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Journal of the Bahá'í Community of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland  
Volume 19, No.8 – February, 2003 / 159BE

**LARGE PRINT** / Standard Print.

National Committees and Departments

## YoS Desk UK

### Year of Service at the School of Nations Brasilia, Brazil

BRAZIL, FOR ME, was a series of amazing experiences. I became familiar with a new culture – a very welcoming one that made me feel at home straight away. Brazilians are a perfect example of the Bahá'í teachings of diversity. Some of them look Japanese, Chinese, European, African, Caribbean, yet they don't have any prejudices against these different physical appearances; they all consider themselves Brazilians and live very peacefully together (at least the ones that I met) whatever their backgrounds may be. They are also extremely encouraging people, always telling me that my Portuguese was great.



Vafa (centre) with children from the School of Nations

The Bahá'í community in Brasilia, the capital city, is quite big and we would always use the hall of the School of Nations, for collective feasts. I learnt some great tips from these celebrations. There was a song at every feast and an artistic report from the treasurer and the opportunity for all to share their personal teaching experiences (at smaller feasts this was possible). Everyone had the opportunity to discuss any topic concerning the affairs of the community that they would like to consult about during the administrative part of the feast (consultations did sometimes go on and on – well it did seem like that when I could understand very little of the discussions and I knew gorgeous gateaux were awaiting). But they did make great use of feasts to review projects and continually learn from them and adapt them.

Throughout the week there were numerous study circles and firesides to attend. Every Sunday there was a teaching project at the park; we would invite people to join us in saying some prayers for peace. This was one of the open devotional meetings organised to reach the objective of the Five Year Plan. We had leaflets to distribute with a selection of prayers and a space for them to put their address to request a free prayer book if they chose.

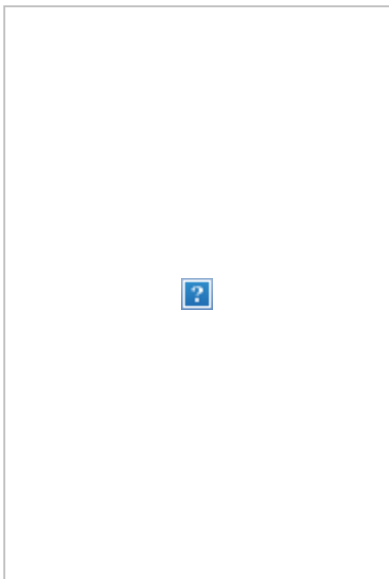
I never had a moment to be bored. During the week I assisted teachers and taught maths at the School of Nations. The school was owned by the National Assembly and run by a Bahá'í director and according to Bahá'í principles.

My year of service was very beneficial to my future career as a teacher as I learnt some valuable skills. Afternoons and weekends were busy with Bahá'í activities or simply spending time with the numerous friends I was able to make, as the Brazilians are ever so friendly. I think my teaching work there was probably very limited due to language barriers but I felt there was something special about my being there. It reminded me of some words I had read in the pioneering section of a Bahá'í Journal:

*The movement itself from place to place, when undertaken for the sake of God, hath always exerted, and can now exert, its influence in the world.*

(Bahá'u'lláh: quoted in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, p. 84)

Vafa Kouchekezadeh



*Shadi Behi*

### Welsh Bahá'í Youth to make video diary of Year of Service in Tierra Santa orphanage

SHADI BEHI, the first Welsh Bahá'í born in the then "Dwyfor" (North Wales) community, is serving at the El Hogar Tierra Santa home for abandoned children in Honduras for six months.

Before Shadi set off on December 1, 2002, she received a call from a Welsh TV company who are in the process of making a programme about the Bahá'í Faith. They came to interview Shadi just days before she left as she is a Welsh-speaking Bahá'í.

The TV company also want Shadi to make a video diary of her time in Honduras and will provide her with the necessary equipment.

Shadi remarked "How unbelievable is this? Amazing how things happen without me having to do anything. God's doing it I'm sure!"

