Bahá'í News

Bahá'í Year 140 May 1983

The 'spiritual axis'

Commentary

Spiritual axis: 'A powerful magnet'

In its message to the Asian/Australasian Bahá'í Conference held last September in Canberra, Australia, the Universal House of Justice drew attention to statements of the Guardian concerning a "spiritual axis" between Australia and Japan.

The purpose of this article is to explore some aspects of the teachings on this spiritual axis, which is destined to affect profoundly the future development of the Faith.

Both the passage of time and the continuing guidance of the Universal House of Justice will be required to disclose fully the mystery and significance of this spiritual axis. It is possible, however, at this early stage, to identify some of the basic features of this novel aspect of the future growth and development of the Faith.

Japan and Australia are separated not only by a vast oceanic distance, but also by fundamental differences of culture, race, language and tradition, and by the memories of the great conflict that engulfed the Pacific region from 1941 to 1945. Yet Shoghi Effendi has unambiguously foreshadowed a remarkable relationship between the Bahá'í communities in these two nations.

In 1957, the Guardian referred to "a spiritual axis, extending from the Antipodes to the northern islands of the Pacific Ocean—an axis whose northern and southern poles will act as powerful magnets, endowed with exceptional spiritual potency, and towards which other younger and less experienced communities will tend for some time to gravitate." [1]

At that time, Shoghi Effendi affirmed that the formation of the Regional Spiritual Assembly of North-East Asia "constitutes a notable parallel to the rise of similar institutions in the Antipodes, establishing thereby a spiritual equilibrium destined to affect, to a marked degree, the destinies of the Faith throughout the islands of the Pacific Ocean, in the years immediately ahead." [2]

Prior to a detailed study of this spiritual axis, two fundamental principles that appear to underly it are discussed here.

The principle of magnetism

The phenomenon of magnetism is a familiar feature of the physical world. Magnetic materials are characterized by an arrangement of atoms which, in conformity with the laws of nature, gives rise to a magnetic field exerting an attractive force on other similar materials.

Since medieval times, scientists have puzzled over the attributes of the magnetic field—the fact that action occurs at a distance, that there is no visible or tangible connection between the two materials, that the attractive force increases greatly as the distance of separation is diminished.

One of the distinctive features of the Bahá'í Revelation is its use of magnetism as an analogy with which to describe the operation of spiritual forces. Consider, for example, the use of the term by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to describe the Manifestation of God as *"the Magnet of the souls and hearts in the Pole of the existing world, to which all the sacred hearts are attracted from the far distant lands and countries."* [3]

By this means, the Master conveys a profound spiritual truth in a simple manner, drawing upon the well-known physical phenomenon as an analogy.

In other places, 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to the Revelation in these terms: *"the divine magnet—the power of the Word of God—will attract the hearts,"* [4] and describes the power of the Covenant as being analogous to magnetism in His exhortation: *"be attracted by the magnet of the Covenant."* [5]

The magnetism analogy is applied not only to the Manifestation and His teachings, but is extended to apply also to actions of the believers that are undertaken in conformity with Divine Law. For example, Shoghi Effendi says: "Today, as never before, the magnet which attracts the blessings from on high, is teaching the Faith of God." [6]

And the Universal House of Justice has referred to Bahá'í conferences in these words: ". . . these conferences, focal points of the love and prayers of the friends everywhere, magnets to attract the spiritual powers which alone can confirm their work . . ." [7]

'Abdu'l-Bahá earlier had described the gathering of the friends together in this way: *"The greatest means for the union and harmony of all is spiritual meetings. This matter is very important and is a magnet to attract Divine confirmation."* [8]

All of these statements, and the many other references to magnetism in the Bahá'í Writings, represent statements of Divine truth, which describe the operation of spiritual forces, just as the laws of nature uncovered by science describe the forces of attraction in the material world.

This principle of magnetism is found explicitly in the statement of the Guardian that refers to Australia and Japan, and is implicit in the descriptions of the significance of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs and the Holy Shrines. It is also implicit in the Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the American believers in which He calls upon them to serve the

Dr. Peter J. Khan, the author of this article on the spiritual axis between Australia and Japan, is a member of the Continental Board of Counsellors in Australasia.

