

# The Wilmette Institute Course on Climate Change - an Impetus for Service and Action



ABS Conference, Toronto  
August 9, 2014

The Wilmette Institute  
<http://wi.bahai.us/>

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Practicing the Arts: A Workshop Course for Bahá'í  
Artists, Sept. 1 to Oct. 2014

The Writings of the Báb, Oct. 1 to Nov. 18, 2014

The Promised Day Is Come, Oct. 10 to Nov. 28, 2014

The Equality of Women and Men: Application in Private  
and Public Life, Oct. 21 to Dec. 9, 2014

Sustainable Development and the Prosperity of  
Humankind, Fall 2015



# WI Course on Climate Change



**Feb. 1 - March 21, 2013**

**May 5 - June 22, 2013**

**March 10 - May 5, 2014**

**Sept. 20 - Nov. 15, 2014**

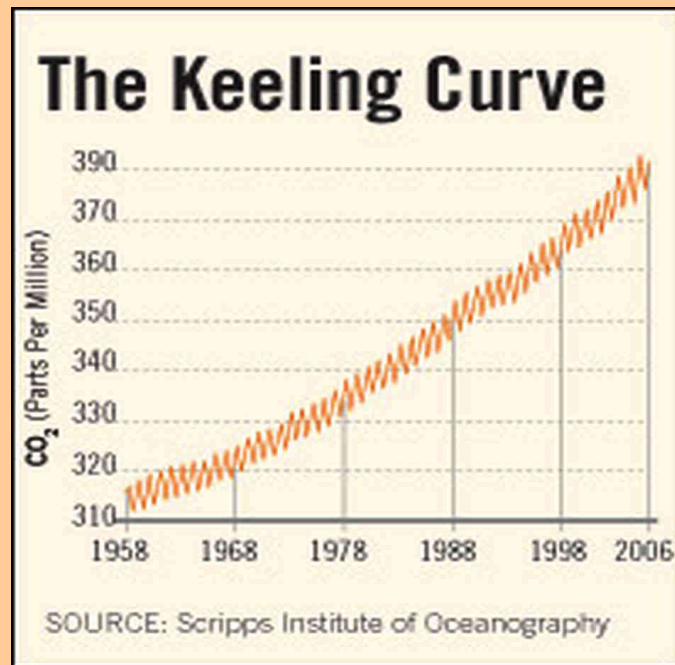
Faculty:

Christine Muller, Gary  
Colliver, Arthur Lyon Dahl,  
Carole Flood, Karryn  
Olson-Ramanujan

# Science and Religion

Causes and impacts of climate change

Spiritual teachings and how they relate to climate change



**1. Why do participants develop a deep commitment to serve ?**

**2. What kind of actions are they taking in their personal lives and in service to the community?**

## **Participants already concerned about the climate crisis are encouraged by spiritual teachings**

I have always seen this arena as my path to service, and seeing how this issue has come to the fore in the guidance from the House of Justice has been extremely exciting for me. I feel reinvigorated to engage with what is often a tiring and seemingly hopeless effort.

Tania Homayoun,  
Climate Change Course Feb. 2013

# **A Rude Awakening and Severe Mental Test**

Going through a process of shock, dismay, sadness, and then seeking guidance in the Writings and coming to hope, inspiration, strength, and courage, this course has been an interesting growth experience...

It has been excellent to face down the fears climate change initially generated, and work through those issues and now feel inspired to move forward.

Josette Bevirt, Climate Change Course May 2013

# Why do participants experience climate change often as a severe mental test?

- **happening now, not only a problem for the distant future**

Before taking this course, I believed that climate change was something that might happen in the future. I did not realize that, not only is it happening now, but people in some of the poorest countries are experiencing the effects of drought and rising sea levels already.

