

The Australian Bahá'í

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Special Section:
The Legacy of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

A year for profound reflection on the life of



'Abdu'l-Bahá

His passing took from the Bahá'ís of that era a Figure Who was the object of their ardent love and loyalty; to the faithful of this age, He remains without parallel: a perfect embodiment in word and deed of

all that His Father taught, the One through Whom the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh was “proclaimed, championed and vindicated”. We are conscious that the coming year will also mark a century since His Will and Testament—that “momentous”, “historic”, “immortal” Document—“called into being, outlined the features and set in motion the processes” of the Administrative Order, “the very pattern of that divine civilization which the almighty Law of Bahá'u'lláh is designed to establish upon earth”. This “unique” and “divinely-conceived” Order, this “mighty administrative structure”, had been fashioned by its Architect to perpetuate the Covenant and channel the spiritual powers of the Cause.

Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 25 November 2020

Special Section: The Legacy of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Following the guidance of the Universal House of Justice on the Day of the Covenant, 25th November 2020, the National Spiritual Assembly has decided that the focus of the September 2021 issue of The Australian Bahá’í will be a profound reflection on the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

When we published the special issue in September we received such a positive response that we decided to make a stand-alone issue of the section about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá so that it can be shared more widely. In producing this we have made some minor updates and corrections.

We invite you to open these pages and reflect on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, His unique station, the significance of the Covenant and how Bahá’ís throughout Australia are learning about Him and striving to follow His example.





*'Abdu'l-Bahá walking outside 7 Haparsim Street in Haifa, c. 1919
Copyright © Bahá'í International Community*

'Abdu'l-Bahá

The Centre of the Covenant

The Greater Covenant is an agreement between mankind and God, that God will send Manifestations of God to help mankind and mankind will follow the guidance of these Manifestations of God.

A unique feature of Bahá'u'lláh's dispensation is His clear and undisputed appointment of His eldest son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Centre of His Covenant. As a unique feature of this dispensation, Bahá'u'lláh has given 'Abdu'l-Bahá the authority to interpret His Writings and the authority to appoint 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own successor to ensure the continued flow of divine guidance and the preservation of religious unity until the appearance of the next Manifestation of God. This guarantee of continued Guidance is referred to as 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Covenant or the "Lesser Covenant".

Next to the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá occupies the highest station in the Bahá'í Faith. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh enjoins the Bahá'ís to turn to "Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root" and to "refer ye whatsoever ye understand not in the Book to Him Who hath branched from this mighty Stock." In the Tablet of the Branch, and in the Book of the Covenant (Kitáb-i-'Ahd), which constitutes His Will and Testament, Bahá'u'lláh establishes 'Abdu'l-Bahá's authority as the Centre of the Covenant.

Thus, upon the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, the Bahá'ís had clear instructions from Bahá'u'lláh to turn to 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the new leader of the Bahá'í Faith and sole authorised interpreter of His teachings.

In the words of Shoghi Effendi, "['Abdu'l-Bahá] is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Centre and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant...". Shoghi Effendi described four purposes for the Lesser Covenant: to "perpetuate the influence of the Faith", "insure its integrity", "safeguard it from schism", and "stimulate its worldwide expansion". The Covenant is the instrument by which we ensure the continuation of divine guidance, leading to the promised "Golden Age" and the establishment of the "Kingdom of God on earth".

Through His Will and Testament, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has perpetuated the Lesser Covenant through the twin pillars of the Bahá'í administrative order—the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice—thus providing for the protection and propagation of the Faith until the next Manifestation of God appears.

What is the Day of the Covenant?

The Day of the Covenant in late November is when Bahá'ís celebrate the appointment of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant with His followers. In one of His Tablets, 'Abdu'l-Bahá elaborates:

Thou hast written concerning the holding of gatherings on the occasion of the Day of the Covenant. Nothing greater, more potent, or more momentous can be conceived than the Covenant of God and His Testament!

Light of the World: Selected Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The Day of the Covenant is one of two Holy Days in the Bahá'í calendar (also known as the Bahá'í calendar) that focus on the distinction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, namely, the Day of the Covenant on the fourth day of the month of Speech (Qawl), and the anniversary of His Ascension on the sixth day of Qawl in 1921.

These are also the only two observed Holy Days on which work does not need to be suspended.

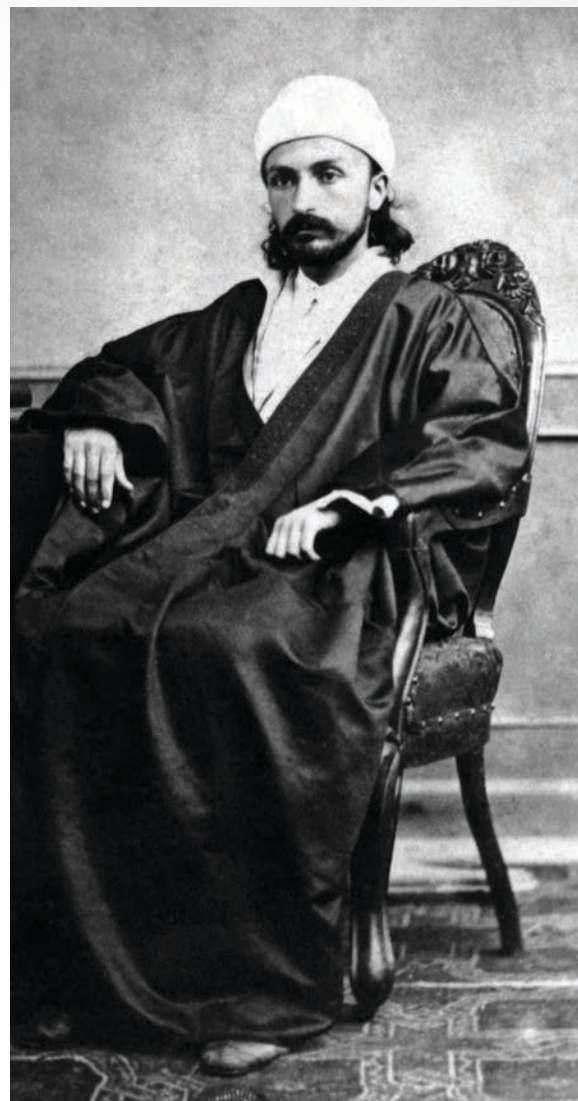
Although He was born on the 23rd of May in 1844, 'Abdu'l-Bahá requested that His own birth not be celebrated on that unique day marking the dawn of the Báb's declaration to Mullá Husayn. A letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice in 1984 explains this historical account:

'Abdu'l-Bahá told the Bahá'ís that this day was not, under any circumstances, to be celebrated as His day of birth. It was the day of the Declaration of The Báb, exclusively associated with Him. But as the Bahá'ís begged for a day to be celebrated as His, He gave them November 26th, to be observed as the day of the appointment of the Centre of the Covenant.

But beyond this profoundly self-effacing request by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Day of the Covenant also marks a most extraordinary pivotal point of Bahá'u'lláh's protection and propagation of the Cause of God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's appointment as the very Centre ensured that the Bahá'í Faith would endure as one united religion, and that the Community of His followers could continue unobstructed by schisms that tore apart the believers in previous dispensations.

The Universal House of Justice also designates this particular Holy Day to begin the period of appointment for Counsellors and their Auxiliary Board members as well as the election or appointment of Regional Bahá'í Councils around the world.

In a letter sent to the Bahá'ís of the World on 25th November 2020, the Universal House of Justice described this unique Holy Day as “an occasion for calling to mind the power of the Covenant”. In other words, the Day of the Covenant is indeed a Holy Day warranting not merely a celebration, but for reflection on its full significance. In that same letter, the Universal House of Justice noted that the Day of the Covenant this year, “will be especially meaningful”.



*Portrait of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Edirne, c. 1868.
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Loving ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Understanding His Station

The early Bahá’ís in the West struggled to understand the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Boris Handal shares how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá responded to this confusion.

Following the Ascension of Bahá’u’lláh in 1892, there were several Bahá’ís from both the East and West who, in their love for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, lavished praise on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá using extreme laudatory terms. Such exaggerations went beyond ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s station and brought Him anxiety and grief. Some believers likened Him to the return of Jesus Christ or to a new Manifestation of God, and others simply elevated Him so much that His positions of servitude and self-effacement were hidden. Enemies of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá used those comments to attack ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and discredit Him.

