

First Century of the Formative Age

Summary for youth
Part 4: Prospect

Reflections on the First Century of the Formative Age

Universal House of Justice

To the Bahá'ís of the World

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Prospect

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At the close of the first century of the Formative Age, the Bahá'í world finds itself endowed with capacity and resources only dimly imagined at the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing.

This brief review of the past hundred years has illustrated how the Bahá'í community, in striving to systematically execute the three Divine Charters, has become a new creation.

Prospect

Just as the human being passes through various stages of physical and intellectual growth and development until it reaches maturity, so too the Bahá'í community develops organically, in size and structure, as well as in understanding and vision, embracing responsibilities and strengthening relationships among individuals, communities, and institutions.

Prospect

It is this growing capacity to resolve complex questions and then to take on still more complex questions that characterizes the process of learning that is propelling the progress of the Faith. Thus, it is evident that with every step forward in its organic unfoldment, the Bahá'í world develops new powers and new capacities that enable it to take on greater challenges as it strives to achieve Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for humanity.

Prospect

And so it shall continue to be, despite the changes and chances of the world, through crisis and victory, with many an unexpected turn, through countless stages of the Formative and Golden Ages to the end of the Dispensation.

Prospect

By the final years of the first century of the Formative Age, a common framework for action had emerged that has become central to the work of the community and which informs thought and gives shape to ever more complex and effective activities. This framework continually evolves through the accumulation of experience and the guidance of the House of Justice.

Prospect

The pivotal elements of this framework are the spiritual truths and cardinal principles of the Revelation. Other elements that also contribute to thought and action involve values, attitudes, concepts, and methods. Still others include the understanding of the physical and social world through insights from various branches of knowledge.

Prospect

Within this continually evolving framework, Bahá'ís are learning how to systematically translate Bahá'u'lláh's teachings into action to realize His high aims for the betterment of the world. The significance of this increased capacity for learning, and its implications for the advancement of humanity at the current stage of its social development, cannot be overestimated.

The Nine Year Plan

The Nine Year Plan outlines the tasks that lie immediately ahead.

- the multiplication and intensification of programmes of growth in clusters worldwide
- increased coherence in the work of community building, social action, and participation in prevalent discourses
- the training institute will be further strengthened and will continue to evolve as an educational organization that develops capabilities for service

The Nine Year Plan

- other educational opportunities will empower young people to contribute to social progress and well-being.
- the unprecedented advancement of women as full partners in community affairs
- the capacity of Bahá'í institutions will be fostered at all levels
- the establishment and development of Local Assemblies enhancing their engagement with the wider society and its leaders

The Nine Year Plan

- the intellectual life of the community will be cultivated to provide the rigour and clarity of thought required to vindicate to a sceptical humanity the applicability of the healing remedy of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings

All these efforts will continue through a series of Plans spanning no less than a generation, that will carry the Bahá'í world across the threshold of its third century.

Prospect

The determined efforts to gain a fuller understanding of, and to live in accordance with, Bahá'u'lláh's teachings take place within the larger context of the twofold process of disintegration and integration. Attaining the objective of the current series of Plans—the release of ever-increasing measures of the society-building power of the Faith—calls for an ability to read the reality of society as it responds to, and is shaped by, these twin processes.

Prospect

A plethora of destructive forces and events, including environmental degradation, climate change, pandemics, the decline of religion and morals, the loss of meaning and identity, the erosion of the concepts of truth and reason, unbridled technology, the exacerbation of prejudices and ideological contention, pervasive corruption, political and economic upheaval, war and genocide, have left their traces in blood and anguish on the pages of history and the lives of billions.

Prospect

At the same time, hopeful constructive trends can also be discerned... the diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity, a greater consciousness of global interdependence, the embrace of collaborative action among individuals and institutions, and a heightened longing for justice and peace are profoundly transforming human relationships.

Prospect

And thus, the movement of the world towards Bahá'u'lláh's vision advances in countless halting steps, in occasional dramatic leaps, and with intermittent stretches where progress stalls or is even reversed, as humanity forges the relationships that constitute the foundations of a united and peaceful world.

Prospect

The destructive forces that buffet the world do not leave the Bahá'í community untouched. As a result, in various places and at various times, the progress of a particular community was retarded by insidious social tendencies or temporarily restricted or even extinguished by opposition. Periodic economic crises reduced the Faith's already limited financial resources, hindering projects for growth and development.

Prospect

The effects of world war paralysed for a time the ability of most communities to implement systematic plans. The upheavals that have reshaped the political map of the world have created obstacles to the full participation of some populations in the work of the Cause. Religious and cultural prejudices once thought to be receding have re-emerged with fresh vehemence. Bahá'ís have striven to address such challenges with perseverance and resolve.

Prospect

Yet, over the past century, no nobler response to the hostile forces unleashed to oppose the advance of the Cause has been witnessed than that of the Bahá'ís of Iran.

