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Shivaji Shinde, left, and Rahul Mahamumi at a house wiring course at the Satara Regional Bahá'í Development Institute.

SATARA, Maharashtra, India — In India's now burgeoning economy, the building trades are flourishing, and learning how to install electrical wiring in homes is an important and potentially profitable skill.

But for Rahul Mahamumi, 16, and his friend Shivaji Shinde, 20, among the most significant benefits so far gleaned from a two-and-a-half month house wiring course at the Bahá'í Center here are an increased sense of self-confidence and a newly manifest desire to serve the community.

The course is different from similar programs because it includes instruction in "personal development" — a general term here for classes that help students improve their social skills and self image. And in this case, the instruction includes elements of spiritual and moral education designed to give students a new vision of themselves and society.

"Basically all the courses in house wiring offer the same technical knowledge," said Mr. Mahamumi. However, he said, the students at the Bahá'í Center are taught to share their skills freely and to use them to help others when they can, even without the prospect of profit. "When we are done, we hope to do service for the community," said Mr. Mahamumi, "not just for making money."

Adds Mr. Shinde, who comes from a farming village some 6 kilometers away: "The [personal development training] inspired us to think that

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For more information on the stories in this newsletter, or any aspect of the Bahá'í International Community and its work, please contact:

ONE COUNTRY
Bahá'í International
Community – Suite 120
866 United Nations Plaza
New York, New York 10017
U.S.A.

E-mail: 1country@bic.org
<http://www.onecountry.org>

Executive Editor:
Ann Boyles

Editor:
Brad Pokorny

Associate Editors:
Nancy Ackerman (Moscow)
Christine Samandari-Hakim (Paris)
Kong Siew Huat (Macau)
Guilda Walker (London)

Editorial Assistant:
Veronica Shoffstall

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A litmus test for Iran

In recent statements, the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran has talked of humanity's entry into a "new century of humanity, understanding, and durable peace."

Emphasizing the role of Iran in building a civilization associated with such principles, President Mohammad Khatami spoke of the importance of "religiosity, liberty and justice," stating that these are "the assets and aspirations of the Islamic revolution as it enters the 21st century."

President Khatami also emphasized the importance of the rule of law, saying that "we should carefully prepare the ground for the implementation of law in our society."

The Bahá'í International Community welcomes such statements, in the hope that they will soon be followed by concrete actions leading to the full emancipation of Iran's Bahá'í community, which is composed of some 300,000 adherents and represents the largest religious minority in Iran.

At the present time, the Bahá'ís of Iran face a continuing religious persecution. Since the Islamic Republic was founded in 1979, more than 200 Bahá'ís have been killed, hundreds have been imprisoned and thousands have lost property and access to higher education. Last July, two Bahá'ís in Iran were killed under suspicious circumstances. Currently, some 15 Bahá'ís are in prison and the community as a whole is deprived of freedom of worship.

In December, the United Nations General Assembly expressed concern over these and other examples of persecution and called for the complete "emancipation" of the Bahá'ís of Iran. [See page 6] The United Nations resolution followed a report in October by a UN special rapporteur on human rights, Prof. Maurice Copithorne, which outlined the extent of continuing persecution and documented the recent killings and other examples of oppression.

Further, as Prof. Copithorne and other United Nations investigators have indicated, the Bahá'ís of Iran have been persecuted solely for their religious belief.

As many observers have long pointed

out, the Bahá'ís of Iran pose no threat to the Government. Their religious principles call on them to obey the law, to refrain from involvement in partisan politics and to practice non-violence. They seek wholeheartedly to join with their countrymen in an atmosphere of religious freedom to help in the construction of a more just and prosperous Iranian nation.

Of special concern to the Bahá'ís of Iran, however, is the lack of legal protections for their right to freedom of belief — a right upheld by several international covenants to which the Government of Iran is a party. Even if specific incidents of persecution were to abate significantly, Iran's Bahá'ís would remain unprotected by the Iranian constitution from random acts of violence.

In 1993, a secret Iranian Government document surfaced. Written in 1991 by the Secretary of the Supreme Revolutionary Cultural Council, the memorandum outlined a government blueprint for the quiet strangulation of Iran's Bahá'í community, stating

Freedom for Bahá'ís to worship without fear would offer a singular litmus test as to whether the Government of Iran has set a new course.

specifically that their treatment should be "such that their progress and development should be blocked" and spelling out a series of guidelines for achieving such a goal.

To this day, the Government has not retracted this document or offered any indication that it has changed its mind about its long-held and deep-seated determination to eradicate the Bahá'í community of Iran.

As the world community searches for a way to determine whether the new words from Iran constitute real change, tangible actions to end some 19 years of oppression and securely establish freedom for Bahá'ís to worship without fear would offer a singular litmus test as to whether the Government of Iran has indeed set itself on a new course. 🌱



In Liberia, some members of the Bahá'í community of Paynesville gathered last July in front of their new Bahá'í Center, built with local materials.

Landegg Academy inaugurates new graduate studies program

WIENACHT, Switzerland — In ceremonies on 29 September 1997, Landegg Academy formally inaugurated a new program of graduate studies, marking a new phase in the institution's development as an international academic center.

The new program will offer a Master of Arts Degree in eight areas: the Arts, Conflict Resolution, Education, Leadership and Management, Psychology, Religion, and Women and Civilization. The program will be highly flexible, offering full-time, part-time or distance learning modes of study, aimed at serving a diverse and internationally far-flung body of students.

Central to all of the programs will be the concept of "applied spirituality," said Dr. Hossain B. Danesh, Landegg's rector, who delivered an inaugural address entitled: "The University of the Future — Fostering an Integrative Paradigm of Knowledge."

Dr. Danesh explained that most of the world's great universities were originally founded by religions. Today, however, university education encourages a separation

of religion from science and discards religious views and their accompanying ethical codes, regarding them with suspicion, he said. "The concept of applied spirituality rejects this dichotomous approach to knowledge and replaces it with an integrative paradigm," he said.

The inauguration was preceded by a conference on "Converging Realities: On Integrating the Scientific and the Spiritual." The keynote address to that conference was delivered by Professor Wang Yiqui, the executive vice-president of Peking University in China. In his talk, which was "The Humanistic Spirit in Science Education," Professor Wang identified five areas in which science education can become humanized: inspiration, history, beauty, social consequences, and the methodology of scientific thinking.

Also in attendance during the inauguration was Madame Rúhiyyih Rabbání, the leading dignitary in the Bahá'í Faith. Landegg Academy is sponsored by the Bahá'í community of Switzerland. ☉

Today, university education encourages a separation of religion from science and discards religious views and their accompanying ethical codes. The concept of applied spirituality rejects this dichotomous approach to knowledge and replaces it with an integrative paradigm.

**— H.B. Danesh,
Rector, Landegg
Academy**

Bahá'í communities worldwide gearing up for human rights education campaign

As reflected by US Bahá'í community efforts to promote CEDAW, Bahá'í communities around the world have long been active in promoting human rights. Many are planning activities in support of this year's 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

WASHINGTON — One of the particular features of the United States Constitution is that all international treaties must be ratified by a two-thirds majority of the US Senate — a legislative body composed of two representatives from each of this country's 50 states.

