

‘Irfán Colloquium

One Hundred and Thirty-Eighth Session

*Tablets of the Divine Plan:
A Centenary Celebration*

Program and Abstracts



Centre for Bahá'í Studies

Acuto, Italy

5-8 July 2016

Vision and Aims of `Irfán Colloquium

Haj Mehdi Arjmand Memorial Fund was established in 1992 to honor Haj Mehdi Arjmand (1861-1941) and is dedicated to promoting the scholarly study of the Bahá'í Faith. Haj Mehdi Arjmand was a Persian scholar and teacher of the Bahá'í Faith who became well known in Iran for his profound knowledge of the Bible, Qur'an, and Bahá'í scriptures. The primary activity of the Fund is sponsoring 'Irfán Colloquium and its publications.

In 2012, benefiting from the guidance received from the Universal House of Justice, a management board was appointed for this fund by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States to function as a Bahá'í agency, and together with **Nadia Saadat Memorial Scholarship Fund**, sponsor 'Irfán Colloquia, presently held in North America and Western Europe in English, Persian and German languages.

The 'Irfán Colloquium aims at promoting and supporting systematic studies of fundamental principles of the Bahá'í beliefs, the Writings of the Central Figures of the Bahá'í Faith, the interface of the Bahá'í Faith with intellectual schools of thought and religious traditions, and looking at current challenges in human society from the Bahá'í perspective. *`Irfán* is a Persian word referring to mystical, theological and spiritual knowledge.

As of July 2016 one hundred and thirty-seven sessions of colloquia have been held. Papers in English presented or received at the 'Irfán Colloquia are annually published in a series of volumes of the *Lights of `Irfán*.

Program

Tuesday 5 July, 2016

Participants' Arrival

12:00 p.m.

Lunch

Afternoon

Registration

6: 15 p.m.

Dinner and Free Time

7:30 p.m.

Opening Session

Words of Welcome and Announcements

Roya Ayman

Getting to Know Each Other

7:45 p.m.

ʿIrfán Colloquium Aims, Mission, and Program

Iraj Ayman

8.00: p.m.

Memorial for Houshang Arjmand

Session 1: 5 July: Tuesday evening

8.30-9.30: *Vahid Rafati*:

**The Mythological Terminology of the Bahá'í Scriptures,
focusing on terms related to Yúsif (Joseph)**

**Session 2: Wednesday Morning - 6 July:
Some Historical Considerations**

9.30-10.30: *Vahid Rafati*

Bahá'í-Inspired Financial and Commercial Companies

Break 30 mins

11.00 – 12.00: *Necati Alkan*

Some Ottoman Documents about Babis and Bahá'ís in the Ottoman Empire

Lunch 12.15-3.00

**Session 3: Wednesday Afternoon – 6 July:
The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá**

3.00-4.00: *Vahid Rafati*:

Spiritual connotations of the terminology in the Bahá'í Scriptures related to dress and materials

Break 30 mins

4.30-5.30: *Habib Riazati*

The major themes in the Tablets of the World and Maqsúd and their intrinsic relationships to the Secret of Divine Civilization of `Abdu'l-Bahá

Break 30 mins

6.00-7.00: *Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani*

Persian (and perhaps Turkish) poems composed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and His ideas about poetry.

**Session 4: Wednesday Evening – 6 July:
The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh**

8.30-9.30 pm: *Necati Alkan*

Bahá'u'lláh's *Lawh-i Istintáq* (Tablet of the Interrogation) and the Murder of Three Azalís in Akka in 1872

**Session 5: Thursday morning – 7 July:
Viewpoints on the Bahá'í Teachings**

9.30-10.30: *Moojan Momen*

A comparison between the commentary and interpretation of an Islamic Tradition by `Abdu'l-Bahá and Ayatu'llah Khomeini

Break 30 mins

11.00 – 12.00: *Daniel Grolin*

Text, Context and Intertext: Challenge and Promises of Computer-aided Research

Lunch 12.15-3.00pm

**Session 6: Thursday Afternoon – 7 July:
*Tablets of the Divine Plan - I***

3.00-4.00: *Jena Khadem-Khodadad*

***Tablets of the Divine Plan* as a "source of transforming force charting the road for the development of the Bahá'í community"**

