FOOD, JUSTICE AND THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

BY

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

Through an examination of the phenomenon of food choice and in particular the relationship between food and justice, this thesis demonstrates the benefits of an inter-disciplinary approach in providing a more nuanced understanding of food. Rejecting a dichotomised view of food as either material or symbol, either culture or nature, either nutritional or social, it develops a concept of liminality that affords new insights into food choice, and argues for a liminal positioning of food between the empirical and ethical realms. Focusing on the Bahá'í faith, it reviews principles and teachings of this new world religion, whose vision of world unity places justice at the centre of its ethical worldview. The thesis tests the claim that food provides a practical way through which Bahá'ís can articulate and achieve their ethical goals, helping them to cross the liminal divide between 'what is' and 'what could be' as they seek to live just lives. Using a dual methodological approach that combines hermeneutic strategies to examine sacred texts, together with qualitative interviews of believers, it examines food issues related to health and healing, hospitality, social development, and spiritual duty. While food does not at first appear to be a prominent issue in the Bahá'í tradition, findings indicate that there is a singular food discourse that evokes spiritual and social themes of simplicity, moderation, commensality and compassion, and which supports the claim that food is integral to, and formative of the Bahá'í concept of justice.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE LIMINALITY OF FOOD

Introduction

This thesis is about food, the need for which defines a common humanity. Food is a substance at once profane and sacred. It is the very basis of material existence without which the human organism cannot survive for more than a few weeks. Yet food is also a culturally and spiritually powerful substance that mediates human relationships and understanding of the world and that is at the heart of interactions with what humans designate as the divine. This contention that food can best be understood not only as a material fact but also as a cultural and spiritual phenomenon is central to my thesis. Food carries cultural and spiritual meaning, signifies social relationships and creates/reflects a sense of identity. At the same time it is important not to lose sight of what distinguishes food from other material and cultural commodities: its organic reality as a human necessity which is literally, as well as symbolically, consumed.

My aim is to explore this dual cultural and spiritual meaning by examining one aspect of the relationship between food and religion. Taking to heart Foucault's dictum that diet is the product of not only medical but also religious discourse on the body, I ask what consequences religious ethical systems have for thinking about food and for shaping food choices (Foucault 1990). My thesis argues that religious-ethical systems are determinative for food choices and food rituals, and reciprocally, that food plays a

constitutive role in shaping a tradition's religious-ethical system, its rules of conduct, ethical principles and worldviews.

I pursue my argument through an exploration of the role of food in one religious tradition, that of the Bahá'í faith and I do so by approaching food as a liminal entity. I have chosen to work with the Bahá'í faith for two main reasons. Firstly, there has been little written about food in this religious tradition. Apart from a few articles by the author, the food beliefs and practices of Bahá'ís have not been described outside of faith literature (Fieldhouse 1995; "Bahá'í Faith" 2002 a; "Food in the Bahá'í Faith" 2002 b). Secondly, the Bahá'í perspective, emphasising science and religion as two wings of the same truth and asserting justice as the underlying principle guiding human behaviour, offers a way of reconnecting the material and moral aspects of food - of bridging the gap between scientific and cultural/social analysis. This bridging may, in turn, suggest a new basis on which to think about food as a human need. The metaphor of the bridge provides me with my theoretical perspective that treats food as liminal. The limen, or threshold, is the place of transition from one state to another and food, I argue, is a transitional substance that both forms and transcends boundaries between the ordinary and the extraordinary.

The Bahá'í prophet-founder, Bahá'u'lláh, proclaimed the need to reconcile all aspects of human existence; the inner and outer; the public and private; the divine and the worldly; the reflective and active; the spiritual and social. I set out to show that in Bahá'í belief and praxis, food bridges these oppositions. It connects the inner body to the outer world, the private eater to the public marketplace, the spiritual soul to the animal body. Most significantly, it bridges the individual-community divide that is characteristic in Western culture and ethics, and that Bahá'í teachings attempt to reconcile.

Drawing chiefly from the work of Victor Turner, I develop for use in the thesis, a concept of liminality that affords new insights into food choice. Rejecting a dichotomised view of food as either material or symbol, either culture or nature, either nutritional or social, I approach food as a bridge - as a means of connecting, of moving toward, and of crossing over. I argue for a liminal positioning of food between the empirical and ethical realms, and I show how food choice must be approached this way, as both a material and a symbolic good. Through an account of the fundamental principles underlying Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a new world order, I show that food discourse[1] is integral to, and formative of the centrally important Bahá'í concept of justice. I test the claim that food provides a practical way through which Bahá'ís can articulate and achieve their ethical goals, helping them to cross the liminal divide between 'what is' and 'what could be' as they seek to live Bahá'u'lláh's justice.

In my thesis I demonstrate the benefits of an inter-disciplinary approach in providing a more nuanced understanding of food. In doing so, I adopt Clifford Goetz's notion of 'blurring the genres' (1983). Drawing upon historical and contemporary work of scholars from the natural sciences, social sciences and humanities, I seek to make sense of food and eating in the Bahá'í faith by understanding religious, social and historical contexts together with the many layers of knowledge and meaning held by individual Bahá'ís. This approach has been described as a characteristic of the emerging field of 'Food Studies' which, as Ken Albala says, allows and encourages scholars to interpret food in a more holistic way by reaching beyond the boundaries of academic disciplines and employing multiple methodological tools as appropriate (Albala 2002). Using a Turnerian-derived concept of liminality as a methodological key and interpretive

[1] I use the term discourse inclusively, as does Foucault, to designate material, cultural and spiritual signifying systems, including institutions, through which the meaning, use and value of food is portrayed.

tool allows me to demonstrate the value of such an inter-disciplinary approach to food and food choice. Food, as liminal, is betwixt and between; it resists containment within the bounds of any single discipline. It also bridges the empirical and the discursive; the quantitative and the qualitative. My approach therefore incorporates ideas from a range of disciplines and employs a dual methodological approach. Drawing broadly on work in hermeneutics and body history, I examine textual material relating to Bahá'í dietary guidance and food-related practices, particularly religious (scriptural) tracts and the writings of religious authorities. So as to practice my own argument as to the need for multiple approaches where food is concerned, the thesis also includes a small sample of ethnographic interviews with Bahá'ís in Manitoba. These interviews establish how Bahá'í believers relate their own food beliefs, attitudes and practices to principles of justice. I use these findings, together with observations derived from informal discussions with Bahá'í academics, as an empirical commentary on my hypothesis. In testing the hypothesis outlined above, the primary task of my thesis is to answer the following questions:

- Is food best understood as liminal, that is, at once an empirical and spiritual-ethical entity?
- Does liminality provide a useful approach to studying food choice?
- What are the food and food-related beliefs and practices of Bahá'ís?
- How does food provide Bahá'ís with a practical means of achieving their ethical goals?

Having thus set out my tasks, my argument and my general goals I now turn, for the remainder of this chapter, to an introduction of general themes and the key concepts of liminality and food choice that will be developed in subsequent chapters of the thesis. I begin by describing the notion of liminality, as originated by Arnold van Gennep and

elaborated by Victor Turner, as a useful way to think across boundaries. Next I give an account of what I mean by food choice. I draw attention to its complex multifaceted nature and highlight the relationship between food and morality. Following that, I consider how food choice has been understood from a variety of disciplinary perspectives. A summary of the major theoretical approaches that have been used in studying nutritional and non-nutritional functions of food is presented, including a small body of work that has explicitly acknowledged the liminality of food. Based on a literature review of food and religion, I identify a gap in the research on the Bahá'í faith, and show how this tradition provides an eminently suitable context for adopting a liminal approach to understanding the role of food.

Liminality and Communitas

The concept of liminality emerged from the work of anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep who, in the early twentieth century, developed the idea of rites of passage as a means to interpret the ritual events marking life crises or changes in the social status of an individual throughout the life span (Van Gennep 1960). Although the concept of rites of passage arose from studies of preliterate or tribal societies, it subsequently came to be used also in complex modern societies.

All societies have rites of passage, and they are of two general types. First are individual rites that mark changes related to age, stage, place, social position and occupation; examples include birth, puberty, marriage, childbirth and death. The life course is a journey which all individuals make, encountering on the way periods and situations that present physical, emotional or social challenges (Kenworthy Teather 1999). Second are rites related to calendar events, such as changes from month to month (new moon), season to season (solstice and equinox) and year to year (New

Year) and which involve large groups or whole societies. Van Gennep focused on the first category, conceptualising rites of passage as being mechanisms to allow changes in social status to occur smoothly and without threatening the social order. He claimed that, notwithstanding the immediate purpose and content of any specific ritual, rites of passage universally had a similar three stage structure. The first stage was one of separation, when an individual left a previous state behind or when a previous set of social conditions were left behind. The second stage was one of transition, during which the individual was neither one thing nor the other but was, in effect, outside of normal social life. The third phase was one of incorporation in which the individual re-entered the community, having been conferred with a new status and new obligations. Rites are associated with each stage of the process. For example, rites of separation emphasise the idea of cutting ties with the old status through symbolic acts such as the giving away of a bride. The hotel-based wedding reception can be seen as a transitional rite which proclaims that the bride is no longer entitled to have meals cooked for her by her mother in her natal home (Delamont 1995). Rites of incorporation involve ideas of joining, such as placing a ring on the bride's finger or 'tying the knot.' Although all three elements are always present in all rites of passage; they are not equally emphasised; different types of rites of passage stress different parts of the scheme. So for example, while rites of incorporation are emphasised in marriage ceremonies, rites of separation take on more importance at funerals. Transition rites are important for events such as pregnancy, or betrothal.

These three stages of separation, transition and incorporation correspond to temporal-spatial phases which Van Gennep termed pre-liminal, liminal and post liminal. Liminality is derived from the Latin 'limen', or threshold, and was used by Van Gennep as a metaphor for the social boundaries crossed during rites of passage. Liminality is a state of being in-between phases, when the individual is neither a member of the group

s/he previously belonged to (the old order), nor yet is s/he a member of the group s/he will belong to upon completion of the rite (the new order). During the transitional or liminal period the liminal individual may be ascribed special powers and may be perceived as being either sacred or taboo. Normal rules of conduct may be suspended or even reversed during this period so that behaviours normally judged inappropriate may become acceptable. For example, initiates may be subject to insults or beatings or may be physically isolated as in the Amerindian vision quest. Social conventions may be mocked or ridiculed as in events such as Carnival and Halloween.

Building on Van Gennep's theories, anthropologist Victor Turner developed the idea of the middle, liminal, phase by exploring the quality of relationships people have with each other during periods of change in social status. He introduced the notion of liminal space as a marginal, ambiguous place of transformation between phases of separation and incorporation. "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial" (Turner 1969 95). During this in-between time they have to submit totally to the authority of the community that represents the culture's traditional values and norms, so that during liminal periods participants are absorbing a new way of being in the world. Turner believed the liminal stage to be of crucial importance in the ritual process. He suggested that people cannot always move smoothly between the three classical stages, but are sometimes held in a state of liminality, which may be quite extensive – as in the adolescent years between childhood and adulthood.

At the collective level, Turner proposes two contrasting models of human interrelationships. The first is the world of bosses and underlings, of class distinctions, of authority and subservience characteristic of structured, differentiated, and hierarchical societies in which individuals are judged and set apart in terms of relative wealth, social status, cultural capital etc. But from time to time hierarchy and structure gives way to

more informal non-hierarchical forms, giving recognition to an essential human bond without which there could be no society. It is, says Turner, as though the underlying nature of being human breaks through to bring people together; what Bynum describes as "A moment of suspension of normal rules and roles, a crossing of boundaries and violating of norms" (1989 30). Liminality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed and that the high must experience what it is like to be low.[2]

Turner suggested that during periods of liminality individuals feel a strong sense of comradeship, of being bound together in a shared experience which he called 'communitas'. Social distinctions such as rank, age, and kinship disappear between liminal subjects in a state of communitas in favour of equality under the authority of community leaders or ritual elders. So while hierarchy divides, communitas unites. The notion of communitas is expanded in Turner's concept of 'anti-structure':

> I have used the term "anti-structure" [...] to describe both liminality and what I have called "communitas". I meant by it not a structural reversal, but the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc, from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses (1982 44).

This suggests an enormous potential. Individuals or societies in a liminal phase are a "kind of institutional capsule or pocket which contains the germ of future social developments, of societal change" (45), an idea that will be important for my thesis as I develop the concept of liminality in relation to Bahá'í ethics. Communitas is frequently associated with the sacred because it transgresses norms and entails potency and potentiality.

Turner identified three sorts of communitas which he termed spontaneous, ideological and normative. Spontaneous communitas occurs suddenly when people find themselves caught up in a sense of oneness. Davies (1994) cites the secular example of

[2] The concept of transgression and status reversal is treated at length by Mikhail Bakhtin (1984).

the Live Aid pop concert; another example would be the experience of responding to a disaster such as a flood, when people work together in a spirit of communitas to protect the homes of strangers from encroaching waters. Normative communitas is an attempt to establish a permanent communitas through systematic rules and laws designed to build the ideal of spontaneity into contemporary life. What was 'transition' in van Gennep's schema becomes a permanent condition. Societies or groups might for example seek to live according to that unity of purpose outlined in a sacred text. Turner saw monks and nuns as living a life of normative communitas, in a permanent or institutionalised state of liminality. The same concept may perhaps be applied to Bahá'ís as they attempt, through their institutions and personal lives, to live out the ideals of justice and unity that are central to their faith. Ideological communitas, Turner's third type, seeks to establish utopian models of society which replicate concrete experiences of spontaneous communitas. The Bahá'í administrative apparatus may also be usefully considered from this perspective. Turner viewed society as involving a dialectical process between communitas and structure (1969 129). The inevitable fate of communitas is a decline into law and structure after which a new form of communitas may emerge.

Turner suggested that humans have a need for liminal experiences; a way to escape the everyday routine through events where the usual rules and social distinctions are suspended and where participants are freed from conformity to usual norms. Such periods of liminality provide a way to reconcile the conflicting demands of society that people live together but that they also maintain strictly separate social statuses. He came to see communitas as a powerful human experience by which the constraints of the social structure could be circumvented, and Deflem comments that his work may be read as a plea to engage in communitas-inspired action to defy the social order (1991 191). Critics suggest that over time communitas became for Turner more a matter of

faith than fact and that he wanted to see communitas and religion leading to an ideal society based on love and peace (Schechner 1985 203). Juschka (2003) observes that, in Turner's concept of communitas power has been neutralised; there is no acknowledgement of the continued existence and playing out of different gender, class, and race social roles. For example, she demonstrates how pilgrimage - an example for Turner of a liminoid event when participants become 'wholly other' - is actually marked with social power and rivalry.

Liminality as a term and as a subject of study has been embraced not only in the field of cultural anthropology, where it originated, but is also widely used in modern cultural studies and post-colonial analysis. For example in the work of Edward Said and Homi Bhabha liminality provides a 'third space' where cultural hybridity can exist and new identities can be forged (Said 1978; Bhabha 1994). The distinction between status and identity was one recognised by van Gennep. Whereas status is conferred by society, identity reflects the internal process of becoming what one is supposed to be, and the degree to which people harmonise their sense of self-identity in relation to their official status is the degree to which they will flourish and play a creative part in the social world (Davies 1994 7). The concept of liminality has also been widely used in literary studies to explore indeterminate liminal states in a wide variety of literatures and literary periods, including literary journeys, Shakespearean drama and Victorian fiction (Woodbridge and Anderson 1993 579). The term liminality is also used in psychology to indicate the boundary between what can be perceived and what cannot.[3] Later in this chapter I suggest ways in which the concept of liminality may be applied to thinking about food.

[3] Hence the now commonplace idea of subliminal advertising.

Understanding Food Choice

The phrase 'food choice' may be interpreted in more or less expansive ways. In its most narrow sense it is used to describe the actual food selections that particular individuals make in the course of daily living. They consume apples or oranges, beef or pork, rice or wheat. In a broader sense, food choice describes a process whereby food moves from 'land to mouth'; it is both an individual and a societal phenomenon. In a still wider interpretation, food choice is an abstract concept that represents the complexity of meaning invested in and action taken around food. It is this latter meaning that is used in this thesis, and food choice is taken to include food-related conduct and ritual.

The fundamental imperative of providing sufficient food to meet physiological needs has provided more or less of a challenge to human groups throughout history, and it seems that almost anything can or has served as human food. Self-evidently though, people can only choose from what food is available to them. Food availability is a complex product of geography, economics and politics mediated in many societies through the production and advertising activities of powerful agrifood industries. However, no human group eats everything that is on offer; not all available choices are regarded as being acceptable. Even when food is in short supply people cling stubbornly to ideas about what can and cannot be eaten.

Infants come into the world without any predetermined food habits or food preferences. They share a common nutritional requirement, one that is met in most cultures by the provision of human or animal milk; but by the time they are a few years old their diets exhibit all the diversity of the world's rich gastro-cultural heritage. Right from the start, children learn what is considered to be culturally appropriate, both in terms of what is defined as food or non-food, and in relation to specific eating contexts.

This happens through socialisation processes whereby children become acquainted with the norms, values, expectations and customs of the culture in which they live (Fieldhouse 1995 6). In learning to conduct themselves in specific ways related to food, they transform the mundane act of eating into what Mauss (1979) calls a fundamental body technique - a physiological imperative that is heavily mediated by culture.

I have previously used the idea of a funnel to illustrate diverse factors impinging on food choice (Fieldhouse 1995). At the uppermost level is the field of availability - where all the possible choices are laid out on a metonymical table. What is on the table is determined by a complex interaction of physical, geographic and technological factors operating within frameworks of political economy that remain invisible to everyday consumers. From this table people select that which is acceptable using a variety of cultural, social and economic criteria including religious beliefs. As the funnel narrows individual preference comes into play, invoking both physiological factors such as sensory perception and cognitive and affective factors such as nutrition knowledge, mood and emotion. Individual choices in turn influence politico-economic decisions about food supply and contribute to creating and maintaining cultural and social norms.

In this way I present food choice as a dynamic interaction between structure and agency. The concept of individual agency holds that people have control over their own decisions and lives and can exert their free will to make choices that have meaning for them. The structural perspective insists that there are larger, often hidden, forces at work which fashion the food choice environment, and which predetermine what choices are available. There is little to be gained from uncritically adopting either side of this argument. It is clear that individuals make food choices within a socio-cultural framework of food meanings and usages while allowing for personal preferences and dislikes that

arise from sensory and emotive responses to food. A vast literature addresses each of these determinants of food choice and argues for the pre-eminence of one or the other[4].

Given that eating decisions are influenced by so many variables and have so many connotations, how do we make sense of the multiplicity of personal, social and cultural meanings conveyed through the seemingly prosaic activity of choosing and consuming food? A number of approaches have been deployed by scholars from disciplines throughout the academy. From the natural sciences there is a huge range of specialities and sub-specialities represented, including biochemistry and molecular biology, food science, nutrition, dietetics and medicine; each with a long list of eminent and influential scholars stretching back to French chemist Antoine Lavoisier, known as 'The Father of Modern Nutrition'. Amongst the social sciences anthropology has been pre-eminent in its concern with food and food habits, from the holistic analysis of traditional social systems (Malinowski 1935; Richards 1939), to structuralism (Levi-Strauss 1963; 1969; Douglas 1972), and cultural materialism (Harris 1986). Mintz and Du Bois (2002) provide an excellent overview of anthropological literature since 1984. Economists (Veblen 1902; Sen 1981; Fine 1998), geographers (Bell and Valentine 1997), and social policy analysts (Lang 1998) all have had something to say. Food themes have appeared in the work of classical sociologists (Simmel 1994; Elias 1978),

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[4] There have been attempts to provide comprehensive models of food choice that integrate a multiplicity of factors; for example see T. Furst, M. Connors, C.A. Bisogni, J. Sobal and L. W. Falk, "Food Choice: A Conceptual Model of the Process," Appetite 26 (1996). However these usually either arbitrarily privilege the author's favoured explanations, or remain at a conceptual level that provides little insight into how individuals make choices in the real world. Also it is inevitable that even in the most comprehensive models that a choice has been made as to what to include and what to leave out. There are thus problems both with explanations that focus on single factors and those that pretend to all-inclusiveness. I would contend that there is little prospect of a unifying theory of food choice, and that explanations are finally dependant on which analytical prism one holds up. I do not then, in my thesis, seek to 'explain' the food choices of Bahá'ís. Neither am I concerned with the particularities of Bahá'í dietary patterns which, given the geographic and cultural spread of the faith, are endlessly diverse. Instead I see food choices as techniques of the self which, whatever their specificity, (re)produce the meaning of what it is to be Bahá'í.

while the last few years have seen a veritable explosion of texts on the sociology of food. For examples, see (Beardsworth and Keil 1997; Corrigan 1997; Germov and Williams 1999; Maurer and Sobal 1995; McIntosh 1996; Warde 1997). Psychologists have examined mental processes involved in human relationships to food, giving particular attention to so-called eating disorders (Bruch 1974; Brumberg 1988); a topic also of considerable interest to Women's Studies (Bordo 1993).

In the arts and humanities, food has attracted the attention of historians, theologians, artists, filmmakers, writers, literary critics, linguists, philosophers and theorists of all persuasions. Norman Keill (1991) provides a select bibliography of food and drink in literature through the ages ranging from the Bible to mystery and detective fiction. Ian Christie (1998) takes an excursion into the territory of the cinematic feast. Peter Singer (1976) adduces ethical reasons for not eating meat, while Elizabeth Telfer (1996) casts a wider philosophical net. Historians have found a rich source of study in food, whether it be general surveys such as those of Mennell in England and France (1985), and Levenstein in the US (1993); studies of famine and war (Salisbury 1969); specific foodstuffs (Mintz 1985); or colonization (Crosby 1972). Cultural studies (Willis 1991), media studies (Fine and Leopold 1993), and postcolonial analyses (Burton 1993; Goldman 1992) are all represented in a veritable smorgasbord of culinary scholarship.

As the foregoing overview reveals, the study of food practices and usages can be approached from many theoretical and methodological perspectives. I next review important features of these diverse approaches, to establish the context of my own (liminal) approach in this thesis. As an organisational tool for this section I use Khare's tripartite classification of ways in which food choice has been understood: as a set of nutrients, as a socio-cultural context for illustrating the logic and principles of different cultural systems, and as a mediator of moral systems and carrier of identity (Khare 1980).

Food as Nutrients

In this approach, primary emphasis is placed on food as a material good; as a carrier of the nutritional elements required for biological survival. Food here is not at all liminal but is a solid organic fact. The problem presented by food habits is conceived as basically one of understanding how and why human groups eat the foods they do, so that these food choices can be manipulated so as to promote individual and population health or for commercial economic purposes. Thus nutritional scientists, public health practitioners and policy makers, and food industry personnel are all primarily interested in food as nutrients.

Scientific nutritional perspectives have traditionally dominated research into eating practices. These materialist approaches take a highly instrumental view of food and eating as means to achieve biological needs. Eating practices are either conducive to physiological functioning, and therefore to be encouraged; or debilitating to the health of the body, and thus to be frowned upon. Nutrition is seen as a means to an end - survival, and understanding of cultural practices is important only to the extent that it may enhance the success of nutrition interventions. These ideas find expression in the laying down of dietary rules, which prescribe the 'correct' way to eat and which, as I will show below, link nutritional science to morality.

Notwithstanding the fact that nutritional science has made spectacular advances in understanding human nutritional needs, in analysing the composition of foods, in the discovery and explication of nutrient functions and in demonstrating the relationship between nutrition, health and disease, it is hard to disagree with Louis Grivetti's contention that the exploration of food practices presents a problematic realm for positivist research.

> Studies of food habits are difficult to control, so attention shifts to clinical investigations; clinical studies give way to research using animal models

> with perceived application to human nutritional problems; 'whole body' animal studies are replaced by tissue culture research, and the arena of nutrition ultimately shifts to cellular biologists. (Grivetti 1991a)

Grivetti argues that what is often lost in specialised scientific approaches is the reality that humans eat food and that food is central to human life. That is to say, food is more than a nutritional substance. In a similar vein, Crotty (1992) suggests that conventional dietary studies yield excellent information on nutrient intake, and sometimes illuminate food choice; but on the whole ignore the social context of food, an understanding of which would, she says, require qualitative methodologies. Crotty describes the act of swallowing as dividing "nutrition's two cultures" - defined as the post-swallowing world of biology, physiology, biochemistry and pathology, and the pre-swallowing domain of behaviour, culture, society and experience. Duff (1994) maintains that because nutrition and dietetics is largely concerned with the post-swallowing world, the information it produces is only of limited use to public health, and that qualitative interpretative and critical methods are needed to add to the extensive quantitative knowledge base and thus restore balance in nutrition research and promotion. Fine, a political economist also challenges the nutritional idea that there is some "normal" physiologically determined standard of consumption around which eating behaviour should be understood. While it is useful in terms of policy goals to reduce the gap between actual and recommended dietary intake, it is not appropriate as an analytical approach to understanding food choice (Fine 1998 19).

Another shortcoming in positivistic approaches has been identified by nutrition researchers working from a feminist perspective. Women are the subject of much nutritional enquiry related to community and family food systems. They have been seen as 'gatekeepers', 'servers' and 'targets' of advertisers and health educators alike. Yet paradoxically the lived experience of women has been largely excluded from theoretical nutrition frameworks developed using traditional investigative models (Chapman and

MacLean 1990). Writing about Home Economics as a discipline almost 25 years earlier, Brown and Paolucci observed that:

> Nutritionists have tended to rely on the first (positivist research) category and the quantitative methods thereof. Qualitative research methods are designed to help researchers understand people and the social and cultural contexts in which they live. Such knowledge, rooted in the experience of people, has been noticeably absent from food and nutrition discourse. This has resulted in gaps in understanding of the multiple, interacting factors that shape people's lives and of the significance of self-initiated (rather than externally caused) actions. (1979)

A recent literature search by the author of qualitative methods in nutrition showed that little has changed (Fieldhouse 2000).

While quantitative nutritional science methodologies would be suitable for answering certain types of questions about the Bahá'í diet, (How prevalent is vegetarianism? Do Bahá'ís have different nutrient intakes than non-Bahá'ís? Are there differences in nutrition-related disease patterns between Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís?), it should be clear from the foregoing discussion that a purely positivistic approach would not be adequate to my goal of understanding the Bahá'í relationship with food.

It is not only nutrition science that adopts a positivistic perspective on food choice. Economics also views food basically as a set of nutrients; but whereas nutrition science gives almost exclusive attention to the organic nature of food, economics totally ignores its biological value and focuses instead on its commodity value. Economists explain food choice in terms of concepts such as supply and demand, price elasticity and substitution. On the whole they are not concerned with either the nutritional or cultural function of food but simply with the particular parameters governing the way it acts as a market product. Sophisticated econometric techniques are used to predict the impact of subsidies, price differentials, and substitutions on consumer food purchasing behaviour. This type of information is of great interest to commercial food manufacturers and retailers who want to know how to maximise product sales and to policy planners

who want to gauge the impact of, for example, food subsidies or taxes on consumption behaviour. Treating food as a mere commodity ignores much of its use-value in meeting human needs, and instead gives prominence to its exchange value in the world of increasingly internationalized commerce. Some economists, notably Amartya Sen, have described the impact of such economic rationality on human health and hunger and have raised ethical questions arising from utilitarian perspectives on food (Sen 1984; 1987). Sen's work is important to my thesis in that his call for a rediscovery of the ethical dimension of economics resonates with Bahá'í ideas on economic justice, which include notions of food equity. Food, as a liminal entity, can be a bridge between rich and poor, plenty and want. These issues are taken up in the later section on food and justice.

The contribution of materialist approaches to understanding food is, of course, far from negligible. In the contemporary West, concerns over human health and development tend to valorise immortality - elided as longevity and freedom from physical disease. The undisputed material value of food in contributing to this state of health has resulted in the recognition of food as a basic human right by the international community and has legitimated food provision as an integral component of health and social programs and of humanitarian relief efforts. The existence of hunger and social inequalities in access food can be used to focus attention on the shortcomings of political, economic, and social arrangements. Materialist approaches can thus have emancipatory as well as reactionary aims and effects. However material considerations alone are insufficient to account for the huge diversity of human foodways and are theoretically inadequate to explain individual food choice or the social relationships of food production and consumption. The interrelationship of food habits with other elements of cultural behaviour and with environmental forces emphasises the futility of treating food choices as being intellectual decisions made solely, or even primarily, on rational nutritional or economic grounds alone. Food is part of a cultural economy in

which material considerations like survival and security are mediated by a philosophical or moral framework. It is to the cultural dimension that I turn next.

Food as a Cultural System

In a seminal essay on the psycho-sociology of food consumption Roland Barthes observed that food is a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations and behaviours (Barthes 1979). While nutritionists and economists, (amongst others) are concerned to uncover the influences that lie behind individual food choices, other scholars have conversely used food choice as a means to understanding social relationships, regulations, and social structure. Anthropologists and sociologists have long emphasised the symbolic nature of food and eating practices and what they mean in the context of a culture (Messer 1984). On the whole they reject the view that there are innate dispositions to certain types of food, or that food habits are solely determined by the material environment. Rather, as Beardsworth and Keill (1997) note, they ask such questions as: how are human food preferences and habits generated, reproduced and diffused throughout a society? How do we account for major differences between human cultures in food practices? What roles do structural features of society such as socio-economic and gender realities have on shaping food choices? What are the symbolic meanings of food and how do they develop? Many different theoretical approaches have been used to explore these questions, of which functionalism and structuralism have been two influential and contrasting examples.

Functionalist studies examine the multiplicity of food uses within society to show how food habits fulfil social needs and how they express and reinforce social, economic and political relationships. One example is the notion of 'distinction' as developed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who saw food choice as a phenomenon that both reflects and creates social differences. Based on a study of 1000 French citizens he showed

how patterns of food preparation, distribution and consumption are expressions of status and social distance, of political power and of family bonds. Seekers after social status emulate the food habits and manners of the admired group in an attempt to accumulate 'cultural capital' (1984).

Food is extensively used in social intercourse as a means of expressing friendship and respect. The act of giving and receiving food carries powerful messages about social status and relationships, the quality and quantity of food offered or shared reflecting a common understanding of the closeness of various types of social relationships; cheese and wine for acquaintances, dinner for close friends. Such a symbolic economics might in some instances overshadow material economic considerations. Food is also used as a manipulative tool to purchase favours or to bring about desired behaviours, and as a weapon with which to humiliate rivals. It confers status through ownership or usage, as exemplified in the now much diminished North American Indian potlatch (Hou 1973), and is commonly a part of ritual proceedings and an indispensable component of the festivals and celebrations which provide structure or rhythm to human lives (Sutton 2001).

In contrast, structuralism as a theoretical approach claims that human cultural diversity can be understood through cognitive structures in the human mind. It is based on an assumption that fundamental human thought involves classification, which is accomplished through systems of binary opposition. Actions, values, thoughts and identities of individuals are largely structured through social norms and expectations, which are in turn linked to the broader organisation and structure of societies (Lupton 1996 8). As far as food is concerned, structuralist analysis looks for rules and conventions that govern the way in which food items are classified, prepared and combined with each other. The assumption is that these rules are like a language which, when properly understood, will provide insights into the organisation of the human mind

and human society (Beardsworth and Keil 61). The idea of food as a sort of language emerged in the mid-twentieth century as a result of the work of social anthropologists in France (Lévi-Strauss 1969) and in England (Douglas 1972), who claimed to have demonstrated the existence of structural rules and patterns that underlie food choice From analysis of a wide range of ethnographic data on cooking Levi-Strauss claimed that a universal feature of human thought involved linking the distinction between raw and cooked food with the universal distinction between nature and culture. The process of transforming nature into culture through cooking is a kind of language, used to establish and regulate linkages and communication between social groups in traditional societies. (A theory which cultural materialist critic Marvin Harris irreverently dismissed as 'The Raw, the Cooked and the Half-baked')

Structuralists have frequently focused on the aesthetic dimensions of food and eating, which Mary Douglas defines as "That part which is subject to pattern-making rules like the rules of poetry, music or dance,", adding that "the explanation of any one such rule will only be found in its contribution to the pattern it helps to create" (Douglas and Nicod 1974 84). Anne Murcott (1982) drew on these ideas in her analysis of the structure of the cooked dinner in a Welsh mining community, developing the concept of a 'proper meal', which had to conform to certain structural properties to be recognised as an acceptable meal. Such a theoretical understanding obviously has very practical implications for the design of nutrition interventions to alter dietary habits.

Beardsworth and Keil (58) summarise the main critiques levelled at these two approaches. Functionalist approaches assume a static view of society, and are unable to account for change and conflict. Neither can they explain the origin of particular institutions or features in society, assuming instead that their effects are sufficient explanation for their presence. Structuralism is criticised for ignoring the political economy of food and food systems, and for neglecting the influences of biological and

environmental factors on food habits, as well as the specific historical and social conditions that gave rise to them. Whereas both functionalist and structuralist approaches have been accused of neglecting the political economy and power structures within which food choice occurs, approaches emerging from the field of critical theory[5] present social class, economic systems, and power relations as important elements in explaining food patterns (Lupton 1996). Critical theory approaches have been applied to food issues in many contexts: at an international level where the people of developing countries are exploited (Sen 1984); at a neighbourhood level, where business decisions outweigh community needs (Gussow 1987; Kayani 2003); or within the family where the food consumption preferences and needs of males are privileged (Charles and Kerr 1988; Adams 1990). As Lupton points out, concepts of power, subordination and exploitation are central to these analyses. For example, the differential food choices of high and low income groups or social classes are sometimes explained by differential access to food mediated by income and geo-spatial commercial planning. In large Western cities supermarkets tend to be clustered in higher-income suburbs while smaller corner stores with higher prices and lesser selection predominate in low-income core neighbourhoods producing what have been dubbed 'food deserts'. Where supermarkets do locate in inner-city areas they tend to price products relatively higher.

Critical analysis approaches are rare in the nutrition literature. A review by the author of nutrition literature since 1980 identified a total of 68 articles that could be characterised as describing or employing qualitative methods in nutrition research. Of

[5] The term 'critical theory', as used in this thesis, denotes a broad range of philosophical, literary and textual approaches deriving largely from post 1960s French and German thinkers, including Adorno, Benjamin, and Habermas.

these, only three citations had a critical theory perspective (Travers 1997; Travers 1996; Germov and Williams 1996). Kent's article on nutrition education as an empowerment tool would be another example, though it did not appear in this search (1988). In addition, nutrition educator Joan Dye Gussow frequently writes from a critical perspective (1987; 1988).

Critical theory approaches have in turn been criticized for failing to take into account the function and purpose of food habits They have a tendency, Mennell says, to assign a single meaning to food-as-text without acknowledging the dynamic, contextual and contradictory meanings of food (Mennell 1985). They also rely on versions of the repressive hypothesis which focus on oppression, struggle and conflict to explain social change. Food habits are, however, constantly changing and not necessarily with conscious resistance or political struggle. Social, cultural, economic and political arrangements change over time and shape the development of systems of cuisine and the particulars of individual food habits. For example, historian Sidney Mintz (1985) demonstrates how dramatic rises in individual sugar consumption over time were linked to political and economic processes acting at a global level. Histories of other single foodstuffs tell a similar story.[6]

Food, Morality and Meaning

Eating is a matter of morality: eating what is 'good for you' is not just a nutritional concept but is regarded as implying a proper way to behave. The heading of this sub-section is also the title of a recent book by John Coveney, in which the author argues

[6] See for example, R.N. Salaman, The History and Social Influence of the Potato (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) M. Kurlansky, Salt: A World History (New York: Walker& Company, 2002). M. Visser, Much Depends on Dinner (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1986). Margaret Visser traces the 'behind-the-scenes' stories of the ingredients of a classic North American meal

that food is, and always has been, the subject of ethical concerns (Coveney 2000). The idea that diet and food practices are constitutive of a virtuous life is an old one, though the practical expression of such ideals has varied historically (Foucault 1990). Taking control of the body through exerting discipline over eating habits is one way of demonstrating self-control or 'fitness'. In ancient Greece, dietetics or 'diaita' related to the conduct of everyday life. It included not just what one ate and drank but also exercise, sleep and sexual relations (Coveney 2000 32). Detailed regimens for food dealt with what foods could or could not be eaten, in what quantities, and in what circumstances. But although one had to be always mindful of one's food and health it was considered improper to be excessive in a regimen and important to retain flexibility to choose appropriate foods for the circumstances or, as Coveney puts it, "the right foods at the right time" (33). Moderation and self-mastery in diet were more than mere avoidance of excess; they were indications of rationality - a display of natural reason and that signalled one's capacity to conduct oneself successfully in political life. Eating, in fact, reflected one's "fitness" to be a citizen.

Diet continued to be very important for the Romans. With the increasing influence of Galenic medicine, physicians were expected to propose a voluntary and rational structure of conduct (Foucault 1990 100). One consequence of this was that detailed principles governing dietary regimens replaced the flexible guidelines which Greeks had been free to interpret according to particular circumstances. Individuals still had a moral responsibility for self-care and preservation of health, but whereas Greek interest in self-care had been directed toward self-knowledge and reason, for Romans self-care was an end in itself. For both the Greeks and Romans though, balancing need, use, and desire through moderation and self-mastery was considered to enhance one's pleasure and was part of an art of existence, an appreciation of living (McHoul and Grace 1993 99 qtd in Coveney 36).

In early Christianity this was to change. Coveney describes three ways in which food and eating represented a problem for early Christians. Firstly it was connected with fornication; secondly it was a source of pollution from the outside world; and thirdly, feeding the body directed energy away from the soul. These ethical problems were solved through ascetic practices of denial to limit the pleasures of eating. Correct eating changed from being a matter of personal ethics to one of religious duty. Coveney's chapter on Greek, Roman and Christian food ethics provides an extended discussion of this.

Diet and self-regulation thus became for many centuries part of a religious discipline which aimed to control the soul (B. Turner 1996 206). Religious conviction inspired the efforts of eighteenth and nineteenth century dietary reformers in the West. In England the physician George Cheyne, noting that expanding merchant trade led to increased food supplies to the marketplace, produced medical discourses aimed at the urban idle rich concerning the moral danger of strong drink and exotic foods (Cheyne 1740). These he contrasted with the 'natural vigour of primitive man', leading him to recommend strict diet and exercise as moral activities which promoted control of unruly passions as well as being conducive to physical health. Cheyne's prescription became incorporated in the Wesleyan Methodist code of ascetic behaviour. Both morality and health required that one ate simply and ate less.

Medico-religious discourses on food blended with scientific rationalism in the work of twentieth century founders of modern nutritional science like Wilbur Atwater. Aronson (1982) charts the career of Atwater to show how nutrition science emerged as a social problem. Under scientific dietetics, food ceased to be a stimulant of desire and became instead, a condition of efficient labour. The vocabulary of passions, desires and humours was replaced by a discourse of calories and proteins as the project of nutrition moved from concern with improving the self to concern with improving others. It was a

moral quest as much as a nutritional one to promote correct eating (particularly for the working class) as that which rendered the body fit for work, and at the lowest cost.

The language of 'good' and 'bad' still persists in talk about food. Good foods are those that are nourishing, or those that symbolise positive attributes such as the 'purity' of milk. When John Kellogg first introduced cornflakes they were sold as symbols of the new technological purity represented by food processing. Foods are also good if they reinforce the social order (Murcott's 'proper meal') or are linked to privileged notions such as naturalness. They are good if they signal self-control and concern for health. On the contrary, bad foods are detrimental to health; they are - like the surreptitious chocolate bar - signs of moral weakness. Some foods incorporate values of both goodness and badness, an obvious example being meat. On the one hand it is valorised as a source of nutrients, of strength, and of social status; on the other hand it is reviled as a culprit in chronic disease, and as a symbol of patriarchal dominance. Margaret Mead has cogently pointed out the contradictions inherent in the labelling and manipulation of 'good' and 'bad' foods. Typically, in Western societies, children are taught that sweet foods are 'bad' for them. However these foods are regularly construed as treats to be offered as a reward for 'good' or desired behaviour (1980). For adults too, feelings of guilt are engendered by indulgent behaviour; by eating that which is preferred but which is low on the hierarchy of nutritious food (Santich 1995). Guilt over food consumption is expressed in familiar laments: "I shouldn't really"; or "I know it's naughty, but go on, just a small slice". What is this guilt based on if not breaking the rules? Except now instead of the rules emanating from religious conviction they are propagated through scientific nutrition and public health discourse. Contemporary Western followers of modern secular scientific dietary advice, in avoiding 'bad' high-fat foods and maintaining "healthy weights", are still practising virtue. Coveney puts it like this:

> (Scientific) Nutrition provides modern subjects with an ethic, an askesis, which allows them to produce themselves as moral individuals with a proper concern for their bodies and souls. In short, nutritional discourse provides a daily conscience through a mode of living – a dietetics – which reminds individuals how to behave in regard to the rules of healthy living (63).

Other examples of how we think about food in a moral sense include ethical vegetarianism, food boycotts and even food security and the "moral right"' to food. The relationship between food and justice is explored at greater length in Chapter Three. From a non-Western perspective Khare ("The Indian Meal: Aspects of Cultural Economy and Food Use" 1986) shows how eating and feeding, as well as food in general, are recognised as essentially moral activities and conditions in the Hindu conception. To eat and feed are matters of inalienable moral responsibility. "In the Hindu view eating to stay alive is a primary moral duty (dharma) of all creatures" ("Hospitality, Charity and Rationing: Three Channels of Food Distribution in India" 162). Moderation is a dominant normative principle of the Hindu approach to food, dietetics, and personal health. This moderation, like the balanced diet of modern dietetics is designed to secure the well-being of the eater. Khare coins the term 'cultural economy' to describe how material constraints and moral choices converge on the need to secure personal and societal satisfaction from food. Similarly, Islamic moral conceptions about proper food and feeding are linked to values of piety, honour, charity and sharing. These concepts will be explored in more detail in later discussions as they form the historical and cultural backdrop from which Bahá'í beliefs and practises emerged.

