

Towards a Spiritual Methodology of Scholarship

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Introduction

This paper is written for the youth. It is an attempt to explore some of the more inspiring elements of Baha'i scholarship that do not often get "air-time". It is written with a confidence in the both the timeliness and the capacity of all youth to arise and enthusiastically² recreate civilization through realizing the transformative spiritual capacity of Baha'i scholarship. The youth are the galvanising force that can enable a world civilization to become conscious of its own Divine origin, spiritual nature, sacred purpose and glorious destiny.

The transformation which is to occur in the functioning of society will certainly depend to a great extent on the effectiveness of the preparations the youth make for the world they will inherit. (Universal House of Justice in Scholarship, 19)

It is time to realise and enjoy a culture of Baha'i scholarship that Abdu'l-baha says is

...the dynamic power in the arteries of life; it is the very soul of the world.
(Abdu'l-Baha, Secrets, 109)

It is the 'mightiest' and 'unshakable' 'pillar' 'of the Faith of God'. (Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections*, 126)

It is hoped that this paper will encourage a confidence in both the capacity and the duty of every single youth to pursue their own unique gift of genius in service to the Faith and

the world. Scholarship is not the exclusive domain of academics in high towers of remote contemplation, rather it is the

inescapable duty imposed on every one of the friends of God... (Abdu'l-Baha, Selections, 126)

Among a range of implications, this statement indicates two important issues for our discussion. Firstly, that scholarship must encompass a diverse range of approaches, as not all people are suited to academic professions or methods and Abdu'l-baha says scholarship is for 'every one of the friends of God'. The second thing this statement says is that each one of us has been given the gifts necessary to be scholars. God would not impose upon us an inescapable duty if She had not also given us the gifts to fulfill that duty.

Lastly it is hoped that the youth will appreciate the urgent need to develop their own gifts of scholarship due to its capacity for developing solutions to all the worlds ills, and thereby mitigating the numerous and great forms of suffering the children of this world face every day.

...they must prepare themselves for the great tasks that lie ahead. This particularly applies to Baha'i youth. Young men and women in the Faith must be deep and thoughtful scholars of its teachings, so that they can teach in a way that will convince people that all the problems facing them have a remedy.

The Cause needs more Baha'i scholars, people who not only are *devoted* to it and *believe* in it and are *anxious* to tell others about it, but also who have a *deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance*, and who can *correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the world*. (emphasis added)

The Cause has the remedy for all the world's ills. The reason why more people don't accept it is because the Baha'is are not always capable of presenting it to them in a way that meets the immediate needs of their minds. Young Baha'is like yourself must prepare themselves to really bring the Message to their generation, who need it so desperately and who can understand the language it speaks so well (From a letter written on behalf of Guardian in Scholarship, 5).

1. Some Suggested Qualities of Baha'i Scholarship:

1.1 Humility and Love of Diversity (Awe in the Face of the Infinite Range of God's Names and Attributes.)

First it is important to acknowledge that there are many different ways to approach scholarship³. Starting with the humbling knowledge that each perspective on scholarship potentially represents a unique gift of insight is necessary for the overall health and maturity of scholarship in our communities, as well as an appropriate starting place for the investigation of truth itself. Therefore, I make no claims that this article is representative of what 'true' scholarship is, nor that it is comprehensive in its overview of scholarship. My understanding of Baha'i scholarship means that as soon as someone says, "THIS is what Baha'i scholarship really is..." I start to get out my "grain of salt." It is human nature to think we have "arrived" at the truth. We often assume we have found "the philosophers stone", or absolute criterion of truth, through our attachment to one particular discipline, thought, method or approach. But in so doing, we lose the freedom to discover the 'hidden mysteries of God' because we think we have already found them.

Shoghi Effendi has told us:

The greatest truth of Baha'u'llah's Revelation is that religious truth is relative, not absolute. (Promised Day Has Come, v.)

One could write books on this one sentence alone and not exhaust its meaning.

Since this was written, the modern usage of 'relative' has made the understanding of the depths of this passage more difficult. Particularly through Christian cultures negative view of 'ethical relativism', and the popular secular usage 'everything is relative' which, among other things, conveys a post-modern assumption that truth is 'in the eyes of the beholder', that truth is fragmentary and has an illusive nature, and that it can be used to justify almost any belief or moral stance.

Although I refrain from even suggesting that I can fully comprehend what Shoghi Effendi meant by this statement, I can with confidence say that the above popular associations of meaning with the word 'relative' are *not* what Shoghi Effendi means here.

For the sake of our discussion it is important to briefly suggest that an important meaning of Shoghi Effendi's statement is that: *Baha'u'llah's Revelation is primarily about relationships*. It is the 'relational' quality of 'relative' that most accurately assists us in our understanding of Shoghi Effendi's statement.

That Revelation is the expression of God's love for each and every one of us. Therefore there are special meanings allocated for each of us that finds expression in our unique relationships with God and each other.

For the Baha'i scholar this has particular importance. It indicates that by assuming only one 'absolute' dogmatic meaning to particular statements of truth we miss experiencing *the personal nature of the expression of love from God*, its implications of unique relationship with ourselves and others, and the gems of meaning that arise from those infinite relationships.

I think if we explore further, we find this applicable to all forms of truth, and not suprisingly (from a Baha'i perspective) this is actually reflected in many discussions in science.⁴

In my opinion, this relational understanding of truth has particular significance for the Baha'i scholar in emphasising the essential need for the *interdependence of humility and a deep love of diversity* that I consider hallmarks of Baha'i scholarship. Such humility is not a lack of confidence, nor a polite, outward appearance of hesitancy, rather it is a result of the love of God: awe in the presence of the infinite diversity of God's attributes that shine throughout creation and in the hearts of His servants. It is the knowledge that to ascribe absolute importance to ones own fallible interpretations would be to tragically miss the wonder of the infinite range of ways to celebrate and explore the embrace of meanings in which the love of God is offered to us.

1.2 Two Pillars of Baha'i Scholarship: Absolute Loyalty to Baha'u'llah and the Unfettered Search for Truth

It is suggested that another hallmark of Baha'i Scholarship is an equally passionate commitment to both absolute loyalty to Baha'u'llah and the independent investigation of truth founded upon the 'searching and intelligent study of the Teachings and history of the Faith.'

