



<p>Kazemipour, Roger Neyman and Charlotte des concepts  Weninger; as well as Todd Smith, for the dans les écrits  continual support, encouragement and in- lettre de la  spiration which was offered during the two- qui nous  year period when the series of papers for la spiritualité  this and the previous issue of The Journal aujourd’hui, alors que  of Bahá’í Studies was drafted, reviewed la communauté bahá’íe  poursuit son travail de création de communautés  and consulted upon. A special thanks is due dynamiques.  to Todd Smith for first setting us on this Nous nous demandons ensuite si,  et  path, and for his steady and enthusiastic dans quelle mesure, les  sciences sociales  support for the project throughout. Special peuvent étudier le phénomène  de la  thanks is also due to Michael Sabet, the ed- spiritualité en tant  qu’élément principal de  itor of the Journal, for his encouragement, la nature humaine, en soutenant  qu’elles  close involvement, incisive observations, peuvent efficacement choisir la  réalité  his keen sense, and remarkable editing spirituelle comme hypothèse de  travail,  skills. I also thank the anonymous referees dont la validité peut ensuite  être évaluée.  and editors for their careful analysis of the  arguments presented, and their input re- Resumen  garding the overall flow of the paper. To El concepto de espiritualidad  desafía una  my wife, Lesley, for her continual support, rigurosa definición, muy  parecida a al-</p>	<p>fait un bref tour d’horizon  d’esprit et de spiritualité  bahá’ís, nous examinons une  Maison universelle de justice  donne un aperçu de ce à quoi  devrait ressembler  la communauté bahá’íe  de création de communautés  Nous nous demandons ensuite si,  dans quelle mesure, les  peuvent étudier le phénomène  spiritualité en tant  la nature humaine, en soutenant  peuvent efficacement choisir la  spirituelle comme hypothèse de  dont la validité peut ensuite  Resumen  El concepto de espiritualidad  rigurosa definición, muy</p>
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<p>gunos conceptos fundamentales en las  years.<sup>2</sup>  matemáticas y la física. Sin embargo, po-  “spirituality” do not  dríamos lograr un entendimiento de este  definitions</p>	<p>over the past twenty-five  “Spirit” and  have rigorous, agreed upon</p>
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vital concepto religioso preguntando a qué in religion or in philosophy.  
 This is not  
 “se parece” la espiritualidad. En este artí-  
 inherently problematic. At the founda-  
 culo, después de un breve bosquejo de los  
 tions of mathematics and the sciences,  
 conceptos del espíritu y la espiritualidad en  
 for instance, we find a number of un-  
 los escritos Bahá’ís, examinamos una carta  
 de la Casa Universal de Justicia que nos da  
 defined terms. In geometry,  
 terms like  
 un panorama sobre a qué se debe parecer  
 “point,” “line,” and  
 “plane”—elements  
 that are fundamental to this  
 la espiritualidad en tiempos actuales, a me-  
 branch of  
 dida que la Comunidad Bahá’í prosigue su  
 knowledge—are formally  
 labeled as  
 “undefined terms.” In  
 labor de crear comunidades vibrantes. En-  
 physics there  
 seguida, exploramos la pregunta de que si  
 isn’t such a formal  
 labelling, but fun-  
 y a que grado las ciencias sociales pueden  
 damental notions including  
 “mass,”  
 investigar el fenómeno de la espiritualidad  
 “energy,” “force,” and  
 “momentum”  
 stubbornly resist definition,  
 como un asunto central a la naturaleza hu-  
 and have  
 mana, argumentando que ellas pueden pro-  
 continuously been revisited by  
 scien-  
 ductivamente adoptar la realidad espiritual  
 tists and philosophers of science (see,  
 como un supuesto, cuya validez puede en-  
 for example, Jammer, Sarracino).<sup>3</sup>  
 tonces ser evaluada.

2 See, for example, The Universal

I

House of Justice letter dated 27 December  
 2005 to the Conference of the Continental

The term “spirituality” permeates  
 Boards of Counsellors.

Bahá’í writings, discourse, and thought.

example, Newton

“All men,” Bahá’u’lláh writes, “have  
 mass as “quantity of

been created to carry forward an ev-  
 inexplicably and

3 As a concrete

famously defined

matter,” a definition that,

er-advancing civilization” (Gleanings  
 some elementa-  
 109:2). This civilization has both ma-  
 further elaborate,  
 terial and spiritual elements (‘Abdu’l-  
 Bahá, Selections 227). In the series  
 philoso-  
 of global plans laid before the Bahá’í  
 dissatis-  
 community by the Universal House  
 concept  
 of Justice, with the single aim of “the  
 the vague  
 “quantity of matter,” began to think  
 release of the society-building power  
 of mass more as a coefficient in the  
 of the Faith in ever greater measures,”  
 equation of motion. Euler was the first  
 Bahá’ís are called upon to “learn . . .  
 in this movement when, in 1760, he  
 how to bring about spiritual and materi-  
 force and  
 al progress” (30 December 2021). This  
 of “force”  
 learning project is at the center of the  
 attack  
 framework for action for Bahá’í com-  
 as being  
 munities that has emerged and evolved  
 notion.” It  
 What Does Spirituality Look Like?

Despite this inability to pin down a  
 Bahá’í  
 formal definition, there are relation-  
 reach a  
 ships among these terms and concepts  
 evolv-  
 that can be expressed in equations.  
 meant by  
 Physicists gain a familiarity with their  
 to con-  
 discipline’s fundamental terms and  
 practical  
 concepts by coming to understand  
 spirituality look  
 these equations and what they repre-

confusedly, is still used in  
 ry textbooks today. As I  
 Eventually physicists and  
 phers of science became  
 fied with this metaphysical  
 of mass, and rather than  
 defined mass as the ratio of  
 acceleration. The concept  
 itself, however, came under  
 in the nineteenth century  
 an “obscure metaphysical

Through these two means the  
 community is able not only to  
 collective, albeit continuously  
 ing, understanding of what is  
 spirit and spirituality, but also  
 tribute to answering a more  
 question: “What does  
 like?”

sent with respect to the motion of discrete entities and waves, and the interactions between them.

Just as the presence of undefined terms in mathematics and physics is not problematic, so the lack of rigorous definitions for spirit and spirituality is not problematic in the Bahá'í Faith. There is a unity of thought within the Bahá'í community as to the implications of the terms and what they refer to. Bahá'ís come to understand what spirituality is and what it is not through two complementary avenues of endeavor. The first avenue is detailed “the study of the writings and guidance of the Faith. The second avenue consists of efforts to translate those writings and guidance, and the principles and injunctions contained therein, into action in personal and community life, and in the functioning of Bahá'í institutions.

Just as the presence of undefined terms in mathematics and physics is not problematic, so the lack of rigorous definitions for spirit and spirituality is not problematic in the Bahá'í Faith. There is a unity of thought within the Bahá'í community as to the implications of the terms and what they refer to. Bahá'ís come to understand what spirituality is and what it is not through two complementary avenues of endeavor. The first avenue is detailed “the study of the writings and guidance of the Faith. The second avenue consists of efforts to translate those writings and guidance, and the principles and injunctions contained therein, into action in personal and community life, and in the functioning of Bahá'í institutions. Relying on guidance from the central was Ernst Mach who developed the is par- working definition from which twentieth century attempts to define mass Justice's have developed, and which is used,

It is to this question that the paper seeks to make a

proceeds in three parts. First, it

ples with ontological questions about spirit and spirituality. There is

tion to do this with great rigor;

is simply to suggest a few

by which we can understand

about these concepts to ground the more practical question.

Second, it looks to recent

from the Universal House of

specifically a paragraph from the

December 2021 letter outlining the qualities and characteristics of

kindled souls being raised up

the processes” (¶ 4) of the

series of Bahá'í plans for

Sarracino the advancement of communities, as a source for

what the spirituality the

munity attempts to act out

institution of the Bahá'í Faith

ticularly useful for our question,

cause the Universal House of

letters are not only the agreed upon

more or less, in textbooks today. . . . focal point of guidance for the global  
 Ernst Mach formulated mass in terms Bahá'í community, but are also  
 craft-  
 of mass-ratio, that is, the “negative ed in reflection of what that Body  
 sees  
 inverse ratio of mutually induced ac- emerging from the actual experience  
 celerations” of two interacting bodies. of Bahá'ís—individuals,  
 communities,  
 This itself, however, has problems and institutions—worldwide.  
 (Sarracino 10–13).

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Third, the paper turns to how the irrationality, referring to ghosts,  
 spir-  
 question “What does spirituality look its, and other intangible  
 entities. Some  
 like?” might help the social sciences even view spirituality as  
 destructive,  
 come to better grips with a phenome- leading to anti-social behavior  
 and  
 non—spirituality—whose ontological violence. The problem is  
 compound-  
 reality they are incapable of directly as- ed by the apparent irrelevance  
 of the  
 sessing, yet one that intimately shapes concept of “spirit” (and  
 allied concepts  
 the motivations and actions of myriad like “soul”) to the natural  
 sciences,  
 people worldwide. Since those moti- and by the ambiguous reception  
 of the  
 vations and actions are proper studies concept in the social sciences,  
 which  
 for the social sciences, the question of either consider it meaningless  
 within  
 how these areas of human inquiry can the predominant materialist  
 paradigm,<sup>5</sup>  
 “quantify” spirituality is an important or simply too difficult to  
 observe the  
 one. This paper’s thesis is that it can action or effect of in an  
 empirically  
 best do so by taking the existence of testable manner.  
 a transcendent spiritual nature in hu- In contrast to this lack of  
 consen-  
 mans as a background assumption to sus around what is meant by  
 spirit and  
 produce evidence from data, and that spirituality in discourse

generally, there  
 this evidence can be used to support is, from what I have observed, a  
 unity  
 or falsify well-formulated hypotheses of understanding on this topic  
 within  
 about human spiritual nature. the Bahá'í community. It is  
 a charac-  
 teristically Bahá'í unity—a unity in  
 S S diversity, in which there is no need to  
 B ' W : perfectly reconcile the inevitable range  
 AB O of perspectives individuals bring to  
 the question, since this range admits  
 The term “spirituality” is understood a richer collective  
 understanding than  
 in a variety of ways by different indi- any one perspective could  
 afford.<sup>6</sup>  
 viduals and communities in wider so-  
 ciety.<sup>4</sup> The views of those unaffiliated  
 5 For a more comprehensive treat-  
 with any particular religion range from ment, see William B. Hurlbut,  
 “Science,  
 positive—if often vague—conceptions Ethics and the Human  
 Spirit” in The  
 of spirituality, to the view that spir- Oxford Handbook of Religion and  
 Science.  
 itual belief is a symptom of human 6 Indeed, a Bahá'í  
 perspective on  
 this, as on many metaphysical topics, be-  
 4 An illustrative example of this gins with the understanding that  
 the human  
 variety can be found in Sena et al.’s 2021 mind can never perfectly grasp  
 the ontol-  
 study of the concepts or definitions of ogy of anything (Gleanings 26),  
 let alone  
 spirituality used by researchers in the med- entities, concepts, realms, etc.  
 that are  
 ical field alone, in which they find, and inherently beyond embodied human  
 per-  
 attempt to categorize, some 166 different ception, or beyond the  
 human’s own onto-  
 definitions. logical station. As with models  
 of reality