Foucault[7] suggests that ethical codes remain fairly constant across time and cultures. What changes is the meaning of actions carried out in accordance with those codes. For the ancient Greeks, ethical food practices led to beauty, truth, and reason; for

[7] See Part 2: Dietetics, in M. Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol. 2, the Uses of Pleasure (New York: Vintage, 1990).

the Romans they produced a strong body; physical resilience in the face of hardship. During Christianity the ethics of food were wrapped up in self-denial and suffering as a Duty to God and a requirement of salvation, while in the contemporary West, practices of the self, including eating, are directed to enhancing pleasure rather than limiting it. I suggest that in the Bahá'í system the ethics of eating may be understood as a practical means of achieving abstract ideals of justice. This is a matter I consider in detail in Chapter Three when I discuss Bahá'í ethics and concepts of justice.

An Interdisciplinary Approach

In the approaches reviewed above, food is variously treated as a nutritional, economic, cultural, symbolic, ethical or spiritual substance. My approach to food as liminal is an attempt to embrace all of these. No single approach provides all the information necessary for a full understanding of food habits; each of the approaches described in the above survey makes a contribution. Two decades ago researchers identified the need for a model which embraces biological, evolutionary, ecological and sociocultural processes and which integrates socio-cultural and biologic approaches to the study of nutrition (Cattle 1977; Pelto 1978). The work of Frederick Simoons (1994), who traces the origins and spread of meat avoidance based on analysis of evidence from archaeological, linguistic, historical and oral tradition sources is one example of an integrated approach. First published in 1961, Simoons' book emphasises that only a full range of factors can explain eating patterns, and he stresses the interplay of religious, moral, hygienic, ecological and economic factors in the context of human culture. Another exemplar of this approach is Louis Grivetti in his studies of the pre-scientific origins of nutrition and dietetics (1992; 1991a; 1991b; 1991c). Khare and Rao (1986). have also emphasised the value of interdisciplinary interpretation in foodways research and the need for more integrated approaches. Brown and Mussel (1984) call such an

approach "nexus studies", since food is posited as being a nexus for convergence of traditional disciplinary methods and insights, while Counihan and Van Esterik go still further and maintain that because food crosses so many conceptual boundaries it *must* be interpreted from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives (1997 1). In fact, they say, "The study of food can be used to question the limits of academic disciplinary boundaries" - a statement which would seem to lend support to my approach to food as liminal.

Liminality and Food

> Food is a liminal substance; it stands as a bridging substance between nature and culture, the human and the natural, the outside and the inside. (Atkinson 1983)

Throughout the thesis I will apply the concepts of liminality and communitas, developed by Van Gennep and Victor Turner, to food in several ways. Firstly, I view food in itself as a liminal substance. It is at once part of the realm of nature and a cultural symbol. Secondly, eating is a liminal act. Thirdly, food is a common element in rites of passage, being a highly symbolic component of acts of separation, transition and incorporation. And fourthly, food not only forms boundaries but also provides the means and opportunity to cross those boundaries.

Food as a liminal substance

As I suggested in my introductory remarks food is, in and of itself, a liminal substance. As such it has the power to mediate social relationships and to confer particular sets of social meanings (James 1990). Eating and drinking are examples of what sociologist Bryan Turner calls body practices, which tie us into the natural world while also locating us in a dense system of social norms and regulations (Turner 1996

185). At the same time the body has become a symbolic focus for and expression of the technological age; it is seen as machine-like, something that can be altered and improved. Food plays an integral role in altering what Mike Featherstone (1991) calls the "project body" and in achieving the fitness (in both a physical and social sense), which is an essential part of the new body technology. This, says James, requires that we approach our food intake cautiously, taking seriously the potential for food to create health or cause bodily harm.

Because food lies between the domains of nature and culture (technology), it is replete with ritual significance. Certain foodstuffs may be treated specifically as liminal. For example, breast milk has been portrayed as a liminal connector between the body of the mother and that of her baby , and breastfeeding itself as a liminal experience (Lupton; Mahon-Daly and Andrews 2002). Alison James explores the particularly potent case of confectionery as a liminal foodstuff. She shows how, lying conceptually between 'real' and 'junk' food, it eludes rigid classification and thereby is able to take on a variety of symbolic meanings as it slips from one semantic domain to another. Referring to the cultural indeterminacy (liminality) of another prominent foodstuff, the McDonald's Big Mac, Nick Perry describes its ability to be all things to all people. "And what it signifies slides promiscuously along and across the disparate (geographical, cultural, social and discursive) locations from which it is read" (1995).

Eating as a Liminal Act.

As Paul Atkinson points out, food is a metaphor for incorporation of the natural into the cultural domain, an idea pursued by Bakhtin in his extensive analysis of eating and drinking in the works of Rabalais, in which he likens taking in food to 'taking in the world' (1984 281). As an act of sustenance it is routine, even mundane - at least in societies where food is plentiful. But it is also possessed of seemingly limitless

possibilities for symbolic significance. Mann ist was er isst (You are what you eat), is true on a figurative as well as literal level. Issues of health and illness, purity and pollution, body image and identity are all examples of the food-body relationship.

Eating is an act of incorporation and as such is fraught with anxiety and danger; for that which nourishes and sustains may also harm or kill, and we manage our bodily boundaries in order to avoid foods which are contaminating, polluting or potentially deadly.[8.] French sociologist Claude Fischler draws attention to the 'omnivore's paradox' which, he says, creates an anxiety or ambivalence between neophilia and neophobia. "On the one hand, needing variety, the omnivore is inclined towards diversification, innovation, exploration and change, which can be vital to its survival; but, on the other hand, it has to be careful, mistrustful, 'conservative' in its eating; any new unknown food is a danger" (1988).This ambiguity, he suggests, lies behind the development of systems of culinary 'rules' which, by providing a cultural framework for food choice in which familiar 'safe' foods recur frequently, relieve individuals of the task of having to treat every eating event as a potential threat. Iossifides' anthropological study of food and drinking practices in a Greek Orthodox convent, revealed that rituals created around food represent eating as a dangerous activity; a crossing of bodily boundaries. Nuns blessed themselves before and after eating to protect against dangers from opening and closing of the body during eating (Iossifides 1992 81).

The danger represented by food is reflected in concepts of pollution, an area explored particularly by Mary Douglas in her analysis of Biblical food prohibitions (1970). For Douglas the unclear is the unclean, so that foods that do not fit clearly into cultural categories are necessarily dangerous and polluting. Drawing on Julia Kristeva's notion of food as abject, Deborah Lupton suggests that *all* food is potentially polluting as it crosses the oral boundary of the "clean and proper body" (Lupton 1996 113)

A different perspective on food as liminal is provided by Crotty's (1993) description of the act of swallowing as dividing "nutrition's two cultures", defined as the pre-swallowing domain of behaviour, culture, society and experience and the post-swallowing world of biology, physiology, biochemistry and pathology. Food, in moving from the outside to the inside of the body connects these two worlds.

As much as eating is a liminal act, so too is abstention from food. The phenomenon of fasting, and its place in the Bahá'í tradition is discussed at length later in the thesis. Here I simply draw attention to its liminal qualities. In the context of the North American Indian vision quest for example, fasting is a traditional means of self-empowerment and a means of attaining clarity (Foster and Little 1987).

> To deliberately abstain from food is to mark the liminal state, the state of paradox and openness and to negate one's prior human and social existence. Without meals to organise the day, having only constantly recurring circadian rhythms, time quickly becomes timelessness [...] fasting is a particularly potent way to mark a new transition, a willingness to change (97)

Abstaining from food marks the liminality of the vision-quester, who in voluntarily abandoning the comforts of food and drink negates normal social relationships in the hope of establishing more powerful kinship relations with the dream-spirits (Irwin 1994 11).

Food in Ritual and Ceremony

Bryan Turner reminds us that the general function of ritual is to bind the individual to the collective whole through a system of (religious) disciplinary practices in which food plays a prominent part (Turner 1996). Celebration of the Christian Eucharist is a particularly potent example. Food is also a common element in rites of passage, being a highly symbolic component of acts of separation, transition and incorporation. Van

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[8] See for example, Z. Bauman, Modernity and Ambivalence (Cambridge: Polity, 1991).

Gennep himself drew attention to the centrality of food, suggesting that eating together is pivotal for bridging transitions. "The rite of eating and drinking together [ ] is clearly a rite of incorporation, of physical union and has been called a sacrament of communion" (29). He goes on to say that:

> A union by this means may be permanent, but more often it lasts only during the period of digestion. Often the sharing of meals is reciprocal and there is an exchange of food which constitutes the confirmation of the bond. When food is exchanged without a common meal the action falls into the vast category of gift exchanges.

Robertson Smith, in discussing meals in ancient Semitic religion confirms that the very act of eating and drinking together was a symbol of confirmation of fellowship and mutual obligation. Those who sit at meals together are united for all social effects: those who do not eat together are aliens to one another; without fellowship in religion and without reciprocal duties (1889 269). In more contemporary literature, Pasi Falk (1994) refers to pre-modern rituals of eating as being integrative mechanisms for the whole community; sharing food represented the incorporation of the partaker into the community. Falk laments the marginalisation, in modernity, of the meal as a community-constituting ritual. An example of just this is provided by Carol Counihan in her study of food habits in Sardinia, in which she associates an erosion in community solidarity with the decline of the traditional *festa* as a redistributive feast (1999 37).

David Sutton's Proustian enquiry into 'Memories of Repast' provides an illustration of how ritual food is liminal in marking transitions between secular and sacred time: "Once into Lent, Cheese Sunday marks the last day one can eat dairy products and the last food consumed is an egg, which is eaten accompanied by the phrase 'With an egg I close my mouth, with an egg I will open it again', referring to the breaking of the fast with red-dyed Easter eggs" (Sutton 2001 30). In a similar vein, the Jewish Pesach or Passover is preceded by a clearing out of leavened food products from the house, while

the end of the Islamic fast of Ramadan is marked with the festival of 'Eid al-Fitr - literally, the festival of breaking the fast.

Food is central to a singular contemporary artistic endeavour aimed at reclaiming public space and blurring boundaries of geography, of culture and of politics. The 'Permanent Breakfast', as conceived by Friedemann Derschmidt in Austria, is a liminal event that seeks to reintroduce public ritual into everyday discourse. By staging formal outdoor breakfasts in contested or otherwise symbolic public spaces, such as national borders or grounds of public buildings, diners at the Permanent Breakfast create an opportunity for sociality that implicitly challenges perceptions of public life (Derschmidt 2003).

Food as Boundary

Food is a significant marker of cultural boundaries, whether these are regional, national, religious or other. Collective identities are created around food and used to define self and other. "I am a Hindu; the cow is sacred"; "I am a Jew; I do not eat pork"; "They eat dogs; they are not like us"; all are expressions of identity. Food readily lends itself to nationalism, regionalism, ethnocentrism and all sorts of other –isms. The 'other' is defined by what s/he does or doesn't eat, and which is invariably judged to be inferior to one's own practice. The ascription of cannibalism (the breaking of perhaps the most fundamental of human food taboos) to others, has always served to distinguish clear cultural boundaries; to identify the 'barbarians'. This even though there is no reliable first hand evidence that cannibalism was ever a customary practice in any culture; the thought is enough (Arens 1979). Food ridicule is another mechanism for demonising the other and extends to the practice of characterising cultures through derogatory use of food terms. Thus the Germans are 'Krauts', the French 'Frogs' and the British 'Limeys'. The word "Eskimo' is an Indian word meaning 'eaters of raw flesh', and was originally

used to express the revulsion of one group toward the food habits of another. In a contemporary inversion of this practice of food ridicule some US restaurateurs renamed 'French fries' as 'freedom fries' in an expression of disdain for French national policy decisions (Associated Press 2003).

Religious prohibitions and taboos, including those associated with food, distinguish between, and often socially separate, followers of different religions as well as sub-groups or castes within religions. Such constraints bring religious considerations into everyday social life by restricting or sanctioning social interaction and behaviours. Proscriptions around food act as boundaries, serving to keep distinct and apart people and things deemed to be different. Notably, in the Hindu religion, the caste system imposes strict rules of what may be eaten with, and by whom. High caste Brahmins may eat only 'pure' food and thus cannot eat with or accept food from lower castes. The Muhammadan prohibition against pork is thought by some to have served the function of reminding Muslims that they were different from (and superior to) their Christian neighbours. In the eighth century C.E. Pope Gregory III prohibited eating of horseflesh to Christians and Christian converts to set them apart from the horse-eating Vandals of northern Europe (Simoons 1994 87). This differentiating function of food and drink is also seen in action in contemporary secular contexts; for example; at social events (who is or isn't invited to the cocktail party), and in institutional settings (who sits at High Table). Mary Douglas shows how food encodes messages about social events and about social relations like hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries. Food categories constitute a social boundary system, while the predictable structure of each meal creates order out of potential disorder. In this way the meal is a microcosm of wider social structures: "The ordered system which is a meal, represents all the ordered systems associated with it" (1972).

What a person chooses to drink is as much a part of their national and cultural identity, the seasons, the life cycle and religion as what they eat (Delamont 1995 38), and in another study Douglas notes how drinks too can act as markers of personal and social identity and of boundaries of inclusion and exclusion (1987 8).

Just as Van Gennep applied the idea of rites of passage to communal calendar-based transitions, so Victor Turner saw communitas operating in a general way to unite people through common experience not only in ritual events, but during liminal occasions such as holy days, festivals, pilgrimages and so on. Food is frequently a feature of such events and occasions, when status differences are set apart as all gather together in obedience to the deity. Food is both a symbolic and a material means of coming together. At feasts, at social occasions, during rituals, fasts, and through common obedience to dietary laws, it offers a way of transcending divisions and of creating communitas. Individuals who observe codified food rules make a public demonstration of belonging to a group, and every day provide themselves with a private affirmation of identification with the group. In this way sense of belonging is constantly reinforced; in obeying the dietary laws one is continually reminded that one is a member of the faith. The need to preserve identity is especially felt when one group is threatened by assimilation into a larger or more powerful group. For example, at one time Jews were forbidden to drink wine with non-Jews as a means of restricting social intercourse which might have led to intermarriage with gentiles and ultimately to cultural assimilation. Eating together contributes to feelings of social cohesion. A funeral meal is a way of appeasing grief by reinforcing bonds that unite the living. More joyous everyday examples include church basement suppers and Sunday school picnics (Fieldhouse 1995).

Liminality as Method in this Thesis

In this thesis liminality provides me with a critical perspective and methodological tool that avoids the ahistoricity of equating food choice with individual preference, the specificity of particular food habits or an exclusive emphasis on material values of food. It allows me to acknowledge the cultural and spiritual value of food while remaining cautious of the postmodernist preoccupation with food as identity. I hope to avoid being caught in a disciplinary trap; an insistence that food means either this or that or that it's meaning is fixed. In this thesis food is liminal in all the ways described above. It can be thought of as bridge which provides both a way of connecting opposite banks and a way of crossing from one to the other. As such it plays a central role in transformative processes - ways of becoming.

Religion and food habits

Having given an overview of some of the main theoretical approaches to studying food, and having established a case for using a liminal approach to understanding food habits, I next focus more specifically on the relationship of food and religion. By reviewing functions and meanings of food within religious traditions using comparative examples from major world religions, I show that food plays an integral role in maintaining religious value systems. In so doing I identify a literature gap regarding food and the Bahá'í faith.

Each of the three general approaches to food choice described earlier is represented in the substantial volume of literature on religious food practices. Nutritional scientists analyse the different dietary patterns and nutritional intakes of religious groups

to explain observed variations in health status. Detailed studies abound of the food habits of particular cultural and religious groups, and of the meanings attributed to food habits by historians, anthropologists and other social scientists. An extensive religious studies and humanities literature explores food as a sacred substance or as a means to live a moral life.

As has been shown earlier, people make choices from the foodstuffs available to them which reflect a constellation of social, economic, political, and cultural influences as well as ethical codes and personal preferences. Religion is one such influence, and religious adherents around the world are more or less circumscribed in their food choices by the teachings of their chosen faith. Religious teachings about food include both dietary laws and guidance to what may be termed customary practice. Religious dietary laws can serve a number of different functions. They can provide a way for people to demonstrate their faith, to show that they accept religious authority. As a mark of group identity they strengthen feelings of belonging, and in this way act as a material reflection of the spiritual bonds which link co-religionists. Conversely, dietary rules may serve to demonstrate or preserve separateness by clearly demarcating cultural boundaries between religions, and controlling against assimilation by others. Food rules serve to restrict, sanction and prohibit social interaction and behaviours. Forgoing food during religious fasts is a form of self-denial, showing that one is more interested in spiritual than in worldly values. Through sacrifices or sacrificial meals, food is used as a means of communicating with the divine or other supernatural forces. Offerings may be made to placate the deity and so forestall disaster, or to seek favours and good fortune. Religious practices may serve, incidentally or purposefully, to encourage ecological sustainability through conservation and judicious use of scarce resources. For examples, see Fieldhouse (1995).

Meals serve as key symbols of religious affiliation and as a means through which religious acts are carried out. Eating is a primary mode of ritual activity that unites believers with the holy (Norman 2002 172). Religious food practices often require the use of specific foods in specific situations, especially during special celebrations such as feasts or fasts, where particular foods often have important symbolic values. Conversely there are many examples of foods which are not allowed for consumption though they are freely available, and religious codes often exclude whole categories of foods from consumption. What must not be eaten may be determined by characteristics of individuals such as age, gender, social or physiological status, or by external constraints such as time of day or time of year (Figure 1.1). Prescriptive rules of what must be eaten, when and how, are the counterpart of prohibitions.

Religious food customs originate in three main ways. Some are required by the deity and are described in scriptures; others are decreed by religious or political leaders; still others arise through adaptation or co-option of pre-existing food practices. Pagan festivals were frequently assimilated and given new meanings as modern religions assumed dominance over older forms of worship. Indeed, religiously-inspired food practices are far from static but are subject to continuous adaptation and re-interpretation. Changes may occur as result of religious reform or revisionism, acculturation, and individual, family, or community adaptations. Immigration provides a good example of how changing circumstances may result in changing attitudes to food. Through the process of acculturation dietary practices are modified in the light of availability of foodstuffs and as an adaptation to new cultural rules, customs and expectations (Choe, Capells and Arnold 1993; Gupta 1975).

Figure 1.1: Comparative examples of religious dietary strictures

Food Restrictions	
Judaism.	* Eat only animals with cloven hooves and which chew the cud. * Eat only forequarters of animal. * Eat only fish with scales and fins. * No blood.
Islam.	* No blood. * No pork * No intoxicating liquor.
Sikhism.	* No beef.
Hinduism.	* Must not kill or eat any animal.
Days of the Year	
Christianity	* No meat on Fridays during Lent. (Catholics) * Fast on Wednesday and Friday (Greek Orthodox)
Judaism	* No food preparation on Sabbath
Time of Day	
Islam	* No eating between sunrise and sunset during Ramadan
Buddhism	* Monks do not eat after midday.
Preparation of Food	
Judaism	* Ritual slaughtering of animals * Separate utensils for meat and dairy products
Islam	* Ritual animal slaughter
Hinduism	* Ritual bathing and donning of clean clothes by Brahmins before eating.
Fasts	
Christian Orthodox	* 40-day Great Lent fast before Easter; 40-day Advent fast (Greek
Islam	* Month of Ramadan. * 13th, 14th, 15th of each month

Adapted with permission from: Fieldhouse, P. (1995) Food and Nutrition: Customs and Culture, (2cnd ed.), p124: Chapman & Hall, London.

Continued compliance with traditional rules depends on social contexts. Believers who are strict when with members of their own religious group may be willing to be more lax when alone or with a different social group. Even without such external forces, adherence to religious dietary laws or guidelines varies on a national, regional, community, family or individual level. In many cases religions have developed several branches, sects or schools of thought which make different demands on members.

There is an extensive literature on religious dietary practices, examples of which follow. Turner (1996) and Whorton (1994) present two different historical perspectives on food in Christian thought and practice. Bosley and Hardinge (1992) focus on Seventh Day Adventists while Pike (1992) addresses the Mormon view. The evolution of the Eucharist is described by Tannahill (1976). Bynum (1987) and Bell (1985) offer explanations of fasting behaviour amongst medieval Christian women. Grivetti and Pangborn (1973), Douglas (1970), and Soler (1973) are among many who have examined Biblical injunctions related to food. Berman (1982) examines the Jewish vegetarian tradition while Sherman (1991) is concerned with the Passover ritual of the seder. Kilara and Iya (1992) examine contemporary and historic aspects of Hindu food habits, while Brown (1957), Harris (1978) and Lodrick (1981) provide contrasting accounts of the Hindu sacred cow taboo. The edited volume of Khare and Rao (1986) contains detailed studies of Hindu and Islam food communities. Chaudry (1992) outlines Islamic food laws while Berg (1997) focuses on fasting in Islam. Reynolds (2000) examines the Sufi relationship to food. Huang and Ang (1992) discuss the food of Chinese Buddhists. Fieldhouse (2002a; 2002b; 2002c; 2002d) provides synopses of the role of food in Zoroastrianism and in Shi'ite, Sunni and Sufi Islam.

None of this research applies its findings to the Bahá'í faith. A search of Collins' (1990) bibliography of English-language works on the Babi and Bahá'í faiths, 1844 - 1985, revealed few references to topics related to food. (Diet = 0; Food = 0; Fast/fasting

= 5; Nutrition = 1; Vegetarianism = 1). Bahá'í writings do include references to allopathic medicine, to fasting, and to vegetarianism, but further searches using resources such as NETDOC, internet search engines and enquiries to scholarly groups on Bahá'í internet listservs revealed that little has previously been written on the part food plays in the Bahá'í tradition. The few exceptions include Walbridge (1996) who describes Bahá'í fasting laws and the Nineteen Day Feast, Cameron (1985) who has addressed the role of nutrition in health and disease from a Bahá'í perspective, and Ghadirian (1985) who has explored the link between nutrition and mental health. However, most Bahá'í material relating to food is in the form of compilations from the sacred writings. This is an important gap, for although the Bahá'í faith is little over a century and a half old it has established itself as a new independent religion, attracting followers from all racial and religious backgrounds, and is generally now included in listings of major world religions.

At first glance it appears that food does not figure prominently in Bahá'í teachings. There are certainly no dietary codes setting out what may or may not be eaten, when and with whom. There is nothing like the complex Jewish food laws that provide a distinct means for performing Jewishness, or the strict rules that govern food transactions between Hindu castes. In fact, 'Abdu'l-Bahá[9] describes food laws as non-essential and temporary. However, just because there is little evidence of formal dietary rules does not mean that food is unimportant in the faith. Rather than setting out rules, Bahá'í teachings provide guidance and emphasize the responsibility of individual believers to live a virtuous life. Just as diet was an essential part of conduct for the Greeks, Romans and Christians so, I will show, the Bahá'í tradition presents a singular food discourse: one that invokes themes of naturalness, simplicity, moderation and compassion as components of just living.

[9] Grandson of the Bahá'í founder-prophet.

Significance of the study

From a food habits research perspective consideration of the ethical imperatives underlying food conduct enriches our understanding of the phenomenon of food choice. It calls attention to the part food plays in health, conceived as "(w)hole(i)ness", and challenges the hegemony of biomedical functioning as the sole criterion for making decisions about "good nutrition". Decisions that are made about food distribution and consumption, whether at a macro or micro policy level or at the level of individual behaviour, are informed by certain understandings of the normative role of food in society, and of the ways in which people fulfil their food needs. For example, modern approaches which favour scientific and economically rational goals lead to exclusive concerns with the nutrient value of food, and to policies predicated on the utility value of food. Through an examination of ethical and spiritual perspectives on food, as reflected in one faith tradition, this study will contribute to extending the ways in which we understand the social norms governing relationships between food and human needs, and which in turn may offer policy makers and practitioners alternative ways of thinking about their decisions. The emphasis in Bahá'í writings on the use of food in healing has a renewed relevance at a time when there is a convergence of desire between the medical/agricultural/industrial sector that is interested in developing and marketing nutraceuticals and functional foods and the consumer-led advocates of natural health products and holistic health. As Anderson observed in regard to Chinese traditional medicine, "The whole concept of a medical theory based on gentle, inexpensive, everyday means of strengthening the body and soothing its aches has much to contribute to our modern system with its powerful and dangerous remedies that all too often create iatrogenic patterns of their own" (1988).

The study adds to the body of knowledge about food and religion, highlighting similarities and differences in the role played by food in this relatively young religion compared to the functions displayed in more ancient religions. It contributes to the emerging discipline of body history through an exploration of the nature of food meanings to Bahá'ís, particularly regarding the linkages between food practices and notions of asceticism, purity, and health. Finally, the work is a contribution to Bahá'í studies, illustrating how the worldview of Bahá'ís is reflected in food-related ideas and practices. The Bahá'í perspective, emphasising science and religion as two wings of the same truth, and asserting justice as the underlying principle guiding human behaviour may offer a way of reconnecting the material and moral aspects of food, of bridging the gap between scientific and cultural/social analysis, and of suggesting a new basis on which to think about food as a human need.

Summary

In this chapter I have introduced the key concepts of liminality and food choice that frame my thesis, and have outlined my thesis goals. I have shown that the study of food and food choices has been approached from many theoretical perspectives, and that a multiplicity of disciplines has treated food as a material, cultural and symbolic phenomenon. Food has also been viewed as a spiritual or ethical substance, and eating has been portrayed as a moral act.

I have situated my enquiry within an examination of ethical dimensions of the Bahá'í religious tradition. Often, particularly in positivistic nutrition discourse, religion is set aside as a more or less interesting sideline - perhaps as a demographic variable to be taken into account in nutrition surveys, or as a cultural code that results in specific marketplace food choices and demands. The Bahá'í insistence on the essential harmony

of religion and science makes it an intriguing case for envisioning a broader view of food, one in which 'religion' is not an explanatory variable for scientific findings, nor simply an alternative frame for understanding food choice, but where food choice, as a liminal technique of the self, provides the means for religious and scientific 'truth' to meet.

I proceed in Chapter Two, to provide a general overview of the Bahá'í faith, its history, central figures and major teachings, as an essential precursor to detailed discussions of how food is involved in Bahá'í concepts of justice. Chapter Three examines elements of the relationship between food and justice, before reviewing some major religious and secular approaches to justice leading to a specific focus on the Bahá'í ethical system. Chapter Four provides a rationale for the qualitative research design I use in this thesis. It describes my dual methodological approach, including a critical review of methodological issues associated with the primary strand of my approach - textual analysis, and an account of the theoretical issues and practical procedures involved in conducting interviews. Chapter Five is a detailed textual analysis of food-related material in Bahá'í writings, that incorporates empirical commentaries based on findings from the interviews, together with other qualitative sources.

CHAPTER TWO

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

Introduction

> The Bahá'í Faith has come to assume of the characteristics of a world religion - a remarkable transition from its origins 150 years ago as a heterodox and seemingly negligible offshoot of an obscure grouping within Shi'i Islam. (Momen and Smith 2001 302)

My goal in this chapter is to provide a brief, but comprehensive overview of the Bahá'í tradition that will familiarise the reader with basic background about the faith and major elements of the Bahá'í worldview. I will identify principles and precepts of the faith which may have implications directly or indirectly for understanding of the role of food. I will establish the importance of transition as a motif in the faith, and the potential this offers for using the notion of liminality; specifically how food as a liminal entity may enable and support transitional acts.

I begin with a brief history of the faith, tracing its development from geo-political origins in the Middle East to its modern-day world-wide presence. This establishes that the Bahá'í faith is a significant force in the world and one that is deserving of scholarly attention. It also underlines the cultural context in which the tradition developed - a context that is essential when discussing food and food conduct; for as Khare points out, any social context of human nutrition will always have some culturally specific and some intercultural dimensions (1980, 528). Next, an overview of the 'what is' provides a summary of key Bahá'í religious teachings that inform the Bahá'í world view, and which

are important for understanding the essential interplay of spiritual and material development in the faith and how food serves the purposes of both. This is followed by an account of the 'what could be'; with particular attention to the centrality of justice in Bahá'u'lláh's vision of human possibilities in a 'New World Order'. I describe the guiding principles and social teachings that support this vision, drawing attention to possible intersections with food and food conduct. Finally, a discussion of what it means to live the Bahá'í life introduces practical and ritual elements of Bahá'í communities, as the arenas in which food related conduct take place, and sets the scene for the more detailed discussion of food and justice in Chapter Three.

What is the Bahá'í Faith?

I begin by providing a very brief outline of the five main phases in the development of the Bahá'í religious tradition, which will aid in understanding and interpreting material in later chapters. There are numerous comprehensive accounts including those by (Hatcher and Martin 1984), (Smith 1987), and (Momen 1997), and an excellent shorter summary by (Bausani 2000) which are the chief sources for this section. This historical context is also a reminder that we are dealing with a non-Western cultural system and one that has undergone a number of doctrinal changes in a short time, factors that will be important when it comes to considering the role of food.

The Bahá'í faith has, in the course of a century and a half, grown from an obscure movement within a minority sect of Islam into a world religion with adherents world-wide. Originating in mid-nineteenth century Persia, the immediate antecedent of the faith was Bábism, itself a messianic sect of Shi'a Islam. The founder of the Bahá'í tradition was the prophet Bahá'u'lláh (Ba-howl-a) who claimed to be the latest in a long and continuing line of divine teachers sent by the one God to bring a new revelation to

humanity. His message of unity and justice was to pave the way for a new era of peace, prosperity and universal harmony for the human race. Bahá'í teachings make a strong link between spiritual and social development and, on the surface, the Bahá'í faith might easily be seen as a social movement devoted to causes usually labelled 'progressive' in secular political terms.

The Beginnings: the Báb

The Bábi and Bahá'í religions emerged in the context of Persian Shi'ism and longstanding conflicts over the question of spiritual authority and succession to the Prophet Muhammad. In1844, an Iranian merchant named Sayyid 'Alí Muhammad, began calling for the spiritual and moral reformation of Persian society. Taking the title of 'Báb', or 'Gate', he announced his mission to prepare the way for the immanent appearance of another divine messenger, whom he called 'The Promise of All Ages'. To orthodox Shi'ites, who viewed Muhammad as the 'Seal of the Prophets' - the last of the line of divine messengers – this was heresy. The Báb was thus seen as a threat to the foundations of Islam (Hatcher and Martin 1984 9). His major written work, the Bayán, abrogated laws of the Qur'anic sharia regarding fasting, prayer, marriage, divorce and inheritance. In addition, the concept of ritual purity was abolished, seclusion of women ended, and alcohol forbidden (Lewis, Pellat and Schacht 1965). The consequences of the Báb's activities and teachings were persecution of his followers (known as Bábis), and arrest and imprisonment of the Báb himself. At his trial, the Báb claimed a new spiritual status by declaring that he himself was none other than the Hidden Imam whose return had been awaited for a thousand years. Supporters proclaimed the independent nature of the Bábi religion, provoking further violence and state action against the Bábis. The Báb was executed in 1850 and the Bábi movement was virtually destroyed.

A New Faith: Bahá'u'lláh

Mírzá Husayn Alí, who earlier had taken the name Bahá'u'lláh (Glory of God), was one of the surviving Bábi leaders. Exiled in Baghdad, he wrote profusely on themes concerning the nature of God, the function of divine manifestations and the spiritual evolution of mankind. He also engaged freely in discussions with both Sunnis and Sufis. The revitalisation of the Bábi movement led to renewed government fears of civil unrest, and resulted in the expulsion of Bahá'u'lláh from Baghdad. Before leaving, he spent twelve days just outside the city in the Garden of Ridvan, during which time he declared to his companions his identity as "He Whom God Shall Make Manifest". However this revelation was not made public until Bahá'u'lláh reached exile in Turkey, where he openly announced his claim to be the long awaited messenger of god promised by the Báb. Despite some continuing schisms, the majority of Bábis accepted Bahá'u'lláh's claims, and began calling themselves Bahá'ís.

Bahá'u'lláh was subsequently exiled to Akka (Acre) in Palestine, where he wrote letters to world leaders urging them to abandon warfare and establish international political and social systems that would support his vision of world peace and harmony. As well, he produced voluminous writings on diverse social and religious themes; including the Kitáb-i-Aqdas[10] (Most Holy Book) that lays out the fundamental laws and ethical principles of the Bahá'í faith. Whereas the Bábi movement had been essentially confined to Shi'ite Islam the new Bahá'í faith had wider appeal, attracting Jewish and Zoroastrian converts in Iran (Stockman and Winters 1997). In 1877 Bahá'u'lláh was given permission to live outside the city, where he devoted himself to writing and to receiving pilgrims. He handed over practical affairs to his eldest son 'Abbas Effendi, the

[10] The published Kitáb-i-Aqdas comprises three sections; revelations of Bahá'u'lláh, Questions and Answers, and notes. In conformity with Bahá'í publishing conventions citations in the text use the notations 'K', 'Q' and 'n' respectively for material in each of these sections.

'Most Great Branch', who became known as 'Abdu'l-Bahá - the Servant of the Glory. Bahá'u'lláh died in Mazra'ih in 1892.

Reaching out: 'Abdu'l-Bahá

Bahá'u'lláh named 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the 'Centre of the Covenant', bestowing him with sole authority over all aspects of the faith including interpreting Bahá'í teachings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá was not himself a prophet but rather was to be seen as the perfect human embodiment of Bahá'u'lláh's teaching. Under 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Bahá'í faith spread beyond the boundaries of the Middle East; first to North American and thence to Europe and Australia. Foreign visitors began to arrive in Akka, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá himself travelled extensively in Europe and North America, raising the profile of this new religion. Much of the Bahá'í exposition on diet and healing is contained in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's talks given during these travels. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also focused on the development of Bahá'í administrative institutions. His1908 'Will and Testament' provided details of the nature and functions of those administrative institutions that were first conceived by Bahá'u'lláh; namely the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. The Guardianship conferred sole authority for the interpretation of Bahá'í teachings on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi. The Universal House of Justice was to become the primary legislative and administrative authority of the Bahá'í community. 'Abdu'l-Bahá died in 1921. Although he had achieved personal world-wide recognition and esteem, the Bahá'í faith itself was still relatively unknown and unacknowledged as a viable religious system (Hatcher and Martin 1984 61).

Guardian of the Faith: Shoghi Effendi

Shoghi Effendi was the first and only Bahá'í Guardian. The two most important functions of the Guardianship were interpretation of Bahá'í teachings and guidance of

the Bahá'í community. Shoghi Effendi de-emphasised the role of charismatic leadership, encouraging allegiance to the institution of the Guardianship and not the person of the Guardian. His efforts were focused on practical development of Bahá'í administrative structures and a series of ambitious plans to spread the faith worldwide. During this time the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa was conceived of as a spiritual centre and administrative complex that would provide a place of pilgrimage for a widely dispersed religious community and which would contribute to creating a sense of common identity. Shoghi Effendi also dedicated much effort to the translation and interpretation of Bahá'í teachings. Having studied in Britain he was able to translate Persian and Arabic writings into English, making Bahá'í ideas accessible to a wide audience and providing an invaluable source of guidance to Western believers (Hatcher and Martin 65).

Routinisation of Charisma: The Universal House of Justice

In 1957 Shoghi Effendi died without nominating a successor. As specified in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's 'Will and Testament' the only other institution with the authority to assume leadership of the Bahá'í community was the Universal House of Justice (UHJ) - a body which did not yet exist. Through consultations among leading Bahá'ís it was decided that the UHJ would be elected by National Spiritual Assemblies of the world in 1963. The first nine elected members, coming from four continents and representing three major religious backgrounds, were symbolic of the essence of the faith - unity (Hatcher and Martin 72) The UHJ undertook centralised development of a series of national, regional and global missionary plans to co-ordinate the expansion and consolidation of the religion, a key element in its growth during the past half-century (Hampson 1980).

A World Religion

The success of the UHJ's endeavours was reflected in a rapid growth in numbers of Bahá'ís, broadening of the ethnic and socio-cultural diversity of membership and the establishment of supporting infrastructure. Estimates of the extent of religious followings are subject to a number of distortions and uncertainties, but 2000 statistics indicate that the Bahá'í world community had almost seven million members in over 220 countries (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2001). While the Bahá'í community has enjoyed rapid growth, its demographic profile has changed profoundly. In 1954, 94% of the total world Bahá'í population were Iranian, but by 1988 this had dropped to only 6% with a concomitant increase in countries of the South, especially in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Numerically, North American and European Bahá'í communities have remained relatively small[11] although, in the former instance, crucial for the organisation of the faith (Smith 1987). As of April 1996, the Bahá'í international community had 174 national spiritual assemblies and almost 20,000 local spiritual assemblies. Over 2,100 ethnic groups were represented and Bahá'í literature had been translated into over 800 languages. In addition the Bahá'í community operated over 1300 social and economic development projects world-wide, including approximately 650 schools and 7 radio stations (Stockman and Winters 1997). The Bahá'í World Centre in the Acre/Haifa area of Israel is both the spiritual and administrative hub of the Bahá'í faith. The burial place of the Báb on Mount Carmel in Haifa and of Bahá'u'lláh near Acre are, for Bahá'ís, the two holiest places on earth.

[11] In 1992 there were 15,000 Bahá'ís in Canada, in 1350 locations and with 410 Spiritual Assemblies.

Given the geographical spread of the Faith and the cultural diversity of its members it is of course highly unlikely that there would be any such thing as a 'typical' Bahá'í diet, which could be uncovered through dietary survey methodologies. I will not therefore be concerned with specific elements of cuisine or with culturally-specific symbolic values of particular foods. Instead I will be interested in whether food brings unity to this diversity by functioning in distinctive ways within what I will call the Bahá'í system.

The Bahá'í View of the World

Following an organisational schema adapted from Whitmore (1998), this section presents key ideas that characterise the Bahá'í worldview. It provides contextual background for my study and identifies Bahá'í religious concepts that will be important in later considerations of the place of food in the faith.

Universe is Unified and Interdependent

Bahá'í writings present what would be called in modern ecological parlance, a holistic view of the universe. Humans are viewed as an integral part of a web of relations that include all aspects of nature. In the Bahá'í cosmos there are three hierarchical levels, at the apex of which is the world of 'God the Creator' who, from nothingness, created the reality of all things (Bahá'u'lláh 1976 64-5). Bahá'u'lláh describes god as an unknowable essence; the only way in which human beings can learn about the nature of the divine is through 'Manifestations of God', individuals who through their words and deeds make manifest the divine virtues. Humans seek to emulate these qualities in their quest for spiritual development and social progress. The Manifestations have a status between that of God and Man - a singular feature of the Bahá'í faith, and are part of the

world of the Kingdom or the world of command, the second level of the cosmos. Bahá'í writings specifically recognise Krishna, Zoroaster (Zorothrushta), Buddha, Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh as Manifestations of God. The third level, the world of Creation, is the material world. It comprises a series of increasingly complex orders from the mineral kingdom, to vegetable and animal life, to human beings, and there is an underlying spirit that animates and connects all of existence. "All parts of the creational world are of one whole. All the parts are subordinate and obedient to the whole" (Bahá'u'lláh 1956).

Divine Revelation is Progressive

The Bahá'í faith teaches that religious truth is relative rather than absolute, and that divine revelation is a continuous and progressive process (Shoghi Effendi 1972). Each revealed religion is seen to be part of a single divine plan, and each has guided humanity through a stage in its progression toward spiritual maturity. However each prophetic dispensation inevitably grows old and externally corrupt, old laws become obsolete and new ones necessary; this is achieved through the appearance of a new Manifestation - a new legislator-prophet for the age (Bausani 2000). Each Manifestation of God is accorded equal spiritual status; each is like a perfect mirror which reflects the same sun (the One God) and the advent of each prophet is interpreted as the return of the spirit and attributes of this singular deity in another mirror (Stockman and Winters 1997). Each Manifestation has the same general purpose of increasing human knowledge of the Will of God but each also brings specific teachings and practical guidance to suit the time and place of his appearance (Bahá'u'lláh 1976 287-8). Failure to distinguish between the two aspects of revelation: the continuing common 'core' and the external elements which are culturally and temporally specific is, from a Bahá'í point of view, one of the major sources of conflict between different religions as

believers who do not recognise that laws must change to suit changing social conditions, will insist on holding on to outmoded signs of faith.

The concept of progressive revelation has profound implications for approaches to understanding the role of food in a religious system. When food is discussed in the context of religions it most often deals with specific food rules and prohibitions that were promulgated at a particular time in history and in a particular social and cultural context. In a sense, these food laws become frozen in time and, while societal arrangements and modes of living change dramatically, the food laws remain as fixed points of reference. This is not to say that food law observances do not fade in significance or that over time they become more honoured in the breach; but they do remain as potent ideological symbols. From a Bahá'í point of view, one might expect that specific food laws would be seen at best, as temporary, and would constitute an external and therefore unessential element of religious praxis.

Humans have a Distinguished Status

In the Bahá'í perspective humans are the culmination of creation, distinguished by powers of reasoning, intellect, and memory as well as having spiritual capacities which are absent in animals. Human nature is seen to have two aspects; the material or lower nature and the higher or spiritual nature. The material nature is associated with cruelty and injustice while the higher nature is expressed in love, mercy, kindness, truth and justice ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1969). Because humans belong to the world of creation they have - in common with animals - biological needs that must be met, and that give rise to selfish behaviour. But the intellectual reality of man predominates over nature, and the goal of Bahá'í spiritual development is subjugation of animalistic desires in order to realise and express the higher true self ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1927 51). The soul which distinguishes humans from animals is a non-material entity not dependent on the body;

rather the body serves as a vehicle for the soul in the physical world. The soul comes into being at the moment the physical body is conceived, and after death continues to progress until it attains the divine presence. Bahá'u'lláh identified capacities of the soul as: the Mind - capacity for rational thought and intellectual activity; the Will - capacity for self-initiated action; the Heart - capacity for deliberate self-sacrificing love or altruism (Hatcher and Martin 1984 106). These capacities are, however, latent - existing only as potentials until they are developed through deliberate effort. Individuals must make conscious decisions to develop the higher or spiritual aspect of their being. This means striving to emulate, in daily life, the attributes of their god as revealed in the teachings and laws of the current Manifestation.