This makes it sometimes difficult for even the most deserving of pacts to win approval, even if it has widespread support among lawmakers. As students of history will recall, even though it was US President Woodrow Wilson who essentially proposed the League of Nations some 80 years ago, the US Senate refused to approve America's membership in it.

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), a highly principled international accord that has already been adopted by more than 160 countries, is still awaiting ratification in the United States.

A broad coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the United States has recently stepped up a long-standing campaign to press for ratification of CEDAW, which, as its title implies, seeks to end discrimination against women worldwide. Among them is the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, which has played a distinctive role in the latest round of activity.

By using the Internet, as well as other media of communication, the Assembly — a democratically elected governing council that administers the affairs of the Bahá'í community at the national level — has asked its members to write letters to their Senators, urging ratification of CEDAW.

What makes this effort noteworthy is the fact that there are active local Bahá'í communities in every state in the country. As a result, the Assembly is able to call on a well-established grassroots organization in place where other members of the NGO coalition that supports CEDAW are sometimes not as heavily represented.

A "Special Capacity"

"There are Bahá'ís in more than 7,000 localities in the United States, representing every race, culture and ethnic origin," said Kit Cosby, the Assembly's Washing-

ton-based coordinator for external affairs. "In this sense, we have a special capacity for local outreach, and we are able legitimately to make contact with Senators, in whatever state they represent, to make the case for CEDAW."

This effort by the US Bahá'ís reflects the determination of the worldwide Bahá'í community to engage in the general effort to promote human rights and especially human rights education — an effort which is being accelerated in view of the upcoming 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 10 December 1948, the Declaration is a simple yet elegant document that recognizes, in its own words, that "the inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." It defines not only basic civil and political rights, such as freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, but also basic economic, social, and cultural rights, such as the right to work and the right to education.

The United Nations, various governments, and numerous non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are planning observances of the anniversary of the Declaration in 1998, a year which also falls in year four of the UN's Decade for Human Rights Education (1994-2004). Bahá'ís hope to be at the forefront of such activities.

In October, for example, the Community's United Nations Office sent out to Bahá'í national communities around the world a special package of information on human rights. The package is designed to assist communities as they become further involved in promoting human rights education in their countries.

"The worldwide Bahá'í community has historically been a strong supporter of UN human rights programs and activities," said Nikoo Mahboubian, a representative of the Bahá'í International Community to the United Nations. "One of our principal aims with this new effort is to contribute to the global human rights education process by drawing attention to the connection be-

tween respect for human rights and the emergence of world peace.”

Ms. Mahboubian said that as early as 1947, the Community issued a major statement in support of the Declaration. Since then, she said, Bahá'í communities worldwide have been involved in numerous efforts to promote human rights. Among other activities, they have worked for the ratification of various human rights conventions, helped to disseminate (and translate) human rights documents, and organized various observations of Human Rights Day.

Gearing Up Worldwide

In anticipation of the coming year, many national Bahá'í communities have recently stepped up activities:

- In Turkey, the Bahá'í community helped to organize a conference for NGOs to discuss the Decade. Sponsored by the Women's Caucus of NGOs in Turkey, of which the Bahá'í community is a member, the 8 December 1997 conference brought together a wide range of speakers including Mrs. Sema Piskinsut, a Member of Parliament and president of the Government's Human Rights Commission.

- In Norway, the Bahá'í community has joined with other NGOs to plan a countrywide commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the UDHR. With the support of the Norwegian Foreign Department, the group is planning an international conference in Oslo next August, titled “The Oslo Conference on Freedom of Religion or Belief. Accepting the Challenge: Building a Coalition to Protect Universal Freedom of Religion or Belief.”

- In Brazil, the Bahá'í community co-sponsored a major human rights conference last September. Organized by the Brazilian Bar Association, the “First International Conference on Human Rights” was held in Brasília and saw the attendance of more than 1,000 people. Other sponsors included the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Brazilian Ministries of Justice and of Foreign Affairs.

- In Canada, the Bahá'ís are planning a campaign to develop special audio-visual and print materials in support of the 50th anniversary of the UDHR. “We hope to bring about a deeper awareness that we are truly one human family, that each individual is born into the world as a trust of the whole and that



the violation of the rights of any member of the family is a violation of everyone's humanity,” said Gerald Filson, the Community's director of external affairs.

In the United States, the Bahá'í community has been invited by the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute to become a member of the steering committee of a national campaign to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

“The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is significant because it is the first time that humanity has embraced a single code of behavior to which all nations are accountable, which is itself a precursor to the establishment of the oneness of humanity — a goal Bahá'ís embrace as the purpose of human existence,” said Jeffery Huffines, the US community's representative to the United Nations.

In the campaign to ratify CEDAW, the US Bahá'í Assembly is co-chair with Amnesty International USA. According to Ms. Cosby, they hope to win the support of at least 75 US Senators by 8 March 1998, which is International Women's Day.

“The Women's Convention is a tool that women around the world are using in the struggle against the effects of discrimination, such as violence against women, poverty, lack of legal status, and so on,” said Ms. Cosby. “The Bahá'ís of the United States — because they are so widely spread and yet possess a strong consciousness of the importance of women's rights — find themselves in a unique position to push this important treaty forward.” ☺

The 21st Annual Conference of the Association for Bahá'í Studies, held in Washington, DC, 14-16 November 1997, focused on the theme of “Fostering Human Rights: Developing Pathways to Peace.” Featuring more than 120 speakers and panelists, the event drew some 700 participants. Shown above are members of a panel discussion (left to right): Shulamith Koenig, Techeste Ahderom, Augusto Lopez, and Susie Clay.

“The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is significant because it is the first time that humanity has embraced a single code of behavior to which all nations are accountable.”

— Jeffery Huffines, UN representative of the United States Bahá'í community

UN General Assembly calls for complete “emancipation” of Iran’s Bahá’í community

The resolution follows the suspicious deaths of two Bahá’ís in July and a subsequently strong report by a UN human rights investigator in October.

UNITED NATIONS—For the twelfth time in 13 years, the United Nations General Assembly has passed a resolution expressing concern over the human rights situation in Iran, taking special note of “grave breaches” of the rights of Bahá’ís there.

The resolution, passed on 12 December 1997 by a vote of 74 to 32 with 56 abstentions, followed an October report by Maurice Danby Copithorne, a UN human rights special investigator, which stated that there has been “no improvement” in the situation of Iran’s Bahá’ís, despite repeated calls by the international community for Iran to live up to international laws that protect human rights and religious tolerance.

Prof. Copithorne reported, for example, that two Bahá’ís were killed in July and “those responsible for the deaths were enjoying impunity.” The two killings were the first reported deaths of Bahá’ís in Iran as a result of persecution since 1992.