Break 30 mins

4.30-5.30: *Iscander Micael Tinto*

**Personal transformation through teaching in the
*Tablets of the Divine Plan***

Break 30 mins

6.00-7.00: *Wendi Momen*

**Tracing Themes found in the
*Tablets of the Divine Plan***

**Session 7: Thursday Evening – 7 July:
*Tablets of the Divine Plan – II***

8.30-9.30 pm: *Moojan Momen*

Tablets of the Divine Plan: A Pictorial Presentation

**Session 8: Friday Morning – 8 July:
Aspects of the Bahá'í Teachings**

9.30-10.30: *Jena Khadem-Khodadad*

**The Phenomenon of Newly Emerging Entities:
The Twofold Process**

Break 30 mins

11.00 – 12.00 *Parvaneh Farid-Monfared*

Spiritual Dimension of Medical Treatment

Lunch 12.15-3.00

**Session 9: Friday Afternoon – 8 July:
The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh**

3.00-4.00: : *Sivan Lerer*

The Hidden Words as andarz literature

Break 30 mins

4.30-5.30: *Nima Rafiee*

Bahá'u'lláh's *Lawḥ-i-Liqá'* (Tablet of the Divine Presence)

6.00-7.00: *Houshmand Badiee*

An analysis of the Role of Religion in Wealth and Poverty

Session 10: Friday Evening – 8 July

Conclusion

8:30 – 9:15 p.m.

General Discussion on the Papers Presented

9:15 p.m.

END OF THE PROGRAM

Program Coordinator:

Roya Ayman

ABSTRACTS

*In Alphabetical Order of
Presenters' Surnames*

Bahá'u'lláh's *Lawh-i Istintáq* (Tablet of the Interrogation) and the Murder of Three Azalis in Akka in 1872

Necati Alkan

One of the saddest events in Bahá'u'lláh's life was the murder of three followers of His half-brother Mirza Yahya "Subh-i Azal" in 'Akka in 1872 by seven Bahá'ís. Like their master, Sayyid Muhammad Isfahani, Aqa Jan Kaj-Kulah and Mirza Rida-Quli Tafrishi were inveterate enemies of Bahá'u'lláh and had been discrediting Him and misrepresenting His Cause in Istanbul and Edirne. After they were exiled with Bahá'u'lláh to 'Akka, they continued their intrigue. Saddened and angered by this mischief, seven Bahá'ís who were in Bahá'u'lláh's entourage killed the three Azalis. In the wake of this Bahá'u'lláh, His son 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the seven Bahá'ís were arrested and interrogated.

This talk will give an overview of this event based on Bahá'u'lláh's lengthy *Lawh-i Istintáq*, Bahá'í sources and the minutes of the court proceedings from Syria that is kept at the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul. In this Tablet Bahá'u'lláh talks about the mischief of Isfahani, Kaj-Kulah and Tafrishi and recounts the shameful act by the Bahá'ís. And it is in the wake of this event that He expressed His grief with the following words: "Were We to make mention of what befell Us, the heavens would be rent asunder and the mountains would crumble." And: "My captivity cannot harm Me. That which can

harm Me is the conduct of those who love Me, who claim to be related to Me, and yet perpetrate what causeth My heart and My pen to groan.” In the *Lawh-i Istintáq* Bahá’u’lláh relates His interrogation by Ottoman officials: “When interrogated, He was asked to state His name and that of the country from which He came. ‘It is more manifest than the sun,’ He answered. The same question was put to Him again, to which He gave the following reply: ‘I deem it not proper to mention it. Refer to the farmán of the government which is in your possession.’ Once again they, with marked deference, reiterated their request, whereupon Bahá’u’lláh spoke with majesty and power these words: ‘My name is Bahá’u’lláh (Light of God), and My country is Núr (Light). Be ye apprized of it.’” (*God Passes By*, 189-91)

While Bahá’u’lláh reprimands the act of the Bahá’ís in the Tablet, He also regards the death of the Azalis as divine punishment: “Verily the Mute [*al-akhras*, Isfahani] called himself ‘Quddus’ and hath claimed what the Evil Whisperer (*al-khannas*) claimed for himself. The other one [Aqá Ján] called himself the ‘Sword of Truth’ (*sayfu’l-haqq*); he said: ‘I, verily, am the conqueror of the cities’. God hath sent the one who hath smitten upon his mouth, so that all may firmly believe that through this Satan’s tail hath been cut off by the sword of the Merciful (*sayfu’r-rahmán*).” (my provisional translation). We see here that despite the horrible act perpetrated by a group of Bahá’ís, Bahá’u’lláh clearly says that the three Azalis got what they deserved.