On this matter the Universal House of Justice Writes:

The combination of absolute loyalty to the Manifestation of God and His Teachings, with the searching and intelligent study of the Teachings and history of the Faith which those Teachings themselves enjoin, is a particular strength of this Dispensation. In past Dispensations the believers have tended to divide into two mutually antagonistic groups: those who held blindly to the letter of the Revelation, and those who questioned and doubted everything.

Like all extremes, both of these can lead to error. The beloved Guardian has written that "The Baha'i Faith...enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth...". (Scholarship, 5)

This 'particular strength of this Dispensation' is a feature of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah that will ensure that the unity of the followers of Baha'u'llah is maintained. Other religions have not had the benefit of the unity of both these pillars of protection and have often fractured into completely differing schisms and denominations based on developing antagonisms caused by such differing commitments.

A word of caution however. Even though the Baha'i community enjoys the grace of the Covenant of Baha'u'llah, it is a grace that requires obligations on the part of the scholar if she or he is to remain within the protecting boundaries of the Covenant.

The invisible forces released by the Revelation of Baha'u'llah have infused the universe with new capacities. This Revelation is inexorably 'resurrecting' the world, causing the twin processes of the death of institutions whose existence is contrary to its animating spirit, and is simultaneously giving birth to, and reinforcing the growth of those institutions whose existence are in harmony with the spirit of this Revelation. In regards to the consciousness of humanity as expressed in the institutions of higher learning this process is most clearly evident in an ever-maturing vision within all academic disciplines. There have been great advancements made in the academic study of all the basic Baha'i principles such as the equality of women and men, elimination of all forms of prejudice, a global system of governance, the harmony of science and religion and others. Regarding this, a letter on written behalf of the Guardian states:

The world has - at least the thinking world - caught up by now with all the great and universal principles enunciated by Baha'u'llah over 70 years ago, and so of course it does not sound "new" to them. But we know the deeper teachings, the capacity of His projected World Order to re-create society, are new and dynamic. It is these we must learn to present intelligently and enticingly to

such men! (Scholarship, 6)

If the thinking world had 'caught up' with us 55 years ago, how much more so is it true now?!

The study of the many academic disciplines affords the Baha'i scholar opportunities to explore differing ways the principles of Baha'u'llah's Revelation have invisibly influenced and become clearly manifested in secular thinking, and this reflection can mature our own visions and greatly benefit the Baha'i community.

The danger is that even as we enjoy the excitement of exploring such wonderful avenues of knowledge we can forget the requirements of a passionate commitment to an absolute loyalty to Baha'u'llah and the unfettered search for truth. It can happen like this: Because current academia is only just beginning to become influenced by the principle of the unity of knowledge, and multi-disciplinary studies are only just beginning, academic 'disciplines have become specialized and isolated from one another' (Universal House of Justice in Scholarship, 17) and often are regarded as complete methods to investigate reality⁵.

If one falls for the narrowness of such a perspective there are dangerous possibilities for the Baha'i scholar. Regarding this the Universal House of Justice writes:

The House of Justice feels that Baha'i scholars must beware of the temptations of intellectual pride. 'Abdu'l-baha has warned the friends in the West that they would be subjected to intellectual tests, and the Guardian reminded them of this warning. There are many aspects of western thinking which have been exalted to a status of unassailable principle in the general mind, that time may well show to have been erroneous or, at least, only partially true. Any Baha'i who rises to eminence in academic circles will be exposed to the powerful influence of such thinking. (Scholarship, 17)

Those scholars who choose to absolutise the methodological assumptions of particular academic disciplines and, for example, conform studies of Baha'i history or theology to 'fit' such theories, potentially lose the capacity for true Baha'i scholarship. Why? First this can occur by the loss of a commitment of absolute loyalty to Baha'u'llah through a gradual allegiance to the more materialistic elements that still persist in most disciplines and a concurrent loss of spiritual vision. Secondly, the scholar in such a situation may argue that the principle of the independent investigation of truth gives them justification to apply such materialistic methodologies to the Revelation of Baha'u'llah, no matter how extreme or inappropriate such methods may be. Ironically, the absolute commitment to only one form of academic method can cause a loss of the capacity of the scholar for the unfettered search for truth. This occurs through excluding the diversity of contributions from other perspectives, disciplines and cultures, ignoring the principles and value of consultation, combined with a loss of humility in asserting such absolutism.

There is a saying that 'the nature of the object will prescribe the method of knowing'⁶. In other words the nature and qualities of what we study will require particularly appropriate ways to study and know it. The Revelation of Baha'u'llah is of a Divine spiritual nature, and therefore materialistic methods of knowledge are not suited to understanding the spiritual qualities of Its nature. This does not mean that disciplines cannot be transformed in a unity of spiritual and material methodology that is more suitable for such investigations. It is the very gift of the Revelation of Baha'u'llah that gives Baha'i scholars the capacity to transform academic disciplines and enable their true capacity for insight. To lose sight of this is dangerous. To instead blindly accept the often materialistic methodologies some academic disciplines incorporate, and then apply these same methodologies to 'explain' the Revelation of Baha'u'llah is an unfortunate loss of a great capacity of the Baha'i scholar to contribute to the spiritualization of such disciplines.

It is suggested that the creation, application and sustenance of this great transformative capacity of the Baha'i scholar will largely depend upon the degree to which they are passionately committed to both an absolute loyalty to Baha'u'llah and an unfettered search for truth.

1.3 Appreciation of the Intrinsic Value of Every Culture and the Genius in Every Person

Appreciating the Intrinsic Value of Culture:

Up until now, most Baha'i scholarship has been recognised as being generated from only several cultural groups. Yet this world contains over 6000 distinct cultures⁷, each possessing unique gifts and vision. I have proposed elsewhere⁸ that cultures, from a Baha'i perspective, are social manifestations of the human spirit to diverse ecological contexts in which the human form develops its spiritual and physical relationships. As Baha'u'llah tells us that every creature in nature manifests a unique name or attribute of God⁹, it follows that such a cultural definition means that each culture will generally manifest completely unique sets of spiritual attributes in response to their long-term equally unique ecological relationships. Therefore each culture has unique and valuable appreciations of Divine Attributes that will offer us diverse approaches and types of knowledge through their own Baha'i scholarship. These are my own conclusions, but I think they are warranted.