In its resolution, the General Assembly called on Iran to “implement fully” the recommendations of a February 1996 report on religious intolerance, which found no legitimate basis for the continuing repression of Bahá’ís and other minority religious groups and called for their freedom of worship. The General Assembly likewise stated that the Bahá’ís and other religious minority groups including Christians should be “completely emancipated.”

“For Iran’s 300,000 member Bahá’í community, which is the largest religious minority in Iran, this call for complete emancipation is extremely significant,” said Techeste Ahderom, the main representative to the United Nations of the Bahá’í International Community. “This represents the first time that the General Assembly, that body which is most representative of world opinion, has called directly for Iran to allow complete religious freedom for Bahá’ís and other religious minority groups.

“Accordingly, we are extremely grateful to the United Nations and its various agencies,” said Mr. Ahderom. “Although there has been a recent change in govern-

ment in Iran, and the head of that government has voiced a new commitment to upholding human rights, we feel that actions speak louder than words, and we are pleased that the international community apparently agrees.”

Two New Deaths

Prof. Copithorne, whose official title is Special Representative of the Commission on Human Rights on the Situation of Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran, said he received information that two Bahá’ís were killed in July 1997 under suspicious circumstances.

“Masha’llah Enayait, a 63-year-old Iranian Bahá’í, died on 4 July 1997 after being severely beaten while in custody in prison in Isfahan,” wrote Prof. Copithorne. “He was arrested under circumstances that are not clear during a visit to his native village of Ardistan to attend a Bahá’í meeting. It was reported that on his death certificate, under the item ‘cause of death’, the doctor had entered ‘will be known later’. Another Bahá’í, Shahram Reza’i, a conscript in the army, was shot in the head on 6 July 1997 by his superior officer on a military base close to Rasht. The officer concerned, who reportedly was responsible for weapons training, maintained that the bullets were fired in error and was released after a few days. It was said that because the dead soldier was a Bahá’í, the court excused the officer from paying the blood money normally required in such cases.”

Prof. Copithorne’s report also said that at least 12 Bahá’ís continue to be held in Iranian prisons because of their beliefs, and he expressed special concern over the cases of four Bahá’ís who are currently in prison and facing death sentences. These individuals are Bihnam Mithaqi and Kayvan Khalajabai, who have been imprisoned since 1989 and were sentenced to death in 1991, and Musa Talibi and Dhabihu’llah Mahrami, who were arrested in 1994 and 1995 respectively, charged with the crime of apostasy and sentenced to death. A fifth man, Ramadan-Ali Dhulfaqari, has also



In the Philippines, the "Voices of Bahá" choir gave a concert to raise funds for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). At center is UNICEF Representative Dr. Terrel Hill, who thanked the group for its efforts. The 29 July 1997 concert was held at the Philamlife Theater in Manila, was attended by more than 700 people, and raised more than US\$1,100. The event was part of the choir's eight-nation tour through Asia last summer.

been condemned to death on the charge of apostasy. Although he was released from prison in 1994, the sentence still remains.

Prof. Copithorne took note of the convictions for apostasy, a charge that is sometimes applied when a Muslim converts to another religion. "The Special Representative considers that the right to change one's religion is a clearly established international human rights norm, as articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights," he wrote. "The Special Representative urges the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran... to take appropriate steps to prevent future prosecutions for acts of religious conversion, whether or not they be categorized as apostasy."

Other forms of persecution against Iran's Bahá'ís also continue, said Prof. Copithorne. "Being active in the Bahá'í

community and gathering for Bahá'í meetings are in practice considered offenses," he wrote. "Short-term detention of Bahá'ís, disregard of their private ownership of property, eviction from and confiscation of their houses and destruction of their holy places continue to be reported."

Since 1979, when the Islamic Revolutionary regime took power in Iran, Bahá'ís have been harassed and persecuted solely on account of their religious beliefs. More than 200 Bahá'ís have been killed, most in the early 1980s, and hundreds of others have spent time in prison. (As of December, at least 15 Bahá'ís were imprisoned solely for their religious beliefs.) Thousands more have been deprived of property and access to education, and the entire community has been deprived of the right to freedom of worship. ☉

Bahá'ís of the United States respond to Iranian President

WASHINGTON, DC — Responding to an invitation to the American people by Iranian President Mohammad Khatami for dialogue on the subject of closer ties between the people of Iran and the people of the United States, the Bahá'í community of the United States issued a statement welcoming the overture but suggesting that Iran's Bahá'ís "be granted their full rights as law-abiding citizens."

In a message issued on 13 January 1998 and published in the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, Robert Henderson, the secretary of the National Spiritual As-

sembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States, said: "We are particularly encouraged by your assertion 'that religion and liberty are consistent and compatible.'"

"Your explicitly stated determination to fulfill the provisions of the Iranian Constitution and to establish the rule of law gives us hope that the freedom of the Bahá'í community in Iran openly to practice its religion will be guaranteed," Mr. Henderson said.

The statement suggested that the most recent UN General Assembly resolution, which calls for the emancipation of the Bahá'í community of Iran, should be implemented. ☉

Located on some 28 acres in the hill station town of Panchgani, India, the New Era Development Institute celebrated its 10th anniversary in October. It now has some nine main buildings. Shown at right is the administration building.



In India, the New Era Development Institute takes a new approach to vocational education

(Continued from page one)

we can do things for ourselves and our community."

The attitudes of these two young students, who are not Bahá'ís, reflect the new directions in social and economic development being pioneered by the New Era Development Institute (NEDI), a Bahá'í-sponsored research and training center located in Panchgani, a small hill station town about 30 kilometers away.

Over the last ten years, the Institute has developed an approach to rural development that combines hardheaded vocational training for rural areas with a specialized curriculum in spiritual and moral principles. The effort is aimed at producing a group of capable and energized individuals who can return to their villages and, while supporting themselves, undertake and encourage local and sustainable development efforts.

"Our product is basically a transformed individual," said Sherif Rushdy, director of NEDI. "Our aim is to give people a new vision, a new heart, a desire to give service, an increased self-confidence, and an understanding of the connection between service and their own growth. And, further, that they have gained a trade by which they can earn an income and a few skills that can be helpful to their community."

The payoff to this new approach is just now emerging in places like Satara, in other villages near the Institute, and, indeed, throughout India. Drawing on and working closely with the grassroots network provided by the two million-member Bahá'í community of India, NEDI has established outreach projects in the states of Gujarat, Manipur, Sikkim and Madhya Pradesh, as well as here in Maharashtra.

So far, more than 600 individuals have undergone training at the NEDI main campus in Panchgani, and at least several thousand more have participated in one of its outreach programs. In all aspects, NEDI, its outreach programs, and its graduates are involved in a wide range of development-oriented activities, from the provision of classes on literacy and basic hygiene to schemes for tree-planting and environmental conservation; from the creation of small-scale income generating projects and rural businesses to efforts that promote the advancement of women.