And whereas Bahá’í sources state that the seven Bahá’ís killed the three Azalis actively based on their mischief, the minutes of the Ottoman court mention that the seven Bahá’ís acted based on money issues between the two parties and defended themselves after being attacked by the Azalis. We also learn the names of the eyewitnesses and their testimonies.

Some Ottoman Documents about Tahirih, Mirza ‘Alí Sayyáh, the Bahá’í school in ‘Akka and the first Western pilgrim group visiting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Necati Alkan

This talk will give an overview of some documents from the Ottoman Archives in Istanbul about various topics involving Bábís and Bahá’ís, such as the Bábí disciple and poetess Tahirih “Qurratu’l-‘Ayn” in Karbala, the death of Mirza ‘Ali Maraghíh’i, called “Sayyah”, who was exiled with other three Bahá’ís in the company of Mirza Yahya to Cyprus; the “illegal” Bahá’í school in ‘Akka, run by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; and about the first Western pilgrim group to ‘Akka.

The only Ottoman document about Tahirih I found to date is a report of Necib (Najib) Pasha, then governor general of Baghdad, from February 1847 that mentions that Mullá ‘Alí Bastámí had come to Karbala as “the deputy of the Mahdi” and “inciting mischief” and that in the same vein a woman called “Qurratu’l-‘Ayn” was arrested and kept in custody because of “distributing mischief in the same region and attracting and inviting ignorant people to be her followers.”

The files concerning Mirzá ‘Alí Sayyáh, who had been a courier of the Báb and was sent by the Ottoman authorities to Cyprus, are from 1871, and the documents in question contain one letter (23 July 1871) by Sayyáh in Turkish, petitioning the authorities that his wife and four children, who had been destitute in Baghdad and are now in Magosa (Famagusta) should be given a proper house and allowances; the other documents talk about the death of Sayyáh on 3 August 1871 and that his family should receive allowances and their journey back to Baghdad should be paid since they are impoverished.

Other Ottoman documents from 1904 mention an unofficial “Bábí School” in ‘Akka under the supervision of ‘Abbás Effendí. The number of its pupils was increasing day by day.

This was seen as a threat to Islamic schools in the region, as were other foreign schools, especially those run by Christian missionaries. This alarmed the authorities who tried to set up more Islamic schools in order to rectify the beliefs of the youth. According to communications between the Ottoman province of Beirut, the foreign ministry in Istanbul and the consulate in Washington a group of Bahá'ís from America visited 'Abbás Effendi in March 1899. They faced difficulties based on false information by certain individuals who were hostile to 'Abbás Effendí. A translation of a letter by an unnamed "Bahá'í leader" ensures the Ottoman authorities that the group visiting 'Akka-Haifa and in fact all Bahá'ís in America are loyal servants and well-wishers of the Ottoman sultan Abdulhamid II. He moreover states that the religion of all American Bahá'ís is Islam and they believe in the prophet-hood of Muhammad, and do not interfere in the politics of any government. The "Bahá'í leader" also writes the names of the mischievous individuals: a certain Nikola Barbur (?Nicolas Barbour), Muhammad 'Ali and Badiyu'llah (sic). This episode refers to the intrigues of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's half-brothers Muhammad 'Alí and Badí'u'lláh to discredit Him in the eyes of the Ottomans.

An analysis of the Role of Religion in Wealth and Poverty

Hooshmand Badee

The association between religion, material well-being and poverty is fundamental in exploring how religious affiliation affect the quality of life of its members. Is for example, poverty encouraged or discouraged? Is wealth creation valued? How difficult will it be for those who have wealth to enter the Kingdom of God? Doctrines of well-being and prosperity in the major world religions provide various incentives for economic activities.

A comparative study and analysis of religions indicate that each promote accumulation of wealth and hard work, while discouraging idleness and poverty. However, some observations of religious communities around the world suggest a misconception that religious affiliation and beliefs contribute to poverty.

This presentation will consider how religion, wealth and poverty are interconnected, and identifies factors other than religion that contribute to the creation of wealth and poverty.