It is clear that food, as a necessity for physical survival and as an essential prerequisite for health has connections to the animal side of human nature as conceived of in Bahá'í teachings. The material body must be cared for, so that proper nutrition becomes an important consideration. Food is also - as the foregoing literature review clearly showed, good to think. Food pervades the non-material realm of human life giving substance to thoughts, ideas and beliefs. As a liminal entity food bridges the animal and spiritual side of human nature.

Humanity's Primary Purpose

Bahá'u'lláh describes two purposes for human existence; one is to know and to worship the creator, and the other is to advance societal development by spreading the spiritual and social teachings of their religion (Bahá'u'lláh 1976 70). These spiritual and practical dimensions are inextricably linked and his teachings emphasise the creation of social structures that promote the development of both individual and collective capacities. "The physical world is thus seen as the arena for the development and

perfection of the human being, a class-room for the spiritual education and maturation of the soul" (Momen 2003).

Food, as demonstrated in Chapter One, has physical, social, and spiritual dimensions. Just as food bridges the inner and outer life of individuals so it also links the individual to society, providing an infinitely nuanced means of tying people into a dense web of social norms and regulations. In this way food provides a practical vehicle for bringing spiritually inspired beliefs of individuals into the public sphere.

Religion is the Key to Balancing Material and Spiritual Development

From the Bahá'í perspective there is no sharp line between secular and religious aspects of life. Social reform, however crucial, must be accompanied by changes within the human heart and spirit if genuine solutions are to be found for worldly ills. For example, economic injustice might be tackled by reform of macro economic structures and activities but it also requires that individuals put service to the greater community before their own selfish desires and material wants. Such behaviour is thought not to be possible in the absence of true religious faith, and the main reason for social conflict and unhappiness lies in the rejection of religious and spiritual principles. By accepting and following the teachings of the current Manifestation of God, individuals can help create a social milieu favourable to both social and spiritual growth (Hatcher and Martin 1984 94).

Institutions Provide the Structure of Religion

"The Bahá'ís consider useless every theology, every individual moral act, every prayer – unless it contributes to the one goal of bringing about the unity of humankind. The means for realising this goal are found in the administrative order" (Bausani 2000). A unique feature of the Bahá'í tradition is that its founder set out the laws and institutions that were to govern his followers in perpetuity. Bahá'u'lláh's written directives concerning

the exact nature of these institutions were enacted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, and administrative principles were set forth in a series of books and manuals that are used throughout the Bahá'í world (Shoghi Effendi 1963). Bahá'ís expend considerable time and effort on ensuring the robustness and healthy functioning of their administrative institutions, in the belief that they can provide an alternative organisational model for a future global system (although some may question whether emphasis on such a bureaucratic system is appropriate to the lives of the majority of Bahá'ís in developing countries). There are two types of institution in the Bahá'í community; those designed to make administrative decisions with respect to the life of the community and those which function to protect the community and contribute to propagation of the Faith (Hatcher and Martin 1984 144).

Covenant Maintains Religious Unity

The concept of covenant as a spiritual contract between people and their god is found in many religions. It is usually associated with the revealed religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, though Heller suggests that a similar relationship can be detected in any human group that locates the purpose and meaning of life in obligations of a transcendental origin (2000a 43). Bahá'ís recognise two covenants. The first is the Greater Covenant in which god promises to send continued guidance to humankind who, in turn, promise to obey divine laws and follow religious teachings. Bahá'u'lláh claimed to be the fulfilment of the covenant established by all past prophets. The opening declaration of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas spells out the twin obligations of humanity to recognise and accept Manifestations of God when they appear and to obey and put into practice their teachings (Bahá'u'lláh 1993 K1). Bahá'ís of other religious backgrounds do not consider that they have abandoned their former faiths when they become Bahá'ís; rather they have 'kept the covenant' in recognizing the succession of god's messengers

instead of following only the teachings of their own prophet (Hatcher and Martin 1984 128).

The lesser covenant requires Bahá'ís to accept the authority of Bahá'u'lláh's appointed successors. The emphasis placed on central authority and the provisions for succession contained in Bahá'í written documents are mechanisms for protecting the faith in the face of a history of schism and dissension. Given that world unity is a central goal of the faith then Bahá'í leaders feel it is necessary that there be unity within the faith itself. As a consequence, internal dissent and opposition to the central authorities of the faith are treated very seriously by the Bahá'í leadership and those who rebel against the appointed head of the faith (known as 'covenant breakers') are expelled or shunned (Momen and Smith 2001). The tension between the conservatism of central authority and the libertarian ideals of individual pursuit of truth has been a major issue for some Bahá'í scholars in recent years.

Food is frequently incorporated into covenantal relationships as part of religious laws given by prophet-legislators. The dietary laws of the Jews are a major example of this; following the law through scrupulous attention to dietary injunctions is a way of demonstrating fidelity to the covenant. Bahá'u'lláh's covenant includes regulations on fasting, while Bahá'í teachings contain further guidance on food-related conduct.

Keys to Achieving the Bahá'í Vision

Bahá'u'lláh's mission was to unify humankind in a peaceful global society. There are a number of principles considered vital to the achievement of this goal and which the form the basis of Bahá'í teaching. Each has ramifications for food beliefs and food related conduct, and are briefly described below.

The Abandonment of All Forms of Prejudice

Bahá'u'lláh counselled his followers to rid themselves of all prejudice, rejecting subordination of any race, religion, nation, ethnic group or social class to any other. 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirmed that: "all these prejudices strike at the very root of human life [...]. So long as these prejudices survive there will be continuous and fearsome wars" ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1978 249). Prejudice often arises from strong identification with the group to which one belongs which is regarded as superior to other groups. In anthropology this is referred to as ethnocentrism, whilst in humanistic discourses it invokes the concept of the 'other'. People outside of the group are viewed negatively, whatever their personal qualities may be. Group prejudice can be based on racial, economic, social, linguistic or other such criteria and it causes conflict by creating disunity. The role of food in creating negative stereotypes and images of the 'other' was noted in Chapter One. Food habits that are unfamiliar readily attract opprobrium and create or reinforce existing prejudices toward those that practice these habits. By promoting diversity within the faith and requiring increased social interaction amongst members of diverse backgrounds, the Bahá'í community confronts the challenge of overcoming prejudice on a daily basis. Through acts of commensality, food plays a role in this process of familiarisation with and acceptance of differences.

Equality of Men and Women

Contrary to traditions that teach that women are socially subordinate, or even naturally inferior to men, the Bahá'í teachings assert that men and women are intellectually and spiritually equal. The equal treatment of women and men is essential to the progressive transformation of society. "To accept and observe a distinction which God has not intended in creation is ignorance and superstition [...]. Until the reality of

equality between man and woman is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible" ('Abdu'l-Bahá The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá During His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912 1982 76). Elsewhere, 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes men and women as the two wings of humanity; if both wings are not equally developed the bird cannot fly. Males and females have complementary qualities and capacities necessary for the achievement of future prosperity. Women are seen to be the greatest factor in establishing conditions for universal peace and international arbitration and in abolishing war among mankind.

Food is frequently a locus for the display of gendered power relationships. The achievement of food equity between men and women may be seen as a step toward true equality.

Elimination of Extremes of Poverty and Wealth

Economic justice is a key component of social justice and is thus of central concern in Bahá'í teachings. Bahá'u'lláh asserted that economic injustice is a moral evil condemned by god, while 'Abdu'l-Bahá observes that: "When we see poverty allowed to reach a condition of starvation, it is a sure sign that somewhere we shall find tyranny" (1969 123). The Bahá'í remedy is to abolish extremes of both poverty and wealth, and the writings address several aspects of wealth redistribution including individual benevolence, progressive taxation and profit-sharing, themes that have been extensively explored in the secondary literature (Hatcher and Martin 1984; Badi'i 1993). While "The use of the planet's wealth can be fundamentally reorganized in response to entirely new conceptions of need", individuals also share responsibility in achieving economic justice (Bahá'í International Community 2001). In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, work is elevated to the rank of worship, while begging is despised. Individuals are exhorted to "waste not your hours

in sloth and idleness but occupy yourself with what will profit you and others" (Bahá'u'lláh 1993 K33). Shoghi Effendi says that wages should be unequal and correspond to the varying capacities and resources of workers; consequently there is affirmation of a direct connection between effort and reward as presented in neo-classical economic theory. Wage incentives are necessary in order to encourage services vital to the welfare of the community. However, the dangers of a 'just desserts' approach to economics are recognised and ameliorated by an insistence on an element of basic social provision as a means of avoiding situations in which:

> We see amongst us men who are overburdened with riches on the one hand and on the other those unfortunate ones who starve with nothing; those who possess several stately palaces, and those who have not where to lay their head. Some we find with numerous courses of costly and dainty food; whilst others can scarce find sufficient crusts to keep them alive [...].This condition of affairs is wrong and must be remedied ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1969 151).

This implies a minimum income level to meet basic needs, with an appropriate social safety net augmented, perhaps, by voluntary giving. At the same time, progressive taxation and other measures such as high inheritance tax would prevent individuals from accumulating wealth beyond a maximum level. Individual generosity is encouraged as a spiritual act which contributes to the just distribution of resources. The payment of Huququ'llah, a voluntary tax on income, also brings spiritual benefits to the giver. Graham (1997), in reviewing the secondary literature on the Bahá'í faith and economics sums up by characterising the Bahá'í economic system as one which combines voluntary and mandatory means for the elimination of extremes of wealth, operating within a framework where wages are conceived of as just rewards.

Food is an obvious signifier of poverty and wealth. In any system designed to reduce economic disparities, access to food may be expected to play a significant part. Enhancing food security for individuals, communities or countries is a tangible demonstration of a commitment to equity, whilst avoidance of food ostentation is at a

personal level also an acknowledgement of the need to minimise disparities. This latter theme emerges from the Bahá'í injunction to choose only one kind of dish at mealtimes, and will be further explored in Chapter Five. However, Shoghi Effendi made a comment about hunger - that shortage of food was not the basis of the problem, but rather it was the shortage of feelings of love and concern. Food equity thus requires both material and spiritual responses.

Realisation of Universal Education

Bahá'í writings assert that equality of educational opportunity is the foundation for the establishment of universal peace. Ignorance is portrayed as a major cause of the strife between peoples for "When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and equality between men and women will be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed" ('Abdu'l-Bahá The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá During His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912 1982 175:1). 'Abdu'l-Bahá goes on to say that without equality this will be impossible because all differences and distinction are conducive to discord and strife. Nevertheless, though people are urged to assure the education of all children, when choices must be made then preference must be given to female children as a way of redressing past injustices and maximising benefits to future generations. As mothers are the first teachers of the new generation it is through them that learning can be most rapidly disseminated in society. Bahá'u'lláh's advocacy of women's education was indeed revolutionary in nineteenth century Persia and also preceded the development of women's emancipation in the West (J. R. Cole 1998 164-87). Kingdon (1997) adds that recognition of the wisdom of the Bahá'í emphasis on women's education is a recent

addition to the list of areas of convergence between Bahá'í teachings and modern secular thought.[12]

Questions of food are intimately bound up with those of education. Sound nutrition is essential to proper brain development and intellectual performance. Children who are malnourished or hungry do not benefit fully from the education they receive. Ensuring adequacy of diet is thus an important contribution to the goal of universal education. In turn, education is necessary for individuals to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to produce, prepare and consume a healthy diet. Just as Bahá'ís view mothers as the prime channel for educating the young, so nutritionist theorists have seen women as the 'gatekeepers' of nutrition knowledge and skills and thus a major force in the socialisation of children's food habits.

Responsibility of Each Person to Search Independently for the Truth

The ability to reason is a powerful human attribute, and Bahá'ís are thus exhorted to engage in an independent investigation of truth through prayer, meditation, study of scriptures and reflection upon their own experiences. Blind allegiance to partisan movements and uncritical acceptance of factional opinions is seen to be a major factor in continuing conflict in the world, as stubborn determination to hold to one view or perspective breeds intolerance of those who do not share it. Individuals have a moral responsibility to use their divinely-bestowed capacity to reason, and in their personal search for the truth come to know why they adhere to a given ideology or doctrine (Hatcher and Martin 1984 86). 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that there is only one truth, and that if only men [sic] would search it out they would find themselves united (The

[12] Others include interest in global governance, world currency and co-ordination of international economic policy.

Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá During His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912 1982 291)

The independent search for truth has to reconcile Bahá'í values of unity and diversity. Differences in perspectives over limits or constraints on individual expression of opinion have arisen particularly in the context of Bahá'í scholarship. Bahá'í authorities agree that anyone may express their personal opinion or understanding of something but that they may not represent it as anything other than their own imperfect understanding of partial truth. Momen (2001) suggests that Bahá'u'lláh's covenant makes it possible and even desirable for different narratives, different viewpoints, different interpretations to evolve within the Bahá'í community as long as the individual Bahá'ís maintain a personal loyalty and willingness to submit to the authority of the Centre of the Covenant. In this way, he says, it is possible to balance the modernist trend towards unity with the post-modernist trend towards diversity and differentiation.

I draw an analogy here to the cultural diversity of food and plurality of customary food practices which, though they differ in their outer form all ultimately lead to the 'one truth' of dietary balance - a theme that I explore further in Chapter Five. Insistence on one 'correct' way of eating, whether based in science, magic, or folklore, is a prescription for contestation, dissent, and alienation. The principle of independent search for truth appears to be congruent with Bahá'í dietary advice being couched in terms of broad guidelines and principles rather than specific laws or admonitions.

Recognition that Religion is in Harmony with Reason and Science

Just as men and women are described as the "two wings of humanity", so religion and science are "The two wings upon which man's intelligence can soar into the heights, with which the human soul can progress" ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1969 143). Smart (1996) comments that any religion which derives its authority from a body of scriptural

writings that is thought to be divinely inspired is likely to run into trouble when scriptural pronouncements contradict the findings of science. Hence, for example, the long-standing battle between Christian creationists and scientific evolutionists. Recently there are signs that this conflict is diminishing and is even considered somewhat passé. Some scientists, like Fritjov Capra (1975) have tried to use the theories of modern physics to support a spiritual interpretation of the universe, whereas many theologians have backed away from insisting on literal interpretation of scriptures. Nevertheless, as Smart argues there is always likely to be a tension (163).

Bahá'í teachings accept the premise that there is indeed a generally perceived basic opposition between religion and science; one which is a major source of conflict in the world today. Faith and reason are seen to be incompatible. But if, as the Bahá'í teachings say, truth is unitary then it is not possible for something to be scientifically false and religiously true. Both faith and reason are ways of knowing; the same god is the author of revelation and the creator of the reality which science investigates, and hence there can be no contradictions between the two (Hatcher and Martin 1984 88). 'Abdu'l-Bahá saw science as actually strengthening religion rather than undermining it.

> If religious beliefs and opinions are found contrary to the standards of science, they are mere superstitions and imaginations; for the antithesis of knowledge is ignorance, and the child of ignorance is superstition. Unquestionably there must be agreement between true religion and science. If a question be found contrary to reason, faith and belief in it are impossible, and there is no outcome but wavering and vacillation (The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá During His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912 1982 181).

Bartholomew (1989) invokes Bohr's complementarity principle to help explain this harmony. The principle states that two concepts or points of view concerning a given aspect of reality that may appear mutually exclusive and irreconcilable do not necessarily conflict, and may indeed together represent a deeper reality than that conveyed by either alone, or by the two simply added together. Religion and science are

concerned with the same underlying reality - there is only one world, one reality - but they have developed different worldviews. Science practices open-minded scepticism, experimenting, analysing and building theories toward a worldview centred on physical reality, to be applied to human material advantage. By contrast, religious worldviews are centred in spiritual reality and human values, acquired by prophetic revelation and interpreted to human spiritual and social advantage. Science seeks a description of the phenomenal world whereas religion seeks a response to it. Aull (1988) suggests that the Bahá'í faith offers an eminently sensible compromise between the extremes of rigid fundamentalism and smug rationalism. Instead of regarding reason and faith as mutually exclusive, Bahá'í teachings suggest that humanity progresses through a robust interplay between the two.

The liminal nature of food well illustrates this interplay. Food is at once science (a material reality) and religion (a spiritual substance). If, from a Bahá'í faith perspective, food-related conduct is compatible with both scientific and religious understanding, or truth, food practices of Bahá'ís should be in accord with scientific principles of nutrition and they should also lead to ethical living. If dietary guidance in the Bahá'í writings appears to be incompatible with the outlook of rational nutritional science, then a deeper unifying reality may lie hidden.

Living the Bahá'í Life – Actions not Words

The philosophical and dogmatic aspects of religion are the least important in the Bahá'í faith, for it is a religion oriented eminently toward practical goals (Bausani 2000 404). The Bahá'ís have taken as their own the phrase attributed to 'Ali:"Everything that is individual is human everything that is social is divine". As a consequence, Bahá'í doctrine emphasises the importance of societal development, and it is this link between

sociality and religion that makes the faith more than a progressive social movement. Since spiritual and social developments are so intimately linked, it is important for Bahá'ís to participate actively in community. Moreover, service is viewed as a basic principle of human existence; every individual act; every personal or community project, is to be carried out in a spirit of service and directed toward the fundamental goal of promoting unity. McMullen aptly describes Bahá'ís as "situated universalists", challenged by their faith to think globally but act locally (2000 14). Historically, many Bahá'ís held prominent public and political positions, though subsequently they were forbidden to participate in partisan politics and are currently unable to hold political office. Some critics have chosen to see this as a sign of the faith shutting itself off from the mainstream society and risking increasing irrelevance, or even as a symbol of repression of individual rights (MacEoin 1985; J.R. Cole 1998). Nevertheless Bahá'ís do participate actively in non-partisan political activities and social movements, especially those related to peace, social justice and community development. In 1983, the World Centre of the Office of Social and Economic Development was established to support and promote learning about development in areas such as literacy, rural development, education, medicine and agriculture. Such activities are viewed as manifestations of faith in action and as practical reinforcements of the teaching work which is the primary duty of every Bahá'í.

Food is often a central feature of international efforts to support social and economic development. Because of its complex meanings, food is a vehicle not only for material aid but also for demonstrating commitment to a shared sense of humanity; it nourishes in a multiplicity of ways.

Communities as concrete expression of values

This section draws on the work of sociologist Will Van den Hoonard, who uses the term community to refer both to the abstract notion of a Bahá'í world community and also as a literal description of a local Bahá'í assembly. In this latter sense, he says, the Bahá'í community is a concrete and visible expression of the teachings and values of the faith. It supports the spiritual development of individual members by providing a social context in which such virtues as non-prejudice can be learned and practised (Van den Hoonaard 1993). Through the organization of both formal and informal community activities, such as Nineteen-Day Feasts, holy day observances and other social and educational events, local spiritual assemblies provide ways to foster understanding and harmony among the believers. As well as promoting the expansion and consolidation of the Bahá'í community, they at the same time demonstrate to the larger non-Bahá'í community the plausibility and desirability of social relationships rooted in concepts of oneness and justice.

Membership in the Bahá'í faith is open to all adults of any creed or race who accept the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and who obey his laws and ordinances. Children raised in Bahá'í households are automatically enrolled as members of the faith. In the early growth of Bahá'í communities in North America there were no formal requirements to becoming a Bahá'í: one simply declared oneself to be so. Bahá'í meetings were regularly attended by people of other denominations and were often seen as purely social occasions. In the absence of a clergy or public places of worship, and given the small number of Bahá'ís in any community, they tended to be socially invisible and not distinct from their neighbours. Many retained their membership in the Christian Church. These factors, says Van den Hoonard, were responsible for the slow growth of the Bahá'í faith in Canada, but also for its long-term sustainability, as it resisted the

temptation to set itself apart (1996 291-3). As the faith became more organised and administrative structures developed under the guidance of Shoghi Effendi there was a shift from an inclusivist view to an exclusivist one, and markers of identity became more pronounced. These included formal membership requirements whereby the aspiring Bahá'í had to apply to the Local Spiritual Assembly and demonstrate knowledge of Bahá'í administration; the establishment of community funds to which only Bahá'ís could donate; and the exclusion of non-Bahá'ís from administrative and worship portions of Nineteen Day Feasts.

There are no Bahá'í clergy, but rather the community governs itself through an elected collective leadership operating at local, national and international levels. An effort is made to involve all members in the religion's decisions, activities and functions, calling on their diverse capacities and talents (Stockman and Winters 1997). Bahá'í communities seek to provide a living demonstration of harmonious human and institutional relationships. Problems arising are addressed through a specific Bahá'í process of striving for unanimity known as consultation, which is based on the belief that there are spiritual principles by which solutions can be found for every social problem. The consultative process is applied to the decision-making process at all levels of human interaction (Van den Hoonaard 1993).

Food has a huge role to play in creating and sustaining community. The offering and acceptance of food is acknowledgement of a common humanity. The shared table disarms hostility and invites intimacy; the shared meal creates communitas. A moment apart from the daily business; it offers the possibility of shared ideas and shared confidences, of shared possibilities in a common future.

Bahá'í Law

Bahá'u'lláh asserted that law is the foundation of all human society and without which order is not possible. As described above, law is derived from successive revelations of the Manifestations of God and therefore changes in accordance with the conditions and needs of the time. Initially, Bahá'u'lláh commended obedience to the laws of the Bayán with which the Báb had replaced traditional Islamic laws. Subsequently, in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas he set out basic laws for living a Bahá'í religious life which, says Walbridge are more concerned with achieving spirituality than with maintaining social order (1996 3). The Kitáb-i-Aqdas deals with a wide range of concerns including, prayer, fasting, marriage and divorce, education, inheritance, burials, wills and testaments, tithing, hunting, sexual relationships, care of the body, work and eating habits (Hatcher and Martin 154). In many ways it resembles previous Islamic and Bábi law, but on the whole is simpler and less demanding of believers. General principles such as courtesy and cleanliness replace elaborate rules covering specific circumstances. The laws were intended to be progressively applied as people developed the capacity to assume the requisite responsibilities, and so the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice gradually introduced provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas as the Bahá'í community grew and matured. For example, following on the publication of Shoghi Effendi's 'Advent of Divine Justice' in 1939, alcohol consumption amongst Canadian Bahá'ís ceased to be a matter of personal decision and became one of adhering to the Bahá'í law (Van den Hoonaard 1996 170). The religious tax known as Huquq'llah became applicable to all Bahá'ís only in 1992. Virtually all Bahá'í law is binding on Bahá'ís of Middle Eastern origin while in developed communities elsewhere most Bahá'í law applies with the main exceptions of the dowry and the period of engagement prior to marriage (Walbridge 1996 24).

Specific laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

Many of the Bahá'í laws and rituals follow the basic Islamic pattern from which they are derived. The Five Pillars of Islam are witness, prayer, fasting, alms-giving and pilgrimage. In Bahá'í life the main ritual obligations are prayer (salat); annual fasting (sawm); and pilgrimage (hajj and ziyara). These are discussed briefly below, while more extensive discussions of these and other Bahá'í laws can be found in Walbridge 1996and MacEoin (1994).

Prayer

Devotional and ceremonial practices are informal. Prayer is private, with three alternative versions to be performed (a long prayer to be said once in 24 hours; a very short prayer to be said at noon; a longer prayer to be said thrice daily) preceded by ritual ablutions. The purpose of prayer is to cultivate humility and devotion. In addition there are hundreds of prayers for specific purposes such as illness, atonement, thanksgiving, praise and dedication. The obligatory prayer is binding on all Bahá'ís between the ages of 15 and 70 years with some exemptions for travellers and menstruating women. However, it is a personal spiritual obligation and is not enforceable by Bahá'í administrative institutions. Collective worship occurs mainly at Nineteen Day Feasts and on holy days and usually consists of successive individual contributions.

Fasting

Fasting is used by Bahá'ís as a way of remembering their dependence on their god, expressing their severance from the material world and strengthening the bonds between them and their fellow believers (Stockman and Winters 1997). To this extent it resembles fasting in other religious traditions. In practice it again follows an Islamic pattern. The main fasting season lasts nineteen days beginning with the first day of the

last month of the Bahá'í year, 'Ala, (2cnd-20th March). The feast of Naw-Ruz follows immediately after. Fasting, as a spiritual duty, is discussed extensively in Chapter Five.

Pilgrimage

In Bahá'í law, hajj or pilgrimage is a major obligation for men who are able to make the journey; it is not required of women though neither is it prohibited. The Islamic hajj to Mecca was replaced in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas by a choice of pilgrimage either to the house of the Báb in Shiraz or to that of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdad, though these once-in-a-lifetime journeys have remained all but impossible for Bahá'ís to undertake. The House of the Báb was demolished in 1979 and the House of Bahá'u'lláh has been closed to Bahá'ís since 1922. Contemporary Bahá'í pilgrimage consists of a nine day visit to the shrines in the Haifa/Acre area of Israel (Walbridge 1996 105). The grave of Shoghi Effendi in London has also become a site of pilgrimage as has the house of Bahá'u'lláh at Edirne in Turkey.

While Bahá'u'lláh's written words remain the fundamental basis for Bahá'í law and teachings, his unwritten words and deeds are not authoritative. This differs from the Islamic tradition in which the hadith (sayings and deeds of Muhammad) are considered as part of the law. Interpretations of Bahá'í law by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi are also binding. The responsibility for adhering to Bahá'í laws and ethics is left largely to individual conscience, though serious breaches of social laws may be brought to the attention of local spiritual assemblies to deal with. Issues of Bahá'í jurisprudence and the possible emergence of a separate Bahá'í legal system are discussed in detail by Walbridge.

As has been previously noted, when dietary matters are discussed in a religious context it is frequently with regard to matters of law. In the case of the Bahá'í faith, this is

not so. Nevertheless, Bahá'í law does address at least two food-related issues; fasting and non-consumption of alcohol; so that food remains, to a limited extent, a vehicle for the performance of legalistic obligations.

Ritual and Ceremony

Ritual is not a big part of Bahá'í community life, and in fact there are specific instructions not to allow ritual to develop. There are no set public communal rituals. Rites of passage are limited to naming ceremonies for babies, marriage and funeral rites, when ceremonies tend to follow local cultural norms rather than a specifically Bahá'í model. The Bahá'í calendar comprises nineteen months of nineteen days each.[13] A solar year is used, with New Year at the spring equinox on March 21st. Each month, day of the month and day of the week is named after an attribute of god and is thus a form of 'sacred time' (Walbridge). Friday is the Bahá'í day of rest. The calendar contains ten holy days that mark anniversaries of the births, declarations and deaths of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh (Figure 2.1). New Year, which falls on the spring equinox, is also celebrated. Holy days take on one of two distinct characters: festive and celebratory or sombre and reverent (McMullen 94). There are no prescribed rituals or ceremonies for these days but devotional meetings may be held, and there should be no work or school. The days of declaration and Naw Ruz are celebratory occasions. There are four or five intercalary days preceding the month of the nineteen day fast are known as Days of Ha during which time there are social gatherings and gift-giving.

In many religious traditions it is the ritual elements of the faith that involve food. The comparative absence of ritual in Bahá'í life may contribute to minimising the

[13] The importance of the number nineteen derives from the Báb's interests in numerology and Gnosticism. Nineteen was the number of wahid - unity.

apparent role of food. However, accounts of Bahá'í meetings and events in the literature, and observations from interviews with Bahá'ís confirm that food is commonly present as an element in such gatherings.

Figure 2.1: Bahá'í Calendar

Nineteen Day Fast	2 - 21 March
Feast of Naw-Ruz (Bahá'í New Year)	21 March
Feast of Ridván (Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh)	21 April to 2 May
Declaration of the Báb (Also birthday of 'Abdu'l-Bahá)	23 May
Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh	29 May
Martyrdom of the Báb	9 July
Birth of the Báb	20 October
Birth of Bahá'u'lláh	12 November
Day of the Covenant	26 November
Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá	28 November
Intercalary Days	26 Feb. – 1 March

Summary

At several points in the preceding discussion I have drawn attention to intersections between food and the beliefs, principles and practices - both social and spiritual - of the Bahá'í faith. Food is involved in health and healing, in commensality and fasting, in celebration. Food is a factor or subject in issues of social justice, economic development, equity and education. Food is a means to spiritual development. Here then is an example of the motif of food and religion discussed in Chapter One. However it seems clear that the role of food in the Bahá'í faith differs from that of other older religious traditions. There are no food rules; no prohibitions of specific food products; no requirements for food rituals; no rules on who can eat with who and when. Instead, it

seems that food is woven more subtly into the Bahá'í cloth. If this cloth - the finished garment - is unity amongst humankind; then the thread that holds the cloth together is justice.

There is a millenarian motif in the Bahá'í faith in that it anticipates cataclysmic changes in human affairs to be followed by a Golden Age of peace and prosperity (Smith 1987). Victor Turner draws attention to parallels between liminality and millenarian movements. Both are periods of transition, times of great possibility, when the established social order is in flux. The Bahá'í expectation of a period of upheaval followed by the emergence of a more perfect social order through divine intervention is described more fully in the next chapter, as I narrow my focus to relationships between food and justice.

CHAPTER THREE

FOOD, JUSTICE AND BAHÁ'Í ETHICS

Introduction

In Chapter One I showed that food is a material and symbolic good that plays an important role in religious beliefs and practice. I also proposed that food is a liminal substance which may be thought of metaphorically as a bridge, as a way of moving toward, of crossing over, of uniting that which is apart. Within a religious context the liminality of food creates a bridge leading from the 'what is' of the world we know to the 'what could be' of a spiritually inspired existence. Then, in Chapter Two, I presented an overview of the Bahá'í faith, suggesting that it provides by virtue of its insistence on the interdependence of spiritual and social development, an eminently suitable context for examining the way in which food as a liminal entity functions to bridge the distance between abstract ethical theory and practical ethical living. I also introduced the metaphor of thread and cloth as a way of thinking about the Bahá'í tradition; the whole cloth is unity; and the strong central thread is justice - which underlies all aspects of Bahá'í ethical teachings. Building on the key ideas that food is liminal, and that eating is an ethical act, I turn now to a more detailed examination of food and justice.

While the pursuit of justice may be considered a universal of human societies, it has evolved in different ways under different cultural conditions both religious and secular. This has resulted over time in different understandings of concepts of justice and how to put them into practice. The dominant theory of justice in a society has wide-

ranging practical implications for conduct with regard to food at all levels of society; individual, family, institutional and government. How, by whom and for whom food is produced, distributed, shared, consumed, and disposed of depends on ideas about desert, rights, virtue and duty and how these are translated into personal and organizational behaviour. If food in the Bahá'í faith does play the bridging role that I suggest, then it is in relationship to the practical expression of justice that it may be expected to be seen most clearly. In this chapter I review some of the concepts and theories of justice that have been most influential over the past two millennia, particularly in the West, drawing out implications for how food and food conduct are treated. I then situate Bahá'í concepts of justice within this scheme, creating a framework for my analysis and presentation of findings in Chapter Five.

Food in Theories of Justice

Modern Western discourse on justice derives from two main sources; one rooted in Judaeo-Christian efforts to search for and embody divine justice in the legislation and structures of the 'covenant community', and the other drawing on Greek philosophical enquiry into the nature of 'the good life' and what sort of social arrangements best reflected and expressed justice. These traditions have interacted over the centuries, sometimes being seen to be complementary, at other times opposed (Forrester 1996 501).

Covenant

Covenant based morality is usually associated with revealed religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam and other religious traditions, though Heller suggests that a similar relationship can be detected in North American indigenous religion and

indeed in any human group that locates the purpose and meaning of life in obligations of a transcendental origin (Heller 2000a 43). The covenant is a spiritual contract binding humans to their god. Within this covenant relationship the deity expects humans to act justly; in fact it is only in doing justice that people can come to know their god (Forrester 502). Conversely, unjust acts signify a turning away from the divine. Divine law is thus the arbiter of justice.

Within the context of covenantal religious traditions 'eating justly' may uniquely mean for an adherent, following the dietary ordinances and food prohibitions laid down in religious precepts; that is, doing what the deity commands. The elaborate food laws of the Jewish and Islamic traditions have previously been discussed in Chapter One. Observance of dietary laws acts as a private reminder and public demonstration of commitment to following the divine will.

Virtue

Libo (1996) suggests that while Western concepts of justice are most often based on the core notions of power, duty and freedom, Eastern philosophies such as that of Confucius seek harmony, tranquillity and fraternity in the pursuit of unity in society. The Confucian view of justice is based on the concept of jen, which can be broadly characterised as love for others, honesty, forbearance and sincerity. It is a moral principle of selflessness which should guide both thinking and action, resulting in civic mindedness and the subordination of personal benefit to the public interest. An intrinsic sense of justice leads to a higher level of self-development and a fuller life. The vital element is the cultivation of individual virtue through education guided by ethical teaching, without which the constraints of regulations, however strongly enforced, become ineffective. Rulers themselves are required to rule not by physical force but by the example of personal virtue.

Notwithstanding Libo's claim, it is evident that virtue in everyday conduct has been a component of justice in Western as well as Eastern traditions. Plato developed a concept of justice that shared many points with Confucian thinking, including the importance of individual virtue and the need for philosopher-kings to establish an ideal moral society. Socrates also locates justice in both the individual person and in society and says justice is what determines the relationship between the parts and gives structure to the whole. The state is a macrocosm of the virtues found in the just individual or soul (Forrester 502).

Virtue may be variously defined from place to place and time to time but frequently invokes traits of moderation, compassion, hospitality, generosity or reciprocity. Most religious traditions have something to say about sharing, hospitality and charity. Examples are the moral duty imposed on Hindus to feed others generously, and the various types of alms-giving such as the zakat of Muslims or the tithing practices of Mennonites. Such practices reflect world views in which food is not necessarily pre-eminently a market commodity, but is a liminal substance existing between the realms of economics and ethics. In Bahá'í teachings voluntary giving to the poor is seen to be both noble and of spiritual benefit to the giver, and also is a moral obligation. The way in which the virtues listed above relate to food conduct will be taken up further in Chapter Five.

Rule of Law

Concerns over justice arose in Athens, says Forrester, because traditional certainties about justice, virtue and the 'good' had been shaken and appeal to tradition was no longer sufficient to maintain societal relationships (501). Realising that the ideal of achieving justice through enlightened rulers was not in practice attainable; Plato proposed instead a state governed by law. Aristotle supported this Platonic idea of the

rule of law rather than individual fiat as a means to ensure social justice. He also distinguished between universal justice - directed at the good of the community as a whole, and particular justice - which he further divided into distributive and rectificatory justice: (In modern parlance, social justice and criminal justice). Distributive justice was based on the merits and accomplishments of society members who should each have their 'rightful share' in accordance with established law. Thus while individual virtues remained important, justice depended not so much on an individuals moral standards but on conformity to a system of rules. The rules regulated exchanges between individuals and protected legitimate individual interests, while assuming that all were fundamentally concerned for the common good. Forrester says there is an assumption here that justice has an objective transcendental grounding but that it can be pursued through rational discussion without reference to religion or revelation. The notion of "justice as order" has informed much of Western thinking since Greek times, and law and justice have often been seen to be synonymous.[14] This is not to say that morality was ignored in the West; religious and secular traditions continued to interact. Augustine, in De Civilitae Dei, distinguished 'true justice' manifested in Christ from the partial or provisional justice that is the best that can be expected on earth. Thomas Aquinas synthesised the two traditions, seeing them as largely complementary, whereas Luther saw earthly and divine justice as being opposed (Forrester 503). Wendy Heller suggests that a moral foundation to the system of law, rooted in the religious idea of covenant and expressed in the form of a 'civil society', persisted until the Enlightenment. Ideas on 'Natural Law' were, she says, still based on assumptions about the validity of religion as the source of morality. Reason and revelation co-existed (2000a 38).

[14] While 'law and order' is a well-worn phrase in contemporary discourse, it is not uncommon for contemporary court rulings to be subject to public judgement as to whether or not they are 'just', suggesting that the identity of law and justice is not absolute.

The essence of natural law is that there are objective moral principles which depend upon the nature of the universe and which can be discerned by reason (Nicholson 1996 172). John Locke in his *Second Treatise on Government* describes the law of nature as the precept that "being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty or Possessions" (Goldie 1997 62). Having a natural right to life implies a right to do what is needed to maintain that life, such as securing food, water, and shelter. If there a natural right to eat to maintain life, then there must be a natural right to acquire food through production or exchange - which means a right of command over resources, including private property. In this view there is no natural right to food as such, but only the right to take necessary actions to obtain food. Locke's ideas were echoed in the American Declaration of Independence which took as self-evident that "All men are created equal and endowed by the Creator with certain 'inalienable rights' among which are 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness'." However, this idea of natural rights was to become progressively detached from any religious grounding and it became impossible to argue that rights were either self-evident or inalienable (Heller 2000a 39)

Rise of utilitarianism

> The idea of people united in a social order defined by a transcendent ethical bond has resonated throughout the ages and remained definitive for social and legal theorists until the second half of the eighteenth century – when it began to implode. (Keane 1988 cited in Heller)

In the West, from the second half of the eighteenth century the governing institutions of the state, says Heller, became increasingly separated from civil society and ethical unity was gradually lost. The concept of civil society, rooted in covenant, disintegrated with the collapse of religion in modernity and was supplanted by social contract theory (Heller 2000a 65). Political and economic systems became more

concerned with regulating affairs for private gain than for the common good. Rights, rather than duties became the main measure of desert, and ethics took a back seat as the emergence of capitalism placed markets at the centre of regulating human interactions. Numerous theories of justice emerged over the next three centuries based on the sovereignty of individuals under the law, of which the most influential was utilitarianism.

Utilitarianism is, in the words of its founder, John Stuart Mill: "The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness" (1998 55). The principle of utility involves assessing an action's consequences, and not the motives or character traits of the agent. Utilitarianism requires that aggregate utility be maximised where utility is equivalent to pleasure, satisfaction, happiness and realisation of preferences. Mill argues that the principle of utility should be seen as a tool for generating secondary moral principles which promote general happiness. Thus most human actions will be judged according to these secondary principles; the principle of utility itself need be invoked only when faced with a moral dilemma between two secondary principles. For example, the moral principle of charity dictates that one should feed a starving neighbour, and the moral principle of self-preservation dictates that one should feed oneself. If one does not have enough food to do both, then one should determine whether general happiness would be better served by feeding ones neighbour, or feeding oneself. Justice requires the promulgation and state enforcement of those institutional rules that promote utility.

Modern utilitarians are divided on how best to achieve a condition which maximises social utility. For some it is through the operation of an unfettered market,

while for others redistribution mechanisms are essential.[15] Utilitarianism has been critiqued from a variety of perspectives.[16] Moral objections highlight the fact that not only does utilitarianism reduce individuals to mere sets of desires and preferences (that can be somehow treated equally); it is also compatible with manifestly unjust outcomes. For example extremes of wealth and poverty, of plenty and want, could be readily justified on the basis of there being a greater aggregate utility in maintaining such discrepancies than in redistribution. That is, utilitarianism can be used to justify the status quo. That huge inequalities do exist with respect to food security in the modern world would seem to bear this out.

Collectivism

The rise of socialist philosophies such as Marxism provided an alternative perspective that associated justice with the meeting of human needs. Reason replaced religion as the sole basis of good government and justice. The economic dimension of socialism is sometimes referred to as collectivism. Collectivism, unlike individualism, gives primacy to the group; individuals act altruistically in the interests of the group as a whole. Collectivism implies the substitution of collective for private property in the means of production, and exists in a diversity of forms. Marxist theory claimed that the need for distributive justice would actually disappear with the establishment of common control over means of production. The usefulness of this perspective has been questioned on the basis that it makes dubious assumptions that collective control would indeed end scarcity of resources and conflict of interests, and also on the assertion that it has not

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[15] The merits of capitalist versus socialist or mixed systems of ownership and production in terms of both efficiency and ethics is discussed at length in: A. Buchanan, Ethics, Efficiency and the Market (New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld, 1985).
[16] Food Ethics Council, Shaping Our Children, 2004, Available: http://www.foodethicscouncil.org/projects/children/introduction.htm, October 30 2004.

been able to demonstrate empirical success. Whereas individualistic capitalist systems sacrifice justice for efficiency, socialist systems are seen to sacrifice efficiency for collectivist justice. Rawls for example, rejects socialist command economies, and even liberal socialism, as equally incapable of providing the conditions for justice as is capitalism.

In societies governed by (at least in theory) principles of collectivity and equality, food may be viewed as more of a public than a private good. Justice requires that the essential needs of all are met through collective societal efforts. For example, in Cuba, since the 1953 revolution all citizens have been entitled to a daily allotment of food and other essentials.[17] In the 1980s children up to the age of fourteen, as well as the sick and the elderly were guaranteed a litre of milk a day for 25c. From 1990 this was restricted to children under the age of seven. As national economic woes deepened, more and more foods were removed from the parallel free market and placed on ration so that they remained available to all. This is not to say that the system works efficiently or even effectively all of the time, but it does reflect a different concept of just food distribution. On a smaller scale, self-contained communities such as Hutterite colonies on the Canadian prairies view food as a shared good. Fields are sown and harvested, and animals are raised in a collective operation. Meals are prepared in a central kitchen and all colony members eat together in a communal area.

