoghi Effendi. *God Passes By*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1957.
- . *Messages to America*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1947.
- . *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1955.
- Sobhani, Felicia. "Who Is Writing the Future? Felicia Sobhani at TEDxYouth@Croccetta." *YouTube*, uploaded by TEDx Talks, 15 December 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-Y6Te9Y1ME>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- Taleb, Nassim Nicholas. *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*. Random House, 2010.
- Tanden, Neera, et al. "Toward a Marshall Plan for America: Rebuilding Our Towns, Cities, and the Middle Class." *Center for American Progress*, 16 May 2017, https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2017/05/17073805/PathForward_MarshallPlan-report1.pdf. Accessed 6 April 2018.
- Taubes, Gary. *The Case Against Sugar*. Knopf, 2016.
- The Compilation of Compilations*. Vol. 2, Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991.
- The Universal House of Justice. Message to the Bahá'ís of the World on Social and Economic Development, 20 October 1983. *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963–86, The Third Epoch of the Formative Age*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996, pp. 601–04.

- . Ridván 1991 Message to the Bahá'ís of the World. *Bahá'í Reference Library*, http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messag19910421_001/19910421_001.pdf. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- . Message to the Bahá'ís of the World, 26 November 1999. *Bahá'í Reference Library*, http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/19991126_001/19991126_001.pdf. Accessed 11 April 2018.
- . Ridván 2008 Message to the Bahá'ís of the World. *Bahá'í Reference Library*, http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20080421_001/20080421_001.pdf. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- . Ridván 2010 Message to the Bahá'ís of the World. *Bahá'í Reference Library*, http://universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org/ridvan-messages/20100421_001. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- . Message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, 28 December 2010. *Bahá'í Reference Library*, http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20101228_001/20101228_001.pdf. Accessed 6 April 2018.
- . Message to the Bahá'ís of Iran on Involvement in the Life of Society, 2 March 2013. *The Universal House of Justice*, http://universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org/involvement-life-society/20130302_001. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- . Message to the Bahá'ís of the World Regarding Economic Life, 1 March 2017. *The Universal House of Justice*, http://universalhouseofjustice.bahai.org/activities-bahai-community/20170301_001. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- . Message to All Who Celebrate the Glory of God, October 2017. *Bahá'í Reference Library*, http://www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20171001_001/20171001_001.pdf. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- Turner, Adair. *Between Debt and the Devil: Money, Credit, and Fixing Global Finance*. Princeton UP, 2016.
- US Bureau of Economic Analysis. “NIPA Table 6.16.” *BEA.gov*, <http://www.bea.gov/iTable/iTable.cfm?reqid=19&step=2#reqid=19&step=2&i-suri=1&1921=survey&1903=239>. Accessed 17 October 2017.
- Wolf, Martin. “Conservatism Buries Reagan and Thatcher.” *Financial Times*, 24 May 2017, p. 11.
- Yellen, Janet. “Inflation, Uncertainty, and Monetary Policy.” *Federal Reserve.gov*, 26 September 2017, <http://www.federalreserve.gov/newsevents/speech/yellen20170926a.htm>. Accessed 12 October 2017.

Thankful in Adversity: Using Bahá'í Writings and Benefit Finding to Enhance Understanding and Application of Mental Health Recovery Principles

LINDSAY-ROSE DYKEMA

Abstract

Mental health recovery has been conceptualized as a process through which individuals with severe mental illness improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and work toward meaningful personal goals. While this is clearly an improvement over the traditional medical model of treatment of schizophrenia and related disorders, the spiritual dimension of mental health recovery still warrants closer investigation. The idea that adversity may offer spiritual insight and opportunities for personal growth—a common theme in the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith—is particularly worthy of consideration. This paper reflects on how both the Bahá'í Writings and the literature on benefit finding can enhance the understanding and applications of mental health recovery principles.

Resumé

Le rétablissement de la santé mentale a été conceptualisé comme étant un processus par lequel les personnes ayant une grave maladie mentale améliorent leur état de santé et leur bien-être, prennent leur vie en main et s'emploient à réaliser des objectifs personnels significatifs. Bien qu'il s'agisse d'une nette amélioration par rapport au modèle médical traditionnel du traitement de la schizophrénie et des troubles connexes, la dimension spirituelle du rétablissement de la santé mentale mérite néanmoins un examen plus approfondi. L'idée selon laquelle l'adversité peut mener à des prises de conscience d'ordre spirituel et offrir des occasions de croissance personnelle – un thème courant dans les enseignements de la foi bahá'íe – justifie une attention toute particulière. L'auteur examine comment les écrits bahá'ís et la littérature sur la recherche d'un mieux-être peuvent permettre de mieux comprendre et appliquer les principes du rétablissement de la santé mentale.

Resumen

La recuperación de la salud mental se ha conceptualizado como un proceso a través del cual las personas con enfermedades mentales severas mejoran su salud y bienestar, viven una vida auto dirigida y trabajan para alcanzar metas personales significativas. Si bien esto es claramente una mejora con respecto al modelo médico tradicional de tratamiento de la esquizofrenia y los trastornos relacionados, la dimensión espiritual de la recuperación de la salud mental aún merece una investigación más a fondo. La idea de que la adversidad puede ofrecer una visión espiritual y oportunidades para el crecimiento personal – un tema común en las enseñanzas de la Fe Bahá'í – es particularmente digna de con-

sideración. Este documento reflexiona sobre cómo los escritos bahá'ís y la literatura sobre la búsqueda de beneficios pueden mejorar la comprensión y las aplicaciones de los principios de recuperación de la salud mental.

In the first half of the twentieth century, individuals with severe mental illness—generally defined as schizophrenia or major mood disorders with psychotic features—were frequently confined to state-run “insane asylums” due to the limited availability of effective treatments for these conditions. Living conditions for these individuals were often unhygienic and overcrowded, and asylums became notorious for the poor treatment or even the abuse of patients (Fakhoury and Priebe 313). In the 1960s, the “de-institutionalization” movement began in the United States when President John F. Kennedy signed the Community Mental Health Centers Act, which authorized construction grants for outpatient mental health clinics. At that point, psychiatric services began to shift from institutional settings to community-based outpatient care. However, treatments for individuals with severe mental illness continued to be inadequate and often were perceived as coercive (Sheth 11).

On the heels of the civil rights movement, a grassroots self-help and advocacy initiative often referred to as the consumer/survivor/ex-patient movement gained momentum throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s—a movement that worked to

ensure that individuals with severe mental illness maintained autonomy and access to services relevant to their own unique needs and preferences (Oaks 1212). The evolution of the shift from institutionalization and the traditional medical model toward a more self-directed approach in which the individual's needs and goals are prioritized has come to be known as the mental health recovery movement.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), the agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that leads public health efforts to advance the behavioral health of the nation, has proposed the following working definition of mental health recovery: “a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness, live a self-directed life, and strive to reach their full potential” (SAMHSA 3). Mental health recovery is a journey of healing and transformation for a person with a severe mental health condition, such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, toward being able to live a fulfilling and meaningful life in communities of his or her choice while striving to reach personal goals. The recovery movement has been a welcome departure from the traditional medical model of the treatment of schizophrenia and related disorders, which focused on clinical outcomes (such as symptom severity, hospitalizations, and medication adherence) rather than on functional goals around social, educational, and occupational

pursuits. It is these functional goals that tend to be much more meaningful to those who struggle with mental health conditions. A lonely man with schizophrenia, for example, is likely to prioritize his own goal of finding a girlfriend over his psychiatrist's goal for him to adhere to his medication regimen.