Renewed Physical and Spiritual Healing, Understanding The Nature of Disease -

A doctor`s perspective

Parvaneh Farid Monfared

This paper is an attempt to explore both physical and spiritual healing based on `Abdu`l-Bahá`s writing. “The cause of entrance of disease into human body” `Abdu`l-Bahá explains is either physical one or is the effect of the excitement of the nerves.” This statement basically changes the whole etiology sections in medical books. Medical science has been looking for merely physical reason and therefore looking for physical healing. `Abdu`l-Bahá explains four types of healing in which one of them is relying on the power of Divine assistance and the rest are matters to be explored. In this regard the attitude of a doctor has a crucial role in the health of individuals, whether health oriented or disease oriented, whether he/she “imparts gladness to the patient”, “brings him to ecstasy and exultation” as mentioned in the writings.

Text, Context and Intertext: Challenge and Promises of Computer-aided Research

Daniel Grolin

Abstract: This paper proposes to view the work of the exegete primarily as one of determining referencing within various levels of the text, namely its context, the environment of the text, and the appearance of intertext in which subsets of the text refers to other. With this view in mind a number of challenges and promises are discussed, exploring the various ways in which computer-aided research can be carried out.

The Phenomenon of Newly Emerging Entities:

The Twofold Process

Jena Khadem Khodadad

The following words of Bahá'u'lláh launch this session:

*“I testify that no sooner had the First Word proceeded, through the potency of Thy will and purpose...than the whole creation was revolutionized, and all that are in the heavens and all that are on earth were stirred to the depths. Through that Word the realities of all created things were shaken, were divided, separated, scattered, combined and reunited, disclosing, in both the contingent world and the heavenly kingdom, **entities of a new creation...**”ⁱ*

Newly Emergent Entities

Newly emergent entities arise *de novo*; ⁱⁱ they introduce new possibilities and fresh propensities into a system: that which was impossible becomes possible; that which was highly improbable becomes probable. Two examples of newly emergent entities -metaphors- from natural sciences- will be offered for reflection: 1-the emergence of oxygen- a significant product of the activity of photosynthetic molecules ⁱⁱⁱ and 2-the birth of a new star in the physical universe.

The emergence of oxygen made animal life possible. Sentient ^{iv} beings evolved capable of consciousness and self-awareness. The emergence of oxygen-- that essential stuff of life--is an apt metaphor for the emergence of the life giving forces- with their *vivifying influence*- which are introduced into existence through Divine Revelations.

The birth of a new star in our physical universe is another insightful metaphor for the birth of a new Star- a new Revelation- in the spiritual universe. The birth of a star generates around itself a whole new field of gravitational forces which had not been there before. These forces pull, attract, and create tension-- generating conditions hitherto unimagined. The birth of the *Star of the Revelation*, of the twin Manifestations, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh-- in mid-nineteenth century-- inaugurated a new Dispensation. It unleashed powerful gravitational forces—the *onrushing forces*- into creation. In a passage, Shoghi Effendi attributes: “The onrushing forces so miraculously released through the agency of two independent and swiftly successive Manifestations...” ^v to the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

A Twofold Process of Integration and Disintegration

These forces attract, pull and also create turbulence with consequent disequilibrium and chaos. Their tumultuous effect may be discerned from the following statement of Bahá'u'lláh:

“No sooner had that Revelation been unveiled to men's eyes than the signs of universal discord appeared among the peoples of the world, and commotion seized the dwellers of earth and heaven, and the foundations of all things were shaken. The forces of dissension were released.”^{vi}

Numerous passages in the Bahá'í sacred texts, also bear the tidings of the *quickenings*, *vivifying* and *regenerating* outcomes of that discord, commotion and dissension.

In conclusion, this session highlights a direct connection between the emergence of *the new entities*- through the revelation of the twin Manifestations- to the culmination of the twofold process in history. Two examples- of **perception** and **physiology of vision**- are offered as metaphors to illustrate and explain the assurance which the Bahá'ís evince in a glorious outcome of the *titanic* struggle between these two forces of disintegration and integration.

The *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, the Fountainhead of Guidance for the Development and Crystallization of the Bahá'í Worldwide Community.

Jena Khadem Khodadad

The Divine Plan, Shoghi Effendi affirms, is “a Plan holding within it the seeds of the world's spiritual revival and ultimate redemption” (Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*). This presentation charts the course of the unfolding stages of the Divine Plan and its anticipated outcome- the efflorescence of the Bahá’í worldwide community.