Someone who does not comprehend the spiritual nature of Bahá'í community growth would search in vain for a causative relationship between an apparently insignificant beautification of land on a mountain slope and the growth of the Institutions of a new World Order foreshadowed in the Bahá'í Writings.

Faith, and promises that *"Should success crown your enterprise, America will assuredly evolve into a centre from which waves of spiritual power will emanate."* [9]

Through the manner in which the international Bahá'í community develops and the embryonic World Order evolves, and as a result of the complex interplay between material resources, as well as cultural, geographic, educational and technical factors, and also communication and transportation facilities, the believers in Australia and Japan will be impelled to perform such prodigious service to the Faith that these two areas will become as poles of a magnet for spiritual forces affecting the Asian and Australasian regions.

The mystery of growth

Collective human enterprises in the world around us, such as industrial production, the construction of cities, and the exploitation of natural resources, are examples of inorganic growth—characterized by exhaustive prior planning in which the final form of the product, building, dam or mine is clearly determined before construction begins, and by progress toward the goal in a well understood, orderly and systematic manner.

In contrast, we see organic growth of living entities in the vegetable, animal or human world—characterized by evolutionary development from an insignificant beginning, proceeding through intermediate forms at an apparently irregular rate, and reaching a mature condition that differs greatly in form and attibutes from the embryonic seed.

This kind of growth is mysterious in nature, and contributes much to the beauty and wonder of the universe. Its mystery arises from the inability of a human being to grasp fully the Divine principles that govern organic growth, or to comprehend the internal spirit that motivates this growth.

The growth of the worldwide Bahá'í community is an organic process that defies comprehension by those whose standards are inorganic. As a consequence, its strength, potential and internal dynamism are gravely underestimated by those who assess its present condition by inorganic measures.

An example of a factor that contributes mysteriously to the growth of the Bahá'í community is that of development at the World Centre. In 1939, when the Guardian took a major step in developing the monument gardens on Mount Carmel, he described it as "an event which will release forces that are bound to hasten the emergence . . . of some of the highest gems of . . . World Order." [10]

Someone who does not comprehend the spiritual nature of Bahá'í community growth would search in vain for a causative relationship between an apparently insignificant beautification of land on a mountain slope and the growth of the Institutions of a new World Order foreshadowed in the Bahá'í Writings.

Other examples may be found in authoritative statements about the future development of the Faith in Europe. The Universal House of Justice has referred to "the islands of the Mediterranean and the North Sea" as "islands which are to play such an important role in the awakening of the entire continent." [11]

Under conditions of inorganic growth, the process would be the exact opposite: first, the Faith would be established firmly on the European continental land mass, and from there, the Mediterranean and North Sea islands would be opened to the Faith. But the organic growth process proceeds by an entirely different strategy, governed by Divine principle, and manifested in the successive Plans emanating from the World Centre of the Faith.

Another European example is that of the future role of the Bahá'í community in Germany, which is destined, in the words of the Guardian, to "embark on a campaign, beyond the borders of its homeland, that will carry the light of the Faith to the adjoining eastern frontiers of Europe, into Asia." [12]

Applying inorganic principles, one would be unlikely to choose the German Bahá'ís for such a role, in view of the tensions and apprehensions which have been apparent between Germany and its Eastern European neighbors since the 1940s.

The statements in the Bahá'í Writings concerning the spiritual axis between Australia and Japan well illustrate the mysteries of organic growth. A casual observer might well wonder why these two countries, so greatly different in population, culture, language, custom and race, and separated by so great a distance, should be designated as the magnetic poles of a spiritual power in that region.

Divine guidance, cognizant of past and future from a perspective that transcends the dimension of time, asserts that the opportunities and challenges destined to arise, as the Bahá'í community hastens toward completion of all the provisions of the Divine Plan in the decades or centuries ahead, will be such as to project Australia and Japan into a pre-eminent role in the affairs of the Faith in the Asian-Australasian region.

The Bahá'í teachings foster the use of the rational faculties in a spirit of inquiry, to unravel the mysteries of the spiritual and material worlds, and thus to contribute to the growth of religious and scientific understanding. Hence, we may confidently anticipate that the mysteries of organic growth will become progressively disclosed, as our understanding of the interplay between the spiritual and material determinants of growth increases, and as the passage of time reveals more fully the course followed by the Bahá'í community in its expansion.

