

life-changing moment, he confessed that he had had absolutely no use for either religion or spirituality. Also present there was an Englishwoman named Marjorie, a lovely senior who is a psychic who says she is never wrong and who also does healings. Peter also introduced me to his namesake, another Peter who was in his late 30's or early 40's, who is on a spiritual path that I would characterize more or less as belonging to New Age spirituality. The two Peters, Frank, Marjorie and I were the anchor group for the meeting, with Peter MacKay being the leader. Then we went up to the hotel.

Peter introduced me briefly. There were two Spanish ladies there for about an half-hour, so Peter MacKay had to translate my talk until they left. I spoke about the developing world consciousness and how people—and all things really—are so interconnected in the world, that unity in all its forms was the key to our age because interconnectedness is about unity, even with the lower forms of life, like plants and animals. I spoke about the world of tomorrow and how the leaders of tomorrow would eventually have to develop the spiritual tools to carry humanity forward, and that the ones who had these spiritual tools and who were able to propose workable, creative solutions to old-age problems were really the best qualified leaders of the world of tomorrow. I spoke about the wonderful phenomenon of perfect strangers becoming friends, after only a matter of hours in one another's company, and suggested that this was happening so quickly because there was precious little time to put the world's grave problems aright. (I spoke of other things that I am passing over). I felt that the audience was listening very closely, so closely that they were resonating. We were tuned to the same vibration. It was of course a Bahá'í inspired talk, but I used the indirect approach, without quoting the writings—at least until the end of the talk.

I closed the talk by reading from the first few pages of the Hidden Words, the ones about love and justice. The audience seemed to be just drinking up Bahá'u'lláh's life-giving words. Peter MacKay said that the readings had confirmed something very important for him, forgotten since his childhood. He realized again that God loved him, and that he needed to hear this fundamental message again, a message that is at the very heart of all religion. They all agreed that LOVE was the most powerful force in the universe.

After the break, we went into part two. Peter did his intuitive, clairvoyant readings of the young people there. He is a spiritualist, but he uses his gift more as a loving teacher and wise mentor. I did not feel any awkward, downward pull of strange, psychic vibrations. It all seemed very natural, I think because Peter's motive is pure. The anchors, including me, assisted in the "reading" of these young people. (I say young people, meaning that most were 20 and 30 somethings). After he diagnosed them, they opened up and talked about their lives and the struggles they have gone through in their families and in their relationships, and how spirituality is fitting into their lives now. Nobody was nervous except in an expectant way. It was all very real, very comfortable, very loving and very natural. People were very much in tune. We also did some story-telling and sharing spiritual experiences. Strangers became friends in a short time.

When the meeting was breaking up, Marjorie stood up and spontaneously laid her hands on my head. It was very relaxing. I use much intellectual energy, i.e. nervous energy in my work; so to feel her healing touch was a comforting balm and a welcome relief. She said I had a past injury in one of my neck muscles, but I had already told her that I broke my neck when I was twelve. She said the tinnitus (ringing in the ears) that I have suffered from for the past forty years, would go away. Well, it will go away eventually, of course—when I leave my body behind for good. Now it's past midnight, but speaking to that youth group was nothing short of a remarkable experience.

When you travel, you do realize that mankind is one. This evening confirmed my faith in human nature, gave me hope for the future, and made me realize how much we are all alike, wherever we are in the world. Many of us share a common human condition. Most of our spiritual struggles, at least in the western world, are the same: to break out of our anonymity, to understand our own nature at a profounder level—it remains a daunting task to "know thyself," one of the commands once inscribed near the entrance to Apollo's shrine at Delphi—to find meaning and purpose in life, to solve our personal problems and to build and live out a system of authentic values. However, such a spiritual search is one sense a luxury, although a necessary one. I do recognize that those who live in dire straits or who lack the bare necessities of life, are more preoccupied by the struggle for survival, and have less time to engage in these important existential preoccupations.

