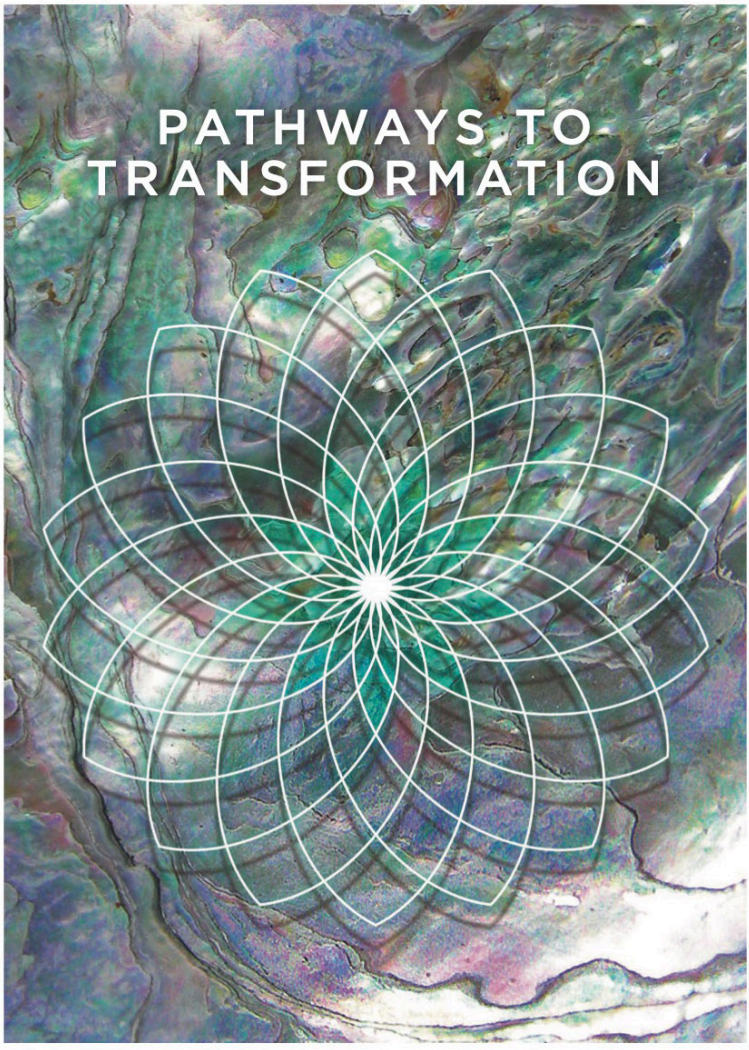

THE BAHÁ'Í JOURNEY

SECOND EDITION 2020

SELECTIONS FROM THE BAHÁ'Í WRITINGS

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O wayfarer in the path of God!
Take thou thy portion of the ocean of
His grace, and deprive not thyself of the
things that lie hidden in its depths.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXIX.

And yet, is not the object of every
Revelation to effect a transformation
in the whole character of mankind,
a transformation that shall manifest itself
both outwardly and inwardly, that
shall affect both its inner life
and external conditions?

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*.

CONTENTS

Preface to the Second Edition 11

Acknowledgements 22

PART ONE
THE BAHÁ'Í REVELATION: ITS ORIGIN AND PURPOSE

CHAPTER 1
The Aims of Bahá'u'lláh 27
The Key to a Deeper Understanding of the Bahá'í Faith 28
The Renewal of Religion 29
The Spiritualisation of Human Beings 32
Living as a Global Community 33
Carrying Forward an Ever-Advancing Civilization 36

CHAPTER 2
The Origins and Growth of the Bahá'í Faith 37
Overview 39
The Ministry of the Báb 39
The Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh 53
The Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 76
The Formative Age 89
The Growth of The Bahá'í Faith 94

CHAPTER 3
The Bahá'í Worldview 99
Basic Concepts of the Bahá'í Faith 100
The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh 108
The Covenant in the Bahá'í Era 111

PART TWO
GROWING AS A BAHÁ'Í

CHAPTER 4
The Process of Spiritual Development **123**
The Spiritual Reality of Human Beings 124
Relating to God and Developing Our Spiritual Powers 129
The Divine Education Programme 137