Time after time, the believers addressed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá by the magnificent titles that Bahá’u’lláh had conferred upon Him, such as “the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root”, “the Limb of the Law of God”, the Being “round Whom all names revolve”, the “Mystery of God”, “Branch of Holiness,” His “most great favor”, and “most perfect bounty” conferred upon humanity, through Whom “every mouldering bone is quickened”. However, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá lovingly discouraged them from using those lofty titles and preferred His self-designated name of “Servant of Bahá”.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Haifa, 1921. *The Bahá’í World 1936-1938*. Copyright © Bahá’í International Community

The stories below reveal how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá educated the friends about His station of servitude.

In *The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh*, Adib Taherzadeh shares the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s secretary as he recounted the way ‘Abdu’l-Bahá reacted to those laudatory remarks from the believers:

... [O]ne day I received a letter from one of the handmaidens of God... This letter, composed in verse, and laudatory in its tone, was addressed to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the form of a supplication to the holy presence of God. I handed the poem to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as He was coming down the steps of the house in front of the sea. I thought it was the right moment to give it to Him. He had hardly read one or two lines when He suddenly turned His face towards me and with the utmost sadness and a deep sense of grief said: ‘Now even you hand me letters such as this! Don’t you know the measure of pain and sorrow which overtakes me when I hear people addressing me with such exalted titles? Even you have not recognized me! If you have not appreciated this, then what can be expected of others? ... Don’t you see all that I do day and night, and everything I write in my letters... I swear by Almighty God that I consider myself lowlier than each and every one of the loved ones of the Blessed Beauty. This is my firm conviction... Tell me if I am wrong. This is my greatest wish. I don’t even wish to make this claim, because I dislike every claim.’ He then turned towards the Qiblih and said, ‘O Blessed Beauty, grant me this station’.

John Esslement noted in *Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era* that there were also a number of Western Bahá’ís who, “felt that they honoured ‘Abdu’l-Bahá by likening Him to a Manifestation or hailing Him as the ‘return of Christ’”. Such remarks brought considerable grief to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Who on repeated occasions alluded to Himself only as a servant of the Blessed Beauty. In part to

address these misconceptions and clarify ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s singular station, Shoghi Effendi wrote a letter dated 8 February 1934 that was subsequently published in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh* under the title “*The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh*”.

Western pilgrims, impressed by His arresting figure, often came back to America and disseminated these misunderstandings. For instance, author Earl Redman writes in *Visiting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* that some Bahá’ís were of the belief that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the Spirit of Christ. For this reason, on 1 December 1901, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá revealed a Tablet for William and Wendell Dodge, who were at that time on pilgrimage in the Holy Land, clarifying His station:

In this greatest period there are only two Manifestations, the Blessed Báb (may my soul be a ransom to him) and the Manifestation of the Blessed Perfection (Glory be to Him).

We are all servants of the threshold of Bahá and the one who serves most in His Holy threshold is the most beloved. My greatest wish and desire is submissiveness and servitude at His Holy Threshold. My name, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, means the servant of God; my heart is the servant of Bahá, and my spirit is the servant of Bahá and rejoices only in this name.

Therefore, in order that there may be no discord, all of the believers in the truth must not mention me except as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the servant of God. The essential thing is love. I must love you, and you must love me. Such is the meaning of the truth, while untruth means rancour, discord and hatred. All else save love is merely outwardly uttered words.

On another occasion, friends in New York were in disagreement as to whether ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the return of Jesus Christ. They decided to write to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Who, on 1 January 1907, wrote to the New York City Board of Counsel the passage to the right, as recorded in *Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Abbas*.



The Mystery of God

My name is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, my identity is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, my qualification is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, my reality is 'Abdu'l-Bahá, my praise is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Thralldom to the Blessed Perfection is my glorious and refulgent diadem; and servitude to all the human race is my perpetual religion. Through the bounty and favor of the Blessed Perfection, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the Ensign of the Most-Great-Peace, which is waving from the Supreme Apex; and through the gift of the Greatest name, he is the Lamp of Universal Salvation, which is shining with the light of the love of God. The Herald of the Kingdom is he, so that he may awaken the people of the East and of the West. The Voice of Friendship, Uprightness, Truth and Reconciliation is he, so as to cause acceleration throughout all regions. No name, no title, no mention, no commendation hath he nor will ever have except 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This is my longing. This is my supreme apex. This is my greatest yearning. This is my eternal life. This is my everlasting glory!

— 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Learning from the Tests Faced By ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

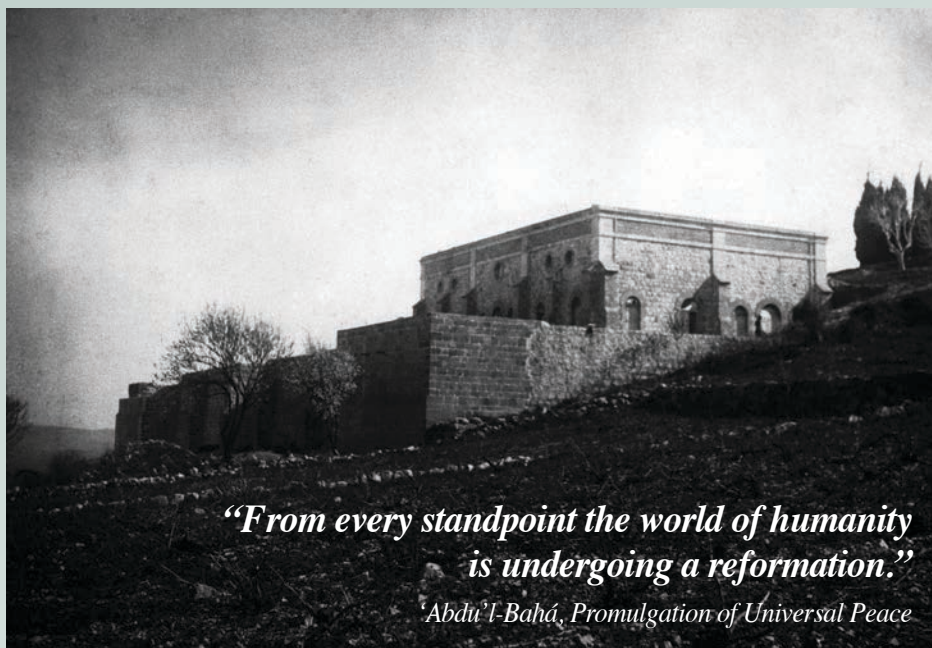
Mankind is truly fortunate that we have the writings of the Faith that so eloquently explain how the powerful forces of integration and disintegration are propelling humanity towards world peace. For us, as individuals, as well as a community, we have the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for solace and, as an example to turn to when looking for direction in our lives.

A snapshot of some of the incidents in the last two decades of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s life beautifully illustrates the gentle power of His “day by day” approach to dealing with the many tests and difficulties He encountered in His life.

In 1901 in ‘Akká, the rules of confinement placed on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and His brothers had become more relaxed due to the kindness and high esteem that had grown for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá since His arrival. Mírzá Muhammad-‘Alí, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s half-brother, filled with jealousy, sent a generous gift to the Sultan along with correspondence suggesting that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was acting against the interests of the Ottoman Empire.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá receiving knighthood for relief of distress and famine during the war, 27 April 1920. Copyright © Bahá’í International Community



“From every standpoint the world of humanity is undergoing a reformation.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace

One of the hallmarks of the ministry of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá occurred on 21 March 1909 when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá laid the remains of the Báb to rest on the slopes of Mount Carmel. The Shrine, pictured above, was a simple building during the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Copyright © Bahá’í International Community.

As a result the rules were tightened and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, once again, was confined to the city walls and subjected to long interviews and questioning.

The confinement that was ordered was much harder for the officials to enforce as they had all benefited from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s kindness and generosity and did not wish to put such hard restrictions on someone they admired so deeply. Despite this, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá never breached the harsh restrictions that were imposed.

During the period of 1901 -1908, while ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was incarcerated within the city walls of ‘Akká, He wrote His Will and Testament. Described by Shoghi Effendi as the Charter for the New World Order, the Will and Testament not only named Shoghi Effendi His successor but protected him from challenge and set up the structure for the establishment of the Universal House of Justice.

Finally, in 1908, at the age of 64, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was released from confinement and was able to join His family in Haifa and complete the work of building the final resting place

for The Báb. This sacred task was completed in 1909. Shoghi Effendi quotes ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in *God Passes By*, saying:

The most joyful tidings is this, ... that the holy, the luminous body of the Báb ... after having for sixty years been transferred from place to place, by reason of the ascendancy of the enemy, and from fear of the malevolent, and having known neither rest nor tranquillity has, through the mercy of the Abhá Beauty, been ceremoniously deposited, on the day of Naw-Ruz, within the sacred casket, in the exalted Shrine on Mt. Carmel.

