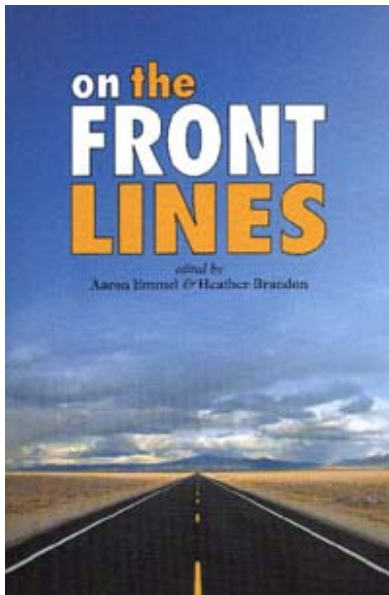


Book Reviews



On the Front Lines – Bahá'í
Youth in Their Own Words
by Aaron Emmel &
Heather Brandon

Publisher: George Ronald

TO BE A YOUNG person in today's world, facing conflicting social and economic pressures, is no simple thing: to be a Bahá'í youth and expected to maintain a standard that much of the rest of the world finds outmoded or irrelevant is even harder. It has never been easy, and with each passing generation, it gets harder. It has been said that today's young people are the first generation that cannot legitimately expect life to be better for them in material terms than it was for their parents, and that this trend will continue. To economic pressures must be added the breaking down of family life and social norms, the devaluing of marriage, the lack of clear authority in society and of respect for what there is, and the pervasive nature of drug-taking. One does not really envy today's young people.

And yet they are the hope for the future. Bahá'í youth in particular have a vision of something better and a sense of being part of and building that new world which will help their peers, and people of all ages, escape the destructive pressures and be able to live lives of meaning. They have the energy and they have advantages denied to older and more settled members of the community. They can reach out to their fellow youth and have a special role in teaching – a young person who accepts a specific “cause” – and commits to it willingly while they are young – is more likely to remain committed to it and serve it with enthusiasm for many years.

It is therefore not surprising that the Bahá'í Faith gives great attention to this group. A computer search through *MARS* reveals 332 occurrences of the word “youth” in the published writings of Shoghi Effendi, the phrase “Bahá'í youth” occurring 102 times. Readers will be familiar with many of the quotations. But what do young people themselves think? What concerns do Bahá'í youth have in their lives? What problems and priorities do they see? After all, if the Bahá'í community as a whole is to give them the support they need, it has to hear what they say. And this book really helps.

I had not previously heard of the American Bahá'í youth Magazine “One” and if the material given here is anything to go by, it is my loss, and the loss of my growing children. I wish I had known about it long ago.

Most of the book is made up of articles from One (there is

most of the book is made up of articles from one (there is also a section about how the magazine came about and the vision of its creators) and they are a lively and interesting mix. Relatively few are introspective, most deal with the person's first hand experiences of life and what it is to be a Bahá'í, whether pioneering, travel-teaching, in college, or just trying to get through the challenges. There are also a number of interviews with people of interest in terms of what they have to say to young men and women.

One of the most interesting interviewees is Layli Miller-Bashir, a passionate defender of women's rights who as a young lawyer found herself precipitated into the public eye in a high profile case in America. (The case and its circumstances are set out in *Do They Hear You When You Cry?* by Fauziya Kassindja and Layli Miller-Bashir – which, while it is not a light or cheerful book, should be read by anyone who really cares about the plight of women in our world and the crimes against them that are all too often overlooked in the name of “respect for people's culture”.)

The back cover of *On the Front Lines* lists the various issues that concern young people, and a reader may gain the impression that what lies within is an analytical study or a stepby- step guide about how to deal with them. That does not do it justice. The book is actually much warmer and more personal and all the more readable, all the better,

Iain S. Palin for that.

