



The Lamp

A NEWSLETTER PUBLISHED BY THE WILMETTE INSTITUTE

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Wilmette Institute's Tenth Anniversary: a Burgeoning Legacy, a Bright Future

In 2005 the Wilmette Institute reached an important milestone: its tenth anniversary.

In January 1995 the National Spiritual Assembly approved a request by a group of its Bahá'í National Center staff in to establish a new center for Bahá'í learning. But the approval came with an important condition: the new institute had to be financially self-supporting.

The newly appointed Wilmette Institute Board decided to start by launching a comprehensive four-year program of study of the Faith. Named "Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization" and designed for youth, the program opened in July 1996 with a four-week residential session attended by thirty-nine students. However, the largest single group of students who flocked to Wilmette proved to be women who had been Bahá'ís for twenty or more years.

The excitement of learning together, the energy of living with a group of Bahá'ís in a dormitory for a month, the dynamic diversity of age and culture, and the deep enthusiasm for studying the Faith left a profound impression on the faculty, students, and the Wilmette Institute Board. Many students left Wilmette on fire to teach and deepen souls, resulting in dozens of enrollments over the next few years.

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2005 Will See a Record Sixteen Distance-Learning Courses

The Wilmette Institute is launching a record number of distance-learning courses in 2005—sixteen in all, including seven new courses and nine repeats, some of which are receiving major revisions.

"The increase in the Wilmette Institute's offerings has been made possible by two developments," explained Dr. Robert H. Stockman, the Institute's director. "First, since 1998 we have offered nearly forty courses at least one time, and it is easier to repeat a course—even with revisions—than to create a new one. Second, we anticipate that our new, integrated registration, website, and Forum software will streamline our operation and reduce our staff work."

Three of the distance-learning courses focus on the life and writings of Bahá'u'lláh. *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* (which began in February) and *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (September), examine works in the middle of Bahá'u'lláh's prophetic career. They will be complemented by a course on *The Life of Bahá'u'lláh* (a new course beginning in June), the only course in the "history and biography" category to be offered in 2005.

Two courses on the writings of Shoghi Effendi will be offered:

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The sequence of courses covered in the four-year Spiritual Foundations program include World Religions and Philosophies and Bahá'í Theology; The Development of the Individual and the Creation of Strong Marriages and Bahá'í Families; The Formation and Governance of Bahá'í Communities; and The Bahá'í Perspective on Global Issues: Carrying Forward an Ever-Advancing Civilization. Each year's study is augmented with modules on Bahá'í history; the Bahá'í writings; Presentation and Curriculum-Development Skills; and Teaching the Bahá'í Faith.

Each year's residential session is preceded and followed by home study facilitated e-mail and phone consultation and student projects and presentations. To accommodate student schedules, the four-week residential schedule has gradually been reduced to nine days.

The success of the Spiritual Foundations program strengthened the Wilmette Institute's Board's resolve to expand the Wilmette Institute to reach students with limited incomes and students who lived in out-of-the way places.

The expansion began in January 1998 when the Wilmette Institute launched its first distance-learning courses. Even though the technology was primitive—a preliminary website and e-mail, with no automated database or payment system—the response was enthusiastic. The first course, on **Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, 1853-68**, drew eighty-nine students.

Since 1998 the Wilmette Institute's technology has gradually improved, and its offerings have diversified. In 2005 the Institute has offered more than forty distance-learning courses. From four courses per year, its schedule has grown to sixteen each year.

The technology of e-mail and the web, however cranky they can be at times, has introduced an international dimension to the Wilmette Institute's distance-learning courses. For they draw students from all over the globe, producing a diverse and rich experience for students and faculty alike. Collaboration with the Bahá'í Academy of India means that in three or four courses per year, Indian students often outnumber the North American students.

On its tenth anniversary the Wilmette Institute stands at a crossroad. To meet increased demand and to be prepared

to enroll students who have completed other sequences of courses, the Wilmette Institute is upgrading its website and its course delivery system, training its faculty to improve mentoring and assessment, revising courses to improve their quality, and encouraging the formation of local study groups

During 2005–06 the Wilmette Institute will lay the foundation for a new phase of expansion and service to the Bahá'í community. As the Institute discovered during its first ten years, any institution—especially one dedicated to education—must constantly learn and grow to meet the needs of its students. The Wilmette Institute's second decade promises to be brighter than its first. ▲

Wilmette Institute Distance-Learning Courses Focus on Texts

Courses on the authoritative texts of two religions are the focus of February, March, and April Wilmette Institute distance-learning offerings (see page 6 for a complete list of courses).