### Year of Service Desk (YOSDeskUK)

Secretary: Sylvia Miley — email: Esmyr Koomen <yosdesk@bahai.org.uk>, Website: [www.bahai.org.uk/yos/](http://www.bahai.org.uk/yos/)

## Committee for International Pioneering and Travel Teaching

SOUTHERN CYPRUS is a "Category One" country as defined by the Universal House of Justice, i.e. of all the countries worldwide it is one of a few that are in most need of travel teachers and pioneers. Southern Cyprus is an island community which is insular, family orientated and profoundly influenced by the Orthodox Church. Consequently, it is not obviously open to change. Hence this is one of the great challenges that face anybody who wants to travel-teach or pioneer. We were "anybody".



*Kath (centre front) and Mike (centre seated) with Cypriot pioneers and friends*

Booking a package holiday in the month of May at first made us cringe: holiday reps, continental breakfasts, a rental car and Ambre Solaire, all seemed far removed from the idea of a "Teaching Trip". However, we found this a cheap and convenient way of making our own way to Cyprus without burdening the already busy Bahá'ís residing there.

The Cypriots are warm like the weather, generous like the helpings of food and friendly in a free and giving way, which makes the UK seem frozen by comparison. So, following the advice of the local Bahá'ís and the CIPTT, we sniffed the air and headed for the coffee shops, played backgammon and wandered the back streets looking for opportunities to meet and befriend local people.

A common experience for us was failing to get a response from the listener, after bringing up the subject of "Bahá'í" in the conversation. Even if we mentioned the word in every sentence, few bit the bait. The listener overlooked it as casually as if we were saying, "We are tourists from England!" Maybe this is their way of being polite. We are not quite sure yet.

The week we were there gave us a good understanding of the Cypriots and of the steadfast, hard-working Bahá'ís who live there. The thirty Bahá'ís who make up the community mainly consist of pioneers and they are all over the age of 40. This community needs younger, independent, self motivated and dedicated long term teachers. They have two Local Assemblies and are following the guidance of the Universal House of Justice from the January 9, 2002 letter just as we are – forming study circles and devotional meetings, but with different challenges.

In our second trip in November, and from consulting with the local Bahá'ís, we found that the need is for us to establish friendships with the Cypriots, keep in contact, email them, call them and most importantly return to Cyprus to allow trust and friendship to grow. This way we can win their hearts, rather than take names and numbers to merely pass on.

As a travel teacher one needs to generate one's own contacts, be independent from the local Bahá'í community and ready to find opportunities wherever one can. Teaching here requires us to be detached from the rewards of instant gratification, be systematic and patient. Friendships are important in the Cypriot culture. Generating contacts in Cyprus can be started here in the UK. Universities, particularly in London, Manchester and Oxbridge will have Greek/Cypriot Societies. Here people can be found who are living out of the confines of the "island mentality" who are ready to explore new lines of thought, yet retain the elements of hospitality that are inbuilt. Having an interest in Cyprus and wanting to learn more about the culture and learning Greek are good enough reasons to go to these societies. The most recent declaration in Cyprus was a young man who found out about the Faith while at University in the US – he went to study circles there and whilst on summer break found the local Bahá'ís and after much soul searching declared.

We arrived looking like tourists and left looking like tourists, but inside a vision was forming.

Perhaps looking at Cyprus now is similar to how the British Bahá'ís saw themselves 60 years ago. It is a blessing to watch Cyprus develop in all aspects towards its future. It has many challenges and opportunities. By being systematic, dedicated and longterm in our approach we know there are great victories to be won.

Kath and Mike Hainsworth

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## From the Desk of the CIPTT

### Impassioned plea from overseas pioneer

THE NEW GREGORIAN year 2003 rolls on. Rather appropriately, at the beginning of the month of Honour, one of our longer term overseas pioneers, David Lambert, was recognised in the Queen's new year Honours List with an MBE for services to the people of Mongolia in the field of English education. This had the added benefit that it generated good media interest in the UK.