Surprise Going-Away Party: Monday, November 30, 2009

As far as I recall, I have had only one other surprise party in my life. It was a surprise birthday party given by the Bahá'ís of Gatineau when my daughters, Mukina and Leah, were teenagers. That surprise party must have taken place when I was in my forties. However, I have never had a surprise going-away party before the one organized by the friends in Gibraltar took place. They succeeded well: It was a total and complete, and altogether wonderful surprise. I was so focused on completing Book 4 during the last class before I left Gibraltar that I didn't even notice the balloons hanging on the walls when I entered the combined living and dining room area of Pouneh and Harald's house in the Ministry of Defence compound, just a stone's throw away from the Spanish border.

Pouneh had phoned about 15 minutes before the class started to offer to pick me up at Neptune House because it had been raining, but I had determined to walk on my own because I had not been getting enough exercise in Gibraltar. I took the call on my mobile phone, just as I was just stepping outside, and noticed that the rain had stopped—only momentarily as it turned out. I crossed the parking lot, walked along in front of the Victoria Sports Complex, and then went straight along to the roundabout where I turned left at Winston Churchill Avenue. Then I crossed the runway heading toward the M.O.D. By this time, the rain had begun to fall hard again, and the wind had picked up, but it wasn't long before I reached Pouneh and Harald's home, the very first house on the right after you have passed the guard's post and main gate.

I suspected nothing and headed straight for the dining room table where Pouneh, Harald and Rozita were sitting calmly waiting to continue our last lesson on Book Four on the lives of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh. Suddenly, the kitchen door burst open and a small crowd of the men, women, children in the Bahá'í community, and some of their friends, came rushing out, smiling and shouting "Surprise!" Well, I was so moved that didn't know whether to laugh or cry, but under the circumstances I didn't want to cry-- so I laughed—and I laughed repeatedly, so much was I under the impact of my emotions!

After the excitement had died down, I was presented with the gift of another backpack, courtesy of Suresh. Suresh had seen me every other day in his shop with

my laptop packed tight in my Mountain Co-op biker's backpack. Other gifts were a farewell jumbo-sized card signed by the friends with their comments, and a coffee-table book about Gibraltar. Then little Robin, Trevor's young step-son, played a tune on the coronet, and little Haifa and Dylan sang "We are drops of one ocean." Another lovely surprise was Trevor's and Haysell's announcement that they were getting married on May 2nd, 2010. These festivities were followed by a delicious potluck supper. All in all, it was a lovely way to celebrate my three months in Gibraltar and to send me merrily back home.

Departure: December 3, 2009

Two of the friends came to see me off, Ramin and Pouneh. Ramin picked me up bag and baggage just outside Neptune House and we made the short drive to the airport. I always find that the last moments spent with loved ones or friends before an international departure are special. There were just the two of us at that point. Ramin was so kind and so humble, the essence of simplicity. We just stood in line and chatted quietly enjoying those final moments. He thanked me again for the three months spent in Gibraltar. We talked for a moment about a personal problem and a small, but very telling word of wisdom fell from his lips: "I think it's best to face your fears." Yes. It was the right word at the right time. How often has just the simplest of words or phrases from one of the friends found its mark in the heart and enabled the listener to do the right thing. In public or media discourse, we are subjected to lengthy speeches and torrents of words to influence the listener; even between close friends the conversations can be long but often with little effect. Although I cannot say that I am wise, Ramin's word was sufficient. Following my return home, it has proven true.

The New Agers with their "pop" psycho-spirituality say that there are only two things in life: love and fear. The New Age dictum is actually based on this verse from the first Epistle of St. John: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love"(4:18). That divine verse contains much wisdom. For fear and love are our greatest motivators and make life possible, although the greater the love is, the less we are dominated by the agony of fear. The new world come-of-age is beginning to learn that love is a greater motivator than fear, with all its negative

consequences. And as Jesus taught, love is a better motivator than fear when he said simply: “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” (John 14:15).

After I had checked in my bags and Ramin and I had said our good-byes, I still had some time left over before the departure of my flight. We had prearranged that I would pop over to Harald and Pouneh’s just across the street to spend some last moments with them. Dr. Harald was soon to be off to his M.O.D. clinic at Eastern Beach, so we said a warm good-bye. Harald is one of those souls of such great integrity, warmth and discipline that his example brought new meaning, to my consciousness at least, that the line between those call themselves Bahá’ís and those who are not official followers of Bahá’u’lláh, can be a fine one indeed. In fact, these distinctions are sometimes so subtle that understanding them should be best left to Bahá’u’lláh Himself.