What will be the impact on our understanding of progressive revelation and the advancement of civilization when scholars arise from India with a unique insight into the balance between linear and cyclic understandings of time or their appreciation of the pantheon of the attributes of God as manifested in their history, among many other unique gifts? What will be the impact on our understanding of the unity of the 'concourse on high' with us here and now when indigenous scholars arise from Africa with a unique insight into the active relationships we maintain with the spirits of our ancestors? What will be the impact on our understanding of the unity of spiritual and material reality when Australian Aboriginal and American Indian scholars arise who offer us the many gifts of their insights into the implications of such a unity? With at least 6000

cultures in the world, we are in for an exciting period of scholarship when we learn to value the gifts of other cultures and find ways for their voices to be heard in the international forum of Baha'i Scholarship

The Genius in Every Person:

I think the Revelation of Baha'u'llah will revolutionise the popular understanding of 'genius' in modern civilisation. Our current understanding of genius is generally limited to materialistic definitions that analyse the processing speed and storage capacity of the human brain. This may allude to often culturally biased, types of intelligence, but intelligence is not the same thing as genius. Current assumptions of intelligence do not adequately demonstrate any capacity for assessing wisdom or more importantly, the individual capacity to offer unique gifts of spiritual insight that have a positive transformative capacity upon civilisation no matter what our 'IQ' may happen to be.

Regarding our individual capacity for scholarship, Baha'u'llah tells us God has given us all two particular gifts of significance here. He has bestowed upon us each the name of 'the Incomparable' as well as 'the All-Pervasive' indicating that each one of us has a completely unique form of genius and that our capacity to influence others with that genius is all-pervasive, to the farthest ends of the universe. This is an understanding of genius that assumes the unity of spiritual and material reality, is based on the Writings, but is beyond the limitations of this paper to explain sufficiently. However I will offer some justification.

First let me offer a visual model and then I will offer some texts that support its construction. In this visual analogy, let us assume that our souls, instead of being flat mirrors are actually closer to multi-dimensional crystalline structures (or perhaps 'gems'). Each crystalline structure is 'composed' of an absolutely unique combination of spiritual attributes.¹⁰ It also helps to support this image to remember that God's Names and Attributes are infinite in range.

Next let us imagine that the universe is immersed in an Ocean of the Light (Love) of God. This light passes through us and is refracted/reflected into completely unique spectral variations due to our unique reflective composition of spiritual facets. In other words we each will reflect different 'colors' of light back out in the universe and these sets of color will not be found anywhere else. .

Our 'genius' is our utterly unique capacity to reflect a unique range of the spectrum of the light of God. In that sense we do not 'possess' such virtues, but reflect them. Furthermore, the variety of spiritual expressions available to us is infinite. This is because our actual value is found in the meeting of light between relationships. However the actual inner reality of our unique composition is not seen by anyone save God.¹¹

The expression of our value is 'seen' when we encounter others, in relationship. Our unique reflection of light then 'meets' the reflected light of the 'other'. This then creates a completely new quality of light at the point of contact between them. This meeting point of relationship is also a completely unique expression of Divine attributes.

The uniqueness of each person and indeed each creature cannot be underestimated. Each being has an internal intrinsic value inscrutable to all save the Mind of God. As Adib Taherzadeh illustrates, every creature manifests the name of God, the 'Incomparable'

. . .the attribute of God the Incomparable appears in every created thing and therefore everything is unique. (Taherzadeh, 199)

He quotes the following from Baha'u'llah to illustrate:

Consider, in like manner, the revelation of the light of the Name of God, the Incomparable. Behold, how this light hath enveloped

the entire creation, how each and every thing manifesteth the sign of His Unity, testifieth to the reality of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, proclaimeth His sovereignty, His oneness, and His power. This revelation is a token of His mercy that hath encompassed all created things. (Gleanings, 190)

As previously mentioned, each being is incomparably unique in its reflective capacity. This is more explicitly stated by Baha'u'llah,

It should be borne in mind, however, that when the light of My Name, the All-Pervading, hath shed its radiance upon the universe, each and every created thing hath, according to a fixed decree, been endowed with the capacity to exercise a particular influence, and been made to possess a distinct virtue...The potency infused into all created things is the direct consequence of the revelation of this most blessed Name. (Gleanings, 189)

The exciting implication of such a principle is that even the most basic forms of beings then possess the creative capacity to create, through relationships, infinite forms of emergent value. Say for instance a basic atom possesses the intrinsic value of a form of unity in its reflective capacity, this most basic of reflections will still form a unique emergent quality dependent on the relationships surrounding it.

Such relationships are not essentially dependent upon physical proximity. The simplest of beings expresses infinite emergent value in that it is presently engaged simultaneously in interdependent relationship with every other being in the entire cosmos.

Know thou that every created thing is a sign of the revelation of God. Each, according to its capacity, is, and will ever remain, a token of the Almighty. Inasmuch as He, the sovereign Lord of all, hath willed to reveal His sovereignty in the kingdom of names and attributes, each and every

created thing hath, through the act of the Divine Will, been made a sign of His glory. So pervasive and general is this revelation that nothing whatsoever in the whole universe can be discovered that doth not reflect His splendor. Under such conditions every consideration of proximity and remoteness is obliterated....

...the things which have been created...and ordained to be the manifestations of His names and attributes, stand, by virtue of the grace with which they have been endowed, exalted beyond all proximity and remoteness. (Gleanings, 184-185)

'Abdu'l-baha further explains the all-pervading influence our unique genius has with all other members of the universe:

How much the organs, the members and parts of the body of man are intermingled and connected for mutual aid and help, and how much they influence one another! In the same way, the parts of this infinite universe have their members and elements connected with one another, and influence one another spiritually and materially....the beings, whether great or small, are connected with one another by the perfect wisdom of God, and affect and influence one another..This subject is worthy of examination. (Abdu'l-Baha, Some Answered Questions, 246-247)

It is apparent that the nature of this exaltation beyond proximity and remoteness is due to the capacity of the Divine light that is being reflected, rather than in the beings themselves. The qualities of light that are reflected by each being, universally include this quality of God as the 'All-Pervading' and mutually influence other beings across the farthest reaches of the universe.