As we know, of course, the honour that really matters is the service to Bahá'u'lláh, the King of Glory, but these small tributes from the external world to the dedication of our stalwart pioneers in their efforts to participate in and contribute to the development of their adopted countries, are important to the international standing of the Faith and an important pointer to the wider population at home and abroad that this is a Faith that inspires its adherents to serve all mankind.

Many, many of our valiant pioneers are deserving of such honours and year after year quietly carry on in their sacrificial efforts to encourage and support the downtrodden, the under valued, the dispossessed, the powerless, the disregarded millions of humanity, each individual of whom is a unique creation of God with an immortal soul to develop and bloom in service to its Lord.

A myriad heartfelt thanks to those who have arisen to pioneer and travel teach so far. Every effort however small is potent in its effect and influence beyond our knowing. As we advance toward the end of yet another year of the Five Year Plan, let us who stand at the ramparts of the homefront rededicate ourselves to respond in the forthcoming months with

even greater determination and resolve to make sacrificial efforts in money, manpower and prayer to meet the goals of this greatly honoured community. A monarchy and system of government commended by Bahá'í 'u'lláh himself, twice visited extensively by the Master, who was himself honoured by this country, and blessed by the bounty of keeping watch over the earthly remains of the Sign of God on Earth, Shoghi Effendi.

We have recently had a particularly impassioned plea from one of the three overseas pioneers in Macedonia for urgent reinforcements and prayers. There is one Local Assembly in the country and a goal to achieve a National Spiritual Assembly by the end of the Plan. Their NTC and the community recite the Tablet of Ahmad every day at 23.00 hours, local time, for the progress of the Faith in that deeply conservative country. Please join them in this at least or if you want to do more, email [ntcbahai@mt.net.mk](mailto:ntcbahai@mt.net.mk) but keep us informed of what develops.

Slovenia is another Balkan goal country that needs our attention especially for long term, financially self supporting pioneers though travel teachers, particularly those with artistic or dance workshop experience, are also needed. The country is fairly mountainous or hilly and heavily afforested. The climate is Mediterranean on the coast and continental inland, hot in summer and cold in winter. Capital city Ljubljana. Total population approx two million, mainly Catholic. Languages: Slovenian, English, German and Italian.

We know, of course, that you also will not forget the other goal countries in the Philip Hainsworth Campaign Five Year Plan Goals in Europe: Bosnia & Herzegovina; Corsica; Croatia; Cyprus (Southern); Faroe Islands; Malta; Kosovo; Montenegro; Serbia; Vojvodina.

We urge you to look at the CIPTT website for information on the needs of each place. The website is at [www.bahai.org.uk/pioneers](http://www.bahai.org.uk/pioneers). The user name and password are confidential to Bahá'í's and should not be distributed to others, not even Bahá'í's, over the internet. The password can be found by contacting the CIPTT or the Journal editor.

#### CIPTT

Secretary: Peyman Adab – email: [peymane@onetel.net.uk](mailto:peymane@onetel.net.uk)  
Visit the CIPTT website at: [www.bahai.org.uk/pioneers/](http://www.bahai.org.uk/pioneers/)

## Travel Teaching and Homefront Pioneering Service

YOU are needed.

The communities below have informed us that they will joyfully welcome pioneers/travel teachers to form their assembly at Ridván which will be soon upon us.

- North Tyneside: Needs 1. Short term accommodation available for 1 (On the list of BCE goals)
- Angmering: (South Downs Cluster) Needs 3. A lot of potential for activities
- Redhill: (Surrey & N.Downs Cluster) Needs 2. Active community with children
- Haywards Heath: (North Downs Cluster ) Needs 1

We have also received a number of requests from small but active groups or isolated believers that would welcome travel teachers/Pioneers to strengthen their community.

- Northhill, near Biggleswade, Beds.
- Leatherhead, Surrey (North Downs Cluster) welcomes pioneers
- Bridge of Weir near Glasgow
- Carmarthen (Wales)
- Rural Training Farm in Abergwili community (Wales)
- Llangunnor community (Wales)
- Balaine/Nantyglo. Nr. Cardiff (Wales)

For more details please contact us. For the list of Goals of the Bahá'í Councils please see their individual Websites.