Neoliberalism

In the last few decades there has been a renaissance of liberal theories of justice (Hayek, 1992; Nozick, 1974; Rawls, 1971). Despite their differences they all share a

[17] See J. Alvarez, Overview of Cuban Food Rationing System (Gainsville: University of Florida Cooperative Extension Service, 2004). S. Koont, "Food Security in Cuba," Monthly Review 55.8 (2004).

common rejection of transcendental foundations, accepting moral pluralism as given and rejecting the search for any objective common ground (Forrester 1996 503). According to these theorists, a just society does not propose any particular definition of the 'good' but simply provides a framework within which individuals can seek their own good with a minimum of interference. It is assumed that individuals will behave in a self-interested way, that individuals have priority over society, that human rights exist and that human beings are fundamentally equal. John Rawls presents an argument for justice as fairness (1971). Rawls accepts the liberal assumption that the main job of government is to secure and distribute fairly the liberties and economic resources individuals need to lead autonomous lives. Each individual has the same right to equal basic liberties. Social and economic inequalities, where they exist, are to satisfy two conditions: first, they are to be attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least-advantaged members of society (Rawls 2001 42) So to achieve justice some redistribution of social goods and benefits is necessary.

In contrast, Hayek (1992) emphasises the role of the market in regulating just relationships, denounces social justice and sees redistribution as immoral. Radical libertarians also do not grant the state a role in the redistribution of wealth but rather identify its principle function as that of enforcement of individual property rights. Nozick (1974) champions libertarian concepts of individual rights, which take precedence over social goals. He claims that justice requires that one's income or wealth is related to one's contribution to society; and that injustice exists when contribution and reward do not match. This perspective seemingly ignores the position of 'non-productive' groups in society, such as young children, the disabled and the mentally ill. In contrast Rawls maintains that it is unfair to reward people for their contribution when social and

economic exclusion denies some the means to contribute; equality of opportunity is necessary to justice.

Neo-liberalism privileges the market for distributing resources and power and seeks to limit the role of the state. In such systems food is viewed as a private good, a commodity to be acquired and disposed of in accordance with the rules and regulations governing all market exchanges. However, in societies where justice is compatible with extremes of wealth and poverty; hunger co-exists with gluttony, obesity walks side by side with malnutrition and food insecurity grows in the midst of affluence. This is true not only of the obvious disparities between wealthy and poor countries - the so-called development gap - but is increasingly so within the borders of rich nations. In Canada since about 1980 there has been a steadily accelerating growth in food insecurity, symbolised by the appearance and proliferation of charitable organisations known as food banks (Davis and Tarasuk 1994). The institutionalisation and public feting of food banks reveals the extent to which private charity has replaced just social distribution as an acceptable means to provide basic necessities of life. Affirming Hayek's view of the hegemony of the market Paul Browne (1996) points out that in some modern conservative thinking the voluntary sector is seen as the only legitimate vehicle for realising collective social goals. Supporters "emphasize their desire to minimize or even eliminate state provision of social welfare, hailing what they see as the moral superiority and less costly nature of charity and volunteer activity". Others acknowledge that within the liberal state it is necessary to include mechanisms for redistribution of food that do not rely on private charity. Examples of public provisioning include free or subsidised school meal programs, food stamps, supplemental food for pregnant women and income supplements targeted for increased food purchase. The practice of food rationing, such as occurs during wars or famines, is another example of a public policy response to just food distribution in times of scarcity (Bentley 1992). Such strategies have been used by

governments in Canada from time to time and to a more or less limited degree. Criticisms are frequently made of the effectiveness of these types of intervention, though often it seems that a moral judgment is being made. Beneficiaries are said to be not deserving of such support because they simply do not manage their money properly. If they didn't drink and smoke, the argument proceeds, they would be able to afford the food they and their families need.

Communitarianism

The main critics of liberal theory have been loosely labelled as communitarians. Two main critiques put forward by communitarians concern the modern preoccupation over rights with an accompanying neglect of responsibilities, and what they see as the damaging focus on the individual at the expense of community. Whereas liberal thinking is marked by abstraction and universalism, communitarians emphasise the particular and the concrete. Philosophical communitarian arguments charge that liberalism rests on an overly individualistic conception of the self. While Rawls (for example) argues that individuals have a supreme interest in shaping, pursuing and revising their own life-plans he neglects the fact that the individual self is defined or constituted by various communal attachments such as the family or religion (Bell 2001). Alan Whitehead, a serving British MP, elaborates this idea that people are not "citizens of nowhere"; that they are not, as members of a myriad organisations, social groups, villages and towns, simply individuals banding together; but are fundamentally only able to develop their defining human characteristics in society. Society in a sense, creates humans: the idea of anyone being able to do or say anything outside its embrace is, literally, nonsense (Whitehead 1998). Others too defend the Aristotlean view that "Man is a social animal, indeed a political animal, because he is not self-sufficient alone, and in an important sense is not self-sufficient outside a polis" (Taylor 1989). However, dominant theories of justice and

economics presume just such an autonomous self. This philosophical presumption has practical political consequences. The presupposition that human beings are best seen as separate individuals pursuing their private goals, leads to a view of society as a mere means for the pursuit of those individual goals. The consequences are valorisation of individual striving and greed at the expense of community cohesion.

A second wave of communitarianism in the 1990s emphasized social responsibility and the promotion of policies to stem the erosion of communal life in an increasingly fragmented world (Etzioni 1995). The political left was criticised for supporting economically unsustainable welfare rights, for undermining family and social ties through state-induced dependency, for discouraging self-help and volunteerism and for centralizing decision-making power. Criticisms of the political right were directed to the erosion of communal life and social responsibilities resulting from unregulated free-market capitalism which undermined the family, disrupted communities and corrupted the political process. These critiques can certainly be applied to food. Whereas right wing views on "individual responsibility" locate responsibility for feeding of children firmly within the family orbit, communitarians lament the extension of market-relations into spheres of human conduct previously characterised by reciprocity and civil obligation (Walzer 1983). For where previously children's diets were almost exclusively mediated by their families, children now have a growing number of direct relationships with food manufacturers, restaurants and retailers, which take place in the marketplace rather than at home or in school. The capacity to regulate what children eat is no longer confined as it once was, in large part, to the family and the state, but lies increasingly with the companies that make and sell food (Food Ethics Council 2004).

Rights

Communitarians level particular criticism at the dominant modern discourse of rights which is seen to justify the neglect of social responsibilities. The use of rights language is increasingly common in the contemporary Western world, so it is not surprising that food has also been portrayed as a rights issue. The existence of the right to food as a legal and moral concept has been debated over the past half-century. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966 and ratified or acceded to by over 100 nations, commits the parties to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of their citizens to be free from hunger by improving methods of production, conservation and distribution of food, and through international co-operation to ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need (United Nations 1966). The World Food Summit in 1996 reaffirmed the right of everyone to have access to safe and nutritious food, consistent with the right to adequate food and the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger. The practical implications of this right for both nation states and for international bodies such as the IMF and World Bank, and the obligations that food rights would impose on governments is hotly contested.

Telfer (1996) describes the problematic nature of the 'right to food', raising the question of who is the right against? And who has the corresponding duty? A difficulty arises because a right to food is a positive right to receive goods and services rather than a negative right not to be harmed or restricted. It appears that the right is seen as a moral one, not a legal one codified and governed by the rule of law. In analysing international reluctance to enforce the right to food Amartya Sen suggests that acceptance of the morality of rights would weaken the whole behavioural foundation of predictive economics (1985). Telfer suggests that individuals cannot have the clearly

demarcated kind of duty that they have with negative rights but that they may have the duty of fostering and supporting a set of institutional organizations and structures to meet the needs of the hungry (9). Affluent citizens can fulfil their duty to the hungry through the setting up relief schemes through the agency of government. "If government action is the only or best way in which every needy person in the country can be guaranteed enough food as of right, then the duty of each individual in respect to that right is a duty to campaign for, vote for and support adequate welfare systems" (10). At the international level poor people of poor countries have rights against the UN to have a global organization set up for relief of hunger and against other governments to mandate and support such a system.

Virtue revisited

Food is clearly a substantive issue in examining the justness of politico-economic systems. On the other hand, whatever the dominant societal model may be, individuals can protest against perceived injustice through their personal food-related choices and behaviours. For example through the deliberate avoidance and consumption of food products associated with what are considered to be unjust regimes, or obtained through unjust production or trade relationships, individual consumers use food as a bridge to connect themselves with global situations that are otherwise beyond their sphere of influence. The widespread boycott of South African produce during the 1960s and 1970s era of apartheid is an outstanding example; but actions can also be more specific and short-term to protest against particular practices such as worker-producer relationships.[18] Many large multinational food companies based in rich Western countries import raw foodstuffs from poor countries of the South. Such products as fruit,

[18] The boycott of Californian grapes by the United Food Workers in the 1980s was a protest against the injustice of poor wages and working conditions of grape pickers. United Farm Workers of America, The Wrath of Grapes, Video, Wayne State University, 1986.

coffee and cacao command far higher prices when they reach the North America and European markets than are paid to the primary producers. On foreign-owned plantations local workers may be paid poverty-line wages to grow and harvest crops which will make huge corporate profits abroad. By refusing to buy the products of particular companies, consumers in the affluent world make a personal protest against exploitation, injustice and greed. And individual conscience has coalesced into collective action. Since 1989, the international 'Fair Trade' movement has provided an alternative to multinational food companies by guaranteeing a better deal to producers in the developing world on an expanding range of products. Fair Trade principles and practices include fair wages, co-operative workplaces, environmental sustainability and financial and technical support. Purchase of Fair Trade products thus provides a means of linking food and social justice in a positive and meaningful way.

Without subscribing to traditional religious views, many people nevertheless express moral sentiments about eating, such as the conviction that it is unjust to eat in certain ways. For example they believe that one should refrain from exploiting animals and therefore not eat meat, or at least avoid eating animals that have been treated in a way deemed to be unethical. Pythagoras viewed vegetarianism as a key factor in peaceful human co-existence, putting forward the view that slaughtering animals brutalised the human soul, while Socrates, Plato and Aristotle all advocated a 'natural' life that did not involve animal cruelty. Telfer, a philosopher, argues that humans have a duty to animals, which is not to eat them. This is a consequence both of compassion and of our essential kinship with animals; justice demands that we treat animals as we would treat other human beings. This stance, commonly associated with vegetarian practice, is explored in Chapter Five in relation to Bahá'í teachings on vegetarianism.

The refusal of food, sometimes to the point of self-starvation and death, is another form of personal practice that can be used to bring attention to perceived injustices. Mahatma Gandhi used such tactics effectively in his struggle against British colonialist rule of India. In the 1980s members of the Irish Republican Army used refusal of food as a potent political symbol of their opposition to British rule in Ireland. Examples of such politically motivated self-starvation continue to arise around the world

Section Summary

There are several basic theories of ethics; one simple distinction that can be made is whether they focus on the morality of the action itself, the consequences of the action, or the motives behind it. Another distinction commonly made is between deontological theories (concerned with duty), utilitarian theories (concerned with achieving the greatest good for the greatest number), and so-called ethical egoism (concerned with achieving the greatest good for the moral agent). In practice people, as individuals or collectively in public or private organizations, usually use a mixture of these systems when faced with ethical issues.

Justice concerns the 'proper' distribution of the benefits and the costs of human interaction (Terkel and Duval 1999 148-9). Many theories of justice agree that justice means giving to each person what s/he is due. But what is due to a person is a matter of dispute. For some it means to be fairly treated according to accepted rules; however, the rules themselves may not be fair. (For example, the market that provides food in an urban centre provides that same food at a greater, and for many unaffordable, cost in remote areas - even though human nutritional needs are similar). The distribution of goods and services based on human need is an essential aspect of socialist theories of justice. Libertarians argue that individuals should be rewarded according to their contribution to society; injustice arises when those who contribute much, receive little

(although it seems less is said about those who contribute little, yet receive much). On the other hand, as John Rawls argues, opportunity is important and it may be unfair to reward people for contributions when some are denied an opportunity to contribute. In the face of life disadvantages of marginalised groups it is unfair to link rewards to accomplishments. There is also a debate between those who argue people are entitled to all they rightly earn and those who think all people should be treated equally - though the conditions for equality are difficult to define (Terkel and Duval 1999 149).

This short overview has shown that food has been connected to justice in a variety of ways: in terms of human rights, of social and economic equity, of desert, of virtue and of duty. Prevailing ideas of what constitutes justice will then affect how food is treated as a material and symbolic good in society. Contrariwise, our relationship to food can be interpreted as a product of our sense of justice. The Bahá'í faith asserts the primacy of justice as a means to achieving the desired state of unity of humankind. It is reasonable therefore to expect that food would play a role in the Bahá'í ethical system even though specific food laws and prohibitions are, as was previously observed, absent. The second part of this chapter examines the Bahá'í approach to justice.

A New World Order

Michael McMullen begins his contemporary study of Bahá'í identity by observing that theorists and commentators of the human condition at the beginning of the Third millennium are divided in their outlook (McMullen 2000 1). Some he says, like Fukuyama (1992) are optimistic at what they see as the final triumph of capitalism. Others are more pessimistic at the conflict, environmental degradation, and poverty that characterises the modern world. This latter theme, described as a crisis of modernity by many contemporary philosophers and social critics (Capra 1982; Etzioni 1995; Jonas 1984;

Walzer 1983), was already present in the mid-nineteenth century discourse of Bahá'u'lláh, who proclaimed that: '"The world is in great turmoil and the minds of its people are in a state of utter confusion" (1994 94); and "Justice is, in this day, bewailing its plight, and Equity groaneth beneath the yoke of oppression. The thick clouds of tyranny have darkened the face of the earth and enveloped its people" (1976 92). Saiedi, a contemporary Bahá'í writer and thinker, points to an intellectual and moral chaos resulting from what he sees as the 'collapse of modernity' (2000 1). An all-encompassing vision for restoring a sense of spiritual and social order is needed, he says, to counter despair and relativism on the one hand or narcissism and worship of greed and violence on the other. And, he continues, "While modernist certainties collapse, post-modernism, with its emphasis on difference, is unable to provide an adequate vision of self, society and ethical ideas to meet new global realities". Wendy Heller adds that whereas secularism was once heralded as the saviour of civilisation it is now increasingly identified as the root cause of its disintegration, a conclusion anticipated in the Bahá'í writings which affirm that social and moral deterioration is directly related to the decline of religion as a social force (2000b 28). Shoghi Effendi particularly criticised the "prevailing spirit of modernism" which by emphasising materialism eroded conceptions of duty and solidarity, reciprocity and loyalty, replacing them with individual selfishness and intolerance leading to the breakdown of family, economic and political structures (Shoghi Effendi 1974 183).

In 1867 Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed his vision of a new World Order which would unite peoples of all nations, races and religions in a Golden Age of peace and prosperity Throughout his writings Bahá'u'lláh uses the terms 'order', 'world order' and 'new world order' to characterise the fundamental changes to political, social and religious life that would mark a new age. The term 'new world order' has acquired considerable negative connotations in secular parlance, being associated on the one hand with a sort of

totalitarian dystopia, a world dictatorship designed to suppress human rights, and on the other with a thinly disguised front for continued Western political and economic dominance in global relationships. In contrast, the intent of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order was to create the conditions in which all countries, races and religions would be united while at the same time preserving and celebrating cultural diversity and the freedom and autonomy of individuals. A universal standard of justice, re-rooted in divine revelation, would bring an end to tyranny and oppression. Science and religion would co-operate for the harmonious development of human life; world resources would be used effectively and equitably, and a variety of universalising mechanisms would be established to simplify and facilitate understanding and interaction amongst the nations and races of mankind (Shoghi Effendi 1974 203-4). These practical measures included a world language and a universal system of currency and of weights and measures. The first goal of the new World Order was the establishment of the 'Lesser Peace', an essentially political arrangement based on the notion of collective security as a means of preventing war. Practically, this would be made possible through creation of a world legislature backed by an international force and with a world tribunal for resolving disputes. This, said Shoghi Effendi, would happen as nations cooperated to implement the general principles of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, even as they remained unaware of it (Shoghi Effendi 1941 128). The ultimate goal though, was the 'Most Great Peace' in which a truly just society would be finally realised as all came to acknowledge and accept the faith of Bahá'u'lláh and act intentionally on its principles and precepts. Cole (1998) demonstrates how Bahá'u'lláh's thoughts embraced and in some cases anticipated the more enlightened aspects of Western modernity while remaining cognisant and critical of it's darker aspects, such as the dangers of blind nationalism and the potential for greed, intolerance and totalitarianism.

In presenting Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual message and social vision as creative, revolutionary, and unprecedented, Saiedi argues that it cannot be subsumed under Eastern or Western worldviews whether traditional or modern (9). Whereas Judaism, Christianity and Islam put into opposition the sacred realm of the divine and the profane realm of nature, Hinduism and Buddhism see the presence of the divine in nature and the opposition of scared and profane is replaced with harmony and unity. For Bahá'ís though: "Both the transcendence of God and the harmony of the sacred and nature are affirmed in this metaphysics of being and revelation" (8). Bahá'u'lláh offered a creative synthesis of the two traditions, and it is perhaps not surprising therefore that Bahá'í writings on justice echo themes found in religious and civil society thinking from East and West, from Aristotle to Locke , from Jefferson to Rawls.

What are the components of Bahá'í justice?

The goal of the Bahá'í revelation is unity, and justice is its chief instrument. The priority of justice for the individual is clear in Bahá'u'lláh's writings. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity amongst humankind, and the existence of injustice - which results in tyranny, oppression, discrimination and prejudice, is the greatest barrier to creating a world in which all can live as 'one people' (Bahá'u'lláh 1988 66).

As noted earlier in this chapter theories of justice may be based either on morality or on social order (Libo 1996 58). For example, in the Islamic context legitimacy is based primarily on the moral qualities of the ruler, while in Western liberal political discourse the legitimacy of a government comes from consent of the governed through some form of election (Lambton 1981). The Bahá'í concept of justice embraces both these ideas. On the one hand, Bahá'ís have an obligation to obey a duly elected government (even when they disagree with its edicts), but there is also, in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, a recurrent emphasis on the responsibility of rulers and those in positions of

power, to think and act in terms of justice. Rulers are the 'shadow of God' and should strive to reflect the divine attributes in their exercise of power, meaning they should act with justice and equity (Saiedi 2000 350).

For the ordinary individual, too, justice is a spiritual quality and "No one can attain their true station except through justice". Lerche, a Bahá'í scholar, notes parallels with Rawls description of a sense of justice as being a mental capacity that requires the deliberate exercise of thought (1996 10). From a Bahá'í perspective, the human capacity for reflection and for the exercise of free will means that people can make conscious decisions to develop the higher or spiritual aspect of their being by striving to emulate, in daily life, the divine attributes revealed in the teachings and laws of the current Manifestation of God. So, for individuals, justice involves an intentional unfolding of inherent capacity. The Bahá'í International Community Office of Public Information describes justice as "That faculty of the human soul that enables each person to distinguish truth from falsehood. It calls for fair-mindedness in ones judgements, for equity in one's treatment of others and is thus a constant if demanding companion in the daily occasions of life" (1995 9).

Thus justice for Bahá'ís has individual and social components; it is a spiritual quality and also a practical way of living that involves acting in ways that strengthen the ties between people and that link personal and social development. The principle of the interdependence of the individual and society has crucial implications for the concept of justice. "Far from encouraging the punitive spirit that has often masqueraded under its name in past ages, justice is the practical expression of the awareness that, in the achievement of human progress the interests of the individual and those of society are inextricably linked" (272). To this extent, the Bahá'í perspective resembles communitarian approaches discussed earlier.

While a personal commitment to justice is an integral part of the pursuit of individual spiritual development, the achievement of social justice is an essential prerequisite to the establishment of unity amongst humankind. How is the notion of justice, based on obedience to Bahá'u'lláh's laws, characterised for the individual? There are several elements that resemble ideas of justice found in other religious and secular systems of thought.

The concept of justice as desert has been widely used by philosophers of different schools. In essence it implies that rewards and resources are distributed in proportion to individuals' meritorious behaviour or traits and according to their contribution to society or the good of others. The argument from desert has been used, for example, to justify market economies as the best means for distributing societal resources assuming that the market does and should distribute according to desert. Buchanan (1985) notes that this is obviously untenable because individuals are rewarded for non-meritorious behaviours and events such as luck, inheritance and corruption. It also ignores 'non-productive individuals', for example young children, who do not participate in the market economy. In the Bahá'í writings the concept of desert is expressed by Bahá'u'lláh's description of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book, as "The infallible Balance which the hand of God is holding, in which all who are in the heavens and all who are in the earth are weighed, and their fate determined" (1993 K183). 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that to do justice is to give to everyone according to his deserts (1981 266), while Shoghi Effendi confirms that because men [sic] are unequal in their ability they should receive wages that correspond to their varying capacities and resources (Hornby 1988 550). In addition, he states that different types of occupation, which require varying educational attainment should quite rightly yield differential wage rewards. The wage-productivity link of neo-classical economics is affirmed. However this link does not hold in real world conditions, where greed and exploitation may result in

extremes of poverty and wealth, or at least in significant inequities. (This is particularly so within the food system, where primary producers - especially those in developing countries - receive only a tiny fraction of the price of the food as sold in the consumer market). Such extremes are unjust; no-one 'deserves' poverty. People do not choose poverty but are pushed into poverty through external forces largely beyond their control. Economic justice requires the removal of factors that contribute to poverty, and it requires generosity and giving. That is there should be a basic social provision that modifies justice's primary principles of reward and punishment (Graham 1997).

Moderation is another characteristic of Bahá'í justice. "Whosoever cleaveth to justice can, under no circumstances transgress the limits of moderation" (Bahá'u'lláh 1976 342). Anything, even liberty, if carried out to excess can exercise a pernicious influence or be a source of evil (216). Moderation has often been seen as a virtue across cultures and history; Aristotle counselled sophrosme - or positive temperance; virtue was not opposite to vice but lay between two poles of extreme behaviour. In contemporary philosophy Telfer (1996) also argues that moral virtue lies in temperance, in a balance between caring too much and caring to little. In Bahá'í writings there are admonitions to avoid both extreme asceticism and hedonism, which have particular implications for food habits as I will show in Chapter Five.

Fundamental to the practice of justice in social relations is the notion of reciprocity, widely articulated in religious systems of thought as the 'Golden Rule'. In the Bahá'í writings this is expressed as "If thine eyes be turned toward justice, choose thou for thy neighbour that which thou choosest for thyself" (Bahá'u'lláh 1988 64). Reciprocity is praised as being central to sociability and to strengthening co-operation and solidarity amongst people so that their accomplishments are greater ('Abdu'l-Bahá The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá During His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912 1982 338). Food of course is an indispensable

vehicle for displaying sociability and nurturing fellowship; reciprocity in food exchanges serves to establish and maintain social relationships (Fieldhouse 1995).

Bahá'u'lláh also relates justice to concepts of reward and punishment. Divine justice is ultimately related to the fear of the divinity. "Justice hath a mighty force at its command. It is none other than reward and punishment for the deeds of men. By the power of this force the tabernacle of order is established throughout the world, causing the wicked to restrain their natures through fear of punishment" (Bahá'u'lláh 1988 164). The fear of the deity motivates individuals to keep justice in mind, to weigh their actions and apply an estimate of deserts. It also motivates individuals not to neglect or turn away from justice (Lerche 1996 13). Bahá'u'lláh said that reward and punishment were the basis of an orderly society; this reinforces the concept of desert that there should be economic rewards for those work hard and contribute to society and penalties for those who are idle and unproductive (Mahtodi 1996). However for this to be just everyone must have the opportunity, as John Rawls insists, to acquire the necessary skills to be productive. Graham (1997) suggests that the Bahá'í emphasis on reward and punishment signifies a departure from utilitarian principles that otherwise seem to have much in common with Bahá'í teachings. Instead he says reward and punishment could be usefully analysed within the context of libertarianism, natural law and neo-classical economics.

Rights are mentioned frequently in the Bahá'í writings. However, the Bahá'í concept of justice does not focus on the private rights of autonomous individuals, and it does not view justice as the arbitration of competing private interests. Protection of rights is seen not an end itself but is rather part of the bigger goal of justice leading to unity. And rights are always coupled with responsibilities: they are viewed as two sides of one coin. Schweitz (2004) suggests that the Western system has largely reduced the concept of justice to the equivalent of rights, and not all rights but a particular set of civil

and political rights, and that without a greatly increased regard for responsibilities (not necessarily legally enforceable), this excessive and exclusive emphasis on certain rights will produce only partial justice and cannot produce unity. Notwithstanding this, human rights are powerfully defended in Bahá'í discourse. Bahá'í organisations at national and international levels are heavily involved in human rights issues and have produced many statements on the topic (Bahá'í International Community 1992).

At a social or collective level, justice is linked in Bahá'í writings to a variety of concepts, all of which have the effect of building unity between people. Bahá'u'lláh's call to nations to establish a system of collective security for preservation of mutual wellbeing admonished that: "Should anyone among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice" (1976 254). Close association between peoples is likewise necessary for the avoidance of prejudice and intolerance, which are signs of injustice. The concept of global citizenship challenges the particularism of nation states which are inherently unjust in that they confer differential entitlements to rights, opportunities and resources based on an accident of birth. The Bahá'í proposal for a universal auxiliary language as a means to allow individuals to communicate across national linguistic boundaries is another way of fostering a sense of global identity and promoting unity.

Perhaps most prominent in the Bahá'í discourse on social justice is attention to economics. Several authors have produced lengthy analyses of the principles of economic justice embedded in Bahá'í teachings (Huddleston 1996; Mahtodi 1996; Graham 1997). Huddleston draws attention to the need to reconcile tensions between what he sees as the three key principles of economic justice; the right to create wealth, the need to avoid extremes of wealth and poverty, and the need for sustainability in economic activity. While capitalism has favoured the first principle and socialism the second, neither have found an optimal balance and neither have adequately addressed

sustainability and stewardship of the earth. Huddleston suggests that rather than settling for trade-offs between these three principles they can be merged into a single unified theme; progress and justice are intimately linked. If the main purpose of life is spiritual development in a quest to 'become noble beings', then the purpose of a just economy, says Huddleston, is to provide the resources that will enable every individual on the planet to reach full physical, intellectual and spiritual potential. He then sketches out how an economic system based on Bahá'í social and economic teachings and leading to justice and unity, could evolve. This has similarities to much current secular thinking on equity and development and the convergence of economic and social goals.[19] Graham suggests that Bahá'ís have a great opportunity to bring Adam Smith's 'code of honour' back into the mainstream of economic discipline by reintroducing notions such as honesty and fairness into market transactions, and in so doing can help modern economists rediscover the roots of their discipline in moral philosophy.

How do you live justly?

"To banish evil thoughts and injustice from ones heart and to establish the concept of justice and proper morality, divine assistance is required" (Bahá'u'lláh 1978 125). Bahá'í teachings state that the establishment of justice for human societies is not possible without divine guidance. Bahá'u'lláh begins the Kitáb-i-Aqdas by proclaiming that "The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is recognition of Him who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His Laws, who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation" (K1). The second obligation is to follow his ordinances and laws. By obeying the ordinances of the deity, which are by their very nature, just, the individual contributes incrementally to the

[19] See for example, H.E. Daly and J.B. Cobb, For the Common Good; Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment and a Sustainable Future. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).

establishment of justice in the world. Hanson (1996) describes the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas as providing a momentum for the creation of justice in society, as the gradual implementation of Bahá'u'lláh's laws by individuals and communities help to transform inequitable and oppressive social conditions into just ones. The laws, notwithstanding their specific subject matter, facilitate the move toward social justice by establishing new concepts for understanding reality, evoking spiritual qualities in human beings, providing a means for uniting people and making possible the redistribution of wealth in ways that promote prosperity.

In the Bahá'í writings great emphasis is placed on the development of individual virtue. Unlike, though, in the Confucian moral system where virtue is acquired through external forces like education, the Bahá'í viewpoint suggests that virtue is an innate human quality (Libo 1996 69). According to Bahá'í teachings justice is the most important of all virtues and is essential to a society based on unity and peace. Treating people and the affairs of society with justice is the fundamental moral duty and obligation of Bahá'ís. Bahá'u'lláh commanded believers to become exemplars of righteousness and perfection as it is the moral behaviour of individuals that transforms injustice into justice.

Summary

Food is related to justice in numerous ways. I have shown that there are several elements of the Bahá'í ethical system in which food plays a significant role. These include ideas related to spiritual development, such as care of the self, virtuous living and abandonment of prejudice, and those related to social development, such as social justice, rights and responsibilities, economics and community development.

In the Bahá'í faith justice involves a constant striving toward creating the conditions for unity, through both personal and social development. I suggest that it is this sense of 'striving toward' that allows food, as a liminal substance, to take on particular significance. How then does the individual Bahá'í seeking to live justly and contribute to social justice in the world, act with regard to food? If justice for a Bahá'í consists first and foremost in comprehending and following the laws and ordinances of Bahá'u'lláh what exactly do these ordinances have to say about food? The next chapter lays out the methodology by which I seek to answer these questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

EMPIRICAL PROCEDURES: ASSUMPTIONS AND RATIONALE FOR A QUALITATIVE DESIGN

Introduction

The preceding chapters have set out the substantive areas of this enquiry and the questions that it seeks to answer. They have introduced key concepts and provided an overview of relevant literature to establish the claim of the thesis to explore new territory. This chapter summarises those aims and outlines the dual methodological approach used to achieve them. At the end of the Chapter One I establish a framework for presenting the results of these two modes of enquiry. Of central importance to this thesis is the contention that the Bahá'í vision of justice can be understood through its discourse on food, and that this is facilitated by approaching food as a liminal substance. The questions posed in Chapter One are restated here:

- Is food best understood as liminal, that is, at once an empirical and spiritual-ethical entity?
- Does liminality provide a useful approach to studying food choice?
- What are the food and food-related beliefs and practices of Bahá'ís?
- How does food provide Bahá'ís with a practical means of achieving their ethical goals?

In pursuing these questions I adopt an approach that, in bridging scientific and humanistic enquiry, is in itself liminal. First though, I examine a number of themes, each

of which poses specific questions that must be addressed before any conclusions or inferences can be drawn about the central hypotheses.

What do Bahá'í sacred writings teach about food and food-related behaviour?

At the outset it is necessary to establish the range, nature and general content of Bahá'í writings that deal with food and food-related issues and to explicate the nature and extent of dietary guidance provided to Bahá'ís by religious (scriptural) tracts, interpretative writings and customary practice. Because Bahá'í teachings on progressive revelation explicitly acknowledge the fact that material circumstances are constantly changing and that therefore the specificity of some teachings is not to be interpreted too literally, it will be necessary to examine how the material, cultural and socio-political factors prevalent at the time of the founding of the faith influenced dietary teachings, and also how the food/health ideology of the faith relates to contemporary scientific nutrition understandings.

Bahá'u'lláh's teachings that most directly address food conduct are those concerning fasting and feasting. I will therefore set out the principles underlying fasting in the Bahá'í faith, drawing comparisons with other religious fasting practices (especially those of Islam) and will enquire into the purpose of the food-sharing component of the Bahá'í Nineteen-Day Feast. This latter will require a more detailed examination of Bahá'í concepts of hospitality and attitudes to commensality. Many of the Bahá'í teachings on food are found in the writings and talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Two themes in particular stand out; the first concerns the purpose of eating as a means to promote and maintain individual health and well-being, and the pattern of eating that achieves this purpose. Eating has been described as a fundamental body technique; food choice is shaped by prevailing attitudes toward the body and the results of that choice are made evident on

the body itself. It is reasonable to assume then that one of the ways in which religious discourse on the body is played out, is through food and eating. I will therefore address the relationship between food, body and health as portrayed in the Bahá'í writings. The second theme relates to broader considerations of human interdependence with fellow humans and with nature, and raises questions of social and ecological justice. Many religions have something to say about social issues such as poverty and inequity and either directly, or by inference, point toward a particular vision of how food should be handled in society. I ask what is the Bahá'í perspective? How is food and food conduct portrayed in the context of social, economic and ecological justice?

How do contemporary Canadian Bahá'ís operationalise the sacred teachings?

It is evident that there may be wide disparities between dietary guidance provided in religious writings and the actual dietary practices of adherents. Such differences may be the result of variations in how religious texts and dietary injunctions are interpreted or they may arise from arise from 'cultural slippage', including the effects of acculturation and changes in material circumstances over time. They may also be a result of ignorance of what dietary teachings actually say or a perception that such teachings are no longer relevant. While it is not my intention to produce a full ethnographic account of Bahá'í food habits, I will use a limited number of case studies to gain insights into the saliency of food issues for Bahá'ís, and how they relate to what their faith says about food and health. Empirical enquiry will also address such questions as how are the scriptural injunctions to vegetarianism and a 'simple natural' diet interpreted and applied by Bahá'ís? How do Bahá'ís describe their experiences of fasting? How do Bahá'ís describe the ritual of providing/sharing food at the Nineteen-

Day Feast? What importance or value do Bahá'ís attribute to food and eating in their religion?

What are the ethical goals set out for Bahá'ís by their leaders and how does food allow Bahá'ís to meet their ethical goals?

Saiedi (2000) claims that Bahá'u'lláh's aim to regenerate the Bábi community in a new vision of world unity required the introduction of a new ethical standard of behaviour and moral conduct, while Schaefer (1997) confirms that Bahá'í ethics is concerned with orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy (right conduct rather than right words). What is this standard of doing, and what are its implications for food conduct? Whereas food and eating per se are not dealt with extensively in Bahá'í teachings, the ethical goals articulated can readily be seen to have implications for both negative and positive conduct in regard to food. In other words there are things that the ethical Bahá'í should refrain from doing and there are opportunities to further ethical goals through deliberate choices. Does the idea of justice in food conduct extend to other food-related practices that are not included in Bahá'í teachings? For example, fair trade, buying local, food boycotts etc. How are Bahá'ís involved in food-related social justice / community development projects?

Examination of these questions will provide support for the central hypothesis that food, as a liminal substance, is a vehicle for rendering abstract concepts of justice intelligible at a personal level and in a concrete way.

Assumptions and rationale for a qualitative design

> The qualitative research tradition includes convictions that human behaviour can only be understood in relation to the subjective meanings individuals construct around phenomena; that those meanings are multiple, socially constructed and context dependent; and that the researcher, as part of the human world, is not and never can be an objective observer. (Chapman and MacLean 1990)

All research is based on assumptions (sometimes hidden) about what constitutes 'valid' research and which research methods are appropriate. Of particular importance are epistemological considerations or assumptions about knowledge and how it can be obtained. Characteristics of qualitative research are listed below while Table 4.1, following, contrasts the principal assumptions within quantitative and qualitative research paradigms.

- Qualitative research is concerned primarily with process rather than with outcomes or products; that is, with understanding rather than measuring. Whereas quantitative research asks questions such as 'how many Xs are there?' in a search for patterns and measurable correlations, qualitative methods attempt to attempt to explain 'what is X?' and, 'how and why does it vary in different circumstances?'
- Qualitative research is interested in meaning; in how people make sense of their lives and experiences. It is directed toward gaining an understanding of people's everyday lives from their point of view (MacLean 1989).
- The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human instrument rather than through inventories, questionnaires or machines.
- Qualitative research involves fieldwork in a naturalistic setting in the belief that meaning is dependent on context and that the participant's perspective is the most important.

- Qualitative research is descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning and understanding gained through words or pictures.
- The process of qualitative research is inductive in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses and theories from details (Merriam 1988).

Table 4.1: Contrast of qualitative and quantitative research traditions

Characteristics	Qualitative	Quantitative
Underlying assumptions	Reality is socially constructed, multiple and changing Observer cannot be separated from what is being observed Meaning is produced through social interaction Meaning is context dependent Variables are complex, interwoven and difficult to measure Emic (insiders point of view)	Social facts have an objective reality that is single and are unchanging Reality is independent from observer Systems can be fragmented into independent subsystems Variables can be identified and relationships measured. Etic (outsider's point of view)
Goals	Interpretation Contextualisation Understanding meanings	Prediction Generalisabily Causal explanations
Research Design	Open ended; ends with hypotheses and theories Inductive Emergent Seeks pluralism, complexity	Structured: begins with hypotheses and theories Deductive Controlled Seeks consensus, the norm
Researcher role	Personal involvement and partiality Empathetic understanding	Detachment and impartiality Objective portrayal
Data	Descriptive, narrative Words, pictures	Quantifiable Statistical
Sample	Small, selected	Large, random
Techniques	Participant observation Open-ended interviews Document analysis	Experiments Surveys
Analysis	Interpretation; minor use of numerical indices. On-going Descriptive write-up	Statistical Analysis; reduces data to numerical indices Post data collection Abstract language in write-up

Adapted from (Chapman and MacLean 1990; Glesne and Peshkin 1992)

Qualitative research embraces a diverse collection of theoretical approaches which nevertheless share certain philosophical and epistemological premises and design implications as described above. Examples of common qualitative approaches include

ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, narrative analysis, case studies, action research, feminist criticism and hermeneutics. The use of a qualitative paradigm for my study is appropriate to my goal of describing the phenomenon of food in the Bahá'í faith in context. I am interested in the meanings that foodways hold for practising Bahá'ís as well as in the interpretation of textual material. The study does not lend itself to measurement or testing which are strengths of the quantitative paradigm.[20] Accordingly, I employ a dual methodological approach that draws on qualitative research techniques from the humanities and social sciences. The first element of this dual approach reflects the fact that the Bahá'í faith is heavily text-centred and that the sacred writings form the essential guide to Bahá'í orthopraxy. I draw on contemporary strategies in hermeneutics to examine selected Bahá'í texts, and to build a coherent account of prescriptive Bahá'í codes of law and personal conduct as they apply to food-related behaviours, as well as to locate textual support for the role of food in a wider societal context. Picking up on Hanson's (1996) suggestion that it is through their mundane everyday acts, carried out in a spirit of obedience and service, that individual Bahá'ís contribute slowly but surely to the establishment of a just society, the second element of my approach involves a small number of case studies in which I use qualitative interviewing techniques to explore how individual Bahá'ís think and act about food. In this way I hope to provide insights into how Bahá'í ethical principles are mapped onto everyday food choices. This interview material is augmented by insights gained through informal discussions with Bahá'ís on an academic internet listserv discussion group.

[20] I do, nevertheless, also draw on positivist science in analysing Bahá'í food practices in the context of modern scientific understandings of nutrition.

Textual methods and issues

The Bahá'í faith is a heavily text-centred religion. There are tens of thousands of extant writings from its five central authorities (The Báb, Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice) providing guidance on thousands of topics. As Schaefer (1997 1) observes, the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is marbled rather than systematic. "Its moral goals, values, commandments, and prohibitions, as well as its multitudinous appeals and admonitions to a virtuous life [...] are diffused throughout the entirety of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh". This is also true of the substantive topic of this thesis - food. Although food is not a major focus in any of these documents it is mentioned with some frequency, along with related concepts such as health, fasting, hospitality in a variety of sources and contexts, both legal and non-legal, by the foundational leaders of the faith.

Key issues in using Bahá'í sources

Scope and nature of Bahá'í writings

There are several annotated guides to Bahá'í writings which organise the extensive literature according to source-type (Collins 1990; MacEoin 2000; Winters 1997). A broad distinction may be made between primary and secondary sources. There are three types of primary sources; Holy Writ (the writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh); Authoritative works (the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi); and Communications from the Universal House of Justice. Secondary sources include scholarly and popular books, theses, periodicals and non-authorised writings. There is a large body of anti-Bahá'í polemic in Persian and a smaller corpus in English (Miller

1974). Table 4.2, adapted from Collins, summarises the main categories of Bahá'í writings.

Table 4.2 Classification of Bahá'í Writings.

<table>
<tr><td>Primary Sources</td><td colspan="4">Status</td></tr>
<tr><td>Writings of Bahá'u'lláh</td><td rowspan="2">Divine Revelation</td><td rowspan="2"></td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Writings of the Báb</td></tr>
<tr><td>Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá</td><td rowspan="7"></td><td rowspan="3">Sacred texts</td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Authoritative texts of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's utterances</td><td rowspan="3">Authorised interpretation</td></tr>
<tr><td>Writings of Shoghi Effendi</td><td rowspan="5"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi</td><td rowspan="2"></td><td rowspan="2">Legislation and elucidation</td></tr>
<tr><td>Writings of the Universal House of Justice</td></tr>
<tr><td>Pilgrim's notes and reported utterances of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi</td><td colspan="3"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Compilations</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="4" rowspan="8"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Secondary sources</td></tr>
<tr><td>Introductory / apologetic</td></tr>
<tr><td>Historical / biographical</td></tr>
<tr><td>Scholarly</td></tr>
<tr><td>Literary / inspirational</td></tr>
<tr><td>Periodicals /electronic listservs</td></tr>
<tr><td>Reference works</td></tr>
<tr><td>Oppositional - non-Bahá'í
- covenant breakers</td></tr>
</table>

Sacred Writings

The sacred writings consist of original texts in the handwriting of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, those written by amanuenses at their dictation, reliable transcripts from well known and trusted scribes and authoritative transcripts of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's utterances (Collins 1990). Original writings are in both Arabic and Persian. The works of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are revealed scripture, while that of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is seen as infallible commentary on and an extension of the first two. The fact that both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh "revealed" their works at great speed and often in an Arabic style

resembling the Qur'án was considered a major proof of their mission. This is because the Qur'án is itself considered an inimitable miracle by Muslims (Momen and Smith 2001). According to MacEoin (1985) the works of the Báb form a sort of 'Old Testament' of personal and state laws: couched in highly ungrammatical Arabic and idiosyncratic Persian they are at times almost unreadable, leading to serious problems in interpretation. He comments that these works are largely unknown to modern Bahá'ís. The writings of the Báb are technically abrogated by those of Bahá'u'lláh, which cover a wide range of topics and employ a number of different stylistic forms. There are tablets, letters and epistles which fall within an established tradition of Eastern epistolatory writing, commentaries on Qur'anic text, doctrinal treatises, laws and mystical, ethical and social teachings (Collins 1990 xii). 'Abdu'l-Bahá's works consist principally of collected letters and lectures many of which have been translated into English.

