



The Lamp

A NEWSLETTER PUBLISHED BY THE WILMETTE INSTITUTE

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2004 Spiritual Foundations Summer Session

The 2004 Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization summer residential session, held in Wilmette from July 30 through August 8, had an international and intensely inquisitive class. The six students came from Canada, Samoa, South Korea, and the United States and included one person investigating the Faith.

The theme of the year, Religion and Theology, was inaugurated on the first full day of classes—Saturday, July 31—with a field trip to Wat Dhammaram Buddhist Temple and the Chin Maya Hindu Mission in the western Chicago suburbs. Both places explained their programs, answered numerous questions about their religions, and were warmly hospitable to the students and faculty. The visits complemented Anne Pearson's classes about Hinduism and Buddhism that day and the next.

Littlebrave Beaston, who was second-year student, faculty member, and dormitory coordinator, gave a presentation on the religions of North America's first peoples, a subject that was extended into an additional class period by popular demand. Robert Stockman covered Judaism and Christianity, answering many questions on such topics as the efforts to reconstruct the historical Jesus, the origin of the New Testament, and the process of creating basic Christian doctrine.

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Clarifying "Introductory," "Intermediate," and "Advanced"

The Wilmette Institute has often been asked what its three study levels mean. Students often choose "advanced" because they want to stretch themselves and maximize their learning. One or two graduate students have taken courses for graduate credit as well. A half dozen university students have chosen "intermediate" because they have arranged to obtain undergraduate credit through their school.

The Wilmette Institute has identified two key principles that define and clarify the nature of the three levels. They are:

1. The capacity for critical thought, that is, the capacity to unearth and critically evaluate the assumptions underlying the learning that one has acquired. Bahá'ís are forbidden to imitate the past blindly. Rather, they must examine matters with an inquiring eye and an open heart, and must even examine their understandings of the Bahá'í writings and teachings (because even though the revelation is perfect, our understanding of it is often shaped by our culture and upbringing). In the Kitáb-i-Íqán Bahá'u'lláh says that the seeker should "so cleanse his heart that no remnant of either love or hate may linger therein, lest that love blindly incline him to error, or that hate repel him away from the truth" (page 192).

Critical thought is useful for work at the introductory

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Susan Maneck gave a very clear and well organized series of four classes on the origin and basic teachings of Islam, followed by four classes on the Báb, the Bábí community, and the life of Bahá'u'lláh before His declaration in the Garden of Ridván.

Ghasem Bayat delivered fascinating classes on the Kitáb-i-Iqán for the annual section on Bahá'í scripture. Peter Terry rounded out the week's intensive classes with a six-hour section on Bahá'í theology, covering such subjects as the nature of God, the worlds of existence, fate, and the basic nature of human beings. His classes will form the basis of a three-month distance-learning course on Bahá'í theology that starts December 1.

A lively and interactive workshop on teaching the Faith was offered by Delara Rapant, Secretary of the National



The 2004 Spiritual Foundations students and faculty meeting with Dr. William Roberts, treasurer of the National Spiritual Assembly. Left to right: David Dodgson, Susan Maneck, Robert Stockman, Laura McLuckie-Khandan, Peter Terry, Ghasem Bayat, Littlebrave Beaston, William Roberts, Danton Ford, Jo Ann Watts, and Ruth Moghbelpour.

Teaching Committee, and Lacey Graves, Coordinator of the Youth Desk. Videos on various world religions rounded out the program.

At the graduation dinner on Saturday evening, August 7, William Roberts, Treasurer of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, told the assembled students, faculty, alums, and guests that the Wilmette Institute was making an effort that would be remembered

prominently in Bahá'í history. He mentioned how impressed he was to meet Wilmette Institute distance-learning students in remote parts of the world where internet connections were hard to obtain. He praised the remarkable diversity of this year's class and added that the National Spiritual Assembly often consulted about the Wilmette Institute and appreciated its sacrificial efforts to foster Bahá'í education. Before giving out the certificates of attendance to this year's students, Iraj Ayman noted that the gathering was just the "tip of the iceberg" and that the Wilmette Institute embraced hundreds of current students and thousands of former students via its distance-learning program, whose presence was symbolically felt and acknowledged at that moment.

