

<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 Resumen arguments presented, and their input re- El concepto de espiritualidad garding the overall flow of the paper. To 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 over the past twenty-five years.² matemáticas y la física. Sin embargo, po- “Spirit” and “spirituality” do not dríamos lograr un entendimiento de este have rigorous, agreed upon 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
 “plane”—elements
 la espiritualidad en tiempos actuales, a me-
 branch of
 dida que la Comunidad Bahá’í prosigue su
 labeled as
 labor de crear comunidades vibrantes. En-
 “undefined terms.” In
 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”
 como un asunto central a la naturaleza hu-
 stubbornly resist definition,
 and have
 continuously been revisited by
 mana, argumentando que ellas pueden pro-
 scien-
 ductivamente adoptar la realidad espiritual
 tists and philosophers of science (see,
 como un supuesto, cuya validez puede en-
 for example, Jammer, Sarracino).³
 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 Bahá'í community attempts to act out the functioning of Bahá'í institutions.

Relying on guidance from the central was Ernst Mach who developed the

is particularly useful for our question,

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

proceeds with ontological questions about spirit and spirituality. There is

an intention to do this with great rigor;

is simply to suggest a few

parameters by which we can understand

about these concepts to ground the more practical question.

Second, it looks to recent

guidance from the Universal House of

Justice, specifically a paragraph from the

December 2021 letter outlining the qualities and characteristics of

kindled souls being raised up

through the processes” (¶ 4) of the

series of Bahá'í plans for

Sarracino the advancement of communities, as a source for

what the spirituality the

community attempts to act out

the institution of the Bahá'í Faith

is particularly useful for our question,

cause the Universal House of

Justice's 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,⁵
 “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.⁶
 viduals and communities in wider so-
 ciety.⁴ 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.⁷
 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

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

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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 of spiritual growth as “the process of the full, adequate, proper and harmonious development of one’s spiritual it becomes the most vile. (Some Answered Questions 36:5)

of spiritual growth as “the process of the full, adequate, proper and harmonious 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).⁹
 ('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.¹⁰
 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
piety and
to which that spiritual essence devel-
resignation and
ops—or remains largely overridden
Will of God,
by the lower animal nature that, in
kindliness, to up-
relation to the human spirit, is materi-
object is
al—depends on this process of growth
the mantle
(‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Promulgation 65).¹¹
character, and to adorn
him with the ornament of holy and
10 In section of his paper I have
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 ques-
be specific to
tion 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 rel-
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- mortal realm, imagining that the greatest stricted; it is divine, eternal, not mortal and happiness is to attain wealth in this world” sensual. For him a spiritual existence and (Promulgation 65:4).
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E T ,C collections of particles but are absent

E , S in the individual particles that com- prise them. Fluidity and its reciprocal, viscosity, are examples of If this is indeed the time of “the com- this emer- gence: the individual ing of age of the entire human race,” particles of, say, a body of water do not as the Bahá’í Faith asserts, it should have fluidity, but the body itself, composed be no surprise that the Revelation of these particles, exhibits this of Bahá’u’lláh not only renews, but property. Similarly, while there are updates, our concept of spirituality aspects of spirituality that can be (Shoghi Effendi, World Order 163). We expressed indi- vidually, other facets of can expect spirituality, on the one hand, spirituality are emergent, appearing when spirituality are individuals or concepts of the past, but also, in organize themselves and work togeth- er. For instance, the this age, to exhibit new characteristics. individual is en- dowed with the power of The individual’s spirituality looks dif- ferent in maturity than in adolescence 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.¹³
 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 spir- itual 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.¹⁴
 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- discussion see
 14 For a more focused
 Scientific Stephen Friberg, "Revelation as
 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
 by constant action, reflection, December 2021, the Universal House
 consultation, and study—visions of Justice clearly outlines the
 task before us, of "building a society
 and strategies are re-examined that consciously pursues [the] collective
 that continue and again. . . . The learning purpose" set out for it by
 process, which is given direction Bahá'u'lláh—to
 through appropriate institutional "work for the betterment of the
 world and live together in concord and
 arrangements, unfolds in a way 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 ?? Learning how to
the Faith amongst others. At both the 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 In light of this mandate placed
cannot be an inner process, of course, 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.

of
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 religion¹⁶
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

must specifically continue 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

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.¹⁷ 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 Bahá’í consultation see White Kazemipour. The continual “clash of opinions” agent and guide for true “Keeness of cidates, “is due to keeness of (Tablets 4:7). Hence, clarity is a crucial adjunct to embrace rational. Historically, many prises that had sound beginnings potentially promising outcomes their way because, partly through row focus and partly through tions arising from the 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 places to be eroding (see Wenninger and S Q Neyman, this issue). As for trustworthiness, it must characterize any religious individual or community who seeks The demands of this period of time require the cultivation of particular, critical 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.¹⁹ attitudes—such as trustworthiness, cooperation, and forbearance—that are building blocks of a stable social order; Hypocrisy is so condemned that Bahá'u'lláh admonishes in one of His tablets, Be thou of the people of hellfire, ?? They share their beliefs liberally with others, remaining but be not a hypocrite. (qtd. in Trustworthiness 38) respectful of the freedom of conscience of every soul, and they never impose their own standards on anyone; The spiritual qualities of generosity, respect and detachment, reflected in the balance struck by liberally sharing ?? While they would not pretend one's belief while never imposing one's standards on others, are equally critical to have discovered all the answers, 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

House of Justice goes on to point out:

Every follower of Bahá’u’lláh knows

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

creation” (28

December 2010). We need, then, a new concept

of

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

the relationship between spirituality

and 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-

powering ourselves and others—then it 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 to contribute its vital role to 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 of each depends on the welfare of all.