Yet it is nonetheless a unity, in that it the power of the senses and  
 powers of  
 builds on certain core propositions in thought that are absent in the

plant. To use the terminology of  
 the Bahá'í writings that combine to modern science, these powers are  
 make “spirit” and “spirituality” usable emergent, appear- ing as more complex  
 organizations  
 From the outset we should distin- of matter emerge from simpler ones.<sup>7</sup>  
 guish between what might be called At each stage of progression,  
 from the lower to the higher levels, the  
 the ontology of spirit on the one hand, higher  
 and the acquisition of spiritual capac- incorporates all the inherent  
 attributes of the lower and adds new  
 ities and the expression of spirituality attributes  
 by humans on the other hand. (Promulgation 85). The lower, by  
 its  
 very nature, remains unaware of, and  
 O S even denies the reality of, the  
 powers  
 of the higher (Selections 163:2).  
 S R It would seem to follow from  
 this  
 conception that God—if we might  
 A useful starting place is ‘Abdu’l-Bahá venture to say anything  
 about the  
 discussion of the unity, and hierarchy, “Unknowable Essence”—is  
 the ulti-  
 of creation: mate Spirit, in that there is no  
 perspec-  
 tive from which One Who stands not  
 [T]he truth is that the world of ex- merely at the apex of creation but  
 ut-  
 istence is a single world, although terly beyond it (as its uttermost  
 Source)  
 its stations are manifold in accor- does not remain “higher.”  
 dance with the manifold realities  
 of things. For instance, the world S O ,  
 of mineral, plant, and animal ex- U R  
 istence is the same world. Despite  
 this, the animal world in relation “Spirit” is not only a  
 description of  
 to the world of the vegetable is a the qualities of one entity relative  
 to  
 spiritual reality and another world another, but also, according to  
 Bahá'í

and abode. (Amr va Khalq 1:202 provisional translation, qtd. in Phelps; emphasis added)

Anderson describes emergence in these terms: Spirituality is thus relative: each higher level is a spiritual reality relative to a lower level. The animal has particles, it turns out, is not to be understood in terms of a simple extrapolation of the in science, the usefulness of whatever concept we have of a transcendent reality is a good indicator of its relationship to truth. (393).

thought, an underlying, ontological

7 Nobel laureate Philip Anderson

The behavior of large and aggregates of elementary properties of a few at each level of complexity new properties appear . . .

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reality. Used in this sense of the term, instantiation we find (for instance) that ‘Abdu’l-Higgs particle, Bahá in Some Answered Questions CERN. refers to a mineral, a vegetable, an animal, and a human spirit — the human of reality spirit or “rational soul” having two and with-aspects, as will be discussed further. spirit Beyond these, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes, measurable there is a “heavenly spirit” or “spirit of conditions are faith,” through which the higher aspect appears with of the human spirit is awakened and complexity—the animated, and which itself “proceeds itself in an through the breath of the Holy Spirit,” been called “the mediator between God and His

we actually observed an of the Higgs field; i.e. a generated in an experiment at We can analogously conceive of a man “field” permeating all (purely by way of analogy, out suggesting that the human has a physical and / or ontology). When the right—when an organism the requisite level of human field instantiates individual soul—what has “the rational soul”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, creation,” which is associated with the As  
 Manifestation of God (ch. 36).8 “if a thousand  
 To understand how “spirit” as a component  
 fundamental ontological reality relates together,  
 to the mundane reality we perceive proportion,  
 through our senses, we might analogize to the concept of fields as understood interaction with  
 in physics. According to current mod- man  
 els, at the most fundamental level mat- (46:7).  
 ter is comprised of fields—such as the Higgs field—that permeate all space and time, with fundamental particles being particular instantiations of fields. Only very recently—in 2012—have underlying  
 ontological spirit and spirituality as a relative condition relate to each other,  
 8 In some contexts, the Bahá’í writings distinguish clearly between the mate- we can consider spirituality as an inher- rial and the spiritual as distinct realms of human  
 existence that are nevertheless unified as explains that in the  
 parts of one whole, with “[t]he physical revealed  
 universe [being] . . . in perfect correspon- God to  
 dence with the spiritual or divine realm” being  
 (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation 93:1). A surpassed” (Kitab-i-  
 philosophical treatment of spirit in the attributes and  
 Bahá’í writings would explore the relation- eternal in  
 ship between the various presentations of on-

Some Answered Questions 55:5).  
 ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains,  
 million years hence, the  
 elements of man are brought  
 measured out in the same  
 combined in the same manner, and subjected to the same  
 other beings, exactly the same  
 will come into existence”  
 S  
 H P  
 To explore how the ideas of  
 ent, yet latent, property of the  
 being. Bahá’u’lláh  
 human being “are potentially  
 all the attributes and names of  
 a degree that no other created  
 hath excelled or  
 Íqán 101). While these  
 names are unchanging and  
 God, and thus have an unchanging

the concept in greater detail than is necessary here. logical existence, their expressions

### What Does Spirituality Look Like?

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as spiritual qualities by human beings animals, It distinguishes humans from

is not automatic: sensible for “the animal perceives

things but cannot perceive concep-

Man is the supreme Talisman. tual realities”

(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Some

Lack of a proper education hath, Answered Questions 48:6). It is a

fac-

however, deprived him of that ulty that the individual, through

vo-

which he doth inherently pos- lition, can turn to the animal

nature

sess. . . . Regard man as a mine and so choose to descend to that

level

rich in gems of inestimable value. of being, or orient to the divine

and

Education can, alone, cause it to thus acquire the attributes

pertaining

reveal its treasures, and enable to that world. It is in that sense,

one

mankind to benefit therefrom. can surmise, that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

refers

(Bahá’u’lláh, Tablets 161–62) to the “human spirit” as

having “two

aspects”:

The attributes of God within human reality thus exist only as potential. They must be developed in order to become both But this human spirit has two aspects: one divine and one satanic—that is, it is capable of

manifest—through education and as a the greatest perfection and

the

result of the individual’s own volition greatest deficiency. Should it

ac-

(Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings ch. 77). quire virtues, it is the

noblest of all

From this perspective, William S. things; and should it acquire

vices,

Hatcher proposes a working definition it becomes the most vile. (Some

of spiritual growth as “the process of Answered Questions 36:5)

the full, adequate, proper and harmo-

nious development of one’s spiritual I would thus restate

Hatcher's defi-  
 capacities" ("Concept" 5).  
 to draw out  
 Key to this process is self-reflec-  
 tion. 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes that man's  
 full, adequate,  
 nature "is threefold: animal, human  
 self-reflective  
 and divine" (Promulgation 139:12).  
 The "human," one may conclude  
 many,  
 from the Bahá'í writings, is that "ra-  
 noble of them  
 tional faculty with which God hath  
 enjoys  
 endowed the essence of man." This  
 of the  
 rational faculty is an inextricable and  
 vir-  
 distinguishing facet of the human  
 is not  
 spirit (Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings 83:1).<sup>9</sup>  
 ('Abdu'l-Bahá,  
 Promulgation 20:2)

inition of spiritual growth  
 an implicit feature: spiritual growth  
 is "the process of the  
 proper, harmonious, and  
 The virtues of humanity are  
 but science is the most  
 all. The distinction which man  
 above and beyond the station  
 animal is due to this paramount  
 tue. It is a bestowal of God; it  
 material; it is divine.

9 This rational capacity of the hu-  
 call sci-  
 man spirit is the source of science:  
 enterprise.

It is in this sense that one can  
 ence a collective spiritual  
 enterprise.

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development of one's spiritual capaci-  
 nature of the di-  
 ties." In other words, we use the pow-  
 this process is  
 ers of the "human" spirit—including  
 myriad passages in  
 the rational power of self-reflection—  
 specifying some of  
 to acquire the "divine" spirit.  
 purpose of the  
 Spiritual growth can thus be consid-  
 Himself,"  
 ered a process of growth towards being,  
 one instance,  
 to develop one's divine capacities.<sup>10</sup>  
 While the essential ontology of the  
 truth-

What, then, is the  
 vine capacities to which  
 directed? There are  
 the Bahá'í writings  
 these capacities. "The  
 one true God in manifesting  
 Bahá'u'lláh writes in  
 is to summon all mankind to

human being is spiritual, the extent of piety and to which that spiritual essence develops—resignation and resignation and ops—or remains largely overridden by the lower animal nature that, in kindness, to up- relation to the human spirit, is material—object is al—depends on this process of growth the mantle ('Abdu'l-Bahá, Promulgation 65).<sup>11</sup> character, and to adorn him with the ornament of holy and goodly deeds. (Gleanings 137:4) quoted, Hatcher uses the terms “spiritual growth” and “spirituality” interchangeably. sense in which There is a strong sense, however, in which like—the way spirituality can be considered a condition or spiritual state one strives to attain, as reflected in a the rationali- letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi: the qualities “How to attain spirituality is, indeed, a question to which every young man and woman this is what must sooner or later try to find a satisfactory recent answer” (qtd. in Importance of Prayer no. House of 40). There need not be any contradiction, Justice in particular, it merits further of course, between viewing spirituality as a exploration. process or as a state. The thoughts, words, and actions by which a person at a given level of spiritual development can progress to a further level are the very same thoughts, ordained in the words, and actions that characterize the relationship. Therefore, con-

fulness and sincerity, to trustworthiness, to submissiveness to the to forbearance and rightness and wisdom. His to array every man with of a saintly