After the students received their certificates they shared their talents: One sang and played on the guitar songs he had composed, another told a story, and others recited prayers. The gathering ended with a rededication to expand the Spiritual Foundations program so that more may benefit from the outstanding quality of its classes. A selection of photographs can be seen at <http://www.wilmetteinstitute.org/press/sfgc2004>. ▲

New Spiritual Foundations Program Coordinator

Pamela Solon has accepted the Wilmette Institute's request that she serve as the coordinator of the Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization program. Her duties will focus on the logistics of the program, such as finding a place to lodge faculty and students next year (both college campuses within walking distance of the House of Worship in Wilmette are closing), and improving the quality of the classroom experience. Robert Stockman will remain coordinator of the curriculum.

An attorney by training, Ms. Solon lives in Winnetka, Illinois. She served as coordinator of the 2004 summer session, a task she completed so effectively the Board decided to invite her to the larger position of program coordinator. She is a graduate of the Spiritual Foundations program (1999-2003). ▲

Study Levels . . . Continued from page 1

level, but not always essential. For work done at an undergraduate level (for a Bachelor's degree) it is important, but the expectations are not as high as for work at the graduate (Master's) level, which is the expectation of someone taking a Wilmette Institute course at the advanced level.

- Scholarly background and context. One of the distinctive features of most Master's degrees is that they seek to give the student exposure to, and some mastery of, a body of knowledge in a particular field, and of the literature containing that knowledge. When a student writes a paper about a novel for a course leading to a Master's degree in English literature, that paper needs to analyze the novel in the context of other scholars' work about novels. A Master's degree student in an English department needs to refer to, and dialogue with, a whole body of literature in the discipline of English literature. One could write a paper about the same novel in a history or sociology course at the Master's level and would have to engage with an entirely different body of knowledge and a different literature. This is an important difference between undergraduate and graduate courses; an undergraduate student in history, taking a physics course, does not need prior knowledge about physics, but anyone taking a physics course at a Master's degree level must be interacting with extensive knowledge of physics acquired outside that course.

Consequently, it is not a simple matter to take a Wilmette Institute course at an advanced level. There is no generic version of such a course; the writing project at the end of the course would look very different if one wrote the paper from the perspective of religious studies, history, literature, or some other discipline. Students wishing to take a Wilmette Institute course at the advanced level needs to have a mentor familiar both with graduate level expectations and with the body of literature with which the student wishes to engage. A discussion between the student and the mentor needs to take place as close to the beginning of the course as possible to set clear learning goals and expectations. Such a discussion is usually of great benefit to students at the intermediate level as well, to make sure they understand the idea of critical thought and to set a schedule

for when they will provide their mentor with an outline of their final project.

Where does this leave students who wish to challenge themselves when taking a Wilmette Institute course? Should they take the course at an advanced level? The answer has to do with whether they want to do a lot of outside reading and utilize critical thought extensively. If not, such students can plan an elaborate project at the introductory level. At all three levels, one can do work that is "excellent," "very good," or "satisfactory." The latter indicates work that meets the basic requirements of the level; the former indicates rare and outstanding work. Students wishing to challenge themselves can, in conversation with their mentor, plan a final project designed to engage them deeply in learning, a project that will set high expectations and result in "excellent" work at the introductory level. The timetable for completing the course need not be three months; it could be five months, which is the length of time all Wilmette Institute students have to complete a course, or in some cases even longer. ▲

No April and July Issues of *The Lamp*

This is the first issue of *The Lamp* since January 2004. The press of work, the lack of human resources, and the lack of news caused us to postpone the next issue, month by month, until now. as a result we are renumbering this issue as volume 9, number 1. There was no volume 8, number 4. ▲

Farewell to Eileen Hanson; Welcome Omid Nolley

The Wilmette Institute is saddened that Eileen Hanson is leaving us after two years of service as part-time office assistant, but we are delighted that she is pioneering to Honduras. Eileen left for her job there, teaching fourth graders in an English-language school, on August 20. She anticipates learning Spanish quickly!

She has been replaced by Mr. Omid Nolley, a 2003 graduate of Bard College in New York State, who was a pioneer to China for most of the 2003-2004 school year, where he taught English. ▲

Student News

Margaret O'Connor, a student in the course on **Bahá'u'lláh's Mystic Writings**, produced the following artwork as a final project for the course. She explains it as follows:

The piece I created is entitled "Fashioner." The idea here was to focus on one aspect of creation — man, and on the manifestation of the attribute of "fashioner" in the human realm. In *The Four Valleys* (p. 63) Bahá'u'lláh states this about the creative powers He has bestowed upon those who are obedient to God's covenant:

O My Servant! Obey Me and I shall make thee like unto Myself. I say 'Be' and it is, and thou shalt say 'Be,' and it shall be.

