

Each of us brings a variety of things home in the course of our lifetime, both into the place where we dwell and into the home within our heart. Every day we make choices and encounter situations that have lasting effects on our lives, our relationships, and our view of the world. Some of what we bring home and end up carrying in our hearts brings us joy, and some is painful. Fortunately, as time goes on, we learn to be more selective and deliberate in choosing what we bring into our lives. We discover that some things are more meaningful and spiritually satisfying than others. For many of us this is the beginning of a lifelong process of personal transformation. We come to see things around us in a new light and seek the divine purpose in the world, and we begin to bring this sacredness home.

A Wayfarer's Guide to Bringing the Sacred Home is a journey through three important relationships: the connection we have with our own inner being, the bond we develop with the members of our family, and the contribution we make to our community. This book endeavors to guide the wayfarer in discovering the sacredness to be found within each of these relationships. Each chapter touches upon important issues within the greater themes of self, family, and community. Extracts from Bahá'í scripture are interspersed throughout each chapter, providing material for meditation and reflection.

Introduction

Together we will explore some of the spiritual features of the self, that part of us which forms our inner being. We will find that by bringing our Creator home into our lives and utilizing the power of prayer, we acquire the means to grow spiritually and deal with life's tests. We will examine several of the dynamics of the family unit and its component relationships. We will discover that by endeavoring to build family unity and establish marital harmony, we can raise our children to be bright emblems of the future. We will look beyond the home to the common experience we share with the rest of the world community. We will find that expanding our circle of unity requires that we begin to appreciate and find common ground with others whom we see as different from ourselves. By looking within ourselves and identifying the prejudices we must overcome, we can begin working toward racial understanding and harmony between the genders. We will find ways of celebrating diversity, serving the needs of our community, and helping to bring the peoples of the world together as one human family.

A Wayfarer's Guide to Bringing the Sacred Home offers a Bahá'í perspective on the inherent receptiveness of our inner being to the sacred Word of God. It suggests ways to achieve a profound sense of reverence within the family and to appreciate the diversity of the people of this planet. This perspective centers on the con-

cepts of unity and oneness, which are central to the teachings of the Bahá'í Faith. The source of these concepts is Bahá'u'lláh (1817–92), the founder of the Bahá'í Faith. They are the central themes woven throughout the more than one hundred volumes of scripture that Bahá'u'lláh wrote during his forty-year ministry. Because he was persecuted by the Persian and Ottoman Empires, Bahá'u'lláh was a prisoner and an exile from the age of thirty-three until his death. Though he wrote in Persian and Arabic, a substantial number of his works have been translated into English and many other languages.

A Wayfarer's Guide to Bringing the Sacred Home incorporates passages from a number of Bahá'u'lláh's works as well as from the writings of three other figures who are important in the history and teachings of the Bahá'í Faith: the Báb (1819–50), who was the forerunner of Bahá'u'lláh and was, Bahá'ís believe, a Prophet of God in his own right; 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844–1921), who was Bahá'u'lláh's eldest son and the appointed interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's writings and teachings; and Shoghi Effendi (1897–1957), who was the great-grandson of Bahá'u'lláh and the head of the Bahá'í Faith after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's death in 1921.

Throughout his works Bahá'u'lláh draws attention to the need for unity in the world and to three essential Bahá'í beliefs. First, he reminds

Introduction

us that there is only one God. Regardless of the variety of names by which we refer to Him—names such as *God*, *Dios*, *Allah*, or *Yahweh*—all refer to the same Divine Being. Second, Bahá'u'lláh teaches that there is only one humanity, one human race. God is the creator of all, and no group or nation can lay exclusive claim to His love or grace. In the sight of God there are no racial, national, or economic distinctions, for no particular group of people is inherently superior to another. Third, he teaches that there is only one religion—the religion of God. God sends Prophets to humanity from time to time, and all progressively develop the same religion of God, even though it comes to different people under different names. Bahá'u'lláh teaches that the age in which we live is the age of the maturation of humankind, a time when humanity is destined to come together as one family and regard each other as fellow believers in one God.