Interpretation

Although not regarded as scripture, the writings of Shoghi Effendi in Persian and English have the status of being infallible interpretations of the sacred text. The English writings and translations are deemed to be authoritative and are the normative basis for translations into other languages. Shoghi Effendi's original writings include letters in own handwriting and letters written on his behalf by secretaries, as well as cables. Shoghi Effendi wrote one book: "God Passes By". All other major published works are single long letters or collections of letters. What Malouf (1997) calls his Victorian English style, provided a model for later Bahá'í writings, particularly that produced by official bodies. Mitchell (1972) provides a detailed examination of the English writings of Shoghi Effendi.

Elucidation

Following the death of the Guardian there was no authorised successor to continue interpreting Bahá'í teachings. The Universal House of Justice was empowered

with the task of elucidation of the writings to provide necessary guidance for Bahá'ís. However it was not empowered to interpret the writings. The line between these activities is often blurred and has led to controversies within the faith.

Compilations

There are several compilations of writings from the major figures of the faith. Some of those produced by central Bahá'í institutions address specific themes. The practice of compilation stems from a long-standing literary tradition in the Muslim world, and in codification of religious laws and teachings in major world faiths (Collins 1990).

Secondary sources

"Bahá'u'lláh's life is a recent well-documented historical event, and it would seem at first glance that empirical data is readily accessible in a way no other religious tradition can offer" (Johnson 1976 39). However, Momen (1999) points out that the modern-day reader is already several steps removed from the experience of early believers who interpret and describe their experiences in terms of conceptual categories available to them. This material is then analysed and interpreted by scholars who read the original language and impose their own conceptual categories. Finally these scholars produce translations and précis for the modern lay reader, which have thus been through a number of filters. Moreover, Cole adds, most of what adherents have written is theological in tone and intent and pays little attention to context (J. R. Cole 1998 15). While numerous general 'official' histories have been written, including the one by Shoghi Effendi, no recent histories have been published because it is not permitted to write about figures (such as UHJ members) who are still living. Because Bahá'í history was characterised by factionalism and schism there is a particular concern to preserve unity. MacEoin (1985) suggests that as a result, official Bahá'í documents have tended to become blander over time, and less inclined to reveal "behind the scenes" conflicts.

This propensity accords with many accounts of history that present a "grand narrative"; a seamless story of inevitable progression from one event to the next (Foucault 1977).

Nevertheless here is a growing body of scholarly writing by Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís that draws attention to conflicts in the faith or that are themselves controversial. For example, Cole (1998) identifies what he terms liberal and conservative camps within the modern Bahá'í administration and, drawing on Foucault's idea of the panopticon, identifies a series of institutional practices which he claims are designed to prevent the surfacing of real differences of opinion.

Bahá'í hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the science and method of interpretation. It is impossible to understand or even talk about a text without interpretation taking place: "Interpretation is perhaps the most basic act of human thinking" (Palmer 1969 8). The relatively small literature on Bahá'í hermeneutics includes seminal papers by May (1989) and Cole (1995) who lay out broad interpretative principles and detailed hermeneutic strategies respectively. Other significant contributions include Fazel and Faranapazir (1992), Lewis (1997), Lambden (1994) and Cole (1990; 1993). This section draws primarily on Cole, who provides a concise review of the historical development of hermeneutical thinking. Medieval European interpretation, he says, allowed for both literal and allegorical meanings to scriptural writings, while the contrary idea that systematic study of the text was all that was needed to reveal its meaning arose from efforts in the West to free interpretation from church dogma. "New concepts such as the hermeneutic circle and historicity led to the ascendancy of positivism, empirical evidence and logic and the discarding of the idea of correspondence between each verse of scripture and some metaphysical truth" (1995 1). Debate over methods continued into the modern era. While some modern philosophers defend the objectivity of modern approaches to interpretation

(Habermas 1987), others criticise the emphasis on understanding authors' intentions to the neglect of 'truth-content' of scriptures (Gadamer 1975). Wittgenstein challenged the idea that one hermeneutic method alone could yield the truth, but held that texts held multiple and contradictory meanings embedded in local knowledge traditions and communities of meaning (Qtd. in Cole 1995 1).

Cole says that these European debates were echoed in Greco-Islamic traditions that form a background to Bahá'í texts, but that there are three issues specific to the Middle Eastern context that have to be kept in mind. Firstly, the English word 'interpretation' covers several distinct activities recognised in Arabic and Persian. Secondly, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá distinguish between interpretative approaches to religious versus legal texts. Thirdly, the type of interpreting depends on who is doing the interpreting – a topic that Cole deals with at length.

It has been suggested that one of the reasons why hermeneutics has not been a major focus in Bahá'í studies is because of the apparent prohibition of interpretation of Holy Writ listed in the synopsis and codification of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. "Whoso interpreteth what hath been sent down from the heaven of Revelation and altereth its evident meaning, he, verily is of them that have perverted the Sublime Word of God" (Bahá'u'lláh 1993 K105). This seems to imply that only a literal approach is acceptable. However, in other places Bahá'u'lláh uses and encourages a variety of different forms of interpretation (allegorical, symbolical, typological, or literal), quoting a Shi'ite saying that each revealed verse has seventy or seventy-one meanings (Bahá'u'lláh 1950 255). Fazel and Fananapazir suggest that the first statement quoted above applies only to authoritative interpretation of scripture and that the latter principle - that there are multiple meanings in the content of the Sacred writings, suggests that literal interpretations can rarely be the only correct understanding of a text. This is a position supported in other Bahá'í writings. "I have no objection to your interpretations and

inferences so long as they are represented as your own personal observations and reflections" (Shoghi Effendi 1981 423). However, while believers are encouraged to undertake an individual quest for truth, because human understanding is always at best, partial, no human interpretation of sacred writings can ever be authoritative or binding on anyone else.

In summary, the Bahá'í approach to hermeneutics gives simultaneous affirmation of different perspectives and interpretative strategies - some of which are subjective and idiosyncratic (local knowledge) and some of which claim to locate objective truth in the text. Cole suggests that the leeway for individual interpretation accords better with post-modern conceptions of knowledge as fragmented, discontinuous and local than with Enlightenment conceptions of a single rationalist master narrative (1998 6). The Bahá'í teachings claim to transcend the artificial barriers between faith and reason. There is a unity of meaning in the writings such that apparent contradictions are simply that - apparent. The teachings are to be seen as a balanced whole within which opposing statements can coexist and therefore particular texts must be read in the context of the whole. Reconciliation of conflicting statements is rendered more plausible by the sanctioning of a range of interpretative strategies.

Interpretative stance adopted in this thesis

The foregoing summary suggests that writings about food and health are intended to be understood in a literal sense insofar as they are part of the laws and rituals of the faith. Certainly this applies to fasting and feasting. Other food-related material would fall into the non-legal category, subject to contextualised interpretation. My approach to examining food-related teachings in the Bahá'í sacred writings is guided

by interpretative principles found within Bahá'í writings, as summarised by May (1989 39).

- Plurality of meaning within religious texts means that a range of interpretations are possible. While clear unambiguous language is used for laws ordinances, teachings and principles, a veiled, mystical or symbolic language is used to convey insights that ordinary or scientific language are unable to.
- Harmony of science and reason must be considered in interpreting religious writings.
- Progressive and relative nature of religions means that while texts are of necessity clothed in the language of a particular era and culture by idioms, mannerisms, conventions and topical references of the day, if historical and cultural context is ignored then misleading and anachronistic conclusions may ensue.
- Religious traditions have both essential and non-essential aspects. Common to all religions are the essential existential and ethical teachings; non-essential elements are the social laws which are culturally and historically specific. Interpretation has to take this into account and recognise that contemporary customs and views may differ from those prevailing at the time and place of the revelation.

In addition, especially during interviews it was important to keep in mind the principle of:

- Independent investigation of truth. Bahá'ís should not blindly emulate others, however powerful or educated, but should strive for their own understanding of the teachings.

The premise of this thesis, that food is a liminal entity at once material and discursive, and that food choice is guided by many different, and sometimes contradictory motives would seem to 'fit' with Bahá'í interpretive principles. The material aspect of food is usually a subject for scientific positivist research. The symbolic meaning and use of food is more usually approached through interpretivist methods.

According to Bahá'í teaching there is only one truth; from a Bahá'í perspective, scientific knowledge about food must be reconcilable with mystical beliefs and religious practice.

Interview methods and issues

The second methodological component of the thesis draws from ethnographic techniques to develop and conduct qualitative interviews with a small number of Bahá'í families. Ethnography, or folk description, is the social research style that emphasises encountering 'alien worlds' and making sense of them. Ethnography has its roots in anthropology, and is generally applied to the study of cultures or sub-cultures. Ethnographers immerse themselves in the lives of the people they study and seek to place the phenomena studied in their social and cultural contexts. Instead of classifying people on the basis of age, sex, education or other pre-determined variable, the ethnographer seeks to describe a culture using those criteria that the informants themselves employ as they observe, interpret and describe their own experiences (McCurdy 1981). Interviews are an important data collection tool for ethnographers. Ethnographic interviewing is designed to discover cultural meanings and describe the cultural knowledge of an informant. Culture may be thought of in a materialist way as the totality of observable behaviour, customs, and daily life, or in a cognitive way as the ideas, beliefs and knowledge that are characteristic of a group of people. The interviewer is interested in what people think and how one person's perspective compares with another - that is what shared values they hold (Sorrell and Redmond 1995). Ethnographic approaches have been utilized in many fields other than anthropology, and variants have arisen such as the 'mini-ethnography' described by Fetterman (1998). A full ethnographic study of food in a Bahá'í community is beyond the scope of this thesis. My much more modest ambition is to apply principles of ethnographic interviewing to

produce a small number of case-studies that will provide insights into how food fits into the world-view of some Canadian Bahá'ís.

Entry to setting

To gain entry to the Bahá'í community in Manitoba I solicited the assistance of the Winnipeg Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assembly (LSA). Through meetings with a key contact in the LSA I gained approval from the Canadian Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly to proceed with the study and identified ways to contact individual Bahá'ís to inform them of my study and request their participation. Invitations to participate in the study were made on my behalf by the key contact. Letters and information bulletins describing the study and explaining interview procedures were developed, together with written consent forms.

Ethical considerations

Anonymity of data can be a particular concern in studies with a small number of participants, especially where they are drawn from a relatively small pool of potential recruits. Although the nature of the information discussed in interviews was not sensitive and unlikely to give rise to any adverse outcomes for participants, to minimise the chance of breaches of anonymity the identity of final participants was known only to the researcher. In the presentation of interview findings pseudonyms are used to protect identity. Participants were given the opportunity to review draft materials so that they could request changes if they felt that anonymity has been compromised. [21]

[21] The research protocol was approved by the Office of Research Services, Human Ethics Secretariat of the University of Manitoba and conforms to guidelines respecting research involving human subjects.

Sample

Interview participants comprised a convenience sample of self-declared Bahá'ís, over the age of majority, living in Winnipeg. Within the pool of potential participants I used purposeful sampling to select respondents with a variety of socio-demographic characteristics in the expectation that this would both elicit a variety of experiences and perspectives and also would capture core experiences that cut across categories. The logic of purposeful sampling lies in achieving (a) appropriateness; that is the extent to which choice of informants fits the study as determined by research questions, and (b) adequacy; that is the extent to which sample can provide sufficient quality data to answer the research question (Morse 1991). Ideally, interviewing proceeds until saturation and redundancy is achieved; that is, until no new information is being uncovered. In practice, access and time usually limit the number of interviews. For my study I set an initial target of five to eight in-depth interviews to yield an appropriate balance of work and information. While I had initially envisaged conducting interviews with individuals, it transpired that family settings were more acceptable. I completed three interviews with couples, in two of which children were occasionally present, though not directly involved as participants. A fourth interview with a single spouse yielded a total of seven participants.

Data collection procedures

Data was collected using semi-structured interviews of approximately 90 minutes in length. These were conducted at the homes of participants. With the permission of participants interviews were audio-taped and subsequently transcribed verbatim by the researcher. In addition written notes were kept to provide contextual information, including non-verbal cues and reflective notes. Interviews were based on a pre-determined inventory of categories and relationships that prescribed the ground to be

covered through a series of grand tour questions and floating and planned prompts, as recommended in the literature (McCracken 1987). The goal was to allow respondents to tell own story in their own words whilst remaining within general parameters of the phenomenon of interest.

Data analysis procedures

Qualitative analysis involves taking the text apart looking for categories and themes, then recontextualising to create a larger consolidated picture. Standard qualitative analysis procedures (McCracken 1987; Tesch 1990) were used to code data, form categories and develop themes within and across interview transcripts. In essence the procedure was as follows.

- Read transcripts to get sense of whole.
- Examine one transcript, asking 'what is this about?' Look for meaning rather than substance.
- Repeat for other interviews. Make list of all topics mentioned. Cluster together in similar topics.
- Use this list to go back to data. Abbreviate topics as codes and write codes next to appropriate segments of text. See if new categories emerge.
- Look for descriptive wording for topics and turn them into categories. Collapse where necessary; draw inter-relations.
- Finalise and alphabetise codes.
- Assemble data belonging to each category into one place and perform preliminary analysis.
- Recode existing data if necessary.

Verification Steps

The traditional criteria against which quantitative research is evaluated are validity and reliability. Internal validity refers to the 'truth value' of the findings; external validity refers to generalisability; reliability refers to reproducibility of findings. These concepts were developed within, and are most appropriate to, the quantitative research paradigm. Because qualitative enquiries are context-bound they do not usually seek to make generalisations from one setting to another. Also, because interpretation is at the heart of qualitative research and there is an acceptance of partial/multiple versions of the 'truth' it is unreasonable to expect that findings could ever be exactly replicated. However one could expect that a second researcher using the same data and same analysis technique would come to broadly similar conclusions. Qualitative research commonly employs different criteria to assess the trustworthiness of the research. These are credibility, dependability and confirmability. To maximise trustworthiness, the following techniques are widely used.

- Triangulation of methods to determine the congruence of findings in data obtained using different methods or sources (interviews; text; listserv discussion).
- Deliberate seeking out of evidence that might contradict the analysis.
- Participant checks of interview analysis to ensure they recognise them as legitimate accounts of their own experience.
- Inclusion of sufficient of original data (for example, interview quotes) in the written account to satisfy the reader of the relation between interpretation and evidence.

Chapter Five incorporates extensive verbatim commentary from interview participants. While this helps to provide assurance of the provenance of the data it does

run risks of appropriation of voice as described in post colonialist critiques.[22] Use of the preceding verification techniques can help to minimize the risk.

Anecdotal evidence

As an additional means to gather insights into the practical arrangements Bahá'ís make with regard to food I issued a general invitation to Bahá'ís subscribed to the *Bridges* listserv to contribute 'food stories' that illustrated either material or symbolic aspects of food use within the Bahá'í community. This sort of information, while manifestly not generalisable, does provide genuine examples of everyday practice that may serve to support or disconfirm theoretical constructs.

Statement of Limitations and Delimitations.

Limitations

A major limitation in textual analysis is related to language. Bahá'í sacred writings were originally penned in either Persian or Arabic. Relatively few critical editions of any original-language Bahá'í texts have actually been published though digital copies of some texts are beginning to appear on scholarly internet sites such as H-Bahá'í.[23] While there are also a growing number of critical scholarly translations of material into

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[22] B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths and H. Tiffin, The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature (London: Routledge, 1989). suggest there are stages in the development of post-colonialist literature. To begin with the only voices heard are those of the colonialists reporting from 'the frontline'. Next indigenous voices are raised – but only those that conform with and suit the purposes of the coloniser are heard. Later there emerges a 'true voice' of the colonised – but this is finally reshaped by the colonialist power and reclaimed as its own. In terms of qualitative research strategies, producing chunks of verbatim interview transcript may seem like (and in fact be) a genuine attempt to allow respondents (the colonised) to speak for themselves. However it inevitably remains a tool of the researcher (colonialist) who selectively abstracts from the transcript to support or contradict a particular point of interest to the researcher.

[23] H-Bahai http://www.h-net.org/~bahai/index/diglib/diglib1.htm

English, the English translations by Shoghi Effendi are regarded as authoritative. The Universal House of Justice has also overseen the translation of some major Bahá'í writings. Access to scriptural authority is therefore predominantly in mediated form. This limitation does not create a great problem with regard to the subject matter of food. Instances where Arabic or Persian terminology regarding food creates ambiguity are identified and discussed in the text.

A second limitation concerns the scope and nature of the empirical interviewing component of the study. It is not feasible within the confines of this thesis to undertake a large scale ethnographic study of the Bahá'í community in Canada, or even in one province or city. The intent of incorporating a small number of case studies is to test the plausibility of the contention of this thesis that Bahá'ís can and do act out justice through the vehicle of food. Because of the inductive nature of this qualitative research method the findings could be subject to other interpretations. Ethnographic truths are partial; the ethnographer is a trickster promising, like Hermes, not to lie, but never undertaking to tell the whole truth either (Crapanzano 1986). Finally, interview findings will reflect points-of-view of Western-living Bahá'ís and the thesis will not address possible differences to be found in Eastern or Southern Bahá'í perspectives.

Delimitations

Given the above limitations my enquiry is delimited in six main ways.

1. It confines itself to a study of selected English-language texts and commentaries.
2. It is confined to interviews with practising Bahá'ís who reside in Winnipeg, Manitoba, (with additional empirical comments from personal communications incorporated as appropriate)
3. It is not a study of the cuisine or dietary habits of Bahá'ís nor of the nutritional implications of such habits - though both issues arise incidentally. Neither is it

concerned with the food habits of individuals based on gender, social class or ethnic origin except to the extent that these impinge on ideas about justice.

4. While food is the substantive heart of agriculture and while agriculture is cast as a priority activity in Bahá'í teachings, this study does not explore the implications of food justice for agricultural practice. Nor does this study address in depth the Bahá'í perspective on ecology or sustainable development.
5. The study is not an account of Bahá'í social development theory and practice beyond the existence of activities that centre on food.
6. It does not consider linguistic use of food symbolism in the writings.

Significance

The significance of this study was outlined in detail in the introductory chapter. In summary, the study will:

- Address a gap in the food and religion literature by describing the role that food plays in the Bahá'í faith.
- Add to the understanding of how food is used in a religious context.
- Demonstrate the value of an inter-disciplinary approach to understanding and reconciling the material and symbolic value of food.
- Contribute to a broader understanding of motives and meanings behind food choice.
- Contribute to scholarly studies of the Bahá'í faith.

CHAPTER FIVE:

THE BAHÁ'Í FOOD DISCOURSE

Analytical Framework

Food-related topics identified in my search of the sacred writings may be grouped under the following themes and sub-themes, though there is inevitably some overlap. Vegetarianism, for example, is treated firstly from a health point of view and later from the perspective of compassion and stewardship.

A. Preservation of Health
    A1: Care of the self
    A2: Vegetarianism (1)
    A3: Alcohol /smoking
    A4: Healing with food
B. Commensality
    B1: Hospitality / Courtesy
    B2: Feasts and Celebrations
C. Social Development: Compassion and stewardship
    C1: Alleviation of hunger and suffering
    C2: Charity
    C3: Vegetarianism (2)
D. Spiritual Duty
    D1: Fasting

For each topic I proceed by:

- Describing the concept in general terms, drawing on comparative examples.

- Discussing ideology and customary practices prevailing at the time of the Bahá'í Revelation, commenting on historical and cultural context so that misleading and anachronistic conclusions are avoided.
- Identifying what the sacred writings actually say pertinent to the issue
- Classifying the nature of the specific teachings, as Law or otherwise.
- Exploring how the teachings are made evident in Bahá'í discourse, including examples and insights from interviews.[24]
- Discussing the practical implications of the teaching and its relationship to contemporary scientific food/nutrition. Commenting on harmony of science and reason in relation to the issue.
- Summarising how this aspect of food-conduct speaks to the Bahá'í concept of justice.

A Preservation of Health

> I haven't met a single Bahá'í who hasn't at least modified their food in some way, given the writings. It may have been only one time in their life, but at some point it comes up for people to think about it and I've had lots of conversations with people about it, who are like me, who haven't made huge changes but are aware that they probably would be healthier if they could come more in line with the advice given. (Barbara)

A1 Care of the Self

A1.1 How is food related to care of the self?

Food consumption is about the body, both at the physiological level (we all need to eat) and in terms of the way in which we think about the relationships between the food we eat and our bodies; health and illness; purity and pollution; body weight, shape

[24] Interview participants are identified with the following pseudonyms: Alan; Barbara; Dorri; Helena; Janet; Kamal; Philippe. A few quotes have information suppressed that might provide identifying clues.

and image. We eat to take care of our bodies; to keep them alive; to allow them to grow and develop; to keep them free from disease. We also eat to take care of our social and emotional health and to nurture our moral and political selves.

A1.2 How was the relationship between food, health and the body conceived of in ideology and customary practices prevailing at the time of the Bahá'í Revelation?

In Islam, the dominant religion of Persia since the time of Muhammad, adherents look to the Qur'an and Hadith to provide guidance on health. The body was conceived of as a divine gift - a gift that must be properly looked after. The believer was exhorted to preserve health even if it meant breaking religious laws such as fasting. Health is to be found in moderation; and cleanliness is very important. In his account of travels in Persia at the turn of the nineteenth century, Edward Granville Browne comments generally on the high esteem Persians had for knowledge (1912). Da'r'ul-Fumun School of Medicine at Teheran University included professors of medicine who followed Galen and Avicenna, as well as those of the modern school. Through his observations of practice and discussions with practitioners Browne confirmed that the old Galenic system, while still dominant, had begun to give place to modern medical theory and practice, more so in the city than in the provinces. Thus the concept of health and body prevalent in nineteenth century Persia was informed largely by theories of homeostasis derived from Greek humoural theory.[25] However it is remarkable to note how eager Persians appeared to be to consult Browne on personal medical matters, implying openness to alternative sources of medical wisdom.

A1.3 What do the Bahá'í sacred writings say about care of the self?

In the Persian Bayán the Báb states: "Since the physical body is the throne whereon the inner temple is established, God hath ordained that the body be preserved

[25] This is more fully discussed below in section A4 on food and healing.

to the extent possible". Similar themes occur in numerous writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi and by the Universal of Justice. Specific to diet are a number of admonitions contained in Bahá'u'lláh's Tablet to The Physician (Bahá'u'lláh 1992).

> O People, do not eat except when you are hungry. Do not drink after you have retired to sleep.
>
> Exercise is good when the stomach is empty; it strengthens the muscles. When the stomach is full it is very harmful.
>
> Do not take nourishment except when (the process of) digestion is completed. Do not swallow until you have thoroughly masticated your food.
>
> Do not neglect medical treatment when it is necessary, but leave it off when health has been restored. Treat disease through diet, by preference, refraining from the use of drugs; and if you find what is required in a single herb, do not resort to a compounded treatment. Abstain from drugs when the health is good but administer them when necessary.
>
> If two diametrically opposite foods are put on the table do not mix them. Be content with one of them. Take first the liquid food before partaking of solid food. The taking of food before that which you have already eaten is digested is dangerous.
>
> When you have eaten, walk a little that the food may settle.
>
> That which is difficult to masticate is forbidden by the wise. Thus the Supreme Pen commands you.
>
> A light meal in the morning is as a light to the body.

Some of these ideas are discussed below, and others in the later section on healing.

"The bounty of good health is the greatest of all gifts" says 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1978 151). Bahá'ís are charged with the responsibility of looking after their own health; for preservation of bodily health and well-being is necessary in order to pursue a life of service and devotion. Maintenance of health requires of Bahá'ís that they solicit up-to-

date medical attention when necessary - even if they are themselves medically qualified, and that they take appropriate action to restore health.

The body is regarded as the temple of the human spirit and consequently should be treated as a willing, obedient and efficient servant. The purpose of caring for the body has nothing to with personal aesthetics or vanity; instead, the body needs to be kept in good health so that the Bahá'í can devote all his or her energy to serving Bahá'u'lláh's purpose. "If he sleep, it should not be for pleasure, but to rest the body in order to do better, to speak better, to explain more beautifully, to serve the servants of God and to prove the truths" (Bahá'u'lláh 1956 354). Shoghi Effendi (1947) describes the body as being like a horse that must be cared for so that it can do its work. Moreover, for the mind to manifest itself, the human body must be whole, as a sound mind cannot be but in a sound body ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1918 127). This requirement for self-care necessitates a rejection of both ascetic and hedonistic practices. While asceticism represents disengagement with everyday life - which is contrary to the Bahá'í commitment to community involvement and service, hedonism shows an undue concern with selfish desires. "Living in seclusion or practising asceticism is not acceptable in the presence of God" (Bahá'u'lláh 1988 71). Rather people should engage in that which will cause "joy and radiance", remembering though that

> If the health and well-being of the body be expended in the path of the Kingdom, this is very acceptable and praiseworthy; and if it be expended to the benefit of the human world in general – even though it be to their material benefit – and be a means of doing good, that is also acceptable... But if the health and welfare of man be spent in sensual desires, in life on the animal plane, and in devilish pursuits – then disease were better than such health; nay death itself were preferable to such a life. ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1915 207)

Bahá'u'lláh exhorts believers to bathe regularly, to wear clean clothes and to generally be the essence of cleanliness and refinement, for: "God hath enjoined upon you to observe the utmost cleanliness" (K76). Personal cleanliness is socially desirable

for both reasons of health and self-respect; it is also symbolic of spiritual purity. Cleanliness is part of the Middle Eastern concept of *latafah* which incorporates refinement, grace, elegance, politeness and delicacy. However, the concept of impurity as a legal category as it is defined in Islamic law, was abolished by Bahá'u'lláh. Nothing that is created by the divine can be impure.

A1.4 Do Bahá'í teachings on care of the self fall into the domain of law or ethical or social teachings?

Preservation of health and care of the self are not matters of law. Bahá'ís are not required to follow any specific health proscriptions other than to refrain from drinking alcohol. Rather, the responsibility for looking after oneself is presented as an ethical duty.

A1.5 How are teachings on care of the self made evident in the discourse on food?

The importance of preserving health, and the role of food in achieving this as described in the Bahá'í teachings, was well-recognised by interview participants who discussed both the personal impact of eating on their own physical and emotional health, and the necessity of maintaining a healthy body as an embodiment of spiritual health and capacity. Many of the teachings on health and care of the body draw on the fundamental Bahá'í principle of moderation. While it is deemed inappropriate to invest too much time and energy in body maintenance for its own sake the body should not be neglected to the point that its optimal functioning is impaired, a caution echoed in Philippe's declaration that: "I don't depend on food. I'm not a slave a food. I eat food because I need it here and there, but this is about it." Moderation is advised, directed toward producing a state of detachment in which worldly goods and needs are recognized as means rather than ends. Consequently, in regard to food, neither gluttony nor ascetic denial of food is an acceptable form of eating conduct. "In all circumstances they should conduct themselves with moderation, if the meal be only one course, this is

more pleasing in the sight of God; however, according to their means they should seek to have this single dish be of good quality" (Universal House of Justice 1984 1).

The concept of moderation was brought up many times by interview participants, who described reflective food practices as one example of the Bahá'í injunction to be moderate in all things. Moderation could be interpreted as meaning not eating excessively, ensuring a balance of foods from different food groups or, as in the quote above, refraining from overindulging in a multitude of dishes. In the Bahá'í written discourse moderation takes the form of a "balanced natural diet", without excess and adapted to local climate and the type of work in which the body is engaged - a formulation which differs little from contemporary nutritional science concepts. What does differ is the way in which this balance is to be achieved. Whereas nutritional science requires of people conscious choice of a balanced diet based on knowledge of nutrient values and a sophisticated awareness of educational messages, 'Abdu'l-Bahá invokes a theory of natural selection of foods derived from inherent human capacities. He uses the idea that animals can 'naturally' discern what they need in their diet, for their constitution 'longs for' what it needs. Though they have no knowledge of the pharmacopoeia of plants, animals, he says, are nevertheless able to avoid what is injurious and consume what is good. 'Abdu'l-Bahá goes on to suggest that humans can also do this but that their ability to do so is obscured by foolish and unnatural modes of living, which indulge the appetites and ignore the principle of moderation. "When the constitution is in a state of equilibrium there is no doubt that whatever is relished will be beneficial to health" (1978 155). This concept of body wisdom was strongly endorsed by Barbara, who commented:" There's some things your body just doesn't like. You know, you eat it, and your mouth might like the taste but the reaction of your body to it [...] within an hour or so (you know) that really you shouldn't have eaten that".

The idea of a natural, instinctive guide to food selection also arises in regard to food combinations.

> But man hath perversely continued to serve his lustful appetites, and he would not content himself with simple foods. Rather, he prepared for himself food that was compounded of many ingredients, of substances differing one from the other [...] and he abandoned the temperance and moderation of a natural way of life. The result was the engendering of diseases both violent and diverse. ('Abdu'l-Bahá 152)

It is not clear whether this criticism of dietary practices refers to the use of food transformed through processing of some kind, or to the combining of different foodstuffs in one meal - though the latter seems more plausible and has a long history. The influential tenth century Arab physician, Avicenna, cautioned that specific food combinations could be either good or harmful. For example, milk was not to be eaten with sour foods or fish, and pulses were not to be eaten with cheese. The suggestion that it is inappropriate to combine foods persists today in popular nutrition writing that exhorts people to eat, for example, only carbohydrate food or only protein foods at any one meal under the assumption that this aids digestion and assimilation of nutrients.

The interview participants had a lot to say about food combining and about simple eating, often drawing directly on the teachings and lived example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

> The way he ('Abdu'l-Bahá) was talking about food, he would always emphasise that the food had to be basic - and he did not mix too many ingredients together. For example, I was just looking at food section of Free Press and your head just turns; you see like 20 ingredients. (Dorri)

Before becoming a Bahá'í Dorri had eaten and liked mixed foods, but gradually had simplified her diet on the basis of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings, and now found that her previous 'mixed eating' style upset her stomach. Barbara was already practising food combining when she encountered the faith, and this resonated well for her:

> I think that the thing that attracted me when I was looking at the writings in terms of my own eating habits were the not-combining opposites, because I was really doing a lot of reading on food combining . I know I feel really well if I just eat meat and vegetables, or if I eat carbohydrates

and vegetables and I don't put my proteins and my carbohydrates together.

Food combining is generally dismissed by the contemporary scientific establishment as an unfounded fad. On the other hand, the idea that as food is more removed from its natural state, that is when it is more artificial or 'compounded' it becomes less healthy and more likely to cause disease, has a certain resonance with contemporary scientific theory that lays substantial blame for chronic disease on diets rich in fat, sugar and salt - which means essentially, the products of modern food manufacturing and processing. Amongst the interview participants the idea that complex food was less healthy was strong, as was the theme of simplifying the diet through restricting the variety of foods consumed at one time. "Then we have potluck, everybody brings foods; but I avoided the rice. Why would I eat the rice? I had salad and I had meat" (Philippe). All of these perspectives were linked to direct quotes or paraphrases from the sacred writings, or by reference to the lived example of Bahá'í holy figures. While the rationale for such guidance was not necessarily clear to respondents, belief in its validity was - rooted in the conviction that through divine knowledge the teachings must be sound.

Bahá'í teachings insist that the outward elements of the faith are mutable; they made sense in the time and place of their revelation, but they are not fixed. Several participants explicitly acknowledged the constantly evolving nature of nutritional understanding and its relationship to health. Alan wryly observed that even modern scientific nutrition is a sort of progressive revelation, pointing out that dietary advice in the Canada Food Guide seemed to change every year with newer understandings of food and health.

A1.6 How do the teachings on care of the self relate to contemporary scientific food/health discourse?

The emphasis placed by Bahá'í teachings on personal responsibility for health seems to be congruent with contemporary public health discourses on 'lifestyle' which locate responsibility for health with the individual. The lifestyle focus is however often criticised for failing to recognise that many factors affecting health are beyond the control of the individual; it is portrayed as a 'blame the victim' approach - one which is more likely to increase inequity than reduce it. Responsible individual behaviour requires a social context where policy decisions and structural systems support healthy choices. The importance of a supportive social milieu in facilitating individual action is also emphasised in Bahá'í teachings. Contemporary secular definitions have also moved away from conceptualising health as an ideal state of well-being or an end in itself, to seeing it as a capacity - a resource for everyday living (World Health Organisation 1996). The resemblance to Bahá'í thinking is striking.

From a nutrition perspective, the idea that humans choose certain foods because they are programmed to know what is physiologically good for them has a perennial appeal. There is evidence of a human genetic predisposition to preference for sweet tastes which would have been adaptive in evolutionary terms, as sweetness acted as a marker for calories. However under conditions of overexposure to sweet calorie dense foods, such behaviour becomes maladaptive. There is also some evidence of an innate longing for salt. Beyond this the evidence is persuasive, if not conclusive, that culture rather than biology guides food selection. For early humans food and disease became quickly linked through common experience and there would have been evolutionary advantages to being able to identify and avoid poisonous substances. Over time this practice may have come to seem natural. In contrast, the selectivity theory insists that the body knows what is good for it and that given free choice humans would

automatically select nutritionally adequate diets. At the beginning of the twentieth century, just as the modern science of nutrition was emerging, Dr. Woods Hutchinson in the United States claimed that instinct was far superior to reason, leading the average man naturally to eat: '...three square meals a day, consisting of anything he can find in the market, and just as much of it as he can afford' (Hutchinson 1906). This overlooks the fact that 'three square meals a day' is of course a cultural artifice. To test the idea of natural food choices in conditions where cultural learning was minimal, early nutrition researchers experimented with allowing newly weaned infants to choose their own diets from a selection of offered foods (Davis 1928; 1939). Definite preferences were shown which changed unpredictably from time to time; appetite was the guiding factor and the diets consumed were nutritionally adequate, but probably only because the selection of nutritious foods offered made it difficult for this not to happen. More recent studies have shown that children seem to prefer high fat foods, which are both widely availability and culturally valued (Agras et al. 1988). It seems unlikely that, given a completely free choice of foods, infants, children, or indeed adults, would select a nutritionally adequate diet.

Nevertheless the concept of body wisdom in regards to food persists, and it is certainly true that the privileging in modernity of the rational mind has served to divert attention from the body. Fritjof Capra echoes the sentiments of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that we have "forgotten how to think with our bodies [...] to use them as agents of knowing, and in doing so we have shut ourselves off from the natural environment" (Capra 1982). Some researchers have interpreted the phenomenon of pica, which is the idiosyncratic consumption of non-food substances such as dirt and clay, as a result of the body's ability to recognise a physiological need for certain nutrients which are found in earth (Hochstein 1968). Dr. Daniela Schlettwein-Gsell, a contemporary Swiss nutritionist, has speculated that just as some musicians have perfect pitch so some people can taste

what is good for the body. She cites the case of the Tuareg who subsist on a diet consisting solely of millet, goat milk and cheese, and dates and who do not long for or seek out dietary variety. The fact that no desire is felt for other food is good evidence, she says, for the existence of some inner sense of the nutritional adequacy of the diet (Mintz and Schlettwein-Gsell 2000). While these sorts of arguments are not convincing to food scholars like historian Sidney Mintz, who expresses a widely held view that it is cultural processes that dominate in determining food choice, they do at least hint at the possibility of as yet unappreciated human capacities.

A1.7 How does care of the self speak to the Bahá'í concept of justice?

Moderation is a major theme throughout the Bahá'í writings and is to be applied to all things, large and small. "Whosoever cleaveth to justice, can, under no circumstances transgress the limits of moderation" (Bahá'u'lláh 1976 342) .The idea that through the small private actions of everyday living Bahá'ís can contribute incrementally to the promotion of a just society is advanced by Holly Hanson (1996 31). Adherence to the principles of moderation and balance in eating contributes both to spiritual well-being - knowing that one is following the guidance of Bahá'u'lláh, and to the incremental promotion of social justice. Moderation protects the individual from the temptation of excess and thus the genesis of societal imbalances. Eating frugally can be interpreted as a gesture of social justice and solidarity. "It is more kingly to be satisfied with a crust of stale bread than to enjoy a sumptuous dinner of many courses, the money for which comes out of the pockets of others" ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1923 453) This sentiment was expressed in the interviews most clearly by Dorri, who in talking about moderation, challenged the justice and morality of "stuffing yourself with too many foods" while others are hungry. Personal restraint and moderation becomes a way of modelling justice, as illustrated in this example.

> In our culture when you invite a guest you always have to have at least six or seven different kinds of food to show our respect. That's the Iranian way, but not the Bahá'í Iranian. So by only taking two kinds of food from the buffet - after doing that over and over - that's a way of telling people even if you prefer six or seven different kinds of food, I only take one. So maybe bringing them to point that they would only make one kind, and hopefully give the money from the other six to the needy. (Dorri)

Similarly, Kamal observed: "I'm sure it doesn't matter if I take one type of food or ten types...hunger is going on. But it's a matter of principle. And we do that. After a while everybody accepts you and they become quite moderate; they think twice about what's the purpose of this?"

Here we see examples of the liminal power of food in enabling the realisation of ethical goals. Food is crucially important as a material substance to maintain the bodily health and well-being that Bahá'ís are exhorted to achieve. This in turn enhances the capacity of individuals to contribute their service to society. At the same time food choice, marked by simplicity and moderation, is symbolic of living justly. Barbara, after describing her personal struggles with food, nevertheless frames her experiences as a step on the journey toward health:

> So I recognise intellectually that place of health for me where I feel better. Have I been able to do that? (Eat healthfully). No. But That's because of emotional issues not because of lack of intellectual understanding of it. I don't necessarily act on it but I do think about it even before I do it – so it's a matter of a maturing process. One will come to a point where ones understanding in ones mind is emulated by what one actually does.

But even as she recognises this, Barbara also acknowledges that for her it is not a present life priority. The journey, which means crossing the divide between knowing and doing, between awareness and praxis, is long; and food is one of the bridges waiting to be crossed.

A2 Vegetarianism

Vegetarianism is not a unitary concept; there is a spectrum of behaviour amongst people who describe themselves as vegetarians. Vegans avoid eating any animal product whatsoever, whether or not it involves the killing of the animal. Others allow dairy products and eggs, while 'lax vegetarians' happily consume fish, chicken and other non-red meats. There is also a fundamental distinction between vegetarianism as a normative socio-cultural behaviour and vegetarianism as a conscious individual choice. Vegetarianism has been presented through the ages as a strategy for achieving both spiritual and material goals, and for advancing both individual health and collective well-being. Themes of health, economics, ecology and spirituality interconnect and draw strength from each other. All these themes appear in Bahá'í teachings. Osborne (1995) introduces the useful notion of self-regarding and other-regarding vegetarianism. The former is more to do with achievement of personal goals—whether corporeal or spiritual, while the latter evinces concern for others, including animals. Following Osborne's classification, this section presents a discussion of the health aspects of vegetarianism. Vegetarianism as an other-regarding practice is discussed in section C.

A2.1 How is vegetarianism related to health?

Health arguments for vegetarianism usually focus on the relationship between diet and chronic disease, particularly degenerative conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and various intestinal disorders, as well as cancer of the colon and breast and dental caries. Diets that emphasise fruit, vegetables, whole cereals and pulses tend to be higher in bulk and lower in calories, sugars and fats than a typical meat-centred regime; thus it is not surprising that studies have shown vegetarians to be lighter on average than non-vegetarians, and to have lower blood cholesterol levels and lower blood pressures. The vegetarian health practices of Seventh Day Adventists have

certainly conferred nutritional benefits on them. As a group they suffer less chronic diet-related disorders such as hypertension and cancer than do the general population (Phillips 1975). Critics maintain that vegetarian diets tend to be low in essential nutrients and pose a threat to health through under-nutrition. Certainly this can happen with poorly planned vegetarian diets that do not take adequate account of the need to assure protein complementarity. The debate is longstanding. The neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry wrote a treatise entitled 'Abstinence from Animal Food' in which he refuted arguments that meat is essential for health and strength. Rather, he insisted, meat is associated with both physical disease and corruption of the soul (Wynne-Tyson 1965). Vegetarianism as a self-regarding Western practice gathered force in the early nineteenth century, with influential figures like Presbyterian preacher Sylvester Graham railing against meat-eating. However, eating meat as a mainstay of the diet does not of necessity produce untoward health effects and is sometimes the only option. Traditional societies of hunters and trappers that have relied heavily on meat have exhibited high levels of health. Indeed modern degenerative diseases only became significant amongst Inuit and First Nations peoples of Canada with the destruction of traditional ways of life and the spread of southern refined foods and dietary patterns (Schaefer et al. 1980; Schaefer and Steckle 1980). Undoubtedly a wide range of dietary diversity is compatible with health.

A2.2 What were the status of vegetarianism in the prevailing food ideologies and customary practices at the time of the Bahá'í Revelation?