I chose the hand as the symbol of this creative ability in the material realm and divided the mandala into quadrants to represent the four different kinds of wayfarers that are described in *The Four Valleys*. The ancients used to believe the universe was created from the four elements of earth, air, fire and water, and they are symbolically depicted throughout the piece and are used symbolically throughout the Writings. The energy waves emanating from the hands are my way of showing the power that we humans hold in our hands when we are obedient in treading the path of God, symbolized by the white spiral in the center. The piece should be rotated 45 degrees to the right so that the white hand is at the top and the square becomes a diamond.

Bahá'u'lláh writes about the name "Fashioner" in *Gleanings* (p. 141):

Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. All the wondrous works ye behold in this world have been manifested through the operation of His supreme and most exalted Will, His wondrous and inflexible Purpose. Through the mere revelation of the word "Fashioner," issuing forth from His lips and proclaiming His attribute to mankind, such power is released as can generate, through successive ages, all the manifold arts which the hands of man can produce. This, verily, is a certain truth. No sooner is this resplendent word uttered, than its animating energies, stirring within all created things, give birth to the means and instruments whereby such arts can be produced and perfected. All the wondrous achievements ye now witness

are the direct consequences of the Revelation of this Name.

As God has "engraved on thee Mine image," the hands in this piece are "engraved" or imprinted with images or lines representing the life force. The spots on the joints of the hands record the generations of humanity down through the ages; in primitive art the knuckles are often used as a counting device and are sometimes marked accordingly.

The hands face the four directions and are given different colors. I did not adopt any particular color system as are used in Native American medicine wheels, but simply my interpretation of the wayfarers of *The Four Valleys* and their symbols:

The First Valley is symbolized by the gold hand, which faces the East, the point of illumination or dawning place. It represents the true self. It is associated with the morning, the season of spring and the time of youthful discoveries.

The Second Valley is represented by the silver hand which points to the West. It symbolizes introspection and intuition and is associated with autumn, the evening and the maturity of middle age.

The Third Valley is symbolized by the copper red hand which faces the South. It is characterized by selfless love and devotion and the burning away of all attachments. It is associated with trust and innocence, mid-day, the season of summer, and the beginning of maturity.

The Fourth Valley is represented by the white hand which points to the North. It represents wisdom, the season of winter, night-time and old age.

