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*The Central Figures*

# *Bahá'u'lláh*

*Volume Two*



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Graphic Design by Pepper Peterson Oldziey

Bahá'í Publishing Trust, Wilmette, Illinois 60091-2886  
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Published 2002  
05 04 03 02 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America

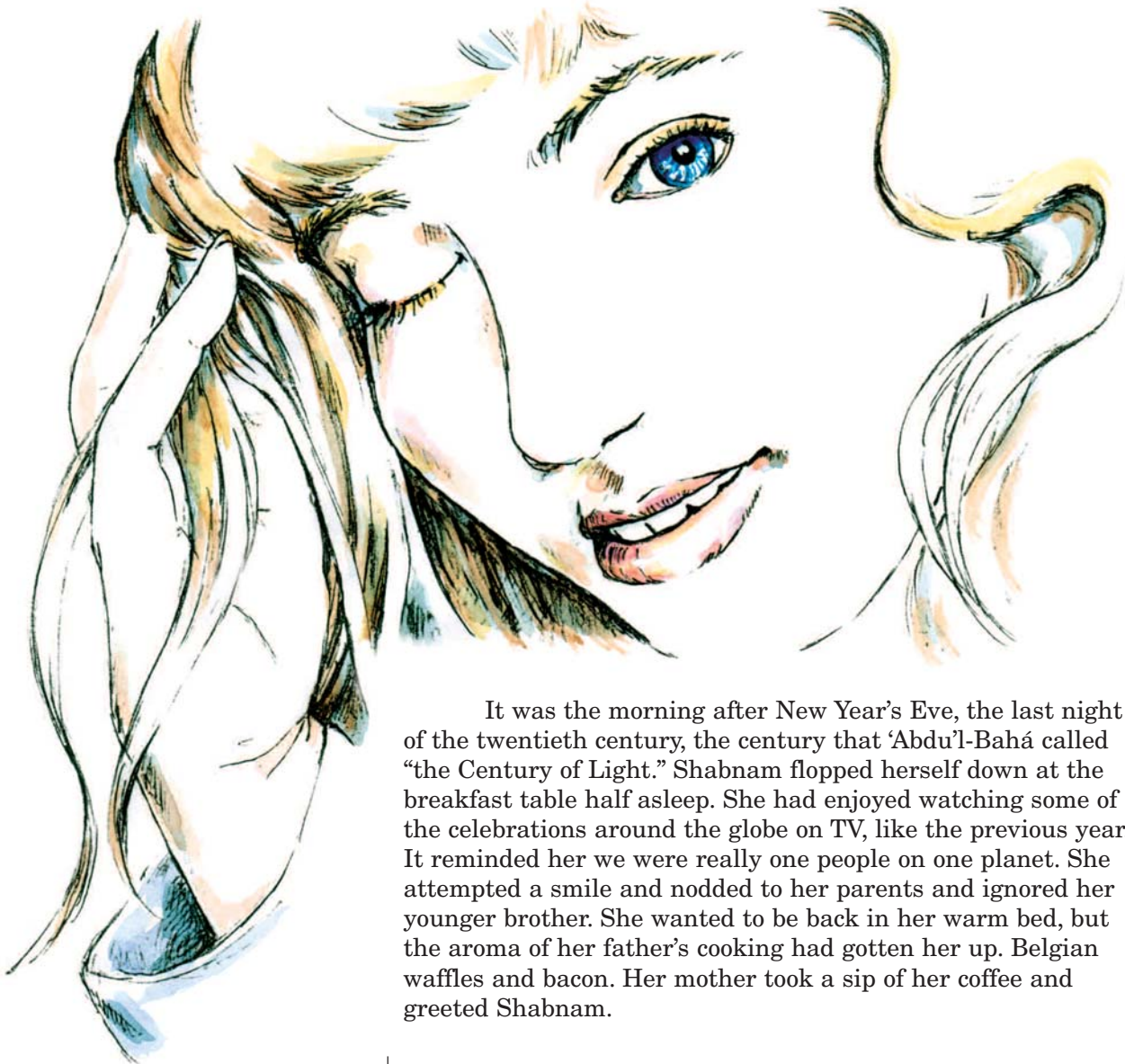
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**Core Curriculum for Spiritual Education • Stories**  
National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States