#### Travel Teaching and Homefront Pioneering Service

Becky Grove, Iran Jolly, Moigan Heintzdoest, Sani, Vanessa Vourtehi

## Bahá'í Office for Religious and Educational Affairs

THE NATIONAL BAHÁ'Í Festival in Scarborough was a most uplifting and positive event that saw a great spirit amongst the community and one which seemed to permeate in an almost physical sense, the people of Scarborough themselves, a number of whom actually came in to the Festival to find out what it was that was going on.

As members of the Bahá'í Office for Religious and Educational Affairs (BOREA), we became very much aware that the work in which the Office is involved, is beginning to have effects in the wider community. Many people came to the BOREA stall to ask about information concerning SACRE (Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education) — every Local Education Authority in England and Wales has one. Some wanted advice on how to become involved in their SACRE; others asked for suggestions on how to overcome local opposition to the Bahá'í's being allowed into the SACRE; some wanted guidance on how to progress Bahá'í participation in the Agreed RE Syllabus Review in their area; while another group came to show or give us copies of their Agreed Syllabus with the Faith in it!

This was very encouraging, as the communities in England and Wales (the regions for which BOREA is responsible) are clearly moving forward and not being put off by any obstacles presented to them.

More worrying, however, was the fact that many individuals came forward to say that BOREA seemed to be unaware of their existence on their local SACRE, or that they were involved in a review of the Agreed Syllabus.

BOREA wants to be able to give the friends up-to-date, accurate information on the communities involved in SACRE. This is only possible, of course, if accurate, up-to-date information is received from those communities involved. In the next issue of the

Bahá'í Journal, BOREA will give a list of all those communities from whom we have received information. If you are not certain that your community has done this, please send it to Jenny Lockwood as soon as possible. The data should include:

- your current status in SACRE (ie: observer; co-opted; or full voting)
- is the Faith on the Agreed Syllabus (if it is, please either send BOREA a copy, or inform us of how to get hold of one, as this enables us to help produce materials that are appropriate for your area)
- is your SACRE performing a review of the syllabus in the next 12 months?

We would also like to hear from you if you are on a SACRE and would be willing to be a "mentor" to those wishing to join SACRE, and have your details shared with them by BOREA.

Finally, more news on the Citizenship materials: the Key Stages 1 and 2 (Primary School) Pilot Materials were launched at the Festival, and a number of copies sold during the weekend. More copies of the Key Stages 3 and 4 (Secondary School) Pilot Materials were also sold. Since they came out in the summer, a number of copies have been used by teachers in state schools. In a workshop at the Festival, a headteacher from a Leicester school, Mr Steve White — who is a campaigner for social cohesion — encouraged people to get this document used in their local secondary schools.

In the next few months BOREA will receive feedback from the teachers who have used the materials and this will enable us to improve the documents and launch the finished product nationally.

If you want any more information about any of the citizenship materials, please use the contact details below.

For information relating to SACRE, contact Jenny Lockwood, email: [borea@bahai.org.uk](mailto:borea@bahai.org.uk)

For information relating to RE or Citizenship in Key Stages 1 and 2,

contact Simon Trick, email: [nstricks@yahoo.com](mailto:nstricks@yahoo.com)

For information relating to RE or Citizenship in Key Stages 3 and 4,

contact Jo Constantine, email: [xdragonladyx@yahoo.com](mailto:xdragonladyx@yahoo.com)

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## **Bahá'í Office for Social and Economic Development** **First 'Virtues Project' course held in Abingdon**

HISTORY WAS made when the first course for the Virtues Project in England was held in the beautiful ancient environment of the Guildhall in Abingdon.

The group consisted of thirty-three people, both Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís, of all ages. Initially, it seemed quite a daunting size – the circle of expectant faces was rather large and I was a little worried that there would be no real intimacy. But I was pleasantly surprised – I think the carefully thought out format of the weekend encouraged a very special and creative atmosphere. There was a mixture of small group activities (often in pairs, but sometimes three in each), feedback and discussion with the whole group, small presentations (by the facilitator Margaret), and moments for quiet reflection and creativity (such as drawing your life in the form of a river!), all of which constantly altered the pace and enabled everyone to participate.