The positive psychology movement, much like the mental health recovery movement, focuses on how individuals can thrive and reach their full potential. Martin Seligman, who is considered the founding father of positive psychology, defines this field as "the scientific study of the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive. The field is founded on the belief that people want to lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, to cultivate what is best within themselves, and to enhance their experiences of love, work, and play" (Positive Psychology Center). Positive psychology—in contrast to traditional approaches that, to their detriment, focus almost exclusively on the identification and alleviation of pathology—emphasizes the need to understand the positive side of human experiences. Unlike mental health recovery, which focuses on persons with severe mental illness, positive psychology caters to individuals in all states of mental health. It may, nonetheless, provide a useful framework for facilitating mental health recovery. Both fields have followed parallel tracks, each seeking to empower individuals to embrace what is good in their lives rather than

attend to what is wrong (Resnick and Rosenheck 120).

The topic of "benefit finding" has gained increasing attention in the mental health field, particularly within the branch of positive psychology. A few other terms represent similar concepts, such as post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi and Calhoun 455), stress-related growth (Park, Cohen, and Murch 71), meaning-making (Wright, Crawford, and Sebastian 597), finding meaning (McIntosh, Silver, and Wortman 812), positive meaning (Moskowitz et al. 49), and adversarial growth (Linley and Joseph 11). These formulations all share the premise that facing adversity can nourish the conviction that we are in some ways better off than we were before.

Benefit finding has been quantified by researchers through various validated instruments, including the Perceived Positive Change Scale (PPCS), the Post-traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI) (Tedeschi and Calhoun 455), and the Stress-Related Growth Scale (SRGS) (Park, Cohen, and Murch 71). There is a very large body of literature to support the positive mental health effects of benefit finding in the face of a considerable range of adversities, including medical conditions (for example, HIV, cancer, heart disease, rheumatoid arthritis, lupus), natural disasters, sexual assault, combat trauma, bereavement, caregiving, and childhood abuse.¹

1 For extensive meta-analysis, see Vicki Helgeson, Kerry Reynolds, and Patricia

To my knowledge, only one study to date has examined the relationship between benefit finding and recovery among individuals with severe mental (rather than physical) illness. Chiba, Kawakami, and Miyamoto studied individuals in Japan with severe mental illness and found that independent of a wide range of demographic and clinical factors, mental health recovery scores positively correlated with benefit-finding scores.

Retta Andresen, a clinical psychologist, examined the idea of stages of mental health recovery and, through qualitative research, identified five common stages through which individuals often progress in the recovery process: moratorium, awareness, preparation, rebuilding, and growth. She theorized that benefit finding is likely to be a feature of later stages (150). This is consistent with the broader literature, which indicates that the time elapsed since the adverse event very strongly moderates the relation of benefit finding to mental health outcomes (Helgeson, Reynolds, and Tomich 797) and that *cumulative* adversity over time is, seemingly paradoxically, associated with stronger levels of emotional well-being (Keinan, Shrira, and Shmotkin 1149). A longitudinal study found that respondents' reports of benefits were more strongly correlated to adjustment thirteen to eighteen months after loss, indicating that benefit finding may be

a long-term process that unfolds over time (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, and Larson 561).

As the field of mental health has progressed from the medical model to the recovery model, mental health services have broadened their scope to offer interventions that cater to individuals' social, occupational, and educational goals. The spiritual dimension of mental health recovery, however, warrants further consideration. Numerous studies have shown that up to 80 percent of individuals with severe mental illness use religion and spirituality to cope (Tepper et al. 660), yet only a minority of them report ever having discussed spiritual issues with their clinicians (Mohr et al. 247). Clinicians' reluctance to actively address spiritual matters with these patients may be partially attributable to the presence of religious delusions in this population, the concern being that encouraging spiritual coping could exacerbate unhealthy beliefs.² However, a growing body of literature refutes the argument that religious involvement or integration of spiritual concerns in psychiatric practice is likely to have adverse effects on mental health. In

² Religious delusions are thought to be present in about 25 percent of individuals with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder (Koenig 283). In my own clinical experience, I once proposed starting a spirituality group for patients with severe mental illness in the VA clinic where I was working at the time, but my proposal was declined based precisely on this concern.

Tomich's "A Meta-Analytic Review of Benefit Finding and Growth."

fact, religious beliefs and practices, which are freely available at any time (regardless of an individual's financial or social circumstances), have been found to be a significant protective factor in reducing psychiatric symptoms (Koenig 283). Sacred writings provide role models who facilitate the acceptance of suffering, and spiritual beliefs tend to impart a sense of meaning and purpose during difficult life circumstances. As such, benefit finding may be one of the "active ingredients" in spiritual and religious coping.

In the Bahá'í Faith, adversity is seen as a vital process leading to spiritual growth, a theme that appears repeatedly in the Bahá'í Writings. These two passages from Bahá'u'lláh's Hidden Words offer an illustrative example:

O Son of Man! If adversity befall thee not in My path, how canst thou walk in the ways of them that are content with My pleasure? If trials afflict thee not in thy longing to meet Me, how wilt thou attain the light in thy love for My beauty? (Arabic no. 50)

O Son of Man! The true lover yearneth for tribulation even as doth the rebel for forgiveness and the sinful for mercy. (Arabic no. 49)

In this paper, I propose a spiritually informed conceptualization of mental health recovery as the process through which an individual gains the capacity to find benefits in adversity. I will

reflect on how both the Bahá'í Writings and the literature on benefit finding can enhance our understanding of the SAMHSA mental health recovery principles in the treatment of individuals with severe mental illness.

SAMHSA has identified a set of ten principles to operationalize mental health recovery. These principles all have areas of intersection with both positive psychology and Bahá'í teachings, which I will review below. I will employ clinical vignettes from my own experience as a psychiatrist to illustrate these ideas.

SAMHSA RECOVERY PRINCIPLE #1:

RECOVERY EMERGES FROM HOPE.

PEOPLE CAN AND DO OVERCOME THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL CHALLENGES, BARRIERS, AND OBSTACLES THAT CONFRONT THEM.

In positive psychology, struggles are viewed as temporary occurrences that function to set the stage for hope in the context of future hardships. Individuals in the midst of current hardships are encouraged to remember past adversities and struggles they have successfully endured and to remind themselves that "this, too, shall pass." Surviving previous adversity provides a mental data bank of empirical support during current hardships that casts hope as a rational response. Therefore, the ability to draw on hope to help cope with a current struggle can be viewed as a benefit of previous adversity. It is unsurprising, then, that those who demonstrate hope as a

dispositional characteristic are more likely to engage in benefit finding (Affleck and Tennen, "Construing Benefits from Adversity" 899).