CHAPTER 5
Turning towards God **143**
Requisites for Spiritual Growth 144
Prayer 144
Meditation and Reading of the Sacred Scriptures 150
Fasting 155
Right Speech and Action 156
Teaching the Cause of God 159
Selfless Service in the Work of the Cause and One's Trade or Profession 160
Voluntary Sharing of Wealth 161
Bahá'í Pilgrimage 164

CHAPTER 6
Cultivating The Virtues and Emotions of the Kingdom **167**
Putting the Teachings into Practice 169
Happiness 170
Purity and Detachment 173
Love and Unity 177
Justice 183

CHAPTER 7
Teaching the Bahá'í Faith **191**
Our Attitude to Teaching 192
Preparing for Teaching 194
The Practice of Personal Teaching 196
Various Teaching Activities 202
Supporting New Believers 205

PART THREE
THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY AND ITS INSTITUTIONS

CHAPTER 8
Bahá'í Marriage and Family Life **211**
Bahá'í Marriage 213
The Marriage Relationship 215
The Bahá'í Family 217
Rearing and Educating Children 221
Work and Wise Financial Management 224
Creating and Maintaining Family Harmony 225
Sexual Relationships 231
Death, Burial and Inheritance 232

CHAPTER 9
The Bahá'í Administrative Order:
The Primary Agency for Spiritual and Social Change **235**
The Nature of the Bahá'í Administrative Order 237
The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice 241
The Hands of the Cause of God, Boards of Counsellors and Auxiliary Boards 246
National Institutions of the Faith 254
Regional Agencies 261
The Local Spiritual Assembly 264
The Bahá'í Funds 267
Bahá'í Elections 272
Bahá'í Consultation and Decision Making 275
Re-Visioning Relationships 280

CHAPTER 10
The Bahá'í Community: The Matrix of Transformation **285**
The Flourishing of the Community 287
Fostering Universal Participation 288
Providing Spiritual Education for Children and Youth 292
Appreciating and Encouraging Minorities 296
Preserving Spiritual Relationships 298
The Badí' Calendar 301
Bahá'í Holy Days 307
The Nineteen-Day Feast 309
The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár 313
National and Local Bahá'í Centres: Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds 316
Gatherings for Deepening 317

PART FOUR
THE GROWTH OF THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY

CHAPTER 11
Developing Capacity for Service **321**
The Context: The Interaction of Dynamic Forces 322
The Institute Process 329
Service Activities Related to the Institute Process 334
Becoming Active Agents of Our Own Learning 340

CHAPTER 12
Community Building in Clusters **347**
Clusters and Cluster Development 348
The Continuum of Cluster Development 350
Key Requirements for Growth 359
The Vital Role of Youth 362
Enhancing Institutional Capacity 365

PART FIVE
THE ADVANCEMENT OF CIVILIZATION

CHAPTER 13
Contributing to the World Community by Social Action **375**
Principles of Global Transformation 376
Developing Capacity for Social Action 378
Projects to Achieve Material Benefit for a Community 387
Addressing Social Division and Disadvantage 392

CHAPTER 14
Ending the Curse of War and Its Miseries **399**
Universal Peace: The Most Critical Stage in Global Development 400
Creating Unity: The Foundation of World Peace 405
Steps Towards a Peaceful World Federal System 410
The Bahá'í Approach to National and Regional Governance 417

CHAPTER 15
Contributing to an Ever-Advancing Civilization **427**
Many Fields of Endeavour 428
Participating in the Discourses of Society 433
We are All Contributing to the Future World Civilization 452

Afterword **457**

References **459**
Writings of Bahá'u'lláh 459
Writings of the Báb 459
Writings and Talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 459
Writings of or on behalf of Shoghi Effendi 460
Writings of or on behalf of the Universal House of Justice 461
Compilations 461
Journals, Newsletters and Yearbooks 462
Internet Sources 462
Sacred Writings of Other Faiths 463
Other Sources 463

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Pathways to Transformation was first published in 2001. It is primarily a compilation selected from the authoritative writings of the Bahá'í Faith. It conceptualises the Bahá'í Faith as a global transformation process, formulated more than a century ago, and inspired by the vision of a planetary civilization embracing religion, science, and the diversity of human beings. It outlines the principal aims of the process of transformation initiated by the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh; reveals the motivating force arising from the lives of the Central Figures; identifies the Covenant which unites the Bahá'í community in action; and presents the laws, teachings, ideals, and institutions that guide our systematic efforts as individuals and as a community to learn how to apply the teachings for the benefit of humanity.