Yet there is also a what spirituality looks in which we must express our capacities, including both ty of the human spirit and of the divine spirit—will our time and place. Since motivates my examination of guidance of the Universal livelihood is prepared and divine creative plan. . . .

ative level of spirituality that this person reveals in man thus attains. The qualities reflected in the favors showered guidance of the Universal House of Justice lower himself discussed in the next section, for instance, wholly occu- can be considered in either light attached to this

11 “But the life of man is not so re- the greatest stricted; it is divine, eternal, not mortal and in this world” sensual. For him a spiritual existence and What Does Spirituality Look Like? (Promulgation 65:4). 83

E T ,C collections of particles but are absent

E , S in the individual particles that com- prise them. Fluidity and its reciprocal, If this is indeed the time of “the com- this emer- ing of age of the entire human race,” particles of, say, as the Bahá’í Faith asserts, it should have fluidity, be no surprise that the Revelation of these of Bahá’u’lláh not only renews, but property. updates, our concept of spirituality aspects of (Shoghi Effendi, World Order 163). We expressed indi- can expect spirituality, on the one hand, spirituality are to bear similarities to understandings individuals or concepts of the past, but also, in togeth- this age, to exhibit new characteristics. individual is en- The individual’s spirituality looks dif- understand- ferent in maturity than in adolescence

sider how base a nature it that, notwithstanding the upon him by God, he should into the animal sphere, be pied with material needs, mortal realm, imagining that happiness is to attain wealth (Promulgation 65:4). 83

collections of particles but are absent

in the individual particles that com- prise them. Fluidity and its reciprocal, viscosity, are examples of

gence: the individual a body of water do not but the body itself, composed particles, exhibits this

Similarly, while there are spirituality that can be vidually, other facets of emergent, appearing when organize themselves and work er. For instance, the dowed with the power of ing, which is a spiritual

power relative  
 or in childhood. As the capacity of the  
 individuals orga-  
 individual to express spirituality in ac-  
 investigate in  
 tion grows as the individual matures,  
 nature,  
 we can expect the same to be true of  
 property  
 humanity as a whole.<sup>13</sup>  
 individual  
 Indeed, the collective dimension  
 activity, sci-  
 of spiritual expression can be consid-  
 individual:  
 ered as another kind of “emergence.”  
 phenomenon arising  
 In nature, certain properties of matter  
 concert.  
 are emergent in that they appear in  
 individuals engage  
 in religious activity, religion itself does  
 not come from the individual: religion  
 12 See ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on “the dif-  
 arises from entire communities work-  
 ference between the perfect man and the  
 ing in concert. It is when followers of a  
 child” (Promulgation 53).  
 13 This may partially explain why  
 particular Messenger of God assemble  
 spirituality is viewed as naïve and / or  
 phenome-  
 superstitious by many, including some  
 Religion and  
 scientifically minded people. Conceptions  
 considered  
 of spirituality suited to previous stages  
 enterprises.  
 of humanity’s collective evolution may,  
 that all three  
 if they linger in the public discourse on  
 civilization-build-  
 spirituality, obscure more relevant concep-  
 Universal  
 tions. Science tends to replace outmoded  
 individual, the  
 paradigms over time; religion may need to

to the animal. When  
 nize themselves to, say,  
 concert some phenomenon of  
 this spirituality emerges as a  
 of the group. Although the  
 may engage in scientific  
 ence does not arise from the  
 it is an emergent  
 from individuals working in  
 Similarly, although  
 and work together that the  
 non of religion appears.  
 science can thus both be  
 emergent spiritual  
 We should expect, then,  
 protagonists in the  
 ing process described by the  
 House of Justice—the  
 community and the

institutions—can

learn to do the same to retain, or regain, its develop and express spirituality (28

relevance.

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December 2010). Spirituality in one of these three protagonists will look different than spirituality in another and, as each protagonist evolves over time, its spirituality will be expressed in new ignores

ways. The development of spirituality the

on the level of the institutions will be in

reflected in a new aim: “not to control premise

but to nurture and guide” (2 March interactions

2013). The development of a new level befitting a

of spirituality on the part of the community will be seen as it

Before exploring “what spirituality takes on the challenge of sustain- con-

ing an environment where the powers of individuals, who wish to exercise self-expression responsibly in accordance with the com- writings,

mon weal and the plans of institu- de-

tions, multiply in unified action. (2 March 2013)

is

thus no surprise that the Revelation

Clearly, these expressions of spiritu- intended to

ality are emergent, in the sense that the transformation

individual, no matter how advanced, society,

cannot achieve them. They require spiritualiza-

institutions and communities that are

for power throughout time. In this context, the assumption that relations among them will inevitably conform to the dictates of competition, a notion that

the extraordinary potential of

human spirit, has been set aside

favour of the more likely

that their harmonious

can foster a civilization

mature humanity. (2 March 2013)

looks like” today, a final general

sideration merits mention. Implicit

in the educational paradigm for spiritual development, and explicit in many places in the Bahá'í

is the principle that spirituality is

veloped systematically at both the

individual and collective level. It

of Bahá'u'lláh, which is

“effect a fundamental

in the whole basis of human

which will involve the

tion of mankind” (Universal House

progressing along their own paths of spiritual development. of Justice in Research Dept. Family (74), is described by Shoghi Effendi as

Spirituality appropriate to humanity's age of maturity will also be progressively expressed in the relationships between the three protagonists: "scientific in its method" (Letter High Commissioner).

At the heart of the learning process is inquiry into the nature of the relationships that bind the individual, the community, and the institutions of society—ac- Indeed, the Universal House of Justice has progressively outlined a framework for action for the global Bahá'í community, appropriate to its level of development and systematic in its approach.<sup>14</sup>

discussors on the stage of history who Scientific 14 For a more focused

have been locked in a struggle in its Method: Science, Diversity, Consultation, and Learning in Action.”

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A document prepared on behalf of the question, we can now turn to the central

Universal House of Justice explains and make it more precise: “What does that spirituality look like today, for individuals, communities and institutions?”

[w]hen efforts are carried out in a learning mode—characterized In its pivotal message of 30 December 2021, the Universal House of Justice clearly outlines the task before us, of “building a society and strategies are re-examined fore us, of “building a society that consciously pursues [the] collective purpose” set out for it by time and again. . . . The learning process, which is given direction Bahá'u'lláh—to “work for the betterment of the world through appropriate institutional arrangements, unfolds in a way and live together in concord and harmony”—and explains that this is that resembles the growth and differentiation of a living organism. work not only of this generation but of

Haphazard change is avoided, and generations to come.” In the same  
mes- continuity of action maintained. sage the Universal House of Justice  
(OSED) outlines three areas of learning  
that are

most crucial at this time:15

The systematic work of the com- ?? Learning how to raise up  
munity is a corollary of the practices vi-

that have always been at the core of brant, outward-looking com-  
the individual Bahá’í’s spiritual life, munities;

and that are reflected in other religious

?? Learning how to bring about

traditions: regular prayer, fasting, and material and spiritual progress;

immersion in the sacred writings of the Faith amongst others. At both the ?? Learning how to  
contribute to

individual and collective level, then, it the discourses that  
influence

is clear that spirituality is not acquired the direction of that  
progress.

passively. That does not mean that it cannot be an inner process, of course, In light of this mandate placed  
be-

but rather that it is acquired through fore the Bahá’í community and  
its

progressive refinement requiring ac- 15 Presumably, for the  
tive, systematic engagement of one’s duration of

faculties. the series of Plans that will

occupy the

Bahá’í community until the year 2046.

W D S Global Plans of fixed durations have  
been

L L ? set in place by the central institution of the  
Bahá’í Faith since the time of the Guardian,

Having explored a few characteristics Shoghi Effendi, and guide the  
community’s

of a Bahá’í conception of spirituality, growth as well as its  
contribution to wider

society.

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collaborators, spirituality looks like collaborate with, and they strive  
to

that set of qualities and attributes that foster fellow feeling even among

will best equip humanity to engage in these three areas of learning over the next quarter century.

As a document that not only clarifies the path before a community dedicated to progressively enacting spiritual behaviour, but reflects back to that they

community what it is already learning about and putting into practice, this letter, I propose, can itself serve as a altruism.

rich resource for answering our central reli-

question. hearts

In eleven sentences of paragraph four, the letter paints a portrait of future

“the enkindled souls being raised up the through the processes of the Plan”: can

occur. They share their beliefs They are committed to the prosperity of all, recognizing that the welfare of individuals rests in the welfare of society at large. They are loyal citizens who eschew partisanship and the contest for worldly power. Instead, they are

focused on transcending differences, harmonizing perspectives, and promoting the use of consultation for making decisions. They emphasize qualities and attitudes—such as trustworthiness, cooperation, and forbearance—that are building blocks of a stable social spiritual-

order. They champion rationality and science as essential for human expression

progress. They advocate tolerance commu-

and understanding, and with the

groups who may traditionally have been hostile to one another.

They are conscious of how the

forces of materialism are at work around them, and their eyes are wide open to the many injustices that persist in the world, yet

are equally clear sighted about the creative power of unity and humanity’s capacity for

They see the power that true

gion possesses to transform

and overcome distrust, and so, with confidence in what the

holds, they labour to cultivate

conditions in which progress

liberally with others, remaining respectful of the freedom of conscience of every soul, and they never impose their own standards on anyone. And while they would not pretend to have discovered all the answers, they are clear about what they have learned and what they still need to learn. Their efforts advance to the alternating rhythm of action and reflection; setbacks leave them unfazed. (30 December 2021 ¶ 4)

With an understanding of

ity as both inherent—in the

al—and emergent—finding

at the collective levels of the

nity and the institution—we can see

inherent oneness of humanity up-  
directives:  
permost in their minds, they view  
everyone as a potential partner to  
What Does Spirituality Look Like?

characterization of the qualities that  
spirituality  
are destined to emerge on both com-  
rational  
munity and institutional levels as the  
is clear-  
work progresses.

In this section, I explore five dimen-  
its letter  
sions of what spirituality looks like  
“en-  
today that emerge from this paragraph:  
embracing rationality, developing  
clarity of vision, acquiring particular  
rationality and  
spiritual qualities, espousing new con-  
human  
cepts of power, and working toward  
reconciliation.

