

First Century of the Formative Age

Summary for youth

Part 1: Achievements, Action, Covenant

Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age

Universal House of Justice

To the Bahá'ís of the World

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Introduction

- - This message is in the tradition of *The Dawnbreakers* and *God Passes By*, an overview of a step in the process of religious transformation in the world.
- It addresses how to apply Bahá'u'lláh's vision and teachings, intended for a millennium and with a potential far beyond what we can appreciate, to our present reality and immediate future.
- It describes a process of civilization-building step-by-step, first embryonic, now in a formative age, with much more still to come in an ever-advancing civilization towards a golden age in the far future.

Introduction

- It shows the important role of the Centre of the Covenant, maintaining unity and providing continuing Divine guidance, as expressed in practice by the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice.
- Its central theme is the process of learning as the instrument for organic development, through consultation, action and reflection, laying the foundation for future steps as we progress.

Introduction

- It explains the constructive role of tests and difficulties, obstacles to be supported and overcome, as we go through crises and victories, while warning us of more to come.
- It allows each of us to situate our own efforts within the larger process of God's unfolding Divine Plan, maintaining hope despite the situation in the world today.
- One aim is to prepare us for what is to come, not to be surprised by the unexpected, the possibility of sudden changes, and what qualities we need to persevere.

Outline

(A century of achievement)

Translating what is written into reality and action

The perpetuation of the Covenant

The unfoldment of the Administrative Order

The worldwide spread and development of the Faith

Involvement in the life of society

The development of the Bahá'í World Centre

Prospect

The century of achievement

In the Bahá'í Faith in the century since the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on 28 November 1923:

- one hundred thousand localities in 235 countries and territories
- emerged from obscurity to occupy its place on the world stage
- a network of thousands of institutions, from the grassroots to the international level
- its pattern of building vibrant local communities has embraced thousands—and in some, tens of thousands—of souls

The century of achievement

- the Sacred Writings have been translated into more than eight hundred languages
- raising of national and local Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs heralds the appearance of thousands of future centres dedicated to worship and service
- world spiritual and administrative centre of the Faith has been established across the twin holy cities of 'Akká and Haifa

The century of achievement

A new way of life is taking shape, distinguished by its devotional character; the commitment of youth to education and service; purposeful conversation among families, friends, and acquaintances on themes of spiritual and social import; and collective endeavours for material and social progress.

The century of achievement

The Bahá'í community's resources, its institutional capacity, its ability to sustain systematic growth and development, its engagement with like-minded institutions, and its involvement in and constructive influence on society stand at an unprecedented height of historical achievement

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s achievements

He was the precious gift bestowed by the Manifestation of God to guide and protect them, the Centre and Pivot of Bahá’u’lláh’s peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá’í ideal.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s achievements

He faithfully nurtured and protected the precious seed that had been planted.

He sheltered the Cause in the cradle of its birth and, guiding its spread in the West, established there the cradle of its administration.

He set firm the footsteps of the believers and raised up a cohort of champions and saints.

He interred the holy remains of the Báb in the mausoleum He raised on Mount Carmel, devotedly tended the twin Holy Shrines, and laid the foundations of the Faith’s world administrative centre.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s achievements

He safeguarded the Faith from its avowed enemies, internal and external.

He revealed the precious Charter for sharing Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings with all peoples across the globe, as well as the Charter that called into being and set in motion the processes of the Administrative Order.

His life spanned the entire period of the Heroic Age inaugurated by the declaration of the Báb.

His ascension ushered in a new Age whose features were as yet unknown to the believers.

The Guardian

Shoghi Effendi's appointment as the Guardian was received with relief, gratitude, and declarations of fealty by the body of the believers.

Shoghi Effendi began to mobilize the members of the widely scattered Bahá'í communities to begin the monumental task of laying the foundations of the Administrative Order.

The Guardian

“This generation stands too close to so colossal a Revelation to appreciate, in their full measure, the infinite possibilities of His Faith, the unprecedented character of His Cause, and the mysterious dispensations of His Providence.”