This approach is based on the guidance of the Universal House of Justice in its Riḍván 1967 message:

> "Dearly loved friends, this is the theme we must pursue in our efforts to deepen in the Cause. What is Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for the human race? For what ends did He submit to the appalling cruelties and indignities heaped upon Him? What does He mean by "a new race of men"? What are the profound changes which He will bring about? The answers are to be found in the Sacred Writings of our Faith and in their interpretation by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and our beloved Guardian. Let the friends immerse themselves in this ocean..."

The over-arching aims of the Bahá'í Revelation can be broadly stated as the renewal of religion, the spiritualisation of human beings, the bringing of all people into relationship as a single global community, and carrying forward an ever-advancing civilization. Though the aims are interdependent and inseparable, each merits individual consideration, and none can be simply subsumed under the others.

Updates since the first edition

Any guidebook for a community committed to learning through action and reflection is bound to have a somewhat limited shelf life, but the primary reason for this second edition is a fundamental change in Bahá'í culture, which has now taken place under the guidance the Universal House of Justice. The change was initiated by its letter of 26 December, 1995 calling for the worldwide establishment of training institutes "to endow ever-growing contingents of believers with the spiritual insights, the knowledge, and the skills needed to carry out the many tasks of accelerated expansion and consolidation, including the teaching and deepening of a large number of people—adults, youth and children." Following some years of experimentation the curricula and books of the Ruhi Institute were adopted universally, with the consequence that now probably a majority of people make their first systematic acquaintance with the Faith through these materials. Institute participants will find many familiar friends among the quotations in this compilation, as well as others that provide new insights, and perhaps even a few that

open new vistas into the depths of the ocean of the Bahá'í Writings, vistas that can only be explored by immersion in the Foundational Works of the Revelation. To encourage and assist this process is one of the highest aims of this compilation, and indeed of the institute process itself.

Allied to the process of education of individuals is a systematic approach to foster the growth of the Bahá'í community by engaging Bahá'ís, friends of the Faith, and interested people in neighbourhood settings in core activities which advance the spiritual and social life of the community, such as devotional meetings, children's classes, empowering activities for junior youth, and of course the institute program itself. As the friends move through the courses of the institute program they are accompanied and assisted in initiating their own activities, thus becoming protagonists of this vast spiritual enterprise. The process is essentially one of community building and is linked to a cycle of community action, reflection, consultation and planning. A substantial literature has evolved around these themes, and a selection is now presented in a new section on the growth of the Bahá'í community.

The preparation of a second edition has also provided an opportunity to correct various errors of omission and commission, to update some translations, and to round out some of the stories of the Central Figures of the Faith. Histories and biographies such as *Leaves of the Twin Divine Trees* by Bahrieh Ma'ani, and *Prophet's Daughter* by Janet Khan have drawn attention to the important role of the women in the families of the twin Manifestations. This edition includes an account of how Khadíjih Bagum, wife of the Báb, was led to recognize His Station before the night of His portentous meeting with Mullá Ḥusayn. Both Fáṭimih Bagum, mother of the Báb, and Khadíjih Bagum, wife of the Báb, were honoured by Bahá'u'lláh. An account has now also been added of the significant role in the Bahá'í Revelation of Bahíyyih Khánum, the eldest daughter of Bahá'u'lláh, honoured by Him with the title of the Greatest Holy Leaf, and designated by the Guardian as an archetype and exemplar for Bahá'ís, both men and women. There is also updated information on the Badí' calendar, which was universally adopted from 21 March 2015, and several other aspects of Bahá'í administration.

The authoritative Bahá'í writings

As the sacred scriptures and authoritative writings of the Bahá'í Faith are clearly distinguished from secondary sources, it seems appropriate to repeat from the first edition the categorisation of the various sources of quotations included.