The Bahá'í Writings inspire readers in the midst of hardships to shift their perspective to one of hope, whatever circumstances may befall them:

Be thou ever hopeful, for the bounties of God never cease to flow upon man. If viewed from one perspective they seem to decrease, but from another they are full and complete. Man is under all conditions immersed in a sea of God's blessings. Therefore, be thou not hopeless under any circumstances, but rather be firm in thy hope. (Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections* 205–06)

In this way, the Bahá'í Writings encourage us to remind ourselves that regardless of our current struggles, we are always immersed in God's blessings. As such, hope is the only rational response to hardship.

It is important to note, however, that one can grow to accept this perspective regardless of whether or not he or she believes in God. Consider the psychological attribute of optimism, which is so closely related to hope that the terms essentially are used interchangeably. Numerous studies have demonstrated the beneficial effects of optimism in improving both physical and mental health (Conversano et al. 25). Seligman defines optimism as reacting to problems with a sense of

confidence and high personal agency (5). Specifically, optimistic people believe that negative events are temporary, limited in scope (instead of pervading every aspect of a person's life), and manageable. The field of positive psychology has developed interventions to build optimism in individuals whose dispositions are less naturally inclined toward it (Seligman 205).

A clinical example from my own experience as a psychiatrist demonstrates the healing power of hope in the face of adversity. "Josh" is a twenty-five-year-old man with a history of schizophrenia. He has had a longstanding fixation with the Navy SEALs, and it has been his dream since he was a child to become one. He spends a great deal of time looking for "signs" from God that, in his mind, would indicate that becoming a SEAL is his destiny. He often takes photographs of patterns he notices in various places—the clouds, his lawn, his dishes—that demonstrate these signs. However, he is aware that his history of mental illness will likely prevent him from pursuing this dream. This has been a very difficult realization for him to come to terms with. "I can't understand why God would give me this dream, but also give me this mental illness that makes it so my dream will never happen," he said to me once, crushed. Over time, however, he has been able to reframe his struggles with his mental illness as experiences that have made him stronger and inspired him to help others. He now hopes to use his passion for the Navy SEALs to perhaps work for

them in some other capacity, such as a photographer (given his affinity for this medium) or as a personal trainer for younger men hoping to enlist in the military. “I still have hope,” he explains. “If you don’t have hope, you don’t have anything.”

SAMHSA RECOVERY PRINCIPLE #2:
RECOVERY IS PERSON DRIVEN.
 INDIVIDUALS DEFINE THEIR OWN LIFE
 GOALS AND DESIGN THEIR UNIQUE PATH.

In positive psychology, one of the ways in which suffering is viewed as meaningful is that it gives us self-knowledge and helps us to understand ourselves better. Rediscovery and reconstruction of an enduring sense of self as an active and responsible agent can be a positive outcome of severe mental illness (Davidson and Strauss 131). Individuals are encouraged to reflect upon what their adverse experiences have taught them about themselves and their relationships with others (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, and Larson 561). Similarly, the Bahá’í Writings emphasize the importance of knowledge of the self: “[M]an should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty” (Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets* 35). The following vignette from my clinical experience illustrates the power of gaining self-knowledge through adversity.

“Tommy” is a fifty-year-old man with a history of bipolar disorder with psychotic features. He graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and had been

a successful engineer before suffering his first psychotic break. In 2005, under the influence of delusional beliefs, he set fire to a restaurant. Despite the fact that he was clearly psychotic at the time of the incident, he was convicted for arson and spent five years in prison. During his incarceration, his illness was inadequately treated, and delusional beliefs led him to severely mutilate himself by biting off two of his fingertips and plucking out one of his eyeballs. However, once he did recover symptomatically, he spent his remaining time in prison reading the Bible, studying it with such devotion that he became a devout Christian with extensive knowledge about scripture, which he then went on to share with others. After his release, despite the immensity of the losses he had endured, he described a deep sense of purpose and serenity that he had never had before, even prior to the onset of his mental illness. “I had always seen myself as an engineer and a soldier,” he reflected, “focused on logic and reason. I had no idea that I had a ‘spiritual’ side, that I could be drawn to religion and inspired by it, that I could come to an understanding of the meaning of why we’re here—to serve God. If I had never gone to prison, I would have never discovered that about myself.”

Both positive psychology and the Bahá’í Writings, then, offer a framework whereby the importance of our own individual self-reflection is acknowledged and appreciated. Therefore, in enhancing and providing opportunities for self-reflection,

adversity can foster mental health recovery.

SAMHSA RECOVERY PRINCIPLE #3:
RECOVERY OCCURS VIA MANY
PATHWAYS. INDIVIDUALS ARE UNIQUE
WITH DISTINCT NEEDS, STRENGTHS,
PREFERENCES, GOALS, CULTURE, AND
BACKGROUNDS (INCLUDING TRAUMA
EXPERIENCES) THAT AFFECT AND
DETERMINE THEIR PATHWAYS TO
RECOVERY.³

One of the tenets of positive psychology is that our experiences make us who we are and give us the opportunity to learn about our signature strengths (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, and Larson 561). It is thought that one can develop a new, perhaps wiser, sense of self through adversity (Helmrath and Steinitz 785; Thompson and Janigian 260).

The unity of mankind is the foundation upon which the Bahá'í Faith is based. As such, one might infer that our similarities as humans are emphasized over our differences. However, the supreme diversity of the human race is in fact celebrated and nurtured. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

Let us look rather at the beauty in diversity, the beauty of harmony, and learn a lesson from the vegetable creation. If you beheld

a garden in which all the plants were the same as to form, color and perfume, it would not seem beautiful to you at all, but, rather, monotonous and dull. The garden which is pleasing to the eye and which makes the heart glad, is the garden in which are growing side by side flowers of every hue, form and perfume, and the joyous contrast of color is what makes for charm and beauty. So is it with trees. An orchard full of fruit trees is a delight; so is a plantation planted with many species of shrubs. It is just the diversity and variety that constitutes its charm; each flower, each tree, each fruit, beside being beautiful in itself, brings out by contrast the qualities of the others, and shows to advantage the special loveliness of each and all. (*Paris Talks* 51–54)

Unity is seen as the means through which people can fully cultivate both their diversity and their individuality. The Bahá'í teachings emphasize the beauty of each person's unique strengths and perspectives and the importance of thoughtful collaboration and consultation to ensure that each voice is heard. This process offers a deeper appreciation of the myriad ways in which individuals with severe mental illness can each embark upon their own unique path to recovery.

What follows is one example from my clinical practice that illustrates this concept. "Jim" is a sixty-year-old man with a history of schizophrenia. Early

3 As this principle overlaps with recovery principle #7 (recovery is culturally based and influenced), I will treat both in this section.

in the course of his illness, he required frequent psychiatric hospitalizations for the stabilization of his symptoms, which included auditory hallucinations of voices berating and insulting him, as well as God's voice commanding him to do sometimes reckless and destructive things. The first time we met, he explained to me that he eventually figured out that when a voice insulted him, he could "shut it down" by saying something that rhymed with whatever vulgar phrase he had heard. "I don't know why it works, but it does," he said. "If I say something like 'duck blue,' it's like I'm pointing out how absurd that voice is, and then it doesn't bother me anymore." Additionally, with regard to his previous delusional beliefs about God, he explained, "I learned that those voices I hear aren't the way God speaks to us. He speaks to us in the wind blowing the leaves, in the feeling we get in our hearts." He was eager for me to tell other patients about what had worked for him. I reflected to him that his own pathway toward learning to manage his symptoms was a unique and beautiful one, and although other individuals with mental illness may not be able to relate specifically to his symptoms, I encouraged him to share his insights with others. He finds a great deal of meaning in helping friends and neighbors who also have mental health conditions through companionship and assistance with daily tasks.