Carolyn Alperin,  
Climate Change Course Feb. 2013

# Why do participants experience climate change often as a severe mental test?

- Happening now, not only a problem for the distant future
- **Climate change impacts**
  - more frequent extreme weather events
  - water scarcity
  - melting of polar ice and glaciers
  - rising sea levels
  - loss of biodiversity

# Why do participants experience climate change often as a severe mental test?

- Happening now, not only a problem for the distant future
- Climate change impacts
- **Social disruption**
  - exacerbation of poverty
  - higher food prices
  - hunger
  - civil unrest and war
  - migration - refugees



# Why do participants experience climate change often as a severe mental test?

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- **Human suffering**


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- **Estimated projection of future temperature rise**

# Why do participants experience climate change often as a severe mental test?

- Happening now, not only a problem for the distant future
- Climate change impacts
- Social disruption
- Human suffering
- Estimated projection of future temperature rise
- **The challenge of effective mitigation**



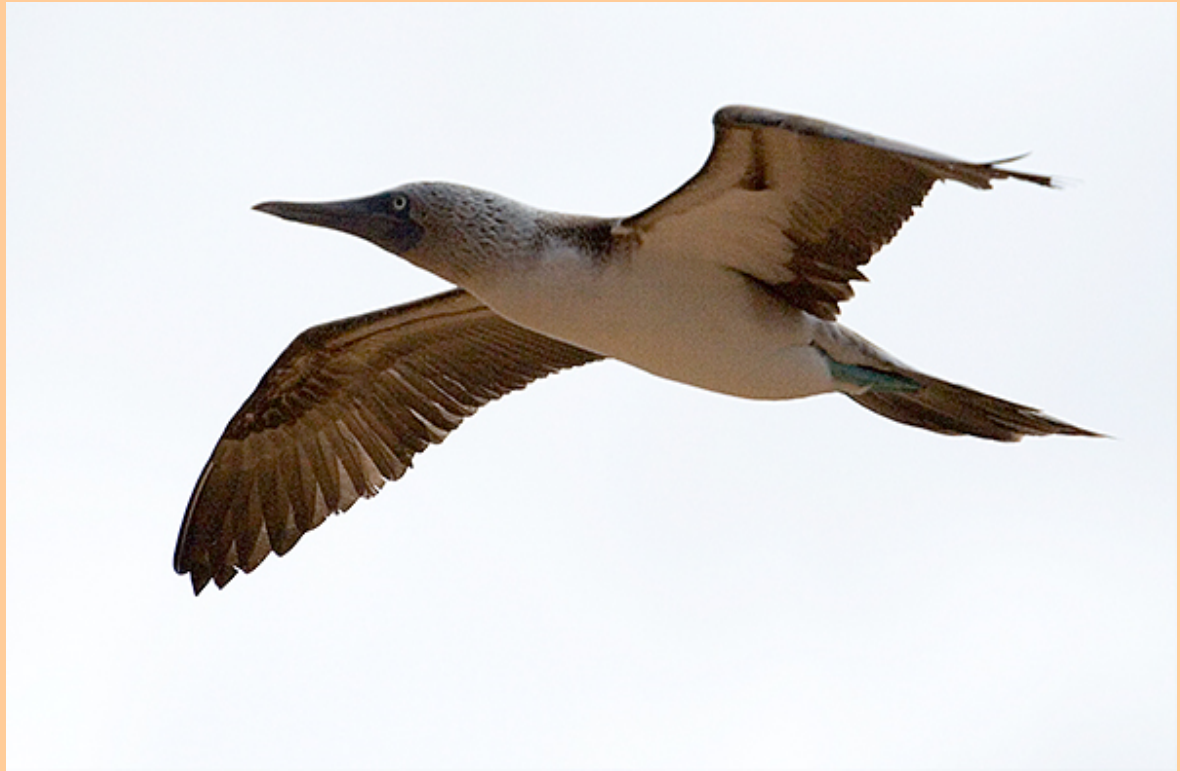


“Each one of the ordinances  
We have revealed is a mighty  
stronghold for the preservation of the  
world of beings.”