A Wayfarer's Guide to Bringing the Sacred Home looks at the personal, social, and cultural benefits of unity, its timeliness today, and the means for its achievement. Over the past century or so since the passing of Bahá'u'lláh in 1892, the word *unity* has gained several new meanings and connotations. For this reason it will be helpful to clarify what it means here. In its vernacular usage, unity is often tacitly defined as some movement toward sameness. This

is not what Bahá'ís believe unity to be. Unity is not uniformity; it is the organic cohesion of varying elements which, Bahá'u'lláh teaches, must embrace and accommodate diversity:

Consider the flowers of a garden. Though differing in kind, color, form and shape, yet, inasmuch as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increaseth their charm and addeth unto their beauty. How unpleasing to the eye if all the flowers and plants, the leaves and blossoms, the fruit, the branches and the trees of that garden were all of the same shape and color! Diversity of hues, form and shape enricheth and adorneth the garden, and heighteneth the effect thereof.¹

At the close of the nineteenth century, Bahá'u'lláh identified the achievement of unity in diversity as our greatest social need. This is still true at the dawn of the third millennium. Indeed Bahá'u'lláh's life and teachings serve as a testimony to the pressing needs of this day and age. We are fortunate that there were contemporary historians who witnessed and wrote about the unparalleled events of Bahá'u'lláh's life and ministry; however, they were often at a loss for words in their attempts to describe him. Perhaps the best attempt occurred just two years

Introduction

before his passing, when Bahá'u'lláh himself welcomed one of the few Westerners ever to meet him. The visitor was Edward Granville Browne, a rising young orientalist and future professor of Cambridge University. In the words of Professor Browne:

The face of him on whom I gazed I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow. . . . No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain!²

In his memoirs Professor Browne recounts that Bahá'u'lláh, in a mild, dignified voice, invited him to be seated and spoke to him:

Praise be to God that thou hast attained! . . . Thou hast come to see a prisoner and an exile. . . . We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment. . . . That all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race

be annulled—what harm is there in this? . . . Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the “Most Great Peace” shall come. . . . Do not you in Europe need this also? Is not this that which Christ foretold? . . . Yet do we see your kings and rulers lavishing their treasures more freely on means for the destruction of the human race than on that which would conduce to the happiness of mankind. . . . These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family. . . .³

Each Prophet of God is a wondrous Teacher sent to help humanity advance to the next stage in its spiritual education; the Prophets’ abilities are beyond our understanding. In a sense, attempting to characterize the Prophets of God is like trying to describe the sun. Though its light and warmth can be described, in the end, words fail to convey its complete reality.

The analogy of a mirror and its relationship to the sun is helpful in portraying the role of the Prophets of God. Like a perfect mirror placed in the sunlight, Bahá’u’lláh and all of the other Prophets of God reflect the glory of God. Bahá’u’lláh and these Prophets are not God Himself, just as the reflection in the mirror is not the sun. Although the bright reflection and the sun itself appear equal, and both shed their

Introduction

light and warmth upon us, they are separate. It is impossible for us to approach the sun without being consumed in a mighty force beyond our comprehension, but we can draw near to the reflection in the mirror and understand something of the sun's light and power. Similarly the Prophets serve as intermediaries between God and humanity, for they are the mirror in whose reflection we can see the attributes of God.

There have been many Prophets of God, and there will be more in the future. We know this is true because God has promised never to abandon us. The names of some of the Prophets He has sent may be familiar to us: Abraham, Krishna, Moses, Zoroaster, Buddha, Christ, Muḥammad, the Báb, and most recently Bahá'u'lláh. We can be sure that there were others whose lives and teachings are not known to us because they appeared before the advent of written communication. One after the other their revelations have been progressive, each building on what has come before and focusing on the next stage in humanity's individual and collective spiritual development. In this age the focus is unity.

May this book serve as a guide on your sacred journey to find a spiritual "home." Whether you seek a spiritual perspective on personal transformation, on the health of your family, or on the well-being of your community, the

inspirational Bahá'í scripture included in *A Wayfarer's Guide to Bringing the Sacred Home* can help you in the journey toward greater spiritual understanding. Spiritual growth is not a sudden occurrence or a one-shot deal; it is a gradual process that starts with a leap of faith and grows through consistent efforts to draw closer to God. May His Word be a source of inspiration to you in everything you do, from the most simple and ordinary of acts to the most noble and courageous. There is no great secret to the journey. All it requires is the willingness to turn toward Him and a sincere desire to embrace that which will bring Him into your heart, your home, and your community.