

A Study on the Language Barrier in the Japanese Baha'i Community

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The Japanese Baha'i Community today is facing a grievous problem of administrative and spiritual stagnation due to its language barrier mainly between English and Japanese. The paper addresses the three most frequently posed questions in relation to this issue: 1) Why the necessity for translation and interpretation; why the linguistic diversity in the first place? 2) Is knowledge of English a necessary qualification for being enrolled in the Baha'i Community? and 3) What is going to be an international auxiliary language, when and how will one be selected? The results showed that the linguistic diversity and translation and interpretation have both advantages and disadvantages and that they serve as a temporary means to achieve the ultimate goal that everyone on earth will communicate with each other through a common language.

1. Problem

The Japanese Baha'i Community today is facing a grievous problem of administrative and spiritual stagnation due to its language barrier mainly between English and Japanese. Due to this barrier, the Baha'is often wonder why there exists the linguistic diversity at all and why the toilsome work of translation and interpretation, why the language did not remain one all this time if linguistic unity is divinely ordained for this dispensation. Moreover, many of the Japanese Baha'is and seekers feel intimidated, believing that knowledge of the English language is a necessary qualification for being enrolled in the Baha'i Community. And lastly, the ultimate question has been being raised: "Whither the international auxiliary language?"—the concept Baha'u'llah and 'Abdu'l-Baha had enunciated—what happened to it? The paper will address these three questions: 1) Why the necessity for translation and interpretation, why the linguistic diversity in the first place? 2) Is knowledge of English a requirement for becoming a Baha'i; and 3) What is going to be an international auxiliary language, when and how will one be selected?

Let us first examine the functions of translation and interpretation by analyzing their advantages and disadvantages.

2. Functions of Translation and Interpretation (referred to as T&I, hereafter)

1) The Advantages of Translation and Interpretation

a) T&I allows one to understand in his/her mother tongue. The first advantage which is the most obvious is that T&I allows the reader or hearer to understand the text in his/her own language, giving him/her better understanding of the text than otherwise. And yet, probably equally important an element in this regard is a psychological impact the mother tongue gives. This is explained in the following letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, dated Dec. 14, 1992:

In the meantime it is essential for the Baha'is to convey the Word of God to all the peoples of the world, as quickly and as completely as possible. For this, translation is essential.

..To expect the Japanese Baha'is to learn Arabic, Persian and English sufficiently well to really understand the Baha'i literature in those three tongues would be too great a demand..even if the friends' command of English is sufficiently good...there is an important emotional and psychological advantage to their being able to read the Word of God in their own mother-tongue. Thus we engage in translating the Writings into even tribal languages which have quite a small number of native speakers. (From a letter addressed to the present author)

This is a manifestation of the Baha'i principle: Unity in Diversity. Though our ultimate goal is to adopt a universal common language, yet in the meantime, we pay respect to each culture, including language. Therefore, T&I becomes essential.

b) T&I deepens the understanding of the inner meanings: Baha'u'llah writes about His own words as follows:

...My holy, My divinely ordained Revelation may be likened unto an ocean in whose depths are concealed innumerable pearls of great price, of surpassing luster. It is the duty of every seeker to bestir himself and strive to attain the shores of this ocean... This most great, this fathomless and surging Ocean is near, astonishingly near, unto you. Behold it is closer to you than your life-vein! (Gleanings CLIII, p. 326)

Likewise, 'Abdu'l-Baha talks about the symbolism and profundity of religious language.

Divine things are too deep to be expressed by common words. The heavenly teachings are expressed in parable in order to be understood and preserved for ages to come. When the spiritually minded dive deeply into the ocean of their meaning, they bring to the surface the pearls of their inner significance. There is no greater pleasure than to study God's word with a spiritual mind (From the utterances of 'Abdu'l-Baha in London, quoted in The Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith, #63).

Thus religious writings and teachings contain many hidden meanings. It is the task of the reader to meditate upon their meanings and reveal them. T&I, by its nature, helps this meditative process; it makes one think and ponder upon meanings of text.

c) T&I spreads divine fragrance abroad. In referring to translation of Baha'u'llah's Writings, 'Abdu'l-Baha has written:

Regarding the translation of the Books and Tablets of the Blessed Beauty: ere long will translations be made into every tongue, with power, clarity and grace. At such time as they are translated, conformably to the originals, and with power and grace of style, the splendours of their inner meanings will be shed abroad, and will illumine the eye of all mankind. Do thy very best to ensure that the translation is in conformity with the original (Selections, #31, p. 66).