The quotations that follow are selected primarily from authoritative Bahá'í sources. These consist of the authenticated translations of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb (which constitute the sacred scriptures of the Faith), expositions of them by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi as authorized exponents and interpreters of the Bahá'í Revelation, and authoritative statements and elucidations of the Universal House of Justice, the governing body of the Bahá'í Faith. Also included are excerpts from published talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that were given during his travels in Europe and America (but the texts of which have not yet been confirmed as fully authenticated), a few key statements from various Bahá'í institutions and agencies such as the Hands

of the Cause and the Bahá'í International Community, and some selections from histories of the Faith, which, though not in the category of authoritative Bahá'í Writings, are included to give further background to the history and the personalities of the Central Figures.

As is customary in Bahá'í compilations, within each sub-section precedence is accorded to the Sacred Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb. These are followed by quotations from the works of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the writings of Shoghi Effendi, of the Universal House of Justice, and then those of any secondary sources. In a few instances an exception to this order has been made when the quotations describe events or issues that have a clear historical or logical sequence.

A fundamental distinction is made in the Bahá'í Faith between written texts, which are binding, and oral traditions or pilgrims' notes, which, although not suppressed, have no authority. 'Abdu'l-Bahá clearly states: "For the people of Bahá, the Text, and only the Text, is authentic." [1] In relation to the text of *Some Answered Questions* and the public talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the West, the Universal House of Justice has provided the following guidance:

> The original of *Some Answered Questions* in Persian is preserved in the Holy Land; its text was read in full and corrected by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself. Unfortunately, 'Abdu'l-Bahá did not read and authenticate all transcripts of His other talks, some of which have been translated into various languages and published. For many of His addresses included in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* and *Paris Talks*, for example, no original authenticated text has yet been found. However, the Guardian allowed such compilations to continue to be used by the friends. In the future each talk will have to be identified and those which are unauthenticated will have to be clearly distinguished from those which form a part of Bahá'í Scripture. This does not mean that the unauthenticated talks will have to cease to be used—merely that the degree of authenticity of every document will have to be known and understood.[2]

The original Writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh are in Persian and Arabic. One of the most important works of Shoghi Effendi in his thirty–six years of Guardianship (1921–1957) was to translate the major Writings into English. To perform this task with the greatest possible fidelity he chose a style reminiscent of the King James Version of the Bible, which conveys a unique blend of intimacy and reverence. For instance, the noonday prayer begins: "I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee." In this style, words such as "mankind", which today are sometimes regarded as having masculine connotations, have been used with their primary and inclusive meaning of the human species.

The goal of building a peaceful world community

Of all the goals of the Bahá'í Revelation perhaps the most distinctive is its commitment to the construction of a peaceful world civilization. This commitment

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1 *Helen Hornby, Lights of Guidance, no. 1431, p. 438.*

2 *Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 23 March 1987, extract provided.*

was most recently reaffirmed by the Universal House of Justice in its letter to the Bahá'ís of the World on 18 January 2019. After noting that Bahá'u'lláh, Himself, summoned the kings and rulers to be reconciled among themselves and enjoined on them the establishment of peace on earth, the letter asserts "For Bahá'ís, the attainment of peace is not simply a goal complementary to their other aims–it has always been a central concern," and quotes from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "it is a matter of religious belief and one of the eternal foundations of the Faith of God."

Following His release in 1909 from imprisonment by the Ottoman Empire, 'Abdu'l-Bahá traversed the United States and numerous countries of Europe in a tireless effort to promote the Bahá'í teachings on peace, and warn humanity of the impending disaster towards which the world was spiralling. His talks in the US were subsequently published under the title of *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*. During the First World War 'Abdu'l-Bahá's life in the Middle East was in the gravest danger, but He was able to win through and consolidate the position of the Faith in Palestine. He later warned that the impositions of the peace treaty had set the world on the path to yet another horrendous global conflagration.[3]

In the 1930's His successor, Shoghi Effendi, wrote an extraordinary series of letters setting out the Bahá'í teachings relevant to peace and world order. These letters were later compiled in a book entitled *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, and they need to be re-discovered, studied and assimilated by each new generation of Bahá'ís. In brief Shoghi Effendi explains that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh does not just constitute a new cycle in the recurrent process of progressive revelation, but represents the beginning of a new stage in social evolution, a stage in which the human race transcends its primitive forms of identity, based on nation, race, or other social group to embrace the consciousness, privileges and responsibilities of world citizenship. It involves a recognition of the wholeness of the human family and concern for their wellbeing, based on the pivotal principle of the oneness of mankind. However, the change is not only attitudinal. It requires the reconstruction and demilitarisation of the entire civilised world and the creation of an international order in which the power of war is permanently replaced by the rule of law: in the final analysis, the only real alternative. This dramatic but obvious requirement for a peaceful planetary civilisation, even if achieved in stages, will pave the way for a progressive society inspired by both science and religion; a society in which the war-based economy of competition and military power is replaced by one serving beneficial social ends and embracing a global prosperity that reaches all its citizens.