?? They promote the use of con-  
sultation in exploring reality,  
E R  
developing understanding, and  
in decision-making;  
Spirituality today must fully embrace  
rationality and all its fruits, includ-  
advance to “the al-  
ing science. Throughout the Bahá’í  
action and  
writings it is emphasized that, at all  
times, religious truth must conform  
to reason, and science and religion<sup>16</sup>  
majority  
must work together. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá  
illiterate, and science  
underscores, “true science is reason  
exist. It  
and reality, and religion is essentially  
Revelation of  
reality and pure reason; therefore, the

in this paragraph two clear  
a guide to individuals engaged in the  
community-building process, and a  
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reality” (Selections 72:3),  
involves embracing fully the  
faculty and its fruits. This  
ly seen in the Universal House

Justice’s characterization, in  
dated 30 December 2021, of the  
kindled souls”:

?? They champion  
science as essential for  
progress;

?? Their efforts  
ternating rhythm of  
reflection.”

In past dispensations the  
of humanity was  
as we know it today did not  
is no surprise that the  
Bahá’u’lláh, originating

in the nine-  
 two must correspond” (Promulgation  
 emphasize uni-  
 44:8). Although the divine is a high-  
 development of  
 er spiritual power than the human or  
 an orienta-  
 rational power, in this day when the  
 reason. In one  
 sciences have become “bridges to  
 America ‘Abdu’l-  
 Bahá emphasizes,  
 16 Much could be written about  
 the relationship between spirituality and  
 in  
 religion, which today is understood from  
 human  
 many different perspectives, and in quite  
 readjust-  
 contradictory ways. For the purposes of  
 service  
 this paper, I simply assert (without trying to  
 intellectuality in  
 prove) the relationship implied by the state-  
 order that the minds of men may  
 ment written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi  
 increase in power and become  
 that “spiritual development . . . is the very  
 foundation and purpose of the Religion of  
 keener in perception, assisting  
 God” (in *Prayer and Devotional Life* 71).  
 attain its

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supremacy so that the ideal virtues  
 be given  
 may appear. (Promulgation 105:3)  
 enhance the  
 life of a community”—the Universal  
 It is clear that the embrace of ratio-  
 nality is not a characteristic of spiritual-  
 maintaining  
 ity today that is confined to the individ-  
 approach to  
 ual. Bahá’í communities as a whole are  
 (Ridván 2023). It  
 learning about emergent expressions of

teenth century, would  
 versal education, the  
 critical thinking skills, and  
 tion towards science and  
 of His talks given in  
 [W]e must arise to service  
 the world of morality, for  
 morals are in need of  
 ment. We must also render  
 to the world of  
 the intellect of man to

“increasing attention needs to  
 to . . . processes that seek to  
 House of Justice emphasizes the im-  
 portance of the community  
 a systematic and scientific  
 its own development  
 must specifically continue to

develop rationality that the isolated individual cannot achieve. These communities system- are currently applying a method to that their three areas of learning that in- the involves “an ongoing process of action, accumulated reflection, study, and consultation” gen- (Universal House of Justice, 24 July enquiry. 2013). Consultation in particular is an will inherently collective means whereby coming the rational faculty can be employed to explore material and spiritual reality, whether to make a decision or to sim- individual ply advance understanding.<sup>17</sup> rationality In laying before the worldwide Bahá’í community the multiplicity it is the of the tasks before it—tasks in which reasoned argument that contributes to a whole

17 In companion papers in this col- One laborative exploration of the harmony of individual’s ra- science and religion other authors have initiative. expanded on the role of consultation. The spiritual world, even more than See, in this issue, Andres Elvira Espinosa the physical world, is a vast world; a “‘Justly and Without Bias’: Consultation as a Technique for Mitigating Cognitive world to be explored. And just as the Biases,” and Roger Neyman and Charlotte measure of Wenninger, “Transformative Dialogue: reali-

the capacity to engage in atic learning . . . a capacity draws on insights arising from Teachings and the store of human knowledge erated through scientific As this capacity grows, much be accomplished over the decades. (Ridván 2023) There is, of course, an responsibility to embrace as well; and even in community pro- cesses such as consultation, individual’s contribution of greater than the sum of its parts. vital contributor to the tional inquiry is freedom of scientist requires a large freedom in exploring physical

A Key to Elevating Discourse” and, in  
of inqui-  
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experiment—so  
Studies, Whitney White Kazemipour,  
requires  
“Even as the Waves of One Sea: Bahá’í  
explore that  
Consultation’s Implicit Cultural Support  
Similarly,  
for the Clash of Differing Opinions” and  
freedom to  
Todd Smith, Becoming Attuned to Reality:  
(Universal  
Presuppositions and the Power of Learning  
2010 ¶  
in Action.”

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10), to explore that reality, and to ad-  
one-  
vance on their own level and at their  
in  
own pace. This reading of reality flows  
from a broader conception of rational-  
?? They are committed to the  
ity that draws on the powers of mind  
prosperity of all, recognizing  
and spirit, including reference to the  
that the welfare of individuals  
insights from both scientific and reli-  
rests in the welfare of society at  
gious understanding.  
large;  
One of the natural, inevitable and  
constructive features of individu-  
how  
al initiative is that there will arise,  
are  
in consultation, what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá  
and  
identifies as “the clash of differing  
to the  
opinions”—as opposed to the “clash  
persist in  
of egos,” which is almost always de-  
equally

ty—freedom to identify lines  
ry, to hypothesize, to  
a person on the spiritual path  
freedom of initiative to  
world and garner its fruits.  
communities require the  
“read their own reality”  
House of Justice, 28 December

?? They have the inherent  
ness of humanity uppermost  
mind;

?? They are conscious of  
the forces of materialism  
at work around them,  
their eyes are wide open  
many injustices that  
the world, yet they are

structive. It is through the “clash of creative differing opinions” that “the shining spark of truth cometh forth” (30 December 2021 ¶ 4).

D C V The faculty of vision, Bahá'u'lláh writes, is derived from the rational Spirituality requires clarity of vision. “the Although practically one’s work may be on a local level—with family, fellow-believers, colleagues, friends, neighbors, or a community—these groups in themselves are limited; that is, they are parts of the whole. A clear vision is a world-embracing vision, and is expressed in selfless service aimed at the betterment of the entire human race. Thus, the House of Justice says of the enkindled souls: “insistent self” (‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections 206:9)—the animal side of human nature—a wider perspective was lost. This has been one of the vital features of the avoided if the wider perspective of the collective enterprise of science throughout health of the entire human family—history. For a deeper discussion and analysis of the operation of this dynamic in and the long-range goal of achieving Bahá’í consultation see White Kazemipour. The unity of the entire human

race—is

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ever held in the consciousness of those obvious importance in an age in which

working at the grassroots level. our very ability to speak civilly across

lines of difference seems in many plac-

A P es to be eroding (see Wenninger and

S Q Neyman, this issue). As for trustworthi-

ness, it must characterize any religious

The demands of this period of time re- individual or community who seeks to

quire the cultivation of particular, crit- contribute to the social good.

Indeed,

ical qualities. The Universal House of religion has acquired a bad name among

Justice emphasizes specific qualities of many people of thought in the world, in

the enkindled souls: no small part because of the gross and

obvious hypocrisy of many religious

?? They emphasize qualities and leaders and religious organizations.<sup>19</sup>

attitudes—such as trustworthi- Hypocrisy is so condemned that Bahá'u'lláh admonishes in one of His  
ness, cooperation, and forbear- tablets,  
ance—that are building blocks  
of a stable social order;

Be thou of the people of hellfire,

?? They share their beliefs lib- but be not a hypocrite.

erally with others, remaining

(qtd. in Trustworthiness 38)

respectful of the freedom of

conscience of every soul, and

they never impose their own The spiritual qualities of generosity, standards on anyone; respect and detachment, reflected in

the balance struck by liberally sharing

?? While they would not pretend

one's belief while never imposing one's

to have discovered all the an-

standards on others, are equally critical

swers, they are clear about

today. The masses of humanity, the

what they have learned and

great majority of whom are religious,  
what they still need to learn.  
increasingly have nowhere to turn to  
(30 December 2021)

find inspiration and positive models.

One is reminded of Bahá'u'lláh's state-

Recalling our definition, building ment in the Book of Certitude:

on Hatcher, of spiritual growth as the

“full, adequate, proper, harmonious,

and self-reflective development of

one's spiritual capacities,” we can nev- 19 The other major cause

of this

ertheless recognize that at each partic- disrepute, namely the disunity of

sectarian

attachments that plague so many religious

ular time in history certain qualities

communities and institutions today, further

rise to the fore as being most condu-

speaks to the need for cooperation and

cive to individual and social progress. forbearance (Universal House of

Justice,

Cooperation and forbearance are of April 2002).

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What “oppression” is more griev- destined to bring about?

ous than that a soul seeking the

truth, and wishing to attain unto Like all similar questions, these can

the knowledge of God, should most practically be addressed in terms

know not where to go for it and of current needs and current directions

from whom to seek it? (Kitáb-i- to be taken. In the paragraph under

Íqán 31) study, the Universal House of Justice

makes a number of relevant observa-

tions about the “enkindled souls”:

On the one hand, the distrust among ?? They are loyal citizens

people who have become cynical about

who eschew partisanship and the

religion needs to be dispelled. On the contest for worldly power;

other hand, those who are religious

need to be shown in action what true

?? They promote the use of con-

religion is and what it can accomplish,

sultation for making decisions;

in a measure that will attract those who ?? They view everyone as a

have become disillusioned, and enable

po- tential partner to

them to work together for a common

collaborate with;

purpose. Intellectual humility is equal-

ly important in this regard: to know true that one has not discovered all the answers even as one is clear about what has been learned so far changes the nature of the invitation, from “join me” to “let us learn together.” These qualities, nurtured in individuals and communities, can foster the kind of fellow feeling that will enable diverse people to work together.

Science and religion are described by the Universal House of Justice as “two complementary systems of knowledge and practice by which human beings come to understand the world around them and through which civilization advances” (2 March 2013).

Yet, throughout history, the knowledge generated by both science and religion has also been coopted by those who wield temporal power.