Bahá'u'lláh, Words of Paradise, Ninth Leaf

# New Dimensions in Understanding Bahá'í Teachings

- **The Harmony of Science and Religion**



- **The Harmony of Science and Religion**

... For a non-physical scientist I probably had a good general understanding of what climate change is ... However, there was a disconnect between that intellectual knowledge and my own spiritual life; I was having difficulty in finding the junction between them. This class has helped to change that disconnect particularly to our personal responsibility and the necessity of stewardship for the earth.

Terry Edwards, Climate Change Course March 2014

# New Dimensions in Understanding Bahá'í Teachings

- The Harmony of Science and Religion
- **Human Interconnectedness with Nature**







Cynthia Crampton, Climate Change Course May 2013

Cynthia Crampton  
Climate Change Course  
May 2013



# New Dimensions in Understanding Bahá'í Teachings

- The Harmony of Science and Religion
- Human Interconnectedness with Nature
- **The Oneness of Humankind**





# New Dimensions in Understanding Bahá'í Teachings

- The Harmony of Science and Religion
- Human Interconnectedness with Nature
- **The Oneness of Humankind**

This topic gives a specific light to the oneness of mankind so it is not just a principle or an ideal.

Having a genuine understanding about our oneness causes us to be genuinely concerned and more proactive about finding solutions, including modification of our lifestyle.

# New Dimensions in Understanding Bahá'í Teachings

- The Harmony of Science and Religion
- Human Interconnectedness with Nature
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- **Justice**




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- The Harmony of Science and Religion
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- **Justice**

The impacts of climate change fall disproportionately on poorer people in poorer nations, although most of the fossil fuel burning has been done in the industrialized nations by the wealthiest people.

We all stand to lose everything, but those with the most money will be hit last.

Dayna Klitzke, Climate Change Course March 2014

Four young girls are standing outdoors, holding protest signs. The girl on the far left is wearing a pink shirt and blue jeans. The girl next to her is wearing a pink shirt and black leggings with white stripes at the bottom. The girl in the middle is wearing a blue denim shirt. The girl on the far right is wearing a white dress with pink and purple floral patterns. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera.

The scariest threat  
Facing human race  
Global warming

Global Warming:-  
A manmade natural  
disaster!!

We may not agree on  
the extreme actions,  
but we certainly can't  
afford the risk of inaction.

# New Dimensions in Understanding Bahá'í Teachings

- The Harmony of Science and Religion
- Human Interconnectedness with Nature
- The Oneness of Humankind
- Justice
- **The Historical Significance of Our Time**





# New Dimensions in Understanding Bahá'í Teachings

- The Harmony of Science and Religion
- Human Interconnectedness with Nature
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- Justice
- **The Historical Significance of Our Time**

*"... there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake."*

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXI

# New Dimensions in Understanding Bahá'í Teachings

- The Harmony of Science and Religion
- Human Interconnectedness with Nature
- The Oneness of Humankind
- Justice
- **The Historical Significance of Our Time**

*"...Then, and only then, will the Divine Standard be unfurled, and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its melody."*

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, LXI

- **The Historical Significance of Our Time**

I now see the climate change crisis as an exact counterpart to the spiritual crisis currently afflicting humanity.

The spirit of the age brought by Bahá'u'lláh is propelling us toward a united planetary civilization, and issues such as climate change are also forcing us in this direction, in spite of our unwillingness to do so in both cases.

Lawrence Staudt,  
Climate Change Course March 2014

# Motivation for Service and Action

- Knowledge – Science: A prerequisite, but not sufficient motivator.
- Despair – Mental test: Propels spiritual growth.
- Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh “a mighty stronghold for the preservation of the world of beings”: Source of hope and energy.
- Bahá'í teachings seen in a new light: Provide guidance in a disoriented world.

Before the course, I was nonchalant, but now I know more about the subject ... and my feelings of stewardship toward the earth and my concern for the well-being of mankind have even increased more. Probably amazing because the course is so short, but this is what the course did to me. Maybe because the approach in this Wilmette course is different - spiritual? It is definitely the power of the Word. I know I have taken environmental classes before but it just ended with knowledge and did not stir any ethical feelings for me or lead me to a path of service. This Wilmette course did.