The Unveiling. The *Tablets of the Divine Plan* were unveiled in 1919, at the end of the First World War- midst jubilation- in New York City at the Tenth Annual Mashrek-el-Azkar Convention and Bahá’í Congress-designated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the “Convention of the Covenant”. Concurrent with this event, across the Atlantic Ocean, the Paris Peace Conference was in session. The outcome of the calls raised through these two events invite our reflection.

The Unfoldment of the Divine Plan. After the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the unfolding stages of the Divine Plan were directed by Shoghi Effendi and subsequently by the Universal House of Justice. The strategy of the plans of the Bahá’í world has been evolutionary and systematic-- implemented in phases. During the first phase, dispersion-- global spread-- was of foremost importance for diffusing the message of Bahá’u’lláh throughout the virgin areas of the world. The later phases of the plans of the Bahá’í world place special focus on advancing the process of “entry by troops”—large scale growth. Three global Plans launched by Shoghi Effendi, the First Seven Year Plan, the Second Seven Year Plan and the Ten Year Global Crusade continued the primary focus on global dispersion. The character and expanse of the Ten Year Global Crusade signify a *defining moment* in the fortunes of the Bahá’í Faith; the Bahá’í Faith became global.

The flow of guidance continued under the directives of the Universal House of Justice through: a series of plans from the Nine Year Plan (1964-73), to the current Five year Plan to culminate in 2021, the Centenary of the passing of `Abdu'l-Bahá. The Four Year Plan (1996-2000) marks a turning point in the approach of the Bahá'í world to growth; its fundamental emphasis was the creation of a sustainable pattern of expansion and consolidation.

Growth of the Bahá'í Community under the Plans of the Bahá'í World. A panoramic survey from the passing of Bahá'u'lláh in 1892, to the present day, highlights several salient points. By 1892, all adherents of the Bahá'í Faith lived in fifteen countries in Asia and Africa, The landmark year 1893- one year after the passing of Bahá'u'lláh- the Bahá'í Faith was mentioned for the first time in the western hemisphere; this was the beginning of enlisting followers in the West. As the result of continuing response to the unfolding stages of the Divine Plan, the Bahá'í Faith has become widespread across the planet with significant increase--since Shoghi Effendi assumed Guardianship-in the total number of countries and localities where Bahá'ís now reside.

Reflections. The approach to growth- through the unfolding stages of the Divine Plan- has been systematic, coherent and evolutionary. Each approach is suited to its *specific historical circumstance*. The course of progression of the global plans of the Bahá'í world displays the dynamic process of *layering*. In the earlier phase, primary focus was placed on geographical spread. The later phases place increasing focus on consolidation. In 2010, The Universal House of Justice- prior to launching its subsequent five year plan -- introduced the elements of involvement in *social action* and participation in the

prevalent *discourses of society*. These were introduced gradually to be further developed in future plans. The phenomenon of **layering** will be discussed in this presentation. Under the guidance of the unfolding stages of the Divine Plan, the Bahá'í community is now well positioned to address its large scale growth and crystallization. The process of **Crystallization**- an elegant metaphor from natural sciences- will be explored in relation to the transformation and crystallization of the Bahá'í worldwide community.

The Hidden Words as andarz literature

Sivan Lerer

The *andarz* literature is a type of wisdom literature which was used in Iran since before the Islamic conquest. Its traces can be found in prominent Iranian works, for example, the *Shāh nāma*, as well as in the more distant Arabic literature. This paper examines the various types of *andarz* literature throughout the ages, from its early beginnings to Islamic times, and analyses *The Hidden Words* of Bahá-u-lláh as a possible continuation of this literary tradition.

A comparison between the commentary and interpretation of an Islamic Tradition by `Abdu'l-Bahá and Ayatu'llah Khomeini

Moojan Momen

There is an Islamic Shi`i Tradition, attributed to the Eleventh Shi`i Imam, Hasan al-`Askari, in which he quotes the

sixth Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq. It is very well-known among Shi`i Islamic scholars because it is the basis of their claim that anyone who is not a *mujtahid* (an expert in the application of Islamic Law) must follow a *mujtahid* in all religious and social matters. In this paper, we will look at the discussion among Shi`i scholars about this Tradition and the manner in which they use it. By way of comparison we will look at `Abdu'l-Bahá's extended commentary on this same Tradition. In contrast to Khomeini and the other Shi`i religious scholars who use this Tradition to assert their right to be followed by all believers and thus eventually, under Khomeini, their right to political authority, `Abdu'l-Bahá uses this Tradition to describe the spiritual and moral attributes needed in those who wish to play a role in social affairs.