Further victories happened in the period from 1911–1914 when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was free to travel to Europe and North America where He travelled extensively giving countless talks, promoting the unity of humankind, and laying the cornerstone for the Mother Temple in Chicago.

Constantly aware of the needs of humanity ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encouraged and nurtured Bahá’ís to farm the lands in the Jordan Valley. He guided them as they planted a variety of grains



'Abdu'l-Bahá with a group of Bahá'ís at Lincoln Park in Chicago, Illinois, 3 May 1912. Copyright © Bahá'í International Community

and then stored their harvest. This continued until the outbreak of World War One when 'Abdu'l-Bahá began His series of letters to the United States and Canada that would become the *Tablets of The Divine Plan*.

It was during World War One, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá arranged for the distribution of the stores of wheat and grains to feed the thousands of hungry people in Palestine, thus averting a famine.

For His services to the people of Palestine, 'Abdu'l-Bahá received the Order of the British Empire in recognition of the accomplishment of saving thousands from starvation during the blockade created by the

conflicts during World War One.

Bahá'u'lláh called His eldest Son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but after Bahá'u'lláh passed away, His Son took on the title, 'Abdu'l-Bahá meaning "Servant of the Glory" or "Servant of Bahá'u'lláh". He left humanity with much guidance and many explanations on the purpose of tests in our lives. He encouraged us to anticipate tests, to greet them as a gift, with the knowledge that they will assist us in becoming more detached from the physical world and closer to the spiritual world.

In this extract from *Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* by Annemarie Honnold, He also shares how the Holy Family used the power of joy and

laughter in even the darkest of times:

'Abdu'l-Bahá loved laughter and His laughter was often a source of solace . . . He said that . . . It is good to laugh. Laughter is spiritual relaxation. When they were in prison, He said, and under the utmost deprivation and difficulties, each of them at the close of the day would relate the most ludicrous event which had happened. Sometimes it was difficult to find one but always they would laugh until the tears would run down their cheeks. Happiness, He said, is never dependent upon material surroundings, otherwise, how sad those years would have been. As it was they were always in the utmost state of joy and happiness.

— Hilary Abadi Ghadim



The funeral of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in Haifa, November 1921. Copyright © Bahá’í International Community

Haifa's Religions United to Farewell ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The outpouring of grief by the residents of Haifa during the funeral of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá demonstrated how He had lived a life of service to all who crossed His path. Michael Day recounts the sad day when the Perfect Exemplar was laid to rest.

As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s funeral procession was ascending Mount Carmel, He was still serving the people of Haifa.

The funeral cortège on 29 November 1921 was a demonstration of religious and racial tolerance—two principles of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings.

Some 10,000 people, nearly half the population of the city, were actively mourning His passing, either by participating in the procession or by lining the streets to pay their respects.

It was obvious to everybody there that the deceased Person was admired, in fact, loved by Muslims, Jews, Christians and other religious groups.

The atmosphere of unity thus created was surely yet another lesson ‘Abdu’l-Bahá provided to the local residents, that people who mourned together could surely live together in harmony.

To see the British administrators of the Holy Land, including the High Commissioner for Palestine, Sir Herbert Samuel, walking uphill in the procession, was enough to prove that the Mandate authorities also held Him in the highest regard.

The City Constabulary Force provided a guard of honour, and behind them in the cortège walked Muslim and Christian Boy Scouts accompanied by their bands. Then came the Muftí and other Muslim leaders, as well as Christian clergy from the Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Anglican traditions, followed by Jewish representatives and by Bahá’ís.

All the pupils of the Notre Dame de Nazareth college were kneeling and praying on the terrace of the school overlooking Abbas Street, named for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

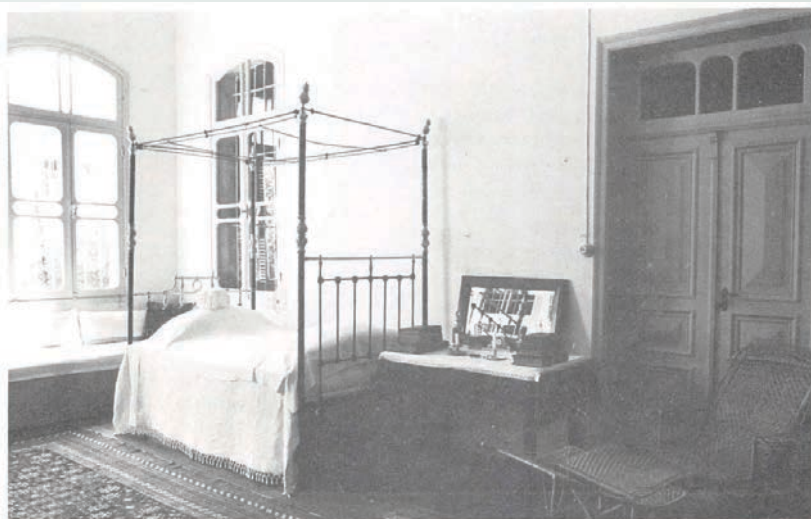
Sounds along the route up the steep slope were confined to soft, rhythmic Islamic chanting and the sobbing of the thousands of people whose difficulties and sorrows had been alleviated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

His life and now His funeral were proof that, by following Bahá’u’lláh’s first counsel in the Arabic Hidden Words, “*Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart*”, one person could help dissolve the barriers of that deeply divided community.

Before the funeral procession, a Muslim cleric had recited a prayer in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house in the presence of Christian and Jewish clergy. No doubt there was also a Bahá'í prayer.

'Abdu'l-Bahá could not be pigeonholed by others into the closed borders of any one religious denomination. Yes, He had a room at the mosque in 'Akká and attended the mosque there and in Haifa. But He was also a known associate of Christians and Jews, and He often quoted from their Holy Books. He was a great friend of the Druze community as well. He clearly followed the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

The room occupied by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and in which He passed away in the early morning hours of November 28, 1921. Copyright © Bahá'í International Community



The funeral procession started at 9am. It was a bright and sunny Tuesday morning, which had followed days of rainy weather.

When the cortège arrived outside the northeast corner of the Shrine of the Báb at about 11 am, the pallbearers placed the coffin on a table. The mourners gathered around it to listen to orations from Muslim, Christian and Jewish speakers.

Even from this distance in time, the words expressed by those paying tribute to 'Abdu'l-Bahá tug at the heartstrings, describing as they do His great qualities as well as the sorrow of those present.

Said one, "He leaveth a memory so lovely, so imperishable, He, indeed, is not dead. Be solaced then, O ye people of Bahá!" Another speaker, the Mufti of Haifa, asked questions that were in the minds of many: "To whom shall the poor now look? Who shall care for the hungry, and the desolate, the widow and the orphan?"

As the mourners gradually made their way out of the Bahá'í property on Mount Carmel, Raḥmatu'lláh, the caretaker of the Shrine, carried 'Abdu'l-Bahá's coffin down the steps leading from the rear eastern room, and placed it in a position facing Bahjí yet not directly in front of the sarcophagus of the Báb in the vault behind.