  
Bahá'í Publishing Trust  
Wilmette, Illinois

# Inheriting the Lesser Peace

*Written by Joseph Sheppherd  
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It was the morning after New Year's Eve, the last night of the twentieth century, the century that 'Abdu'l-Bahá called "the Century of Light." Shabnam flopped herself down at the breakfast table half asleep. She had enjoyed watching some of the celebrations around the globe on TV, like the previous year. It reminded her we were really one people on one planet. She attempted a smile and nodded to her parents and ignored her younger brother. She wanted to be back in her warm bed, but the aroma of her father's cooking had gotten her up. Belgian waffles and bacon. Her mother took a sip of her coffee and greeted Shabnam.

“Good morning, O Inheritor of the Lesser Peace!” she said cheerfully.

“Mmmornin’,” muttered Shabnam incoherently.

Her mother said something else equally incomprehensible, but Shabnam didn’t hear it. A fresh stack of steaming waffles was calling too loudly to her, and she forked a couple onto her plate. She peered around the table through squinted eyes trying to locate the butter and maple syrup. Her father took pity on her and pushed them in her direction. Silently, she took a bite. It was so good.

There was a two-sided, or if you counted her little brother, a two-and-a-half-sided conversation going on, which mercifully didn’t include her. Her mother didn’t try to draw her into the discussion. She recognized the look in her daughter’s eyes. It was that morning “the-wheel-is-turning-but-the-hamster’s-asleep” look.

Shabnam’s father poured her a glass of fresh orange juice, and the words in her ears began to take shape in her mind. The juice helped. The words formed a kind of stream of semi-consciousness: “lesser peas,” “little peas,” “petits pois.” Shabnam shook her head. “Where did that come from?” she asked herself. She listened while she ate and tried hard to wake up. She decided it was “piece” and not “peas” they were saying, but she had no idea what this “lesser piece” was they were talking about. She concentrated, but the discussion didn’t seem to reveal what this lesser thing was a piece of.

Finally, Shabnam felt she was awake enough to attempt a whole sentence.

“What are you people talking about?” she asked.

“The Lesser Peace, sweetheart,” said her mother.

Unfortunately, this contained no new information.

“And . . . what is that?” she insisted. Normally, she would worry that her little brother might make fun of her for not knowing stuff, but it was too early in the morning, and she just didn’t care at the moment.

“We were just wondering if the Lesser Peace was here,” explained her mother.

Shabnam just stared blankly at her.

“You know, the Lesser Peace, not the Most Great Peace,” continued her mother.







“Oh, you mean peace, not piece,” blurted Shabnam suddenly.

Now, it was her family’s turn to stare uncomprehendingly. Shabnam realized that this sounded fairly stupid. She didn’t wait to hear what her brother might say to this.

“And so . . .” interjected Shabnam quickly in an attempt to distract him, “it might be here?”

“That’s right,” said her brother in his most annoying I-know-something-you-don’t-know little voice. It was way too early in the day to have a brother like hers.

“And . . . how would you know?” she asked him testily, wishing she were an only child.

“Oh, we were just discussing the possibilities,” her mother replied. “It’s 2001, the beginning of the new millennium. We were wondering if you and your brother’s generation would live in a time of world peace.”

Her father secretly wondered if the two of them would make peace with each other during their parent’s generation. “You remember learning about the ‘Lesser Peace’ at Bahá’í Summer School, don’t you?” her father asked.

Shabnam tried to remember. “Most Great Peace” sounded somewhat familiar, but she really didn’t have a clue what the “Lesser Peace” might be.

“You remember, sweetheart . . .” her mother interjected, “when Bahá’u’lláh was a prisoner, He wrote warnings to the kings of the world. . . .”

Now Shabnam remembered.