SAMHSA RECOVERY PRINCIPLE #4:
RECOVERY IS HOLISTIC. IT ENCOMPASSES MIND, BODY, SPIRIT, AND COMMUNITY. THE ARRAY OF SERVICES AND FORMS OF SUPPORT AVAILABLE SHOULD BE INTEGRATED AND COORDINATED.

From a positive psychology perspective, one can conceptualize three different levels of healing. The first is an intellectual level—the idea that a certain hardship is happening for a reason (even if that reason is not immediately evident to us). The second is an emotional level—the idea that hardships can lead to personal growth and self-understanding, as described earlier. Finally, several studies have found that adversity can foster spiritual growth, including the idea of balance in the universe and submission to God's will. Given that all three of these levels are considered and valued, it is clear that the positive psychology framework is consistent with the principle that mental health recovery should offer a holistic approach.

The Bahá'í Writings offer insights about maintaining health through approaches on multiple different levels. Present-day holistic health professionals, as well as more mainstream physicians in the emerging field of lifestyle medicine,⁴ emphasize the importance

4 Lifestyle medicine is an emerging medical specialty that uses evidence-based lifestyle therapeutic approaches—such as a whole food, plant-based diet—to prevent, treat, and even reverse chronic

of nutrition in maintaining physical and mental health, echoing the sentiments 'Abdu'l-Bahá expressed over a century ago:

It is, therefore, evident that it is possible to cure by foods, aliments and fruits; but as today the science of medicine is imperfect, this fact is not yet fully grasped. When the science of medicine reaches perfection, treatment will be given by foods, aliments, fragrant fruits and vegetables. (*Some Answered Questions* 297)

It is important to note that Bahá'í teachings explicitly indicate that although true healing is from God, seeking medical treatment is encouraged. Shoghi Effendi writes:

There is nothing in our teachings about Freud and his method. Psychiatry treatment in general is no doubt an important contribution to medicine, but we must believe it is still a growing rather than a perfected science. As Bahá'u'lláh has urged us to avail ourselves of the help of good physicians, Bahá'ís are certainly not only free to turn to psychiatry for assistance but should, when available, do so. This does not mean psychiatrists are always wise or always right; it means we are free to avail

ourselves of the best medicine has to offer us. (*Directives* 62)

Finally, like all major religions, the Bahá'í Faith emphasizes intellectual and spiritual approaches in healing from suffering. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

Consider that the highest type of creation below man is the animal, which is superior to all degrees of life except man. Manifestly, the animal has been created for the life of this world. Its highest virtue is to express excellence in the material plane of existence. The animal is perfect when its body is healthy and its physical senses are whole. When it is characterized by the attributes of physical health, when its physical forces are in working order, when food and surrounding conditions minister to its needs, it has attained the ultimate perfection of its kingdom. But man does not depend upon these things for his virtues. No matter how perfect his health and physical powers, if that is all, he has not yet risen above the degree of a perfect animal. Beyond and above this, God has opened the doors of ideal virtues and attainments before the face of man. He has created in his being the mysteries of the divine Kingdom. He has bestowed upon him the power of intellect so that through the attribute of reason, when fortified by the Holy Spirit, he may penetrate and discover ideal realities

diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and coronary artery disease (American College of Lifestyle Medicine).

and become informed of the mysteries of the world of significances. (*Promulgation* 303)

It is clear, then, that both the positive psychology framework and the Bahá'í Writings offer a holistic approach to recovery, encompassing mind, body, and spirit. Physical and mental health are inextricably connected, one influencing the other continuously, and this is perhaps especially true for people with severe mental illness. Numerous studies have shown that individuals with schizophrenia have a markedly decreased life expectancy compared with the general population, and this discrepancy is primarily attributable to lifestyle-related cardiovascular risk factors, such as obesity, diabetes, hypertension, and tobacco use (Olfson et al. 1172). Other barriers to physical wellness in these individuals include side effects of antipsychotic medications (many of which can cause weight gain and insulin resistance) and suboptimal access to, and coordination with, primary care. However, improving both mental and physical wellness is possible, as illustrated by the following vignette from my own clinical practice.

“Gary” is a fifty-six-year-old man with a history of schizophrenia. At one point, he was morbidly obese and had been diagnosed with type 2 diabetes, hypercholesterolemia, and hypertension. He was also very socially isolated. He began to participate in meetings at his local National Alliance for the Mentally Ill chapter, where he

was able to socialize on a weekly basis. Over time, he built up enough motivation to start making lifestyle changes, including healthier dietary choices and regular exercise. In a gradual, healthy way, he lost a staggering 150 pounds. His primary care providers asked him to volunteer his time as a peer mentor for other obese patients who were trying to make lifestyle changes. He found this work rewarding and meaningful, the first productive outlet for his skills in many years. In this way, the adversity of his physical health challenges enhanced his mental health recovery.

SAMHSA RECOVERY PRINCIPLE #5:
RECOVERY IS SUPPORTED BY PEERS AND ALLIES. MUTUAL SUPPORT AND MUTUAL AID GROUPS, INCLUDING THE SHARING OF EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS, AS WELL AS SOCIAL LEARNING, PLAY AN INVALUABLE ROLE IN RECOVERY.

A common theme in the benefit-finding literature is that adversity can foster positive personality change, such as the development of empathy and compassion for others (Affleck and Tennen, “The Effect” 899). Having endured a particular hardship may heighten and perfect an individual’s capacity for empathy for someone who is going through a similar experience and, as such, gives that person the opportunity to render an invaluable service to others. This is clearly valued in the field of mental health recovery, as evidenced by the growing

body of literature on the efficacy of peer support specialists (Chinman et al. 429). Peer support specialists are individuals with severe mental health conditions who work to engage others in mental health treatment, offering a degree of empathy that most mental health professionals cannot provide. In turn, the peer support specialists themselves are able to discover deep meaning in their hardships.