Once Harald left, Pouneh offered me tea and fruit and sandwiches to take on my journey. She also offered me the gift of a book, *The Prince*, by Hushang Golshiri and translated from the Persian by James Buchanan. It is the story of the dark reminiscences of a dying consumptive prince of the doomed Qajar dynasty. As I read Buchanan’s introduction, the book seemed already familiar with the Iranian ambiance depicted there that once surrounded the historical “woeful struggles,” as Shoghi Effendi called them, of the Bábí martyrs of the Heroic Age (1844-1921). Buchanan mentions in passing the Bábí martyrs, those living torches, who had burning candles placed into their gouged out flesh by a savage populace misled by an equally fanatical clergy. And yet, they sang and danced beyond their pain and praised their Beloved until they expired. The translator tells us that the prince’s grandfather was Nasiri’d-din-Shah, the great enemy and avowed destroyer of the Bábí-Bahá’í Faith.

Pouneh inscribed the book: “With all our love, Harald, Pouneh, Haifa and Nura, xxx, See you soon.” Under the title she quoted the great Rumi: “When something unique becomes many, it loses its value. Yet many are the sorrows of the heart but they become precious gems on the path to the Beloved.” Then Pouneh, Haifa, Nura and I walked across the road to the Gibraltar Airport where I stood in line. Pouneh and I chatted for a while, reminiscing about the last three months. Then I said good-bye to the little children and their mother and walked on to board the plane.

As the Easy Jet Air Bus took off from the landing strip, I looked out of the window to take a last look at the white stucco Neptune House where I had stayed, clearly visible below, and glimpsed the great Rock of Gibraltar, that living symbol of steadfastness, and the surrounding waters of the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, at the convergence of the two seas that I had dreamt about in another realm, and which I was destined to find later in person in the concrete world of space-time. *Au revoir*, dear Gibraltar. I leave fragments of my heart with you. God only knows whether or not I shall see you again.

Final Reflections: What I Have Learned in These Past Three Months

1. All the Promises in the Sacred Writings are True

Our sacred writings contain some remarkable promises of divine assistance for all those who arise to serve—especially for those who travel to foreign fields. It would be mistaken to think that these promises were mere hyperbole, just an emphatic way of basically saying that God will help you. But as for so many other things in life, one may know these things either theoretically or practically. One may well believe them theoretically. One should start there. But a believer becomes confirmed when he or she experiences them practically, by actually serving abroad in the field.

2. The Emerging World Consciousness and the Kindness of Strangers

One thing that constantly astonished me was the way that strangers seemed to just appear—and did appear. Every day there was a new surprise and delight. These friends, although they were not all believers in God in the traditional sense, nonetheless they felt as if they were members of my spiritual family. To me these souls represented the crest of the wave of rising world consciousness that is taking place simultaneously throughout the planet. We realize now more than ever that the catastrophic problems we share are global and interconnected, or in the language of the new physics, “entangled.” They require new and radically different solutions which must follow spiritual lines. For love and finding common points of similarity will always bring souls together, while focusing on differences is a misguided tactic that will always separate us one from the other and produce division and strife, unless these differences are accented to enhance the beauty of humanity in the perspective of “unity in diversity.”

Although I did some “leg-work” in trying to open doors for the Faith in Gibraltar, without my seeking them, opportunities were brought to me by others to teach the Cause, either directly or indirectly, whether it was Giordano’s invitation to address the Philosophical Society or Peter MacKay’s invitation to address his youth group or Samantha’s invitation to join the Theory of One discussion group which explored the oneness of all things, and that was intended to elaborate a new theory to sort out the world’s problems. The rapidity which defines the emergence of this intimacy reflects the pressing lack of time that remains for humans living in the dysfunctional old world order to correct the urgent problems that confound and confront mankind and that now threaten its very existence. In *The Hidden Words* (Persian #7) Bahá’u’lláh reveals: “Take one pace and with the next advance into the immortal realm and the enter the pavilion of eternity.” In past ages, lovers of God earnestly sought their heart’s desire, but in this revelation, the Beloved, astonishingly, seeks us! This affirmation should cause no trace of pride, smugness or self-congratulation. It is a testimony to the power of the Grand Theophany, the Great Manifestation of God, that suffuses and sustains all creation and that earnestly seeks to make the knowledge of God’s Revelation known to every single soul in this Great Day.

