



# The Lamp

A NEWSLETTER PUBLISHED BY THE WILMETTE INSTITUTE

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## Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization: Time to Register!

Registration has opened for the 2004 Spiritual Foundations for a Global Civilization program, which will focus on world religions and Bahá'í theology. Classes will cover all the major world religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), consider the religions of North America's original inhabitants, and examine Bahá'í theological teachings on such subjects as the concepts of God, revelation, Manifestation, humanity, creation, afterlife, and Covenant. In addition to the main theme—religion—the session will cover the Bahá'í scriptures focusing on religion, especially the Kitáb-i-Iqán. The history unit will examine the Báb, the Bábís, and the life of Bahá'u'lláh up to His declaration in the garden of Ridván in 1863, a topic that connects well with the study of Islam. The skill to be taught will be public speaking. Teaching the Faith will be the subject of a six-hour workshop.

Home study begins May 1, 2004. It is followed by nine days of intensive classroom study and discussion in Wilmette, starting with an optional field trip to places of worship on Saturday morning, July 31. The summer session ends at noon on Sunday, August 8. Students will also have the chance to pray daily at the House of Worship, serve as guides there between classes, and visit the Bahá'í National Center. The program costs \$450, plus lodging (probably

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## The Wilmette Institute, Academic Study of the Faith, and the Institute Process

One question about the Wilmette Institute that often intrigues or confuses students is whether it focuses on academic study of the Bahá'í Faith or the institute process. The short answer to the question is: both. The Institute was created to raise up human resources in the Bahá'í community, to foster personal transformation through learning, and to contribute to the still-elusive goal of entry by troops. It was inaugurated just as the institute process was being defined in a new and more precise way (for the institute process is actually a century or more old, though it has not always gone by that name). It has designed its courses to accomplish the goals the Universal House of Justice has laid out for the institute process: a defined sequence of introductory material, a systematic approach to learning, formal study, application of learning through service to others, and study in small, local groups or circles.

The Wilmette Institute is not the only approach to the institute process; the Ruhi materials are the most popular system worldwide, and the Core Curriculum has been developing in the United States for over ten years and is widely used in institute classes and circles. Each approach has its own strengths and weaknesses. The Wilmette Institute's approach has been to take the university experience as a partial model for its educational philosophy. This

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## Wilmette Institute . . . Continued from page 1

approach has advantages: many people are familiar with it and used to its standards of quality. One disadvantage is that not everyone has the time and inclination to take a course that meets those standards, though the Wilmette Institute has accommodated them by allowing learners to take courses at the “introductory” or “entry” level. Another disadvantage is that a university approach can be intense for teachers and requires a lot of preparation and administration, hence the need to charge for courses.

The Wilmette Institute seeks, for the foreseeable future, to remain balanced between the demands of the two possible foci of its courses—university standards and the institute process—because it views the two as complementary and as giving the Institute a definable and unique mission. As much as the Institute would like to become a university-like institution, it is not possible in the near term. The Wilmette Institute is exploring ways to have its courses accredited at either the undergraduate or graduate level. This could eventually lead to accreditation of a degree program as well. But most options for pursuing accreditation would require an expensive infrastructure that is not practical.

Furthermore, demand for university-type courses on the Bahá’í Faith is still limited, as the closure of Landegg International University last month demonstrates. Nur University in Bolivia, a large, Bahá’í-inspired institution, offers no courses on the Bahá’í Faith; rather, Nur has based its curriculum on the description of a good education in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s *The Secret of Divine Civilization* and focuses on subjects needed in a developing country like Bolivia. The Bahá’í Chair for World Peace at the University of Maryland teaches a course on world religions but has not yet developed a course on the Bahá’í Faith. In North America since 1992, introductory courses on the Bahá’í Faith have been offered at Northwestern University (Evanston, IL), University of California (Berkeley, CA), McGill University (Montreal, QC), the University of Toronto (Toronto, ON), and Emory University (Atlanta, GA). No undergraduate courses beyond “Bahá’í 101” have ever been taught in North America. While one can

pursue a graduate education with a Bahá’í focus at Hebrew University in Israel and one or two universities in India, even at those institutions the teaching of Bahá’í courses is rudimentary.