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

I have here looked at only one para- is graph of one letter from the Universal outset House of Justice. Many other such under- passages could be similarly explored. study. I believe that the foregoing clearly phe- demonstrates that the ongoing guid- studied ance of this supreme institution of these the global Bahá’í community is a rich spirituali- source for understanding what spiritu- originating ality looks like today, for individuals, individuals communities, and institutions. We can

looks like the cultivation of ities of trustworthiness, forbearance, generosity and It looks like the commitment to em- powering 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 gion has always been a core of the Bahá’í Faith. demonstrably embrace science. Is converse true? Can science be

One challenge to such receptivity that science, as discussed at the of the paper, has largely not stood spirituality as an object of Religion and spirituality as social nomena 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 Bahá’í Communities Can Uplift Individuals Lost in the Darkness of Trauma.” 96 The Journal of Bahá’í Studies 33.4 2023

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 physicist, one can carry on have—on their individual lives and the quite well physicist, one can carry on wider world—could it turn to the more without bothering with that higher level of emergence. Similarly, the fundamental question of whether hu- el of emergence. Similarly, the natural sciences as a whole—physics, mans have a spiritual nature, an onto- sciences as a whole—physics, chem- istry and biology—can pursue logical underpinning to their being that istry and biology—can pursue their investigation of the world of bears a truth relationship with (at least nature without assuming the existence of some of) their spiritual beliefs? without assuming the existence of real- ities beyond the level of the biological seem unanswerable. Science is about animal. The human body, which shares in this animal nature, can be things that can be observed and mea- in this animal nature, can be investi- gated through these sciences, but- sured because they have a physical what we think of as 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. If humans do possess a
 clear sense of what spirituality looks transcendent nature, then, study of this
 transcendent like, then we can construct different nature would become the province
 transcendent theories—incorporating contrasting of
 of background assumptions about the on- the social sciences. Considering
 the theological 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 the evolution of the social
 eses that can be evaluated in light of sciences,
 data. To support this claim, I first spec- this would initially require
 consider- ation that humans may have a
 ify which of the sciences might be able higher
 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 science works, might say something
 how
 of specific categories of phenomena.
 What Does Spirituality Look Like? 97
 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 Robert Grosseteste, it must be falsifiable—that is, it must be formulated in such a way that one can demonstrate it to be wrong if, indeed, it is.²¹ 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 son 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

21 This has led some to claim that science can never prove anything, but both in- only show things to be false. This notion of the calls into question the nature of inductive proof, which is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that this feature of set of pre-

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

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

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.²³

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 information 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 presuppositions 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).

²³ 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 to identify the operating background assumptions do not background as- sumptions and to evaluate them, undermine objectivity in science; it is as well preserved, through a process of trans- links be- as on its ability to assess the formative criticism or transformative tween evidence and theory (25–143).25

interrogation, within a scientific com- I R munity (63–82). In transformative in- S terrogation, background assumptions are aired and examined, alternative needs to be mentioned: the accumulation of ways of looking at the data (i.e. through different background assumptions) are the study of patterns and consistencies in explored and, ultimately, consensus that data lead science to usefully 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. To see how this might work, we can consider two rival theories, one that takes spirituality as a background assumption, and the other that (in line with the prevailing, if often implicit, scientific paradigm) that the human is simply an animal, with no spiritual nature. Turning first to explanatory power, we must acknowledge that certain kinds of data that we might initially observed or measured. What would they 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.²⁸ That is certainly the inter-

ity” 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- ductionist / materialist paradigm

current re- thing sacred. They have the power to 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 value in research aimed at openly distinguishing characteristics of human

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

human intellect, capacities, societies, gist, is not so much that they are great 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.²⁹
appear to be

It might seem that we are at an

tion differ from their animal
in degree or in kind. For a recent
survey
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,³⁰ 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 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.³¹ One could simultaneously generate theories and hypotheses consistent with a materialist set of background towards

paradigm one could argue that belief or affiliation may be resilience but is not its cause; other factor drives both resilience for instance. A good design would be able to evaluate bility; I assume for the purposes of discussion a data set that shows that affiliation was in fact causally 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 tion 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,

One of the “overriding principles of 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 threatens human civilization, can be seen as a dramatic illustration of this “overriding principle.” The hypotheses of evolutionary psychology would predict, if anything, that our civilization, which has carried our (animal) species to an unprecedented and “unnatural” state of success, will suffer collapse. Peace The human race, greatly reduced in numbers, may revert to a tribal stage, with religion (which helped bring

if something necessary for our past evolution were to prove to be a significant factor in helping us advance into a new state, or society, totally different from the one we came out of. If in fact prove to be the case, it support the non-materialist paradigm, in which the existence of spiritual ality, and religion’s ingfully generate knowledge about reality, are background

Indeed, such an outcome would seem to validate the vision for ity’s future contained in the writings. Bahá’u’lláh ically: “These fruitless strifes, ruinous wars shall pass away, and ‘Most Great Peace’ shall in God Passes By 194)—a Peace established “by the direct the laws and principles revealed by Bahá’u’lláh” (from a behalf of Shoghi Effendi qtd. in 64). Further, the arrival of this Peace . . . for which from age to age 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 guidance 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 beleaguered community against the

productive future research.³²

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-focused spirit of tolerance and inclusiveness 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 examples—that 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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