Scientific discovery leads to new technologies that can be used to improve life but also to serve the ends of those who wish to exert power over others. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá described the “destructive and infernal machines. . . forces of demolition and the invention of fiery implements” of His own time as evidence that the current “civilization is conjoined with barbarism”

?? They see the power that religion possesses to hearts; ?? They labour to conditions in which can occur. (30 December 2021 ¶ 4)

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Universal House of Justice has written regarding the individual, and community, Throughout human history,

(Selections 225:6). In the twentieth century, discoveries in physics enabled the development of nuclear weapons, while advances in psychology were also weaponized into techniques of persuasion designed to channel human activity into patterns of commercial-

of  
ization (Packard).

Religion, as the historical framework for spirituality, has also generated what we might call “social technologies.” These technologies helped com-

create stable and happy families, stable and progressive communities, and well-ordered societies. But through excess of zeal, ulterior motives, and thirst for power, other technologies is

have been developed that may have individual, passed for spiritualization: forms of social control, coercion, demands for relationships

conformity, oppression of the spirit, House and the tyranny of forced catechisms “Every

and beliefs.  
well

The positive contributions of both science and religion show that each has creation” (28

the capacity to contribute to positive forms of power—to exert an influence of

on the world that changes it for the better. Yet this is not the sense in which power is often conceived. Animated by the

an often-unconscious culture of conflict and

(Karlberg, “Constructive Resilience” is an

actions among these three have been fraught with difficulties at every turn, with the individual clamouring for freedom, the institution demanding submission, and the community claiming precedence. . . . Today, in this age

transition, as humanity struggles

to attain its collective maturity, such relationships—nay, the

conception of the individual,

social institutions, and of the

munity—continue to be assailed by crises too numerous to count.

(28 December 2010)

A reconceptualization of power

central to reimagining the

community, and institution in a way that permits harmonious

between them. As the Universal

of Justice goes on to point out:

follower of Bahá’u’lláh knows

that the purpose of His Revelation is to bring into being a new

December 2010).

We need, then, a new concept

power.

The writings and guidance of the Bahá’í Faith help us understand

relationship between spirituality

power. On the one hand, there

and “Constructive Imaginary”), our spiritu- societies view power as a thing to be to

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unambiguous affirmation that al actions—from prayer to service

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study of the Revealed Word of God— give us access to sources of power that can effect real change in ourselves expressions of

and the world. At the same time, it is made equally clear that spiritual power of this kind is not a power to be used against others; coercion to advance explanation

spiritual ends is not countenanced. As spiritu-

‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains,

But in this wondrous Dispensation, the Blessed Beauty hath . . . abrogated contention and conflict, and even rejected undue insistence. He exhorted us instead to “consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship”. He ordained that we be loving friends and well-wishers of all peoples and religions, and enjoined upon us to demonstrate the highest virtues in our dealings with the kindreds of the earth. (Light 32:2)

The Bahá’í concept of the exercise becom-

of power involves empowerment—that oth- powering individuals through empha- re-

sis on the “twofold moral purpose, to “eschew . . . the develop their inherent potentialities (Universal

and to contribute to the transformation of society” (Universal House of here a

Justice, Ridván 2010); empowering

promotion of consultation, and the willingness to view everyone as a potential partner, are both

the new conception of power.

This focus on empowerment, and eschewing coercion, can be seen for example in Bahá’u’lláh’s

of how to teach, a fundamental

al activity for Bahá’ís:

Should anyone among you be incapable of grasping a certain truth, or be striving to comprehend it, show forth, when conversing with him, a spirit of extreme kindness and goodwill. Help him to see and recognize the truth, without esteeming yourself to be, in the least, superior to him, or to be possessed of greater endowments. (Gleanings 5:3)

If spirituality today looks like developing this new kind of power—em-

equally requires that we avoid

ing entangled in the pursuit of

er kind of power. Thus, spirituality

quires that the individual

contest for worldly power”

House of Justice, 30 December 2021).

I venture to suggest that we see

concrete example of the

transformation  
communities through practices such of “satanic strength”—which,  
given  
as consultation to become unified the Bahá’í conception of Satan as  
“the  
protagonists of their own progress; lower nature in man”  
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá,  
and empowering institutions through Promulgation 97:12), might be under-  
development of a culture of service stood as an individual’s  
(community’s  
and empathy, on the one hand, and of or institution’s) efforts to  
advance  
equity, justice and trustworthiness, their own selfish interests, even at  
the  
on the other hand. In this context, the expense of others—into “heavenly  
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power,” a power that is deployed for planet” (Universal House of  
Justice 26  
the betterment of all, that refuses to November 1992). Well aware of the  
overbear anyone’s freedom of con- pivotal importance of the  
principle of  
science, and is thus truly spiritual. unity, the Bahá’í community has,  
over  
the decades, worked to root out preju-  
W R dice of all forms within its own  
ranks.  
This important work is by no means  
The cultivation of spirituality in this complete and must continue; it is,  
how-  
period of time demands a more active ever, no longer sufficient.  
attempt at religious reconciliation— Religion inherently has the  
power  
both between religions and between to tame the passions of disunity,  
but  
those who are religious and those who when religion itself is divided, it  
los-  
have separated themselves from reli- es this power. Religiously motivated  
gion. In describing the enkindled souls, animosity and violence, as well as  
the  
the Universal House of Justice notes: entanglement of religion with  
divisive  
partisan politics, feed polarizations that  
?? They see the power that true threaten to tear national communities  
religion possesses to trans- apart, and thus contribute to a situa-  
form hearts and overcome dis- tion in which “the world is becoming  
trust, and so, with confidence increasingly ungovernable” (Universal

in what the future holds, they labour to cultivate the conditions in which progress can occur; ing the salutary effect of the erosion of prejudices that in the past have plagued ?? They advocate tolerance and the world, notes that, regrettably, understanding, and they strive to foster fellow feeling even [i]n contrast to the processes of among groups who may traditionally have been hostile to the rest of humanity’s social relationships, the suggestion that ?? They are focused on transcending differences and harmonizing perspectives. (30 December 2021) Just as the principle of the oneness of humanity is “the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh revolve” (Shoghi Effendi, *World Order* 42), “[d]isunity is the crux of the advancement of problems which so severely afflict the civilization. What Does Spirituality Look Like? 95

Spirituality, then, looks like embrace “striv[ing] to foster fellow feeling even of the among groups who may traditionally have been hostile to one another.” It looks Individuals, communities, and institutions can do this work at the neighborhood level—the level at which people interact on a daily basis and live their This spirituality looks like the of rationality and the infusion collective use of reason, through sultation, into community life. like the adoption of a clear vision the inherent oneness of humanity, an understanding that the welfare each depends on the welfare of all.

It daily lives—by being “focused on the qual- transcending differences, harmonizing cooperation, perspectives,” and viewing “everyone as a potential partner to collaborate with” (30 December 2021 ¶ 4). Today, it is not a sufficient expression of spirituality for the individual or community to transform only itself, striving to hold itself up as a model to be emulated. Spirituality means actively working to bring about reconciliation and transformation of one’s neighborhood, and wider society, through the daily activities in which one is engaged.

looks like the cultivation of ities of trustworthiness, forbearance, generosity and respect. It looks like the commitment to empowering others rather than gain power over them. And it looks like the resolve to focus on ing differences and working towards reconciliation. The harmony of science and religion has always been a core principle of the Bahá’í Faith. demonstrably embrace science. Is converse true? Can science be

ly receptive to spirituality?

I have here looked at only one paragraph of one letter from the Universal House of Justice. Many other such passages could be similarly explored. I believe that the foregoing clearly demonstrates that the ongoing guidance of this supreme institution of the global Bahá’í community is a rich source for understanding what spirituality looks like today, for individuals, communities, and institutions. We can

One challenge to such receptivity that science, as discussed at the outset of the paper, has largely not stood spirituality as an object of study. Religion and spirituality as social phenomena have, of course, been in the social sciences. But can sciences go beyond treating ty’s impact in the world as in the subjective belief of and groups, and consider what it

might

see in the single passage under study mean for spirituality to have a basis

elements of a lived spirituality that in “objective” ontological reality?20

should be recognizable and laudable It is to this question that I now turn.

both to people from a religious back- 20 For an insightful article ground and to those with no religious on this

background but who are committed to a see Craig, “A Lamp in the Darkness: How

moral vision for social transformation. Bahá’í Communities Can Uplift Individuals

Lost in the Darkness of Trauma.”

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S H It is not necessary for the prosecution  
S N of physics, for example, to assume that

large collections of molecules are able

Where science has previously asked to reach a state of self-organization:

what effect humans’ spiritual beliefs that is the province of biology. As a

have—on their individual lives and the physicist, one can carry on quite well

wider world—could it turn to the more without bothering with that higher lev-

fundamental question of whether hu- el of emergence. Similarly, the natural

mans have a spiritual nature, an onto- sciences as a whole—physics, chem-

logical underpinning to their being that istry and biology—can pursue their

bears a truth relationship with (at least investigation of the world of nature

some of) their spiritual beliefs? without assuming the existence of real-

As a question for science this may ities beyond the level of the biological

seem unanswerable. Science is about animal. The human body, which shares

things that can be observed and mea- in this animal nature, can be investi-

sured because they have a physical gated through these sciences, but what

ontology, not about things like “spirit” we think of as

“humanity”—the inner  
 that are supposed to have a (primarily) life and social reality of the  
 human being—requires different  
 non-physical, or supra-physical, ontol- disciplinary approaches. The very existence of  
 disciplinary ogy that our powers of observation and the measurement cannot access. social sciences, as independent  
 I argue here that spirituality can be tific disciplines, attests to the  
 inadequa- cy of biology to investigate this  
 investigated by science. If we have a reality.  
 clear sense of what spirituality looks transcendent  
 transcendent like, then we can construct different nature, then, study of this  
 transcendent theories—incorporating contrasting nature would become the province  
 of background assumptions about the on- the social sciences. Considering  
 the tological basis for this spiritual behav- materialist / reductionist  
 paradigm that at present exerts such a strong  
 paradi- gior—and generate falsifiable hypoth- grip on  
 grip on eses that can be evaluated in light of the evolution of the social  
 sciences, data. To support this claim, I first spec- this would initially require  
 consider- ify which of the sciences might be able ation that humans may have a  
 higher to do this, before turning to the way in nature. And this consideration, if  
 taken which this might be done in spite of the seriously, could find shape in the  
 for- non-physicality of spiritual reality. mulation of testable hypotheses.