If we incorporate modern scientific knowledge about the nature of light, it becomes apparent that such influence is not only universal in range of influence, but is also potentially immediate in effect. Physics provides us with an astounding example of this

interchange of forces and mysterious unity. The Einstein-Poldoski-Rosin Paradox, an empirically tested theory¹², demonstrates that if two photons are emitted by the same source, they will simultaneously change their polarity if only one is changed. This is regardless of distance. So two photons separated by billions of light years both change their corresponding polarity instantaneously. This is in spite of the fact that there is no apparent signals passed, and that this signal would have to travel faster than the speed of light. This potentially implies an interdependence of relationships between particles, which transcends physical laws, as we know them and leads to the conclusion that local actions may have immediate consequences on the farthest side of the universe.

In other words not only do our actions influence fellow beings in our local ecosystem, but instantly influence beings on the farthest side of the universe.

This model from Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-baha offers us a great range of astounding possibilities, but several come to mind in relation to scholarship.

First: Although each of us is a genius of priceless and unique value, we do not possess such genius, we merely have the capacity to reflect it through being immersed in the light of God. Therefore, we can also choose to 'switch off' our capacity for genius by turning away from the light that is our empowering agent. Such knowledge inspires our humility and our commitment to absolute loyalty to Baha'u'llah.

Second: Scholarship through consultation is seen as essential. This model inspires a great excitement and love in our anticipation of the meaning created in our relationship with others. Whether they are Einstein or someone with Downs-Syndrome, this spiritual level of 'consultation' will produce an emergent ray of light that expresses a set of Divine attributes that will not be generated anywhere else in the universe except between each other.

"This subject is worth of examination". This vision of reality as an infinite series of loving relationships immersed in the Light of God has numerous consequences for all academic disciplines. It is well beyond the capacity of this paper to explore them, however it should be said that it heals the breaches in knowledge that have occurred in our recent history of western thought. For example, it offers an alternative to the dichotomies of subjective vs. objective knowledge. Truth is acknowledged to be real, but is generated in relationships, in contrast to the 'either/or' of only an internal act of the imagination vs. an external concrete fact.

1.4 The Unity of Spiritual and Material Reality and Our Intimate Relationship with Members of the Abha Kingdom

Once again, it is beyond the limitations of this paper to adequately address this vital issue that is at the heart of Baha'i scholarship. There are many areas and methods one can approach and use to discuss it, but I will limit myself to two important areas. First I will very briefly touch on the history of how our civilisation has largely lost its capacity to have an integrated vision of spiritual and material reality. This approach I consider of great value in that it opens the door to intelligently exploring the limitations of current materialistic methodologies, in both academic disciplines and in popular thought. This then empowers us to make rationale explorations of how this breach in thought can be remedied in each discipline.

Secondly I will suggest that a fundamental agency, or empowering relationship, that makes Baha'i scholarship possible, is the active relationship we have with members of the Abha Kingdom, here and now. It is suggested that the creativity of our thoughts, responsible for the advancement of civilisation, are not necessarily independently generated in our brains, but are largely a result of the loving 'suggestions' of thought from members of the Abha Kingdom. This is not a truth often discussed in examinations of scholarship, even though the Writings, I feel, make this very clear.

Restoring the Unity of spiritual and material reality:

The harmony of science and religion is seen as a defining feature of the next, inescapable stage in the organic evolution of the spiritual and social life of humanity.

In such a world society, science and religion, the two most potent forces in human life, will be reconciled, will cooperate, and will harmoniously develop. (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order of Baha'u'llah*, 203-204)

The imbalanced and fractured perspective of spirit and matter in western consciousness can be traced historically back to the enlightenment period in which European philosophers, politicians and scientists developed what has often been called a dualistic metaphysics or world-view. This period has often been caricatured as a war between science and religion, with science the ultimate victor. However this fracturing of metaphysics is due to a somewhat more complex history. Such a fractured worldview was the product of over-reactions to the tyranny of knowledge enforced by both political and religious leaders at the time. Such tyrannical assertions of absolute truth resulted in such great injustices as the thirty-year war and the grand inquisition. The philosophies and political reactions to this injustice that were largely perpetuated by religious institutions, resulted in the removal of the “tyrant God” from the centre of modern thought. This process of the removal of the Divine was gradual but effective.

Ironically most of the central figures considered responsible for this process all believed in God, and some of them quite strongly, yet the fashion in which they were interpreted by radical secularists is largely to be blamed for the fracturing effect. Here is a representative summary of some of the forces at work in our history:

Newton’s success in explaining the operations of the universe through mechanistic principles was often equated with seeing the physical order as a machine. Newton actually encouraged this metaphor in that it alluded to Divine intelligence behind the design. Later science would adopt the concept of universal principles and law

explaining all physical relationships, but lose the idea of design and God. This was enabled as the “machine” gained the principle of independent internal momentum, through Descartes and others; and finally when the machine acquired a random, purposeless evolutionary force of its own, through Darwin. The machine, had once been a marvel of genius in its sophistication, elegance and universal intelligibility that alluded to an infinitely virtuous Creator. However through a distorted interpretation of both the processes themselves, and the intentions of their authors, it became a self-winding, self-operating, and self-designing machine, as it were. The result is our currently predominantly materialistic and positivistic world-view. Associated with these developments, the assertion grew that truth is completely relative to the individual. Such an idea was developed so that tyrannical forms of injustice could not assert their hold on the minds of entire populations. While such a goal is a noble one, the over-reactive nature of the philosophies that developed out of such a context created a kind of spiritual neurosis in the west in which it is impossible to assert that there are universal truths that are relational to us all. Such a process resulted in the splitting of reality that has formed unnecessary dualities that usually incorporate a hierarchical objectification of matter and spirit, male and female, objective and subjective, nature and humanity, culture and civilisation, among many other categories.

Such a summary does not properly represent the many historical and philosophical elements that contributed to such a process, but I think it provides an adequately brief example of one of many valuable approaches we can take¹³. If Baha’i scholars take the time to investigate the unique ways in which the above process impacted on the particular discipline(s) they are studying, it enables them to suggest ways in which this process of division was unnecessary and encourage others of the benefits of a restoration of vision of spiritual and material reality. As they study with this confidence, undoubtedly unique insights of practical applications arise from their increasing understanding of the importance of the spiritual realm for their own discipline.