A course on *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, a collection of recently translated tablets by Bahá'u'lláh to kings and rulers, began on February 15. The works included in *Summons* occupy an important stage in the early to middle part of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. They follow the mystical topics and scriptural exegesis typical of His earliest works and predate His emphasis on personal laws and principles of social reform that dominate much of his later revelations. A small but dedicated group of students has begun to study the tablets.

The Promised Day is Come is the topic of a second distance-learning course beginning on April 1. It will cover Shoghi Effendi's 1941 letter about the apocalyptic conditions of the world and the divine promise they hold. This is the Wilmette Institute's first course on the work, and it should be popular. But there is still room for more students—and time to enroll.

The Qur'án will be the focus of a distance-learning course starting on April 15. First offered in 2002, the course

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Sixteen Courses . . . Continued from page 1

The Promised Day is Come (February, a new offering)

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: selected Letters
(October)

The latter course is being offered for the fifth time to fulfill a mandate from the Universal House of Justice that the friends study three letters from *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States has made study of the letters an educational mandate for the upcoming year.

By far the largest category of courses includes ones on the Bahá'í Teachings. The seven courses in this subject area include:

The Bahá'í Administrative Institutions: "This Unique and Wondrous System" (April, a new course)

The Bahá'í Faith: A Comprehensive Introduction
(June, a Basic course)

Bahá'í Theology II: Humanity and Creation (August, a new course)

Education for Sustainable Development (October, a new course)

Mining the Gems: Development of the Individual
(early November, a rerun from 2001)

The Covenant (mid November a new course)

How to Study the Bahá'í Writings (December, a Basics course that is being redesigned)

The National Spiritual Assembly of the United States has asked the friends to study the Bahá'í administrative institutions, particularly the National Spiritual Assembly and the Continental Counselors, during 2005–06. The course is pulling together study materials that will be useful in local communities.

The course on **Education for Sustainable Development** is a collaboration among the Office of External Affairs, the Wilmette Institute, and *World Order* magazine. It is a response to the United Nations Decade for Education on Sustainable Development, which begins in 2005. The course will include Bahá'í writings on the subject as well as other literature deepening and expanding one's understanding of the topic.

The course on individual development echoes the theme of the 2005 Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization program, which will focus on the development of the individual and the creation of strong Bahá'í marriages and families. Through this distance-learning course, those unable to enroll in the ten-month Spiritual Foundations course and to attend the nine-day residential session near the House of Worship will be able to taste some of the rich offerings.

Three courses, all reruns, will be offered on various religions and their scriptures:

Judaism for Deepening and Dialogue (January)

The Qur'án (April)

Christianity for Deepening and Dialogue (July).

Finally, the Wilmette Institute is pleased to collaborate with the Archives Department in offering a new course on **Introduction to Bahá'í Archives** (September). The course is open to archivists of Local Spiritual Assemblies. Since the course will involve organizing archival materials, one must have access to an archive to complete it.

All the distance-learning courses are three months long, and each one costs \$150 for an individual and \$300 for a group. Financial aid is available to those needing a lower tuition rate.

The Institute hopes that its continued growth will provide a rich offering to the Bahá'í community and an important source of knowledge and skills for the development of human resources and the expansion of the Bahá'í community. ▲

Texts Focused On . . . Continued from page 2

offers a chance to fulfill the Guardian's exhortation to Bahá'ís to study the revelation of the Muslim dispensation. The course will cover the history of the revelation of the Qur'án, the contents of individual surahs (chapters), the compiling of the surahs into a single book, and the history of interpretation of some of the text.

To register, go to <http://www.wilmetteinstitute.org/> and click on "sign up for a class." ▲

Spiritual Foundations Summer Session Takes Shape

Individual Development and Creating Strong Bahá'í Marriages and Families is the theme of the 2005–2006 Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization Program, which is entering its tenth year. The program's summer residential session will be held in Wilmette from July 29 through August 7, 2005. Registration is now open, and we urge you to reserve your space.

Dr. Michael L. Penn and Dr. Saba Ayman-Nolley will serve as faculty for the lead unit on the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual development of the individual. Dr. Leslie Asplund will teach the unit on marriage and family life.

The units on individual development and creating strong marriages and families will constitute the primary theme to be covered in the 2005–2006 session.