“Oh, yes. When He was in . . . Adrianople.” Now, it was coming back. “Bahá’u’lláh wrote to the kings and rulers of the earth.”

“That’s right,” said her mother. Shabnam was waking up.

All of a sudden her father asked: “Who can name all the kings Bahá’u’lláh wrote to?” Shabnam groaned. This was her father’s “let’s-make-an-educational-game-out-of-this” speciality that they usually only had to endure during long trips trapped in the car. Her father looked around the table and fixed his gaze directly on his daughter. Shabnam quickly looked pleadingly to her mother.

“Since you suggested it, let’s see if you can name them, dear,” urged her mother, coming to her daughter’s rescue. Shabnam loved her mother so much. Her father was caught in his own game.

“Let me see,” he said, as he began counting them off on his fingers. “There was Napoleon . . . and . . .”

“Napoleon the what?” asked his wife.

“Napoleon the Bonaparte?” ventured her husband.

“No, not that Napoleon. It was Napoleon the Third of France,” she informed him.

“Well then, who was Napoleon Bonaparte?” asked her husband.

“Napoleon Bonaparte was Napoleon the First,” she answered.

“So, it was Napoleon the Third, Bahá’u’lláh wrote to,” he asserted.

“That’s right, dear,” she confirmed.

“Then, who was Napoleon the Second?” he mused.

“There was no Napoleon the Second,” she revealed. “Well, at least that Napoleon never ruled . . .”

“I’m confused,” he confessed.

“I know, dear. It’s okay,” she reassured him.

“How can there be a Napoleon the First and a Napoleon the Third without there being a Napoleon the Second. It just isn’t logical.” He looked perplexed.

“It’s just the way it is, dear. Don’t worry about it.” She noticed that her husband was still holding up the one finger. He hadn’t progressed very far in his counting. “What about the other rulers, dear?” she suggested.

Shabman noticed her father was on the spot. His daughter and son were watching him closely. He had to get the others right. One by one, he counted them off.

“Kaiser Wilhelm the First of Germany, Tzar Nicola-something Alexander . . . the Second of Russia . . . Sultán ‘Abdu’l-‘Azíz of the Ottoman Empire . . .” He paused at four fingers. He couldn’t remember if it was “Franz Josef” or “Josef Franz.” He didn’t want to get it wrong. He took a deep breath. “Franz Josef,” he guessed, “Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary.” His wife smiled and gave him the thumbs up sign. The rest were easy.





“Násiri’d-Dín Sháh of Persia . . . Pope Pius the Ninth of the Roman Catholic Church . . . and Queen Victoria of the British Empire.” He now showed eight fingers.

“Not bad, dear,” congratulated his wife.

“Now, who can tell us what Bahá’u’lláh said to them?” he asked looking directly at his wife. Shabnam’s mother reached behind her and found a copy of *The Proclamation of Bahá’u’lláh* and began to open it.

“Hey! That’s not fair,” he objected.

“No one said you couldn’t look up their names, dear. That’s what books are for.” She grinned at him. However, she closed the book and tried to remember in her own words.

“If I recall correctly,” she began, “Bahá’u’lláh outlined the responsibilities of those in power to safeguard the well-being of all people and to use their resources for the establishment of international peace. Bahá’u’lláh offered them the opportunity to achieve what He called the “Most Great Peace,” a permanent peace and world unity to be founded on spiritual principles. But the kings and rulers failed to gather together to resolve their differences. Had they begun the process of disarmament then in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the world would have been spared all the death and destruction of the wars we have seen in the twentieth century. After they failed to respond to His call, Bahá’u’lláh offered them a “Lesser Peace” instead of the “Most Great Peace.”

She opened the book and read aloud: “Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents.” Shabnam’s mother turned to her and explained. “You see, we were promised that the Lesser Peace would come first, and before you got up this morning, we were discussing the possibilities of you inheriting it in your lifetime.”

Shabnam was fully awake now. She looked around the table and wondered if other families were as interesting as hers. ★