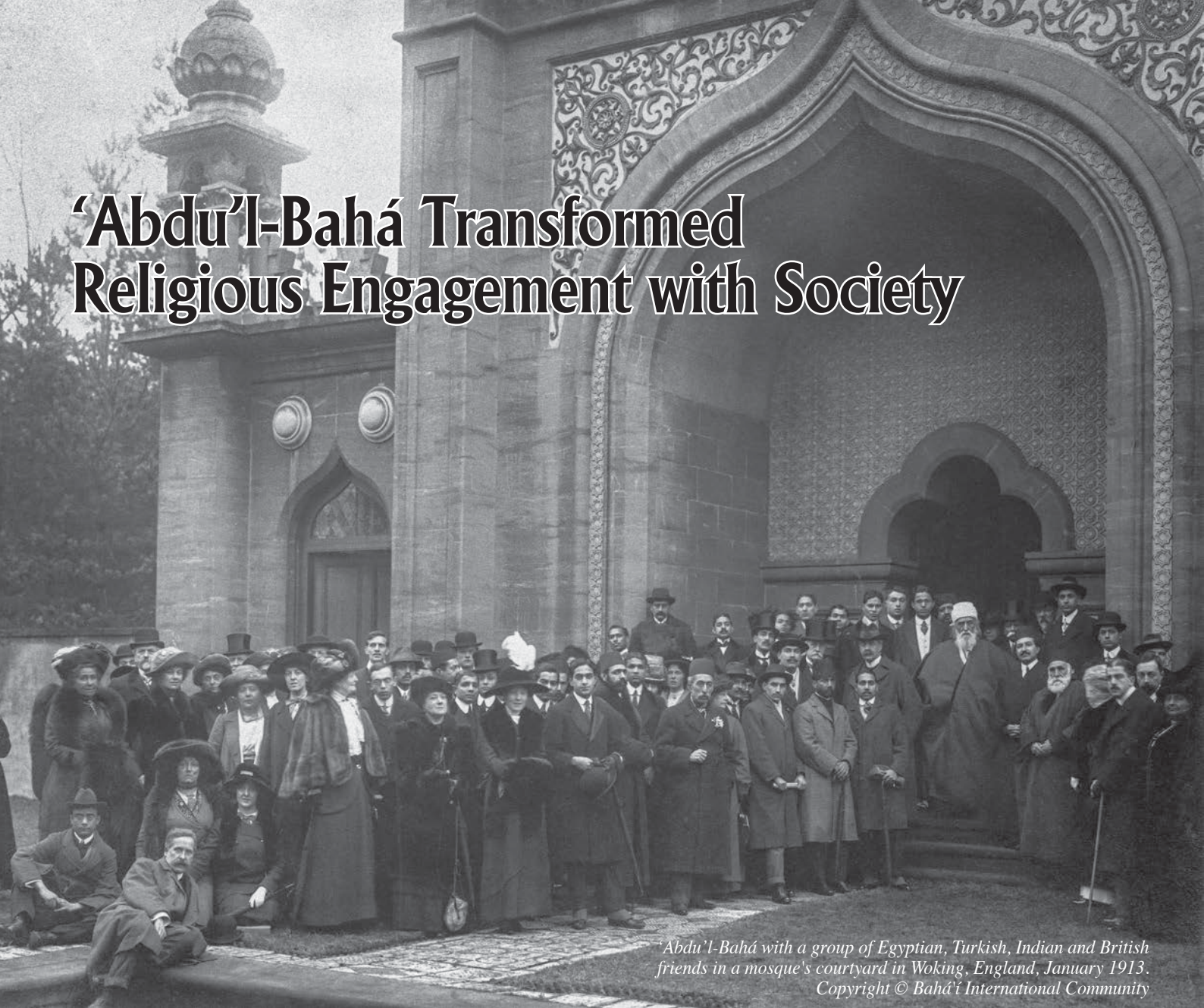
For nearly 100 years, pilgrims and visitors have visited His temporary resting place, and generations to come will visit the permanent Shrine dedicated to the One Whose very name testifies to service.

- *In his latest book, Fragrance of Glory, Michael Day describes the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in both photos and words. It is available now from Bahá'í Books Australia at www.bahaibooks.com.au.*

Ten thousand mourners from numerous religious backgrounds attend the funeral of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Haifa, 29 November 1921. Copyright © Bahá'í International Community



'Abdu'l-Bahá Transformed Religious Engagement with Society



'Abdu'l-Bahá with a group of Egyptian, Turkish, Indian and British friends in a mosque's courtyard in Woking, England, January 1913. Copyright © Bahá'í International Community

The Australian Office of External Affairs reflects on how 'Abdu'l-Bahá forged relations with wider society.

In September 2019, six Members of Parliament in Canberra spoke in support of a motion which celebrated the Bicentenary of the Birth of The Báb, acknowledged the “contribution that Australian Bahá'ís make to social cohesion, unity and community building in Australia”, and condemned the persecution of Bahá'ís in Iran, often with direct reference to the Writings.

Additionally, stirring addresses referencing the spirit of harmony and service demonstrated by their Bahá'í constituents, have been given by MPs and Senators in defence of the friends in Iran and in celebration of Holy Days commemorated in their electorate or state.

Remarkable then, that more than a century ago 'Abdu'l-Bahá, while travelling in the streets of Washington, D.C., lamented poignantly the wrongs suffered by the Blessed Beauty: “O Bahá'u'lláh! May my soul be offered up for Thy sake! How full were Thy days with trials and tribulations! How severe the ordeals Thou didst endure! How solid the foundation Thou hast finally laid, and how glorious the banner Thou didst hoist!”

The efforts of External Affairs Offices of Bahá'í Communities around the world, to build relationships with governments, has resulted in heads of state and members of legislatures arising to passionately defend the sorely afflicted community of Bahá'ís in Iran, and acknowledge the efforts of Bahá'ís to cultivate unity and peace in their societies.

In recent years, Offices of External Affairs across the globe have been

focusing on increasing the range and depth of their contributions to public discourse in an ever-rising number of social spaces on national stages. The Australian Office participates in consultations and meetings with government, institutions, communities, media, multilateral bodies, prominent thinkers and civil society on a range of discourses; offering insights drawn from the Bahá'í Writings and from the community's growing experience in applying them. These discourses include social cohesion, the role of religion in society, the role of youth, gender equality, the role of media and the environment.

In these efforts, many of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets and public addresses are called to mind, as well as drawing inspiration from His engagements. Both before and during His Ministry, 'Abdu'l-Bahá spoke with governments,

professional societies, religious groups, dignitaries, and others in a manner that transformed religious engagement with society. Only future historians will be able to appreciate how skilfully and tirelessly ‘Abdu’l-Bahá worked to establish a foundation for, and the tone of, the work of the Offices of External Affairs that is carried out by Bahá’í Communities today.

For instance, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s addresses on racial unity at gatherings in places like Howard University, an historically black college, provide a rich source of inspiration for participating in discourses on social cohesion and racial justice. The Australian Office of External Affairs contributed to similar social issues through the publication of *Creating an Inclusive Narrative*. The publication captures the insights and experience distilled from hundreds of roundtable participants, representing communities and groups of all kinds. It conveys the vision, hopes and aspirations of Australians to foster a socially cohesive society in addition to offering distinctive Bahá’í perspectives on the oneness of humanity, and consultation.

In all these initiatives we hold in our hearts ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s vision expressed in a talk given in Chicago: that all may associate “...even as flowers grow and blend together side by side without discord or disagreement between them”. [from *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, notes by Joseph H. Hannen]

Shoghi Effendi describes in powerful terms just how extraordinary ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s addresses in the West were: “He Who, in His own words, had entered prison as a youth and left it an old man, Who never in His life had faced a public audience, had attended no school, had never moved in Western circles, and was unfamiliar with Western customs and language, had arisen not only to proclaim from pulpit and platform, in some of the chief capitals of Europe and in the leading cities of the North American continent, the distinctive verities enshrined in His Father’s Faith, but to demonstrate as well the Divine origin of the Prophets gone before Him, and to disclose the nature of the tie binding them to that Faith”.

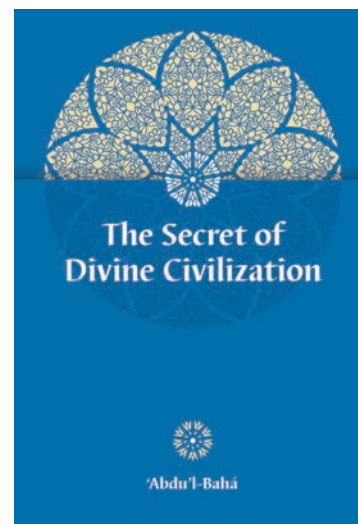
Whether through efforts of the Bahá’í International Community, Offices of External Affairs, or individuals in their professions and localities, all are striving to walk shoulder-to-shoulder with others in society to translate into action ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s call made in London: “Do not only say that Unity, Love and Brotherhood are good; you must work for their

realization.... To know that it is possible to reach a state of perfection is good; to march forward on the path is better.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s pioneering inroads into prevalent discourses of society were not limited to His engagements in the West. In response to Bahá’u’lláh’s instructions, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá penned *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, a treatise addressed to the rulers and people of Persia, where He outlined the spiritual principles required to produce an intellectually, materially, and spiritually prosperous society. Through other Tablets and Writings, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s guidance and instructions to believers in the East enabled them to not only engage in discourse with their compatriots but to foster efforts to develop the social and material needs of these communities as well.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá has charted a path that avoids, on one hand, forays into the mire of partisanship and, on the other, an apathetic and aloof attitude to social injustice or political phenomena of historical importance.

This path, like so many others that He has carved out for humanity, provides efforts to engage in the life of society at all levels with a consummate and unflinching reference point.