The Bahá'í teachings emphasize that all of us, as creations of one God, are part of one human family. Bahá'u'lláh said, "The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch" (*Gleanings* 112:1). As such, we are encouraged to support others through acts of service and kindness. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

You must manifest complete love and affection toward all mankind. Do not exalt yourselves above others, but consider all as your equals, recognizing them as the servants of one God. Know that God is compassionate toward all; therefore, love all from the depths of your hearts, prefer all religionists before yourselves, be filled with love for every race, and be kind toward the people of all nationalities . . . Refrain from reprimanding [others], and if you wish to give admonition or advice, let it be offered in such a way that it will not burden the hearer. Turn all your thoughts toward bringing

joy to hearts.... Assist the world of humanity as much as possible. Be the source of consolation to every sad one, assist every weak one, be helpful to every indigent one, care for every sick one, be the cause of glorification to every lowly one, and shelter those who are overshadowed by fear. . . . Be illumined, be spiritual, be divine, be glorious, be quickened of God, be a Bahá'í. (*Promulgation* 452–53)

The Bahá'í Writings emphasize that it is our sacrosanct duty to offer support and assistance to others whenever possible. It is only in turning away from the self and toward the face of God—that is, toward service to humanity—that we break free from the bonds of earthly suffering. Focusing one's efforts and energy in a compassionate manner toward another suffering person is one mechanism through which healing and recovery are born out of adversity. This is illustrated by the following vignette from my clinical experience.

"George" is a sixty-five-year-old man with a history of schizophrenia. He has been hospitalized numerous times over the last four decades of his life, and he has had periods of homelessness. Once he had achieved some degree of symptomatic stability, he began to volunteer regularly at a soup kitchen in Chicago. He had previously eaten at this soup kitchen when he himself had been penniless and homeless, and the opportunity to "give back" offered him a valued role

for which he was grateful. He loves to tell the story of the time Mother Teresa visited the soup kitchen and he was able to meet her. “If I didn’t have schizophrenia,” he reflects, “I would never have been homeless. And if I had never been homeless, I would not have volunteered at the soup kitchen, and I never would have met the blessed Mother Teresa. That’s why I thank God for my mental illness.”

SAMHSA RECOVERY PRINCIPLE #6:
RECOVERY IS SUPPORTED THROUGH
RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL NETWORKS.
AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN THE
RECOVERY PROCESS IS THE PRESENCE
AND INVOLVEMENT OF PEOPLE WHO
BELIEVE IN THE PERSON’S ABILITY TO
RECOVER; WHO OFFER HOPE, SUPPORT,
AND ENCOURAGEMENT; AND WHO
SUGGEST STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES
FOR CHANGE.

A common theme in the benefit-finding literature is that adversity can strengthen relationships with family and friends (Affleck and Tennen, “Construing Benefits” 899). For example, an individual in crisis may be pleasantly surprised by an outpouring of support she receives from friends, family, or the community, which leads her to appreciate those relationships and her support system more than she had prior to the adverse event. As such, gratitude for adversity can be an important element in mental health recovery.

The Bahá’í Writings, as discussed earlier, are replete with guidance

about the crucial importance of offering hope, support, and service to one another. In his book *Portals to Freedom*, Howard Colby Ives shares an anecdote that perfectly illustrates how strongly the Bahá’í Faith emphasizes service to others:

Lua Getsinger, one of the early Bahá’ís of America, tells of an experience she had in Akká. She had made the pilgrimage to the prison-city to see ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. One day He said to her that He was too busy today to call upon a friend of His who was very poor and sick. He wished Lua to go in His place. He told her to take food to the sick man and care for him as He had been doing. Lua learned the address and immediately went to do as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had asked. She felt proud that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had trusted her with some of His own work. But soon she returned to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in a state of excitement. “Master,” she exclaimed, “You sent me to a very terrible place! I almost fainted from the awful smell, the dirty rooms, the degrading condition of that man and his house. I left quickly before I could catch some terrible disease.” Sadly and sternly, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gazed at her. If she wanted to serve God, He told her, she would have to serve her fellow man, because in every person she should see the image and likeness of God. Then He told

her to go back to the man's house. If the house was dirty, she should clean it. If the man was dirty, she should bathe him. If he was hungry, she should feed him. He asked her not to come back until all of this was done. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has done these things many times for this man, and he told Lua Getsinger that she should be able to do them once. This is how 'Abdu'l-Bahá taught Lua to serve her fellow man. (85)

Similarly, 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes, "We should all visit the sick. When they are in sorrow and suffering, it is a real help and benefit to have a friend come. Happiness is a great healer to those who are ill. You must always have this thought of love and affection when you visit the ailing and afflicted" (*Promulgation* 204). Being on the receiving end of such support fosters gratitude in the face of adversity and is clearly conducive to mental health recovery. Consider, for example, the following story from my clinical experience.

"Stacy" is a forty-seven-year-old woman with schizoaffective disorder. After her husband informed her that he was involved with another woman and planned to file for divorce, she became severely depressed. She began to have distressing hallucinations, including voices urging her to harm herself. She reached out to her mental health providers for help and was admitted to the hospital for treatment. During her hospitalization, many friends from her

church community, as well as peers from the outpatient program where she had been receiving treatment, visited her to offer support and encouragement. She was surprised and profoundly touched by their kindness. She later expressed gratitude for having been hospitalized because it helped her realize that even though her marriage was ending, she was not alone.

SAMHSA RECOVERY PRINCIPLE #8:
RECOVERY IS SUPPORTED BY
ADDRESSING TRAUMA. SERVICES
AND SUPPORT SHOULD BE TRAUMA
INFORMED TO FOSTER SAFETY
(PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL)
AND TRUST, AS WELL AS TO
PROMOTE CHOICE, EMPOWERMENT,
AND COLLABORATION.

Post-traumatic growth is a concept very closely linked to benefit finding, and one that has been operationalized by Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun, who developed the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI). This measure assesses positive responses to trauma in five areas: appreciation of life, relationships with others, new possibilities in life, personal strength, and spiritual change. Trauma-informed services and supports would ideally not only address the negative impacts of trauma, but also assist individuals in identifying these potential positive responses, in order to meaningfully foster mental health recovery.

In the Bahá'í Writings, suffering is

considered an inescapable reality, but one that fosters personal growth and is indeed essential for it. “Men who suffer not,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes, “attain no perfection” (*Paris Talks* 50). Elsewhere, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reminds us that suffering is a means for attaining true happiness:

The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering. The more the ground is ploughed the better the seed will grow, the better the harvest will be. Just as the plough furrows the earth deeply, purifying it of weeds and thistles, so suffering and tribulation free man from the petty affairs of this worldly life until he arrives at a state of complete detachment. His attitude in this world will be that of divine happiness. Man is, so to speak, unripe: the heat of the fire of suffering will mature him. Look back to the times past and you will find that the greatest men have suffered most. (*Paris Talks* 178)

Trauma distinguishes itself from other forms of suffering in that it often robs individuals of a sense of safety. In a letter to an individual believer dated 5 January 1992, the Universal House of Justice writes:

Your letter refers to experiences in the Bahá’í community, such as group activity, chanting, and embracing, which have the effect of

triggering in your daughters the revival of painful memories they are seeking to overcome. While this is unfortunate, it might also be viewed as an important part of the healing process that they learn to clearly distinguish between people motivated by a corrupt inclination to abuse and manipulate others, and a community which has as its watchword the protection of the rights of each individual, and which is striving to strengthen the bond of mutual love and respect which binds it together.

Bahá’ís view the community’s loving support as an essential part of healing from trauma and developing a sense of interpersonal safety and trust—which is of the utmost importance in mental health recovery, as the following example from my clinical experience illustrates.

