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Studies in Bahá'í Faith Program Begins

On January 1, 1999, the Wilmette Institute inaugurated its Studies in the Bahá'í Faith program, which will offer distance-education courses on various aspects of the Faith. Enrollment is open to anyone who wishes to study the Bahá'í Faith deeply and seriously but who is unable to take a course that has a residential requirement. Like the Spiritual Foundations program, the Studies in the Bahá'í Faith program aims to raise up knowledgeable teachers and administrators of the Bahá'í Faith by imparting knowledge, developing various skills, such as teaching skills, fostering Bahá'í identity, and imparting a spirit of service.

The Studies in the Bahá'í Faith program has two series of courses, both of which began in January.

"Exploring Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation" offers four courses covering Bahá'u'lláh's entire literary output as it is available in English and two courses on specific texts He revealed. The two courses developed to date are on the Kitáb-i-Íqán and related texts (April 1 to October 30, 1999), and the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and related texts (October 1, 1999 to March 31, 2000).

The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh series was inaugurated on January 1 by the course "The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, 1853-63." Registration totaled 65 students. The six-month course covers Bahá'u'lláh's most prominent works revealed before His declaration in the Garden of Ridván in April 1863. These include the Hidden Words, the Seven Valleys, the Four Valleys, and the Book of Certitude. Faculty include Dr. Iraj Ayman and Dr. Iskandar Hai, who answer students' questions and post comments about tablets; Dr. Robert Stockman, who coordinates the course and posts some comments about tablets; and Mr. Jonah Winters, who reviews students' learning projects and maintains the course's web site.

Three more six-month distance education courses will the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh series: the Constantinople-Adrianople Period (1863-68), the Early Akka Period (1868-73), and the Late Akka period (1874-92). The courses can be taken in any order and will be repeated starting in 2001.

The second series in the Studies in the Bahá'í Faith program is called "Exploring the World's Religions." It includes courses on all the major world religions, including the Bahá'í Faith, taught from the point of comparative religion and utilizing the Bahá'í scriptures.

The first course, "Hinduism for Deepening and Dialogue," began on January 1 and will be followed for two months. Twenty students enrolled. It will be followed by one on Judaism (March 1-April 30), and another on Buddhism (May 1-June 30). A course offering a systematic introduction to the Bahá'í Faith will run from June 1 to August 30. It will be followed by two-month courses on Christianity (September 1-October 30), Chinese Religions (November 1-December 30), and Zoroastrianism (January 1-February 28, 2000). The series concludes with a three-month course on Islam (March 1-May 30, 2000) and a repeat of the introductory course on the Bahá'í Faith (June 1-August 30, 2000). The series will then be repeated, probably in 2001.

The religion series has retained an excellent faculty. Dann May and Anne Pearson will teach Hinduism, Buddhism, and Chinese Religions. Dr. Pearson has a doctorate in Hinduism and Mr. May is an expert on Chinese religions; both know Buddhism well. Dr. Moojan Momen, author of books on Hinduism and Buddhism in Bahá'í perspective, has agreed to answer student questions by e-mail, as has Phyllis G. L. Chew, author of *Chinese Religions and the Bahá'í Faith*. Dr. Ali Merchant, a member of the Indian National Spiritual Assembly, has agreed to assist with Hinduism.

Christianity and Judaism will be coordinated by Robert Stockman. Dr. Maurine Stein, a Jewish scholar in world religions and Ms. Yael Wurmfeld, a Bahá'í of Jewish background with considerable experience in interfaith dialogue, will be answering student questions about Judaism and providing short postings on a variety of Jewish subjects. Michael Sours Rohani (author of numerous books on the Bible in Bahá'í perspective) will also serve as faculty. Mr. May and Mr. Rohani will be the chief faculty for the course on Christianity.

The study of Zoroastrianism will be guided by Dr. Fereydoun Vahman, a Bahá'í professor of Iranian literature at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark, who is an expert in that faith. Dr. Bijan Ma'sumian and Ms. Farnaz Ma'sumian will be among the faculty of the course on the Bahá'í Faith. Faculty for the course on Islam are still being selected. Since faculty are able to participate in as many of the course listservers as they want, many of these faculty are already participating in and enriching the discussions of the Hinduism course.