- For an in-depth historical account of the external affairs initiatives of the global Bahá’í community up to the year 2000 and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s role in shaping this, see *Century of Light*, available both online at www.bahai.org/library/ and for purchase from Bahá’í Books Australia. You can also explore the work of the Australian Office of External Affairs at www.oea.bahai.org.au.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressing a large gathering at the Plymouth Congregational Church, Chicago, Illinois, 5 May 1912. Copyright © Bahá’í International Community

Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from

The Bahá’í World was overjoyed when the Universal House of Justice announced in its Ridván Message of 2019 that the time had come to construct the Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Since that announcement, just two and a half years ago, construction has proceeded quickly.

The Shrine is being constructed close to the Ridván Garden, two kilometres southeast of ‘Akká. The highly respected Iranian-Canadian architect who has been appointed to design the Shrine, Mr Hossein Amanat, explained, “‘Abdu’l-Bahá wanted to be buried under the sands between Haifa and ‘Akká, which He described as the pathway trodden by the loved ones and the pilgrims”.

The design concept was unveiled in September 2019. Referring to the prayer of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “*Make me as dust in the pathway of Thy loved ones*”, Mr Amanat reflected, “one is hesitant to design an imposing structure for His resting place. His wishes must be taken into consideration, but not to such a literal extent that His station is not revered and recognised.”



January 2020: Initial preparations for construction work on the site for the Shrine that will be the final resting place for the sacred remains of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá have begun. Source: Bahá’í World News Service

September 2020: Construction continued with appropriate public health measures in place from the start of the pandemic. By September, the foundations were complete. “With an overnight concrete pour, a platform across an area of 2,900 square metres was recently cast at the centre of the site, bringing the central foundation work to completion”, reported the Bahá’í World News Service at the time.



Conception to Construction

March 2021: The concrete pour for the central plaza and floor of the main edifice this week signified a new stage in the project, as two portal walls near completion. Source: Bahá'í World News Service



July 2021: “Many of the distinctive architectural features of the design of the Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are becoming visible as work progresses”, reported the Bahá'í World News Service. “The eight pillars of the main edifice are now complete, and scaffolding is being set up in the space between the pillars and the completed folding walls for work on the trellis that will span the central plaza.”

All photographs Copyright © Bahá'í International Community

“Lord! Give me to drink from the chalice of selflessness; with its robe clothe me, and in its ocean immerse me. Make me as dust in the pathway of Thy loved ones, and grant that I may offer up my soul for the earth ennobled by the footsteps of Thy chosen ones in Thy path, O Lord of Glory in the Highest.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá

Pioneer Reflects on *Vignettes from the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*

Marjorie Tidman reflects on the book, Vignettes from the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and how the example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá guided her family while pioneering in the Pilbara, Western Australia.



‘Abdu’l-Bahá made it quite clear that people of very different capacities were qualified to teach this great Faith, each in his own way. John David Bosch, who had come to America from Switzerland, felt that he could not be a speaker – instead he circulated pamphlets and books. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá encouraged him: ‘You are doing very well; you are doing better than talking. With you it is not words or the movement of the lips; with you it is the heart that speaks. In your presence silence speaks and radiates.’

As pioneers to the north of Western Australia in the 1980s, the above story was one of many we cherished in Annamarie Honnold’s wonderful collection: *Vignettes of the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*.

The indigenous people were tired of “whitefellas” talking incessantly like noisy white cockatoos. We learned to become comfortable with periods of silence, which built genuine friendships. The wonderful travel teacher Roxanne

Tyrrell visited the home of an indigenous elder in Onslow. No words had been spoken but when their eyes met, tears rolled down their cheeks.

Once ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was asked, ‘Why do all the guests who visit you come away with shining countenances?’ He said with his beautiful smile: “I cannot tell you, but in all those upon whom I look, I see only my Father’s Face.”

Our indigenous friends related to the Faith through the stories of The Báb and Bahá’u’lláh’s imprisonment, exile and suffering. They empathised with another people who had long-suffered oppression.

... ‘This philosophy of joy was the keynote of all of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s teaching. “Are you happy?” was His frequent greeting to His visitors. “Be happy!” ‘Those who were unhappy ... would weep at this ... ‘And sometimes He would wipe away with His own hands the tears from their wet cheeks, and they would leave His presence transfigured.’

‘Remember the saying: “Of all pilgrimages the greatest is to relieve the sorrow-laden heart.”’

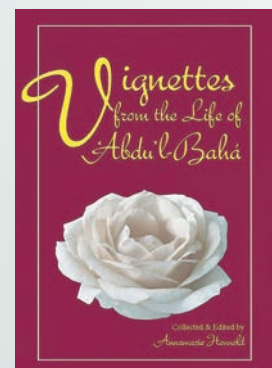
‘Abdu’l-Bahá [said]... “We have sat together many times before, and we shall sit together many times again in the Kingdom. We shall laugh together very much in those times, and we shall tell of the things that befell us in the Path of God. In every world of God a new Lord’s Supper is set for the faithful.” There was a time when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was in chains. The jailers were amazed that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sang and laughed. He informed them they were doing Him a kindness – He had wanted to know the feelings of a man in chains. Now He knew!

Every precious vignette invited our reflection: How can we radiate the Divine standard within these intimate glimpses of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s life?

‘Abdu’l-Bahá [said] ‘O how I long to see the loved ones taking upon themselves the responsibilities of the Cause! ... I am waiting, I am patiently waiting.’

And when our responsibilities felt too many or too weighty...

...when some one expressed discouragement to Him, saying they could not possibly acquire all the qualities and virtues that Bahá’ís are directed to possess, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá replied, “Kam Kam. Rúz bih rúz” – little by little; day by day.’



- The book, *Vignettes: Reflections from the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, compiled and edited by Annamarie Honnold, can be ordered from Bahá’í Books Australia at www.bahaibooks.com.au.



Youth Reflect on Example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s humility did not stem from any weakness. Once when a child asked Him why all the rivers of the earth flow into the ocean, He said, “because it sets itself lower than them all and so draws them to itself”.

Annamarie Honnold, Vignettes from the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

A valley always sets itself lower than the loftiest mountain, just as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá set himself below Bahá’u’lláh. But how can we reach such a humble position? The world of nature always provides refreshing insight into the world of humanity. Through its magnificent imagery, we can gain insight into what it truly means to strive for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s example as a Servant of God.

As the ice melts from the mountain it flows to the lowest point, and that valley becomes the most verdant and life-giving. After interviewing youth who have served in different places, they all came to similar conclusions about their relationship with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in their service. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s humility was a stand-out quality that showed His true success in life, and the youth are constantly striving to replicate this in their service.

It is through ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s unconditional love that many find the unique combination of growth and humility. Maryam Adherom, who recently returned from a youth year of service at the Bahá’í World Centre, generously shares, “What always amazes me about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was His capacity for humility. It is so inspiring to think of this perfect human being,

this perfect soul with such an esteemed station that managed to put every single person before himself ... We seem to be in a battle with our egos all the time. But when you think of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, He had such a momentous role in the propagation of the Faith and the progress of the world. Still, He only thought of Himself as a servant of God. As if He belonged to everybody else. His love was for everyone, His spirit was for everyone. Even those who did not know Him, those who hated Him, those who loved Him of course. Every single person had a piece of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in their hearts, and they were in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s heart and still are.”

Though humble, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, when called on, shone forth a lively and dynamic personality even in the face of hardship. Constantly concerned for everyone, He especially went out of His way to make others smile and laugh. “Bringing joy to a room is something all of us can do if we choose to do it,” said Jacob Baron, who currently serves in Riverton, Perth. “But ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was conscious about what He said and what He did. He actively tried to bring joy to everyone. Joy was a part of His being.”

‘Abdu’l-Bahá provides a reservoir of unique, selfless inspiration to youth. “It

redirects the purpose of my service—why I do what I do—which I think means I have fewer barriers,” said Alia Golastani, who recently returned from serving in Geraldton. “If serving others was only about me and my growth, I would come across so many issues. It makes me do these activities with zeal. I aspire so greatly to serve people as He did... Everyone that He was around, every soul that He touched, was completely refreshed by His presence and His service. I feel like I can do it with the humility that He had. If I can maintain that joy, I can only do it by doing these activities with zeal.”