T S S P B  
 A S  
 Different scientific disciplines con- Most of us, if asked to describe  
 fine themselves to the investigation how  
 of specific categories of phenomena. science works, might say something  
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 like this: in science we accumulate data, My argument, then, is that  
 the exis- tence of a transcendent  
 which serves as evidence for or against

spiritual nature formulated hypotheses. background A key criterion for a scientific hypothesis, familiar again to many, and that is that, as proposed originally by the Muslim scholar Hasan Ibn Al-Haytham and later the medieval scholar Though Robert Grosseteste, it must be falsifiable—that is, it must be formulated not, for the reason in such a way that one can demonstrate it to be wrong if, indeed, it is.<sup>21</sup> reductionist As philosopher of science Helen Longino points out, what is missing in this picture is the role of background hypotheses. beliefs or assumptions. Background assumptions invariably exist, in all the sciences, and form the link between raw data and what is accepted as evidence. presuppositions

in humans can be taken as a assumption in the social sciences produce evidence from data, this evidence can be used to or falsify well-formulated about human spiritual nature. this may at first glance circular argument, it is reason that hypotheses are always able. If humans are, as the paradigm holds, nothing but background assumptions to that will produce a better set of Before providing examples illustrate the argument, it useful to explore the in the sciences of and background assumptions—two very different things, but capable—from the perspective philosophy of science. Hugh presents a model of science as evidence, logic, and a small set of pre-

inductive proof gives to scientific truth that “evidence loses its evidential role”

curious property of being enduring, on the (Practice 112). The role of these

one hand, and relative, on the other hand. presuppositions

Some scientific theories are later shown to is perhaps the aspect of science that is be completely incorrect—as was the case least understood and least appreciated with the caloric theory of heat and the (Practice ch. 4; Brief ch. 5).

phlogiston theory of combustion—while others are shown to be approximations of a more sophisticated and encompassing presupposition is a

theory—as is the case with Newtonian reach a

mechanics and gravitation, or with equilib- yet it

rium thermodynamics which, in the twen- cannot possibly be proved. A

pre- supposition cannot be proved

tieth century, gave way to a wider theory of in

nonequilibrium thermodynamics. the ordinary sense of

marshalling

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definitive evidence because pre- Whereas this small set of

presupposi- tions is necessarily shared by all

suppositions precede and empower sci- entists as the basis for scientific

evi- evidence. But that does not neces- ity to have any meaning, background

activ- sarily mean that presuppositions are arbitrary and shaky. Rather, assumptions, in contrast, are not

are arbitrary and shaky. Rather, universal and to some extent are

presuppositions should be chosen cul- ture-dependent. Background assump-

carefully, disclosed, and then legit- tions, as stated above, are

imated. Because presuppositions inescapable

are just as necessary as evidence in science, linking data to evidence

for science to reach any conclu- as they do. Crucially, the same set

of data interpreted on the basis of

sions, a reflective account of sci- differ- ent background assumptions can lead

ence must discuss them. (Brief 73)

to different evidentiary conclusions.<sup>23</sup>

Gauch cites Caldin's useful summation of the role of presuppositions: hand, fully support the validity of these "Most scientists take for granted their presuppositions. 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirms the metaphysical assumptions, but they are reality of the world we experience: "The nonetheless necessary logically to the is illusory.

conclusions of science" (Brief 73). although the

So what are these presuppositions compared of science? As put forward by Thomas Reid and the Scottish School of

proven, and Common Sense, they are the same as Questions

the presuppositions behind "common sense," which hinge on the idea that our apprehend-senses (and the instruments that extend by

them), in aggregate, reveal to us true in-world and formation about the real world (Gauch, unveileth the

book of its own self before thine eyes and Practice 64-65, 120-23). Furthermore, revealeth that which the Pen of thy Lord, the truths and secrets of nature are susceptible to being understood through thee with

rational enquiry and the exercise of the it and will human intellect. While these presuppos-

as to sitions may seem obvious, in the history eloquent

of philosophy they have been denied by skeptics, most notably Pyrrho of Elis, out of

Sextus Empiricus, David Hume, and

sophists hold that all existence

. . . This notion is false, for

existence of things is an illusion

to the existence of God, yet in

gent world it is established,

undeniable" (Some Answered

79:1). Bahá'u'lláh further

this world can be meaningfully

ed by human senses and understood

the human mind: "Look at the

ponder a while upon it. It

scribed therein. It will acquaint

that which is within it and upon

give thee such clear explanations

make thee independent of every

expounder" (Tablets 9:13).

<sup>23</sup> Data is the raw material

which evidence is constructed.

Evidence, some of the postmodernists (Practice in turn, is used to support or refute mental constructs, conjectures, hypotheses, and ultimately laws or theories: in short, to create scientific truth. It is in the process of interpreting data—of using it to generate

22 The Bahá'í writings, on the other  
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In Science As Social Knowledge Helen support of Longino, notes that the ob- jectivity of science rests on Longino gives a number of examples the ability of the scientific community of this.24 Longino argues, however, experts of the scientific community of that background assumptions do not to identify the operating background as- sumptions and to evaluate them, undermine objectivity in science; it is as well as on its ability to assess the preserved, through a process of trans- links be- tween evidence and theory links be- formative criticism or transformative (25–143).25

I R

interrogation, within a scientific com- munity (63–82). In transformative in- S

terrogation, background assumptions are aired and examined, alternative One more feature of science needs to be mentioned: the accumulation of ways of looking at the data (i.e. through of data (things measurable) and different background assumptions) are the study of patterns and consistencies in the study explored and, ultimately, consensus that data lead science to usefully that may be obtained. Naomi Oreskes, in hypoth- esize the existence of what ‘Abdu’l- Bahá calls “intelligible” or intellectual evidence—that background assumptions play a role.

realities (Some Answered Questions 16), or what a physicist might call 24 One example she gives is an ex- periment performed by Priestey and re- ontologically mathematical realities:

peated by Lavoisier. Both performed the directly real phenomena that cannot be  
 same experiment and obtained the same observed (they are not  
 “sensible,” as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá puts it).  
 data, but each had a different background ‘Abdu’l-Bahá puts it).  
 assumption. Priestley believed in the phlo- For example, because a vast  
 range of phenomena can be understood  
 giston theory which held that combustion if we  
 resulted from the release of a combustible hypothesize that fields  
 exist—such as the Higgs field referred to  
 substance (phlogiston) from the burning above, or  
 matter into the air. Lavoisier believed that the electron field—we infer  
 that fields  
 combustion was due to combination of the exist. Yet the field cannot be directly  
 exist. Yet the field cannot be directly  
 combusting substance with a substance in observed; only the particle that instan-  
 the air (what is now known as the Oxygen theory). Each scientist saw the data as ev-  
 tiates it can be. These entities, which  
 idence for his own hypothesis about com- have a precise mathematical  
 formu-  
 bustion. Longino writes, lation, are considered in the  
 physical  
 The two thus had the same experi- 25 For a deeper analysis of  
 trans-  
 mental information but approached formative interrogation and a  
 proposed  
 it with different background beliefs. extension to transformative  
 dialogue, see  
 . . . In the context of their differing Neyman and Wenninger. For further  
 dis-  
 background beliefs and assumptions cussion of the role of diversity  
 in science,  
 different aspects of the same state of and truth-seeking more generally,  
 from a  
 affairs became evidentially signifi- Bahá’í perspective, see  
 Friberg, Smith, and  
 cant. (47–48) Espinosa.  
 100 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 33.4 2023  
 sciences to be real, and are physical. If spirituality were adopted as  
 a  
 Although “non-sensible” they are, nev- background assumption in the  
 social

ertheless, entities that inhabit the physical universe in which we live. In the sense that the Bahá'í writings conceive it—as a transcendent intellectual power and, beyond that, as a transcendent divine power, both of which the human possesses but the animal lacks—spirituality is an intelligible, and not a sensible, reality. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, while 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirms that intelligible realities such as ped- include some physical realities (Some Answered Questions 48), we can presume that the human (and higher) spirits are not physical.

then emerge out of the data could be evaluated according to these two features, to see if the assumption has Does a theory, incorporating the ground assumption of the reality ituality, not only explain the but also have the power of prediction? And just as importantly, can such a theory be used to develop gies—social technologies, agogies, or therapeutic —that, when applied, help to society forward? To see how this might work, we can consider two rival theories, one that takes spirituality as a background as- B A sumption, and the other that assumes S S (in line with the prevailing, if often implicit, scientific paradigm) that the human is simply an animal, with no spiritual nature. So far, then, we have seen that scientists interpret data through background assumptions, and that science can Turning first to explanatory pow- er, we must acknowledge that certain kinds of data that we might initially observed or measured. What would it think support the former theory are then look like for the social sciences potentially equally well explained

by

to treat spirituality as a background assumption?

26 As noted above, data can

be an-

Successful scientific theories—

alyzed through several lenses, each

rep-

those that, amongst other things, incor-

representing a different set of

background

porate effective background assump-

assumptions. Undoubtedly, over

time, a

tions—have two features:

single, perhaps broad, set of

background

1. Explanatory power (and dra-

assumptions—even a worldview—will

matically, sometimes, the ability

emerge with the potential to become a new

to explain bodies of data that in

paradigm.

the absence of the theory would

27 For example, forms of psycho-

appear to be disconnected);

analysis that account for the existence of

2. Predictive power.

the human being's spiritual reality.

See

John S. Hatcher.