Vegetarianism is not and was not a predominant feature of eating patterns in Islamic countries. Islamic food practices are derived first from the Qur'an and secondly from the Hadith (the sayings and deeds of Muhammad). Prior to the advent of Muhammad, food practices amongst the Arab peoples of the Middle East were diverse. Pre-Islamic Arabs had few food prohibitions and these were more a matter of local

custom, specific to particular tribes. The establishment of common Islamic food laws served as a vehicle though which to unite these diverse groups, while at the same time differentiating the new religion from Judaism. In several places in the Qur'an Muhammad refers to the restrictive food laws of the Jews as a burden imposed on them for sins, noting that there were few food restrictions prior to the revelation of the Torah (1989 4:160; 6:46). While he retained certain elements of Jewish food law, such as the prohibition on pork, Muhammad proclaimed food to be a general beneficence, a divine gift to be enjoyed by humanity without undue burden. "O ye who believe! Eat of the good things that We have provided you, and be grateful to Allah if it be Him ye worship" (2:172). In the Qur'an food is mentioned frequently as this fundamental beneficence, a divine blessing. Believers are exhorted to eat of the good things with which their god has supplied them and are given only minimal dietary restrictions. Forbidden, or halal, is that which dies naturally, blood, swine's flesh and that over which any other name than God's has been invoked. Also prohibited are meat of the ass, carnivorous animals such as tiger, fox, dog and leopard which kill prey by using their paws, and birds of prey. Alcohol is strictly forbidden along with any other substance which is debilitating to the faculties. The meat of permitted animals is only halal if slaughtered in accordance with Islamic law, by cutting the throat whilst pronouncing the words 'Bismillah. Allah Akbar' (I begin with God's name: God is great). Further food regulations are contained in the Hadith and have been elaborated over time by various schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Foods are allocated to one of the five categories of action in Islamic law: obligatory; recommended; neutral; disapproved; or prohibited. Each school of jurisprudence categorizes foods differently though the differences between Shi'ites and Sunnis are on the whole of little practical everyday significance. While many Muslims do eat meat other than pork, Sufi teachings recommend that such meat be consumed only in small quantities. Some Sufi orders, both ancient and modern, have praised vegetarianism as a more compassionate

practice, and have viewed animal consumption as conducive to animalistic behaviour (Hoffman 1995).

A2.3 What do the Bahá'í sacred writings say about vegetarianism?

Similarly to Islam, Bahá'í texts describe food as a beneficence to be enjoyed. "Eat ye, O people, of the good things which God hath allowed you, and deprive not yourselves from His wondrous bounties" (Bahá'u'lláh 1976 277); "All that has been created is for man, who is at the apex of creation, and he must be thankful for the divine bestowals. All material things are for us, so that through our gratitude we may learn to understand life as a divine benefit" ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1918 134). Thus animal food is not forbidden in Bahá'í teachings. All foods are available for human consumption, though this permissiveness is mediated by health, ethical and ecological considerations that seem to uphold the value and desirability of vegetarianism. Meat is acknowledged to be a nutritious and even sometimes essential food, for example in convalescence.

> Meat is nourishing and containeth the elements of herbs, seeds and fruits; therefore sometimes it is essential for the sick and for the rehabilitation of health. There is no objection in the Law of God to the eating of meat if it is required. So if thy constitution is rather weak and thou findest meat useful, thou mayest eat it ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1984)

Nevertheless, several references confirm that it is undoubtedly possible to live without meat and that there will indeed come a time when this happens on a global scale.

> The food of the future will be fruit and grains. The time will come when meat will no longer be eaten. Medical science is only in its infancy, yet it has shown that our natural food is that which grows out of the ground. The people will gradually develop up to the condition of this natural food. (Grundy 1979)

There appears to be some ambiguity in the writings around the notion that meat is permissible. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that the deity determined the food of every living being and to eat contrary to that determination is not approved. As evidence of the naturalness

of vegetarianism he then discourses at length on the nature of animal and human teeth. Carnivorous animals have teeth, talons and claws that are specifically designed for meat-eating while grazing animals have teeth suitable for chewing on vegetable matter. Human teeth are designed to grind grain and cut fruit and vegetables, indicating that man's food is intended to be cereal and fruit and not meat.

> The human teeth, the molars, are formed to grind grain. The front teeth, the incisors, are for fruits, etc. It is, therefore, quite apparent according to the implements for eating that man's food is intended to be grain and not meat. When mankind is more fully developed, the eating of meat will gradually cease. ('Abdu'l-Bahá The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá During His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912 1982 171)

To demonstrate that health is not compromised by a vegetarian diet 'Abdu'l-Bahá cites the case of Indian Brahmins for whom non-meat eating does not diminish their "strength, power, vigour, outward senses or intellectual virtues" (Hornby 1988 295). 'Abdu'l-Bahá said on one occasion that delicious meats should be served at Naw Ruz. This has sometimes been taken literally as confirmation that meat-eating is indeed not prohibited in the Bahá'í faith. However it may be that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was using the word 'meat' in its broader usage to mean food in general, as distinct from drink.

A2.4 Do Bahá'í teachings on vegetarianism fall into the domain of law or ethical or social teachings?

Vegetarianism is not mentioned in Bahá'u'lláh's Book of Laws but is elaborated mostly in the writings and talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; specifically in addresses given during his visit to the United States and Canada in 1912 and recorded in the Promulgation of Universal Peace. The Universal House of Justice, in a letter to an individual believer states that 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said that in the future human beings will be vegetarians but abstention from eating meat is "Not a law of this Dispensation, the laws of God being attuned to the needs and possibilities of each age" (Universal House of Justice 1992).

A2.5 How are teachings on vegetarianism made evident in the discourse on food?

'Abdu'l-Bahá is clear that humans are equipped for eating a vegetarian diet and that fruits and grains are the 'natural' diet of mankind, and presumably therefore, more healthy. He is also convinced that the human future will be a vegetarian one. Why then present vegetarianism as something that is not compulsory in the present age? 'Abdu'l-Bahá's discourse on vegetarianism provides a good example of two Bahá'í principles in action. Firstly it embodies the idea of a progressive implementation of desirable practices over time. Vegetarianism will ultimately become the norm - but only when humans are advanced enough in their spiritual development that they are ready to forego meat. Secondly it illustrates the principle of individual search for truth; guidance is offered, but it is up to individuals to reach their own conclusions as to how they should act.

Until the Health and Healing Compilation was published there was little available in English to encourage vegetarianism (Universal House of Justice 1984). Nevertheless, interview participants showed a ready familiarity with teachings about vegetarianism. Three main themes emerged which echo those found in the sacred writings: vegetarianism is more natural and is healthier; vegetarianism is the way of the future; vegetarianism is an individual choice and there are good reasons to not prescribe it in law. The idea of vegetarianism being more 'natural' was supported by participants through direct references to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's discourse on human dentition. Philippe noted that "Although we don't have prohibitions in regard to eating meat the tendency is that we actually are non-meat eating creatures, just by observing the teeth". Helena explained her understanding of the writings on vegetarianism that "It's simply better for the body". Participants were quite clear on the status of the teachings in regard to vegetarianism. Kamal explained:

> It's not a law. It's not really a big issue you know. If a Bahá'í drinks alcohol, after a couple of warnings they take the voting right from him or her; because it is a law in the Bahá'í Faith. Smoking, it is something that is not prohibited - but it's not recommended; but as for being vegetarian it is just advice".

Other respondents agreed that it is totally up to the individual as to whether he or she wishes to eat meat or not, and it's not something that Bahá'ís should be pressuring each other about.

The fact that 'Abdu'l-Bahá referred to a vegetarian diet as being the diet of the future, to be fully adopted when humanity was ready for it, has led many Bahá'ís to simply proclaim that the time is not yet right, and that it is currently impractical. The interview participants agreed. Barbara summarised a recurrent theme. "Like mostly Bahá'ís will say, yeah, in the future we're going to be vegetarians, but it's just not that time right now. Where mankind is, we just don't have the capabilities to do that because we come from such broad backgrounds". Janet provided a practical illustration of this: "You know for instance the Canadians that live in the north here; it would kind of be impractical for them to be vegetarians". And Philippe explained why vegetarianism might not even be a good idea at all at present.

> We don't live in the social milieu in which this is actually a good idea. Vegetables, fruits all come from south of America; they're green, they don't taste like fruit and they certainly don't have all the nutrients of properly ripened fruit. Vegetables have had chemicals they use on the land. I mean a person being a vegetarian nowadays is really endangering their health!

Yet participants affirmed that things would inevitably change when conditions permitted. "He ('Abdu'l-Bahá) also said that fruit and nuts and greens are the food of the future, so that tells me where were headed". Janet foresaw a time when there would be enough new resources of protein that humans don't have to eat animals. There was a sense that vegetarianism was indeed becoming more common amongst both Bahá'ís and in the wider society, and especially amongst younger people. One participant reversed this

equation by suggesting that practising vegetarians might be more likely to be attracted to the faith, as it was a good fit with their existing values.

A2.6 How do the teachings on vegetarianism relate to contemporary scientific food & health discourse?

Contemporary with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Hereward Carrington in England produced a work entitled '"The natural food of man, being an attempt to prove from comparative anatomy, physiology, chemistry and hygiene, that the original, best and natural diet of man is fruit and nuts" (Carrington 1912). The idea that humans are naturally fruit eaters is a physiological 'proof' long favoured by vegetarians and one that continues to be promulgated in popular nutrition discourse. While meat was not part of the diet of early humans the adoption of dietary diversity led to the ability to colonise and adapt to different types of environments worldwide (Ungar and Teaford 2000). Undoubtedly humans have become omnivores, who are skilfully able to exploit a wide variety of food sources. The argument that vegetarianism is somehow 'natural' would appear to be difficult to sustain. It depends on a variety of biological essentialism that chooses an arbitrary point in time to fix what is 'proper' for always. It neglects the fact that humans continue to evolve and that the environments in which they live and make choices change significantly over time. Diets that were once appropriate can become maladaptive in changed circumstances.

While vegetarianism can be a deliberate choice, made for a variety of reasons, there are also cogent arguments that non-meat eating is primarily a consequence of want, not of choice, and that primates, including humans increase their dietary meat when it is economically feasible to do so (Hamilton and Busse 1975). The term 'meat-hunger' has been used to describe a supposed craving for meat especially amongst people living at subsistence level. However, in many human societies meat consumption is associated with wealth, prestige and power so that it is possible to make a social

argument for explaining the desirability of meat without invoking the slippery concept of 'naturalness'. The healthfulness or otherwise of vegetarian diets is hotly debated in the scientific nutrition literature. Dyer (1982) provides a useful bibliography.

A2.7 How does vegetarianism speak to the Bahá'í concept of justice

Vegetarianism, where it is a matter of choice versus custom, can be considered to be a liminal form of eating. The rejection of meat forms a kind of threshold that represents a crossing place from mainstream eating practices to a dietary pattern based on explicit values (spiritual or secular). Vegetarians, though far from constituting a homogenous group, do exhibit some of the characteristics of the liminal group as described by Turner. There is a sense of common identity, perhaps of communitas, that is not readily apparent when describing 'meat-eaters'. (There are vegetarian restaurants—but not carnivore or omnivore restaurants: vegetarian societies but not meat-eaters societies). Adopting vegetarian eating patterns marks a step on the Bahá'í journey toward justice. It provides the individual Bahá'í with opportunities for personal spiritual development, to meet personal ethical goals and improve personal health - and also (as will be discussed in more detail later) to contribute to a more compassionate and caring society through ethical treatment of animals and the environment. Janet expressed this sentiment, noting parallels between Bahá'í teachings and comments she attributed to Albert Einstein. "(He said) nothing will change the world more than the evolution to a vegetarian diet, something like that. So I do believe that's where we're headed, and that's kind of my way, in a very modest way of getting on what I feel is an inevitable band wagon. I think it's healthier for the earth and healthier for people".

A3 Alcohol avoidance

Alcohol is often treated as a category separate from food, though the two are commonly associated as complementary activities as in the phrase 'food and drink'. From a nutritional point of view alcohol is a type of food, in that it provides caloric energy to the body. An injunction against food consumption such as is found in religious fasting laws logically includes avoidance of alcohol. However, in a religious context avoidance of alcohol is generally related to properties other than its nutritional ones.

A3.1 How is alcohol related to health?

Alcohol consumption has effects on physical, mental and social health. Alcohol has effects of enormous range and complexity on the body, affecting virtually every organ system directly or indirectly. Over time it can lead to tissue degeneration and impaired physiological function such as seen in cirrhosis, or scarring, of the liver. Ingestion of large quantities of alcohol in a short time period can also result in alcohol poisoning as the body is unable to metabolise or excrete toxins fast enough, and in extreme cases, brain damage or even death may ensue. Prolonged over-consumption of alcohol produces a chemical dependency in the body - a condition known as alcoholism. In states of temporary inebriation or long-term alcoholism, mental function is negatively affected. Alcohol is also associated with social health. On the one hand, like food, it plays a part in sociability and hospitality; but excessive drinking can lead to anti-social consequences ranging from offensive behaviour to life-threatening acts. In Canada alcohol is a major cause of morbidity and is strongly associated with both intentional and unintentional injury, including suicide, homicide, motor vehicle crashes and drowning.

A3.2 How was alcohol conceived of in ideology and customary practices prevailing at the time of the Bahá'í Revelation?

Zubaida and Tapper (1994) review common linguistic and customary associations of food and drink in different Middle Eastern cultural contexts and question the adequacy of Western cultural categories (food, drink, eating) to translate indigenous Middle Eastern conceptions. In the English usage the word 'drink' often signifies alcohol - and is opposed to 'food' as a category. In Middle Eastern languages the categories are not so clear and drinking is not necessarily distinct from eating. For example, in Tehrani Persian 'khordan' is a single verb encompassing eating and drinking, while in Afghan Persian the categories are clearly distinguished. Also, tobacco smoking is closely linked with drinking in some Middle Eastern languages.

Wine drinking was common in the time of Muhammad. There are several references to wine in Surahs of the Qur'an that illustrate changing attitudes toward alcohol over time. In early revelations wine is acknowledged to have some benefit, but which is outweighed by harm (2:219); later, believers are exhorted not to pray while under the influence of intoxicants (4:4); and finally it is expressly prohibited as "an abomination of Satan's handiwork" (5:90). The latter, together with guidance found in the Hadith forms the basis for most modern Islamic interpretations which view alcohol as both morally and socially unacceptable. Wine was condemned as *haram* and prohibition of wine and spirits became a distinctive marker of the Muslim world by contrast with Christians and Jews. There has been a protracted debate on what wine is for Muhammad. Originally it may have referred only to date wine. Later, any alcoholic beverage was classified as wine in so much as they all intoxicate and obscure the faculty of reason. This was also the basis of later debates concerning attitudes to tea,

coffee,[26] tobacco, qat and harder drugs. It is worth noting though that some Muslims, notably Sufis, interpret the Qur'anic verses in other ways and do not prohibit wine. Sufi mystical imagery uses intoxication of wine as a metaphor for joy of losing personal identity and achieving unity with God.

Despite the Islamic prohibition, wine drinking remained common in the Middle East. In his account of a year amongst the Persians, Edward Granville Browne reveals the use of alcohol to be widespread (Browne 1912). Browne is entertained by Zoroastrians with tea, wine, brandy and kebabs. Wine and spirits played a great role in lives of Persian Zoroastrians, being lawful if not taken to excess. Zoroastrians, observed Browne, drank for good fellowship and taste. On the other hand the use and abuse of alcohol was unlawful to Muslims. Nevertheless, Browne's accounts amply demonstrate that alcohol was consumed by, at least some, Muslims. "The Muslim detests the taste of wine and spirits and drinks to get drunk. After each drink he makes a grimace of disgust, rinses mouth and eats lumps of sugar" (410). Describing dinner parties in Tehran, Browne says the guests are always offered Kalyans (water-pipes) and wine, or undiluted spirits (the latter being preferred), and they continue to smoke and drink intermittently during the whole of the evening. Thus wine seems to have been commonly imbibed - at least in the circles in which Browne moved if not more generally; for he also refers to meeting with some French travellers who couldn't obtain wine "because they didn't know where to go for it" (518).

A3.3. What do the Bahá'í sacred writings say about alcohol?

In the Bayán, the Báb forbade the use of alcohol. There is also a clear prohibition in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh of the consumption of alcoholic drinks. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

[26] Coffee consumption has been controversial at times though 16th century attempts to ban it proved impossible to enforce. While coffee is a symbol of hospitality in some Arab countries, it may be avoided by devout Muslims.

he states "It is inadmissible that man, who hath been endowed with reason, should consume that which stealeth it away. Nay, rather it behooveth him to comport himself in a manner worthy of the human station, and not in accordance with the misdeeds of every heedless and wavering soul" (K119). There are many other references which prohibit the use of wine and other intoxicating drinks and which describe the deleterious effect of such intoxication on the individual. For example:

> Regarding the use of liquor: According to the text of the Book of Aqdás, both light and strong drinks are prohibited. The reason for this prohibition is that alcohol leadeth the mind astray and causeth the weakening of the body. If alcohol were beneficial, it would have been brought into the world by the Divine creation and not by the effort of man. Whatever is beneficial for man existeth in creation. Now it hath been proved and is established medically and scientifically that liquor is harmful ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1984 247).

In another instance, using the example of what is evidently the Sikh community (though he does not name them directly) 'Abdu'l-Bahá links avoidance of intoxicating substances with superior strength, courage, health, beauty and comeliness. "Experience hath shown how greatly the renouncing of smoking, of intoxicating drink, and of opium, conducive to health and vigour, to the expansion and keenness of the mind and to bodily strength" (1978 150). Shoghi Effendi provides further guidance on this subject, describing the habit of drinking as a 'great misery' and a 'great evil'

> With regard to your first question on alcohol and drinking, Bahá'u'lláh, fully aware of the great misery that it bring about, prohibits it as He expressly states that everything that takes away the mind, or in other words makes one drunk, is forbidden. (Shoghi Effendi 1926 8-9)

3.4 Do Bahá'í teachings on alcohol fall into the domain of law or ethical or social teachings?

The prohibition against consumption of alcohol is an ordinance of Bahá'u'lláh. It is law. This is a strict prohibition and not just advice. "Under no circumstances should Bahá'ís drink. It is unambiguously forbidden in the Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh, that there is no excuse for them even touching it in the form of a toast, or in a burning plum pudding; in

fact, in any way" (Shoghi Effendi 1957). There is no ambivalence or room for interpretation.

A3.5 How are teachings on alcohol made evident in the Bahá'í discourse on food?

As noted earlier, the Bahá'í body should be protected against harmful habits which could compromise its healthfulness. Whilst smoking is merely discouraged, alcohol and drugs are definitely forbidden unless required for medical purposes. These substances, it is said, damage the mind as well as the body, and they also provide an unhealthy escape from the realities of life. Inebriated states are deemed to be undignified and absurd, lowering the station of man. If individuals lose control through addiction they act contrary to purpose of creation, which is to free themselves from binds of material world. Thus addiction-provoking behaviours hamper one's spiritual and moral development (Schaefer 1997).The health and social consequences of alcohol abuse are also recognized, primarily in the form of poverty and in the death toll due to drinking and driving. Dorri commented that from a health point of view: "Without alcohol, 99.9% of the problems are being solved. You're not going to have FAS babies and the thing is the effect of alcohol on the foetus is so much worse in the first few weeks of conception".

In guidelines prepared by the Universal House of Justice on the serving of alcohol drinks by Bahá'ís and Bahá'í Institutions, both the rules and the social implications of strict avoidance of alcohol are laid out (Universal House of Justice 1982).

- No Bahá'í institution should serve alcohol to non-Bahá'ís under any circumstances.
- If an individual Bahá'í entertaining an individual guest or a small group of guests as an official representative of the Bahá'í community, he should not serve alcohol in his own home, but must use his discretion whether or not to do so if the entertaining is taking place in a restaurant.
- No Bahá'í should serve alcohol at any function or reception given by him, such as a wedding reception or a party to which a number of people are invited.
- When a Bahá'í is privately entertaining a non-Bahá'í or a small group of guests in his own home, he must himself judge whether or not to serve alcohol. This will depend to a great degree on the customs of the country in which he is living, the individuals concerned, and the host's relationship to his guests. Obviously it is better for the Bahá'í not to serve alcohol if possible, but against this he must weigh the probable

reaction of the guest in the circumstances which prevail and in the particular situation. In some countries there would be no problem in failing to provide alcohol to a guest; in others it would be regarded as extremely peculiar and anti-social and would immediately raise a barrier to further contact. It is not desirable to make a major issue of the matter.

- When such private entertaining of an individual or small group of non-Bahá'ís taking place in a restaurant the same general principles as in point 4 above apply, except that in such a public place a failure to provide alcoholic drinks would be less easily understood than in a private home, and the Bahá'í must use his discretion accordingly.
- Alcohol must not be served in a restaurant or other business which is wholly owned by Bahá'ís.
- If a Bahá'í is employed by others in a job which involves the serving of alcohol, he is not obliged to change that employment. This is a matter left to each individual to decide in the light of his own conscience. Obviously such kinds of employment vary widely from bartending to serving in a grocery in which wine is retailed. If the job requires a great deal of involvement with the serving of alcohol it is better for the Bahá'í to obtain other employment if he can.

One of the interview participants faced these issues regularly. In the course of business he often found himself in situations where alcohol was a sociability factor. "When we go to lunch, some people order alcoholic beverages. I do not do that. Sometimes it is not towards benefit as far as professional side - you won't be part of that team. But I think for Bahá'ís, being a Bahá'í is the most important thing" (Kamal). Of course there are also social occasions when the Bahá'í is the guest rather than the host. Normative rules of hospitality and courtesy dictate that the guest accepts what is offered; but what if this offering includes alcohol? Interview participants reacted in different ways.

> Oh, it happens all the time and especially in (Country) because the gardens are just riotous; berries and fruits grow really well there and everybody makes wine out of stuff from their garden and nobody considers it alcohol – but it is! They say 'You must have some of our gooseberry wine' and we'd say; 'Well, we're Bahá'ís you know, we don't drink'. 'But this isn't really wine, you know.' So I didn't feel any compunction about turning that down. (Helena)

Alan had never drunk alcohol and was certain that he would refuse it if offered, whatever the circumstances, while Janet told a story that indicated more ambivalence.

> I've never been in a position where I felt I had to take a sip of wine or whatever, but I know that our friend was meeting with, I don't know, a king or something like that once. And he said he did drink some wine because there was some sort of toast and that was all that was there and he just

> felt that he needed to do that. But I've never been in that particular situation, but I suppose I would (drink) if I really felt like it would be offensive not to.

In making decisions about drinking, Kamal reinforced the basic Bahá'í principle of individual responsibility, explaining that even though the law is very strict, if someone really likes to drink alcohol they have the freedom to do so. Helena agreed, but drew a distinction between public and private circumstances. "Generally a LSA would not intrude into a believer's life unless the believer was being quite blatant. So it's a question of struggling with something and trying to get it under control yourself versus sitting in a bar and saying 'Well I'm a Bahá'í and I don't see anything wrong with drinking'!".

That administrative bodies are willing to step in is illustrated by a 1998 letter to the National Spiritual Assemblies of Africa, in which the Universal House of Justice draws attention to the balance between the need for progressive implementation of Bahá'u'lláh's laws and the dangers of non-implementation. It acknowledges that where drinking of alcohol is customary, believers must be given time to adapt to new ways, but regrets that the practice continues as it harms the good name of the faith in the eyes of non-Bahá'ís, and sets a bad example for others. The letter encourages continued education to ensure that the law is obeyed, but backs this up with the threat of suspension of administrative rights, including holding of office and voting, from those who continue to flagrantly disregard the ordinance.

A3.6 How do the teachings on alcohol relate to contemporary scientific food/health discourse?

Although from a nutritional standpoint alcohol is a source of energy and, to a small extent, nutrients it is not generally considered to be a positive contribution to daily nutritional requirements. However, contrary to the Bahá'í outlook, contemporary health advice, at least in the West, does not totally censure alcohol, but rather advises moderation. There are also medical claims that consumption of small amounts of

alcohol, for example red wine, may actually contribute to cardiovascular health. Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating suggests that for most adults, moderate drinking means no more than one drink a day (350ml beer; 150ml wine, 50ml liquor) and no more than seven drinks a week. More than four drinks on one occasion or more than fourteen drinks a week is a risk to health and safety. In addition pregnant and nursing women are advised to avoid alcohol. Concerns are expressed in terms of the association between alcohol consumption and chronic diseases such as cirrhosis and cancer, and the association of alcohol consumption with social problems such as violence. While health warnings about alcohol consumption are somewhat restrained, and while the drinking of alcohol is encouraged commercially as a social activity there are nevertheless profound concerns about the negative societal impacts of alcohol abuse. The involvement of alcohol in a high percentage of injuries due to driving or to violence has led to a gradual strengthening of social and legal sanctions against excessive drinking in many countries. Laws against drinking and driving in particular have recognised that alcohol impairs judgement. So while there is general agreement between Bahá'í teachings and contemporary scientific health opinion on the effects and consequences of alcohol consumption, responses diverge.[27]

A3.7 How does alcohol avoidance speak to the Bahá'í concept of justice?

Avoiding alcohol is a command of the Bahá'í god and following divine laws is an essential component of living justly. Without full control of one's faculties it is not possible to focus all one's energies on 'positive living'. If individuals lose control through inebriation or addiction they act contrary to purpose of creation which is to free themselves from the binds of the material world. Thus addiction-provoking behaviours

[27] This is a reversal of the situation around smoking which attracts uncompromising condemnation from the modern health establishment, but which is merely discouraged in Bahá'í teachings.

hamper one's spiritual and moral development. Huddleston argues that even taking the occasional drink makes its consumption socially acceptable and that therefore it should be totally eschewed. Here is another example of Hanson's dictum that the private actions of individuals have an incremental effect in promoting justice in society. If people follow the Bahá'í example and avoid alcohol, the result may well be decreased social problems and conflicts, and hence more just social relationships. Moreover, Huddleston says, alcohol users are supporting a global wastage of resources which could be diverted to more constructive uses (1980 52). How scarce resources are used has a profound impact on the conditions in which people live and the relationships between them. Expenditures that contribute to equity may be seen to be more just than those that entrench or widen disparities. Any use of resources also carries an opportunity cost in that those resources cannot be used for other purposes that may have more positive societal results. This is the essence of Huddleston's argument. Of course, the same could be said for many, if not most, things, depending on one's preferences and values. For example Susan George (1986), in her seminal work on international development, put the spotlight on golf courses as an outrageous use of precious land and water resources.

A4 Food and Healing

A4.1 How is food related to healing?

The idea that food is an important means of healing can be traced back in many cultural traditions to ancient times when there was no real distinction between food and medicine. In the West, beginning in the nineteenth century the relationship between food and healing was put on a scientific basis with the identification of active ingredients such as vitamins and minerals in food and their role in maintaining and repairing body systems. However, with the advent of scientific thinking, food and medicine became

progressively seen as separate categories and food was relegated to the subservient role. Notwithstanding the fact that nutritional therapy is now an indispensable component of the treatment of many diseases, Western healing has come to depend more and more on medical interventions involving drugs and surgery.

A4.2 How was the relationship between food and healing conceived of in ideology and customary practices prevailing at the time of the Bahá'í Revelation?

The concept of balance prominent in Bahá'í writings on healing is familiar from ancient medical systems such as Greek humoural theory, the Indian ayurvedic system and the Chinese yin-yang continuum. It persists in Indo-Mediterranean and Latin American concepts of hot and cold bodily states and as part of popular medical wisdom in the West. Greek humoural theory held that there were four bodily elements each of which had particular characteristics.[28] Medical practice consisted of understanding the normal mixture of humours or complexion of a person, the complexion of their illness and the method of restoring harmony in the body. Humoural theory and practice was spread widely by Christian, Jewish and Muslim physicians including the tenth century Arab physician, Avicenna, who wrote treatises that formed the basis for centuries of medical practice (Ullmann 1997 xi).

While the Qur'an itself contains little or no explicit medicine, Sunni and Shi'ite Hadith writers compiled medical wisdom attributed to Muhammad, though these Hadith too are relatively few, and frequently contradictory. Likewise statements on medical matters and bodily health attributed to the Twelver Shi'is were compiled. The 'Golden Treatise', which is a discourse on medical cures and good health, is attributed to the eighth Imam, 'Ali al-Rida, and commentaries on this treatise were translated into Persian and Urdu. According to Fananapazir and Lambden (1992) there also exists a treatise

[28] Blood (hot and wet); phlegm (cold and wet); black bile (cold and dry); yellow bile (hot and dry).

entitled "The Book of Prophetic Medicine according to the View of the Household of the Prophet" which is attributed to Jabir ibn Hayyan (c721 – 815 CE), and upon which Bahá'u'lláh drew for his own medical pronouncements.

Ebrahimnejad (2000) shows how a unique blend of Qur'anic and Hippocratic medical principles and practice emerged in Persia that made room for both folk healers and professional physicians and that employed astrology, religion and magic as well as therapeutic principles. Attempts to introduce 'modern medicine' continually came up against the self-interest of those who wanted to cling to older theories and the result was a syncretism rather than replacement of one system with the other. In using the language of allopathic medicine and exhorting the virtues of consulting qualified physicians, Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá were therefore employing terminology and concepts familiar and acceptable to people of the day.

A4.3 What do the Bahá'í sacred writings say about food and healing?

Bahá'u'lláh's 'Tablet to the Physician' contains specific teachings regarding medicine, health, and the nature of spiritual healing that echo medical maxims and advice from both Greek and Islamic medical traditions. In it, Bahá'u'lláh praises medicine as the most meritorious of all sciences, enumerates some basic prescriptions for good health and offers dietary advice (See A1.3). He stresses that a prerequisite for good health is contentment and that emotions such as grief, sorrow, jealousy and anger are detrimental to bodily health. He instructs the physician first to turn to God for assistance, then to prescribe the remedy—for surely the physician who has recognized Bahá'u'lláh and is filled with his love, will exert such an influence that a mere visit will restore health to the patient (Taherzadeh 1987; Fananapazir and Lambden 1992).

Shoghi Effendi cautioned that the 'Tablet to the Physician' was addressed to a man who was a student of the 'old type' of healing prevalent in the East and familiar with the terminology used in those days. Thus, he says, Bahá'u'lláh addresses him in terms used by the medical men of those days; terms that are quite different from those used by modern medicine, so that one would have to have a deep knowledge of this former school of medicine to understand the questions Bahá'u'lláh was elucidating (Shoghi Effendi 1945). He elsewhere described the Tablet as not containing much scientific information but having some interesting advice for keeping healthy (Shoghi Effendi 1922 21). 'Abdu'l-Bahá expands on Bahá'í teachings on health and healing in 'Some Answered Questions', in a number of his talks, and in some pilgrims' notes. He identifies four kinds of healing without medicine; two material and two spiritual ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1981 254). There are also material forms of treatment involving the use of medicine and, most especially, of food, which has properties as yet unappreciated.

> The science of medicine is still in a condition of infancy: it has not reached maturity; but when it has reached this point, cures will be performed by things which are not repulsive to the smell and taste of man; that is to say by aliments, fruits and vegetables which are agreeable to the taste and have an agreeable smell. ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1981 257)

There are numerous references to the concept of homeostatic balance and the vital role of food in maintaining and restoring equilibrium. A typical formulation occurs in 'Some Answered Questions'. "For instance, there is a decrease in one of the constituent ingredients of the body of man, and in another there is an increase; so the proportion of the equilibrium is disordered, and disease occurs [...]. When by remedies and treatments the equilibrium is re-established, the disease is banished (258). 'Abdu'l-Bahá continues with a specific example. "So, if the saccharine constituent increases, the health is impaired; and when the doctor forbids sweet and starchy foods the saccharine constituent diminishes, the equilibrium is re-established, the disease is driven off." The point is driven home that all the elements that are combined in man, exist also in

vegetables. "Therefore if one of the constituents which compose the body of man diminishes, and he partakes of foods in which there is much of that diminished constituent, then the equilibrium will be established, and a cure will be obtained". Finally, the pre-eminence of food as a response to healing is reasserted. "So long as the aim is the readjustment of the constituents of the body, it can be effected either by medicine or by food. When the science of medicine reaches perfection, treatment will be given by foods, aliments, fragrant fruits, and vegetables, and by various waters, hot and cold in temperature ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1981 260-1).

A4.4 Do Bahá'í teachings on food and healing fall into the domain of law or ethical or social teachings?

These teachings are not authoritative law and are open to individual interpretation in their meaning and application. The Universal House of Justice has pointed out that no specific school of nutrition or medicine has been associated with Bahá'í teachings, but rather that there are certain guidelines, indications and principles that may be useful. A statement issued on behalf of Shoghi Effendi cautioned that: "It is premature to try and elaborate on the few general references to health and medicine made in our Holy Scriptures" (Universal House of Justice 1978).

A4.5 How are teachings on food and healing made evident in the Bahá'í discourse?

Notwithstanding the above, it is nevertheless clear that Bahá'í teachings give food a pre-eminent role not only in maintaining health, but also as the preferred means for treatment of disease. Interview participants were familiar with the teachings on the relationship between food and healing, including those found in Tablet to the Physician, and this was reflected in their everyday health practices. Philippe, who otherwise tended to minimise the importance of food as an issue, enthused:

> But the most exciting thing that I think about food, honestly, is its healing properties. One is its energy force that it gives you to function but the other one is the healing of the mind and the body. That's pretty powerful.

Janet drew directly on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words to describe her own approach. "There's nothing in the teachings to prohibit you from using the pharmaceutical, but I would try and find a food first, as an individual, because I'm more comfortable with that and I know of this teaching and I believe in this teaching". Later she added: "Every day I take B complex, I take vitamin E, and I take evening primrose oil, and that's it, and if I feel like I'm getting a cold I take extra vitamin C and Echinacea." Bahá'ís who become sick are instructed to seek the advice of a competent physician, and to obey the medical orders they are given. This reflects Bahá'í teachings on obedience to authority, and it holds even if one is oneself an eminent physician. Physicians, however, are not the only source of medical advice. Janet described a long-standing family commitment to naturopathy, and Helena also commented that naturopathy seemed to be in harmony with Bahá'í ideas about healing. Danesh (1979) perceives a threat in the rise of pseudo scientific and anti-scientific medical thinking and says the preservation and advancement of medical knowledge is a responsible use of available arts and sciences pending the arrival of the world order of Bahá'u'lláh. Some would place naturopathy in this category. However, in reference to alternate healing methods Shoghi Effendi declared "One is free to investigate new things and use them if they prove of real value and no harm" (Shoghi Effendi 1952 14).

While most respondents spoke about food as a material means of healing, the spiritual dimension was captured in a comment from Janet.

> At the bakery it's interesting too, because she says she bakes with love, and I believe her. I think it does affect the food there, I feel the food at the bakery - the bread we buy - is healing bread. I really do.

This story recalls the Sufi concept of 'baraka', the blessing power of God. Due to its consecrated nature, bread is traditionally imbued with baraka (Seidel 2000). According to Smith (1987 84) there is still current a belief held by some Iranian Bahá'ís

concerning healing properties of naibal (sugar loaf) placed in Bahá'í shrines by them specifically to acquire baraka.

A4.6 How do the teachings relate to contemporary scientific food/health discourse

Changes in diet bear a complex relationship to internal homeostatic balance so that there are inherent difficulties in linking a specific dietary substance to a specific bodily condition. Ingested foods must be broken down into simpler chemical components, absorbed in the body and transported to cellular sites to be used or stored. Nevertheless the concept of 'balance' has remained central to nutrition teaching, drawing on both folk wisdom and rationalistic scientific research, and expressed in culturally specific ways.

Whereas Western health reformers and modern scientific health practitioners alike have often placed into opposition the concepts of natural and scientific knowledge of food, 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not do so; rather he endorses both approaches. The injunction to seek the best that medical science has to offer at any time would imply that newer knowledge of the role and pathways of food in maintaining health and combating disease should be accepted by Bahá'ís. While contemporary practitioners of popular nutrition continue to promote old ideas, Bahá'ís are specifically obliged to consult (doctors) well trained in the medical sciences. Ironically this newer medical knowledge, resting exclusively on rationalistic principles, has to a large extent undermined the messages of 'naturalness' and simplicity contained in Bahá'í writings. Furthermore modern scientific medical training pays scant attention to nutrition and the role of food in health and disease. Bahá'í teachings recognise this present shortcoming, but nevertheless look forward to a time when all illness will be treated by food.

While 'Abdu'l-Bahá looks to the future to establish the true value of food in treating illness, the idea of diet as panacea is a familiar one that persisted through the

centuries while medicine and dietetics remained interwoven and largely interchangeable. In eighteenth century Britain, George Cheyne wrote in An Essay on Regimen: " It is diet alone, proper and specific diet, in Quantity, Quality and Order, which is the sole universal remedy and the only Means known to medical Art" (Cheyne 1740). Sylvester Graham and John Kellogg in the U.S. were nineteenth century apostles of 'the regimen'; and a conviction that correct diet promises unlimited health benefits persists in the 'alternative' nutrition and health movements and literature of today. The scientific establishment is much more cautious in its approach and claims, but it is interesting in the light of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words to note that right now we are seeing a tremendous explosion of scientific as well as commercial interest in 'functional foods' and 'nutraceuticals'. Functional foods are foods that are deemed to have specific effects in the body beyond their basic nutritional value. For example, fish contains omega-3 fatty acids believed to have a role in preventing cardiovascular disease, while many fruits and vegetables contain phytochemicals that may reduce cancer risk. Dorri made a direct connection between the Bahá'í teachings and modern nutritional science.

> For example, I was just reading a couple of weeks ago about the Báb. The Báb's followers were encouraged to drink tea – and it took me a while then it just clicked; because now they are finding so many antioxidants in tea. There's all this research on antioxidants and keeping your youth longer. Maybe he had this divine knowledge.

Nutraceuticals, sometimes known as 'medical foods' are biochemically active food components that can be isolated and used in a therapeutic way. It is ironic that these latest developments in food science provide a sort of endorsement for what older traditions and popular belief have maintained all along: food is medicine.

A4.7 How does food and healing speak to the Bahá'í concept of justice?

The relationship between health and justice was previously discussed. In as much food is seen to be the primary means of maintaining and restoring health, it

contributes to the achievement of this justice. It is just to prefer food as the route to health because this is what Bahá'u'lláh commanded. It might also be argued that treating disease through food is a more effective use of resources than drugs and other medical therapies. Following the line of argument used for alcohol avoidance, choosing food over drugs decreases demands on scarce resources that could be better utilised elsewhere. Given that drug consumption is highest in populations that already enjoy the best health, the opportunity costs are magnified.

As a healing substance food is more than just a collection of nutrients. It is a vehicle for restoring balance to an out-of-kilter system. It is medicine and yet, not-medicine. It is a liminal substance that crosses the boundary between balance and dis-ease; it restores harmony to that which is disrupted.

B Commensality

Food sharing is an almost universal medium for expressing fellowship; it embodies values of hospitality, duty, giving, sacrifice and compassion. Giving, receiving and sharing food are gestures of friendship and symbols of trust and interdependency. The sharing of food has been a common theme in religious traditions and both the giving and acceptance of food are often identified as religious duties. Commensality means eating together, or more broadly signifies food as fellowship, and has multiple dimensions. In this section I examine the concept of hospitality as a personal, social and spiritual practice, and describe commensal occasions and relationships in Bahá'í organisational and ritual life.

B1 Hospitality and Courtesy

B1.1 How is food involved in hospitality and courtesy?

Hospitality in the form of food given to guests has been admired as a virtue throughout history. Hospitality originated in meeting the needs of travellers; traditionally it was a kind of sanctuary and the host's responsibility was primarily for the safety of the guest. Subsequently the concept has broadened to embrace elements of both duty and pleasure. Hospitable motives include; desire for company; desire for pleasure of entertaining; desire to please others; desire to meet other's needs (compassion); allegiance to duties to be hospitable; and ulterior motives (Telfer 1996 206-07). Hospitality is given to one's own circle of friends and acquaintances or to strangers; in the latter case it may be either 'good Samaritan' hospitality or provided as part of a business transaction as for example at a hotel or guesthouse.[29]

Courtesy or courtoisie were early terms for good behaviour, or what was deemed proper conduct by members of the courtly classes of Europe from the sixteenth century on. Table manners, which required the exercise of self-restraint, were a means of showing consideration for others and at the same time demonstrating one's own knowledge of social rules. They were in effect mediators of non-violent social interaction; ways to avoid giving offence and to demonstrate accomplishment. Deliberately flouting the rules could be interpreted as an act of aggression just as much as the wielding of a knife. The evolution of European manners particularly as they relate to food and eating is treated extensively by Elias (1978), while more recently Margaret Visser (1991) has analysed the significance of mealtime etiquette.

[29] Some might argue that when services are paid for, it is not hospitality - something which the modern 'hospitality industry' would undoubtedly dispute.

B1.2 How was the relationship between food, hospitality and courtesy conceived of in ideology and customary practices prevailing at the time of the Bahá'í Revelation?

In Islam, hospitality is regarded as a sacred duty. The prophet Muhammad exalted the virtues of hospitality and commended believers to accept food that was offered, for to refuse such food was to refuse divine bounty and to neglect an opportunity to honour a noble act. So important was this principle of courteous acceptance of hospitality that it was to be followed even if it meant breaking a religious fast. In what John Walbridge calls an era of Bedouin lawlessness, hospitality became an important way of mediating relationships and defusing potential threats (Walbridge 1996 206). In the Sufi tradition particularly, hospitality assumed tremendous and enduring importance as seen today in the form of feeding stations in Sufi centres and at Moulid (saint day) festivals. In Sufism *adab* is a form of behaviour which creates the conditions in which the attributes of God may be clearly reflected (Seidel 2000).[30] Significantly the word adab is derived from the Arabic for 'to invite' or 'to gather for a banquet'.

In his account of late nineteenth century travels in Persia, Edward Granville Browne reports that tea was the pre-eminent material vehicle of hospitality, along with sherbet and water-pipe. Gifts of sacrificed lambs were given to him as an acknowledgement of his distinguished status, while serving of melons - which were a regional specialty, symbolized hospitality and friendship (Browne 1912). Browne also illustrates well the workings of courtesy and hospitality at a Persian dinner party in Teheran. He comments that amongst the urban elite dining habits had been Europeanized, with the use of chairs, tables, knives and forks - practices which had not then reached the provinces. After preliminary welcomes and offers of drinks:

> Dishes of 'djil' (pistachio nuts and the like) are handed round or placed near the guests; and from time to time a spit of kebabs (pieces of broiled meat) enveloped in a folded sheet of the flat breads called nan-i-sangak, is brought in. [...] The guests squat down on their knees and heels round

[30] Seidel provides an excellent extended exploration of hospitality in the Sufi discourse.