The Wilmette Institute sees only one or two students per year taking its courses for credit through their university. Hence, for the foreseeable future, the bulk of the Wilmette Institute’s efforts will be tied to the institute process. The National Spiritual Assembly has called for a diversity of approaches to the institute process so that different people have different sorts of courses available to them at different times and stages of their lives. The Wilmette Institute has identified a “niche” for itself in that process by offering high-quality courses that can be taken at different levels; that are currently unavailable in any other setting; that provide opportunities for individualized learning as well as for local study groups; that link the participant with students and faculty from around the world; and that are potentially accreditable for students seeking to include a Bahá’í component in their university educations. As the Faith grows, and as basic courses such as the Ruhi sequence and the Fundamental Verities are taken by large numbers of Bahá’ís, the importance of the Wilmette Institute’s courses can only increase. ▲

## Updating the Website

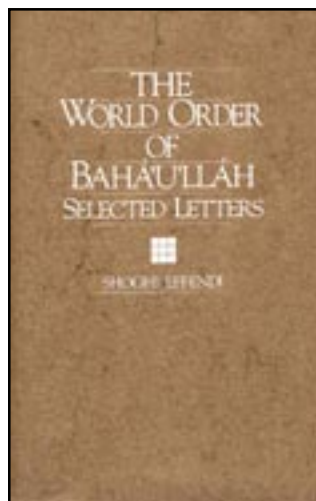
The Wilmette Institute’s Website continues to improve. In November, course descriptions for the 2004 distance-learning courses were placed on the site, and students started to register immediately. On December 14, a “Flash-free” main page went up, giving those without “Flash” software access to the Institute’s offerings. Its address is <http://www.wilmetteinstitute.org/development/flashfree/>. It provides everything the more attractive, Flash-enhanced main page has.

In the near future the main navigational bar will feature a “Support WI” button. It will provide information about the Institute’s financial needs and a volunteering wish list. The page should streamline the Institute’s efforts to recruit help in order to grow. ▲

## World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, Selected Letters: The Annual Education Theme

In December the Wilmette Institute Board decided to offer the course **The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters** three times in 2004, starting on May 1, August 1, and November 15.

The three letters singled out for careful study by the Universal House of Justice in its Ridván 2003 letter are "The Goal of a New World Order," "America and the Most Great Peace," and "The Unfoldment of World Civilization." Because the House of Justice has brought them to the attention of the Bahá'ís of the world, the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States has decided to make them the annual educational theme for the



period Ridván 2004 through Ridván 2005. As a result, many classes and deepenings on the letters are anticipated around the country.

The Wilmette Institute's new educational technology makes it easy to offer the course three times. The materials for the course have been placed on a Website so that students can download them, reducing the Institute's need to photocopy and mail materials. And by switching from listservers to forums, the interesting questions and significant comments by one group of students and faculty can be edited and made available to the next group. In this fashion the course itself becomes a living commentary on the letters, growing richer and richer as a source of information as more groups of students move through it.

The Institute hopes in particular that local study groups will use the course on the World Order letters as a systematic medium for local study. Such local study groups are usually recognized as "study circles" and thus "count" as part of the institute process. ▲

## Student News

Comments by Linda Head in her learning self-assessment for the course **Early Mystic Writings of Bahá'u'lláh**:

For me, having previously read (more than once!) the *Hidden Words*, *The Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys*, and *Gems of Divine Mysteries*, the only new material encountered during this course was Attar's "Conference of the Birds." I'm grateful for this chance to become acquainted with that Sufi poem. . . . [regarding what she has learned] Rather than the actual course materials themselves, the new (to me) email forums that have been established by the Institute have provided challenges and opportunities to develop hitherto unproven skills – of the "electronic" kind. These challenges . . . have yielded at least a little more competence and respect for the wonders of modern communication systems. I do like the forums. Congratulations and keep up the good work! . . .

