



# The Lamp

A NEWSLETTER PUBLISHED BY THE WILMETTE INSTITUTE

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## New Website Unveiled

On June 3, the Wilmette Institute's new website went "live" on the Worldwide Web, thanks to the hard work and creativity of Jordan Gottlieb, its new designer. The site has several important new features:

- A more attractive and youthful look. For those with older web browsers and those lacking "Flash" software (which can be downloaded for free) a text-only site is on the way as well.
- \* An efficient content management system. The bulk of the site is in "weblogs" created in a free software called "Movable Type." The Wilmette Institute staff can create a weblog, place text and photographs in it, edit it, and save it using a process that is very similar to, and not significantly more complicated than, the use of a word processing program to edit a document. The revised weblog immediately appears on the website. Since the new site was set up, changes have been made to it almost daily.
- A news feature that allows the Wilmette Institute staff to post the latest news about the Institute's services and programs on the main page, complete with photographs.

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## Beyond Listservers: The New Wilmette Institute Forums

An important new feature of the Wilmette Institute's website is the installation of phpBB, a free "Bulletin Board" program. Just like a real bulletin board, bulletin board software provides a place where people can "post" things: documents, letters, comments, questions, ideas. The postings are organized in *categories*, which in turn are organized into *forums*, which in turn have a series of *topics*, each of which has postings of various sorts within.

For example, a Wilmette Institute course can be a category, and each study unit or major division of the course a forum. Unit one can be a forum labeled "Unit 1: Getting Started," and when one clicks on the name one reveals a series of topics such as "faculty introductions," "student introductions," and "course syllabus." Clicking on the "faculty introductions" topic, one sees a series of postings; the first gives a list of all the faculty; the second is an introduction one of the faculty created about him or herself; etc. Clicking on the "syllabus" topic opens a posting that contains the syllabus or a link to a webpage with it. The student can then print it out, read it, and if something is unclear, he or she can click on the "reply" button and post a question under the syllabus, which a faculty member can

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## Spiritual Foundations Lineup Complete, Program More Attractive than Ever

The Spiritual Foundations summer session promises to be dynamic and exciting. The session will begin Saturday afternoon, August 2, with a class on Bahá'í scripture as it relates to social change and evolution offered by Nader Saiedi, professor of sociology at Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota, and author of the widely acclaimed book *Logos and Civilization*. That evening Martha Schweitz, former professor of law and current director of the Office of Research in Governance Studies at the Bahá'í National Center, will offer the first of a series of classes on the establishment of world peace. Both topics will continue on Sunday and Monday.

On Monday evening and most of the day Tuesday, Dr. Saiedi will explore a different subject: global prosperity, an examination of the nature of economics and the barriers to creating a prosperous global society. Wednesday will be devoted to a unit on the oneness of humanity, with discussion on such related subjects as racial and gender equality. Richard Thomas, Professor of American history at Michigan State University, will present the unit. Thursday will focus on "Toward a New Political Order" with Jaleh Dashti-Gibson, who has a doctorate in Political Science from Notre Dame University, where she currently teaches. Friday will feature a morning session on science and religion by Craig Loehle, author of *On the Shoulders of Giants*, a book examining various scientific issues as they relate to the Bahá'í scriptures.

The summer program will also include a workshop on how to create courses and curricular materials coordinated by Nancy Davis; an exploration of Bahá'í history led by Robert H. Stockman; and a workshop on teaching the Faith. Saturday night, August 9, the summer session culminates in a Farewell Dinner, where attending students will receive certificates. The keynote speaker will be Stephen Birkland.

The shortened week-long summer session begins at 2 p.m. on Saturday, August 2. The program—which ends on

Sunday, August 10, at 12 noon—will cost \$450 (a bit more than half the cost of last year's program). The simplified registration process is available on our Website, and everyone is encouraged to take advantage of this exceptional educational opportunity. Auditing is available for certain classes or days at a special fee. The full program of classes will be accessible on the website at <http://wilmetteinstitute.org/development>, Go to "courses," then "Spiritual Foundations." ▲

## New Course Responds to Call in Ridván Message

In response to the Universal House of Justice's Ridván message to the Bahá'ís of the world, calling on them to study three letters in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* ("The Goal of a New World Order," "America and the Most Great Peace," and "The Unfoldment of World Civilization"), the Wilmette Institute has scheduled a special distance-learning course. It will begin December 1, 2003, and continue through the end of February 2004. The Institute hopes to prepare special deepening materials that it can post to the public part of its website as a service to the Bahá'í community and will supplement them with additional materials for the students registered for the course. We anticipate a number of local study groups will form to study the letters, which, the Universal House of Justice assures us, provide "an unambiguous explanation for what is occurring" in the present troubled times. ▲

## Website Unveiled . . . Continued from page 1

- An "image of the moment" feature, which rotates randomly among fifty photographs. Currently, only a small fraction of the images are directly related to the Wilmette Institute, but that percentage should increase after the Spiritual Foundations summer session is over.