Tracing Themes found in the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*

Wendi Momen

This paper examines the main themes in the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* and traces them through the successive teaching Plans of the Universal House of Justice, particularly in the period 1996 through 2016.

Myths and Symbolism in the Bahá'í Writings: the case of Joseph

Vahid Rafati

The Bahá'í Writings contain vast numbers of mythical, allegorical, and symbolic expressions. These enrich Bahá'í literature and connect the writings of the Faith to the religious and literary heritage of humankind. Their purpose is to convey tangible realities as immaterial qualities. Thus for example the Wolf stands for bloodshed and cruelty, while the Dog is a symbol of protection and faithfulness.

On the other hand, spiritual expressions convey tangible realities. When one reads in the writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá that "you should become like the heavenly angels," what is meant is purity of heart, obtaining divine character, chastity, and other virtues and qualifications.

In an allegorical language, terms such as "wine," "drunken," "cup," and so on are meant to convey spiritual and supernatural realities, as are numerous other terms and expressions used throughout the Bahá'í Writings that draw on mythical expressions rooted in religious and literary human history. Particularly noteworthy in this regard is the story of Joseph, references to which have enriched the beauty of the Bahá'í Writings while showing the strong links to the literary and spiritual heritage of biblical and Qur'anic literature.

Financial Enterprises of the Early Eastern Bahá'ís

Vahid Rafati

The financial and economic history of the Eastern Bahá'ís, and the ways through which the financial needs of their communities were met, is a key research area in the wider history of Bahá'í development. The emergence of historical documents, family papers, and governmental archives are

important sources that can facilitate such study. No less significant are the reports, petitions, and correspondence that individual Bahá'ís, institutions, and economic enterprises have sent to the Bahá'í Centre since the time of Bahá'u'lláh.

Since the earliest days of the Faith and all the way to the present moment, Bahá'í communities have been faced with financial commitments: to develop the Bahá'í administration; to take care of holy places and endowments; to establish and run the educational and social institutions; to maintain the cemeteries; to support and expand Bahá'í teaching work; to support the pioneers; to establish and support Bahá'í publications; to take care of the poor and persecuted. Such endeavours have always been challenging in the face of continuous enmities, arrests, persecutions, confiscations and hardships for Bahá'í individuals and communities.

The financial needs of the communities in their early days were met by the voluntary contributions of individuals. Gradually it became a communal act. As the Bahá'í administration was established and developed, the Local Fund came into being under the care, guidance, and supervision of local administrative bodies. The fundamental distinguishing feature of these financial activities was that the names of contributors and the amount of contribution were never announced and treated confidentially. Indeed, the Bahá'í Holy Writings make it abundantly clear that in all financial transactions absolute honesty, trustworthiness, and fidelity must be closely observed.

With the revelation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and its rules and regulations regarding the Institution of Huqúqu'lláh and the appointment of the Trustees, a new chapter in the financial history of the Bahá'í community came into effect. New developments continued with the establishment of the International, Regional, National, and Local Funds which are

now in charge of most financial and economic activities in the Bahá'í world.

Mahalu'l Baraka, Blessed Investment Fund, a financial institution that was first established during the time of Bahá'u'lláh and received His approval, functioned like a local bank under the supervision of some Bahá'í financiers and merchants. They gathered the contributions of individual Bahá'ís by having a plan to conduct business and through its income support the financial needs of Bahá'í individuals, families, and institutions. As far as it is known, Mahalu'l Baraka was established in India, Iran, Mosel, and the well-organized one in Ishqabad.

Related to financial issues in the Bahá'í Faith is a law of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas that has not, as yet, been implemented: the Law of Zakat (Tithes). Only in the future, when this law is put into practice, will we witness its impact upon the financial affairs of the Faith.

Fabrics and Garments in the Bahá'í Writings

Vahid Rafati

In the Súriy-i-Qalam (Surih of the Pen), Baha'u'llah writes: “Adorn, then, your souls with the silken vesture of certitude and your bodies with the broidered robe of the All-Merciful...”. In another Surih, which is entitled the “Súriy-i-Qamís” (Surih of the Shirt), one reads that, “ the forms of things became adorned in the garments of names...” , and , “ Ere long We will sanctify the hem of Thy robe from the idle suggestions of the manifestations of names and attributes...”. Further in the same Surih one finds the expression, “ O Countenance of Grandeur adorned in the raiment of glory...”. And, again in the same

Surih, Bahá'u'lláh states that “ ...all things between earth and heaven are assembled in the cloaks of grief...”.