The persecution of the Bahá'ís of Iran continues unremittingly to the present day. Despite all they have endured, the Bahá'ís of Iran have responded with unbowed courage and constructive resilience.

Prospect

They have won imperishable distinction through such achievements as the establishment of the Bahá'í Institute for Higher Education to ensure the education of succeeding generations, their efforts to transform the views of the fair-minded among their compatriots—whether inside or outside the country—and above all, their endurance of countless injustices, indignities, and privations in order to protect their fellow believers, maintain the integrity of Bahá'u'lláh's Faith in His beloved homeland, and safeguard its presence in that land as a benefit to its citizens.

Prospect

In such expressions of unswerving fortitude, of consecrated devotion and mutual support lie essential lessons for how the Bahá'í world must respond to the acceleration of the destructive forces that can be expected in the years ahead.

Prospect

At its heart, the challenge presented by the interplay of the processes of integration and disintegration is the challenge of holding fast to Bahá'u'lláh's description of reality and to His teachings, while resisting the pull of controversial and polarizing debates and beguiling prescriptions that reflect futile attempts to define human identity and social reality through limited human conceptions, materialist philosophies, and competing passions.

Prospect

If Bahá'ís become entangled in the delusory notions of contending peoples, if they emulate the values, attitudes, and practices that define a self-absorbed and self-serving age, the release of those forces necessary to redeem humanity from its plight will be delayed and obstructed.

Prospect

Rather, as the Guardian explains, “The champion builders of Bahá’u’lláh’s rising World Order must scale nobler heights of heroism as humanity plunges into greater depths of despair, degradation, dissension, and distress. Let them forge ahead into the future serenely confident that the hour of their mightiest exertions and the supreme opportunity for their greatest exploits must coincide with the apocalyptic upheaval marking the lowest ebb in mankind’s fast-declining fortunes.”

Prospect

None can anticipate precisely what course the forces of disintegration are destined to take, what violent convulsions will yet assail humanity in this travailing age, or what obstacles and opportunities may arise, until the process reaches its culmination in the appearance of that Great Peace that will signalize the arrival of the stage when, recognizing the unity and wholeness of humankind, the nations will “put away the weapons of war, and turn to the instruments of universal reconstruction”.

Prospect

One thing, however, is certain: The process of integration will also accelerate, knitting together ever more closely the efforts of those who are learning to translate Bahá'u'lláh's teachings into reality with those in the wider society who seek justice and peace.

Prospect

Shoghi Effendi promised to the Bahá'ís of America that the time would come when they would be called upon to engage their fellow citizens in a process of working for the healing and betterment of their nation. That time has now come. And it has come not only for the Bahá'ís of America, but for the Bahá'ís of the world, as the society-building power inherent in the Faith is released in ever-greater measures.

Prospect

Releasing such power has implications for the decades to come.

- Every people and every nation has a part to play in the next stage in the fundamental reconstruction of human society.
- All have unique insights and experiences to offer for the building of a unified world.
- It is the responsibility of the friends to assist populations to release their latent potentialities to achieve their highest aspirations.

Prospect

- Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a unified world will offer a hopeful and clear direction to peoples whose perception has been distorted by the confusion prevailing in the world, and a constructive path for cooperation in the search for solutions to long-standing social maladies.
- As the spirit of the Faith increasingly permeates the hearts to enkindle love and reinforce the shared identity of humanity as one people, it instils a sense of loyal and conscientious civic responsibility and, in place of the pursuit of worldly power, redirects energies towards disinterested service in the pursuit of the common good.

Prospect

- Populations increasingly adopt the method of consultation, action, and reflection to displace endless contest and conflict.
- Individuals, communities, and institutions across diverse societies increasingly harmonize their efforts in common purpose to overcome sectarian rivalries
- Spiritual and moral qualities foundational to humanity's progress and well-being take root in human character and social practice.

Prospect

The world is, in truth, moving on towards its destiny. Let all take inspiration from the words of the beloved Guardian.

“The potentialities with which an almighty Providence has endowed it will no doubt enable its promoters to achieve their purpose. Much, however, will depend upon the spirit and manner in which that task will be conducted.”

Prospect

“Through the clearness and steadiness of their vision, through the unvitiated vitality of their belief, through the incorruptibility of their character, through the adamant force of their resolve, the matchless superiority of their aims and purpose, and the unsurpassed range of their accomplishments, they who labour for the glory of the Most Great Name ... can best demonstrate to the visionless, faithless, and restless society to which they belong their power to proffer a haven of refuge to its members in the hour of their realized doom.”

Prospect

“Then and only then will this tender sapling, embedded in the fertile soil of a Divinely appointed Administrative Order, and energized by the dynamic processes of its institutions, yield its richest and destined fruit.”

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Full text of the message

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