What does 'Abdu'l-Baha mean by "the splendours of their inner meanings" and by "be shed abroad" and "illumine the eyes of all mankind?" For one thing, we can say the translator himself understands the meaning and influence others intellectually. But there is more to that. Baha'u'llah Himself seems to be explaining this process in the following celebrated passage:

Inlone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men. Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul (Gleanings CXXXVI, p. 295).

We have been often told that Divine words uttered by a believer influence not only the believer himself but people around and sometimes even the whole world, as explained in this passage. And yet, the same process can take place when translating. This happens because, when one translates in a proper spiritual and mental condition, the same process takes place, because one is in a meditative state and deepening the understanding of the words. Thus, though a Community like Japan may seem to have disadvantages of having to go through translation, it could enjoy the benefits of spreading Divine fragrance abroad. Of course, such a process is invisible and has no meaning to materialistic empiricists. We can only say that one can "feel" the power by practicing it regularly.

d) T&I allows views from different angles. Linguists (A. E. Fantani, 1989) suggest that language is more than just a mere tool but it is "a world view" itself. Or others (Saito, 1992) say that to learn a language is to learn philosophy. According to this view, it is implied that translation into a different language means to express the same theme in a different perspective, thus we deepen the understanding of that subject. It is not within the scope of this paper to examine and evaluate which language has what sort of characteristics and strengths. Yet, we may state quite confidently that different tongues offer different ways of understanding the same text. T&I enables this process.

e) T&I promotes the process of consultation. 'Abdu'l-Baha has in several places referred to great difficulty of the art of translation. In one place He says that a translator must be versed in various sciences, religions, divine wisdoms, thoughts and scientific and philosophical terms (see Ma'idiy-i-Asmani, Vol. 9, p. 141 quoted in Story of My Heart, p. 208). In another place, He says:

...translation is one of the most difficult arts. In both Persian and English utmost proficiency is necessary, that the translator be a writer and use as the vehicle of expression great eloquence and fluency of tongue (Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Baha, I, p. 152, quoted in An Index of Quotations, under the title "Translation").

Thus, it is extremely difficult for one person to translate, especially to translate religious texts. Therefore, usually a committee of several translators is appointed for collaborative works (see Abdu'l-Baha, quoted in An Index of Quotations under "Translation"; Shoghi Effendi's letter dated 2/27/1926 quoted in George Townshend, pp. 55-56). The Baha'i

principle of consultation is very important because it is the source of mature understanding and success for great enterprises. T&I promotes this process of consultation.

f) T&I serves the principle of progressive revelation within a dispensation. The great barrier which intervenes between languages does not always act as a negative barrier, but sometimes serves as a positive one. The translation difficulty has in some cases protected the Baha'i teachings from being misused or abused. For instance, soon after the *Kitab-i-Aqdas*, the Most Holy Book, was revealed, one of the believers tried to translate the Book into another language. Baha'u'llah, while praising the motive of that believer, had to prohibit such an act at that point. The wisdom of this has been now revealed to us who live in the last decade of the 20th century, some hundred years after the revelation of that Book. Because not all the laws are meant to be enforced immediately but rather gradually according to the conditions of the society. Because it requires a great deal of preparation materially, mentally and spiritually to present it to the whole Baha'i world, the publication of its English translation was not realized until this year (January, 1993). The prohibition of translation served as a protective measure and allowed progressive revelation within this dispensation.

g) T&I helps elevate one's literary level. Sometimes, because of the difficulty of translation, translators work on improving their final product so hard that they often end up creating a new dimension of literature. They create a new language, and launch a new level of language development in that culture. Some of the great Japanese literary men were also great translators: Natsume Soseki, Mori Ogai and Yokoi Shonan, for example. In the Baha'i Faith, we can cite Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian himself.

h) T&I leads to raising Baha'i scholars. Because of intensive, intimate association with the texts, T&I helps create scholars of that field. Indeed, the first step to scholarship is usually getting familiar with the literature of a given field. T&I offers a direct opportunity to become versed in the Writings.

i) T&I allows consideration and sensitivity to the culture into whose language the Baha'i Teachings are translated. As mentioned earlier, language can be seen as a world view, a kind of philosophy. Thus, when we translate, we are not merely paraphrasing the text into another tongue, but we are relating and applying the concepts to that society and culture. So, sometimes translating and interpreting the ideas and concepts literally do not move the hearers' hearts. Until we translate the teachings into the philosophy of that people, we cannot influence them, just as 'Abdu'l-Baha advised Baha'i teachers going to China to speak in Chinese terminology when teaching.