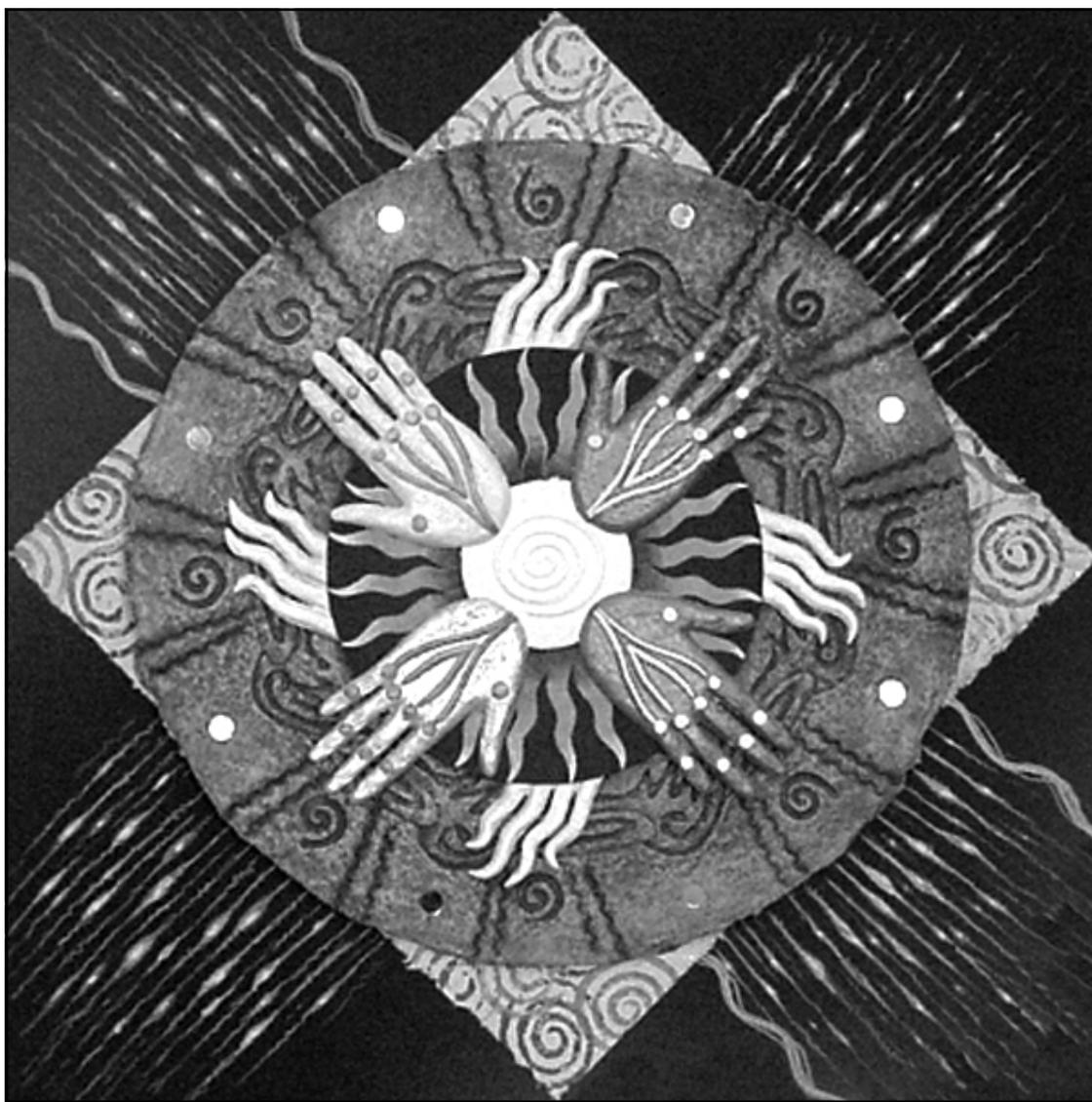
"Fashioner" gives off a different kind of energy than the first piece [completed as another art project for the course]. Again, there are layers of meaning, but for me the symbols I used are much more specific in their connotations. For example, the spiral is repeated both in stamped designs on the outer triangles of handmade paper and in the circular background of molded paper. These maze/path spirals symbolize for me the paths of our continual daily journeys — moving inward towards the center of illumination through prayer and meditation, out again into the realm of volition and action, then back inside again.

In the end, however, I still find that my humble attempts at art can never come close to expressing the wonderment, awe and bewilderment I feel when pondering the subtle mysteries enshrined in the divine attributes "Creator" and "Fashioner." I love this meditation of Bahá'u'lláh which gives voice to this very

sentiment in *Prayers and Meditations* (p. 302):

Thy might beareth me witness! I am well aware that were I to bow myself before a handful of dust, from now until the end that hath no end, in acknowledgment of its relationship to Thy name, the Fashioner, I would still find myself far removed from that dust, and incapable of

failure to do him adequate service, and my deprivation of what can truly befit his station. And this for the reason that I recognize in them naught else except the bond that bindeth them to Thy names and Thine attributes. How can, then, such a man succeed in befittingly extolling the One through a motion of Whose finger all the names and their kingdom



approaching it, and would discover that such an adoration can in no wise befit it, nor transcend the limitations to which I myself have been subjected. And were I to arise to serve one of Thy servants, and to wait at his door so long as Thine own kingdom endureth and Thine omnipotence will last, as a sign of my acknowledgment of the tie that bindeth him to Thy name, the Creator, I would, likewise, — and to this Thy glory beareth me witness — have to confess my complete

were called into being, and all the attributes and their dominion were created, and Who, through yet another motion of that same finger, hath united the letters B and E (Be) and knit them together, manifesting thereby what the highest thoughts of Thy chosen ones who enjoy near access to Thee are unable to grasp, and what the profoundest wisdom of those of Thy loved ones that are wholly devoted to Thee are powerless to fathom.

Wilmette Institute Distance-Learning Course Schedule

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

2004:

Sept. 1-Nov. 30: **The Kitáb-Í-íqán**

Nov. 15-Feb. 15: **Islam for Deepening and Dialogue**

Dec. 1-Feb. 15: **Rediscovering the Dawnbreakers: Bahá'í History, 1844-53**

Dec. 1-Feb. 28: **Bahá'í Theology: Concepts of God, Revelation, Manifestation, Humanity, Creation, Afterlife, and Covenant [Basics Course]**

Dec. 15-Mar. 15: **The Role of the Bahá'ís in this Age of Transition: The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, Selected Letters**

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>. ▲

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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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