The history module will include units on Bahá'u'lláh's life and revelation, 1863–92, and on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life and ministry, 1844–1921. Dr. Robert H. Stockman will teach a brief unit on the history of the Bahá'í community, 1863–1921. Additional faculty will be announced later.

The skills workshops will cover teaching the Faith and improving writing skills. Morris Taylor will cover teaching the Faith. Kim Douglas, an author, English teacher, and professional editor, will offer a unit on expository writing, which will help the students improve their writing skills.

The summer residential session will be preceded by home study (preparing one for the residential session) running from May 1 through July 29. It will be followed by additional home study running from September 1 through April 30.

Registration for the program has just opened. A form is available at <https://regmain.usbnc.org/foundations.asp>. The Spiritual Foundations program will cost \$450, plus lodging at Baker Hall, National-Louis University (probably about \$125) and meals (which will average about \$15 per day at restaurants). ▲

Program of the 'Irfán Colloquium

The 'Irfán Colloquium will hold another of its small weekend-long conferences at Bosch Bahá'í School on May 26–29, 2005. The presentations will be in English only. The conference will focus on the study of scripture, especially the Bahá'í writings, and on principles of Bahá'í theology. All are free to attend, and proposals for presentations are being accepted.

The schedule of the talks for the English-language program, include the following:

1. Dr. Muin Afnani, "General Introduction to the English and Persian/Arabic Writings of Shoghi Effendi including a Brief Summary of the Major Themes, as well as His major Writings and Collections of His Writings"
2. Dr. Amin Banani—"Tahirih: A Portrait in Poetry"
3. Dr. Ghasem Bayat—"The Image of the Prophet of Islam in Muslim and Bahá'í Writings"
4. Dr. Sateh Bayat—"The Covenant Renewed: Perspective in Religious Revelation and History"
5. Dr. Sholeh Quin—"The Báb's Tablets to Muhammad Shah"
6. Babk Rod Khadem—"The Concept of Truth-Seeking in the Course of History"
7. Mozhan Khadem—"A Comparative Study of Some of the Isma'ili and Bahá'í Theological Concepts"
8. Dr. Wolfgang Klebel—"Lawh-i-Hikmat (Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet of Wisdom): Spiritual Materialism vs. Dialogical Thinking"
9. Dr. Ian Kluge—"Further Explorations in Bahá'í Ontology: Further Conclusions on Ontology in the Writings, Particularly the Ontologies of Self and Change"
10. Dr. Stephen Lambden—" *Thrif* (Scriptural Falsification) and *Tanzil* (Divine Revelation) : Some Aspects of Divine Guidance through Sacred Scripture with Special Reference to Aspects of Its Transmission,

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Student News

Jacqueline Ayorinde of Rush, N.Y. wrote this summary of what she learned in the recent course on the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

"The more I read Bahá'u'lláh's words the more I want to read them. I was very anxious to get to the end of the day to have time to read and study. I learned so much about the themes in the book (the Kitáb-i-Íqán) and thought that Hooper Dunbar's book was such a gift. I learned so much I don't know where to start.

"I learned about trusting Bahá'u'lláh and forgetting about the standards of men and religious leaders who often oppose the Prophets and Manifestations. I have a much deeper understanding of the history of religion. I also see there are many reasons why people fail to recognize a Manifestation. I came to understand more about language and symbolic and literal use of it in the context of religion and how sometimes it is a veil.

"I learned about how God tests people in terms of the expectations of the next Manifestation and the actual reality. I also learned that it is the purity of heart, chastity of soul and freedom of spirit, that gives one the eyes to see, not human learning (p. 211 or p. 235). Earthly learning can obscure seeing the truth. . . .

"I also was taken by the concept that God is eternally hidden from us. All Manifestations are from the same source and only differ in the intensity of their revelation. The concept that God's Words through the Manifestations can separate the believer and the non-believer and also to unite believers together. . . .

"I have made progress, I feel, in setting aside time for reflection. My meditations are times I cherish. I always struggle as a visual artist to leave time to create. 'One has the responsibility to objectify one's own consciousness,' as Otto Donald Rogers [a Canadian artist] puts it. However, there is so much to be done, as a Ruhi tutor, in holding regular devotional gatherings, training children's class teachers, and an assistant. Our community is having an invitation campaign, a multicultural arts, faith and festival called the 'Celebration of the Oneness of Humanity' which is

produced by a committee of two and then the community helps the day of the event. Our cluster is almost to A status and we have many seekers who need attention. There are times when I know it is only by the grace of God that all this somehow gets done. I have to say if I have learned anything it would be the power of divine assistance.