Lastly, the effects of such a restoration of vision upon our civilisation cannot be underestimated. It is suggested that an entirely new dimension will open up before us.

With regard to the harmony of science and religion, the Writings of the Central Figures and the commentaries of the Guardian make abundantly clear that the task of humanity, including the Baha'i community that serves as the leaven within it, is to create a global civilization which embodies both the spiritual and material dimensions of existence. The nature and scope of such a civilization are still beyond anything the present generation can conceive. The prosecution of this vast enterprise will depend on a progressive interaction between the truths and principles of religion and the discoveries and insights of scientific inquiry. This entails living with ambiguities as a natural and inescapable feature of the process of exploring reality. It also requires us not to limit science to any particular school of thought or methodological approach postulated in the course of its development... (Universal House of Justice, Letter to an individual, 19 May, 1995, cited in a letter 13, August 1997 viewed at <http://www.bahai-library.org/uhj/science.religion.htm>, last viewed May 16, 2000)

If we use the analogy of the eyes, and consider that one eye can see the material realm and the other eye can see the spiritual realm, an astonishing realisation opens before us. We have all trained ourselves to see with one eye shut. This does not merely mean we have lost half our vision. It means that we have been limiting ourselves, as a civilisation, to a two-dimensional capacity of vision. When both eyes are used in co-operation, an entirely new, third dimension, never before seen, opens up before us. Who can even begin to imagine what possibilities will open up to our civilisation as its capacity to perceive a whole new dimension of reality is opened up before it. The exciting opportunity for the youth to act as the scholarly catalysts that enable this to occur is before you.

Our Intimate Relationship with Members of the Abha Kingdom:

For most Baha'i's, our capacity to appreciate the relationship between our 'world' and the 'world' of the Abha Kingdom has been affected by the secular 'spiritual neurosis' that sees reality as split on many levels, including spiritual and material. We often think of the Abha Kingdom as being in a different place and having an entirely different function than this world.

We are told, however, that the Abha Kingdom, is not a remote world that we may 'travel' to someday when we pass 'away'. It is within this world.

Those souls who are pure and unsullied, upon the dissolution of their elemental frames, hasten away to the world of God, and ***that world is within this world***. The people of this world, however, are unaware of that world, and are even as the mineral and vegetable that know nothing of the world of the animal and the world of man. (Selections, 194-195)

But if ye ask as to the place, know ye that ***the world of existence is a single world***, although its stations are various and distinct. For example, the mineral life occupieth its own plane, but a mineral entity is without any awareness at all of the vegetable kingdom... (Abdul-baha in London, 96)

Those who have ascended have different attributes... yet there is no real separation. (Abdul-baha, The Divine Art of Living, 124)

Those who are in the next world still intimately associate with us and are concerned with our progress and the progress of our civilisation and they still communicate with us, but rather than hearing words, we have creative thoughts.

In prayer there is a mingling of station, a mingling of condition. Pray for them as they pray for you! When you do not know it, and are in a receptive

attitude, they are able to make suggestions to you... (Abdul-baha in London, 96)

They have designated 'jobs' that they receive from God in which they work with us to advance Divine civilisation.

Those who have passed on through death, have a sphere of their own. It is not removed from ours; their work, the work of the kingdom, is ours...
(Abdul-baha in London, 96)

We are told that they are responsible for the progress of the world and the advancement of its peoples.

Such a soul provideth, at the bidding of the Ideal King and Divine Educator, the pure leaven that leaveneth the world of being, and furnisheth the power through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest.
(Gleanings, 161)

There are countless examples of Baha'i's of capacity who have passed on to the next world, acquiring greater power, and then assisting the Cause to advance to new stages of development and increased capacity.

During the past five years, the historical dialectic of triumph and disaster has operated simultaneously within the Cause of God. The Army of Light has sustained the loss of six Hands of the Cause and waves of bitter persecution which have again engulfed the long-suffering community in Iran, and have resulted in the razing of the House of the Bab, the demolition of Baha'u'llah's ancestral home in Takur, and the martyrdom of scores of valiant souls. *Yet these disasters have called forth fresh energies in the hearts of the friends, have fed the deep roots of the Cause and given rise to*

a great harvest of signal victories. (The Universal House of Justice, Messages 1963 to 1986, 574)

One of those new capacities of the Faith after this period was represented in the creation of the Department of Social and Economic Development and the sudden ability of the Faith to engage in systematic plans to assist the developing nations of the world through a growing variety of dynamic methods of assistance.

What implications does all this have for Baha'i scholarship?

I can only speak personally, but I feel it offers an opportunity to recognise the often-unnoticed role of members of the Abha kingdom in inspiring our thoughts and creating opportunities in our attempts to rise to the challenge of scholarship. It is both awe inspiring and humbling to know how 'in this very room' are sanctified souls, often those whom we have known and loved, waiting to help us with our tasks of scholarship, yet only impeded by our own readiness and capacity to receive such inspiration. It is through aligning ourselves with the Covenant, immersing ourselves in prayer, meditating upon the writings, purifying our character, and arising to act in the interests of others and the Faith through deeds characterised by self-sacrifice they we acquire such ongoing and increasing capacity to receive the inspiration of those who 'stand next to us'.

1.5 Some Suggested Practical Strategies of Baha'i Scholarship for Baha'i Youth at University

I hope to have emphasized the value of a great diversity of approaches to scholarship that we must learn to appreciate for a global culture of Baha'i scholarship to reach fruition. However, since this Congress is composed primarily of Baha'i university students, it is of course necessary to focus on that particular context.

I can only offer some of the insights gained through my own experience at university. Such suggestions may be suitable for some or even many, but not for all. To start with, I think it is helpful to understand our periods at University as pioneering posts. This knowledge of ourselves as pioneers inspires an appropriate attitude of service, self-motivation, individual creative initiative and assurance of Divine assistance.

In the following substantial quote, Shoghi Effendi provides us with a vision of how we can each individually pursue a systematic program, incorporating practical applications of our Baha'i scholarship on campus:

Let him not wait for any directions, or expect any special encouragement, from the elected representatives of his elected community, nor be deterred by any obstacles...