2) The Disadvantages of T&I

a) T&I is time and energy-consuming. The most obvious disadvantage of T&I is that it is time and energy consuming. Because of the great difficulty and supreme importance of translating the Word of God or messages from the World Centre, Baha'i translators must take even greater care and caution than usual. Plus, there is often no financial reward or assistance involved; things must be done on a voluntary basis.

At the United Nations, they adopt six languages as official means of communication: English, German, French, Chinese, Russian and Arabic. If we calculate the number of combinations, there are 30 at maximum. At the EEC

(European Economic Community) office in Brussels, there are nine official languages used. There is a great amount of time and energy and money used just for translation work.

b) T&I undermines the principle of independent search for truth. Because of the difficulty, translators must often "interpret" the text and explain the meaning in different ways if necessary. Thus opinions and views of translators could be introduced into the text. This undermines the Baha'i principle of independent investigation of truth.

c) Translators and interpreters could be subject to abuse and misuse of the text. In some places, Baha'u'llah criticizes the religious leaders' act of preventing people from attaining the shore of salvation because of their power or lack of knowledge and understanding. They have interpreted religious texts literally or according to their limited understanding or desires. Translators could fall into the same category because they could influence readers through their translation. The same danger exists in scholars' activity in general. Translators and scholars could abuse texts and mislead the Community. Even if they may not have any intention to do so, there still lies a possibility of text being misinterpreted. (For a proper guidance of Baha'i scholars, we may refer to M. Women's article on "Scholarship and Baha'i Community.")

d) T&I loses original nuances of the text. Because language reflects social and cultural as well as the literary traditions of a given land, it is virtually impossible to convey the exact meanings and nuances of the original text through T&I.

e) T&I undermines the motivation for learning foreign languages. Reliance on T&I, especially when T&I is of good quality, weakens the motivation to learn a foreign language. It is known that Shoghi Effendi once prohibited translation of part of the Arabic Writings into Persian so that the Baha'i children and youth might learn Arabic (Letters written on behalf of the Guardian written to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Iran, quoted in a memorandum of the Research Department May, 1988). If we rely on T&I forever, we will never get to learn whatever the international language the world might adopt. Unfortunately, in the meticulous and well-organized system of the Japanese translation world, we have Japanese translations of all the major literary masterpieces of the world and scientific-technical texts, so that Japanese people need not bother to read them in English or other tongues. On the other hand, many of the developing countries' politicians and scholars must read such works in English or other original tongues to obtain information, because they cannot afford to systematize translation and publication (see E. O. Reschauer's *The Meaning of Internationalization*).

3. The Meaning of Linguistic Diversity

Having analyzed the advantages and disadvantages of T&I, let us now examine the significance of linguistic diversity.

a) The origin of linguistic diversity. In the Bible (Genesis 11:1-9), in the story of the Tower of Babel, it is written that the people of ancient time spoke only one language. One day they tried to build a tower which would reach the heaven, so that they would not be scattered abroad on the face of the earth. Looking at this act, the Lord said "Behold, people are one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do; and now nothing will be

restrained from them, which they have imagined to do" (11:6) and then their tongue was confused (thus the word "babel") and they were scattered abroad.

Baha' u' llah also reiterates this story in one of His Tablets (see Gleanings LXXXVII, pp. 172-174). Whether, when and where this event actually took place, is not the scope of this paper, but, rather, to focus our attention on its symbolic meaning could lead us to one of the solutions of the problems raised in this paper. The key words may be "...nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do". In other words, God rebuked man's arrogance and self-conceit. By confusing their tongue, they were no longer able to communicate with each other and could not accomplish their projected task. It implied that God wishes humankind to become humble and subservient to His Will. Herein seems to lie the fundamental meaning of linguistic diversity: peoples will not attain linguistic unity until they learn spiritual discipline, until they learn to cooperate and work together for a truly noble goal, not for their vain imagination.

b) The positive meanings of linguistic diversity. Despite the punitive implication of linguistic diversity, linguists point out some positive aspects. They basically come down to this: That the linguistic diversity allows different world views to develop, which, in turn, contribute to richness and a wealth of knowledge and wisdom, and diversity can be a source of beauty and harmony to the whole (see 'Abdu'l-Baha in Selections, #225, pp. 290-292). If we use the diversity properly, we can promote the development of civilization.

c) The linguistic position of the Japanese language. The major languages of the world are usually categorized into several language families according to their historical relationships (this is sort of like a family tree). The Word of God was first uttered in Sanskrit, Pali, Hebrew, Aramaic, Avestan, Arabic and Persian in known history. These languages fall into either the Indo-European language family or the Afro-Asian language family.