“Brandon” is a twenty-seven-year-old man with a history of bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) related to his two combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan. He struggled a great deal to adapt to civilian life once he returned from the war, and his anxiety was so severe that he essentially secluded himself in his apartment, only leaving home for necessary appointments and errands. He was referred to a psychosocial rehabilitation clinic that offered classes relevant to recovery goals. Initially, he was too anxious to participate in groups,

as his discomfort around other people was so severe. Over time, however, he began to feel accepted and welcomed by other veterans in the program, and he started to share some of his own experiences with his peers. He was a talented artist and skillfully used this modality to express his emotions related to his experiences in combat. After other veterans offered positive and encouraging feedback about his skills and abilities, he felt empowered to return to college. He recently graduated with a degree in social work and hopes to help other veterans suffering from PTSD.

SAMHSA RECOVERY PRINCIPLE #9:
RECOVERY INVOLVES INDIVIDUAL,
FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY STRENGTHS
AND RESPONSIBILITY. INDIVIDUALS,
FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES HAVE
STRENGTHS AND RESOURCES THAT
SERVE AS A FOUNDATION FOR RECOVERY.

The growing field of positive psychology, like the mental health recovery movement, has emphasized the importance of focusing on and mobilizing an individual's strengths rather than his or her deficits and pathology. Seligman and Chris Petersen, another pioneer in the field, developed a questionnaire to help individuals identify their signature character strengths so that they can engage in endeavors that build upon them to live happier, more fulfilling lives (Wood et al. 15). The field has expanded to address family and community strengths as well.

Sheridan et al. define "family-centered positive psychology" as a framework for working with children and families that promotes strengths and capacity building within individuals and systems rather than simply focusing on the resolution of problems or remediation of deficiencies (7). The family's strengths and resources are seen as the context for growth within which children can develop competencies and skills.⁵

Centered as it is on the principle of the unity of mankind, the Bahá'í Faith offers rich guidance on the importance of focusing on one another's strengths. As an illustrative example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes:

One must see in every human being only that which is worthy of praise. When this is done, one can be a friend to the whole human race. If, however, we look at people from the standpoint of their faults, then being a friend to them is a formidable task. It happened one day in the time of Christ—may the life of the world be a sacrifice unto Him—that He passed by the dead body of a dog, a carcass reeking, hideous, the limbs rotting away. One of those present said: "How foul its stench!" And another said: "How

⁵ See also Dan Buettner's book *The Blue Zones of Happiness*, which explores how policy-level interventions based largely on positive psychology principles can build levels of happiness in communities.

sickening! How loathsome!” To be brief, each one of them had something to add to the list. But then Christ Himself spoke, and He told them: “Look at that dog’s teeth! How gleaming white!” The Messiah’s sin-covering gaze did not for a moment dwell upon the repulsiveness of that carrion. The one element of that dead dog’s carcass which was not abomination was the teeth: and Jesus looked upon their brightness. Thus is it incumbent upon us, when we direct our gaze toward other people, to see where they excel, not where they fail. (*Selections* 320)⁶

6 Notably, the Bahá’í Faith also emphasizes the importance of identifying and building upon strengths at a community level in order to engage effectively in capacity building. Consider this excerpt from a statement by the Bahá’í International Community: “One of the defining characteristics that has emerged in the conversation on resilience is the attempt to look for existing sources of strength and capacity at the local level within conflict-affected societies and seek to build on these as a vehicle for lasting transformation. In doing so, the focus on resilience captures an important insight: conflict-affected communities should be looked at through the lens of strength and potentiality, not fragility. This shift in focus has practical implications. While insights and resources from international actors are essential, a strength-based framework will recognize that peace is not transposed

The Bahá’í Writings, then, call upon us to focus on the strengths inherent in every human being. It is clear that doing so fosters not only unity among men, but also the sense of self-worth and self-efficacy⁷ that is essential in recovery from severe mental illness.

One clinical example from my own practice illustrates the importance of a strengths-based approach. “Terry” is a forty-four-year-old man with a history of severe recurrent depression, which had led to multiple suicide attempts in the past. His mood disorder dates back to adolescence—he had been a troubled and rebellious teen and had several brushes with the law. Most notably, he was incarcerated for two years after stabbing his stepfather in an effort to stop him from beating his mother. In ninth grade, he was expelled from high school for frequent fights. He had difficulty finding employment due to his criminal record and limited education. Terry happens to be extremely intelligent, and prior to establishing treatment with me he spent almost all of his time reading in his father’s basement, where he lived. He was one of the most well-read people I have ever met, and he and I would trade book recommendations and discuss works of literature in our sessions. The depths of his insight and

from outside, but must be driven by constructive sources within.”

7 “Self-efficacy” is defined as an individual’s belief in his or her own ability to successfully accomplish a task or influence events that affect his or her life (Bandura 71).

interpretation of these works was extremely impressive, and I did not hesitate to point that out to him. He told me that, socially isolated as he was, this was the first positive feedback he had received from anyone for as long as he could remember. He enrolled in a local psychosocial rehabilitation program that offers funding for individuals with mental health conditions to further their education. “On paper I look like a loser,” he reflected to me. “But you saw the good in me, and now I feel like I might actually be able to make something of myself.”

SAMHSA RECOVERY PRINCIPLE #10:
RECOVERY IS BASED ON RESPECT.
 COMMUNITY, SYSTEMS, AND SOCIETAL
 ACCEPTANCE AND APPRECIATION
 FOR PEOPLE AFFECTED BY MENTAL
 HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE
 PROBLEMS—INCLUDING PROTECTING
 THEIR RIGHTS AND ELIMINATION OF
 DISCRIMINATION—ARE CRUCIAL IN
 ACHIEVING RECOVERY.

It is incumbent on mental health professionals to work toward the elimination of stigmas. Individuals with severe mental illness have invariably been faced with difficult and often traumatic circumstances—and they have survived. A positive psychology framework draws our attention to the resilience that is apparent in their diagnosis alone.

One of the core principles of the Bahá'í Faith is the elimination of all forms of prejudice. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes:

Prejudices of all kinds—whether religious, racial, patriotic or political—are destructive of divine foundations in man. All the warfare and bloodshed in human history have been the outcome of prejudice. This earth is one home and native land. God has created mankind with equal endowment and right to live upon the earth. . . . All are the children and servants of God. Why should we be separated by artificial and imaginary boundaries? In the animal kingdom the doves flock together in harmony and agreement. They have no prejudices. We are human and superior in intelligence. Is it befitting that lower creatures should manifest virtues which lack expression in man? (*Promulgation* 470)

The stigma surrounding severe mental illness is clearly a form of prejudice that we are called upon to eliminate. By emphasizing respect for all as a way to remove artificial and imaginary boundaries, the Bahá'í teachings highlight the importance of working toward unity in a manner conducive to mental health recovery. As a clinical example, consider Genesis House, a psychosocial rehabilitation clubhouse for individuals with severe mental illness affiliated with the clinic where I work as a staff psychiatrist.