1999 Spiritual Foundations Residential Program Taking Shape

The selection of faculty for the fourth year of the Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization program is continuing. The theme of the 1999-2000 year is carrying forward an ever-advancing civilization.

Dr. Richard Thomas will teach a series of classes on racial unity, one of the significant themes of the 1999 summer program. Dr. Thomas, the well-known author of *Racial Unity: An Imperative for Social Progress*, has a Ph.D. . . . [resume summary]. He is also a member of the Regional Council for the Central States.

Dr. Jena Khodadad will teach several classes on science and religion as they relate to each other and to the pressing needs of the modern world. Dr. Khodadad. . . [resume summary]. She is also a member of the Regional Council for the Central States.

Dr. Iraj Poostchi, an internationally recognized expert on Bahá'í principles as they relate to agriculture and rural development, will offer classes on that subject. Dr. Poostchi [resume summary].

Mr. Robert White will give several classes on the environment and nature. Mr. White is the author of an excellent article on the Bahá'í teachings on nature, *Spiritual Foundations for an Ecologically Sustainable Society*. He . . . [resume summary]

Dr. Iraj Ayman and Mrs. Lili Ayman will return to the summer faculty, speaking respectively about the theory and principles of education and about the Bahá'í Faith and literacy. Iraj Ayman . . . [resume summaries]

Dr. Robert Stockman will teach part of the Bahá'í history minicourse, which focuses on the period from 1957 to the present. Dr. Stockman is the administrator of the Institute, coordinator of the National Spiritual Assembly's Research Office, and a faculty member in religious studies at DePaul University. He has a doctorate in American religious history from Harvard University.

Dr. Phyllis Bernard and Mr. Dann May will teach a ten-hour minicourse on conflict resolution, a part of the skills-development component of the fourth year's program. Both are certified conflict resolution teachers. Phyllis Bernard . . . [resume summary for both]

Mr. Ronald Precht will teach a short course on public relations and dealing with the media, another component of the skill-development module. Mr. Precht coordinated the National Spiritual Assembly's Office of Public Information from 1986? to 1993, where he built and trained the national network of public information representatives. He continues to be active in public relations . . . [resume summary].

Additional faculty, as reported in the last issue of *The Lamp*, include: Dr. Firuz Kazemzadeh, who will cover the historical context of the peace statement; Dr. Farhad Sabetan, who will teach the Bahá'í Faith as it relates to economics and the goal of widespread prosperity; and Dr. Hoda Mahmoudi, who will offer classes on equality of women and men.

Faculty for the Bahá'í teachings on world order, including an examination of the statement *Turning Point of the Nations* and a ten-hour course on Bahá'í writings on world order, including the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, tablets revealed after it, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, *The Advent of Divine Justice*, and *The Promised Day Is Come* will be announced in the next issue.

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Enrollment Open for Fourth Year of Spiritual Foundations Program

Enrollment is now open for the fourth year of the Wilmette Institute's Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization program. The theme of the 1999-2000 program is "Carrying Forward an Ever-Advancing Civilization."

The year-long course will examine Bahá'u'lláh's social teachings, which `Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi subsequently interpreted and elaborated. The curriculum will also include a series of statements that elucidate and apply the Baha'i social teachings. These include *The Promise of World Peace* (1986), *Turning Point For All Nations* (1995), *The Prosperity of Humankind* (1995), *The Vision of Race Unity* (1991), and *Two Wings of a Bird: The Equality of Women and Men* (1997). Collectively, the statements identify a series of issues facing humanity, emphasize their mutually reinforcing and overlapping natures, and outline the spiritual principles necessary for resolving them. Other issues included in the course will be science, agriculture, and the environment.

In addition, the program will cover the history of the Bahá'í Faith from 1957 to the present, Bahá'í writings on global civilization, conflict-resolution skills, public relations, and media work.

The 1999-2000 academic year begins on May 1 with two-and-a-half months of reading assignments and home-study exercises. The preparatory readings will prepare the students for the residential session, which will be held in Wilmette from July 17 to August 6. As in past years, students will explore the year's topics through lectures, discussion, and group work.

In addition to class work, the residential session includes field trips, service opportunities at the House of Worship and at the Bahá'í National Center, homework, and community-forming activities. The program will culminate with the Farewell Dinner on Friday evening, August 6.