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the latter. Animal emotion and be-

after meaning, which transcends

pure

havior, the current paradigm runs,

survival, assumes central

importance.

are emergent properties arising from

One would not say this about

animal

the physical world and are intimately

groups, except to the extent that

the

tied with self-interest, whether that

human observer might ascribe

“mean-

interest be of the organism itself or

ing” to them. The question then

be-

of its genetic line. Animals can sacri-

comes which theory—the one that

fice themselves in order to reproduce;

incorporates a background

assumption

of spiritual reality, or its

they can sacrifice themselves for their

explains this data. Are these

lack—better

young; they can sacrifice for the hive,

human traits truly transcendent,

unique

the family, the herd, the pride. In some

they merely extensions of animal

or are

circles the case has been made that

tion and behavior?

emo-

they sacrifice themselves so that their

Here it may seem that the

genes survive—what George Wald has

spirituality

called “vicarious selection” (61). Thus, theory is better supported:

the human

the fact that a human parent sacrific- is exhibiting intellectual and emotional

es her life for her child, for example, capacities that categorically transcend

does not necessarily support the “spir- the animal.<sup>28</sup> That is certainly the inter-

ituality” theory more strongly than its pretation confirmed in the Bahá’í writ-

alternative. ings, as when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

notes that

Data could, however, be generated “the animal perceives sensible things

showing that humans have the ability but cannot perceive conceptual reali-

to acquire loyalty to abstract entities ties” (Some Answered Questions 48:6),

far above any level of self-interest or giving as an example the ability of the

“gene-interest” and to sacrifice for earth-bound human to extrapolate from

such abstract concepts as truth, love, observation the non-observable fact

justice, humanity, and the sacred. that the earth is spherical (48:6–7).

Humans have the capacity to treat all However, even a scientist who fellow humans with kindness and love, agrees that this is a difference in kind,

no matter how they are treated in re- 28 Note that, given the turn; to consider all life itself as some- current re-

thing sacred. They have the power to ductionist / materialist paradigm that rules

conceptualize a world far above the both the physical and the social sciences,

world of the senses and to gain deep we can expect even this statement to be

reverence for that world. One of the controversial. There would thus be great

distinguishing characteristics of human value in research aimed at openly consider-

societies, according to the anthropolo- ing this question—asking whether human

gist, is not so much that they are great intellect, capacities, societies, and civiliza-

and civiliza-

at surviving (which they are, of course),  
counterparts  
but that being to a great extent masters  
survey  
of their environment, their seeking  
perspective,  
see Filson.

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and not in degree, between the hu-  
answer  
man and the animal might challenge  
feature  
'Abdu'l-Bahá's conclusion that "man  
scientific theories—their  
is endowed with a power of discovery  
power  
that distinguishes him from the animal,  
and this power is none but the human  
hypotheti-  
spirit" (Some Answered Questions  
statement  
48:7, emphasis added). In terms of the  
inherent and the emergent, the scien-  
tist could argue that animal intellect  
knowledge  
and emotion are emergent phenomena  
concealed a  
arising out of collections of extremely  
applied,  
large numbers of elements that inter-  
whol-  
act in very complex ways. When the  
knowledge,  
elements decompose, the animal, and  
from  
the qualities it manifests, disappears.  
greatly aid  
He might say that the same is true with  
Whatever de-  
regard to the human, regarding the hu-  
courage.  
man mind as simply a higher order of  
emergent phenomenon transcending  
animal intelligence.<sup>29</sup>  
appear to be

It might seem that we are at an

tion differ from their animal  
in degree or in kind. For a recent  
of this question from a Bahá'í

sliding into metaphysics? To

this, we can turn to the second

of successful

predictive power, including the

to generate new technologies.

As an example of such a

cal technology, consider this

of Bahá'u'lláh:

In the treasuries of the

of God there lieth

knowledge which, when

will largely, though not

ly, eliminate fear. This

however, should be taught

childhood, as it will

in its elimination.

creaseth fear increaseth

(Epistle 32)

This would, on its face,

a knowledge that could be

discovered  
 impasse between the view of unique  
 technology  
 human attributes as emergent phys-  
 Baha'u'llah's prediction  
 ical phenomena and, say, the Bahá'í  
 and its future  
 view that the human soul is a single,  
 towards  
 non-physical entity, and that the powers  
 the truth of  
 of the intellect and of the divine in the  
 man is  
 individual are, therefore, inherent rath-  
 development  
 er than emergent. How could the social  
 the pre-  
 sciences decide between these para-  
 that human  
 digms while remaining sciences, that is,  
 spiritual  
 employing methods that put them firm-  
 assumption that  
 ly in the camp of science rather than  
 would  
 evolve into a new paradigm.

29 Terrence Deacon takes this  
 stance. “Biologically we are just another  
 ape; mentally we are a whole new phylum  
 of organism” (Goodenough and Deacon  
 862). Deacon, who calls himself “a reli-  
 the accu-  
 gious non-theist” (865), takes a strict emer-  
 research,  
 gentist view of this phenomenon.

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to effect this paradigm shift, we can  
 working  
 look to a couple of available examples  
 of the kind of scientific investigations  
 that could contribute to this.  
 on

In 2018, Science published a lengthy  
 article on resilience. One of its sections  
 older  
 presents a trio of studies that merged

by science and applied as a  
 of that science.  
 regarding this knowledge  
 discovery would contribute  
 proof—scientific proof—of  
 the background assumption that  
 a spiritual being. With the  
 of more technologies, based on  
 dictive power of the theory  
 beings have a transcendent  
 nature, the background  
 man has such a spiritual nature

T

B

A

While it would take time, and  
 mulation of a robust body of

church, and only then began

together to rebuild their houses.

A number of factors were iden-  
 tified as having a negative effect

recovery, among them the amount  
 of time spent in shelters. Being

than fifty or disabled were also

strong in Katrina@10, a long-term study case of looking at resilience in people who lost their homes in New Orleans because of Hurricane Katrina. The goal of the study is ambitious: “to build a crystal ball that uses a few characteristics to predict disaster recovery in the long term,” with one possible result being to “help policymakers and disaster recovery programs pick out especially vulnerable groups” and “even steer them toward interventions that do the most good”—i.e. to develop a technology to increase resilience (Servick). The study found that among the pre-storm predictors of resilience, “psychological strength”—which included religiosity and perceived ability to respond to stressors—was the primary factor, with household income over \$20,000 a close second. In general, religiosity was a factor in recovery, both among communities who returned to their old homes and rebuilt, and among those who rebuilt their lives elsewhere. materialistic

negative indicators. But in the Vietnamese community, internal cohesion coupled with their helped motivate them to return to old homes quickly, reducing the negative effect of spending a long time in shelters. Presumably, this internal cohesion—which one say was closely tied to the ty’s religiosity—also the negative factors of age ity. In general, as one might was a combination of inner and factors that contributed to, or detracted from, the ability to recover. Given this kind of data, that religious affiliation was of greater resilience,<sup>30</sup> it would be possible for social science researchers to formulate theories, and that take spiritual reality as a ground assumption, and then to evaluate their predictive power.

30 Note that within a

One survivor in particular, who seemed religious to have built a better life than the one correlated with she had before the hurricane, reported that some ed that she had “developed a deeper religiosity and relationship with God.” One group, research an immigrant Vietnamese community this possibility; I assume for the purposes of this discussion a data set that shows that almost immediately and began to re-religious affiliation was in fact causally build. They started by rebuilding their connected to resilience.

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One could, for example, adopt as a background assumption that humans are spiritual beings, in the sense that (a) we have a transcendent intellect, and (b) we can acquire divine attributes. This could be accompanied by the background assumptions that religion, to the degree that it has remained faithful to the unifying principles of its spiritual foundational scriptures, meaningfully reflects and nurtures the divine attributes humans possess, and in so doing contributes to resilience.<sup>31</sup> One could simultaneously generate theories and hypotheses consistent with a materialist set of background towards is, religion itself has evolved as a beneficial adaptation in humans, and 2. Human beings have been made to benefit from religion through the operation of selection, not through the of a Creator or through interaction with an underlying reality. This is a stance often taken evolutionary psychology, “a theory about the origins of the human mind. It assumes that all human like that of animals, is directed

assumptions. These theories could ac-  
evolu-  
knowledge that religion is a cause of  
Within this  
resilience, but not conclude that reli-  
evolutionari-  
gion's beliefs are true. Here the back-  
accurate in  
ground assumptions could include the  
following:

1. Human beings have evolved in  
certain ways due to the beliefs  
and practices of religion—that  
on which principles of social  
co-operation can be firmly con-  
31 These background assumptions  
are made explicit in the Bahá'í writings  
arguing for the reality of religious  
and guidance. For instance, the Universal  
belief as some kind of transcendent  
House of Justice writes that  
truth, only the utility of the belief  
[r]eligion, as we are all aware, reaches  
to the roots of motivation. When it has  
been faithful to the spirit and example  
of the transcendent Figures who gave  
the world its great belief systems, it  
has awakened in whole populations  
capacities to love, to forgive, to cre-  
ate, to dare greatly, to overcome prej-  
udice, to sacrifice for the common  
good and to discipline the impulses of  
background  
animal instinct. (April 2002)

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assumption to create evidence—in  
reality  
this case, evidence for the validity of  
survival.  
the idea that man is an animal, and all  
human behavior is rooted in the evolu-  
ability to  
tionary struggle for survival. The hy-  
future. It  
potheses formulated from the evidence  
coincidence

competitive advantage in the  
tionary struggle of life.”

paradigm, religion can be

ly adaptive without being

its description of reality:

Sociobiologist E.O. Wilson sees  
religious belief in particular as  
providing a sense of 'sacredness'

structed. . . . Yet Wilson is not

in benefiting the individual and  
sustaining social unity. Indeed,  
Wilson claims that morality has no  
other demonstrable function than  
to keep human genetic material  
intact. (Hurlbut 874)

Here we see the operation of  
Longino's model. The data is fil-  
tered through a particular

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and that man has a transcendent

should be superfluous to our

Evolution occurs in response to im-  
mediate conditions; it has no

see into, or to prepare for, the

would be an extraordinary

arising from data as filtered through this particular background assumption significant factor in helping us advance into a new state, or society, totally different from the one we came out of. If al reality have explanatory power. But in fact prove to be the case, it would do they have predictive power? support the non-materialist paradigm, in which the existence of spiritual re-nature” governing “all population behavior,” as noted by physicist Marvin Chester, is that “the effect on the environment of a population’s success is to alter that environment in a way that opposes the success” (Populations 1). Bahá’í writings. Bahá’u’lláh The developing climate crisis, which predicts emphatically: “These fruitless strifes, threatens human civilization, can be seen as a dramatic illustration of this ruinous wars shall pass away, and the “overriding principle.” The hypotheses ‘Most Great Peace’ shall of evolutionary psychology would predict, if anything, that our civilization, operation of in God Passes By 194)—a Peace established “by the direct which has carried our (animal) species to an unprecedented and “unnatural” the laws and principles revealed by Bahá’u’lláh” (from a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi qtd. in state of success, will suffer collapse. Peace 64). Further, the arrival of this The human race, greatly reduced in numbers, may revert to a tribal stage, Peace . . . for which from age to age with religion (which helped bring the sacred scriptures of mankind

have about this crisis) most likely returning constantly held the promise” would to those forms that served the interests validate the predictive power of reli- of tribal society so well in the past. gion itself (Promise of World Peace 1). Conversely, if our civilization survives, So here we have two clearly dif- it will be through the (unpredictable) ferent sets of predictions, stemming emergence of new capabilities that are from theories incorporating different not connected to the religious beliefs background assumptions. On the one that helped us in our evolutionary past. hand, the prediction that if humanity Specifically, beliefs that there is a God is to resolve the crises currently facing