I must admit certain aspects such as “spiritual companioning” at first sounded rather bizarre! But this in fact turned out to be a very inspiring, rewarding way of communication, one that simply requires deep listening. One of the most important things I learnt was that we too often “rescue” others when talking to them – this can mean interrupting, advising, comparing, offering a “helpful” word, etc. Certainly this can be done with the very best, comforting intentions but all too often it in fact stops that person from talking. Margaret gave the example of a crying child...we hold them and say, “Hush” or “It’s ok”... and sometimes it’s NOT ok! We are in the habit, from a very early age, of comforting someone by making him or her be quiet (often with a physical gesture).

One approach to spiritual companioning developed by this project taught us to just be present and listen; this doesn’t mean we say nothing at all, but we respect silence, and allow people to tell their story (if, of course they want to). It also involves asking open questions such as “How did you sleep?” rather than “Did you sleep well?” which is a closed, limiting question (i.e. they can only really say yes or no).

We were welcomed on the Friday evening with warm drinks, our own folders and a diamond-shaped name badge each. When divided into smaller groups, we always had the chance to both speak and listen to others, and at the end of each activity we were asked to acknowledge a virtue we had seen in each other – these were written on our name badges so that by the end of the weekend we all went away with a list of virtues that others had seen in us.

It was emphasised that we should always acknowledge and praise someone for demonstrating a virtue, but we should be specific: how have they shown this virtue? Praising people is about holding up a mirror to them for that moment, not branding them for life. So instead of saying, “you’re so generous”, it would be better to say “that was very generous of you when...” This can be particularly heartening for people if they’re acknowledged for doing something that is maybe out of character, or the result of extreme effort. We also learnt how to replace vices, which are part of man’s lower nature, with virtues.

The Saturday afternoon was typically autumnal – crisp and sunny, and we all went on a “spirit walk”. This meant walking on our own without talking to anyone else – and many of us went to the park, which was beautiful with fiery colour. We simply had to walk and appreciate what we saw; if something caught our eye, we should stop and study it. One of the steps for spiritual health is to expose ourselves to beauty; this walk was all about being surrounded by nature and finding what “re-creates” us emotionally/

spiritually/mentally. We came back and spent some time, still in silence, writing down our thoughts on the objects that had attracted us. We had to relate these to the virtue we had each picked earlier that day (chosen randomly, from the collection of the 52 virtues cards).

I had picked “Honesty”, and it was a very enriching experience to think quite practically about how this virtue related to my personal interests on the spirit walk. Indirectly this exercise showed us the link between the virtues and our everyday lives and perceptions. We then went into groups of three to share what we had seen and felt, remembering to listen carefully when others were talking.

Music also played an important part and helped create an attentive, thought provoking atmosphere. It was often played at the opening and closing of sessions, and as we had been given copies of the lyrics in our folders, we were encouraged to listen more carefully than we might do ordinarily.

We had a fantastic group of people that were really open and ready to gain from the course; and because we were immediately plunged into sharing and talking at quite a deep and personal level, there was almost instantly a very friendly, comfortable and warm atmosphere.

I met so many wonderful new people, and over this weekend truly appreciated that it is a privilege to talk so sharingly with other souls, when each and every one of us is so unique and complex. I felt the course achieved a wonderful balance between the spiritual and practical; I left with a sense that I could really put into practice what I’d learnt and use it both for myself and others.

All our needs were catered for beautifully – delicious meals in the wonderful, cosy atmosphere of Susie Howard’s home, frequent breaks for coffee, cake and biscuits, and (for some of us) lovely accommodation in the rather exciting, off the beaten track, Kingfisher Barn. So much hard work, thought and care went into making the weekend a very special and inspirational time for us all. Thank you very much!

Genevieve Burnett