The residential portion of the program is followed by the home study work during which students complete additional reading assignments, participate in further discussion on the course listserver, and turn in assignments (firesides, deepenings, papers, artistic projects, and so on). The residential session runs from September 1, 1999, through March 31, 2000.

Registration for the fourth year Spiritual Foundations program closes on March 30 or when maximum enrollment has been reached. For details on how to register, see page 00.

Enrollment Open for Two Distance-Education Courses

The Wilmette Institute is now accepting registrations for "Judaism for Dialogue and Deepening," a part of its new distance-education course series called World Religions: An Integrated Approach.

Registration will be open until March 10 or until maximum enrollment has been reached.

The two-month course on Judaism begins March 1, 1999. It costs \$100 (\$80 per student if they are registering as a member of a local study group of three or more).

Registration has also begun for "The Kitáb-i-Iqán and Related Texts," a six-month course that begins April 1. The course, which is part of the Wilmette Institute's new series of distance-education courses on Exploring the Revelation of Baha'u'llah, will use Hooper Dunbar's new *A Companion to the Study of the Kitáb-i-Iqán*, an excellent commentary on the Book of Certitude.

Tuition for the Kitáb-i-Iqán course is \$225 (\$180 per student if registering as a member of a local study group of three or more).

Both distance-education courses include e-mail listservers for students and faculty, regular conference calls, systematic lesson plans, and a wide variety of learning projects.

For information on enrolling in the Judaism course or the Kitáb-i-Iqán course, see page 00.

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To Register for a Wilmette Institute Course

Registering for a distance-education course is easy: just fill out a simple form and send it, with your payment, to the Wilmette Institute's registrar, Heather Gorman. For the Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization program there is an application process that includes writing a short statement and obtaining a letter of recommendation from a local spiritual assembly or Auxiliary Board member. Forms are available from Heather Gorman or may be found on our web site (www.usbnc.org/wilmette). Call Heather (847-733-3415) or fax her (847-733-3563) for more information. Our automated information line (847-733-3595) has recorded information on our programs and can be reached 24 hours a day.

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Call for Papers for Spirituality Conference

Papers and presentations are now being accepted for a two-day conference on "Revealing the Splendors of His Light: Exploring Spirituality in Bahá'í Life" to be held in Wilmette on Saturday and Sunday, August 7-8, 1999. The conference is being sponsored by the Institute for Bahá'í Studies.

The theme of the conference comes from a statement by 'Abdu'l-Baha, in which He discusses the favorable conditions for the rapid growth of the Faith in North America. He refers to this continent, and particularly the United States, as the "home of the righteous, and the gathering place of the free" wherein "the splendors of His light shall be revealed, where the mysteries of His Faith shall be unveiled."

The conference will consider the role of spirituality, individually and collectively, in fulfilling America's destiny. Experiential and theoretical explorations of this theme will pay particular attention to the ways in which spirituality effects social change, as the Universal House of Justice stated in its 1998 Ridván message, through "the power of the Covenant, the dynamics of prayer, the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of the Holy Texts, and the transformative forces that operate upon [one's] soul as [one] strives to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles."

Those interested in making a presentation should submit an abstract or description of 250-500 words to Mrs. Lynne Yancy, c/o Research Office, Bahá'í National Center, Wilmette, IL 60091; phone (847) 733-3548; email: lyancy@usbnc.org. The deadline for submissions is June 1.

[Editor's note: This conference will begin the day after the residential session of the Spiritual Foundations program ends in Wilmette on Friday, August 6. We encourage all Wilmette Institute students—both from the Spiritual Foundations program and from the various distance-education courses—to attend the conference as a practical way of seeing how their own studies can come to fruition in such conferences. All are welcome to arrive during the day on Friday and attend the Spiritual Foundation's farewell dinner (but make a reservation; it's required), where the residential students will receive their certificates and celebrate the conclusion of the summer program. Anyone interested in arriving even earlier and auditing the last day or two of classes should contact Heather Gorman at 847-733-3415; hgorman@usbnc.org.]