In this regard, the New Era Development Institute currently stands as one of the largest and most fully realized Bahá'í-sponsored development efforts in the world. It is a leader in conceptualizing how to apply the principles of the Bahá'í Faith to development. Indeed, perhaps the most interesting facet of the Institute's

"Our aim is to give people a new vision, a new heart, a desire to give service, an increased self-confidence, and an understanding of the connection between service and their own growth."

**— Sherif Rushdy,
director, NEDI**

work has been the creation of a curriculum that achieves an integration of the practical with the spiritual quite successfully. NEDI administrators see such an integration as the key to inspiring individuals to take action to develop themselves and their communities.

Vocational Education with a Twist

NEDI was founded officially some 10 years ago, but its beginnings can be traced to outreach service projects undertaken by the New Era High School in the early 1970s [see page 12]. Over time, NEDI has become known primarily as a center for rural vocational education, defining its mission in terms of providing both vocational and development training to village-level men and women.

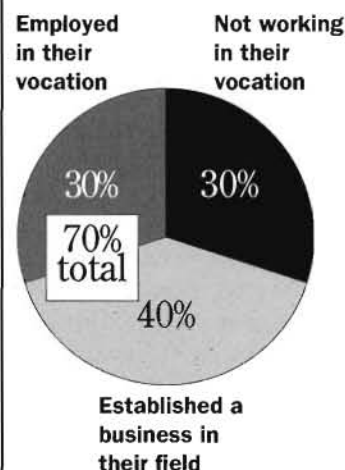
And in terms of providing quality vocational education, NEDI's success is remarkable. The Institute currently provides training in nine vocational areas: diesel mechanics, motorcycle repair, data processing, dressmaking, refrigeration and air conditioning repair, radio and television servicing, agriculture and animal husbandry, and primary and pre-primary teacher training. According to surveys by the Institute, more than 70 percent of graduates are working in the field for which they were trained, a relatively high rate in a developing country like India.

The 28-acre campus features nine main buildings: two classroom blocks, four dormitories (two for women and two for men), a workshop, a staff housing unit, and an administrative building. The two classroom blocks and two of the dormitories were completed in 1997, thanks to development assistance grants from the governments of Canada and Norway. The Institute's total staff numbers about 85, with some 30 involved directly in training and administration.

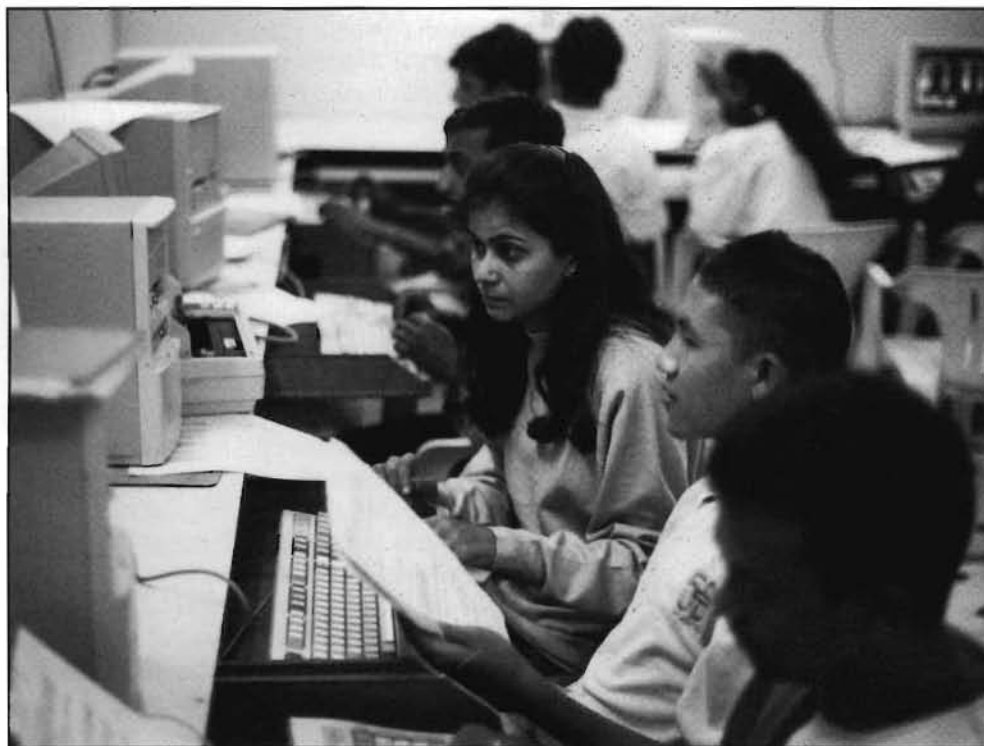
Current on-campus enrollment is about 175 students. Most are young, in their early 20s, and they come from all parts of India and a handful of foreign countries. (Currently, the school has students from Bangladesh, Tanzania and the Congo.) Most are Bahá'ís, but at least 35 percent are Hindus, Muslims, or another religion.

The tuition is low. NEDI's true cost of educating, housing and feeding each student runs about \$1,300 a year. However, students are charged from \$150 to \$475, with women receiving a 25 percent discount. Funding for this subsidy, and the work of the Institute in general, comes principally from the Bahá'í community of India, from the Bahá'í International Community, and from long-running development assistance grants of the Canadian and Norwegian governments.

Placement Rates



Surveys of the Institute's graduates indicate that 30 percent have found employment in the vocation they were trained in and another 40 percent have established their own businesses, for a total of some 70 percent who are working in the field for which they were trained.



Among the course offerings at NEDI is a year-long program in computer science. Like all courses, it includes a core curriculum of moral education which focuses on equipping students with the tools to do community development once they return home. Shown in the photograph to the left is Surita Kushwah of Gwalior, center, helping Vyayananda Sharma of Manipur, right, with a programming problem.

What is real development? Buses, cars and tractors or cooperation and unity?

PANCHGANI, Maharashtra, India — In striving to illuminate what it means to integrate spiritual principles with economic development, the New Era Development Institute (NEDI) has hit upon a simple but revealing exercise that can be used almost anywhere in the world.

Most of the Institute's students come from India's villages, and they attend expecting to return one day to help develop their home communities.

During the first week at NEDI, all are asked to draw a picture of what their villages are like. The drawings are often done with childish simplicity, showing stick figures and little regard for perspective, and the subjects are usually quite similar: they mostly depict a series of huts along a dirt road, surrounded by garbage and undernourished children.

Then the students are asked to draw what they would like their villages to become. This time, most of the students draw a nice straight road, electric poles on one side, with a series of big buildings: a school, a hospital, a government office. There are nice houses, usually with television sets inside. And there are buses and cars, and tractors in the fields.

Usually, however, the pictures of the "developed village" lack people. And the NEDI instructors have learned at this point to ask about that, and to question whether all of those buildings, and amenities like electricity and television, will make the people happy.