Looking back on the achievements and failures of the 20th Century, there was a clear opportunity for fundamental change in the aftermath of the Second World War, and even considerable discussion of the idea of world government, with influential and respected proponents such as Mahatma Ghandi, Albert Einstein, General Douglas MacArthur, Bertrand Russell, Winston Churchill, and later Pope John XXIII.[4] Unfortunately the political realities limited the possibilities. The United Nations, which was then established, together with the subsequent International Declaration of Human Rights represented marked progress, but fell short of what was needed

[3] *Century of Light.*
[4] *Cooperative Peace Strategies, pp. 177-179.*

to secure a permanent peace. The world plunged into the cold war between the superpowers of the US and USSR. The threat to human survival was greater than at any previous time in the history of our race, with a fragile peace maintained by the threat of mutually assured destruction.

In the midst of the Cold War and on the eve of the United Nations International Year of Peace in 1986, the Universal House of Justice issued a statement addressed to the Peoples of the World and entitled *The Promise of World Peace*. This document declared that the Great Peace to which, throughout the centuries, people of good will had inclined their hearts, was at last within the reach of the nations; that for the first time it had become possible to view the entire planet with its myriad diversified peoples in one perspective; that world peace was not only possible but inevitable as the next stage in the evolution of the planet; and that the real choice was whether it would be achieved only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by clinging to old patterns of behaviour or embraced voluntarily as an act of consultative will.

The Promise of World Peace[5] addresses some of the misconceptions of human nature as incorrigibly selfish and aggressive, and of the world religions as intrinsically competitive rather than morally educative. It discusses the ideologies glorifying nation, race, class, religion and gender, which have divided humanity. It acknowledges the futility of trying to create peace by banning particular weapons of war, and calls for the recognition of the oneness of humankind as the essential precondition for world order. With this recognition the need identified by Bahá'u'lláh for a consultative gathering of the world's leaders to establish a permanent organisational framework for peace becomes both necessary and imperative. Finally the experience of the Bahá'í community may be seen as an example of this enlarging unity, and as a model that might reinforce hope in the practicality of the vision of a united world in which humanity can live as one global society.

On a world scale the latter part of the 20th Century witnessed significant progress towards peace. Economic and political changes in the USSR lead to a new openness that culminated symbolically in the destruction of the Berlin Wall that had separated the populations of Eastern and Western Europe. This was followed by the reunification of Germany in 1990, and the collapse of the union of the States that had formed the USSR in 1991. In 1994 the apartheid regime formally dividing the population of South Africa on the basis of race and disenfranchising the black majority was finally ended, almost incredibly, without a bloody revolution. The last president under Apartheid, F. W. de Klerk, and the first black African President, Nelson Mandela, were both awarded Nobel Peace prizes.

The century concluded with the United Nations Millennium Summit in which the nations of the world pledged themselves to the goals of "peace, cooperation and development" and world religious leaders called on their communities "to respect the right of freedom of religion, to seek reconciliation, and to engage in mutual forgiveness and healing".[6] These were noble aspirations, but then we entered a new era of war with millions of refugees fleeing for their lives in desperation, the threat of terrorism reaching even the great cities of the West, the multiplication of

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[5] *The Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World, October 1985.*

[6] *Century of Light.*

environmental crises precipitated by human activity, the re-emergence of extremism, and the threat of nuclear conflict. It became all too clear that the call of Bahá'u'lláh, repeated by the Universal House of Justice, for the leaders of the nations to lay the foundations of a secure peace for humanity, and the many hopes expressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, remained sadly unfulfilled.

The challenging path to peace

The Universal House of Justice, in its January 18, 2019 message, conceptualised the fitful progress of the journey towards peace in terms of the dynamic interplay of the forces of integration and disintegration.