3. **Synchronicity and the Power of Thought: Material and Spiritual Goods**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that the reality of man is his thought, a truth that parallels the old biblical proverb “As a man thinketh so is he.” (Actually, that saying, I have since discovered is only a partial quote. The full sentence in Proverbs 23:7 reads: “As a man thinketh **in his heart** so he is.”). According to this belief, it is especially the thoughts that are entertained deeply in the heart, with profound conviction and hope, that become realized in the outer world. This law of the power of thought I was to discover over and over again in Gibraltar. This process of guidance and confirmation, or guidance and realization, which begins with a sincere desire to serve the Faith, involves both oneself and those who watch over us from the Abhá Kingdom

One small example of things just manifesting out of the ether—just as new friends and opportunities suddenly appeared—came in the form of an old song. Of course, sceptics argue that such things are merely coincidental. But when such coincidence becomes life-changing, or even confirming in a less significant way, it

is safe to assume that the synchronicity was created by the power of mind, and more especially, by the magic, hidden Hand of God. The song, which has no special significance for me among the scores upon scores of songs that I know and enjoy singing, I first heard when I was a student in Paris, beginning in the fall of 1965. It was an Italian popular hit song, “Lo Che Non Vivo Senza Te,” rendered in English by Dusty Springfield as “You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me.” It played in Italian on French radio. The lyrics included this line: “How am I going to live without you for a lifetime when I can’t (even) live an hour without you?” At this writing, it has been fully 45 years since I first heard that song. It has by no means been floating around in my musical memory since then, so I cannot say that the song has been frequently revisited. But when I travelled to Gibraltar, one afternoon as I walked down Main Street, this old song started to run through my mind again and I found myself singing it. That same day, tattoo artist and quantum physics connoisseur, Keith Tonna, invited me to dinner in a restaurant off Irish Town Road, one of the main streets of Gibraltar which parallels Main Street. As we walked into the restaurant, the strains of that very Italian song floated on the air from a radio being played back in the kitchen. When I heard the music, I related to Keith the coincidence connected with the song, but I am sure that I was subjectively more impressed by the experience than he was.

4. Personal Problem-Solving

Although my main motive in travel-teaching was not to solve personal problems, my last reflection on lessons learned in Gibraltar would be the following: whatever your problems and challenges are, arising to serve the Faith will help to solve them. When you arise to serve the Faith, you tap into the Covenant; you align yourself with that divine energy that sustains the universe and all that lies within it. You are affected, consequently, at a much deeper level than the mind and the emotions. Your heart is moved and changed. Your consciousness is refreshed and purified; yes, even your strained nerves. You find a greater degree of detachment—a never-ending process in this life. You experience increased peace of mind.

Closing the Book

Gibraltar was my first in the three month short-term pioneering project, the current approach which helps to define the more systematic effort to teach the Bahá'í Faith which has now replaced random travel-teaching with its stays of unspecified duration. At this writing, it is now the end of March, 2010, and we have just celebrated Naw-Ruz 167 B.E. I have now reached the end of this spiritual travelog. When I look back now on my short stay, I am left with two predominant emotions: the first is gratitude for the opportunity of being able to help the friends in Gibraltar in a small way to advance the institute process. My visit lasted only a short time. But they, not I, are the steadfast pioneers who are engaged in the day-to-day, long-term community building process. The second emotion is a warm satisfaction, the joy that comes with knowing that you have served the Faith abroad. The physical move that is pioneering, whether it be long or short, always corresponds to movement in one's inner life. We are inevitably changed by the experience. The greatest of all teachers, next to the Founders of our Faith, the immortal Martha Root, said that she never liked to say good-bye. Instead it was Alláh'u'Abhá and only Alláh'u'Abhá. So in closing I say to you Alláh'u'Abhá!

John Allan McLean, Ottawa, 8 Bahá, 167/28 March

2010