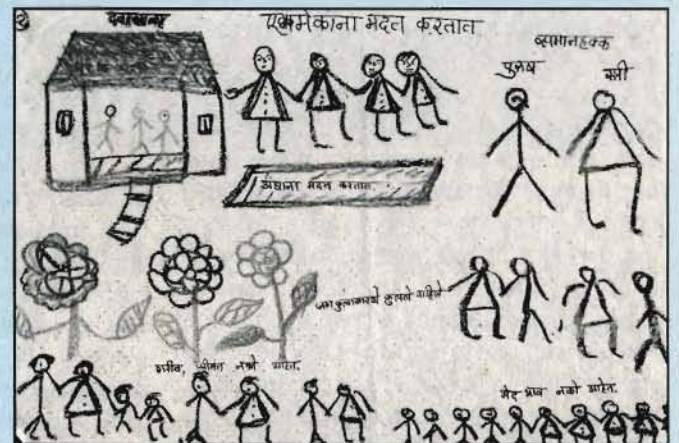
A developed village, city-style, with big buildings

The students begin to think and discuss and soon realize that they have merely replicated what they have seen in Bombay or on a television show about New York. Then they are asked: are the people happy in Bombay or New York — and would they themselves be happy in the "developed village" that was just drawn?

After some discussion and thought, the answer is usually "No, the people are not happy." There is fighting and crime and people are afraid to go out at night, the students say.

Others mention pollution and corruption. The students quickly realize, say NEDI instructors, that while the physical environment has changed, the people and the community have not.

Then the instructors launch a discussion about what might make people happy — and how that could be achieved. And the students inevitably start talking about honesty and cooperation and cleanliness. According to NEDI instructors, they soon conclude that people would be happier if there were no corruption and if people were more helpful to each other.



A developed village where people are the focus

More discussion is held and then, at the end of the exercise, the students are asked to draw another picture of what a "spiritually developed" village would be like. Then they draw a new sort of village, one with lots of people in it, and they are all working together or cooperating. The place is cleaner and more orderly, to be sure. But it also shows happy people.

"So the first step of development intervention is to help people understand who they are as people and to help them see how they can change their behavior," said NEDI's director, Sherif Rushdy.

He and others at NEDI are convinced that such change ultimately comes only through religious faith.

"Development is changing people and you cannot change people unless people are exposed to some Divine Writings or guidance — whether it's the Writings of Buddha or Krishna or Muhammad or Jesus or Bahá'u'lláh — doesn't matter," said Mr. Rushdy. "The source of the Divine Writings comes from God and going back to that source of guidance is what empowers people.

"Now, there are other movements which have taken the religious teachings and have empowered people," said Mr. Rushdy. "The Bahá'í approach is no different from that, except that the teachings are based on the message of Bahá'u'lláh and what He has to offer for today." ☉

As noted, the Institute also sponsors and/or coordinates regional training courses as part of its outreach program. In 1997, according to Mr. Rushdy, some 1,300 individuals were involved in such outreach courses, which run from two weeks to three months.

In addition to providing students with vocational training, the Institute has also directly undertaken a number of small-scale development projects in the villages around Panchgani. These projects have ranged from poultry and pig raising to literacy training to the promotion of bio-gas energy systems.

A "Technology of Training"

According to Mr. Rushdy, the local projects have served in part as a proving ground for the elaboration of a development curriculum, an elaboration that is one of the Institute's most significant accomplishments so far.

"What we have achieved is really a technology of training that gives a balanced development to the individual, releasing their potential as community developers," said Mr. Rushdy.

"Every course of study has four tracks: a service track, a spiritual track, a vocational track and a cultural track. In this way, our aim is that each student should leave with some service skill — how to promote health, hygiene, literacy, the education of children and the like; some spiritual skills — so they know why they are doing these things; some vocational skills — so they can get some money to support themselves; and some cultural skills, meaning training in tolerance and diversity and the arts — so they have the confidence and the capacity to be leaders and they are able to convey development messages through the arts," said Mr. Rushdy.

At the heart of this training technology is what is known on campus as the "core curriculum." Regardless of whether students come to NEDI to learn to be diesel mechanics or pre-primary teachers, they all study the core curriculum, which is taught for the first two hours of each day and extends into an innovative campus community life and requirement for off-campus service.

The heart of the core curriculum is an attempt to teach respect for universal spiritual principles and how to apply them to

contemporary issues, said Dr. Radha Rost, the Institute's training coordinator.

"We teach the basic principles of religion, principles that are common to all the world's religions — we don't teach the Bahá'í Faith per se," said Dr. Rost. "At the same time, however, most of the main elements of the curriculum are drawn from the Bahá'í teachings."

Curriculum elements include not only such progressive social principles as the equality of women and men, the oneness of humanity and the need to eliminate extremes of wealth and poverty, but also in-depth discussions of topics concerned with the soul, the spiritual reality of existence, and the fundamental purpose of life.

The in-depth discussion of religion and spiritual topics underlies a fundamental tenet at the Institute: that truly sustainable development is impossible without tapping into the power of faith.

"If development agencies spend enough money, they can make any project happen," said Mr. Rushdy. "But we believe that sustainability comes from within, and the key to sustainability that all development agencies are looking for is what inspires individuals to take action to develop themselves and their community."

"What we find is that this inspiration, in the long term, does not come from the social worker or the professional development intervenor. It comes from the individual's own connection with God.

"Faith is the key to sustainability, and translating faith into action is what

"If development agencies spend enough money, they can make any project happen. But we believe that sustainability comes from within, and the key to sustainability that all development agencies are looking for is what inspires individuals to take action to develop themselves and their community."

**— Sherif Rushdy,
director of NEDI**

At NEDI's Panchgani campus, students in the motorcycle repair program work on a scooter.



For more than half a century, New Era High School has set the pace for service

PANCHGANI, Maharashtra, India — In some respects, the New Era High School might be considered as the grandfather of modern Bahá'í development efforts.

Founded at the end of World War II in August 1945, the School was one of the first education projects started by Bahá'ís outside of Iran. Its first class consisted of some 16 students, aged four to eight, and they gathered in a small rented house in this scenic and temperate hill station town.

In the 53 years since, the School has grown and flourished, becoming a highly respected private academy, drawing students from all over the world. It currently offers a complete program of study for grade levels from kindergarten through high school, and has an enrollment of nearly 1,000.

The School has long given a high priority to moral education and the promotion of values for world citizenship, and its students have regularly scored high marks on government exams and other academic tests.

Of equal significance, the School has been a proving ground for early Bahá'í efforts at promoting social and economic development in rural areas.

In the 1970s and 1980s, the School gradually began to establish a series of outreach programs aimed at assisting poor and underdeveloped villages in the region. The program was started as a service project for students, operating under the direction of Dr. Ray Johnson, who was the school's principal from 1971 to 1983.

These initial efforts began in 1973, and they involved sending eighth, ninth and tenth grade students down the mountainside into the village of Chicklee in the Krishna River Valley one day a month to assist in such projects as showing villagers how to rid themselves of scabies or assisting in the construction of a new water storage tank.

