



Association for Bahá'í Studies (English Speaking Europe)



“The world has – at least the thinking world – caught up by now with all the great and universal principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh over 70 years ago, and so of course it does not sound ‘new’ to them. But we know that the deeper teachings, the capacity of His projected World Order to recreate society, are new and dynamic. It is these we must learn to present intelligently and enticingly to such men!”

(Shoghi Effendi: Prominent People, p. 272)

Bahá'í Scholarship Course, Arts Academy 2001

ATTENDING A course on Bahá'í scholarship at the Arts Academy initially seemed somewhat embarrassing. On arrival, old friends and new acquaintances would all invariably enquire as to what course we were doing. After incoherent mumblings and other attempts at avoiding the question, we would admit with a nudge and a wink that, yes, we had joined a flower arranging course. The reality of the situation, however, turned out to be much, much better...



Friends at the Bahá'í Scholarship Course held at the Arts Academy, Sidcot 2001. Back Row: Mahmoud Foroughi, Seena Fazel and Dominic Brookshaw (tutors) Middle: Nadi Hofmann, Shadi Doostar, Tom Habibi, Masoud Afjan, Ian Hamilton, Jonneke Koomen. Front Row: Jane Aldred, John Danesh, Alison Jay, William Richards, Sarah Sabour-Pickett.

The course was set up by the Association for Bahá'í Studies (English Speaking Europe) to train and inspire people – particularly youth – to “do” Bahá'í research. Bahá'í scholars have important work to do. Moojan Momen spoke of the unique opportunities to explore and develop Bahá'í thought, so early on in its evolution. Bahá'í scholarship also plays a key role in both teaching and defending the Faith, as discussed by Seena Fazel.

The course was also a careers-taster. We learnt about the variety of work done by the speakers, both within the Bahá'í and academic communities. All the scholars who attended the course were extremely colourful characters and immediately dispelled this misnomer of the “nerdy” scholar.

Stephen Lambden discussed the diverse fields of study in Bahá'í Scholarship, especially mentioning Bahá'í theology and dialogue with other established religions. Dominic Brookshaw spoke of the literary context in Bahá'í scripture with particular reference to the Hidden Words and the Long Obligatory Prayer. Sholeh Quinn vividly demonstrated the realities of looking at Bahá'í history within often less-than-encouraging mainstream academic settings. During Lil Abdo's sessions, models for studying early Bahá'í history were discussed, and she shared fascinating accounts of the early believers in the UK.

Bahá'í scholars face difficult challenges, both from within the Bahá'í community and outside. In particular, the small number of Bahá'í scholars can be a disadvantage. They all reiterated the urgent need for more Bahá'í scholars, especially amongst the youth. None of them tried to glamorise this form of service to the Faith, but all, with a twinkle in their eyes, mentioned the immense satisfaction they derived from profound and systematic study of the Faith.

This course was very inspiring, practically useful and ground breaking in concept. Indeed, the great effort and huge sacrifices made by all the speakers were much appreciated by all who participated. The Arts Academy was a fantastic setting, and towards the end, we even dared to admit the true nature of the, uh “flower arranging course”, and sparked much interest – let's hope there are more of these courses to come! Thanks to all who made it happen: the Association for Bahá'í Studies, the Arts Academy team and the National Spiritual Assembly of the UK.

Shadi Doostar and Jonneke Koomen

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