“The contents of the Will of the Master are far too much for the present generation to comprehend. It needs at least a century of actual working before the treasures of wisdom hidden in it can be revealed.”

The Universal House of Justice

[We] pause to reflect with you on the wisdom enshrined in the provisions of the Will and Testament, to trace the course of the Faith's unfoldment and observe the coherence of the stages of its organic development, to discern the possibilities inherent in the processes driving its progress, and to appreciate its promise for the decades ahead as its power to reshape society is increasingly made manifest in the world through the growing impact of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation.

Translating what is written
into reality and action

A decorative graphic consisting of several concentric, slightly offset diamond shapes. The innermost diamond is a bright orange-red, and as the diamonds expand outwards, they become progressively more transparent and blend into the dark brown background.

Translating writings into action

Bahá'u'lláh's purpose is to usher in a new stage in human development—the organic and spiritual unity of the peoples and nations of the world—signalizing thereby the coming of age of the human race and characterized, in the fullness of time, by the emergence of a world civilization and culture. “It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action.”

Translating writings into action

The task of building a mature, peaceful, just, and united world is a vast undertaking in which every people and nation must be able to participate. The Bahá'í community welcomes all to join in this endeavour as protagonists in a spiritual enterprise that can overcome the forces of disintegration eroding the old social order and give tangible form to an integrative process that will lead to the unfoldment of a new order in its stead.

Translating writings into action

The Formative Age is that critical period in the Faith's development in which the friends increasingly come to appreciate the mission with which Bahá'u'lláh has entrusted them, deepen their understanding of the meaning and implications of His revealed Word, and systematically cultivate capacity—their own and that of others—in order to put into practice His teachings for the betterment of the world.

Translating writings into action

Shoghi Effendi guided the Bahá'ís in their efforts to gain a deeper understanding of their mission, which would define their identity and purpose.

- the meaning of the coming of Bahá'u'lláh
- the part the Bahá'ís must play in contributing to the advancement of humankind
- the nature of the development of the Bahá'í community
- its many transformations, often unexpected, over decades and centuries
- the dialectic of crisis and victory, preparing them for the tortuous path they must traverse

Translating writings into action

- to refine their characters and hone their minds to meet the challenges of building a new world
- not to despair when encountering the problems of a nascent and rapidly evolving community
- the privations and the deteriorating milieu of a tumultuous age
- the Bahá'ís are to be as a leaven that could inspire others to arise and overcome entrenched patterns of divisiveness, conflict, and contest for power

Translating writings into action

- to learn how to effectively establish the structural basis of the Administrative Order and systematically share Bahá'u'lláh's teachings with others
- a capacity for learning how to apply the Teachings was gradually cultivated within the community
- at the climax of his ministry, the Bahá'í world combined its forces for the unprecedented achievements of the Ten Year Spiritual Crusade.

The Three Charters

- *Tablet of Carmel* by Bahá'u'lláh: development of the institutions of the Faith at its World Centre
- *Will and Testament* of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: the Administrative Order
- *Tablets of the Divine Plan*: propagation of the Faith
- interdependent and mutually reinforcing

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By the final years of the first century of the Formative Age, the essential aspects of a process of learning that was in a fledgling state at the beginning of that century were consciously grasped and systematically implemented by Bahá'ís worldwide across the full range of their endeavours.

The Universal House of Justice

Today the Bahá'í community is distinguished by a mode of operation characterized by study, consultation, action, and reflection. It is steadily increasing its capacity to apply the Teachings in a variety of social spaces and to collaborate with those in the wider society who share a yearning to revitalize the material and spiritual foundations of the social order.

The Universal House of Justice

- individuals and communities become protagonists of their own development
- an embrace of the oneness of humanity banishes prejudice and otherness
- the spiritual dimension of human life is fostered through adherence to principle and strengthening of the community's devotional character
- the capacity for learning is developed and directed towards personal and social transformation

The Universal House of Justice

The effort to understand the implications of what Bahá'u'lláh has revealed and to apply His healing remedy has now become more explicit, more deliberate, and an indelible part of Bahá'í culture.