"We started these things out of a strong conviction that everybody has within them a need to serve," said Jane Grover, who was a vice principal at New Era from 1971 to 1977 and one of the initiators of this program. "And young people, especially, can de-

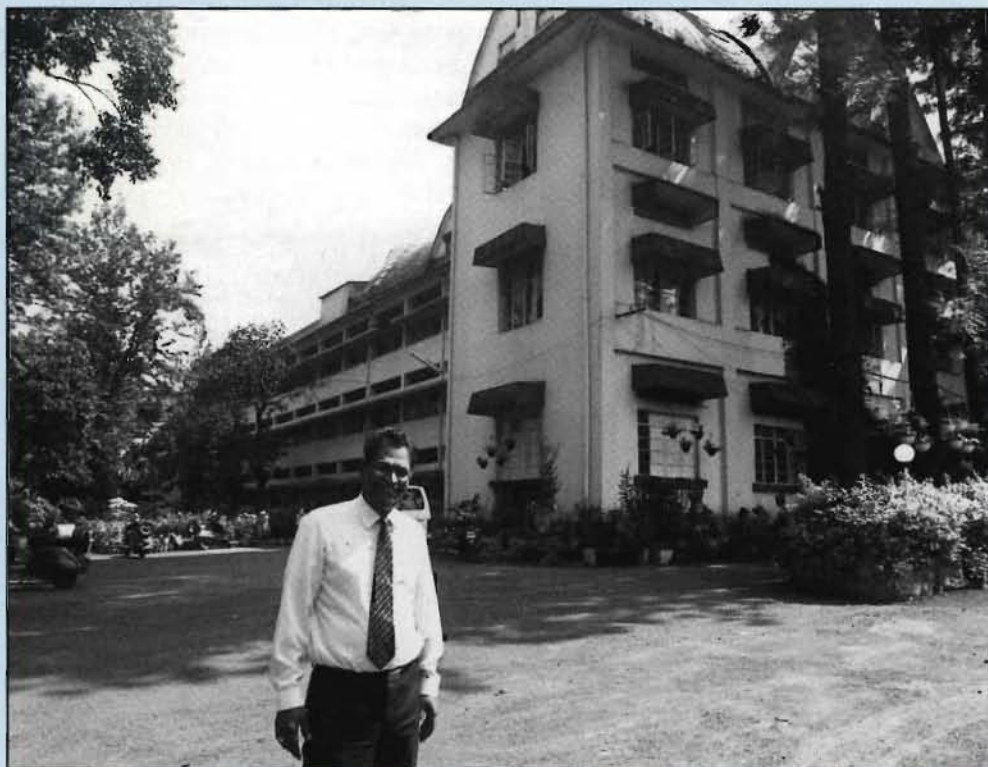
velop that capacity by doing service."

These efforts gradually became more formalized. Grant money was accepted, a van was purchased, and staff members became engaged full time in rural development. Projects to promote health, literacy and better animal husbandry were undertaken.

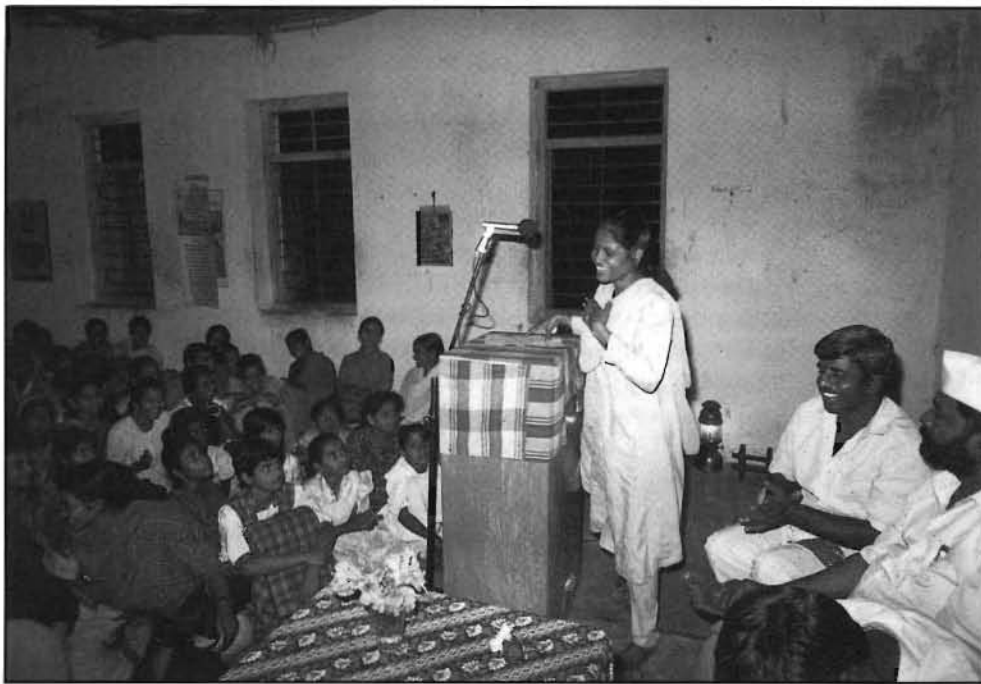
By 1975, the New Era Rural Development Program was established and then, in 1980, a secondary project, the Institute for Rural Technology, was founded. In 1983, these two programs were combined as the New Era Centre for Rural Education and Development. And, finally, in 1987, the New Era Development Institute was founded and its administration was separated entirely from the administration of the New Era High School.

The School is today formally out of the rural development business, ceding that work to NEDI, its sister institution. But it continues to train its students to be service-oriented. Students are required to perform service in and around the campus, as well as to undertake various short-term community service projects.

"Although we are a very good academic school, our primary aim is to build a citizenry that is well developed in terms of moral values and an attitude of service," said Dr. Vasudevan Nair, the principal. ☉



New Era High School Principal Dr. Vasudevan Nair, in front of the school's main building.



In the village of Biblewadi, NEDI, in collaboration with the State Bahá'í Council of Maharashtra, has sponsored a series of courses on literacy, personal development and women's advancement. The graduates from one course were honored in a village ceremony in November, during which some women spoke in public for the first time, displaying a new self-confidence.

development is all about. It has always been. Civilizations around the world have all been built on the actions of people who had a new vision and had the faith to carry it through," said Mr. Rushdy. "And this is what we hope to imbue in our students here. For we feel that, more than simply another development institution, we are in the business of establishing a new civilization."

While it is difficult to gather concrete statistics on the degree to which NEDI students are indeed spiritually energized and concomitantly acting to develop their communities, NEDI's approach has certainly drawn favorable attention from various government development agencies. The Institute has received funds for various projects from the Government of India since 1989, and, as noted, has likewise developed relationships with the Canadian International Development Agency and the Norwegian overseas development authority (NORAD). In 1997, the Institute entered into a four-year collaboration with Norway's Telemark College at Notodden. The collaboration will seek to exchange ideas about teacher-training curriculum, with a focus on cooperative learning, peace education and the use of drama.