Genesis House follows the clubhouse model, in which members and staff work side by side to manage various units, such as clerical tasks,

food services, outreach, advocacy, and employment. Members feel supported, accepted, and empowered to contribute their skills to the day-to-day operations of the clubhouse. Last year, members launched the first annual “All Minds Matter” 5K run/walk to promote positive support and reduce the stigma associated with mental illness. Hundreds of people from the local community participated in the race. At the event, clubhouse members were encouraged to share their recovery stories highlighting how they have successfully overcome the challenges and hardships associated with their mental health conditions. In this way, their stories of resilience and courage in the face of adversity helped reduce the stigma associated with these conditions and fight against prejudice in the community.

CONCLUSIONS

The process through which an individual gains the capacity to find benefits in adversity can be instrumental in mental health recovery. The field of positive psychology and the spiritual principles of the Bahá’í Faith offer very similar perspectives on the healing properties of benefit finding and the mechanisms by which it can lead to personal growth.

How, then, can mental health professionals foster the process of benefit finding when working with individuals with severe mental illness? Similarly, how can Bahá’ís offer strength and support to people suffering with

mental health conditions? Encouraging spiritual reflection, regardless of one’s religious background, can be very helpful in this process. Notably, however, spirituality is not a prerequisite to benefit finding and does not predict an individual’s capacity to find something positive in adverse experiences (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, and Larson 561).

It can be challenging to encourage individuals with severe mental health conditions to reflect on the potential benefits of adverse experiences, a process sometimes termed “benefit reminding.” Some people may experience well-intentioned efforts to encourage benefit finding as insensitive and invalidating—as an unwelcome attempt to minimize the burdens and challenges that must be overcome—so it is important to be mindful of this possibility. In a thoughtful way, we can help others reflect on whether their adversity has helped them grow stronger as a person, revealed character strengths they had not realized they had, enhanced their appreciation of certain aspects of their lives, helped deepen their relationships, strengthened their faith in God, or made them more compassionate or forgiving.

Stress is ubiquitous in our society, and many individuals have been indoctrinated with the traditional view that stress leads to poor physical and mental health outcomes and should therefore be managed with effective coping strategies. While it is clearly important to develop and utilize coping techniques to minimize stress,

recent research suggests that it is the appraisal of stress that determines its effect on health. Jeremy P. Jamieson, Wendy Berry Mendes, and Matthew K. Nock, for example, found that acute stress responses could be improved by altering appraisals of arousal (1). The authors explain that stressful situations are accompanied by increased physiological arousal (e.g., the sensation of a racing heart), which is typically construed in a negative manner. This leads to negative affect (e.g., anxiety), increased vigilance for threat cues, and impaired performance on tasks. However, a simple arousal-reappraisal manipulation (i.e., offering education on how the stress response actually can be healthy and beneficial by improving cardiac efficiency

and peripheral blood flow) has been shown to shift negative stress states to more positive ones. This in turn reduces negative affect and facilitates performance. What this suggests is that while stress may be inevitable, altering our perspective in such a way that reframes adversity as potentially beneficial may lead to improved mental health.

Mental health practitioners can use the safety of our compassionate alliance with individuals with severe mental illness to explore the wide range of possible benefits from adverse experiences. We all stand to gain deep spiritual healing from Bahá'u'lláh's counsel to "be generous in prosperity, and thankful in adversity" (*Gleanings* 130:1).

WORKS CITED

- 'Abdu'l-Bahá. *Paris Talks*. Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1972.
- . *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1982.
- . *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*. Bahá'í World Centre, 1982.
- . *Some Answered Questions*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990.
- Affleck, Glenn, and Howard Tennen. "Construing Benefits from Adversity: Adaptational Significance and Dispositional Underpinnings." *Journal of Personality*, vol. 64, no. 4, Apr. 1996, pp. 899–922.
- . "The Effect of Newborn Intensive Care on Parents' Psychological Well-Being." *Child Health Care*, vol. 20, no. 1, Jan. 1991, pp. 6–14.
- American College of Lifestyle Medicine. "What is Lifestyle Medicine?" *American College of Lifestyle Medicine*, www.lifestylemedicine.org/What-is-Lifestyle-Medicine. Accessed 21 May 2018.
- Andresen, Retta. *The Experiences of Recovery from Schizophrenia: Development of a Definition, Model, and Measurement of Recovery*. Dissertation, University of Wollongong, 2007.
- Bahá'í International Community. "Peace and Resilience: Engaging Effectively at the Local Level." *Bahá'í World News Service*, <http://dl.bahai.org/bwns/assets/documentlibrary/1165-BIC-contribution-on-Peace-and-resilience.pdf>. Accessed 21 May 2018.

- Bahá'u'lláh. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1990.
- . *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1985.
- . *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1988.
- Bandura, Albert. "Self-Efficacy." *Encyclopedia of Human Behavior*, 1st ed., edited by V.S. Ramachandran, Academic Press, 1994, pp. 71–81.
- Buettner, Dan. *The Blue Zones of Happiness: Lessons from the World's Happiest People*. National Geographic Partners, 2017.
- Chiba, Rie, Norito Kawakami, and Yuki Miyamoto. "Quantitative Relationship Between Recovery and Benefit-Finding Among Persons with Chronic Mental Illness in Japan." *Nursing and Health Sciences*, vol. 13, no. 2, Feb. 2011, pp. 126–32.
- Chinman, Matthew, et al. "Peer Support Services for Individuals with Severe Mental Illness: Assessing the Evidence." *Psychiatric Services*, vol. 65, no. 4, Apr. 2014, pp. 429–41.
- Conversano, Ciro, et al. "Optimism and Its Impact on Physical and Mental Well-Being." *Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health*, vol. 6, no. 1, Jan. 2010, pp. 25–29.
- Davidson, Larry, and John Strauss. "Sense of Self in Recovery from Severe Mental Illness." *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, vol. 65, no. 2, Feb. 1992, pp. 131–45.
- Davis, Christopher, Susan Nolen-Hoeksema, and Judith Larson. "Making Sense of Loss and Benefiting from the Experience: Two Construals of Meaning." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 75, no. 2, Feb. 1998, pp. 561–74.
- Fakhoury, Walid, and Stefan Priebe. "Deinstitutionalization and Reinstitutionalization: Major Changes in the Provision of Mental Healthcare." *Psychiatry*, vol. 6, no. 8, Aug. 2007, pp. 313–16.
- Helgeson, Vicki, Kerry Reynolds, and Patricia Tomich. "A Meta-Analytic Review of Benefit Finding and Growth." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 74, no. 5, May 2006, pp. 797–816.
- Helmrath, T. A., and E. M. Steinitz. "Death of an Infant: Parental Grieving and the Failure of Social Support." *Journal of Family Practice*, vol. 6, no. 4, Apr. 1978, pp. 785–90.
- Ives, Howard Colby. *Portals to Freedom*. E. P. Dutton and Company, 1937.
- Jamieson, Jeremy P., Wendy Berry Mendes, and Matthew K. Nock. "Improving Acute Stress Responses: The Power of Reappraisal." *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, vol. 22, no. 1, Jan. 2012, pp. 1–6.
- Keinan, Giora, Amit Shrira, and Dov Shmotkin. "The Association Between Cumulative Adversity and Mental Health: Considering Dose and Primary Focus of Adversity." *Quality of Life Research*, vol. 21, 2012, pp. 1149–58.