Roland Maddela, Climate Change Course Feb. 2013

## 2. Actions Taken by Course Participants

- Changes in personal lifestyle
- Application in Bahá'í community life, particularly in core activities
- Teaching
- Interfaith collaboration and social discourse

I have found how to remain hopeful when facing a very complex and enormous problem and to value it as a gift to the Bahá'ís to further the Cause.

I more strongly value our study circles, devotionals, and education efforts in advancing civilization.

I have more gratitude for my fellow Bahá'ís and more compassion for humanity on this planet. My biggest change is a very much increased mindfulness about my day-to-day actions and how I can modify them to help the planet.

Mary Hansen, Climate Change Course, March 2014

# Some Actions by Participants:

Reduced meat consumption

Reduced consumption of all products

Shorter showers

More frequent walks to grocery store

Reduced waste

Plans to insulate the roof, to install solar panels

Bought a bike

Reduced driving

Car pooling

Fewer plane trips

Turned down the thermostat

More local food

Reduced the amounts of electricity and natural gas

Started turning off my computer and chargers at night

Stopped buying bottled water

Divested from fossil fuel companies



I have improved those activities: turning out lights, using less hot water, hanging clothes on the line, reducing car trips, using our bikes for transportation, being more thoughtful with every purchasing decisions, consuming less. Our family's electric bill was 25% lower after starting this class and our gasoline bill was also lower. ...”

Lisa Kelly, Climate Change Course May 2013

Easy, small efforts as recycling and using less water and electricity will not be nearly enough to prevent a world-wide catastrophe.

It will take a greater level of unity and effort than mankind has ever manifested before.

Carolyn Alperin, Climate Change Course Feb. 2013

# Core Activities

- **Devotional Programs**



# Core Activities

- Devotional Programs
- **Children's Classes**



Gainesville, Florida, 2013

# Core Activities

- Devotional Programs

- **Children's Classes**

Last Sunday I had to interrupt my history about THE BAB, and talk to my 6 graders about climate change.

I actually reviewed unit 5 with them and they loved it.

My surprise was that only one of five brilliant students knew about climate change and this was alarming to me.



# Core Activities

- Devotional Programs
- Children's Classes
- **Youth Classes and Activities**



# Core Activities

- Devotional Programs
- Children's Classes
- Youth Classes and Activities
- **Local Study Group on Climate Change**

# Teaching

Since the solution requires a spiritual foundation, ... I have found a great way/link to enhance my teaching capabilities.

Nekicia Lockett WI Course on Sustainable Development  
2011



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Nekicia Lockett, Course on Sustainable Development 2011

I have started many dialogues with non-Baha'is about viewing climate change through a spiritual perspective.

Lisa Kelly, Climate Change Course May 2013

# Social Discourse

I feel now that I have a good beginning foundation in the hugely-complex area of global climate change, and can therefore speak out with confidence -- in informal conversations, at meetings, doing presentations or leading discussions.

Rita Erickson, Climate Change Course March 2014

# **Social Discourse**

- **Presentations**



# ***Climate Change: Bridging the Gaps thru Effective Education and Action***

Collage by Roland Maddela, Climate Change Course Feb. 2013



# Social Discourse

- Presentations
- **Integration into professional work**

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- **Social Activism**

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- Presentations
- Integration into professional work
- Social Activism
- **Creation of a new Interfaith Climate Group**



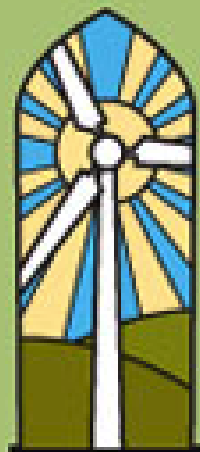


Gainesville, Florida Study Group,  
Climate Change Course Feb. 2013



# Social Discourse

- Presentations
- Integration into professional work
- Social activism
- Creation of a new Interfaith Climate Group
- **Collaboration with like minded groups**