'Be unrestrained as the wind,' is Baha'u'llah's counsel to every would-be teacher of his Cause....

Having on his own initiative, and undaunted by any hindrances which either friend or foe may, unwittingly or deliberately, obstruct his path, resolved to arise and respond to the call of teaching, let him carefully consider every avenue of approach which he might utilize in his personal attempts to capture the attention, maintain the interest, and deepen the faith, of those whom he seeks to bring into the fold of his Faith. (*The Advent of Divine Justice*, 50-51)

And here, Shoghi Effendi continuing his encouragement to potential pioneers, links our periods of activity at University as pioneering posts:

Let him survey the possibilities which the particular circumstances in which he lives offer him, evaluate their advantages, and proceed intelligently and systematically to utilize them for the achievement of the object he has in mind. Let him also attempt to devise such methods as association with clubs, exhibitions, and societies, lectures on subjects akin to the teachings

and ideals of his Cause such as temperance, morality, social welfare, religious and racial tolerance, economic cooperation, Islam, and Comparative Religion, or participation in social, cultural, humanitarian, charitable, and educational organizations and enterprises which, while safeguarding the integrity of his Faith, will open up to him a multitude of ways and means whereby he can enlist successively the sympathy, the support, and ultimately the allegiance of those with whom he comes in contact. Let him, while such contacts are being made, bear in mind the claims which his Faith is constantly making upon him to preserve its dignity, and station, to safeguard the integrity of its laws and principles, to demonstrate its comprehensiveness and universality, and to defend fearlessly its manifold and vital interests. Let him consider the degree of his hearer's receptivity, and decide for himself the suitability of the direct or indirect method of teaching...(*The Advent of Divine Justice*, 51)

The wisdom of this advice is beyond the capacity of this paper to fully explore but some particular elements can be considered.

The Golden Age of humanity will see universities very different in character than from where they stand today. We can already see the incredible influence of Baha'u'llah's Revelation upon the thoughts and subjects of study. As has already been mentioned, this invisible influence has resulted in such academic thinking 'catching up' with all the great principles of the Faith as early as 1949. However the deeper significance of the principles enshrined in that Revelation have yet to manifest themselves in academic disciplines.

Some of these qualities, in my opinion, include a more intimate relationship of consultation between the academic disciplines based on the knowledge of the unity of God, the unity of humanity and the unity of knowledge; a quality of research that is goal directed at the practical advancement of human civilisation and which initially is primarily concerned with the alleviation of human suffering; and ultimately whose

methodology is universally characterised by a recognition of the harmony of spiritual and material reality.

So what can we do, as youth to make such a fundamental shift in university culture occur? As Shoghi Effendi said in the above quote, that will largely depend upon the unique circumstances and opportunities that each person finds themselves in. Each person will have to make those initial decisions of action and method themselves. However I can offer some minor examples from my own experience.

At a youth meeting in Haifa, House Member Ian Semple emphasized the importance of being systematic planners, and in having short, medium and long-term goals. The governing principles mentioned by Shoghi Effendi above are very helpful in that regard but will again rely on personal initiative and creativity.

Among the long-term goals, I have already mentioned the value of eventually becoming familiar with the historical and methodological origins of each particular discipline that we study. Particularly in regards to becoming conscious of how spiritual considerations became separated from materialistic ones since the Enlightenment, and how, in a number of disciplines, to varying degrees, this division is being repaired. For most people this familiarisation will be a long-term process, as they become more aware of their discipline. But the sooner we are conscious of its value in offering a tool to rationally justify spiritual approaches, the sooner we can begin the process and recognise significant issues in what we study.

Some more practical short-term strategies that we can engage in are the following:

The Baha'i consultation model is of great value on all levels, as it represents a practical manifestation of the principle of the unity of knowledge and humanity. This can mean recognising that each discipline may have a different approach to solving a problem or looking at an issue. Because of the unity of knowledge, these different approaches often complement the approach of our own particular discipline and even sometimes offer a

fresh approach not considered by our discipline due to the entrenched culture of the separation of disciplines. This approach reinforces the value of multi-disciplinary studies within the university culture. More importantly this approach often has the effect of making our own work very advanced and original, when all we have done is use the principles of consultation to our benefit. I cannot stress how much this method 'pays off'. One does not have to be an expert in any of the areas of consultation, (although of course the greater your expertise, the greater your capacity to relate) because you are consulting the experts themselves in a variety of disciplines in querying their approaches to particular issues or problems. All you have to do is become familiar with at least the basics before-hand, be a good listener when consulting the experts, and then reflect on what you have heard or read at length.

For me, over the past fourteen years, this has meant recognising the value of other religions theological methodologies for exploring Baha'i principles; recognising the spiritual value of Baha'i theological principles for the field of environmental ethics; recognising the value of environmental philosophy arguments (particularly those from ecological feminists) about the intrinsic value of nature for the field of Indigenous Studies in using the same arguments to recognise the value of culture; valuing and linking the arguments within Indigenous Studies about the spiritual and cultural concerns of Indigenous Peoples and recognising its value for different types of law (Human Rights, Environmental Law, Intellectual Property Law etc.); and this has meant recognising the value of a closer collaboration between the different branches of law in both recognising spiritual concerns of Indigenous Peoples and in developing more effective means of responding to their concerns. All of these investigations then lead full circle to a deeper appreciation of Baha'i principles of progressive revelation, equality of women and men, elimination of all forms of prejudice, harmony of science and religion, expression of the Divine in nature, the unity of God, unity of Humanity, unity of knowledge and other principles.

Another suggestion offered, is that whenever we are aware that we may be meeting a lecturer, whether at a public meeting, a departmental seminar, privately, or any other

means, that we read some of their works before-hand if available. Ideally read as much as possible of their work, but if we have very limited time then at least read the introduction and conclusion of selected works they have written. This way at least we gain an appreciation for what issues they consider important and what conclusions they came to when they focused on those issues. That way we can meditate on Baha'i responses to the approaches they have used and intelligently present them with a Baha'i position, whether directly or indirectly, by starting with an appreciation of the valuable elements we have seen in their own work. Nothing opens the door to the hearts of lecturers more than having someone in front of them who genuinely appreciates their work and may even have practical suggestions for how their work may have relevance in other fields. Equally we can be more systematic about determining which lecturers may have more affinity with particular Baha'i principles and once we have prepared ourselves, specifically approach them.