The Japanese language, on the other hand, is sometimes categorized under the Ural-Altaic language family. However, its relationship to the other languages and its origin are still not known. Its closest language is said to be Korean, and yet even this language differs from the former so much that we cannot prove yet their relationship. The phonetic system, grammar and writing of Japanese are quite different from any other language of the world. It stands as quite unique. This makes it difficult for Japanese people to acquire other languages, while speakers of other languages (except for Koreans and Chinese) find it extremely difficult to master Japanese. Since the linguistic characteristics of the Japanese people are quite different, it means the thinking pattern and philosophical background of the Japanese people are also different. These are the reasons that the Japanese is said to be an isolated language.

d) The nature of language and Word of God. In some parts of the Lawh-i-Maqsud (Tablets of Baha' u' llah, pp. 172-174), Baha' u' llah gives an exposition on the nature of "word". He says "every word is endowed with a spirit, therefore the speaker or expounder should carefully deliver his words at the appropriate time and place, for the impression which each word maketh is clearly evident and perceptible." In other words, "word" has spiritual nature or it is spiritual in essence. Thus, "word" involves the world of hearts. Language learning has a great deal to do with hearts rather than intellect per se.

Then He says that the “Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable” (ibid. p. 173). In the Lawh-i-Hikmat, He explains that “the Word of God...is higher and far superior to that which the senses can perceive, for it is sanctified from any property or substance...” (TB, pp. 1450-141). A. Taherzadeh explains (The Revelation of Baha’u’llah, Vol. 1, Ch. 3) that when the Word of God is revealed in the spiritual world, it possesses infinite potentiality in its influential power. It creates a new creation, thus the expression “Creative Word”; and that when revealed in the human language, it is influenced or limited by that tongue, and that our task is to find the hidden meanings behind the letters and syllables. Through meditation, we obtain and partake of that hidden creative force.

The implications of this explanation are twofold: 1) Even if one cannot read or write, one may be able to partake of this spiritual bounty of the Word of God, because it transcends the human writing in essence and Baha’u’llah Himself confirms by saying “the understanding” of His Word “does not depend on human learning but only on the purity of heart, sanctity of soul and freedom of spirit (see Kitáb-i-Íqán); 2) Even if the Japanese readers may have to depend on translation of the Word, they can still be influenced by the creative power of the Word by sincerely meditating on the meanings of the Word.

Having examined the significance of linguistic diversity, we can now begin to come up with solutions to overcome the language barrier. The solutions consists of two parts: the conceptual and practical. For we must first change our vision before we take action.

4. Solutions: Conceptual Stage

a) The Vision of Baha’u’llah. The vision of Baha’u’llah about linguistic unity is as follows: In one place (Bisharat, Tablets, p. 22), He states that humankind must choose one language to be taught to all children so that they will converse in their mother tongue and the common tongue with each other throughout the world. Yet, later He says that efforts must be made to reduce the languages to one (Kalimat-i-Firdawsiyih, Tablets of Baha’u’llah, p. 68).

A letter written on behalf of the Guardian (dated 3/16/1946) explains that the time when the world will have adopted one common language is the far distant future. In the meantime, the world will have to deal with the respective mother tongues and the auxiliary language (see Lights of Guidance #1141). Then how will this universal language be adopted? Baha’u’llah one time wrote that “the sovereigns of the world...or the ministers of the earth” should counsel together” (Bisharat, Tablets, p. 22) and at another time “the Trustees of the House of Justice “ should choose one language...and select a common script” (Ishraqat, Tablets, p. 127). A. Taherzadeh suggests (The Revelation of Baha’u’llah, Vol. 4, p. 160) that the process will consist of two stages, with the former process preceding the latter, when the Universal House of Justice will have been recognized throughout the world.

Then, what will be the universal language? There is no mention about this decision in the Writings, rather Baha’is are supporters of whatever language the governments of the world or the Universal House of Justice chooses to adopt as such (a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, dated 6/4/1937, quoted in Lights of Guidance # 1140).

However, Baha' u'llah has specified that such a language may be either adopted from the existing languages or be invented anew. Among the existing languages, we have had English, French, Chinese, Spanish and others as candidates. However, for linguistic limitations, political and emotional reasons, we have not been able to settle on one of them.