> the cloth, the host placing him whom he desires most to honour on his right side at the upper end of the room (i.e. opposite the door). At the lower end the musicians and minstrels take their places and all, without further delay commence an attack on the viands. The consumption of food progresses rapidly, but with little conversation, for it is not usual in Persia to linger over meals, or to prolong them by talk, which is better conducted while the mouth is not otherwise employed. If the host wishes to pay special honour to a guest he picks out and places in his mouth some particularly delicate morsel. In about a quarter of an hour from the commencement of the banquet most of the guests have finished and washed their hands by pouring water over them from a metal ewer into a plate of the same material, brought round by servants for that purpose. They then rinse out their mouths, roll down their sleeves again, partake of a final pipe, and, unless they mean to stay for the night, depart homewards (119f).

In Browne's account, the attention to proper procedure and correct behaviour surrounding dining is reminiscent of the account given by sociologist Norbert Elias of the development and function of table manners in Europe from the sixteenth century on (Elias 1978). Whether, as in Europe, 'courtly' standards of etiquette became gradually embedded in standards of general behaviour amongst ordinary Persians is beyond the scope of this thesis.

B1.3 What do the Bahá'í sacred writings say about hospitality and courtesy?

Following in the Middle Eastern tradition Bahá'ís embraced the importance of hospitality as a means to fostering fellowship and unity. However, Walbridge (1996 212) points out that Bahá'ís are cautioned by their administrative institutions not to presume on the hospitality of others and not to let others take undue advantage of their own hospitality. This injunction is reminiscent of Muhammad's counsel that hospitality which extends beyond three days becomes charity. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh specifies that the intercalary days preceding Naw Ruz are to be set aside for hospitality and giving of gifts. "It behooveth the people of Bahá, throughout these days, to provide great cheer for themselves, their kindred and, beyond them, the poor and needy" (K16). Shoghi Effendi describes Naw Ruz itself as a '"Feast of hospitality and rejoicing"(1973 30). In

some religious traditions food is directly connected to places of worship; for example, at Sikh temples, *langars* are communal kitchens where all can eat together in a gesture of hospitable solidarity. In contrast, Shoghi Effendi specified that kitchen facilities were not needed as part of the design of Houses of Worship, as no food was to be served in the temple which were purely for prayer (1922 243).

Bahá'u'lláh called courtesy the 'prince of virtues' saying that those who do not subordinate their pleasure to the legitimate interests of others act selfishly (1988 7:15). Courtesy is part of the larger idea of refinement, the Arabic word for which is 'latafah'. It has a wide range of meanings including elegance, gracefulness, cleanliness, civility, politeness, gentleness, delicacy and graciousness, as well as being subtle, refined, sanctified and pure (Bahá'u'lláh 1993 n74). A specific reference to refined behaviour regarding food occurs in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

> Take heed lest, when partaking of food, ye plunge your hands into the contents of bowls and platters. Adopt ye such usages as are most in keeping with refinement. He, verily, desireth to see in you the manners of the inmates of Paradise in His mighty and most sublime Kingdom. Hold ye fast unto refinement under all conditions, that your eyes may be preserved from beholding what is repugnant both to your own selves and to the dwellers of Paradise. (K46)

The use of communal bowls for eating was commonplace. In English, 'plunging' connotes a rude or robust approach to eating. By cautioning against plunging hands into food bowls, Bahá'u'lláh seems to be suggesting a standard of etiquette different from common practice, otherwise he would hardly need to comment. His reference to removing from sight what is 'repugnant' is a close echo of Elias's thesis that in medieval Europe the 'threshold of repugnance' increased as a concomitant of 'civilised' behaviour.

B1.4 Do Bahá'í teachings on hospitality and courtesy fall into the domain of law or ethical or social teachings?

Hospitality and courtesy are clearly important virtues to be acquired and cultivated. They are part of ethical conduct and are not legal requirements as such.

B1.5 How are teachings on hospitality and courtesy made evident in the Bahá'í discourse on food?

A story is told of a visitor to Akka who hesitated when Bahá'u'lláh had tea served. Bahá'u'lláh said: "The meaning of offering a person tea is that he should drink it". That is guests should accept food offered to them; to refuse is to risk offence. Yet there are occasions when food offered may present a moral or health challenge to the recipient. In the case of medical reasons there should be no compunction, Bahá'ís are told, in refusing inappropriate foods (Universal House of Justice 1977a). Otherwise they should be guided by the two principles of moderation and courtesy in the way they express their opinions and in deciding whether they should refuse food offered to them or request special foods. Janet described this dilemma:

> I still eat chicken, I eat fish, and beef. Pork is the only thing that I won't eat, kind of no matter what, although I must say if I was out to dinner with people I don't know and they serve me beef and it was in their home, I would make a judgement call. I did eat pork not too long ago because I was in that situation and I just thought it would be too rude not to eat it, so I did eat it, but I didn't enjoy it, I ate it out of courtesy. If I thought the people would feel, wouldn't be hurt, if I refused to eat it, I wouldn't eat it, but I really felt in this case that it would hurt the host's feelings, so I did eat it.

The importance of food hospitality was very evident in the conversations of all the interview participants. Barbara described a busy household in which food assumed a key role in enacting Bahá'í principles.

> I never know how many people will be eating in my house; sometimes there'll be 15-20 people for supper 4 nights running (and) they'll all be eating at different times. So part of the whole hospitality of a family is that food is always open and available to whoever comes. And for me that is part of the writings where Bahá'u'lláh has said that we must be hospitable to all; to stranger and friend alike.

Being aware of and striving to meet the needs of family and guests alike was a crucial element of this hospitality, and one which connected hospitality to the Bahá'í ideal of service to others.

> So if I invite people over I'm always aware of what their nutritional needs are; I always ask if they're allergic to anything. I'm always aware of peoples healing requirements are or how they eat, so it's very easy for me to adapt anything to anybody. I'm very comfortable doing that: I feel that it's a service to my friends.

Sometimes though, customary social norms of hospitality give rise to anxiety where they conflict with other Bahá'í principles. The concept of simplicity in eating described earlier may conflict with social expectations of hospitality that expect more elaborate provisions. Having described his everyday approach to simple eating, Kamal stated that this holds true even when guests are invited.

> Even though there's a lot of hospitality - still we'll have only one type of food. Sometimes (my wife) mentions this is really rude, we have to have a couple of different foods. I said, OK, you know, so it's not 100% simple - but it's toward that. Always we shoot for the best; we don't make ten different kinds of food. We shoot for one, and we make two.

Treating guests courteously and being fully engaged with them was viewed as being more truly hospitable than worrying about the number of food dishes on the table.

B1.6 How do the teachings relate to contemporary scientific food/health discourse?

Courtesy and hospitality are not concepts used in scientific nutrition discourse. Nevertheless the practical application of these virtues may be vital to achieving desirable nutritional outcomes for vulnerable populations. For example, the all-embracing hospitality of the soup kitchen table helps to ensure that access to food is extended to marginalised people, and thus contributes to individual food security.

B1.7 How does hospitality and courtesy speak to the Bahá'í concept of justice?

Like Sufis, Bahá'ís strive through their thoughts, words and actions to emulate the divine attributes in the world of the flesh. To do so is to act with justice. Above, I noted the strong connection in Sufism between just living and hospitality; I suggest that a similar relationship exists for Bahá'ís. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas contains many exhortations to Bahá'ís to distinguish themselves through their good deeds and conduct. Hospitality and

courtesy are two facets of this sort of praiseworthy behaviour. Hospitality is a way of breaking down barriers and of bringing people together - something which is specifically enjoined on Bahá'ís as a strategy to counter prejudice. Bahá'u'lláh admonished believers to associate with others, for it is in such association that barriers of prejudice and suspicion may be overcome. 'Abdu'l-Bahá also said that hospitality was a means to reduce tension between nations. At table, if people fight it is with words, not weapons. And talk paves the way to understanding, reconciliation, peace and justice.

The sharing of food, whether it be through customary hospitality, formal protocol, or the hospitality of strangers - what Cathy Campbell calls 'open commensality' of the extended table, is a way of bringing people together, promoting understanding and contributing to social justice and unity (2003 85). As described in Chapter One, rules on who eats together, and who gives food to and accepts food from whom, are powerful markers of group identity based on exclusion of those who "don't belong". Open commensality, marked by unbounded hospitality erases those boundaries in 'an etiquette of inclusion' (88). While she speaks from a Christian perspective, Campbell's observations resonate strongly with Bahá'í beliefs and praxis. The hospitality of the table, she says, is not simply a metaphor; it provides a real place of connection, trust and openness and in this way "enacts a different basis for human community" (95). The Bahá'í belief that it is through the practical everyday actions of individuals that justice is created accords well with this sentiment. There are few better ways to disarm prejudice and dissent and to strengthen the ties between people than through sharing meals.

B2 Feasts and celebrations

B2.1 What is the nature and purpose of feasts and celebrations?

While food may be provided to specific individuals as a gesture of hospitality or act of charity, it is also commonly shared in fellowship in the communal context of a

feast. The word feast denotes a special occasion, commonly public, on which food is consumed of a different quality and quantity to that of everyday meals. In many places the feast is a community event with no exclusive guest list; everyone is welcome. In general, foods used for feasting are scarce; of high quality; often expensive; difficult and time-consuming to prepare. That is, they have high status and are definitely different to everyday fare (Fieldhouse 1995 193). One typology of feasts divides them into four categories. Ecofests celebrate astronomical or seasonal events and are frequently associated with preliterate or pagan rituals which were designed to ensure control of the food supply. Theofests celebrate religious events and are often wedded to ecofest predecessors; for example, Christmas celebrates the birth of Christ and also the winter solstice. Most religions hold regular feast days to mark significant events in the history of the faith or to celebrate important seasonal occasions such as spring planting or autumn harvest. Many festivals had an agrarian origin, but as they became associated with particular events or deities they ceased to be seasonal as such. As well, new festivals were instituted which had none of the agrarian rationale of earlier celebrations; instead, they celebrated national, local and political occasions. These may be labelled, as a third group, secular festivals. A fourth category of festival embraces personal rituals; into this grouping can be placed birthdays and anniversaries, together with rites of passage such as weddings and funerals.

The sharing of food or meals is commonly part of religious rituals, where its liminality allows it function as a spiritual symbol - an offering to the gods perhaps, at the same time it fulfils a material need. For example food appears as an offering in Zoroastrian rituals such as Yasna and Afrinigan (Fieldhouse 2002a), and in Hindu ceremonies (Toomey 1994); in both cases the food is commonly shared among worshippers following the ceremony, or distributed to the needy in the wider community.

B2.2 How was commensality conceived of in ideology and customary practices prevailing at the time of the Bahá'í Revelation, and what was the nature of feasts and celebrations?

Speaking of the situation in Persia at the time of Bahá'u'lláh's appearance 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that people and tribes were separated by hatred and violent strife so that they would not come together for any purpose other than war: "They would not partake of the same food, or drink of the same water; association and intercourse were impossible" (The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá During His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912 1982 129). During Bábi times, some disciples believed that Islamic law had been abrogated by the Báb and therefore they thought of most Shi'is as unbelievers. They and their products were to be avoided as ritually impure; food from their bazaars was to be purified before it could be eaten (Smith 1987 36). The concept of purity and impurity (or cleanliness and uncleanliness) had strong roots in Zoroastrian and Islamic culture as well as being an important part of Jewish food laws.[31] The idea that impurity was contagious was firmly established, leading to an emphasis on the importance both of personal physical cleanliness and avoidance of pollution through unclean things - including food. Bahá'u'lláh abolished the idea of ritual impurity as it pertained to either material objects or to non-believers. "God hath, likewise, as a bounty from His presence, abolished the concept of uncleanliness whereby divers things and people have been held to be impure" (K75). This created new possibilities for social intercourse.

Calendar feasts were an important feature of Persian life. Theo-fests marked important dates on the religious calendar while eco-fests were associated with seasonal events. For example, the celebration of Naw Ruz (New Year) at the time of the spring equinox was a long-established Zoroastrian custom that was embraced and encouraged

[31] For a full discussion see M. Douglas, Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo (Harmonsworth: Penguin Books, 1970).

by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The end of the Islamic fast of Ramadan was celebrated with prayers and with feasting in a festival called 'Id-ul-Fitr, at which everyone was "God's guest". 'Id al-adha, or the feast of sacrifice took place at the end of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. All adult male Muslims who were so able were required to sacrifice a lamb, goat or cow. Islamic prescriptions require that the sacrificial meat be divided into three equal portions; one for the family, one for friends, relatives and neighbours and one for charity. The feast was derived from events in Jewish history and was held in remembrance of God's mercy in allowing Abraham to sacrifice a ram instead of his son, Ishmael.

In addition, personal feasts such as at wedding ceremonies were a common part of everyday life. Walbridge (1996) comments that banquets and shared meals were an important part of the activities that surrounded the person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá , at home and during his travels. The meals provided to Bahá'í pilgrims in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's house were a means of uniting the visitors who came from different countries and cultures. Often the visitors themselves hosted banquets, and early Bahá'ís often mention these shared meals in accounts of their pilgrimages.[32]

B2.3 What do the sacred writings say about feasts and celebrations?

Commensality in Bahá'í teaching and practice takes two main forms. The first is as part of a formalised administrative community meeting known as the Nineteen Day Feast. The second is by way of informal community gatherings to celebrate holy days in the Bahá'í calendar. Each is discussed in turn below.

Nineteen Day Feast

The Nineteen Day Feast is the name given to the monthly meeting of Bahá'í Local Spiritual Assemblies, and encompasses elements of worship, administrative

[32] See for example, R. Wilhelm, S. Cobb and G. Coy, In His Presence: Visits to "Abdu'l-Bahá (Los Angeles: Kalimat Press, 1989).

business and social fellowship. The feast is held every nineteen days in each Bahá'í community, usually on the night preceding the first day of each Bahá'í month. In contrast to the usual meaning of feasts as described above, the Bahá'í 'Feast' has a very particular meaning. It originates with the Báb in the Arabic Bayán, where there is a command to entertain nineteen people every nineteen days, even if the only thing one is able to provide is water. Bahá'u'lláh confirms this duty in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: "Verily, it is enjoined upon you to offer a feast, once in every month, though only water be served, for God hath purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through both heavenly and material means" (K57). 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote that the Bahá'í Feast carried on the ancient religious obligation to display hospitality and to be generous with food and he stressed the important role of the Feast in increasing the unity of Bahá'í communities.

> It is my hope that this feast will be given on one day out of every nineteen, for it bringeth you closer together; it is the very well-spring of unity and loving-kindness! In every cycle and dispensation, the feast hath been favoured and loved, and the spreading of a table for the lovers of God hath been considered a praiseworthy act. (1978 89-90)

The host was to personally serve the guests, assure their comfort and show kindness to all. If arranged in this manner, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says, the supper is the "Lord's Supper", for "The result is the same result and the effect is the same effect" (1915 468-9). At first, the Feast was purely a social occasion, often being the only opportunity for Bahá'ís to meet and share fellowship, as they did not necessarily know each other as private citizens. Early Feasts in Canada were characterised by small numbers, lack of administrative business, and the presence of non-Bahá'ís who were "well-known" in the community (Van den Hoonaard 1996 160). The subsequent development of the Feast beyond a purely personal occasion was guided and encouraged by `Abdu'l-Bahá, who made clear that the Feast was to be a devotional occasion, with prayers and readings in addition to the meal, creating of an atmosphere in which believers would find themselves spiritually restored.

Whereas early Feasts were attended by anyone who so wished, Shoghi Effendi indicated that the Feast was intended only for the members of the Bahá'í community (including children of Bahá'ís). Non-Bahá'ís are not permitted to attend the business and devotional sessions but visitors should be received hospitably at the social portion of the Feast. Feasts hosted by a Local Spiritual Assembly are open to Bahá'ís from other communities and no believer in good standing may be excluded from a Feast.

Calendrical Celebrations

The Báb established a new calendar which later became the Bahá'í calendar. It is based on nineteen months of nineteen days in length with a day running from sunset to sunset. Intercalary days are added between the eighteenth and nineteenth month to adjust to the solar year. Each day and each month is named; the first day of each month is known as Bahá and the first month of the Bahá'í year is also named Bahá. The first day of this month is thus the Bahá'í New Year, known as Naw Ruz; it was ordained by the Báb as a festival and was thusly confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh establishes the Bahá'í festivals and the intercalary days which precede the period of fasting. "All Feasts have attained their consummation in the two Most Great Festivals, and in the two other Festivals that fall on the twin days" (K110). The two "Most Great" festivals are Ridvan and the anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb. Ridvan commemorates Bahá'u'lláh's declaration of his prophetic mission during his twelve day stay in the Garden of Ridvan near Baghdad in 1863. Bahá'u'lláh refers to it as the King of Festivals (K112). The first, ninth and twelfth days of this festival are accounted Holy days, on which no work should be performed. The other great festival is the 'twin birthdays' of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb, which fall on consecutive days of the Islamic lunar calendar. Should these days fall within the month of fasting then the requirement to fast should not apply. The intercalary days before the nineteen day fast are designated as

days for feasting, rejoicing and charity, for "It behooveth the people of Bahá, throughout these days, to provide good cheer for themselves, their kindred and, beyond them, the poor and needy" (K16).

B2.4 Do Bahá'í teachings on feasts and fasts fall into the domain of law or ethical or social teachings?

The Nineteen Day Feast was established by Bahá'u'lláh in his Book of Laws, and is accorded the utmost importance by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Although it is clearly it is to be desired, and is a mark of the robustness of a Bahá'í community, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas does indicate that the offering of the feast is not obligatory (Q48). The feast is a personal observance, in which the believer displays hospitality by receiving and feeding guests. There is no indication that it is an administrative or community institution, a development that as described above came later. Moreover, attendance at Nineteen Day Feasts, though seen to be very important, is not obligatory.

B2.5 How are teachings on feasts and celebrations made evident in the Bahá'í discourse on food?

As observed above, early Bahá'í Nineteen Day Feasts emphasized hospitality and were purely social occasions, usually hosted by individual believers. On the Canadian prairies in the 1930s:

> Each Bahá'í family would invite other Bahá'ís to come and share a meal. We'd vie with one another to find out who could provide the cheapest, most satisfactory, most gourmet meal for the least amount of money. Everyone would come and pay the minimum for which the least meal cost. Others of course could pay a dollar if they wished; the wealthier members did so.(R. Sala) quoted in (Van den Hoonaard 1996 162).

The modern Feast is usually sponsored by the Local Spiritual Assembly. It may be held at a Bahá'í community centre or may be hosted at the homes of individual Bahá'ís. In the latter case the obligation of providing food for a ritual event overlaps with customary hospitality as described in the preceding section. Commonly in practice a few families volunteer to provide refreshments for a Feast, on a rotating basis (co-ordinated

by the Local Spiritual Assembly), or sometimes a pot-luck approach is adopted. The process followed in the Winnipeg Bahá'í community involves a coordinating committee: "They have a list and every time they will ask three or four families to be host. These three or four families basically between themselves just bring vegetable dishes, or cookies, or fruits" (Kamal). What is served actually depends on a number of factors including organisational capacity, the cultural background of the volunteer food providers and their material means. Janet explains that:

> There has to be something given, but it could be just water, and some Feasts we have a lot of food and other Feasts we might have a cookie and a cup of tea, so it's really, the Feast is really not what it is. It's a word used but it's a symbol, it's a spiritual feast more than a physical feast.

Several participants noted that there was a tendency to provide more than enough food than was strictly necessary. Though this is often seen to be a characteristic of generous hospitality, Helena pointed out the necessity of restraint in order to nurture equitable relationships.

> In some communities it can get competitive. So you have to watch that. The fanciness of the food for example. So I think that most of us with a little experience will try to keep the food simple at a Bahá'í Feast. So that if you have money to really produce nice things for the feast and next month it's a family that doesn't have the resources, you don't want to embarrass them. So I think we all make an effort not to overdo it or not tot try and compete with each other.

The act of providing food is a form of service to the community and may be the best, or indeed only, way in which some members can contribute; particularly if there are linguistic barriers to full participation in the life of the community.

> I think the people that host the most tend to be older Iranian refugees, who don't speak English and it's the one thing they can do for the community, so they really like to do it because they want to help and this is one thing they can do. (Janet)

Certainly a number of participants observed that attendance at events was often higher when people knew the food would be provided by Persian families. Concerns have been expressed amongst some North American Bahá'ís that unfair expectations

can develop whereby it is taken for granted that women, and especially Persian women will be the main food preparers. This holds for celebrations and community events too. Helena admitted that, particularly when the role of women was still a little more traditional than it is now, women would try and not only provide food for the feast but "kind of show off our skills as well!". But, she notes, that with changing social patterns and time pressures as more women have started to work, shop-bought products are now common and acceptable.

Food is also an integral part of Bahá'í community celebrations. During the intercalary days preceding Naw Ruz, Bahá'ís often host social gatherings and participate in gift giving. On the days of Declaration and the anniversaries of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh there are no prescribed rituals; however community gatherings and feasts are common and take different forms according to local custom. Unlike the Nineteen Day Feast these occasions are non-exclusive and present an opportunity for the broader non-Bahá'í community to encounter the faith.

> Naw Ruz is perhaps the least threatening and most interesting event to non-Bahá'ís. For that reason our community has tried every year to promote an inter-community Naw Ruz event that was perceptible to the larger community and reflected well on Bahá'ís. Having others, preferably non-Bahá'ís, cater the event has many advantages. People outside of the community see the Bahá'ís as a part of the civic community, having fun without alcohol and with the entire family involved. (Matthew 2003)

B2.6 How do the teachings relate to contemporary scientific food/health discourse?

As in the case of hospitality and courtesy, commensality does not usually figure in scientific discourses on food. Nevertheless, eating together is often encouraged by nutrition educators and other human services practitioners, both for its social value and because it may confer nutritional benefits. An example of this is the tendency for older people to skip meals or make do with snacks when alone, which can have an impact on the amount and quality of nutritional intake to the detriment of health. Eating together is

a strategy for ensuring eating at all and is the rationale behind the implementation of congregate meal programs in nursing homes and seniors residences. Similarly, young people and busy adults often skip meals or grab 'junk' food on the run with potential negative impacts on nutritional intake. Eating together has been shown to have both health and social benefits (Allen, Patterson and Warren 1970; Gillman and et al 2000). These examples illustrate the importance of embedding nutritional health promotion in the social context of everyday life and are good illustrations of the harmony between religious teachings and scientific goals.

B2.7 How do feasts and celebrations speak to the Bahá'í concept of justice?

Food sharing has a special significance to the Bahá'í community in the context of the Nineteen Day Feast. Through celebratory days and community events it is also a broader mechanism for promoting fellowship and unity. Bahá'u'lláh explains that the purpose of the Feast is to bind hearts together with material means. It is essentially a way of unifying the Bahá'í community; and unity is a prerequisite for justice. In the interviews, Allan captured this idea of "commensality across time and space" as an important tool in promoting a sense of oneness; of communitas. Speaking of the standardised tripartite structure of the Feast he observed:

> Now, how that is carried out, you know, in a village in East Timor is clearly going to be very different from how it is carried out by a western community in the middle of the North American continent, and yet I know that those three abstract ideas or concepts are being adhered to in that village in East Timor; and that is, I think, part of that grand scheme of community unity at a global level, where the macro and a micro are simultaneously in sync. I don't know what (food) they're going to serve over in East Timor, right? But I know they're doing it.

In a talk on the Feast of Naw Ruz in Alexandria in 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá reinforced the power of commensality to build unity.

> In the sacred laws of God, in every cycle and dispensation there are blessed feasts, holidays and workless days. On such days all kinds of occupations, commerce, industry, agriculture, et cetera, should be

> suspended. All should rejoice together, hold general meetings, becomes as one assembly, so that the national oneness, unity and harmony may be demonstrated in the eyes of all. Cited in (Esslemont 1970 182)

The change in attendance regulations at Nineteen Day Feasts from an open meeting to one restricted to Bahá'ís was introduced as a means of creating boundaries in order to strengthen collective identity. Such a move appears to contradict the idea of 'open commensality', and to erect barriers between people rather than dismantle them. Though it remains the case that non-Bahá'ís may be invited to attend the social portion of a Feast, it is not clear how often this actually happens. However, certainly at community celebrations of holy days (as well as at other Bahá'í-sponsored events), all are welcome - Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í alike. Such occasions provide an opportunity for interaction with the wider community.

Justice requires the abandonment of prejudice and the growth of understanding between peoples, which in turn necessitates people associating more closely with others so as to bridge cultural distances. Eating together is a pre-eminent way of achieving this.

What is provided to eat at Bahá'í feasts and community gatherings is on the surface a passive reflection of local custom and is therefore unremarkable. Where the Bahá'í community exhibits cultural diversity this is reflected in differing types of food. However, the provision of food does offer an opportunity to enact and further the ethical ideals of the faith; failure to do so is a source of critical debate within some communities. For example Bahá'í principles of courtesy and consideration for others would dictate that it is not just the host's vision of what is culturally acceptable that counts, but that the food preferences and health requirements of all members of the community must be comprehended and catered to. This means for example ensuring that vegetarian choices are available or that allowance is made for people suffering from health problems such as diabetes and heart disease. It is even possible to suggest that Bahá'í gatherings should eschew non-nutritious high fat and sugar dishes altogether out of consideration

for the health of others. Through the process of consultation Spiritual Assemblies can set standards based on purposeful and informed decisions regarding food provision. While Bahá'ís don't need to preach vegetarianism or forbid junk foods they can consider food provision as a form of courtesy. One correspondent on the Bahá'í listserv discussion thread suggested that a conscious desire to develop an inclusive approach would be a positive development. In contrast to this view, the challenge of eating unfamiliar foods can be seen as an opportunity for individuals to demonstrate their willingness to bridge cultures and assert their personal commitment to embracing difference.

> I'm not going to generalise, but here in the prairies it's mostly your meat and potatoes type of people. So in this midst of this, you have people eating this weird kind of food. And to be honest with you, there are some Persian foods they look pretty scary! But I've seen Canadian Bahá'í friends, as we're standing in line to take food, they take it, they eat it and go "mm good' and I'm going 'oh my God, you're brave!". It's very interesting. It's so lovely, and to me this is one of the beauties and miracles of the power of Bahá'u'lláh's words to transform people. (Dorri)

In these examples we see the role of food and food events in creating a sense of communitas, of distinctive fellowship. We also see the liminal power of food in crossing and erasing borders, in allowing people, even when separated by distance and time, to construct a shared identity - what we might think of as a virtual commensal communitas. The small private acts of individuals in unconditionally offering and accepting food demonstrate a commitment to acceptance of human differences, to embracing the other, and to building unity through celebration of diversity.

C. Social development: Compassion and Stewardship

C1 Alleviation of hunger and suffering

Food has been described as a prerequisite for human health (World Health Organisation 1996) and as a fundamental human right. Nevertheless many people around the world suffer from hunger and food insecurity and from the diseases of malnutrition that such deprivation brings.

C1.1 How is food related to hunger and suffering?

Food is a basic necessity. It is a vital component of the survival requirements that lie at the base of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. No matter what cultural variations exist in food usages the requirement to eat at more or less frequent intervals is a relentless fact of daily life. "For the man who is extremely and dangerously hungry, no other interests exist, but food. He dreams food, he remembers food, he thinks food; he emotes only about food, he perceives only food, and he wants only food" (Maslow 1970 374). While it is possible to dispute the hierarchical nature of the needs identified by Maslow, arguing that spiritual needs are not necessarily set aside when the corporeal body suffers, there is no doubt that the fact of hunger draws attention to the unequivocal material value of food.

There has always been hunger: when the hunt fails; when the rains don't fall; when the crops don't ripen; when blight and pests strike. In a world of scarcity and uncertainty hunger may have seemed to be a natural part of the human condition - an inevitable fact of life. Indeed, hunger has been chronicled throughout recorded history, affecting people of all times and places, persisting in the face of whatever 'progress' or

development is achieved. Contemporary hunger, though, is far from natural. While it is a consequence of scarcity - it is scarcity in the midst of abundance. Malnutrition exists side by side with affluence; crops are exported in the depths of famine; food is destroyed while the poor beg for a meal. The "food problem" is often seen as simply a supply problem: more food must be produced to feed the ever-growing world population. This approach, known as FAD (Food Availability Decline) dominated thinking about hunger in the decades following World War II. It led to a concentration on methods of expanding food production which, notwithstanding more sophisticated analyses, persists today. Hence technological innovations such as the Green Revolution of the 1970s, and now genetically modified food are offered as solutions to hunger. Sometimes the cure is worse than the disease and ironically, despite some successes, the Green Revolution resulted in fewer farmers producing fewer varieties of crops; already wealthy farmers prospered while the majority of peasants saw their land resource dwindle or disappear. Now, genetically modified food is being promoted as the latest answer to increasing food supplies, with similar implications for loss of diversity and concentration of control of the global food system into fewer and fewer hands, a scenario that causes considerable anxiety amongst many concerned with food security and with food justice. And yet, on a per capita basis there is (and has been for a long time) more than enough food produced worldwide to more than adequately meet the nutritional needs of every man, woman and child on the planet. The heart of the food problem lies not so much with production capacity (though of course this is not to be underestimated in its critical importance), but with distribution. Hunger raises issues of both efficiency and of ethics.

Despite continued pledges by the governments of the world to tackle hunger in a meaningful way projections for deaths from malnutrition and starvation continue to

increase. The gap between land and mouth, captured in a telling post-war cartoon,[33] persists and, while it is most dramatic in its scale and consequences in countries of the South it also exists in the most affluent of industrialized countries of the North. In rich countries where abundant food supplies are assured, some people still go hungry. Each year on the Canadian prairies, the breadbasket of the world, an increasing number of people turn to charitable food banks to meet their daily needs. The world has never grown so much food and food has seldom been so cheap. Simply put, contemporary hunger equals poverty. The United States grows 40% more food than it needs; yet 26 million Americans need food handouts. India has built up a record surplus of 59 million tonnes of grain yet almost half of all Indian children are malnourished (Vidal 2002). It is also the case that farmers in poor countries are abandoning agriculture because they cannot compete with heavily subsidised food imported from industrialised countries under international trade rules.

C1.2 How was hunger conceived of in ideology and customary practices prevailing at the time of the Bahá'í Revelation?

Historical accounts demonstrate that hunger and famine were common conditions in nineteenth century Persia. Two examples from Shoghi Effendi's history of the Bahá'í faith are illustrative of numerous references.

> Famine added its horrors to the stupendous weight of afflictions under which the people were groaning. The gaunt spectre of starvation stalked abroad amidst them, and the prospect of a slow and painful death haunted their vision. (1944 85)

> Mention should, moreover, be made of the devastating famine which, about a year after the illustrious Badi' had been tortured to death, ravaged Persia and reduced the population to such extremities that even the rich went hungry, and hundreds of mothers ghoulishly devoured their own children. (233)

[33] This showed an international food expert literally measuring the distance between a field of cereal crop and the mouth of an emaciated child sitting in the field.

Contemporary accounts gathered in the collection entitled 'Memorials of the Faithful' paint a similar picture.

> When the retinue of Bahá'u'lláh left Baghdad for Constantinople, He was accompanied by a great crowd of people. Along the way, they met with famine conditions. ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1971 39)

> Since there was a famine in that area, it sometimes happened that we would be roaming from village to village from after the noon hour until half the night was gone. As best we could, we could procure whatever was available, then return to the convoy. (157)

Secular sources document famines in Persia in 1860 and again in 1870-71, the latter which called forth an international relief effort. We can thus conclude that hunger and famine were familiar circumstances in the era in which the Bahá'í faith was born. For the most part no causes are identified in these accounts for the existence of famine. However in the second of the quotations above there is at least an implicit acknowledgement of the association between hunger and poverty, as Shoghi Effendi notes that *even the rich* went hungry.

C1.3 What do the Bahá'í sacred writings say about hunger?

Where hunger is mentioned in the Bahá'í writings it is in fact generally in the context of poverty and inequity. The rich are not begrudged their wealth nor admonished to give it up but they are accorded a duty to look out for the needs of the poor.

> The arrangements of the circumstances of the people must be such that poverty shall disappear, and that every one as far as possible, according to his position and rank, shall be comfortable. Whilst the nobles and others in high rank are in easy circumstances, the poor also should be able to get their daily food and not be brought to the extremities of hunger. ('Abdu'l-Bahá 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London 1982 29)

The sixth principle of Bahá'u'lláh is described as equal opportunity of the means of existence: Everyone has the right to live and to a certain amount of well-being.

> As a rich man is able to live in his palace surrounded by luxury and the greatest comfort, so should a poor man be able to have the necessaries of life. Nobody should die of hunger; everybody should have sufficient

> clothing; one man should not live in excess while another has no possible means of existence ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1969 131).

There is no overt suggestion that poverty and hunger for many are actually consequences of the existence of wealth and privilege for few, although the quote from 'Abdu'l-Bahá below at least points in this direction.

> A financier with colossal wealth should not exist whilst near him is a poor man in dire necessity. When we see poverty allowed to reach a condition of starvation it is a sure sign that somewhere we shall find tyranny. ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1969 153)

But even so, poverty and hunger are not permissible excuses for breaching normative legal codes:

> They who dwell within the tabernacle of God, and are established upon the seats of everlasting glory, will refuse, though they be dying of hunger, to stretch their hands and seize unlawfully the property of their neighbour, however vile and worthless he may be (Bahá'u'lláh 1976 298).

C1.4 Do Bahá'í teachings on hunger fall into the domain of law or ethical or social teachings?

Teachings on hunger and poverty are clearly matters of social conscience and ethical behaviour. Bahá'ís are not obliged to share wealth or alleviate hunger through direct personal action. However there is a growing secondary literature on Bahá'í economics which discusses the nature of economic systems that would be compatible with Bahá'í principles and goals (Lerche 1996; Graham 1997; Rassekh 2001).

C1.5 How are teachings on hunger made evident in the Bahá'í discourse on food?

Direct action to alleviate hunger is not a priority in Bahá'í teachings or development activity, though it is incorporated into a variety of Bahá'í sponsored development projects, including family gardening, primary health education, and television cooking shows (Bahá'í World Centre 2003). Hunger is seen as one among many ills afflicting the human race. Moreover, it is feared that individual efforts may be overwhelmed by the magnitude of such social problems as hunger, and therefore be

both inefficient and ineffective. Instead of attending to the symptoms of an unjust world Bahá'ís are encouraged to focus their efforts on the underlying cause, which is identified as lack of a divinely inspired unifying framework for living. Long term resolution of hunger (and other social problems) is seen to depend on success in teaching about and establishing the necessary social mechanisms to achieve a world in which unity and justice are paramount, for the small number of Bahá'ís in the world could not directly alleviate more than an infinitesimal amount of suffering.

> This does not mean we must not help the needy, we should; but our contributions to the Faith are the surest way of lifting once and for all time the burden of hunger and misery from mankind, for it is only through the system of Bahá'u'lláh - Divine in origin - that the world can be gotten on its feet and want, fear, hunger, war, etc., be eliminated (Shoghi Effendi 1973 14).

The conviction that no solutions to the hunger problem are possible until global peace and unity is established was strongly reflected in the interviews. Speaking of the widening gap between the 'haves' and have-nots', Janet articulated a common sentiment.

> And I guess for Bahá'ís the solution lies in the principal of the oneness of humanity. I know I believe until we see this oneness of humanity that a lot of world problems, i.e. hunger, or an unjust distribution of food and other material necessities will continue.

The Bahá'í International Community (BIC) has issued two statements on the issue of food security which both focus on the role of women farmers in food production. It has also identified food insecurity as one of the conditions that arises from fundamental imbalances in the world. In a statement entitled 'Turning Point for All Nations' made on the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations, the BIC proposed application of the principle of collective security to problems of the global commons beyond that of military aggression. Food insecurity, far from being a localised problem was attributed to a complex breakdown of the present day global order (Bahá'í International Community 1995). This theme was pursued in a paper presented to the

World Faiths and Development Dialogue in which the BIC said: 'Eliminating hunger and malnutrition; establishing food security; providing adequate shelter; and achieving health for all will require a shift in values, a commitment to equity, and a corresponding reorientation of policies, goals and programs'. (1998).

Notwithstanding this, comments from interview participants showed clearly that individuals can and do make direct personal contributions to alleviating hunger and suffering at a local level. Barbara described how food provided a group of Persian elders with a tangible means for rendering community service.

> (They) don't speak English very well and have felt that they haven't been able to be of service to their community - which is one of the laws of Bahá'u'lláh. And what they chose as their service is that they would make food for the children down at Turtle island. So once a week, those elders – most of them are 70-80 years old – they make food and that food is picked up and taken down to the kids. It's finding mechanisms of not only individuals going out to serve, but groups working together in the community to make something that is long-term.

Respondents felt that despite the need for broad systems changes, individuals needed to take back a sense of personal responsibility, to be aware of local issues and needs and to engage directly with programs like Turtle Island or work with hungry kids in schools. They also, like Janet, expressed the conviction that through their own spiritual development and contribution to the faith they were, in a modest way contributing to long term solutions to world problems rooted in injustice. Such sentiments are a powerful endorsement of Michael McMullen's characterisation of Bahá'ís as situated universalists who think globally and act locally' (2000).

C1.6 How do the teachings relate to contemporary scientific food/health discourse?

While malnutrition is a concept clearly defined within the scientific paradigm, hunger is a more emotive term which invokes moral and political dimensions to the problem of insufficient food intake. Both the causes and consequences of malnutrition are well understood - whether it is the endemic malnutrition of populations living on the

margins of existence, or the sudden devastation of famine. Less clear are the distal causes - the broad social, political, economic and environmental factors that give rise to conditions of food shortages. There is a continual debate between those who ascribe hunger and famine primarily to technical failures and those who identify political failures at the heart of the problem. Not surprisingly this produces a wide range of alternative views on what needs to be done to alleviate hunger and who has the duty and ability to do so. For individuals in the rich world the sense that one ought to help the anonymous hungry of other countries is often tempered by the feeling that it is beyond individual control - that institutions must be the actors. However the situation is different for the individual confronted by a hungry person 'on their own doorstep'. Responsibility for ensuring that populations are adequately fed is usually laid at the door of governments, both domestic and foreign, though non-government organisations have taken a major role in intervening both in crisis situations and in on-going community development efforts toward food security.

In her discussion of the right to food Telfer (1996) suggests that individuals cannot have the clearly demarcated kind of duty that they have with negative rights but that they may have the duty of fostering and supporting a set of institutional organizations and structures to meet the needs of the hungry (9). Affluent citizens can fulfil their duty to the hungry through the setting up relief schemes through the agency of government. "If government action is the only or best way in which every needy person in the country can be guaranteed enough food as of right, then the duty of each individual in respect to that right is a duty to campaign for, vote for and support adequate welfare systems" (10). This view echoes the Bahá'í approach of working to bring about those conditions (economic, political, social) in which the right to food can be realised, at both a local and global level.

C1.7 How does alleviation of hunger speak to the Bahá'í concept of justice?

> A new economic order can be founded only on an unshakeable conviction of the oneness of mankind. Discussions aimed at solving problems related to extreme poverty based on the premise that we are one human family rapidly expand beyond the current vocabulary of economics. They demand a wider context, one which anticipates the emergence of a global system of relationships resting on the principles of equity and justice (Bahá'í International Community 1994)

The Bahá'í International Community views the increasing disparity between the rich and the poor is a major destabilizing influence and source of injustice in the world. It produces or exacerbates regional and national conflicts, environmental degradation, crime and violence, and the increasing use of illicit drugs. Hunger is one manifestation of obvious inequalities in the world, and few are able to look at starvation and extreme poverty without feeling a sense of failure. Alan offered his personal interpretation of this sentiment:

> Food has become a weapon to keep a line between the haves and the have-nots. So I do not believe that one can entertain any notion or concept of justice at any level until the will is in place that no child, no person should go hungry, and that is a world embracing vision that sooner or later needs to be articulated and exercised, because how can one talk about justice if people are without food. So in this world, right now in this day and age I see food as being used as a political weapon and therefore it is keeping people from moving towards a process of justice.

While global efforts toward the alleviation of hunger promote unity by ameliorating extremes in the human condition, local actions are the building blocks. The provision of food to the poor is presented as a duty of the believer rather than as a right of the poor. Exhortations to Bahá'ís to feed those who are hungry act to imbue or reinforce the sense of duty that Bahá'ís should have toward fellow humans. Barbara described the sense of collective responsibility stemming from a common humanity.

> So you've got kids there who are not being fed properly by the parents. So of course the community has to - is responsible to look after those kids, because kids are the responsibility of all, not just of their parents.

> Your children my children or those in Africa, are our responsibility to feed.
> It doesn't matter that they're over there.

Helena reinforced this, and added an interesting comment about food-mediated relationships. "These children - they don't belong to other parents - they belong to us, and we will be accountable for what happens to them. And I think its coming: people are beginning to broaden what they believe to be their family". The family, whether defined through kinship or co-residency, is characterised by a free exchange of food (amongst other things). The inclusion of more people within this sphere of unconditional food exchange does in effect enlarge the boundaries of the 'family'. It is an act of inclusion that reduces the distance between people and is thus conducive to greater understanding and the removal of prejudice.

Once more we see the Bahá'í idea that incremental changes in individual behaviour and attitudes are placed at the heart of bringing about larger social and political changes necessary to establish justice in the global community. Food here is material; it meets real physical needs. But at the same time its liminality allows it to be a symbol of caring, of collective responsibility and a drive to transcend cultural, racial and socio-economic divides that perpetuate social injustice.

C2 Charity

C2.1 How is food related to charity?