The Asian-Australasian region

The spiritual axis between Australia

and Japan lies at the interface of "the vast continent of Asia" and "the water hemisphere which comprises all of Australasia." [13] Together, "the population of Asia and Australasia is well over half the world population." [14] Within these two continental areas are to be found many areas named specifically by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the *Tablets of the Divine Plan,* significant in light of the statement by the Universal House of Justice as to "how great is the potential for the Faith in the localities blessed by these references." [15]

The Australasian continental region embraces the Pacific, the world's largest ocean, in which are to be found 10,000 islands scattered over an area of 160 million square kilometers; it is lightly populated, with the largest number of people being the some 15 million in Australia, whose land area is almost equal to that of the United States.

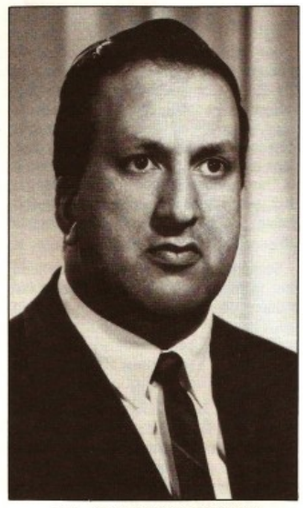
Shoghi Effendi described the Pacific region around, and including, Australia as "an area endowed with unimaginable potentialities, and which, owing to its strategic position, is bound to feel the impact of world shaking forces, and to shape to a marked degree through the experiences gained by its peoples in the school of adversity, the destinies of mankind." [16]

'Abdu'l-Bahá directed attention to *"the three great island groups of the Pacific Ocean—Polynesia, Micronesia and Melanesia."* [17] The great potential of the indigenous Pacific Islanders is lauded by the Guardian in his statement that "a spiritual receptivity, a purity of heart and uprightness of character exists potentially amongst many of the peoples of the Pacific Isles to an extent equal to that of the tribesmen of Africa." [18]

By contrast, the vast Asian continental land mass includes more than half the entire population of the world. It is described by the Guardian as "the cradle of the principal religions of mankind; the home of so many of the oldest and mightiest civilizations which have flourished on this planet; the crossways of so many kindreds and races; the battleground of so many peoples and nations . . ." [19]

The Universal House of Justice called attention recently to the fact that this region "includes Asiatic U.S.S.R. and mainland China accounting for more than one thousand million souls who are, for the most part, untouched by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh." [20]

'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have described China many years ago in these terms: *"China, China, China, Chinaward the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh must march! Where is that holy sanctified*



DR. PETER J. KHAN

Bahá'í to become the teacher of China! China has most great capability. The Chinese people are most simple-hearted and truth-seeking . . . China is the country of the future . . ." [21]

The area of influence of the spiritual axis between Australia and Japan also includes Southeast Asia, a region described by the Guardian in this manner:

"By virtue of its vastness, its heterogeneous character, its geographical position, bridging the gulf separating the Bahá'í communities now firmly established in both the northern and southern regions of the Pacific Ocean, the spiritual receptivity of many of its inhabitants, and the role which they are destined to play in the future shaping of the affairs of mankind, this vast area . . . is bound . . . to exercise a far-reaching influence on the future destinies of the World Bahá'í community . . ." [22]

Elsewhere, the Universal House of Justice says of this region: "South East Asia, whose gifted and industrious people have embraced four of the world's major religions, have produced in all ages civilizations and cultures representative of the highest accomplishments of the human race." [23]

From these passages it is clear that the continental areas on both sides of the spiritual axis have unusually great potential, and that they are destined to have a marked influence on the future of mankind.

The two continental regions are complementary in the role that they can play in the development of the worldwide Bahá'í community. Asia has the potential to provide vast manpower to reinforce the ranks of teachers and administrators, while the small independent nations of Australasia can bring recognition and prestige to the Faith as the Bahá'ís become an appreciable fraction of the national population and as the Bahá'í values permeate the national consciousness.