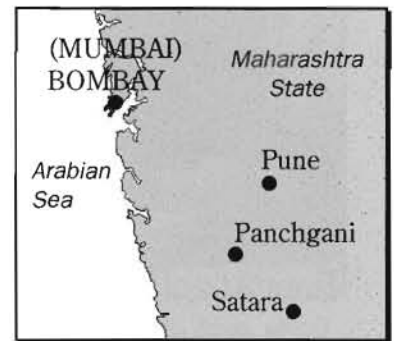
There is also considerable anecdotal evidence that the Institute's approach is succeeding. Recent interviews with NEDI graduates at six locations in Gujarat and Maharashtra states indicated that many

are indeed imbued with a self-confidence and commitment to voluntary community service.

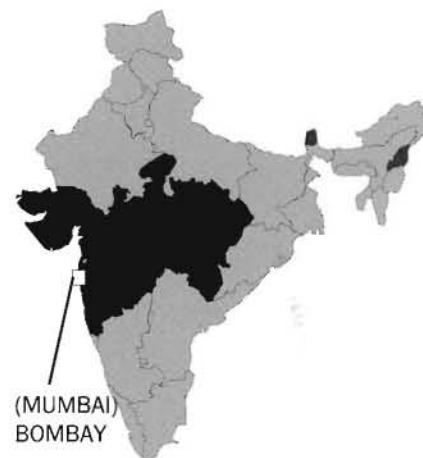
As recounted above, students at a house wiring course in Satara expressed such new attitudes during an interview in November. The course was sponsored by the State Bahá'í Council of Maharashtra, in collaboration with NEDI. The Council provided the classroom and sleeping space, utilizing the Satara Bahá'í Center, and NEDI provided the instructors and funding for the course, which drew some 29 students, of which none are Bahá'ís. It should be noted that this sort of collaboration with regional Bahá'í organizations and agencies is basic to the mandate established for NEDI, which is operated by the National Bahá'í Community of India.

At the same time, in the nearby village of Biblewadi, the Maharashtra Bahá'í Council, in a similar collaboration with NEDI, was sponsoring a series of courses aimed at improving literacy rates, promoting better health and hygiene for women and children, and boosting self-esteem.

The sense of appreciation for these courses, which were given free of charge by NEDI staff and by NEDI-trained volunteers, was evident at a ceremony hosted by village leaders on 20 November 1997. Following a feast, in a ceremony that ran well past midnight, community leaders gave a series of speeches that praised NEDI for its work. Among other things, they said they liked the



The region near Bombay (Mumbai), showing Panchgani, a hill station where NEDI is located.



NEDI has outreach programs in five Indian states: Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, and Sikkim.

Institute's approach to encouraging self-development through moral education.

"This is a holistic program for the community, and the whole community has received a new self-confidence," said Tulsiram Moré, the village chief. "We have some bad habits. If somebody in the village is progressing, we sometimes try to pull him down. But through the spiritual education, we'll get ourselves better developed."

In the village of Shendurjane, some 20 kilometers to the north, another col-

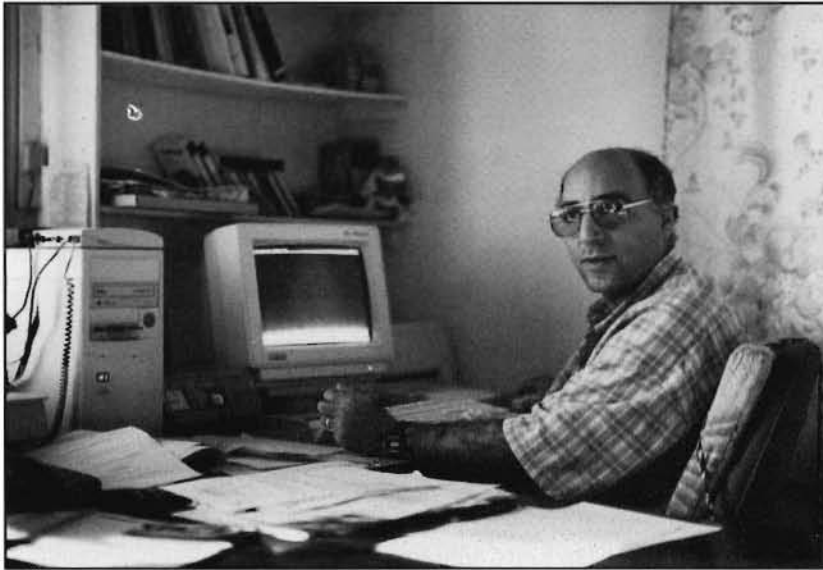
laboration between NEDI and the Maharashtra Bahá'í Council resulted in nightly classes on spiritual development in November. This course, lasting just two weeks, was based on a one of a series of workbooks on spiritual issues developed by Bahá'í educators in Latin America, known in their totality as the Ruhi Institute Course. The course covers topics such as the nature of the soul, the prospects for an afterlife and the connection between the soul's evolution and service to humanity on earth.

The connection between these topics and the development of their own community was evident to the dozen young men who were taking the course. In interviews after the class, they said the discussions helped them see the connection between morality and social progress.

"Those who go through this course, they will never hurt anybody or do bad things because they will remember all the time that God is there to ask us about our actions," said Babu Jadhav, a 20-year-old Hindu farmer. ☸

[NEXT ISSUE: How local Bahá'í communities among the Dang people in Gujarat State are working with NEDI graduates to boost a homegrown program of community development.]

Below: Sherif Rushdy, director of the New Era Development Institute, in his office.



Family conference in Albania

TIRANA, Albania — More than 200 people attended a conference on the theme of "A Healthy Family for a Healthy Society," held in December 1998 and sponsored by the Albanian Bahá'í community.

Speakers addressed topics ranging from dealing with stress and violence in a family context to the creation of healthy marriages and an exploration of new mod-

els for the family.

Representatives from the Ministry of Health and some 17 non-governmental organizations were present at the conference, which also received coverage in the Albanian news media.

Organized by an ad hoc women's task force, the conference included artistic programs in the evening. ☸

ONE COUNTRY starts email text service

NEWYORK—ONE COUNTRY, the newsletter of the Bahá'í International Community, has established an email text list server, which will enable computer users to subscribe to the full texts of ONE COUNTRY via email.

Those wishing to subscribe should send an email with their email address and name to <1country-request@bcc.org>.

Then, once each quarter, the full text of each article in ONE COUNTRY will be emailed to every subscriber. In addition, news bulletins may occasionally be sent to subscribers. To correspond with the editors, please write to <1country@bic.org>. Back articles and other information can be found at the ONE COUNTRY web site, <<http://www.onecountry.org>>. ☸

Review: *God, Chance and Necessity*

(Continued from back page)

operation if not for an omnipotent being.

Prof. Ward, a Christian who obviously possesses a broadly ecumenical mind, likewise argues that various new refinements to the theory of evolution fail to explain how something as complex as human consciousness might arise.

"According to the theory of natural selection, mutations are random; that is, they have no built-in tendency to develop in any particular direction," Prof. Ward writes, saying that it is accordingly "wholly improbable" to then suggest that "the repeated application of a completely blind and non-purposive process of organic mutation and replication" might give rise to beings that possess the capacity of self-consciousness.