As for invented languages, we have Esperanto, Interlingua, Volapuk, Ido and Novial. So far, Esperanto has been the most influential. Yet Esperanto needs more improvement, because to perfect an invented language is no easy task, and cannot be done by only one person.

Taberzadeh also writes that, in one of His Tablets, Baha' u'llah states that if all the peoples of the earth learn to speak Arabic, God will be pleased, and that its eloquence and expression are praised and in its potentiality no other can tongue can match it (The Revelation of Baha' u'llah, Vol. 4, p. 160).

b) The spiritual destiny of Japan. One often wonders why an isolated country like Japan has to shoulder the responsibility of leading the world to the oneness and wholeness of human relationships. Why not more centrally-located countries with more dominant language backgrounds?

W. Barnes (see References) suggests that the same principle which was first enforced in Persia, a land chosen as the cradle of the Baha'i Faith because it was the most corrupted society of all at that time, is working in Japan. That is, because Japan is one of the most isolated cases of the world in terms of geography, culture and language, she has been divinely chosen to carry out this task of becoming one of the leading nations to help establish a World Community. If she accomplished her task through the power of Divine Teachings, then we know the Teachings will work anywhere else in the world.

c) The linguistic barrier as a means of growth. Though the linguistic barrier presents many problems, if we use them properly, they will become a source of our growth. For tests are necessary for human growth. Maybe we will learn, for example, patience, humility and humbleness, as implied in the lesson of the Tower of Babel.

d) The soul's relationship between this world and the next world. We must also recall the Baha'i concept of the life after death. The soul's development continues even after physical death, and sometimes its growth is more smooth after death. Pure souls in the next world are responsible for the development of this world. Thus, seeming deprivation in language skills does not mean absolute deprivation. The spiritual state of such a soul or community may be greater than one thinks.

e) The relationship between language development and spiritual guidance. Another important concept that we must deal with is that true language development will take place when coupled with proper spiritual guidance. Why is this? As mentioned repeatedly, language is a world view, a philosophy and a culture. If one learns a certain language, he will necessarily be influenced by the cultural background of that tongue. If that culture has undesirable traits for him, he will feel reluctant to learn actively. Yet, if he adopts proper spiritual principles and concepts, he will be able to discern what is good and what is bad for him, while acquiring the basic linguistic skills apart from those negative elements.

This fear of negative elements is a major cause of rejecting anything foreign, including language. However, if we guide our spiritual life according to a value system, we will be able to distinguish between language study and acquiring the negative traits of a given culture. Herein lies an important implication that the spread of Divine Teachings and proper language development in Japan or elsewhere may synchronize.

D) The significance and limitations of learning foreign languages. The great German writer Goethe once said "Wer fremde Sprachen nicht kennt, weiß nichts von seiner eigenen" ("He who knows not foreign languages knows nothing of his own". (Quoted in Tanaka's *Edgo Kenkyusha no Tameni*, on a page preceding Ch.1). The well-known Japanese Christian thinker, Uchimura Kanzo, (*Gaikokugo no Kenkyu*) stressed the importance of studying European languages and philosophical systems in order for Japan to produce world literature. The late US ambassador to Japan, E.O. Reischauer (*The Meaning of Internationalization*, Part 3), encouraged Japanese youth to acquire English speaking skills so that they will become true members and participants of a World Community. The benefits of acquiring foreign languages, especially an international one, are infinite. One might need first to get a inkling of this fact.

On the other hand, Baha'u'llah once commented on a Mullah who had acquired several tongues, characterizing him as one who wasted his time, because, if the world adopts one common language, the time and energy for acquiring many languages would be saved (Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, pp. 137-138).

There is nothing in the Baha'i Teachings against learning more than two languages; nay acquiring foreign languages for the purpose of spreading the Cause of God is permitted and encouraged (see Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 50, Part IV. 3. v.), nor is there undue condemnation about someone not knowing more than one language or even how to read or write. Only when a universal language is adopted, the Baha'is are all encouraged to acquire it.

5. Solutions: Practical Stage

Based upon the above vision and concepts, we may incorporate the following measures as practical solutions.

a) Language education

1) English education. Although T&I has its own benefits, still the language barrier must be overcome as much as possible, and since adoption of a universal tongue might take some time, we can begin to make efforts on our part by at least acquiring what seems to be a temporary or unofficial international language and a virtual common tongue of the Baha'i World Community: English. Individuals and communities can adopt ways and means to acquire it through a scientific method as well as by seeking spiritual assistance.