With the new website, the Wilmette Institute anticipates that it will be able to provide much more timely and useful information to its students and to those curious about its programs. ▲

## Beyond Listservers . . . *Continued from page 1*

answer by clicking on “reply” to the question.

Bulletin boards have immense advantages over listservers, which the Wilmette Institute has used for most of its courses until now. The chief advantage is organization; an email can be sent to a listserver, listing all the faculty or reminding the students what to do in unit 1, but it is soon buried under dozens of other emails and becomes difficult to find. Students must file the emails systematically, delete them, or live with information chaos. With bulletin boards one can usually remember where one saw information and go back to retrieve it later. Since each forum name is accompanied by its dates, at a glance students can see what work they are supposed to do during which dates.

Forums have a few disadvantages, though. Students have to go to the Worldwide Web to view the postings, rather than passively wait for the messages to tumble into their email inbox. Forums also require some basic computer literacy that is beyond the skills of newcomers to the Worldwide Web; the skills are quite simple to learn, but the effort takes a week or two. Finally, there are a few peculiarities unique to the Wilmette Institute’s system. For example, some students sign up under nicknames, which makes it impossible for the Wilmette Institute staff to determine which course the student is in, because the staff must match the initial bulletin board sign-up to a name in a particular course registration list. The Wilmette Institute doesn’t know which course “Bahá’í-gal” has registered to take and can’t add her to the group of users able to access just the forums of a particular course.

In spite of the complications, however, the bulletin boards should produce a much better organized, neater, more pleasant learning environment. Students will be able to go to the Wilmette Institute “café” forum and chat with students from any course about any topic they want. Forums about how to teach the Faith and how to acquire necessary skills for entry by troops and community development will complement the course materials and shape their application. Each course has a “faculty lounge” where the

faculty can talk about how the course is going. And subsequent courses can read the postings of earlier groups of students, or the selected best of their postings. If all the course readings are available electronically via the forums, the Wilmette Institute might run courses more often for smaller groups of students and might not have to mail anything to students any more. ▲

## Student Comments

Written on the eve of the end of the course **Living the Spiritual Life**:

If we strive through daily practice and discipline to refine our spiritual qualities, each of us can touch the lives of those around us with harmony and joyfulness. I often say that life is one grand symphony, and we each need to sing our own note. This class [**Living the Spiritual Life**] has reminded me that the clarity and beauty of my personal song depends on my everyday choices, my use of time and energy, my reactions to frustration, my allocation of material resources, my patience with others, my joyfulness in the face of struggle, and my enduring faith in the abundant goodness and guidance of Bahá’u’lláh.

Kathryn Brown ▲

# Wilmette Institute Distance-Learning Course Schedule

Note: Courses are "Beyond the Basics" Unless Otherwise Noted

## 2003:

July 15-Oct. 15: **The Ministry of Shoghi Effendi**

Sept. 1-Nov. 30: **The Bahá'í Faith and the Establishment of World Peace**

Oct. 1-Dec. 31: **The Right of God: Huqúqu'lláh**

Nov. 1-Jan. 31: **Hidden Words, Seven Valleys, Four Valleys, Gems of Mysteries, and Other Early Mystic Works by Bahá'u'lláh**

Dec. 1-Feb. 28: **Selected Letters from *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh***

Dec. 15-Mar. 15: **How to Study the Bahá'í Writings** [Basics Course]

## 2004: [Tentative]

Jan. 15-April 15: **Christianity for Deepening and Dialogue**

Feb. 15-May 15: **'Abdu'l-Bahá's *The Secret of Divine Civilization***

Mar. 15-June 15: **The Bahá'í Community, 1921-57: Administrative Consolidation and Worldwide Expansion**

Apr. 15-July 15: **Health and Nutrition**

June 1-Sept. 30 [four months]: **Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation: A Systematic Survey** [Basic Course]

All distance-learning courses include web-based discussion forums for students and faculty, regular conference calls, systematic lesson plans, and a wide variety of learning projects to help students apply their learning in their local communities. All courses are available at the "introductory" level for those unsure they can commit to taking a university-level course, the "intermediate" (undergraduate) level for those wishing to go into more depth, and the "advanced" (graduate) level for those wishing to do extensive research or writing.

More information on all of them can be found on the Web at <http://www.wilmetteinstitute.org>. ▲

## The Lamp



THE WILMETTE INSTITUTE was established in January 1995 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States to offer academic, professional, and service-oriented courses related to the Bahá'í Faith. In addition to offering university level courses on Bahá'í topics, the Wilmette Institute fosters Bahá'í scholarship; develops new, innovative curricular materials; creates high quality courses on teaching the Faith; and refines Bahá'í concepts of pedagogy.

It aims to produce teachers and administrators of the Bahá'í Faith of great capacity, capable of sharing and demonstrating Bahá'í truths in their lives and speech.

For more information about the Bahá'í Faith, the Wilmette Institute, or its courses, contact:

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