Spiritual Foundations Student News

Report on Recent Traveling Teaching Trip in Oklahoma

January 2-12, 1999

by Aaron Cederquist

Ever since early last year I had been looking for an opportunity to go traveling teaching with someone who has had a lot of experience and understanding, as sort of a "hands-on" teaching workshop. When I met Alice Ferro this summer at the Wilmette Institute, this desire became reality, and I arranged to join her in December in northeast Oklahoma, where she has traveled to teach the Faith for fourteen years. So on January 1, another Bahá'í youth (Brent Falconer in Richmond, VA) and I left Virginia for Oklahoma for ten days of traveling teaching.

The experience was very rewarding. Each day we traveled with Alice to some of the thirty towns that she covers. We visited homes of her various contacts, both non-Bahá'í and Bahá'í, sitting and talking with them. Many of the families we visited were Native American (mostly Cherokee)—often one or two members were Bahá'í, but everyone else would learn about the Faith—and some of these families were large enough to be potential LSA's. We visited at least seventy people across a number of different towns, and traveled at least nine hundred miles those ten days (not including a three-hundred mile round trip to Oklahoma City).

One Saturday each month Alice sets up an evening of dinner and fellowship at the local Bahá'í Center for anyone who wants to come. She prepares enough food to feed eighty or more, and invites everyone she runs into, most of whom already know her pretty well. They provide an opportunity for people to experience the faintest glimpse of true Bahá'í community and for the Bahá'ís to do some teaching—usually two-thirds or more of the guests are not yet Bahá'ís.

Brent and I were fortunate enough to be there for one of these dinners. We helped Alice a little with the preparations—preparing twenty chickens, picking up a few people who didn't have cars, and taking care of a few other odds and ends (Alice, of course, also prepared spaghetti and roasts, bought bread and pies, cleaned a lot, and called various people she knew, among other things). Brent had bought a soccer ball and that evening many of the youth went outside and played soccer together. Alice says that the mere presence of Bahá'í youth there brought many younger people to that dinner who otherwise would not have come, many of whom have now become interested in studying the Faith, and that the fact that both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í youth were playing together greatly impressed many of the Native American parents.

I learned a lot more than I expected from this, both about what it means to teach by developing friendships and about the wonderful things that perseverance, determination, and audacity can accomplish. The area itself seems very ripe, as the long persistent years of effort that Alice has put into the area, coupled with the recent increase in help and assistance from other Bahá'ís in the area, are beginning to bear their fruit. It also struck me how much what Alice is doing in visiting the Bahá'ís in the area mirrors what I saw in Colombia, where the Ruhi Institute initiated a deepening and consolidation program (based on the Ruhi courses) that consisted of mini-institutes of three to ten people, often a mix of Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í, and often done in people's homes. Perhaps something similar would work in Oklahoma.

[Editor's note: This issue could easily be increased in length by half if we included everything we could about northeastern Oklahoma. Since the last issue of The Lamp went to press, Alice Ferro dedicated a regional Bahá'í center on her property, which attracted a large crowd and was reported in a local newspaper in glowing terms. Alice has reported two more enrollments in the area as teaching gains momentum. The Bahá'í group in Vinata (population 5,800) cooperated with the local black churches to organize the first Martin Luther King Day parade in Vinata. It consisted of two floats, one on the Faith. The executive director of the Wyandotte tribe received a Bahá'í delegation and literature on the Faith, asked questions, and requested more literature. As a result of last year's classes, Alice drew up a detailed Four Year plan for her efforts in the area and is systematically working her way through the goals. To help an ill Bahá'í after a long day of driving people to Bahá'í events, Alice went out late at night, fell asleep behind the wheel, and totaled her car; but she was all right and was able to obtain a new van for free through a local dealership and is now driving more children to Bahá'í classes than ever! The Institute hopes more of its students will be able to visit northeastern Oklahoma or deputize the teaching work there through the State Teaching Committee. Two Spiritual Foundations students are hoping to visit in March or April.

Mr. Marc Greenberg, a third-year student in the Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization program, has been accepted at the McGregor School of Antioch University in Yellow Springs, Ohio, for a Master's degree in religious studies. Marc became increasingly interested in religious studies as a result of the Wilmette Institute's classes, referred to the program in his application, and requested a recommendation from a Wilmette Institute faculty member for the program. We are thrilled to see the Institute has proved so useful and wish Marc great success in his studies.

