

“Every soul may find sanctuary...”

A Series on Queerness and the Divine Plan

Introduction

Summary

Since its inception in the mid-19th century, the Bahá'í Faith has developed in a way that has distinguished it from other religious traditions. Since the leadership of Bahá'u'lláh's eldest child and successor, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the community has been guided by a successive series of plans based on and derived from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's *Tablets of the Divine Plan*. These Plans are usually launched in groups or series, with Bahá'í history as a whole marked by Epochs, each characterizing a particular set of cultural and societal developments regarding the growth of the Cause. The series of Plans that has most recently ended had as its aim the development of a Framework for Action, while the aim of the next series, launched in Ridván 2022, is the “release of the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures” (UHJ, 30 December 2021).

In many ways, the expression of the Bahá'í Faith through individual, community and institutional life is unique compared to many other religions and cultures. It has been a mere 177 years since the Declaration of the Báb, which Bahá'ís see as the day the Cause began, and in that time, the Bahá'ís have grown and refined a diverse, active, widespread, modern (and post-modern) movement, the principles and goals of which extend beyond those who consider themselves Bahá'ís. The purpose of this article, however, is not to go through the statistics and achievements of the Bahá'í Community, as those are well recorded. Instead, we will explore the most recent stage of its development through a Queer lens and put forward a few humble suggestions on how this new, mature state of the community can be harnessed for improving the lives of Queer people.

The current Plans that guide the development of the global Bahá'í community derive their origins from the Divine Plan, revealed to the Bahá'í world by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His *Tablets of the Divine Plan*. These Tablets taught, encouraged, and fostered the fledgling global Bahá'í community to: (1) continue to look beyond its confines to ensure the spread of the Faith to every population and location on the planet without coercion or prejudice (2) directly teach the Faith on an individual level (3) emphasize

the important responsibility of the American and Canadian believers in executing the Divine Plan.

Following His passing, the administration of the Faith was guided by Shoghi Effendi, appointed as the Guardian in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament. He directed the evolution and growth of the Bahá'í world through a series of detailed global Plans. These plans mainly focussed on: (1) developing the capacity to directly teach and spread the Faith (2) opening up new territories and populations through pioneering and community formation and (3) developing Bahá'í Institutions and the Administration.

After the passing of the Guardian and the completion of the Ten Year Crusade (1953-1963), the Bahá'í community elected the first Universal House of Justice through a unique democratic process. This institution's conceptual origins date back to the time of Bahá'u'lláh, and its eventual structure developed during the ministries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian. It is under this institution that the Bahá'í world is currently guided, and under whose leadership this next stage in the community's advancement is held. The House of Justice has continued the format of launching global plans of various durations. Each Plan has its own characteristics and goal, which manifest differently across the planet. Between 1964 and 2022, there have been 11 Plans, spread over three Epochs, which unite the Plans within them under common themes or purposes. The last series of Plans, which began in the year 2000, lasted 21 years and had among its main goals the substantial advancement of the process of entry by troops, specifically by utilizing the then newly developed Ruhi Institute. The aim of this series of Plans was the development of a Framework for Action, which is now the foundation for this next series of Plans beginning in Riqván 2022.

This next Epoch, which started with the One Year Plan in 2021, and which goes into full swing with the Nine Year Plan launching in Riqván 2022, builds on the immense learning and successes of the past 21 years and has as its singular aim the "release of the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures" (UHJ, 30 December 2021). Although always of concern, the themes, topics, and issues of Queerness and the Bahá'í Cause that we explore through "A Single Heart" are particularly poignant when done so in the context of this aim. It is with this in mind that we believe an exploration of a selection of themes and paragraphs from the 30 December 2021 message of the House of Justice, describing the Nine Year Plan and the progress made to date, will be extremely useful for those wishing to keep Queer topics and issues within the scope of their community's advancement and their own lives.

Reference

Universal House of Justice. Universal House of Justice to the Continental Boards of Counsellors, Haifa, Israel, December 30, 2021. www.bahai.org/library/authoritative-texts/the-universal-house-of-justice/messages/20211230_001/1#75852447