On the path of service, there are always ups and downs that challenge our expectations, which can be difficult. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is a constant reminder of what we can strive to become. He was always content with His station. He had an inner sense of happiness that He could radiate to others in hard times and also valued others with the utmost regard. Finding the lowest valley is by no means an easy task. It takes detachment and steadfastness. By observing His example and applying it to our service, we can become a reservoir of inspiration to others. Be humble, joyful, and be content with the will of God, as was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

— Ramona Zare



Counsellor Vahid Saberi and Auxiliary Board member, Ellie Saberi, travelled around Queensland to encourage believers to reflect, consult and act for the Centenary of the Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. They are pictured here consulting with Mr Stanley Cook on Thursday Island.

Queensland Bahá’í Institutions Put Centenary Plans Into Action

The Administrative Order of Bahá’u’lláh in Queensland is working together to reflect on the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the strength of the Covenant of which He was the Centre. The effect is being felt throughout Queensland.

This year “will be a year for profound reflection on the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the strength of the Covenant of which He was the Centre, as the community prepares to commemorate the centenary of His Ascension”, said the Universal House of Justice in its message of 25 November 2020.

Across the Queensland region, individuals, families, neighbourhoods, communities and clusters are finding creative ways to respond to this call. Importantly, so too are the institutions of the region.

Recently, member of the Continental Board of Counsellors, Dr Vahid Saberi, travelled together with his wife and

Auxiliary Board member, Mrs Ellie Saberi, throughout the region, visiting every cluster. Wherever they visited, attention was brought to the Perfect Exemplar through a variety of means, including the gifting to every member of every community a specially prepared booklet called ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: Shelter for All Mankind containing writings of and about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

In whatever place they visited, these representatives of the Institution of the Counsellors, supported by members of other regional institutions, lovingly encouraged the friends to value, read and reflect on the content of that booklet, sparking consultation and action in location after location.

A group of assistants accompanied by their tireless Auxiliary Board members and Counsellor conducted an analysis of each unit of each part of the Ruhi Institute courses – identifying how they each build capacity to think, speak and act more like our Master.

This analysis then served as the basis for the development of a presentation about the relationship between ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the training institute which is now being refined through a process of action and reflection in preparation for widespread use.

In the animated version of the Council’s Annual Report, the Council also brought attention to the importance of a “profound reflection on the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá” and linked the institute courses to our efforts to look at ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, follow ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and be as He is.

At the first Regional Institutional Meeting of the One Year Plan - where members of regional institutions gather for several days of prayer, study, analysis, consultation and planning - many hours were dedicated to study of key guidance by and about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as part of a deliberate and concentrated focus on His life in response to the call of the Universal House of Justice. Similarly, the evening of the Regional Institutional Meeting was dedicated to the sharing of stories and generation of insights about the Centre of the Covenant.

The Regional Bahá’í Council, in close collaboration with other regional institutions, is currently preparing a two-day conference which will be held in the third week of September with the objective of supporting the friends in the region to draw closer to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, become more like ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and prepare for the centenary of His passing.

The Power of Travelling for the Faith



Dawn prayers have been held every week in the Waiben neighbourhood since the visit of the Counsellor.

Member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the Torres Strait, Margaret Gabey, reflects on the recent visits of representatives of Queensland regional Bahá'í institutions to Thursday Island and the spiritual energy that flows from such visits.

Our vision is to have a Bahá'í island where the whole population is engaged with work of soul-weaving and healing made possible by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. There are 3,000 souls on Thursday Island. That's three thousand mines rich in gems. Three thousand mirrors which can reflect the light of the Sun. Three thousand candles to shine in the darkness of the night.

Recently we had a visit from Counsellor Vahid Saberi along with some Auxiliary Board members and other friends. It created so much spiritual energy – even people who had no idea what was happening commented on the spiritual intensity of that week.

I personally felt like I was floating. The love, the love, the love that flowed to and from the friends. It carried us away to another plane.

We gathered at the Bahá'í Centre for prayers, to watch *A Widening Embrace* and consult. It felt like we were in a sea

of love. One of the local friends turned to me and said, “I feel so loved. How do I become a Bahá'í?” That conversation continues to unfold, and she has a declaration card ready to sign.

Later the Counsellor was trying to meet with the Local Spiritual Assembly but it kept being interrupted because people were attracted by the spirit and they kept coming in, wanting to know the source of the energy, wanting to join in.

These visits are so important. We have friends that come regularly from Cairns. Then after the Counsellor's visit we had a visit from the Regional Institute Coordinator, and from the Council Secretary who is planning to pioneer here with his dear wife, and from Auxiliary Board members. This brings vibrancy and life to our remote and isolated community.

We now feel connected to the whole of Australia through the visits of these institution members and friends.

In *The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh*, Bahá'u'lláh says, “The movement itself from place to place, when undertaken for the sake of God, hath always exerted, and can now exert, its influence in the world”. And in the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá says that after firmness in the covenant, then love and unity, the third condition to be an Apostle of Bahá'u'lláh, is travel.

Teachers must continually travel to all parts of the continent, nay, rather, to all parts of the world, but they must travel like ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, who journeyed throughout the cities of America. He was sanctified and free from every attachment and in the utmost severance. Just as His Holiness Christ says: Shake off the very dust from your feet.

In a community like ours we really feel the power of that movement. It helps us to maintain our focus on the community building processes even in the face of many challenges. The One Year Plan is unfolding here on Thursday Island with devotional meetings, education of children and study circles. Our next big plan is a Family Festival, so we are starting to organise that now.



'Abdu'l-Bahá sitting in His carriage along the beach on His way back to Haifa from Bahjí, October 1921. Copyright © Bahá'í International Community



'Abdu'l-Bahá on board the S.S. Celtic as he sailed from New York City to Liverpool, England, 5 December 1912. Copyright © Bahá'í International Community

Thursday Islanders Put Example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Into Action

Three women on Thursday Island have initiated a neighbourhood project that has gained growing support from locals in the area. From the beginning they drew on the spiritual resources of the Plan and listened to their neighbours with love in their hearts.

During this Centenary year, the development of the Faith on Thursday Island has shifted gears with new opportunities for engaging with families and community action presenting themselves daily. Such renewed vigour has been perpetuated by the ardour and dedication of the Bahá’í friends of Thursday Island, and an inspiring visit by the Counsellor, Auxiliary Board members, Regional Council and visiting team members to Thursday Island’s verdant shores.

Among the various core activities taking place, recent efforts on Thursday Island have focused on a small neighbourhood called Waiben on the back part of the Island. Ms Anne Akee is a long-standing Waiben resident and a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Torres Strait Shire. Anne and another neighbourhood mother (a cousin) were brought together by Auntie Ina Apuita, also a member of the Local Spiritual Assembly and dedicated Bahá’í of 30 years.

Together they started to develop a vision for the spiritual education of the neighbourhood children. Auntie Ina had shared with them the important role of mothers in this aspect of a child’s development and the three began to study Book 1, *Reflections on the Life of the Spirit* and elements of Book 3, *Teaching Children’s Classes* in preparation for a small children’s class. Unfortunately, a series of significant challenges disrupted this work. However, the visit from the Counsellor provided such impetus to these activities.



At the Bahá’í Centre on Thursday Island, participants learned how to share concepts with parents on the importance of spiritual education for children.



Consultation with participants is a key element in any neighbourhood project, no matter how young they are. Thursday Island youth pioneer, Olinga Yaganagi, is consulting with a group of children and junior youth from the Waiben neighbourhood before starting their community service project – cleaning up rubbish.



Bahá'í youth, Olinga Yaganagi (far right), and young participants in the Waiben neighbourhood enjoy working together on their gardening project.

Following the visit, Anne, the local mother, Aunty Ina and a visiting team member recommenced the Ruhi Institute studies. Their study naturally brought up reflections on the real needs of the neighbourhood and how to engage families in natural and genuine conversations about the wellbeing of their neighbourhood children. Anne and her cousin both observed how the children wandered around with nothing to do and how some often went without proper food. They also noted how difficult it was to engage many of the parents in conversation or connection.

Anne has been hosting dawn prayers each week since the visit of the Counsellor. After dawn prayers one morning Anne shared an idea, a vision for her Waiben community. She wanted to create a flourishing garden with the children. She envisioned a service project

‘Throughout this fledgling project attention is given to both spiritual and material food.’

that would teach them valuable skills and provide food for the local families all year round. She could also see how this may assist in engaging neighbourhood families in a meaningful way and hopefully open opportunities for deeper conversations about the importance of spiritual education of the children, junior youth and youth.