The word 'charity' is derived from carited, the term for Christian love and benevolence. Charitable giving-of money or of food is an integral part of some religions and is highly valued in many secular settings. In some ways charity may be read as an extension of customary hospitality to strangers, characterised by the 'impersonal' nature of the transaction; the giver and the receiver do not necessarily know one another (though they may come to do so). In contemporary North America food charity has been interpreted both as a positive expression of community concern and goodwill, and as an

undesirable consequence of inadequate politico-economic systems (Poppendieck 1998; Fieldhouse 1999). In an Asian context, the overlapping role of food in hospitality and charity in India is discussed by Khare ("Hospitality, Charity and Rationing: Three Channels of Food Distribution in India" 1986).

C2.2 How was the relationship between food and charity conceived of in ideology and customary practices prevailing at the time of the Bahá'í Revelation?

Food charity was a well established religious practice in the Middle East. Both Christianity and Islam had long emphasised the duty of the believer to feed the poor. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus describes how he will come on the Day of Judgement and condemn those who did not feed or succour those less fortunate, for in failing to do so, they had left Christ Himself hungry, thirsty, sick and unclothed (Matthew 25: 31-46). The Qur'an stresses the responsibility of those with means to provide for the poor and makes the feeding of a specified number of poor people the expiation for certain offences, such as breaches of fasting regulations. Zakat was a tax levied on Muslims for the specific purpose of providing alms for the poor. It required that believers give a fixed portion of certain categories of income, beyond certain limits, for relief of the poor, other charitable activities and to aid the Faith of God. Charity is also a fundamental virtue in Judaism.

C2.3 What do the Bahá'í sacred writings say about charity?

If courtesy is the prince of virtues, charity is similarly esteemed when it comes to action. "Charity is pleasing and praiseworthy in the sight of God and is regarded as a prince among goodly deeds" (Bahá'u'lláh 1988 71). The essence of charity is for the servant to recount the blessings of his Lord and to render thanks unto Him at all times and under all conditions (156). Charity is associated with humility; recognizing that others are in need is a reminder of one's own good fortune, which is itself a blessing from god. In Bahá'í teachings voluntary giving to the poor is seen to be both noble and of spiritual benefit to the giver, and also is a moral obligation.

> Is it possible that, seeing one of his fellow-creatures starving, destitute of everything, a man can rest and live comfortably in his luxurious mansion? [...]. That is why, in the Religion of God, it is prescribed and established that wealthy men each year give part of their fortune for the maintenance of the poor and unfortunate" ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1981 278).

Bahá'u'lláh decreed In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas that the Bahá'í law of zakat should follow what had been decreed in the Qur'an' (Q107). However, the Qur'an did not stipulate detailed regulations concerning amounts and limits for zakat; these have yet to be developed for Bahá'ís by the Universal House of Justice. Meantime Bahá'ís are encouraged to contribute to a Bahá'í fund that is used for administrative, educational and charitable purposes.

C2.4 Do Bahá'í teachings on charity fall into the domain of law or ethical or social teachings?

Charity is a matter of personal conscience, though legal requirements may be developed in the future based on Bahá'u'lláh's reference to charity in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

C2.5 How are teachings on charity made evident in the Bahá'í discourse on food?

Shoghi Effendi envisioned that the Houses of Worship and their various dependencies dedicated to social, humanitarian, educational and scientific pursuits would "Afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved and education to the ignorant" (Shoghi Effendi 1963 184). Specifically regarding food, 'Abdu'l-Bahá exhorted Bahá'ís to: "Direct your whole effort toward the happiness of those who are despondent, bestow food upon the hungry" ('Abdu'l-Bahá The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá During His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912 1982 469). In `Akka, 'Abdu'l-Bahá established charitable systems including the distribution of food supplied from Bahá'í farms. He was knighted by the British government for his services in averting famine in the `Akka area during World War I (Walbridge 1996). However, mendicancy is forbidden and the giving of charity to people who take up begging as their profession is

prohibited. Dorri linked this teaching to the contemporary concept of empowerment. "So we don't believe in giving money to beggars: instead teach him a skill and then let him make the money".

In the interviews, discussion of food charity centred on food banks. Though there were a spectrum of views expressed, and participants could see the value of food banks in meeting short-term needs, all agreed that such a charitable response is insufficient, and that effective solutions lie in deeper analysis of and action on social injustices. The use of food banks was seen to be an affront to human dignity and certainly not a desirable way of meeting human food needs. Philippe expressed this sentiment concisely: "We're talking food banks, huh? This is margin stuff. If you want to address the problem you have to go to the core of the problem; and that is prejudice". While individual Bahá'ís may indeed support charities such as food banks and soup kitchens, as short-term and practical ways of making an individual contribution, collectively Bahá'ís have been active in supporting food security through social development projects rather than through charitable feeding programmes per se.

C2.6 How do the teachings relate to contemporary scientific food/health discourse?

Charity is not a concept used in scientific nutrition discourse. However, in the wider academic and public discourse, the role of private charity in responding to food insecurity is hotly debated. Although in Canada there seems to be a belief in the moral responsibility of citizens to help the poor through charitable contributions it is nevertheless true that charitable organizations are unreliable and unstable means of producing income support for the poor. The institutionalization of charity as the key response to hunger and poverty undermines the cultural consensus of public entitlements. The failure of neo-liberal governments to seriously address the issue of

hunger is seen by many as an indictment of market-driven economic relations which pay little attention to a growing marginalized and disenfranchised segment of the population. Critics of food banks, while expressing sympathy with the motives of donors and workers, insist that long term solutions lie in structural changes in social relationships that will increase individual food entitlements and thus obviate the need for reliance on charity.[34] This closely resembles the Bahá'í perspective.

C2.7 How do teachings on charity, speak to the Bahá'í concept of justice?

Food received as a gift is appreciated as much for the generosity or thoughtfulness it represents as for its material value in assuaging hunger. Freely given it acknowledges and nurtures a common humanity that is at the heart of justice and unity. Similarly, charitable giving leads the reflective donor to think about who is getting the food; to see them as more than passive anonymous "recipients", but as fellow human beings in need. In being charitable, Bahá'ís are following the commands of the founder prophet, Bahá'u'lláh, and in so doing are necessarily acting through justice. Charity reminds people of their personal obligations and responsibilities to act locally, while contributing (albeit minimally) to more equitable redistribution of wealth and resources.

C3 Vegetarianism

C3.1 How is vegetarianism related to compassion and stewardship?

Health aspects of vegetarianism were discussed earlier. Another dimension of vegetarianism that has both religious and secular aspects invokes ethical arguments that appeal to compassion and respect for life. Religious views emerge from the idea that humans are an interdependent part of creation and do not have any special claims over

[34] A more extensive discussion of this issue can be found in P. Fieldhouse, Markets, Morals and Food Banks: Responses to Hunger in Canada, Unpublished paper, Winnipeg.:

animals. This reasoning reaches its apotheosis in the Jaina concept of ahimsa, or non-injury to living beings. Jaina monks are fastidious in preserving life, for example by sweeping the floor in front of them to avoid treading on insects and filtering water to avoid inadvertently swallowing any small creatures. Beliefs in metempsychosis, the transmigration of souls, similarly motivate orthodox Buddhists and Hindus. One Hindu commentator proposed that vegetarianism contributes to the superior spiritual position of Hinduism, and that it is necessary for proper worship and attainment of spiritual freedom (Bon 1966). Vegetarianism thus becomes an indicator of devotion to a moral life.

Secular arguments focus more frequently on the idea of animal rights and condemn both the eating of creatures that have demonstrable interests and rights and the cruelty inherent in rearing of animals under modern factory farm conditions (Singer 1979). These arguments are rejected outright in philosophical positions that deny that animals can have natural rights.

C3.2 How was the relationship between food, compassion and stewardship conceived of in ideology and customary practices prevailing at the time of the Bahá'í Revelation?

From the Islamic perspective everything in existence was created by Allah for the use of humans who were the most favoured of God's creation. In turn, the duty of humans was to care for animal and plant life as one would care for a friend, and to act in a way so that all could benefit from this beneficence. Planting and cultivation of the land in order to produce food were meritorious activities identified by Muhammad. Muslims were called on to treat animals with the utmost compassion. Respect for animals was reflected in the Islamic requirements surrounding the slaughtering process. To be halal, or lawful, an animal had to be killed by slitting the three blood vessels in its throat, allowing the blood to drain out, a procedure reminiscent of Jewish practice. This method of killing was seen to be superior to others such as strangulation or a blow to the head because it caused the animal the least suffering.

C3.3 What do the Bahá'í sacred writings say about compassionate vegetarianism and stewardship?

The Bahá'í writings present what would be called in modern ecological parlance, a holistic view of nature. Human beings are portrayed as an integral part of a web of relations that include all aspects of nature, of the created world: "All parts of the creational world are of one whole [...] All the parts are subordinate and obedient to the whole" (Bahá'u'lláh 1956 364). The world of nature is a purposeful reflection of the divine will. "Say: Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator" (Bahá'u'lláh 1988 142). There follows an implicit understanding that nature is to be respected and protected as a divine trust for which humans are answerable. Moreover, in the Bahá'í view, physical creation is dynamic and evolving from "one degree of perfection to another". It is, however, "incomplete" since it lacks "intelligence and education". It stands in need of development by man in order to create not only a higher degree of order and beauty, but also to increase its fertility and productivity (Research Department of the UHJ 1989 6-8). Bahá'u'lláh accorded great importance to agriculture, a stance reinforced by 'Abdu'l-Bahá who called the tillage of the soil the fundamental basis of community. "Nature is the material world. When we look upon it, we see that it is dark and imperfect. For instance, if we allow a piece of land to remain in its natural condition, we will find it covered with thorns and thistles; useless weeds and wild vegetation will flourish upon it, and it will become like a jungle. The trees will be fruitless, lacking beauty and symmetry" (The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá During His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912 1982 308). In addition to the primacy accorded to sustainable development practices with regard to the land, Bahá'u'lláh clearly addressed the need to protect animals. "Look not upon the creatures of God except with the eye of kindliness and of mercy, for Our loving

providence hath pervaded all created things and Our grace encompassed the earth and the heavens" (1976 33).

The idea that humans are at once part of nature and apart from it is reflected in the way that 'Abdu'l-Bahá talks about food. He makes numbers of references to the naturalness of eating fruits and cereals and he cites examples of how animals behave in order to support his claim for the existence of similar capacities in humans. At other times he clearly differentiates between animals and humans: "Wolves, lions and tigers are ferocious because it is their natural and necessary means for attaining food. Man has no need of such ferocity; his food is provided in other ways" (1927). Because meat is unnecessary and is in any case, an inefficient source of energy, the killing of animals has moral implications. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the killing of animals and the eating of their meat as "Somewhat contrary to pity and compassion" and suggests that it would be more pleasing to god to "content oneself with cereals, fruit, oil and nuts, such as pistachios, almonds and so on" (Hornby 1988 296). Thus refraining from killing animals is a way of developing one's spiritual qualities. In a letter written to an individual believer Shoghi Effendi affirmed this position but also admitted that the topic was controversial:

> In regard to the question as to whether people ought to kill animals for food or not, there is no explicit statement in the Bahá'í Sacred Scriptures (as far as I know] in favour or against it. It is certain, however, that if man can live on a purely vegetarian diet and thus avoid killing animals, it would be much preferable. This is however, a very controversial question and the Bahá'ís are free to express their views on it. (Universal House of Justice 1931)

C3.4 Do Bahá'í teachings on compassion and stewardship fall into the domain of law or ethical or social teachings?

Injunctions to respect the earth and the life upon it are part of ethical teachings and are not proscribed by Bahá'í law.

C3.5 How are teachings on compassionate vegetarianism and stewardship made evident in the Bahá'í discourse on food?

Vegetarianism does seem to be a controversial topic within at least some Bahá'í communities. Evidence to support this comes from a series of exchanges on an academic Bahá'í internet listserv. While vegetarian Bahá'ís believed that other Bahá'ís are not very tolerant or accommodating of vegetarians, non-vegetarian Bahá'ís accused vegetarians of being unnecessarily aggressive in promoting their views and practices and of projecting an air of 'superiority'. Both sides portrayed the other as being defensive. While suggestive, this is not of course generalisable to Bahá'í communities at large. What discussants did agree on (speaking from North American, European and Japanese perspectives), was that vegetarianism is not particularly common amongst Bahá'ís except where it is customary in the general population. It is certainly not a hallmark of the faith as might be anticipated from a superficial examination of the writings alone. But in fact, vegetarianism is not required by the writings and because of this some Bahá'ís see it as a non-issue. Others maintain that while there is nothing in the Bahá'í writings that supports the necessity of vegetarian-style eating, it is clearly seen in the writings as being preferable and, in the long term, inevitable.

> The future will be such that we will become compassionate toward the animals; so we will probably eat less and less animal flesh and more and more we will concentrate on fruits and grains and vegetables and this kind of stuff. I can see it in myself (Philippe).

> Eventually we all will be vegetarian, maybe it will take a few hundred years, but the planet needs it too; the earth needs vegetarianism, in my opinion as well. (Janet)

Moreover because vegetarianism seems to fit so well with the Bahá'í ethical framework and principles some Bahá'ís contend that it should be seen as more than simply a lifestyle choice, believing that people can have happier, healthier and more spiritually fulfilling lives if they reduce the amount of meat they eat, take more concern about how their food came to them, and generally spiritualise the aspects of basic living.

Nevertheless, others continue to disagree; holding that what a person or family chooses to eat is personal and not subject to criticism from Bahá'ís who eat a different diet.

Beyond the question of vegetarianism, the wider issue of stewardship was raised by one interview participant.

> Bahá'u'lláh does talk about being stewards of the earth, that as a species we are stewards of the planet and therefore great care and judgement needs to be exercised in how we use these resources, whether they be mineral, or agricultural, or farming from the sea, there needs to be a relationship, there needs to be a balance. (Alan)

C3.6 How do the teachings on compassionate vegetarianism and stewardship relate to contemporary scientific food/health discourse?

Brought into public prominence by the publication of Francis Moore Lappe's "Diet for a Small Planet", ecological perspectives on vegetarianism raise questions about the (in)efficiency of intensive livestock production and the sustainability of large-scale meat consumption as a normative human dietary pattern. Arguments are frequently linked to ethical stances regarding world hunger and inequitable resource consumption. The rising world demand for meat, epitomised by the meat-centred diet of North Americans, encourages the use of energy-intensive methods of food production which places tremendous pressure on ecosystems and on resource usage and which has led to claims that environmental responsibility demands the elimination of livestock (Rifkin 1992). Others reject as impractical Rifkin's utopian vision of a return to a "natural" world, while agreeing that current methods of animal rearing are wasteful and unsustainable and should be eliminated. Instead, they suggest animal rearing should be reintegrated into traditional pastoralist practices where animals are part of the natural ecosystem, and are raised for food instead of primarily for profit (Gussow 1994). This approach accommodates the reality that there are ecosystems (such as the Arctic) where dependence on plant food is simply not an option. Even in more temperate climates not all land is arable; some is more suited to animal rearing.

Nick Fiddes (1997) argues that there is a continuing decline in the popularity of meat in Western countries (particularly in the UK) that he ascribes to a changing moral stance that is widening the sphere of human compassion to include animals. As evidence of this he cites an increased popularity of vegetarianism along with increases in anti-fur and other animal welfare activities as well as meat industry attempts to glamorise meat and dissociate the bought product from the actual animal. Fiddes suggests that this change is associated with disillusionment with modernity and the Enlightenment goal of human domination over nature.

C3.7 How does compassion and stewardship speak to the Bahá'í concept of justice?

Bahá'í' attitudes to nature reinforce the notion of unity and interdependence of all creation, and encourage sustainable agriculture as a practical basis for human existence. Development efforts must be tempered by moderation, a commitment to protecting the heritage of future generations and an awareness of the sanctity of nature that pervades the writings of the Bahá'í Faith (Research Department of the UHJ 1989).

The high prestige accorded to meat in many parts of the world reflects its symbolic value as a sign of wealth and power. Meat is preferentially given to men, the strongest hunter or the richest noble. Differential access to food (especially meat) can be interpreted as a form of discrimination or injustice. Meat-centred diets make huge demands on world resources including available land and energy. To consume a meat-rich diet therefore means maintaining control over considerable resources, resources that are not shared with the majority of the world's population. By reducing the demand for meat, land and resources that are used for intensive animal rearing are freed to produce larger quantities of plant crops. In this way vegetarianism allows for a more equitable sharing of the world's resources and contributes to reducing world hunger and malnutrition by 'co-ordinating food production with human needs' (Hershaft 1978; Sabry

1975). Eating simple vegetarian food thus provides individual eaters with a way of restraining their call on the world's limited resources.

If vegetarianism has so many desirable traits why then did Bahá'u'lláh permit the consumption of meat? One way of looking at it might be to go back to the idea of cultural boundaries. If you do not wish to create boundaries or barriers you do not set up food rules that might exclude or alienate potential followers. Because Bahá'u'lláh was presenting a discourse of unity he did not need distinct food laws to identify believers; conversely no-one had to change their customary food habits in order to become a Bahá'í. In the Islam Shar'ia all human activities are classified into one of five categories: obligatory; recommended; neutral; disapproved; or prohibited. It seems that in Bahá'í teachings meat-eating is being treated as a disapproved or perhaps a neutral activity: consumption is not prohibited but there is merit in abstaining. Islamic Law also recognizes that necessity may legitimately override usual observance; for example a fast should be broken if there is a threat to health. The Bahá'í suggestion that meat is of particular value for nourishing the sick appears to follow a similar line of reasoning. A permissive stance is also in line with Islamic belief that God does not want to make life unnecessarily difficult for his people.

There is also no inconsistency in permitting a practice while at the same time drawing attention to its moral shortcomings and advocating for its elimination over time. Bahá'í laws were purposefully only to be introduced gradually as people developed the capacity to respond to the requisite responsibilities, and inconsistencies in practice are accepted. For example, smoking is prohibited during the Nineteen Day Fast only to Bahá'ís of Middle Eastern origin. Berman (1982) from a Jewish perspective, similarly maintains that permitting meat consumption was a concession by the divinity to man's imperfection and that humans are still not morally ready to forgo the eating of flesh.

The Bahá'í presumption that there will be a time when humans do not eat meat suggests that changing eating habits are part and parcel of the pursuit of spiritual progression and the transition to the more just world of the future. The relinquishment of meat is an individual choice that takes on value as a symbol of this spiritual progression.

D Spiritual Duties

D1 Fasting

D1.1 How is fasting related to religious practice?

Fasting in one form or another is an almost universal practice and fasts are very common events in religious calendars. As a religious practice fasting serves various purposes such as; preparation for a great deed or a new stage of life; mourning; penitence; purification; supplication; quest for dreams and visions; moral or religious protest (Walbridge 1996). Fasts are also used to commemorate important days in the history of a religion. For the individual, fasting teaches patience, unselfishness, moderation, willpower, discipline, spirit of social belonging, unity and brotherhood. Fasting practices differ in nature and extent but rarely involve complete prolonged abstention from food. More commonly restrictions are placed on consumption of specific foods, often those with high status (such as meat), or those which are particularly important in the diet (such as olive oil during Greek Orthodox Lent). Frequently there are restrictions on the frequency of meals or on the times during which food may be taken, as in the Muslim fast of Ramadan, when eating is permitted only between the hours of sunset and sunrise. Sometimes, the general populace observes only special fast days whilst more ascetic adherents will forego food on a regular basis. In some instances holy men and women will fast on behalf of the general population as is the case with Buddhist

monks. Fasting is frequently associated with other austerities, such as abstention from sexual relations and the abandonment of all sorts of luxury. Other examples of fasting practices are provided by Fieldhouse (1995).

D1.2 How was fasting viewed in ideology and customary practices prevailing at the time of the Bahá'í Revelation?

Fasting, one of the Five Pillars of Islam, was an important duty for Muslims. Muhammad said, "Every good act that a man does shall receive from ten to seven hundred rewards, but the rewards of fasting are beyond bounds for fasting is for God alone and He will give its rewards". Fasting was a way of expressing piety, self-restraint and freedom from worldly desire, and was also a means of reaping spiritual rewards. It was not conceived of as self-denial and punishment of the body. There are different categories of fasting in Islam: those that are obligatory; those that are recommended but which may be broken without penalty; those that are blameworthy and discouraged, and those that are forbidden. Obligatory fasts include the month of Ramadan, expiatory fasts performed as kaffarah (atonement) for breaking the Ramadan fast, and those performed in fulfilment of a vow. The chief obligatory fast is Ramadan; it involves abstinence from food and water between sunrise and sunset for the whole month, and is prescribed for all who have reached the Age of Responsibility, (12 years for girls; 15 years for boys). The desire to participate in the fast is encouraged in children from as young as 6-8 years of age. Traditionally, eating and drinking was permitted during the night until dawn when a white thread could be distinguished from a black one. The day's fast was broken as soon after sunset as possible by a snack (traditionally dates and water) to be followed later by a larger meal. A pre-dawn meal was eaten as late as possible prior to sunrise. The Ramadan fast was and is one of the most strictly observed of Islamic practices, though certain groups are exempted partially or totally from fasting. Deliberate infractions necessitate qada, or restitution, in which missed days are made up as soon

as possible, and also kaffarah, or atonement, which involves prolonged additional fasting, extensive feeding of the poor or the freeing of a Muslim slave. Different sects have different laws and customs regarding qada and kaffarah. The fast of Ramadan was explained to Edward Granville Browne by Persian notables, thus:

> The fast of Ramazan appears to you a most grievous burden for a prophet and legislator to lay upon his followers, but in truth in this is its very value, for, as it is enjoined on all alike, the rich are made to realise what hunger and thirst, which they would otherwise never experience, really are. Thus they are enabled to understand the condition of those who are always exposed to these trials, and brought to sympathise with them and to strive to ameliorate their lot more than they otherwise would do. (Browne 1912 124)

The Bahá'í fast bears marked resemblance to Islamic practice, the context in which it emerged, although the rigidity and rigour of fasting requirements is somewhat abated. It is not uncommon that customary practices are retained or adapted by new religious or political movements in order to attract adherents - or at least not alienate the "natural constituency." [35]

D1.3 What do the Bahá'í sacred writings say about fasting?

Just as fasting constitutes one of the five pillars of Islam so for Bahá'ís, fasting and prayer constitute "The two pillars that sustain the revealed Law of God". Most of the laws and directives related to fasting are found in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

> We have commanded you to pray and fast from the beginning of maturity; this is ordained by God, your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers (K10)
>
> O people of the world! We have enjoined upon you fasting during a brief period, and at its close have designated for you Naw-Ruz as a feast (K16)
>
> Abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sundown, and beware lest desire deprive you of this grace that is appointed in the Book (K17)

In the Questions and Answers section of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh affirms that

[35] Sometimes though, as I showed in the earlier discussions on food laws, deliberate breaks with customary practice are implemented in order to establish a new or separate identity.

obligatory fasting, along with prayer, occupies an exalted station in the sight of God (Q93). At the same time he provides details of permitted exemptions from fasting (See Figure 5.1). Other references to fasting are found throughout Bahá'u'lláh's writings. For example;

> Fasting and obligatory prayer are as two wings to man's life. Blessed be the one who soareth with their aid in the heaven of the love of God, the Lord of all worlds.
>
> Pilgrimage to the House is a service due to God. And likewise are the daily prayer, fasting , and the laws which shone forth above the horizon of the Book of God, the Lord of the World and the true Educator of the peoples and kindreds of the earth' (1988 109)

Bahá'u'lláh says that he has revealed the laws of obligatory prayer and fasting so that through them believers may draw nearer to the divine. "Fasting is the cause of awakening man. The heart becomes tender and the spirituality of man increases. This is produced by the fact that man's thoughts will be confined to the commemoration of God, and through this awakening and stimulation surely ideal advancements follow" (True and Hadi 1907 11). The institution of fasting is described as a bounty, a gift for the benefit of mankind, though it is acknowledged that people may not be consciously aware of these benefits: "There are various stages and stations for the Fast and innumerable effects and benefits are concealed therein" (Research Department of the UHJ 2000). The exercise of self-control involved in fasting is seen to of great benefit to the soul, and fasting is the supreme remedy for the disease of selfishness and passion.

'Abdu'l-Bahá reinforces the spiritual nature and purpose of fasting which, he says, is the cause of the elevation of one's spiritual station. "For this physical fasting is a symbol of the spiritual fasting, that is, abstaining from all carnal desires, becoming characterized with the attributes of the spiritual ones, attracted to the heavenly fragrances and enkindled" ('Abdu'l-Bahá 1915 40). Shoghi Effendi too, affirms the fundamentally spiritual significance and purpose of fasting. "It is essentially a period of

meditation and prayer, of spiritual recuperation, during which the believer must strive to make the necessary readjustments in his inner life, and to refresh and reinvigorate the spiritual forces latent in his soul" (1973 28-9). The Bahá'í concern for the principle of moderation, already seen in regard to diet, is also evident in advice on fasting.

> Fasting for this purpose does not mean entire abstinence from food. The golden rule as to food is, do not take too much or too little. Moderation is necessary. There is a sect in India who practice extreme abstinence, and gradually decrease their food until they exist on almost nothing. But their intelligence suffers. A man is not fit to do service to God with brain or body if he is weakened by lack of food. He cannot see clearly." "Abdu'l-Bahá cited in (Esslemont 1970 184).

Smoking is called `drinking smoke' in Arabic, and so smoking is banned while one is fasting. This prohibition is at present only binding on Bahá'ís of Middle Eastern background and has not yet been applied in the West. Bahá'ís are allowed to fast at other times of the year but as this is not encouraged, it is rarely done. Bahá'u'lláh permitted the making of vows to fast but preferred that such vows be `directed to such objectives as will profit mankind' (Shoghi Effendi 1973 3-4).

D1.4 Do Bahá'í teachings on fasting fall into the domain of law or ethical or social teachings?

Numerous extracts from the sacred writings confirm the obligatory status of fasting. Bahá'u'lláh cautions believers not to neglect prayer and fasting, for those who fail to observe them will never be acceptable in the sight of God. 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms that: "In the realm of worship, fasting and obligatory prayers constitute the two mightiest pillars of God's holy Law. Neglecting them is in no wise permitted, and falling short in their performance is of a certainty not acceptable. Shoghi Effendi further reinforces the point. "Certain laws, such as fasting , obligatory prayers, the consent of the parents before marriage, avoidance of alcoholic drinks, monogamy, should be regarded by all believers as universally and vitally applicable at the present time" (1973 3). However, this seemingly absolutist stance is moderated in other pronouncements by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

> The laws of God, such as fasting, obligatory prayer and the like, as well as His counsels regarding virtues, good deeds and proper conduct, must be carried out everywhere to the extent possible, unless some insurmountable obstacle or some great danger presents itself or it runneth counter to the dictates of wisdom (Research Department of the UHJ 2000 2:IV).

Once again, the principle of moderation trumps all else.

D1.5 How are teachings on fasting made evident in the Bahá'í discourse on food?

The Bahá'í fast is adapted from the fast ordained by the Báb in the Bayán, and that occupied the last month of the Bábi calendar, the month of `Ala', roughly 2-20 March. Believers were to fast from the age of eleven (numerically equivalent to huva, `He') until forty-two (bala, `Yea'). Children could fast until noon for the first eleven days. Those over forty-two were exempted from fasting. Fasting meant abstention from food, drink and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset, or preferably from slightly before sunrise until slightly after sunset. No exemptions are mentioned. The real meaning of the fast, the Báb said, was abstention from the love of other than the Manifestation of God. The future continuation of the fast was to be contingent its acceptance by Him Whom God shall make manifest

Bahá'u'lláh endorsed the Bayán fast, in a modified form (Figure 5.1) The Bahá'í fast is binding on all believers from fifteen, the age of maturity, until age seventy. There is no provision made for children undertaking partial fasts. Exemptions from fasting resemble those found in Islam but again differ in detail. Exempt are:

- Travellers; providing their journey is a minimum of nine hours in duration. "Should the traveller stop in a place, anticipating that he will stay there for no less than one month by the Bayán reckoning, it is incumbent on him to keep the Fast; but if for less than one month, he is exempt from fasting. If he arriveth during the Fast at a place where he is to stay one month according to the Bayán, he should not observe the Fast till three days have elapsed, thereafter keeping it throughout the remainder of its course; but if he come to his home, where he hath heretofore been permanently resident, he must commence his fast upon the first day after his arrival" (Bahá'u'lláh 1993 Q22);
- The sick;
- Women who are pregnant or nursing;

- Women who menstruating, who must instead perform prescribed Ablutions and repeat the phrase `Glorified be God, the Lord of Splendour and Beauty' ninety-five times between one noon and the next;
- Those engaged in heavy labour, who are advised to be discrete and restrained in availing themselves of this exemption, when: "It is most commendable to eat with frugality and in private". (Q76)

Unlike in the Islamic model, fasters who are unable to meet their commitment do not have to make any sort of restitution or make up the missed days later. Nor is sexual intercourse prohibited during fasting periods. Another difference lies in the fact that those eligible to be exempted from the fast are not thereby prohibited from fasting if they so wish. However, Bahá'u'lláh explains that the virtues of fasting can only be realised in a state of health and that in times of ill-health it is not permissible to observe these obligations (Q 93).

Figure 5.1 Comparison of Islamic, Bábi and Bahá'í fasting regulations

Exemptions	Ramadan (Islamic]	Bábi Fast	Bahá'í Fast
Age	below 15yr (boys) below 12yr (girls elderly (if in poor health)	below 11yr over 42yr	below 15yr above 70yr
Physiological status	in childbirth menstruating pregnant breastfeeding		menstruating pregnant nursing
Health	the sick		the sick
Work	heavy labourers		heavy labourers
Travel	travellers		travellers
Sexual relations	prohibited	prohibited	permitted

In contrast to the Islamic fast of Ramadan where institutional enforcement engenders penalties for infractions, the Bahá'í fast becomes a personal obligation. The fast is binding on Bahá'ís in all countries but it is an individual obligation, not enforceable by Bahá'í administrative institutions. Fasting is the responsibility of each individual to undertake to the best of his or her ability, within the requirements of that person's life, work and circumstances.

Fasting itself is only acceptable if it is done purely out of love for God. Philippe quoted Bahá'u'lláh as saying: "You may fast from all eternity to eternity; someone else may not fast a single second in their life. If it should be the will of god, the one has never been fasting will be granted the benefit of the one who has always been fasting, and vice versa. This shows that the merit is in the attitude of doing it". This is reminiscent of the importance of niyyah, or 'intent' in the Muslim Ramadan fast, for if one does not abandon falsehood in words and deeds then Allah has no need for his abandoning of food and drink. A corollary to this is that no Bahá'í should be critical of the way in which others approach the fast, or even if they fast at all. Indeed, for many interview participants, fasting had at some time in their lives, been a challenge; from minor problems of tiredness and headaches to mood changes and the sense of being out of control.

> It's between you and your God to decide if you're capable of fasting that day or not. There are days I don't fast because I think physically I cannot do it. You have to fast but you have to make sure it doesn't have any negative consequences on your life. So if I'm fasting and my blood sugar is going down and I get impatient at him (husband), that's not what Bahá'u'lláh wants. (Dorri)

In Chapter One I spoke about fasting as a liminal experience, citing the example of the North American native vision quest. In fasting, the seeker in effect steps outside of everyday life in order to attain greater clarity and insight. This sentiment was strongly expressed in the interviews. Alan declared:

> But you know I think that fasting has been part of the spiritual evolution of the species from day one, so the conscious exercise of it just puts one in

> a different space, and it's really quite fantastic when you're fasting. It's such a separate reality from the rest of the planet.

Philippe spoke of the virtue of fasting toward the higher realm; how fasting helped to snap him out of mundane reality and identify with something more elevated, and how it helped him to recognise his human potential.

> The Manifestation of God creates everything around it – it's beyond contingency. For us mortal beings to understand this we put ourselves in a state of fast and try to recreate that spirit of being sustained by something else – which is not necessarily food. The first fast – I realised how much of the time I spent during the day was in a state of hypnosis – not being fully aware of what I was doing. The fast puts things into perspective; here are your powers – magnify them, utilise them better. Learn how to control them; learn how to increase efficiency of what you do.

While the spiritual intent and value of the fast is feted there are nevertheless practical issues to contend with. After Philippe observed that not-eating resulted in a huge expansion of time available during the day, time to devote to the sort of spiritual reflection encouraged by the teachings, Barbara promptly offered a counter-perspective that illustrates a different, and gendered, reality.

> That happens to people who don't have to cook. But women, because we're the nurturers of our family, have to start cooking about an hour, two hours prior, before the fast ends. So there we are in the whole cooking mode of food because everybody is really hungry and we know our family is really hungry, especially in this environment where you have a really long day. Or the family's getting up early to eat - then you have to get up earlier. There are many, many women who are in this mode of having to prepare food.

Apart from the demands on scarce time, and the physical consequences of spending extended hours in the kitchen, food preparation also creates unique mental demands on women who have to cook but not eat.

> So they have to go through this kind of detachment; how do you cook and not taste the food? You have to have faith; the faith that what you are providing is out of love. This sacrifice that you're making; dealing with food during a time that food is not taken in. It changes your attitude of service. Suddenly you start looking at: 'Oh, I am serving my family'. It's something different than: 'I'm just cooking supper'. Because now there's an element of sacrifice in what you're doing. You're basically sacrificing

> your own comfort to make sure that their comfort is taken care of. So some very interesting dynamics there, so unless the man is the person doing the cooking in the family he doesn't come up against. It's a very interesting challenge, and most women I speak to have that challenge.

D1.6 How do the teachings relate to contemporary scientific food/health discourse?

The emphasis of the Bahá'í fast is clearly on spiritual benefits rather than on the effects it may have on physical health. In fact the only context in which fasting is associated with bodily health is the injunction to avoid extremes and be moderate. Huddleston (1980) suggests that fasting permits 'periodic cleansing of body', which can be healthy if not too harshly enforced; but this is not an intent expressed in the Bahá'í writings themselves. In contemporary secular food discourse in the West fasting is commonly proposed as a means of cleansing the body - ridding it of toxins and other noxious substances. In scientific discourse fasting is treated as a physiological state in which the body makes metabolic adjustments in order to maintain homeostasis. It is not generally seen to have either positive or negative short-term health consequences. Prolonged fasting can overwhelm the body's ability to compensate and eventually results in severe metabolic disturbances.

D1.7 How does fasting speak to the Bahá'í concept of justice?

Fasting is a liminal act. To deliberately abstain from food is to mark the liminal state, a state of spiritual openness in which the faster seeks closer knowledge of the divine will. It is a duty to God and to do one's duty is to act justly. Fasting helps to develop moral and spiritual strength, to conquer desires and tendencies toward greed, revenge, anger, provocation, and fear and instead to promote beauty, harmony, goodness, truth, kindness, peace, compassion and justice. Human selfishness being one cause of injustice, the ability to rise above selfishness is a potential source of justice.

Fasting is however, more than a matter of personal denial and individual spiritual development. It is a tangible way of expressing social concern; of connecting to another reality. Fasting allows one to experience the sensation of hunger and thereby empathise more closely with those for whom hunger is an involuntary condition, and recognise the injustice of this situation. Fasting also promotes a feeling of fellowship, of communitas, knowing that Bahá'ís all over the world are fasting at same time. In this way it functions to strengthen ties between people of different cultures and races across the globe.

Huddleston suggests that the timing of the fast is it itself an example of divine justice. The time of the fast he says, preceding the spring equinox is the time of 'most moderate climate in all parts of the world'. Thus extremes of cold and heat when there may be greater demand for food and drink are avoided. It is also the period when day and night are divided into about 12 hours in most parts of the world. This notion of 'equity' can be contrasted with that of the 'movable fast' of Ramadan. Celebration of Ramadan progresses through the calendar so that over time Muslims in different part of the world will experience both longer and shorter fast days.

Finally, the discourse on fasting, as it emerged in the interviews with local Bahá'ís, raises issues of equality between men and women, something, that Bahá'í teachings portray as an essential component of justice.

Summary and conclusions

I set out in this thesis the claim that food provides a practical way through which Bahá'ís can articulate and achieve their ethical goals; a way for them to translate abstract ethical principles into practical everyday living. In a broader view I hoped that through an examination of ethical and spiritual perspectives on food, as reflected in one faith tradition, this study would also contribute to extending the ways in which we understand the social norms governing relationships between food and human needs. In so doing I undertook to demonstrate the benefits of an inter-disciplinary approach in providing a more nuanced understanding of food, and I posed a number of specific questions that my enquiry would address:

- Is food best understood as liminal, that is, at once an empirical and spiritual-ethical entity?
- Does liminality provide a useful approach to studying food choice?
- What are the food and food-related beliefs and practices of Bahá'ís?
- How does food provide Bahá'ís with a practical means of achieving their ethical goals?

I began by reviewing scholarly literature from a wide range of disciplines in the natural and social sciences and in the humanities and summarised the major ways in which food choice has been theorised. Rejecting a dichotomised view of food as either material or symbol, either culture or nature, either nutritional or social; I developed a concept of liminality that affords new insights into food choice, and I argued for a liminal positioning of food between the empirical and ethical realms. I reviewed the literature on

food and religion, showing that food plays an important role in religious beliefs and practice, but that a gap existed in the absence of studies of food in the Bahá'í faith.

Next I provided an overview of the history, organisation, principles and teachings of the Bahá'í faith, identifying intersections between food and food conduct and religious orthodoxy and orthopraxy. I identified justice as a key ethical issue for Bahá'ís, and I proposed that the faith provided, by virtue of its insistence on the interdependence of spiritual and social development, an eminently suitable context for examining the way in which food as a liminal entity functions to bridge the distance between abstract ethical theory and practical ethical living.

Building on the key ideas that food is liminal, and that eating is an ethical act, I examined theories of food and justice. I showed that the dominant theory of justice in a society has wide-ranging practical implications for conduct with regard to food at all levels of society; individual, family, institutional and government. I illustrated how, by whom and for whom food is produced, distributed, shared, consumed, and disposed of depends on ideas about desert, rights, virtue and duty. I characterised Bahá'í justice as a constant striving toward creating the conditions for unity amongst humankind, and drew attention to the importance of both personal spiritual development and action to promote social harmony.

I described a methodological approach that combined hermeneutic strategies to examine sacred texts, together with qualitative interviews of believers. I provided an account of theoretical issues and practical procedures in both of these research methods, and showed how this dual methodological approach would provide richer insights into the Bahá'í food discourse.

Finally, I presented findings from both the textual and interview research in an integrated format that described in detail the Bahá'í food discourse. It examined food issues related to health and healing – including vegetarianism and alcohol avoidance;

commensality as practiced through customary hospitality, rituals and celebrations; social development, compassion and stewardship; and the spiritual duty of fasting. I showed how each of these was related to Bahá'í concepts of justice, and how each provided a praxis through which individual believers could live justly.

The questions set out at the beginning have been addressed. On a broad level, this thesis has demonstrated that a multidisciplinary approach to thinking about food enriches our understanding of the meanings and functions of food in society. Through an examination of ethical and spiritual perspectives on food, as reflected in one faith tradition it has contributed to extending the ways in which we understand the social norms governing relationships between food and human needs. It has shown that the concept of liminality may provide a useful way to think about food and to bridge traditional disciplinary boundaries, though further research is undoubtedly needed.

The thesis has added to the body of knowledge about food and religion, and has highlighted the similarities and differences in the role played by food in a relatively young religion compared to more ancient faith traditions. On the surface, food does not appear to be a prominent issue in the Bahá'í faith. Certainly there are no strong food laws or prohibitions resembling those found in some older religious traditions, including Islam - the immediate antecedent of the Bahá'í faith. However findings indicate that when food is seen as an ethical-empirical entity, there is indeed a singular Bahá'í food discourse that evokes spiritual and social themes of simplicity, moderation, commensality and compassion, and which supports the claim that food is integral to, and formative of the Bahá'í concept of justice.

The work suggests several potentially fertile areas for further research and enquiry. The categories developed in the analysis could be further explored with Bahá'í

communities of different ethnic, cultural, socio-economic and geographical types with a view to determining if the constructs have internal validity, and to what extent the sentiments expressed by participants in this study are generalisable. This could be pursued through qualitative enquiry using interview, case study and focus group techniques, or through survey methods.

Bahá'ís are exhorted to look after their health. The impact of Bahá'í food choice on physical well-being could be investigated using quantitative methods well known to nutritional science. Do the food habits and/or nutritional status of Bahá'ís differ from non-Bahá'ís of similar demographic backgrounds? Are patterns of nutrition-related chronic disease different between Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í populations? What is the prevalence and nature of vegetarianism in Bahá'í communities?

I noted in Chapter Five that the Bahá'í claim that in the future, when medical knowledge is sufficiently advanced, all disease will be treated by food is convergent with the emerging modern fields of functional foods and nutraceuticals. An exploration of public attitudes and beliefs concerning 'food as medicine' could yield valuable practical insights into the acceptability and use of these new products as well as an enhanced understanding of how popular concepts of food as medicine are integrated with scientific nutrition knowledge in informing the everyday food choice decisions of individuals. I also noted differences in male and female accounts of fasting. Examination of gendered experiences of fasting in the Bahá'í (or other) faith tradition would contribute to critical nutrition enquiry that seeks to understand the impact of gender on food choice.

Throughout this work I have contrasted the absence of explicit dietary laws in the Bahá'í faith with the formal proscriptions of some older faith traditions. I also noted that such dietary laws may be variously interpreted and applied (or ignored) in contemporary faith communities. There is much scope for research on the meanings dietary laws hold for contemporary believers and the way in which such laws are interpreted and put in

practice, which may challenge assumptions about the food choices of religious practitioners.

From a nutrition policy and practice perspective, research could address the question of whether considerations of justice, as described in this thesis, are potentially a useful tool in motivating changes in food consumption in the pursuit of individual health and collective food security. Finally, I have introduced the concept of liminality as a way of thinking about food choice. This concept remains to be developed and tested through specific applications; for example in exploring the animality of food, or in the integrative function of eating together.

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