The Asian believers bring to the Bahá'í community the richness of their cultural traditions rooted in the wisdom of the great religions of the Prophetic Cycle, while the Australasian Bahá'ís are, in many nations, relatively free from the fetters of religious orthodoxy and ecclesiastical authority and can thus freely surrender themselves to the Bahá'í way of life. The individualism that is so dominant in much of Australasia is balanced by the emphasis on social cooperation and collective action in much of Asia.

Thus the spiritual axis acts as a bridge joining together the best qualities of the peoples of the world's largest continent and the world's largest oceanic area, for the construction of the new World Order.

Australia and Japan

Australia and Japan, designated as the southern and northern poles, respectively, of the spiritual axis, share certain characteristics in common

The formation in 1957 of a regional National Spiritual Assembly centered in Tokyo was hailed by the Guardian as 'a momentous development paving the way for the eventual introduction of the Faith into the far-flung Chinese mainland and, beyond it, to the extensive territories of Soviet Russia.'

while they are complementary in other ways.

Both share the bounty of having been opened to the Faith during the Ministry of the Center of the Covenant, by Bahá'ís who came as pioneers from America and who were later to be designated as Hands of the Cause of God. The Guardian refers to the Japanese and Australian Bahá'í communities as having had "the inestimable privilege of being called into being in the lifetime of, and through the operation of the dynamic forces released by the Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant." [24]

Both are destined to shoulder great responsibilities in service to the Cause. The Guardian indicated that the Bahá'ís of Australia and New Zealand would "contribute, to a degree unsuspected as yet by its members, its full share to the world-wide establishment of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, the emancipation of its Oriental followers, the recognition of its independence, the birth of its World Order and the emergence of . . . world civilization." [25]

He further designated the Japanese Bahá'ís as "destined to have a preponderating share in awakening the peoples and races inhabiting the entire Pacific area, to the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, and to act as the Vanguard of His hosts in their future spiritual conquest of the main body of the yellow race on the Chinese mainland." [26]

The formation in 1957 of a regional National Spiritual Assembly centered in Tokyo was hailed by the Guardian as "a momentous development paving the way for the eventual introduction of the Faith into the far-flung Chinese mainland and, beyond it, to the extensive territories of Soviet Russia." [27]

In addition, there are complementary characteristics. Australia has a small population spread over a large area, whereas Japan has a large population concentrated in a relatively small area. Commercially, these two nations have become important trading partners in recent years, with the vast natural resources of Australia balanced by the mighty industrial technology of Japan.

The Guardian analyzed the Australian Bahá'í community as showing "exemplary loyalty," "unsparing devotion," "keen enthusiasm," "persistent endeavours" and "willingness to sacrifice." [28] On one occasion, he said, through his secretary, that "the soundness, healthiness and vigour" of the Australian Bahá'í community "is an example to the Bahá'ís in other continents of the globe." [29]

The Japanese people were described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as being *"intelligent and sagacious"* [30] and as having *"the power of rapid assimilation"* and of being *"endowed with a most remarkable capacity for the spread of the Cause of God."* [31] Shoghi Effendi praised the Japanese people for their "great vision and spirituality" [32] and for being "so sensitive to every form of beauty both spiritual and material." [33] The Guardian also wrote that "the love of the Japanese people for truth and beauty is very great." [34]

It is clear that the Australian and Japanese Bahá'ís share great opportunities and responsibilities for the future progress of the Faith, and that their characteristics are complementary rather than identical. It thus follows that unity and close cooperation between the two communities allows these complementary qualities to be combined to produce an amalgam having a capacity and potential far greater than that of the individual national communities themselves.

This complementary quality may well be one of the secrets behind the mystery of the spiritual axis, and the profound influence that the axis is destined to have on the future growth of the Faith.

Developing the spiritual axis

The Bahá'í writings clearly indicate measures to be taken, and pitfalls to be avoided, in the development of the spiritual axis. As early as 1918, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to Agnes Alexander, who was then a pioneer to Japan, advising her that *"Effort must be exerted . . . that East and West, like unto two longing souls, may embrace each other in the utmost of love."* [35]

In his message concerning the spiritual axis, Shoghi Effendi designated "the close and continued association" of the Australian and Japanese Bahá'í communities in raising and consolidating the World Order as being "a matter of vital and urgent importance." [36] One historic milestone in that close association was the unprecedented joint consultation of the National Spiritual Assemblies of Japan and Australia at the International Bahá'í Conference last September in Canberra.