Another advantage to applying principles of consultation is the writing of papers for publication and otherwise. Scientific culture already incorporates multi-authored papers in Journals, and this is by necessity of the many scientists required to complete various types of scientific research projects these days. However, they still do not often collaborate between differing disciplines, like between Quantum Physics and Ecology. Within the Humanities, one very rarely sees collaborative papers. The emphasis is usually on individuals getting credit for developing new ideas. A Baha'i approach to consultation, once again produces amazing results. If we collaborate with another person from another culture or discipline in the writing of a paper it often creates a more innovative paper that also has more credibility, as this gives it a unique multi-disciplinary quality.

This happened to me a few months ago where I had the chance to replace a speaker in a last minute cancellation, and give a paper at an International conference at Washington University on 'Biodiversity, Biotechnology and the Protection of Traditional Knowledge'. I noticed that there were no Indigenous presenters in my section, considered this a relative form of injustice, and determined to ask another Indigenous student doing his Masters (on preserving the knowledge of his own Aboriginal community), to co-write

and present with me. Although we only had 5 weeks for preparation, we met with an Indigenous elder (interestingly, a white man who had been raised by rural Aboriginals from childhood) who gave us advice on inter-cultural consultation and on how to present a united paper. It was decided that besides co-writing the paper (on the relevance of Indigenous spiritual knowledge for the law) my Indigenous friend would make a painting of the ideas of the paper in a semi-traditional indigenous manner. We then presented both the painting and the paper at this conference. The conference was attended by numerous world experts, including, in our section, directors of the World Trade Organisation and the World Intellectual Property Organisation. Our presentations were received very well, with dozens of experts in different fields following up with us by engaging in further consultation over the next few days about the impact of spiritual considerations for the field. This resulted in offers of support through long-term research collaborations, requests for the paper to be published in both a book and an international law journal, a grant offer from a German based institution, an offer of positions as researchers at the United Nations University in Tokyo and other practical offers of assistance.

At the end of the conference the head of the Law faculty summed up the conference by saying that he personally felt that the most important truth that emerged from discussions was the importance of the unity of spiritual and material reality for the field of Law.

I think this adequately demonstrates the benefits of valuing others cultures and disciplines through an application of consultation in our attempts to develop our capacity for Baha'i scholarship

I want to emphasise that one does not need to wait until you are a post-graduate student to write collaborative papers that will get published. It is better to start initiating the methodology of consultation sooner, rather than later

The next suggestion, is that there is an exciting new pattern of Baha'i post-graduate research available to students from all disciplines in Australia. Those who anticipate doing an honors degree in their subject, or are already completing one, should

contemplate this. In Australia, there is something called an Australian Postgraduate Award Industry (APAI) scholarship. This is like a normal APA scholarship, except that it has the added component of a contributing industry partner. The scholarship is worth over \$23,000 per year, with \$18,000 of it coming from the Australian Research Council and a further \$5,000 coming from the industry partner. APAI research applications submitted to the ARC have about a 48% chance of success, and that is a significantly higher rate of success than other forms of research grants have.

If an honors student achieves class II honors or higher upon completion, they are eligible for this scholarship. For the Baha'i scholar the opportunity exists to develop a research proposal that is characterised by a deep appreciation of certain Baha'i principles they have managed to relate to their field. If the research proposal is of a high enough quality, and manages to successfully incorporate a mature appreciation of Baha'i principles, whether implicitly or explicitly, then there is the opportunity to approach a Baha'i institution, or even certain individuals and ask them to consider becoming the industry partner. As the financial capacity of the Faith grows, it is anticipated that this will become increasingly viable as an option. This approach gives the Baha'i scholar a scholarship to complete a Masters or a PhD with a research focus incorporating Baha'i principles. This also gives the Faith an opportunity to have the prestige and development of credibility within the Australian academic community by becoming known as the industry partner for successful and innovative research projects. Even if the research project proposal does not make it as one of the 48% successful applications, a service to the Faith has still occurred, as many within their particular educational institution, as well as many of those involved in its governmental review, will have gained an appreciation for the focus and quality of the research proposal, as well as the willingness of Baha'i institutions to support such research. Such research applications have already occurred and students interested in pursuing such a process should contact the ABS for further advice.

While there are many other possible avenues of practical techniques for students at university to express and develop forms of Baha'i scholarship, I want to conclude by offering one last suggestion.

Baha'i societies often engage in organising seminars or conferences of a Baha'i theme. Often we merely focus on trying to get some good quality presenters to present papers at such functions. Yet there are many opportunities to transform university culture through these conferences and seminars by facilitating an environment during the conference that enhances appreciation of the benefits of the qualities of what may be considered the hallmarks of the future universities of the Golden Age. It is suggested that the Baha'i society consult about what these qualities may be and find small ways to incorporate them into the context of the conference.

The Australian Association for Baha'i Studies has decided that one such practical method is to hold, when possible, a parallel children's conference on the same theme as the academic conference, simplified to the capacity of the children. This idea was originally developed out of a concern to encourage more female presenters to attend. But it was thought that it was possible to move beyond mere child-care and hold an actual children's conference on the same theme. This encourages several principles in university culture that are not traditionally considered. First it demonstrates a practical commitment to the equality of women and men, secondly it encourages a child-centered community, while thirdly it demonstrates the long-term nature of the issues discussed and suggests that an intelligent focus on such subjects can begin at a much earlier age than previously considered; lastly it facilitates family consultation on the issues of the conference. This last point is important, because often academics have little time with their families, are bound by the specialised and individualistic contexts of their work, and do not often discuss the complex nature of their work at home. This encourages a very different culture of family participation and gives the child a sense of value that will undoubtedly manifest itself in their future capacity to carry their own insights further.

Two upcoming conferences are going to incorporate this method, the first, on November 29, 2003 on 'Collective Security in the 21st Century' and the second, April 21-24, 2004 on 'Bioprospecting and Indigenous Knowledge'. The first conference will have a children's conference focusing on themes of peace, the unity of humanity, and simple methods of conflict resolution. The second conference will have a children's conference focusing on celebrating Indigenous culture through workshops on Indigenous dance, art, music, folklore and language.