Aside from all the rather dry titillation provided by the image of these erudite Oxford dons arguing back and forth about such questions, *God, Chance and Necessity* makes a number of important contributions to the overall debate about the existence of an active and all-loving God. As anyone who has reflected on these questions knows, there is a duality to the answers that is somewhat like the famous optical illusion that oscillates between a vase and two faces. As a phrase from the Bahá'í sacred writings tell us: God is at once and the same time both the "most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden."

In his book, however, Prof. Ward powerfully brings the theistic side of this duality into sharp focus. Consider this critique of those who would say that the laws of the universe simply are, and that there is no need to postulate a Creator:

"Suppose the basic laws of physics popped into existence for no reason at all," Prof. Ward reasons. "One day, they did not exist. The next day, there they were, governing the behavior of electrons and atoms. Now if anything at all might pop into existence for no reason, there is actually no way of assessing the probability of laws of physics doing so. One day, there might be nothing. The next day, there might be a very large carrot... If anything is possible, that certainly

is. The day after that, the carrot might disappear and be replaced by a purple spotted gorilla. Why not? Why does this thought seem odd, or even ridiculous, whereas the thought that some law of physics might just pop into existence does not? Logically, they are on a par."

Accordingly, Prof. Ward writes, the existence of God is actually the simplest and therefore the most scientific theory for the creation of the universe and the impulse behind evolution.

"That the whole cosmos has developed from simplicity and unconsciousness to complexity and self-awareness is a foundational view of modern science," he writes. "Such an evolution from a state where no values are apprehended to states in which values can be both created and enjoyed gives an overwhelming impression of purpose or design. There is thus every reason to think that a scientific evolutionary account and a religious belief in a guiding creative force are not just compatible, but mutually reinforcing."

From a Bahá'í point of view, there is much to agree with in Prof. Ward's reasoning. Bahá'ís certainly hold the view that an all-loving Creator did initiate the universe and that God continues an active role in a process of continuous recreation.

Indeed, Prof. Ward's overall view that the vastness, wonder and diversity of creation is itself a powerful sign of the existence of God, and that the development of human consciousness is surely one of this creation's main purposes, calls to mind the following passage from Bahá'u'lláh:

"All-praise to the unity of God, and all-honor to Him, the sovereign Lord, the incomparable and all-glorious Ruler of the universe, Who, out of utter nothingness, hath created the reality of all things, Who, from naught, hath brought into being the most refined and subtle elements of His creation, and Who, rescuing His creatures from the abasement of remoteness and the perils of ultimate extinction, hath received them into His kingdom of incorruptible glory. Nothing short of His all-encompassing grace, His all-pervading mercy, could have possibly achieved it. How could it, otherwise, have been possible for sheer nothingness to have acquired by itself the worthiness and capacity to emerge from its state of non-existence into the realm of being?" ☉

Prof. Ward essentially argues that modern scientific knowledge does not undermine a belief in God but, instead, actually shows that a Supreme Being is the best explanation of why things are the way they are.

A kinder, gentler universe

God, Chance and Necessity

By Keith Ward

Oneworld

Oxford

Ever since Darwin, belief in God has been under a seemingly strong and continuous assault by science and scientists. And most recently, new notions about how the universe may have grown from a quantum singularity and refinements in the theory of evolution have given fuel to those who would argue that creation was an accident and human consciousness a lucky fluke.

In response, many scientists (and others) who believe in God have written that these same new theories can, in fact, be seen to bolster a belief in an omnipotent Creator. These authors argue that the elegance and economy of the new theories are actually evidences of the operation of a great unseen Hand — and not merely the result of some materialistic mechanism of probability and Darwinian pruning.

In terms of straightforward logic, among the soundest of the thinkers in this pro-God camp must surely be Keith Ward, the Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford University. Prof. Ward has written a tightly reasoned and highly accessible book that seeks to show the fallacies of modern scientific atheism and to make the case for an all-knowing, all-powerful and all-good Creator who continues to play an active (if undetectable) role in running the universe.

Entitled *God, Chance and Necessity*, the book created quite a stir in England when it came out a year ago, inasmuch as much of it was directed at the work of two Oxford colleagues, Peter Atkins and Richard Dawkins.

Prof. Atkins, a chemist, argued in his 1994 book, *Creation Revisited*, that the “big bang” singularity which scientists generally believe marked the start of our universe could have emerged spontaneously out of “nothingness,” suggesting that the laws of quantum physics provide for just such an occurrence. And Prof. Dawkins, a biologist, has argued similarly in a series of recent books that the laws of natural selection can easily explain how increasingly complex organisms have arisen without the help of God, even in apparent violation of the overall tendency for things to become simpler (to decay or breakdown, in other words) over time.

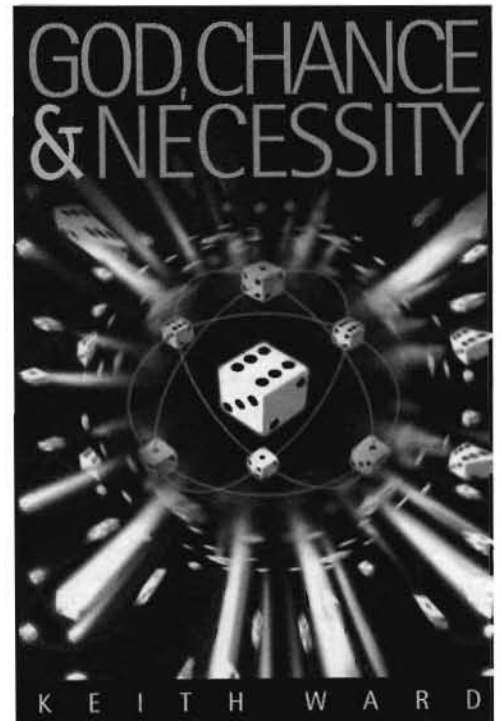
Review

Prof. Ward seeks to rebut these ideas and others, aiming to prove that modern scientific knowledge does not undermine a belief in God but, instead, actually shows that a Supreme Being is the best explanation of why things are the way they are.

He undertakes this quest largely by using logic and philosophical reasoning against Atkins, Dawkins and others. Indeed, his *modus operandi* is to show how their own arguments can be turned around in support of the God hypothesis — something he often does quite convincingly.

Discussing the idea, for example, that the universe could have sprung spontaneously from a primordial soup of quantum fluctuations, proto-particles and probabilities (as Atkins and others have suggested), Prof. Ward argues that such a preexistent state is not “nothing” at all, but rather a very big “something.”

“...the hypothesis proposed by Atkins, that ‘spacetime generates its own dust in the process of its own self-assembly’, is blatantly self-contradictory,” Prof. Ward



writes. “It is ...logically impossible for a cause to bring about some effect, without already being in existence.” He bolsters this argument by asking what it is in the universe that keeps such quantum processes — and all other natural laws — in

(Continued on page 15)