> … despite the repeated crises into which international affairs were thrown, Shoghi Effendi could discern "the progress, however fitful, of the forces working in harmony with the spirit of the age". These forces have continued to move humanity towards an age of peace—not merely a peace which rules out armed conflict, but a collective state of being, manifesting unity. Notwithstanding, it remains a long journey, and it proceeds in fits and starts…
>
> As the present century opened, new challenges began to loom. With time, these intensified, leading to a retreat from the promising steps forward with which the previous century had closed. Today, many of the dominant currents in societies everywhere are pushing people apart, not drawing them together…
>
> Thus do the forces of disintegration regroup and gain ground. So be it. The unification of humanity is unstoppable by any human force; the promises made by the prophets of old and by the Author of the Cause of God Himself testify to this truth. Yet the course humanity takes to achieve its destiny may very well be tortuous. The tumult raised by the contending peoples of the earth threatens to drown out the voices of those noble-minded souls in every society who call for an end to conflict and struggle…
>
> Universal peace is the destination towards which humanity has been moving throughout the ages under the influence of the Word of God that has been progressively imparted by the Creator to His creation. Shoghi Effendi described humanity's advance towards a new, global stage in its collective life in terms of social evolution, "an evolution that has had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, its subsequent development in the achievement of tribal solidarity, leading in turn to the constitution of the city-state, and expanding later into the institution of independent and sovereign nations." Now, with the coming of Bahá'u'lláh, the human race stands on the threshold of its maturity. World unity is finally possible. A global order that unifies the nations with the assent of humanity is the only adequate answer to the destabilizing forces that threaten the world.

It is important to recognise both the necessity and the limitations of statesmanship in persuading the masses to embrace a new world order which can replace one based on recourse to war to resolve differences between nations. Following the First World War the first efforts to construct a new world order were strongly influenced by the visionary leadership of Woodrow Wilson and resulted in the establishment of

the League of Nations. This signal achievement was undermined by shortsighted political partisanship that caused the United States to refuse to join the league.[7] Fears, prejudices, perceived rights, and group loyalties must all be confronted in so fundamental a change as the one required. Shoghi Effendi was well aware of the limitations of statesmanship. In a letter written in 1931 and entitled *The Goal of a New World Order* he discussed the problems of a war-weary world and the clear signs of another impending international disaster.

> No scheme which the calculations of the highest statesmanship may yet devise; no doctrine which the most distinguished exponents of economic theory may hope to advance; no principle which the most ardent of moralists may strive to inculcate, can provide, in the last resort, adequate foundations upon which the future of a distracted world can be built. No appeal for mutual tolerance which the worldly-wise might raise, however compelling and insistent, can calm its passions or help restore its vigor. Nor would any general scheme of mere organized international cooperation, in whatever sphere of human activity, however ingenious in conception, or extensive in scope, succeed in removing the root cause of the evil that has so rudely upset the equilibrium of present-day society. Not even, I venture to assert, would the very act of devising the machinery required for the political and economic unification of the world—a principle that has been increasingly advocated in recent times—provide in itself the antidote against the poison that is steadily undermining the vigor of organized peoples and nations.[8]

Losing the path through misdirection

The prejudices, misconceptions and false ideologies that contribute to the reluctance of humanity to consider any alternative to the obsolescent system of unrestricted national sovereignty were discussed by the Universal House of Justice in *The Promise of World Peace*. Looking back from the standpoint of the end of the 20th Century two issues in particular were identified and discussed in *Century of Light*, an overview prepared under the auspices of the Universal House of Justice.

The first issue concerns the moral foundations of peace. It is noteworthy that following the First World War ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had written the following in His reply to a letter from the Central Organization for a Durable Peace at The Hague:

> O ye esteemed ones who are pioneers among the well-wishers of the world of humanity! … At present Universal Peace is a matter of great importance, but unity of conscience is essential, so that the foundation of this matter may become secure, its establishment firm and its edifice strong.[9]

It is unity of conscience that provides the moral basis of government. Political corruption, the neglect or persecution of rejected minorities, broken promises,

---

7 *Century of Light.*
8 *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.*
9 *Century of Light.*

hopelessness, and unsustainable economic circumstances erode the trust that enables the process of government to function.