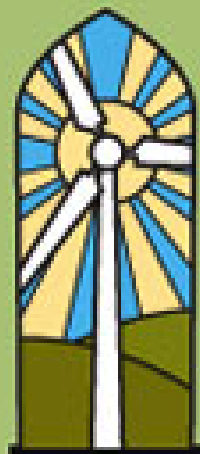


# Interfaith Power & Light

A RELIGIOUS RESPONSE TO GLOBAL WARMING



<http://www.interfaithpowerandlight.org/>

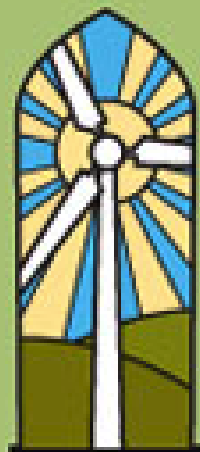


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New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light



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A RELIGIOUS RESPONSE TO GLOBAL WARMING



New Mexico Interfaith Power and Light



THE SANTA FE  
BAHA'I COMMUNITY  
*Online*





# NATIONAL PREACH-IN ON CLIMATE CHANGE FEBRUARY 14•16, 2014

[DOWNLOAD KIT](#)

## RELIGIOUS STATEMENTS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

### **BAHA'I**

Seizing the Opportunity: Redefining the Challenge of Climate Change

### **BUDDHIST**

Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change

### **CHRISTIAN**

Catholic â€“ U.S. Catholic Bishopsâ€™™ Statement on Climate Change



## **A Passion for Service and Action**

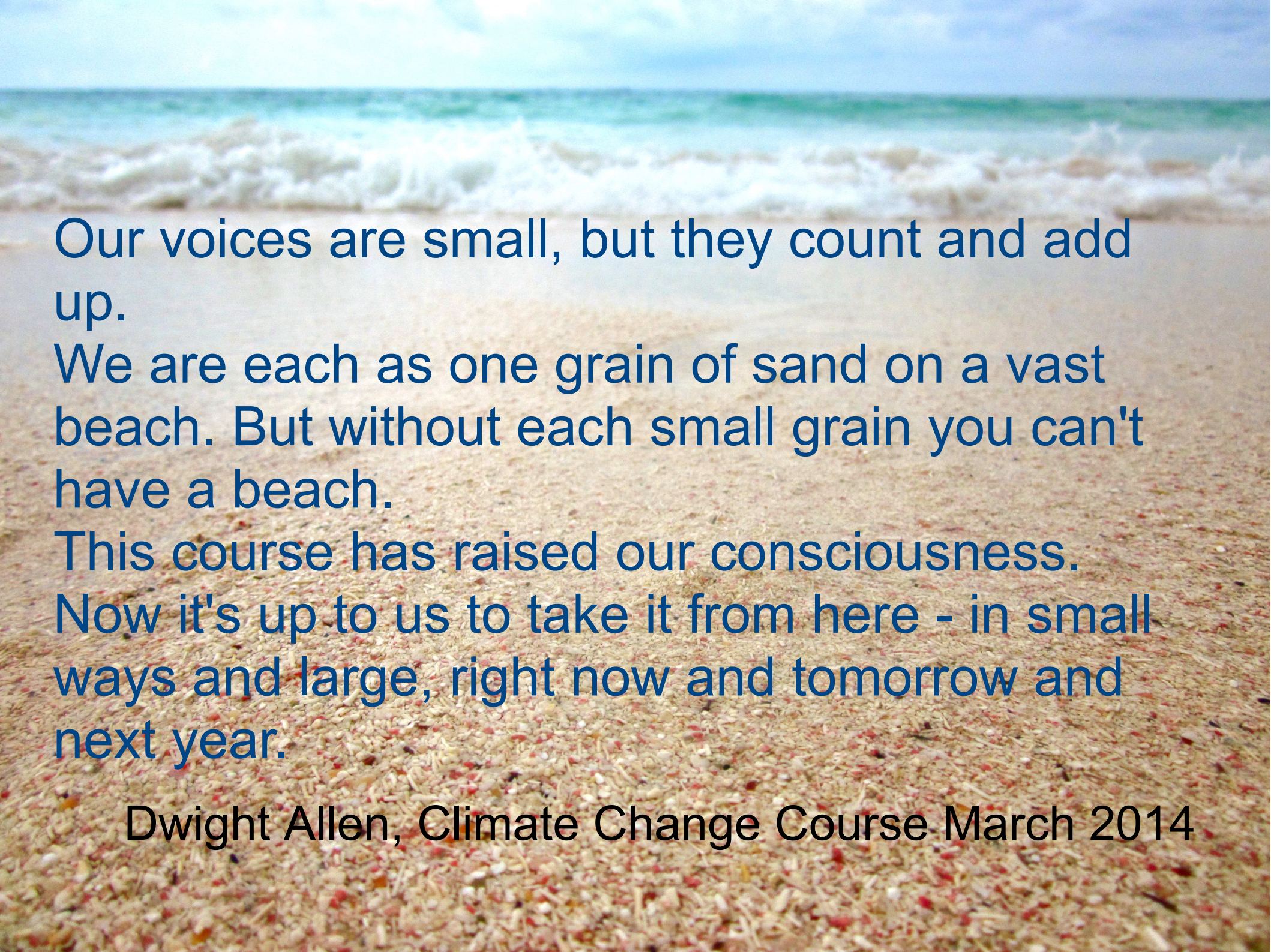
I feel even more powerfully the need to address climate change, now.