Almost too obvious to state is the fact that whenever we study the Writings, particularly when our study is coupled with the opportunity to share ideas with fellow students, we are gaining more tools with which to present the Faith to the public. Ideas (ideally, memorized quotations) from the mystic writings are easily applied to the situations that come up in conversations with friends about the ups and downs of life. Learning from tests, having faith in ourselves, awareness of the oneness of humanity, seeing with our own eyes in our effort to be fair in judgments – so many times it's possible to slip in a short phrase of Bahá'u'lláh's wisdom (I'm obviously thinking especially of various Hidden Words here). ▲

### Spiritual Foundations . . . Continued from page 1

about \$100) and meals at restaurants. Some financial assistance is available. Students can register at <https://regmain.usbnc.org/foundations.asp>. It is anticipated the topic will be popular, so register early. The registration process has been simplified and no longer requires a recommendation letter. For more information about Spiritual Foundations, go to the website (<http://www.wilmetteinstitute.org/development>, or if you lack "Flash", <http://www.wilmetteinstitute.org/development/flashfree>), click on "courses," then click on "Spiritual Foundations." ▲

## Student Paper

Extract from Cynthia Schawamreh's "Approaching Bahá'í Biography: The Model of *The Priceless Pearl*," a final research paper for the course **The Ministry of Shoghi Effendi**:

There are many obstacles to the writing of historical biography in the context of the lives of the early figures of the Bahá'í Faith. One particularly pressing problem encountered as a Bahá'í approaching this subject is determining the appropriate balance of respectful reverence and critical analysis. Added to this are the complexities of quickly evaporating source material, certain cultural barriers with respect to concepts of privacy, and the traditional reluctance of many early eastern Bahá'ís to record their own memories due both to modesty and to the desire to avoid creating a new body of hadith (traditions relating to the life of the Prophet Mohammad) they were afraid might be misused. Standing out as an example of how to write Bahá'í biography both respectfully and honestly



Counselor Steven Birkland, the 2003 summer students, and guests enjoy dinner together.



Joyce Olinga receives her certificate from Dr. Manuchehr Derakhshani at the 2003 Spiritual Foundations Dinner.

is Ruhyyih Khanum's masterpiece biography of Shoghi Effendi, *The Priceless Pearl*. This work is unique in that it combines primary source material, as the direct recollections of the wife of Shoghi Effendi himself and eyewitness to most of the events she describes, with critical evaluation of the "Unique Ministry of the Guardian" which she is so eminently qualified to present in her own right as an appointed Hand of the Cause of God. Even more outstanding

is the fact that this book, authored by a direct participant in the life of one of the towering early figures of the Bahá'í Faith, is written by a woman. This provides a unique glimpse into the innermost circle of the "Holy Household" itself. When considered against the taboo on asking a prominent man about the details of his home life that affected the information we have about the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, and `Abdu'l-Bahá, this fact is truly remarkable. The sense of propriety with respect to the

public exposure of the private life of famous figures is very different in eastern and western cultures. Ruhyyih Khanum offers us a particularly useful blend of detail and decorum in her approach to the life of Shoghi Effendi through *The Priceless Pearl*, a model of biography for important figures in the Bahá'í Faith for future historians. ▲

## Huqúqu'lláh Course Rescheduled

The process of consulting with the Huqúqu'lláh Board of Trustees for North America has resulted in a concrete plan for a course on the Right of God. Among the faculty will be one of the Trustees, Dr. Amin Banani, professor emeritus at UCLA and son of the late Hand of the Cause of God Musa Banani. Two Huqúqu'lláh representatives, Gisu Muhadger and Nabil Fares, will also be faculty. All students will receive a copy of the Huqúqu'lláh video in their study packet. The course will run May 15 through August 15, 2004. We anticipate that it will prove enlightening and popular. ▲

# Wilmette Institute Distance-Learning Course Schedule

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

## 2004:

Jan. 15-April 15: **Christianity for Deepening and Dialogue**

Feb. 15-May 15: **'Abdu'l-Bahá's *The Secret of Divine Civilization***

Mar. 15-June 15: **The Bahá'í Community, 1921-57: Administrative Consolidation and Worldwide Expansion**

Apr. 15-July 15: **Health and Nutrition**

May 1-July 31: **The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters**

May 15-Aug. 15: **Huqúqu'lláh: The Right of God**

June 1-Sept. 30 [four months]: **Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation: A Systematic Survey** [Basic Course]

July 1-Sept. 30: **The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh**

Aug. 1-Oct. 31: **The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters**

Sept. 1-Nov. 30: **The Kitáb-Í-Íqán**

Nov. 1-Jan 31: **Rediscovering the Dawnbreakers: Bahá'í History, 1844-53**

Nov. 15-Feb. 15: **The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters**

Dec. 1-Feb. 28: **Bahá'í Theology: Concepts of God, Revelation, Manifestation, Humanity, Creation, Afterlife, and Covenant** [Basics Course]

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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