Even though these conferences have not been held yet, the international response of the academic community to the proposition of such a model (through website advertising) has been significant. For example the Chair of the American Philosophical Association Chapter of Indigenous Philosophy has commented on how wonderful and radical an idea this is, and that she is already recommending it as a model in her travels. This is from one of the worlds most educated Indigenous peoples, who holds Doctorates in both Law and Philosophy, is an editor of several international journals, and who has respected positions with a number of prestigious universities and other Indigenous communities.

Conclusion:

There are many traditional and valuable issues of Baha'i scholarship that this paper has not focused upon. This does not mean that these subjects are any less important, such as historical explorations of the foundations of the Faith, the development of a defensive capacity, the value of developing specialist expertise, the value of literary and historical criticism in studying the Baha'i Writings, or a review of other works that have focused on Baha'i scholarship.

In spite of the limitations of this paper, it is hoped that it has offered the youth a vision of their sacred duty to pursue scholarship and a confidence in their own utterly unique spiritual genius to impact upon the world. I hope to have indicated the importance to the scholar of the qualities of humility, love of the diversity of the Names and Attributes of God, the intrinsic spiritual value of all cultures and the supreme value of consultation.

Equally I hope to have alluded to some of the exciting implications that the unity of spiritual and material reality has upon our capacity for vision, and the future vision of civilisation. Similarly, realisation of how the members of the Abha Kingdom, here and now, inspire the creativity of our thoughts, offers us powerful resources and strength. Perhaps of greatest significance, is the suggested importance to Baha'i scholarship of an equally passionate commitment to both pillars of absolute loyalty to Baha'u'llah and the unfettered search for truth.

You are all greatly needed:

The field is indeed so immense, the period so critical, the Cause so great, the workers so few, the time so short, the privilege so priceless, that no follower of the Faith of Baha'u'llah, worthy to bear His name, can afford a moment's hesitation. (*The Advent of Divine Justice*, 39)

The knowledge of our supremely creative spiritual interconnections with each other and with the Abha Kingdom empowers us to realise that we are not alone in our endeavors.

By the righteousness of God! Whoso openeth his lips in this Day and maketh mention of the name of his Lord, the hosts of Divine inspiration shall descend upon him from the heaven of My name, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. On him shall also descend the Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light. Thus hath it been foreordained in the realm of God's Revelation, by the behest of Him Who is the All Glorious, the Most Powerful. (Gleanings, 280)

Endnotes

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2 The word "enthusiasm" comes from the classical Greek *enthousiazein* which can be translated to mean "to be possessed or infused with the Spirit of God"

3 There are a growing number of articles and compilations on Baha'i scholarship that all provide valuable resources for our contemplation and guidance. For example, in 1993 the Association for Baha'i Studies Australia published *Baha'i Scholarship: A Compilation & Essays*. This contains an important compilation on Baha'i scholarship prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, as well as various letters from the Universal House of Justice, and a number of essays written by individual Baha'i believers. A simple search using the keyword 'scholarship' at <http://bahai-library.org> gives rise to many valuable articles and other compilations that have been published elsewhere.

4 One only has to spend a brief time studying Einstein and Quantum Physics to enjoy the parallels. For an example of such discussions see John Polkinghorne, *One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology*, (SPCK, 1986)

5 On this David Harmon comments, "It is often said that any coherence that once may have existed in the Western scholarly tradition is long gone. Gone too, so the reasoning holds, is any hope for a broad, intelligible view of what is going on in this particular region of thought. The few remaining would-be generalists must skulk through a fragmented, fractured intellectual landscape, picking their way on cat's feet through minefields laid down by increasingly specialized and insular disciplines, moving gingerly so as not to detonate the latest fashionable theory. Erosion, of a kind, is responsible for the dominant feature of this landscape: a chasm between science and the humanities, now grown so wide and deep that it is often given up as unbridgeable. Actually, 'given up' is a mild way of putting it. There are plenty of people who positively relish the distance, thankful of any opportunity to dismiss the other side, on guard always against any attempts at bridge building.", David Harmon, 'On the Meaning and Moral Imperative of Diversity,' in Luisa Maffi, ed., *On Biocultural Diversity: Linking Language, Knowledge and the Environment*, Washington, Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001, p. 53

6 I encountered this idea first through Karl Barth, but it can be traced back earlier to Thomas Aquinas who said, 'Cognita sunt in in cognoscente secundum modum cognoscentis' or, 'Things known are in the knower according to the mode of the knower.' (*Summa Theologiae*, II/II, 1, 2; p. 1057)

7 There are 6703 languages catalogued by Grimes, B. ed. 1996. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. 13th ed. Dallas: Summer Institute of Linguistics. (Available on the World Wide Web at: <http://www.sil.org/ethnologue/>.)

8 This understanding forms the basis for much of my teaching in Indigenous Studies. A discussion of this concept is on an online lecture at http://www.warawara.mq.edu.au/abst100/lecture_culturalknowledge.html or a more detailed discussion is in my Masters Thesis, *An Examination of the Environmental Crisis with Particular Focus on the Balance Between the Instrumental and Intrinsic Value of Nature From a Baha'i Perspective*, 2001, University of Sydney. You can download a copy from <http://laurel.ocs.mq.edu.au/~cjone005/Complete Thesis for Masters.doc>

9 "Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes.", *Gleanings*, p.65

10 It is not that any soul has attributes that another one does not, rather the uniqueness is in the orientation of the composition of their reflective capacity.

11 "When we consider the world of existence, we find that the essential reality underlying any given phenomenon is unknown. Phenomenal, or created, things are known to us only by their attributes. Man discerns only manifestations, or attributes, of objects, while the identity, or reality, of them remains hidden. For example, we call this object a flower. What do we understand by this name and title? We understand that the qualities appertaining to this organism are perceptible to us, but the intrinsic elemental reality, or identity, of it remains unknown. Its external appearance and manifest attributes are knowable; but the inner being, the underlying reality or intrinsic identity, is still beyond the ken and perception of our human powers". `Abdu'l-Baha, *Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 421

12 See I J R Aitchison, *Gauge Theories in Particle Physics*, 1989

13 The best example of this technique I have found is in: Alister E. Mcgrath, *Science and Religion: An Introduction*, (Oxford, UK, Blackwell Publishers, 1999)

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