The conscious grasp of the process of learning and its extension worldwide, from the grassroots to the international arena, is among the finest fruits of the first century of the Formative Age.

Translating writings into action

This process will increasingly inform the work of every institution, community, and individual in the years ahead, as the Bahá'í world takes on ever-greater challenges and releases in ever-greater measures the Faith's society-building power.

The Bahá'í world constantly evolves and develops organically as individuals, communities, and institutions strive to translate into reality the truths of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.

The perpetuation of the Covenant

The perpetuation of the Covenant

To preserve the unity of His Faith, maintain the integrity and flexibility of His teachings, and guarantee the progress of all humanity, Bahá'u'lláh established a Covenant with His followers that is unique in the annals of religious history for its authority and its explicit and comprehensive nature.

In His Most Holy Book and in the Book of His Covenant, as well as in other Tablets, Bahá'u'lláh instructed that after His passing the friends should turn to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of that Covenant, to guide the affairs of the Faith.

The perpetuation of the Covenant

In His Will and Testament, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá perpetuated the Covenant by laying down the provisions for the Administrative Order ordained in Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings, thereby ensuring the continuation of authority and leadership through the twin institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice, as well as a sound relationship between individuals and institutions within the Faith.

The perpetuation of the Covenant

Foremost among the achievements of the past century is the victory of the Covenant, which both protected the Faith from division and propelled it to embrace and contribute to the empowerment of all peoples and nations.

In recognizing Bahá'u'lláh, a believer enters voluntarily into His Covenant as an act of free conscience and, out of love for Him, remains steadfast in adherence to its requirements.

The perpetuation of the Covenant

The existence of the Covenant does not mean that no one will ever attempt to divide the Faith, cause damage to it, or retard its progress. But it does guarantee that every such attempt is foredoomed to fail.

The perpetuation of the Covenant

Every generation of Bahá'ís, however great their spiritual perception, will inevitably have a circumscribed comprehension of the full implications of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, owing to the limitations of their own historical circumstances and the particular stage of the Faith's organic development.

The hard-won understanding of the nature of the Covenant and the firmness that such insight engenders and sustains will continue to be essential for unity and progress over the course of the Dispensation.

The perpetuation of the Covenant

It is now evident and firmly established that Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant provides for two authoritative centres. The first is the Book: the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, along with the body of works of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi that constitute authoritative interpretation and explication of the Creative Word. ...the existence of the Book ensures that the Revelation is available to every believer, indeed to all humanity, unadulterated by human misinterpretations or accretions.

The perpetuation of the Covenant

The second authoritative centre is the Universal House of Justice, which, as the Sacred Writings affirm, is under the care and unerring guidance of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb.

The powers and duties with which the House of Justice has been invested encompass all that is necessary to ensure the fulfilment of Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for humanity.

The perpetuation of the Covenant

The House of Justice will provide guidance throughout the Dispensation according to the exigencies of the time, thus ensuring that the Cause, even as a living organism, is able to adapt to the needs and requirements of an ever-changing society. And it guarantees that no one can alter the nature of Bahá'u'lláh's message or change the essential characteristics of the Cause.

The perpetuation of the Covenant

A world largely oblivious to the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation finds itself increasingly divided and disoriented on matters of truth, morality, identity, and purpose, and bewildered by the accelerating and corrosive effect of the forces of disintegration. For the Bahá'í community, however, the Covenant offers a source of clarity and refuge, of freedom and strength.

The perpetuation of the Covenant

Out of love for Bahá'u'lláh and reassured by His explicit instructions, individuals, communities, and institutions find in the two authoritative centres of the Covenant the necessary guidance for the unfoldment of the Faith and the preservation of the integrity of the Teachings.