The Guardian also identified three barriers, which form part of the life of the two nations and which must be overcome in order to effect and maintain that association. These barriers are:

- ". . .great . . . distance that separates them . . ."
- ". . .they differ in race, language, custom, and religion . . ."
- ". . .active . . . political forces which tend to keep them apart and foster racial and political antagonisms . . ." [37]

The Universal House of Justice commented on that passage recently, pointing out that "These guidelines, penned a quarter of a century ago, are as valid today as when they were written, and can be taken to heart by all Bahá'í communities on either side of the axis." [38]

A significant outcome of the spiritual axis is the execution of collective projects by the Japanese and Australian Bahá'í communities, with the support of Bahá'ís in other areas. The Guardian indicated that the spiritual axis was "destined to affect, to a marked degree, the destinies of the Faith

throughout the islands of the Pacific Ocean in the years immediately ahead," [39] and he spoke of "the collective enterprises that must, sooner or later, be launched and carried to a successful conclusion by the island communities situated in the Northern and Southern regions as well as in the heart of the Pacific Ocean." [40]

The Guardian also called on Australia to "lend whatever assistance is possible" to the Bahá'í community of New Zealand so that, in the future, that community might also "share, in a befitting manner" [41] in these collective endeavors.

The Universal House of Justice has designated as one of the goals of the Seven Year Plan "a joint team teaching project to the Caroline Islands" to be planned and carried out as a collaborative effort by the National Spiritual Assemblies of Australia and Japan. No doubt this project, important as it is, will prove to be no more than the beginning of a vast program of collaboration in projects in the Pacific Islands and in Asia, stretching forth into the distant future of the Formative Age of the Faith.

The effect on the world

Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written in 1922, his first message to the Bahá'ís of Japan in his capacity as Guardian of the Faith, quoted the Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as stating: *"Japan, with (another country whose name He stated but bade us conceal for the present) will take the lead in the spiritual re-awakening of the peoples and nations that the world shall soon witness."* [42]

In light of later references by the Guardian to the relationship between Japan and Australia, it appears reasonable to entertain the possibility that perhaps these were the two countries to which 'Abdu'l-Bahá referred, and that the power of the spiritual axis will be to effect "the spiritual re-awakening of the peoples and nations" so desperately needed by a social order which is, throughout the world, infected with "materialism, greed, corruption and conflict." [43]

NOTES

1. Shoghi Effendi, *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand 1923-1947.*
2. "Japan Will Turn Ablaze," compilation.
3. *Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,* Vol. 1.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Shoghi Effendi, in "The Power of Divine Assistance," compilation.
7. Universal House of Justice, *Wellspring of Guidance.*
8. *The Divine Art of Living,* compilation.
9. *Citadel of Faith,* p. 29.
10. Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America 1932-1946,* p. 33.
11. *Wellspring of Guidance.*
12. *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand 1923-1947.*
13. Universal House of Justice, message to the Asian/Australasian Bahá'í Conference in Canberra, September 1982.
14. Message to the Asian/Australasian Bahá'í Conference, September 1982.
15. *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968-1973.*
16. *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand 1923-1947.*
17. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan,* p. 13.
18. Shoghi Effendi, "The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community," p. 365.
19. *The Bahá'í World,* Vol. XII, pp. 180-81.
20. Message to the Asian/Australian Bahá'í Conference in Canberra, September 1982.
21. "Star of the West" magazine, Vol. III, No. 3, p. 37.
22. *The Bahá'í World,* Vol. XIII, p. 302.
23. *Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968-1973.*
24. *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand 1923-1947.*
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. "Japan Will Turn Ablaze," compilation.
28. *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand 1923-1947.*
29. Ibid.
30. "Japan Will Turn Ablaze," compilation.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
35. Ibid.
36. *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand 1923-1947.*
37. Ibid.
38. Message to the Asian/Australian Bahá'í Conference in Canberra, September 1982.
39. "Japan Will Turn Ablaze," compilation.
40. *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand 1923-1947.*
41. Ibid.
42. "Japan Will Turn Ablaze," compilation.
43. Message to the Asian/Australian Bahá'í Conference in Canberra, September 1982.