Though this is an all-important project, we cannot coerce this process; individuals and communities' voluntary willingness and general tolerance and loving atmosphere are essential. For this matter, the following goal becomes also important.

2) Japanese education. From the above-mentioned vision, it is implied that the world will have to go through some time having a bilingual life. Therefore it becomes important for non-Japanese speaking people in Japan to try to acquire Japanese. This is a sign of humbleness and cooperation towards the above project. Yet, this cannot be forced either. We must have an understanding attitude towards all kinds of situations which might prevent one from learning a language. Thus, this measure must be adopted as a general policy, not a coercive one.

b) Facilitation of translation and interpretation work

1) Training of translators and interpreters. Since T&I is also essential for the time being, we must begin to train more translators and interpreters. There are just too few Baha'i translators in Japan. Though this might be purely volunteer-based work, we must systematize raising more translators for various meetings, conferences and functions.

2) Systematization of translation and interpretation work. We must also organize the T&I work itself, such as by establishing a communication network, utilizing computers and telecommunication, exchanging information.

c) Promotion of deepening on the concepts. The concepts and ideas introduced and dealt with in this paper or elsewhere, which are related to this subject, need to be disseminated and discussed among individuals and communities. In order to change actions, first vision must be changed. And vision is formed according to concepts and ideas which are in our minds. Thus the importance of such a deepening activity.

d) Adoption of related goals into the Three-Year Plan. In order to organize and systematize the above goals more officially, we can incorporate them into the upcoming 3-Year Plan (1993-1996).

6. Conclusion

Through the current examination and analysis, we have come up with the following answers to the three questions raised at the onset.

1) T&I has both advantages and disadvantages. Some of the advantages have spiritual benefits and seem to have functions to serve the Divine Cause itself. On the other hand, the disadvantages identified have also a great weight in terms of danger and being obstacles to individual and social life.

It was suggested that the linguistic diversity has a symbolic origin and meaning, and that humankind has the task of detaching itself from vain imaginations. Linguistic diversity also has the potential of contributing to the beauty and harmony of the whole world.

As for the second question, whether English is a necessary requirement for enrolling in the Baha'i Faith: There is no such teaching or administrative rule in the Baha'i Community. In the extreme case, one does not depend on human learning to understand the Divine Word. On the other hand, this does not eliminate the need to continue learning till one dies. If one takes a Middle Path, it may be concluded that knowledge of English is not

a requirement of enrolling, yet once one starts to tread a spiritual journey according to Bahá'í teachings, one needs to try to perfect oneself in various ways; the language issue is one of them. In order to better serve himself and the world, he may wish to acquire a linguistic tool.

As for the international tongue: First, the world's governments may choose one language, existing or invented, to be taught along with respective mother tongues throughout the world. Second, the Universal House of Justice, when fully recognized universally, will reconfirm the former international tongue or choose a new one. In the distant future, the world will adopt a single common tongue. Yet, adoption of such a measure, even in the first stage, may be a far-reaching measure. Therefore, practical action as to how to deal with an international language, for the moment, might remain left to each individual, local and national communities, while English serves as a virtual common language for the Bahá'í World Community.

The famed human-rights movement leader Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. once gave that historic speech called "I have a dream", in which he shared his dream: "I have a dream that one day the state of ... will be transformed into a situation where little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls and walk together as sisters and brothers..." (quoted in *Let the Trumpet Sound*, p. 254). It was a big dream, yet it set the stage and many changes and improvements took place afterwards. We may need to do the same: to have a dream and to have a vision that one day the world will be turned into a situation where Persians, Americans, Australians, Japanese, Chinese and Koreans, Africans and Arabs and French... will all gather in one place and converse with one common tongue without being hindered by any linguistic barriers so that we behold an ideal situation envisaged by 'Abdu'l-Baha in one of His talks in North America:

Today the greatest need of the world of humanity is discontinuance of the existing misunderstandings among nations. This can be accomplished through the unity of language. Unless the unity of languages is realized, the Most Great Peace and the oneness of the human world cannot be effectively organized and established.. Through this means international education and training become possible; the evidence and history of the past can be acquired. The spread of the known facts of the human world depends upon language... Therefore, the very first service to the world of man is to establish this auxiliary international means of communication... Through it sciences and arts will be spread among the nations, and it will prove to be the means of the progress and development of all races (The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 60-61, quoted in *Lights of Guidance*, #1138).

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