Through consultation with Anne, Ina, visiting team members and their new Auxiliary Board member, they decided as a first step to engage neighbourhood children through a simple service project to clean up the local area. The Bahá'ís bought gloves and garbage bags and invited children to join them in cleaning up the rubbish in the neighbourhood. Children, junior youth and youth of all ages came out of their houses to join in, each encouraging one another to come and assist. Before long, there were 18 children of all ages helping to clean the whole area.

When the clean-up was complete, the children decided to play a relay race on the beach with all ages playing

“Do not be content with showing friendship in words alone, let your heart burn with loving kindness for all who may cross your path.”
— ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

together and supporting one another. Their laughter and joy rang out across the small community. That afternoon finished with a sausage sizzle and the children asking what was next and could they do it all again tomorrow. Anne and the team shared the suggestion of building a children's garden. The children were so excited to participate. They left so happy in anticipation for the next day's activities.

The following day, 24 children, junior youth and youth turned up to help start the garden. The afternoon activities commenced with some simple prayers and sharing of a quote, “*In the garden of thy heart plant naught but the rose of love*”, and a discussion with the children about the type of neighbourhood the children wanted to create together. They all agreed they wanted to create a neighbourhood full of flowers, vegetables, fruit and love. As the children began potting seeds, Anne and some of the children walked around the neighbourhood to talk with their parents and grandparents. The families were all very happy for the venture to proceed and offered materials and resources in support.

The garden project is now well underway with children coming every day to water and nurture their seedlings. The participants have collected rocks from the beach and cleared large areas of unused land to create garden beds and have begun planting coconut saplings and small fruit trees. The vision for this project continues to unfold through ongoing consultation with the young participants and their parents.

Throughout this fledgling project attention is given to both spiritual and material food. Participants come together to share prayers and learn a quote before starting the activities each afternoon. Children are also encouraged to reflect on the quotes and stories of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that relate to their endeavours. Some

Continued on page 22

From page 21

of the junior youth have been shown a few junior youth texts and asked if they would like to study them together while they create the gardens. Several junior youth are keen and have asked each day when can they start. This is hoped to commence in the coming weeks with support from a youth currently working on the Island and the local youth in the neighbourhood.

To commemorate the Centenary of the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, neighbourhood efforts are further supported by Bahá’í’s planning to host a monthly potluck devotional gathering in the centrally located Bahá’í Centre on Thursday Island. The Bahá’í families hope to invite as many friends, neighbours and local officials as possible to share prayers, music and stories of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in a spirit of unity and radiant love. In this way, Thursday Island families hope to maintain the spirit of immense love and unity felt by all during the visit of the Counsellor and the

power generated by the Centenary of the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

One of the insights gleaned while serving with friends on Thursday Island is that when we learn to listen more deeply with nothing but love in our hearts and the desire to simply support plans inspired by the hearts of those local to the process, the community begins to unite and advance in such profound ways we could not previously conceive.



Left to Right: Olinga Yaganagi, Ina Apuita and Anne Akee plan home visits in the Waiben neighbourhood on Thursday Island.

New National Website for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Centenary

A new website dedicated to commemorating the centenary of the Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has been recently launched. It features artistic expressions, initiatives and projects inspired by the Centenary from around Australia and can be found at www.abdul-baha.bahai.org.au.

Friends from around Australia are encouraged to submit expressions of how they are marking this period of special potency through various forms of art (photos, paintings, music, poetry, story-telling), service or community projects, and initiatives. Submissions can be made for review and publishing via the online Google form: <https://bit.ly/3Dwlqfz>

Reading About ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Online

A large number and variety of quality articles and other resources about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá have been made available through the group of official international Bahá’í websites.

There is no better place to start than the Writings and Talks of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá available at the Bahá’í Reference Library at www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/.

As Holy Writings are translated from the original languages, they are posted on this website.

Introductory articles about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are available on the official website of the worldwide Bahá’í Community at www.bahai.org/abdul-baha.

This suite of articles covers the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, His significance, the development of the Bahá’í community during the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and quotations from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

There is a considerable amount of extra reading through the additional articles and resources about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at the end of this group of articles. The Bahá’í World website has a special collection of articles called ‘The Mystery of God’. This is available at <https://bahaiworld.bahai.org/special-collections/the-mystery-of-god/>.

Articles in the collection include ‘The Station and Titles of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’ by Shoghi Effendi. A more recently written article is ‘Reading Reality in Times of Crisis: ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Great War’. The articles are very well referenced. Following those references can lead to other fascinating and thought-provoking articles.



The Mystery of God

November 2021 will mark one hundred years since the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. “The observance of this anniversary,” writes the Universal House of Justice, “will undoubtedly prompt individuals and communities alike to contemplate the significance of that infinitely poignant moment when He Who was the Mystery of God departed from this world.” This collection will, in the coming months, be augmented with articles published in honor of the Centenary.



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The Station and Titles of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá



An Account of the Passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá



Reading Reality in Times of Crisis



Children enjoyed craft activities about the Covenant at one of the camps organised by youth from the Maroondah and Manningham communities in Melbourne at the start of July.

Children Learn About the Covenant and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The Bahá’í community of Maroondah in Melbourne’s outer eastern suburbs, held a small camp focused on The Báb for their children during Easter.

After attending one camp, the children decided they wanted more, and so a plan was put in place to hold a camp every semester.

Four youth, Miss Mahtab Mirafsalmanshadi, Mr Anis Setoodeh, Mr Adib Ahmad and Mr Shakib Shahnavaizi, planned a follow up camp, this time focused on the Covenant, with particular emphasis on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

The original plan was to hold the camp in Bahá’í homes, however with COVID-19 restrictions, this wasn’t possible, so a slightly more ambitious plan was put in place to hold a larger camp at the Mt Morton Bahá’í Centre. As this venue would have been too large for the small group of children, they invited children to attend from the Dandenong and Manningham communities.

A well-crafted program was developed and run solely by the youth for children aged eight to fourteen.

O my dear children!

Your letter was received. A degree of joy was attained that is beyond words or writing that, praise be to God, the power of the Kingdom of God hath trained such children who, from their early childhood, eagerly wish to acquire Bahá’í education that they may, from the period of their childhood, engage in service to the world of humanity.

My highest wish and desire is that ye who are my children may be educated according to the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh and may receive a Bahá’í training; that ye may each become a lighted candle in the world of humanity, may be devoted to the service of all mankind, may give up your rest and comfort, so that ye may become the cause of the tranquillity of the world of creation.

Such is my hope for you and I trust that ye may become the cause of my joy and gladness in the Kingdom of God.



Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

The program lasted from 8:00am to 8:00pm and included presentations on the nature of the Covenant, leading to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the Centre of the Covenant and a movie presentation on the development of the Shrine of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This was then tied to a range of craft activities.

The children made paintings, cards and bookmarks that were then used for fundraising for the construction of the Shrine.

The children are preparing the entire program for a celebration of the Day of the Covenant later this year. They are practising songs they have learned, and some role-playing for this program.

The children loved the camp and asked for there to be more camps just like those held by the Junior Youth.

Applying ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Guidance to Our Economic Life

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s example and guidance can help us unite our spiritual and material paths. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had some practical advice that we can consider when managing our personal material resources.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s example is something that Bahá’ís so often strive to emulate. In considering three examples from His life, we can look to the reality of our own lives and ask ourselves what advice our beloved Master might give about our participation in economic life. Adopting the guidance of the Faith means that we can earn our living, manage our material resources and spend our money judiciously for our families and the progress of the Cause.

In the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh, it is incumbent upon every soul to acquire a trade and an occupation. For example, I know how to weave or make a mat, and you know some other trade. This, in itself is an act of worship, provided that it is conducted on the basis of utmost honesty and faithfulness. And this is the cause of prosperity.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I



‘Abdu’l-Bahá advised him to resign and Breakwell did so at the first opportunity, and was thus relieved of being associated with this injustice.

Regardless of whether the money might be needed for the progress of the Cause, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s advice to Breakwell was to forego that income because of the way it was created.

It is indeed a good and praiseworthy thing to progress materially, but in so doing, let us not neglect the more important spiritual progress, and close our eyes to the Divine light shining in our midst. — ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Paris Talks

There are so many stories of the frugality and sacrifice of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that it is hard to know where to begin. For Himself and His family, the simplest food and clothing sufficed, and He would gladly give up His own belongings to others who needed them more. A story from the *Vignettes from the Life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* illustrates this:

‘Abdu’l-Bahá kept little clothing—one coat at a time was ample. He ate little food. He was known to begin His day with tea, goat’s milk cheese and wheat bread. And at the evening meal a cup of milk and a piece of bread might suffice. He considered the latter a healthy meal. Had not Bahá’u’lláh, while at Sullaymaniyyih, subsisted mostly on milk? (Sometimes Bahá’u’lláh ate rice and milk cooked together.) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sparse diet also included herbs and olives; it rarely included meat.

For ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, very little was considered a necessity and though He advised that the Bahá’ís should act with moderation and live a “well-pleasing” life, His own life was lived with careful economy.

It is helpful for us to consider our own lives and whether we can make sacrifices in order to achieve our goals.

Thou hast asked regarding the means of livelihood. Trust in God and engage in your work and practice economy; the confirmations of God shall descend and you will be enabled to pay off your debts. Be ye occupied always with the mention of Bahá’u’lláh and seek ye no other hope and desire save Him.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Bahá’í World Faith

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the way that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá managed the generation, management and expenditure of wealth was in His generosity. Far from practising frugality in order to hoard wealth, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was unflinchingly generous with everyone He met.

He used what money He was able to save judiciously for the benefit of others, as we know from the historical accounts of His actions during the First World War.

His wise purchase of more than 1700 acres of land which He then leased to others to farm in exchange for a share of the wheat, along with the purchase of more wheat in 1917, allowed Him to prevent a famine in Northern Palestine by distributing the wheat widely among the people.

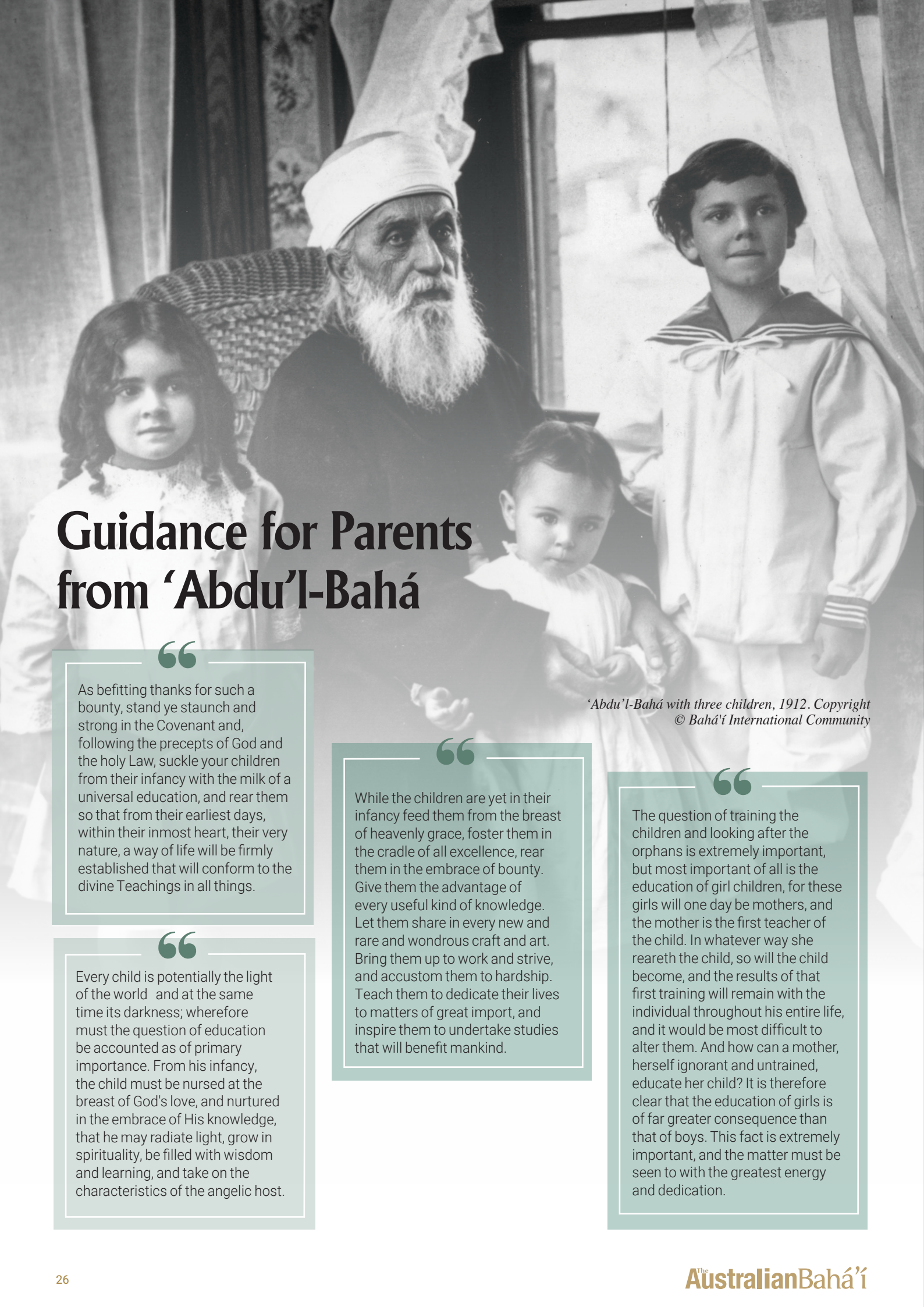
From His example we can see that Bahá’ís are not required to live frugal lives for the sake of accumulating wealth, but that using our money is important too. We should do so wisely and conduct our economic interactions in accordance with those same spiritual principles which guide our personal interactions with others.

It is with deep gratitude that we can reflect on so many moments in the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as an inspiring example of how we can consider these aspects of wealth and incorporate His guidance in our daily lives.

Not only was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá capable of undertaking a trade Himself, but He placed a very high importance on the characteristics of trustworthiness and moral rectitude. It was not enough that each Bahá’í should have a profession but their conduct in business matters, whether as employer or employee, should be in accordance with spiritual principles.

A wonderful example of this is in the story of Thomas Breakwell. When Breakwell first learned of the Bahá’í Faith he was a wealthy young man able to travel from the United States to England to visit relatives and to take long holidays.

He had a responsible position in a cotton mill in one of the southern states of the United States. Breakwell was fortunate enough to be able to travel to ‘Akká in 1901 to visit ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and when they met, Breakwell told ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that his work in the United States was lucrative, but that the mills used child labour.



Guidance for Parents from 'Abdu'l-Bahá

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As befitting thanks for such a bounty, stand ye staunch and strong in the Covenant and, following the precepts of God and the holy Law, suckle your children from their infancy with the milk of a universal education, and rear them so that from their earliest days, within their inmost heart, their very nature, a way of life will be firmly established that will conform to the divine Teachings in all things.

“

Every child is potentially the light of the world and at the same time its darkness; wherefore must the question of education be accounted as of primary importance. From his infancy, the child must be nursed at the breast of God's love, and nurtured in the embrace of His knowledge, that he may radiate light, grow in spirituality, be filled with wisdom and learning, and take on the characteristics of the angelic host.

“

While the children are yet in their infancy feed them from the breast of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence, rear them in the embrace of bounty. Give them the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship. Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.

“

The question of training the children and looking after the orphans is extremely important, but most important of all is the education of girl children, for these girls will one day be mothers, and the mother is the first teacher of the child. In whatever way she reareth the child, so will the child become, and the results of that first training will remain with the individual throughout his entire life, and it would be most difficult to alter them. And how can a mother, herself ignorant and untrained, educate her child? It is therefore clear that the education of girls is of far greater consequence than that of boys. This fact is extremely important, and the matter must be seen to with the greatest energy and dedication.

'Abdu'l-Bahá with three children, 1912. Copyright © Bahá'í International Community

The One Year Plan

A Tribute to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

It is now up to us to follow in the footsteps of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, to reflect on the Covenant, His station and His example. It is up to us to consult in the manner that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá desires and to come up with realistic plans to help our neighbours. It is up to us to act on our plans, to adapt them and help to bring the change the world so desperately needs.

Let our actions during this One Year Plan be a befitting tribute to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

“

I desire distinction for you. The Bahá’ís must be distinguished from others of humanity. But this distinction must not depend upon wealth—that they should become more affluent than other people. I do not desire for you financial distinction. It is not an ordinary distinction I desire; not scientific, commercial, industrial distinction. For you I desire spiritual distinction—that is, you must become eminent and distinguished in morals. In the love of God you must become distinguished from all else. You must become distinguished for loving humanity, for unity and accord, for love and justice. In brief, you must become distinguished in all the virtues of the human world ...

‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ



The Australian Bahá'í

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Front Cover

Graphic rendering of the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
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Back Cover

'Abdu'l-Bahá walking up Haparsim Street, c. 1920
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