Such expressions, quoted here from only two of Bahá'u'lláh's works, clearly show the vivid presence of fabrics and garments in His writings to convey mystical, allegorical, metaphorical, mythical, and literal meanings. These are closely associated with the religious, cultural, theological, and literary heritage of mankind, particularly where oriental civilization is concerned.

Such a frequency of names, kinds, attributes, colors, and values of garments and fabrics, not only in Bahá'u'lláh's works, but in the entire body of the Bahá'í Sacred Writings, make the study of this vast topic challenging, important, and fascinating for one to realize the unbelievable and priceless richness of the Bahá'í Sacred Writings.

Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet: *Lawḥ-i-Liqá'* (The Tablet of the Divine Presence)

Nima Rafiei

Presenting a provisional English translation of one of Bahá'u'lláh's tablets, the *Lawḥ-i-Liqá'* (the Tablet of the Divine Presence) with notes on its content and the historical circumstances of its revelation. It is published in *Ma'idiyih Ásmái* vol. 8 and in *Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A`lá*, vol. 1 with some minor differences between the two versions. The name of the tablet comes from Ishraq Khavari, it is not named in *Áthár-i-Qalam-i-A`lá*, vol. 1.

The major themes in the Tablets of the World and Maqsúd and their intrinsic relationships to the *Secret of Divine Civilization* of `Abdu'l-Bahá

Habib Riazati

Among the tablets of Bahá'ulláh addressing some of the major issues of our age are the Lawh-i-Dunyá and Lawh-i-Maqsúd. While in Adrianople, `Abdu'l-Bahá was asked by Bahá'ulláh to write a treatise dealing with the crisis of the world and offer some of His solutions which lead to the composition of the *Secret of Divine Civilization*.

The purpose of this presentation is to correlate the contents of these three Best-Known works by the revealer and the interpreter of the Cause; examine their common concepts/themes and most importantly their relevance to the current social issues.

The Tablet of Maqsúd and the tablet of the World can be found in the compilation of "*the Tablets of Bahá'ulláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. The electronic copies of these two tablets as well as the *Secret of Divine Civilization* can be found in the English section of Bahá'í Reference Library (www.reference.Bahá'í.org)

Poetry in `Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings and Utterances.

Julio Savi and Faezeh Mardani

As Shoghi Effendi pointed out, "the Prophets of God do not teach the arts," which are "an expression of the people." However, `Abdu'l-Bahá, Who Himself wrote a few poems in

Persian and in Turkish, has left good guidance on the issue of poetry, and any aspiring poet or reader of poetry would benefit from becoming familiar with His words. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá mentions at least seven aspects of poetry: inspiration, beauty, eloquence, a versified language, novelty, expressivity, depth and loftiness of meanings. He moreover sets forth clear concepts on the purposes of poetry. The authors examine ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words in the light of verses from His poems in Persian language.

Personal transformation through teaching in the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*

Iscander Micael Tinto

When it comes to tools for personal transformation we are used to consider traditional, self-directed methods such as praying, studying the Sacred Word, and deepening our understanding of it. In the Bahá’í Faith, an important additional element, one that is instead completely directed toward those who have not joined the ranks of the Community, is the act of teaching the Faith. By analyzing the references found in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, we will highlight and review the characteristics required of the teacher, and how these are born and developed through one’s personal commitment to becoming a pure channel through which the Will of God is expressed.

The purpose of this paper is to explore specific aspects of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s exhortations regarding the character of the teacher: detachment, steadfastness in the Covenant, self-

sacrifice, purity of motive, courage and conviction, loving-kindness, humility and wisdom, as well as unity and friendship among the friends.

In the course of this exploration, we will consider the two images, often expressed in this collection of tablets, of the farmer and the gardener and their implications, and the connection to the Celestial concourse and the blessings pouring from Heaven on every detached soul who embarks in the enterprise of spreading the message of Bahá'u'lláh.

Finally, we will relate all these concepts to the apparently contradictory exhortation to actively serve the Faith and embark in teaching work without undue concern for our limitations, and to the intertwined processes and duties of personal transformation and teaching the Faith.