It is the paramount problem of our time, and Bahá'í communities must start talking about it.

... We cannot afford to delay this conversation and the changes that must follow it, if deeds are to be our adorning.

Stephen Fuqua, Climate Change Course Feb. 2013



A photograph of a beach with waves crashing onto the shore. The sky is overcast with grey clouds. The water is a mix of blue and green, with white foam from the waves. The sand is light brown and textured.

Our voices are small, but they count and add up.

We are each as one grain of sand on a vast beach. But without each small grain you can't have a beach.

This course has raised our consciousness.

Now it's up to us to take it from here - in small ways and large, right now and tomorrow and next year.

Dwight Allen, Climate Change Course March 2014



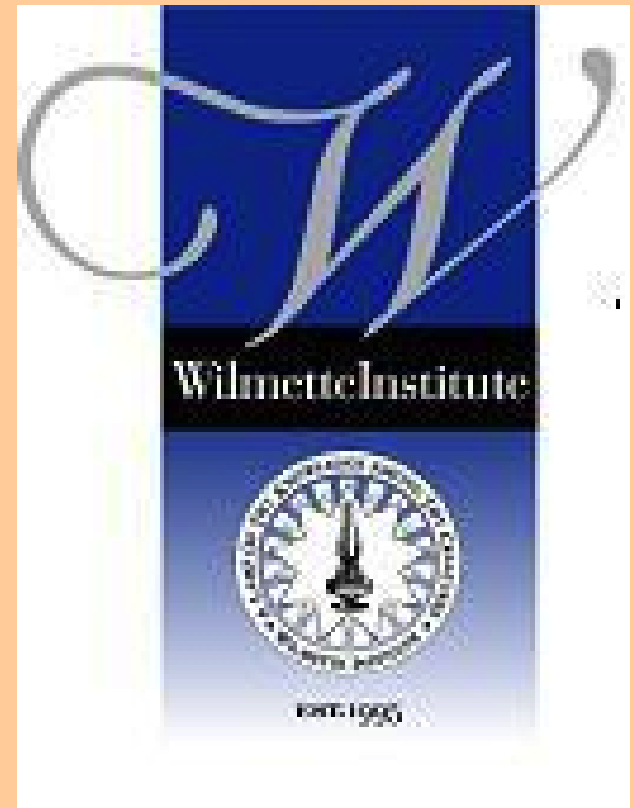
**Special thanks to Tahirih Vejdani,  
Arthur Lyon Dahl, and Robert Stockman**

## **The Wilmette Institute**

<http://wi.bahai.us/>

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## **International Environment Forum**

[www.iefworld.org](http://www.iefworld.org)