- Koenig, Harold G. "Research on Religion, Spirituality, and Mental Health: A Review." *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, vol. 54, no. 5, May 2009, pp. 283–91.
- Linley, P. Alex, and Stephen Joseph. "Positive Change Following Trauma and Adversity: A Review." *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, vol. 17, no. 1, Jan. 2004, pp. 11–21.
- McIntosh, Daniel, Roxane Silver, and Camille Wortman. "Religion's Role in Adjustment to a Negative Life Event: Coping with the Loss of a Child." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, vol. 65, no. 4, Apr. 1993, pp. 812–21.
- Mohr, Sylvia, et al. "The Assessment of Spirituality and Religiousness in Schizophrenia." *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, vol. 195, no. 3, Apr. 2007, pp. 247–53.
- Moskowitz, Judith, et al. "Coping and Mood During AIDS-Related Caregiving and Bereavement." *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*, vol. 18, no. 1, Jan. 1996, pp. 49–57.
- Oaks, David. "Evolution of the Consumer Movement." *Psychiatric Services*, vol. 57, no. 8, Sept. 2006, p. 1212.
- Olfson, Mark, et al. "Premature Mortality Among Adults with Schizophrenia in the United States." *JAMA Psychiatry*, vol. 72, no. 12, Dec. 2015, pp. 1172–81.
- Park, Crystal, Lawrence Cohen, and Renee Murch. "Assessment and Prediction of Stress-Related Growth." *Journal of Personality*, vol. 64, no. 1, Jan. 1996, pp. 71–105.
- Positive Psychology Center. "Welcome." *Positive Psychology Center*, <http://ppc.sas.upenn.edu>. Accessed 9 December 2017.
- Resnick, Sandra, and Robert Rosenheck. "Recovery and Positive Psychology: Parallel Themes and Potential Synergies." *Psychiatric Services*, vol. 57, no. 1, Jan. 2006, pp. 120–22.
- Seligman, Martin. *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*. First Vintage Books, 1990.
- Sheridan, Susan, et al. "Family-Centered Positive Psychology: Focusing on Strengths to Build Student Success." *Psychology in the Schools*, vol. 41, no. 1, Jan. 2004, pp. 7–17.
- Sheth, Hitesh. "Deinstitutionalization or Disowning Responsibility." *International Journal of Psychosocial Rehabilitation*, vol. 13, no. 2, Feb. 2009, pp. 11–20.
- Shoghi Effendi. *Directives from the Guardian*. US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1973.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. *SAMHSA's Working Definition of Recovery*. SAMHSA, 2012.
- Tedeschi, Richard, and Lawrence Calhoun. "The Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory: Measuring the Positive Legacy of Trauma." *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, vol. 9, no. 3, Mar. 1996, pp. 455–71.

- Tennen, Howard, and Glenn Affleck. "Benefit-Finding and Benefit-Reminding." *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, edited by C. R. Snyder and S. J. Lopez, Oxford UP, 2002, pp. 584–97.
- Tepper, Leslie, et al. "The Prevalence of Religious Coping Among Persons with Severe Mental Illness." *Psychiatric Services*, vol. 52, no. 5, May 2001, pp. 660–65.
- Thompson, Suzanne, and Aris Janigian. "Life Schemes: A Framework for Understanding the Search for Meaning." *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, vol. 7, no. 3, Mar. 1988, pp. 260–80.
- The Universal House of Justice. Letter to an individual believer, 2 January 1992. Retrieved from <https://susangammage.com/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-a-bahai-perspective>. Accessed 13 June 2018.
- Wood, Alex, et al. "Using Personal and Psychological Strengths Leads to Increases in Well-Being Over Time: A Longitudinal Study and the Development of the Strengths Use Questionnaire." *Personality and Individual Differences*, vol. 50, no. 1, Jan. 2011, pp. 15–19.
- Wright, Margaret, Emily Crawford, and Katherine Sebastian. "Positive Resolution of Childhood Sexual Abuse Experiences: The Role of Coping, Benefit-Finding, and Meaning-Making." *Journal of Family Violence*, vol. 22, no. 7, July 2007, pp. 597–608.

Biographical Information

GREGORY DAHL is author of *One World, One People: How Globalization Is Shaping Our Future* (Bahá'í Publishing, 2007) and numerous articles. After studying economics at Harvard, he pursued a 27-year career as an economist and senior official of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), working with top-level government officials in different areas of the globe to try to resolve economic problems. He served as the resident representative of the IMF in Haïti, Sierra Leone, Bulgaria, and Madagascar for a total of ten years. His IMF position gave him first-hand experience with the practical dilemmas faced by leaders as well as their human and often moral shortcomings in dealing with those dilemmas. He is a second-generation Bahá'í and has traveled and visited Bahá'í communities in over 100 countries. He served on the National Spiritual Assembly of Bulgaria for ten years and was its secretary for five years, and he has been a Deputy Trustee of Huqúqu'lláh since 2008. He currently lives in the Czech Republic with his family.

LINDSAY-ROSE DYKEMA completed her medical residency in psychiatry at Columbia University (NY), followed by a fellowship in psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery in Durham, NC, where she was first introduced to the Bahá'í Faith by a colleague. She

works as a psychiatrist specializing in the treatment of individuals with schizophrenia-spectrum disorders.

Born in South Korea, THERESE YOUNG KIM studied English and Literature in Kyung-hee University in Seoul and worked at Lufthansa ticketing office for four years before coming to America. She worked as an interpreter for over 25 years in New York while writing poems and stories, now with her novel in completion, *Nayoung's Journey*. Her stories and poems have been published in Korean journals, Infinity, Rosebud, Poetry Pacific, and recently in Tuck Magazine. She has attended literary workshops and conferences, such as, Juniper Summer Writing Conference, Wesleyan Writers Conference. She lives in New York City.

LAYLI MARIA MIRON earned a Masters degree in 2017 and is currently working toward a PhD at Penn State. Her field is Rhetoric and Composition, a specialization within English. To learn more about her work, please visit sites.psu.edu/layli.

OTTO DONALD ROGERS is a Canadian painter and sculptor from rural Saskatchewan whose abstract works strive to reflect the Baha'i belief in the concept of unity through diversity. His work has been widely exhibited and is held in many private and public collections, both in Canada and in many other countries. In addition to his art, he has served on a number of

Bahá'í Institutions including two five-year terms in Haifa, Israel, as a Counsellor member of the International Teaching Centre (1988-1998), and in 2009 delivered the Association for Bahá'í Studies Balyuzi lecture

SHOLEH WOLPÉ is an Iranian-born poet and writer. A recipient of the 2014 PEN/Heim, 2013 Midwest Book Award and 2010 Lois Roth Persian Translation prize, among others, Wolpé's literary work include four collections of poetry, two plays, three books of translations, and three anthologies. Wolpé's writings have been translated into eleven languages and her modern translation of *The Conference of the Birds* (W.W. Norton) by 12th century Iranian mystic poet, Attar, has been hailed by Reza Aslan as a translation that "is sure to be as timeless as the masterpiece itself." She has lived in the UK and Trinidad and is presently based in Los Angeles.