FRIDAY

7.30 Doing and understanding Bahá'í scholarship: open forum discussion.

8.00 Todd Lawson (Montreal, Canada).
The Hidden Words and the Hidden Words

Bahá'u'lláh's Hidden Words (originally known as The Hidden Book of Fatíma) is one of the most beloved works of Bahá'í scripture. In this brief presentation I would like to compare this work with an early work entitled The Hidden Words by one of the more influential scholars of later Shi'ism, Mullá Muhsin Faydí Káshání (d.1680). It is suggested that the differences between the two works point to essential differences between the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and the general nature of Shi'i orthodoxy. This is not to say that all of the ideas and teachings in Faydí Káshání's Hidden Words have been rejected or condemned by Bahá'u'lláh. Rather, many of them live on in this later work but in a more universalized and accessible form. It is suggested that the title of Bahá'u'lláh's Work actually invites such a comparison in order to emphasize that the Islam of His time and place had become far too parochial and communalistic, and that the true spirit of Islam had been disguised and hidden beneath an excessive Imám-worship that was pressed into the service of a xenophobic and nationalistic religio-political identity. It is of the utmost importance, however, to observe that the Bahá'í teachings insist upon an informed and sincere respect for Islamic intellectual history. This is most clearly exemplified in the many references to this earlier Shi'i work of Faydí Káshání by the prolific and influential Bahá'í scholar 'Abdu'l-Hamíd Ishráq-Khávár who frequently cites it in the process of commenting on such central books as the Kitáb-i Qádn.

SATURDAY

10.00 Barney Leith (Sec. NSA. UK)
The More We Are Together: the Politics and Practicalities of Bahá'í Involvement in Inter-religious Collaboration.

On 3rd November Prime Minister Tony Blair attended a gala Diváil celebration in London, where he spoke positively about the increasingly multi-faith nature of the UK. Increasingly the leaders of the faith communities understand the importance of co-existence, dialogue and collaboration. A growing number of interfaith organizations provide for a setting in which dialogue can take place and collaboration be planned. This raises a number of important questions for Bahá'í involvement in what is essentially an inter-religious 'political' process. For example: Is there a tension between Bahá'í hegemonist aspirations and the need for co-existence? Does the 'equal value' or 'many paths to one goal' position (necessary for co-existence and collaboration) compromise the Bahá'í theological position of religion as a historically evolving process? This paper will raise these and other questions and attempt some preliminary answers.

11.30 Sholeh A. Quinn, Dept. of History, Ohio University
Persian Historiography and the Bábí-Bahá'í Chronicle Tradition: Some Preliminary Observations

Although the study of Bábí and Bahá'í historiography is still in its very early stages, a number of scholars, going back to E.G. Browne, have written about, translated, and analyzed a number of Bábí and Bahá'í chronicles. Some preliminary and essential work, such as establishing the relationship between some of the more important narratives, has been done. Furthermore, scholars have presented theories regarding the nature of Bábí and Bahá'í historiography. This paper seeks to situate that scholarship within the context of earlier chronicle traditions of Persian historical writing: namely, Safavid and post-Safavid historiography. Safavid historiography is itself a continuation of earlier traditions of Timurid historical writings. To what extent did these traditions survive in Bábí/Bahá'í historiography? How do recent conclusions made by a number of scholars regarding the nature of pre-modern and early-modern Persian historiography compare with conclusions reached by scholars of the Bábí/Bahá'í tradition?

1.00 LUNCH

2.30 Necati Alkan. (Germany, Ruhr University Bochum; currently SOAS)
Young Ottomans, Young Turks and the Bahá'í Faith, 1850s-1922.

This research attempts to examine the contacts and convergence of ideas between the Young Ottoman and Young Turkish reform movements and the Bahá'ís. The Young Ottomans, a group of Western educated Ottoman intellectuals in the 1850s who were influenced by current European ideologies like liberalism and constitutionalism criticised and opposed the "Tanzimat" or reforms which they thought were not democratic and imposed from above by some Pashas imitating the West. During their banishment to different places certain Young Ottomans came in contact with the Bahá'ís in the 1870s which they mention in their letters or memoirs. An important role among the Young Turks who inherited the ideas of the Young Ottoman movement, was played by Abdullah Cevdet, a radical freethinker who wrote an article in which he attacked Islam and suggested the Bahá'í Faith as a world religion. Due to his "anarchist" thoughts he put on trial and thus aroused considerable public attention.

4.00 Mooman Memeh (UK).
An Account of the Activities and an Analysis of the Role of Jamál Effendi in the Propagation of the Bahá'í Faith in Asia

Jamál Effendi (Suleyman Khan Tunubâni) was the first to teach the Bahá'í Faith extensively throughout India. There have been widely differing opinions about him in the Bahá'í community. Some have praised his efforts and expressed admiration for the teaching of the Bahá'í Faith that he carried through India, South-East and Central Asia. Others have expressed scepticism about his efforts, pointing out that comparatively few people became confirmed Bahá'ís through his activities and have even hinted at questions about his prosperity. In this paper, there is an attempt to analyze the facts that are known about his life and activities. Some new sources of information are introduced. In summary, it may be said that, although ideas about the success of the efforts of Jamál Effendi may have been exaggerated in certain accounts, he did
nevertheless succeed in establishing the Bahá’í Faith in the hearts of individuals and small groups of people across a very wide area of the Indian sub-continent as well as proclaiming the Bahá’í Faith across a much wider area including Central Asia and South-East Asia. Some analysis is carried out of Jamá’l Effendi’s methods of propagating the Bahá’í Faith and a comparison is made with certain other Bahá’ís who carried out similar activities in other parts of the world.

5.30 PANEL DISCUSSION.

- 8.00  'BARBECUE', AESTHETIC, WHIRLIGIG

- SUNDAY


The first part of this paper will focus upon Biblical and Islamic prediction of eschatological catastrophe and their Báb-Bahá’í interpretations. This as expected in the Abrahamic religions; Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Bible, the Qur'án and various associated traditions indicate that a divine theophany, a messianic theophany will take place in the 'last days'. There will be various accompanying "signs" and portents signaling the 'end of the world' and precipitating the partial or wholesale reordering of existing earthly and/or cosmic order. The Báb-Bahá’í interpretation and/or demythologisation of such expectations will be sketched. The second part of this paper will consider recurrent Abrahamic millennial chronologies in the light of claims of eschatological, millennial fulfilment. The abandonment and/or (successive) reinterpretation(s) of these millennial chronologies by diverse religionists will be reviewed as will the Bahá’í adoption and (re-) interpretation of millennial chronological schemes.

2.30 Roger Prentice (UK) Black Rain on the temple roof.

The Bahá’í Faith is a re-statement of the ancient truths of religion. It is also an agency for the spiritualization of humankind:

O peoples of the world! The Sun of Truth hath risen to illumine the whole earth, and to spiritualize the community of man. (SWAB:1)

This presentation explores some possibilities for how the Bahá’í Teachings might guide the process of spiritualizing education. It suggests what is wrong with education and what conceptual framework might define spiritualized education and provide a re-alignment of educational aims. Spiritualization as being synonymous with humanization and holization is explored in relation to meaning-making as the core element.

4.00 OPEN FORUM & FUTURE SEMINARS.