"My entire life has now the focus of my Beloved and this Cause. This transformation happened slowly I think through the Ruhi Books and the other Wilmette course I took on the Mystical Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. I have come to understand that I can never learn everything or do everything before me but have accepted that by the grace of God I can do all I can. I have reached a state of contentment but still continue to strive to improve.

"I have been sharing concepts from the Íqán with my study circle and selected writings from the Íqán for my devotional gatherings." ▲

'Irfán Program . . . Continued from page 4

Preservation and Alleged Textual Corruption"

11. Jack McLean—"Art of Rhetoric in the Writings of Shoghi Effendi"
12. Dr. Sima Quddusi—"Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace at the Hague"
13. Dr. Mahyad Rahnamaie—"Bridging between the Gist of the Epistemology of the Bahá'í Faith and 'Minimalism'"
14. Habib Riazati—"The Commentary of the Báb on "Man Arafa Nafsieh fa qad Araf RabeH" and Its Relation to the Commentaries of Bahá'u'lláh and Master on the Same Topic"
15. James B. Thomas, "Seeds of Revelation and the Mystic Bond between the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh: An Exposition on Excerpts from the Persian Bayán"

The 'Irfán colloquia, with parallel programs in English and Persian, are held each year at Bosch and Louhelen Bahá'í Schools and in various places in Europe (Acuto, Italy; United Kingdom; Germany). ▲

Wilmette Institute Distance-Learning Course Schedule

Note: Courses are "Beyond the Basics" Unless Otherwise Noted

Jan. 15-Apr. 15, 2005: **Judaism for Deepening and Dialogue**
 Feb. 15-May 15, 2005: **The Summons of the Lord of Hosts**
 Mar. 15-June 15, 2005: **The Promised Day Is Come**
 April 15-July 15, 2005: **The Qur'án**
 May 15-Aug. 15, 2005: **The Bahá'í Administrative Institutions: "This Unique and Wondrous System"**
 June 1-Aug. 31, 2005: **The Bahá'í Faith: A Comprehensive Introduction [BASICS]**
 June 15-Sept. 15, 2005: **The Life of Bahá'u'lláh**
 July 15-Oct. 15, 2005: **Christianity for Deepening and Dialogue**
 Aug. 15-Nov. 15, 2005: **Bahá'í Theology II: Creation and Humanity**
 Sept. 15-Dec. 15, 2005: **The Kitáb-i-Aqdas**
 Sept. 16-Dec. 16, 2005: **Introduction to Bahá'í Archives**
 Oct. 1-Dec. 31, 2005: **World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters**
 Oct. 15, 2005-Jan. 15, 2006: **Sustainable Development and the Prosperity of Humankind**
 Nov. 1, 2005-Jan.31, 2006: **The Exemplar: The Life and Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá**

Nov. 15, 2005-Feb. 15, 2006: **The Covenant**
 Dec. 15, 2005-Mar. 15, 2006: **How to Study the Bahá'í Writings [BASICS]**
 Jan. 15-Apr. 15, 2006: **Mining the Gems: Development of the Individual**
 Feb. 15-May 15, 2006: **Islam for Deepening and Dialogue**
 Mar. 15-June 15, 2006: **Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas**
 Apr. 15-July 15, 2006: **The Writings of the Báb**

All distance-learning courses include web-based discussion forums for students and faculty, regular conference calls, systematic lesson plans, and a wide variety of learning projects to help students apply their learning in their local communities. All courses are available at the "introductory" level for those unsure they can commit to taking a university-level course, the "intermediate" (undergraduate) level for those wishing to go into more depth, and the "advanced" (graduate) level for those wishing to do extensive research or writing.

More information on all of them can be found on the Web at <http://www.wilmetteinstitute.org>. ▲

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THE WILMETTE INSTITUTE was established in January 1995 by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States to offer academic, professional, and service-oriented courses related to the Bahá'í Faith. In addition to offering university level courses on Bahá'í topics, the Wilmette Institute fosters Bahá'í scholarship; develops new, innovative curricular materials; creates high quality courses on teaching the Faith; and refines Bahá'í concepts of pedagogy.

It aims to produce teachers and administrators of the Bahá'í Faith of great capacity, capable of sharing and demonstrating Bahá'í truths in their lives and speech.

For more information about the Bahá'í Faith, the Wilmette Institute, or its courses, contact:

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