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it, then religion—having arisen as an development of the Bahá’í community evolutionarily selected response to con- in Iran, both materially and spiritually, ditions in our distant past—will have despite severe clerical and governmen- tal opposition since the birth little role to play. On the other hand, of the the prediction that only with religion— Bahá’í Faith in the mid-nineteenth cen- tury. The document Century of Light specifically the eternal principles of religion, and full embrace of the reality notes that the immediate agent of this transformation in the early of the divine—can humanity bring civ- twentieth century was none other than ilization back into moderation. To say century was none other than ‘Abdu’l- Bahá. Though confined to that only with religion can we do this physically distant from the ‘Akka and Bahá’í community, He sent is not to say that religion alone can do Persian Tablets” (letters) through it—it must be religion in harmony with Persian believers were revived “a flood of science. The fruit of this happy union which “the will be an ever-advancing civilization

and characterized by both material and communications spiritual prosperity. This, then, is the spiritual sustenance prediction we can make from hypothesis leadership in eses derived from evidence arrived at turmoil by filtering the data through the background assumption that God, and hence land.” These spirituality, is real and that the essential smallest vil- purpose of life is not to propagate one’s responded to genes, but to develop one’s spiritual capacities, and, in so doing, contribute to an “ever-advancing civilization.” assurance”

While it would be foolhardy for proponents of either theory to claim, at this early stage and with humanity’s future path seemingly still in question, that future, with the evidence conclusively proves them dispassion- right, there are emerging examples we presently can look at as support for the prediction un- that religion can act as a remedy for the prima- crises facing our societies—that it can, mi- for instance, contribute to a communi- the ty’s resilience in the face of these cri- achieved ses, and empower it to contribute to the after day, advancement of civilization at the local or national level. endless-

heartened.” These “provided not only the nance they needed, but finding their way through the that was undermining the order of things in their letters, “reaching even the lages across the country, the appeals and questions of individual believers, bringing ance, encouragement and

(8). Century of Light concludes this section with this observation: Social historians of the a perspective far more ate and universal than is possible, and benefiting from impeded access to all of the ry documentation, will study nutely the transformation that Master [‘Abdu’l-Bahá] in these early years. Day month after month, from a distant exile where He was

One of the most remarkable stories of resilience in the modern period is the ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

ly harried by the host of enemies surrounding Him,

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was able not only to stimulate the expansion of the Persian Bahá’í (Karlberg, community, but to shape its consciousness and collective life.

to social change under conditions of violent oppression.

“Constructive Resilience” 1)

The result was the emergence of a culture, however localized, that their

In the face of the fiercest opposition they have steadfastly kept to

was unlike anything humanity had ever known. Our century, with all beliefs,

fundamental principles by maintaining the integrity of their faith and

its upheavals and its grandiloquent claims to create a new order, has no comparable example of the sys-

on the one hand, and continuing to strive, as much as was in their power, to work for the welfare of their

nation thematic application of the powers other

and their fellow-citizens, on the

of a single Mind to the building of a distinctive and successful com-

hand. The community’s capacity to achieve these things in the face of

such munity that saw its ultimate sphere of work as the globe itself. (10) teachings,

circumstances supports the argument that their religious faith and

far from merely providing some gen-

There are similarly a number of remarkable instances of resilience within the global Bahá’í community in the dynam-

eral sense of social cohesion within the community, allow them to work in ways that reflect real spiritual

postwar period that have yet to be fully power.

ics, and to access real spiritual

studied. The Bahá’í community of Iran lens of

Recent scholarship using the

after the Islamic Revolution provides study the

“constructive resilience” to

one outstanding example. A steady com-

response of the Iranian Bahá’í

stream of letters from the Universal to

munity to oppression points the way

House of Justice has helped sustain that

productive future research.<sup>32</sup>

beleaguered community against the onslaught of a vicious foe determined be

What about Bahá’í communities elsewhere? One story that remains to

to exterminate it. Century of Light Bahá'í com-  
notes that early on, after the Islamic Revolution, it was the Bahá'ís, rather than their oppressors, who “quickly set government, the terms of the encounter” (119). human rights violations, and deep divisions Against the backdrop of dramatic virtual- struggles for social change in the obtaining twentieth century, characterized by non-violent opposition and civil disobedience, the Bahá'í community of Iran has pursued a distinctively non-adversarial approach  
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independence in 1965. Against this world, backdrop, the Bahá'í community in principles suit- the DRC has emerged, grown, and maturity flourished, showing not only remarkable resilience but also a remarkable for internal cohesion and outwardly-fo- and- and- cused spirit of tolerance and inclusive- and- ness that stand in stark contrast to the and problems facing the nation to which it rise belongs. The Bahá'í community of the a new DRC has, in fact, risen to become one (1 of the foremost Bahá'í communities in the world. Critical to its success has been the continual guidance Bahá'ís told in detail is that of the munity of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), a country that seen abusive totalitarian civil war, corruption, serious due to ethnic hostilities, for ly its entire existence since  
32 See, for example, Michael Karlberg's articles  
Resilience: The Bahá'í Response to Oppression” and “The Constructive Imaginary.”

dedicated to bettering the Bahá'ís bring the ed to humanity's age of to bear on the conditions of the world's peoples. They strive the transformation of the inner outer realities of human life, for the cultivation of spiritual social conditions that will give to a new kind of people and society founded on unity. . . .  
November 2022)  
It is a testament to the

Congolese in general, and the Congolese Bahá'í success in living community in particular, has received demonstrating from the Universal House of Justice, directing them always to be cognizant chosen of their spiritual capacities and diligent House of in their continued cultivation of those complet- qualities. ed in 2023 (Bahá'í News).

A recent letter from the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the DRC acknowledges that “alas, your both nation has time and again suffered from Universal House conflict among some of its peoples... to the [Y]ou are, of course, not immune to the forces that generate and drive conflict,” and a state of affairs that demands “vigi- what their lance by all the believers in ensuring their that divisions, especially those related did not to ethnicity, do not take root in your such community.” The letter goes on to say, very limited effect, at best. Clearly these are The mission of the Bahá'ís is indeed exist to learn to apply the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh in their individ- systemat- ual and collective lives and in technologies the life of their society. Through well-ordered efforts and in collab- both

Bahá'í community's up to this mandate—to in practice “what spirituality like”—that their country was as the site of the first national House of Worship in the Bahá'í world, In these two brief of Iran and of the DRC—we see ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and the of Justice basing their appeals community on an unshakeable belief that humans are spiritual beings have the capacity, no matter external circumstances, to develop spiritual qualities. If humanity have this capacity, then messages as those above could have only a capacities that, if they do in humanity, can be discovered and studied by the sciences, and ically developed through arising from those discoveries. In summary, scientific truth is

oration with many others who are  
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for the moment, adopt a background  
its  
assumption that man has a spiritual  
nature. Filtering the data concerning  
lev-  
the rise and resilience of the Bahá'í  
community  
communities of Iran and the Congo  
through that background assumption,  
the  
one obtains explanatory evidence  
supporting a hypothesis that humans  
the  
have a spiritual nature as outlined in  
the Bahá'í writings. That hypothe-  
institution,  
sis also allows us to predict that once  
Indeed,  
the Bahá'í community of Iran is freed  
Faith wrote  
from the egregious restrictions placed  
on it by Iran's current government, the  
Bahá'í community will, in the words  
has  
of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "contribute in mak-  
whatever  
ing of the land of Iran the envy and  
admiration of the peoples and nations  
in the  
of the world" (qtd. in Shoghi Effendi,  
move-  
Bahá'í Administration 173). Similarly,  
pro-  
we can predict that the people of the  
Bahá'u'lláh, be  
Democratic Republic of the Congo  
will be able to overcome the "divisions  
related to ethnicity" that so severely  
afflict their country, with the Bahá'í  
an argu-  
community becoming a model and  
in-  
playing a significant role in helping its  
science—specifically the

explanatory and predictive. Let us,  
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human history. In the evolution of  
conceptual understanding and of its  
expression of spirituality at the  
els of the individual, the  
and the institutions, the worldwide  
Bahá'í community is blessed by  
ongoing program of learning of the  
International Teaching Centre and  
constant stream of guidance coming  
from its supreme governing  
the Universal House of Justice.  
the Guardian of the Bahá'í  
in the 1930s that  
the machinery of the Cause  
been so fashioned, that  
is deemed necessary to incorpo-  
rate into it in order to keep it  
forefront of all progressive  
ments, can, according to the  
visions made by  
safely embodied therein. (World  
Order 22–23)  
Finally, I have presented  
ment that human spirituality can be  
vestigated by

nation overcome these divisions. Here, social sciences—by examining data then, we have both explanation and in light of the background assumption

prediction that, in concert, can provide that man is a spiritual being, and from

proof of the hypothesis. the evidence derived from filtering data

through that background assumption,

C forming testable hypotheses.

Over the next twenty-five years the

In this paper I have examined some Bahá'í worldwide community will be

of the features and characteristics of focusing on “the release of the soci-

spirituality, and have presented, by ety-building powers of the Faith in ev-

examining a particular passage from er-greater measures” (Universal House

a recent letter of the Universal House of Justice, 30 December 2021 ¶ 3).

As

of Justice, an overview of what spiri- Bahá'u'lláh declared to

British orien-

tuality would look like at this point in talist E.G. Browne, “We desire but the

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good of the world and the happiness Principle Governing Popu- of the nations (qtd. in Shoghi Effendi, lations.” Acta

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Advent 37). This good and this happi- 289–302, 2012.

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