Why I am Taking a Distance-Education Course Comments by Students

My name is Paddy Payne (and I'm male—many Americans assume that Paddy is a female name!). I'm interested in knowing whether there are any other people in New Zealand who are taking this course, so we can establish a more “local” support group. Also, I'm interested in how many people in total are taking this course, the countries they come from, and whether any of them were Hindus prior to becoming a Bahá'í. My faith background is Anglican Christian, but I have been a Bahá'í for over 20 years.

I'm very involved in interfaith activities in New Zealand—our national chapter of WCRP (World Conference on Religion and Peace), our local council sponsored Faith and Community group etc—and wish to develop a greater appreciation of these different faiths within the context of progressive revelation and the Bahá'í Faith.

The course materials have just arrived, so I started reading them yet. Looks interesting stuff—and I'm delighted that there is a practical component to the course—giving a talk and spending time with local Hindus etc.

--Paddy Payne
“Hinduism for Dialogue and Deepening”

My name is Judd Rook, and I live in McMinnville, Oregon, in the Pacific Northwest of the U.S. I became a Bahá'í 2 years ago on my 38th birthday after 20+ years of doubting the existence of God (I lost my faith during the compulsory Lutheran confirmation process at age 15). I now thank God every day for the Bahá'í Faith and for providing me with the ability to recognize Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God in this day.

As a linear thinker, I was struck immediately by the logic of progressive revelation when I began investigating the Faith. I am quite eager to learn of the common threads of the world's great religions and how I can use this knowledge when interacting with people of other faiths.

I live with my wife Susan (a Baha'i of 12 months) and my 3 children: Erin—16 (a Baha'i of 2 years; we declared on the same day after independent investigations), Kelsey—10, and Franklin—7.

I look forward to getting to know all of you and learn with you.

--Judd Rock
“Hinduism for Dialogue and Deepening”

My name is Chantelle Warthe and I live in Shawnigan Lake, B.C., Canada. I'm 19 years old and have been a Bahá'í all my life. I graduated from Maxwell Int'l Bahá'í school in '97 and took some introductory courses in other faiths while I was there, but I want to learn more. So I'm very excited to be in this class! I am anxious to learn about other religions and how they fit into progressive revelation, so that I can explain it better when teaching the Faith. I haven't received the course materials yet, but it's still great to be reading all your e-mails. It's nice to meet you all!
Allah'u'Abha!

--Chantelle Warthe
“Hinduism for Dialogue and Deepening”

My turn to introduce myself. My name is Annick Elzière. I am French living in Flemington, NJ, and I am a Bahá'í since January 1994. I have been the only Bahá'í in my town but thanks to God, one more Bahá'í moved in last October and another one in the next town so, hopefully, things should get moving a little. I am looking forward to the course too and. . . I haven't studied for a long long long time so lets hope for the best.

--Annick Elzière
“Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, 1853–63”

My name is Stephen Johnson and I'm a scientist on Long Island. I'm 27 years old and have been a Bahá'í for 10 short years. In that time I've been eager to partake of a vigorous study of the Bahá'í Writings. I'm pleased to finally have both the time and inclination.

--Stephen Johnson

“Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, 1853–63”

My name is Saghi Nabily from Grapevine, Texas. I have two kids ages 2 and 5 with whom I stay at home. I am very excited to get started on this course and hope I can meet its requirements. I decided to take this course because I felt that it might provide a more systematic method of learning about the Faith than I could achieve on my own. . . .I look forward to working with all of you.

--Saghi Nabily

“Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, 1853–63”

Another excited customer . . . happy to "meet" my fellow students. I'm Charlene Olsen, 42 years old, Bahá'í since 1991, stay-at-home mom (temporarily retired attorney) of 1-1/2 year-old Malina. My husband Chris is a 4th generation Bahá'í; I'm the first in my family. We've always been residents of the Central States region of the United States, set out in the Tablets of the Divine Plan (Ohio, Illinois, now Waukesha, Wisconsin). How exciting to have truly divine instructions!

I'm both fascinated and frightened by the initial readings in the materials. Like a too-rational moth checking out the flames? I'm afraid I'll catch fire if I get in too deep. Well, isn't that what I'm here for?

My life is likely to change here. I'm glad we're all in this together.

--Charlene Olsen

“Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, 1853–63”