> The collapse of society's moral foundations has left the greater part of humankind floundering without reference points in a world that grows daily more threatening and unpredictable. To suggest that the process has nearly reached its end would be merely to raise false hopes. One may appreciate that intense political efforts are being made, that impressive scientific advances continue or that economic conditions improve for a portion of humankind—all without seeing in such developments anything resembling hope of a secure life for oneself, or more importantly, for one's children. The sense of disillusionment, which, as Shoghi Effendi warned, the spread of political corruption would create in the minds of the mass of humankind, is now widespread. Outbreaks of lawlessness have become pandemic in both urban and rural life in many lands...[10]

The second issue is globalisation, a topic which more than any other produced anguished debates at the Millennial Summit. In a remarkably short period the information revolution associated with the World Wide Web has transformed the production and dissemination of knowledge, and the processes of communication and interconnection between people and organisations of all kinds. Manufacturing operations have been relocated and reconfigured to take advantage of skills irrespective of location, and knowledge itself has become a commodity more valuable than financial capital and material resources. The benefit to millions of people is both obvious and impressive, and has lead to a world community operating largely without reference to national boundaries. These benefits are quite consistent with the Bahá'í vision of the earth as one country and of mankind as its citizens. However, the total effect of the current global economic system, distorted by greed, fear and manipulation, has not been a steady increase in global prosperity. On the contrary, it has had the disastrous outcome that the gap between the rich and the poor has progressively increased and two thirds of the world's population are engulfed in privation and despair.[11] Globalisation without the balancing factors of unity and justice now evokes fear and resentment rather than moving people to embrace the concept of world citizenship.

Century of Light, goes on to identify the underlying problem as the philosophy of materialism that reigns today virtually unchallenged under the nominal designation of "Western civilisation".

> Philosophically and politically, it presents itself as a kind of liberal relativism; economically and socially, as capitalism—two value systems that have now so adjusted to each other and become so mutually reinforcing as to constitute virtually a single, comprehensive world-view.
>
> Appreciation of the benefits—in terms of the personal freedom, social prosperity and scientific progress enjoyed by a significant minority of the Earth's people—

[10] *Century of Light.*
[11] *Century of Light.*

> cannot withhold a thinking person from recognizing that the system is morally and intellectually bankrupt…
>
> Bahá'u'lláh urges those who believe in Him to "see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others", to "know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbour". Tragically, what Bahá'ís see in present-day society is unbridled exploitation of the masses of humanity by greed that excuses itself as the operation of "impersonal market forces". What meets their eyes everywhere is the destruction of moral foundations vital to humanity's future, through gross self-indulgence masquerading as "freedom of speech". What they find themselves struggling against daily is the pressure of a dogmatic materialism, claiming to be the voice of "science", that seeks systematically to exclude from intellectual life all impulses arising from the spiritual level of human consciousness.
>
> And for a Bahá'í the ultimate issues are spiritual. The Cause is not a political party nor an ideology, much less an engine for political agitation against this or that social wrong. The process of transformation it has set in motion advances by inducing a fundamental change of consciousness, and the challenge it poses to everyone who would serve it is to free oneself from attachment to inherited assumptions and preferences that are irreconcilable with the Will of God for humanity's coming of age.[12]

This analysis is closely akin to one provided by Shoghi Effendi in 1935:

> Indeed, the chief reason for the evils now rampant in society is a lack of spirituality. The materialistic civilization of our age has so much absorbed the energy and interest of mankind, that people in general no longer feel the necessity of raising themselves above the forces and conditions of their daily material existence. There is not sufficient demand for things that we should call spiritual to differentiate them from the needs and requirements of our physical existence. The universal crisis affecting mankind is, therefore, essentially spiritual in its causes. The spirit of the age, taken on the whole, is irreligious. Man's outlook upon life is too crude and materialistic to enable him to elevate himself into the higher realms of the spirit.
>
> It is this condition, so sadly morbid, into which society has fallen, that religion seeks to improve and transform. For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling that unites man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer. And this is the reason why Bahá'u'lláh has so much stressed the importance of worship. It is not sufficient for a believer to merely accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality, which he can acquire chiefly by the means of prayer. The Bahá'í Faith, like all other Divine religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man that has first to be fed. And this spiritual nourishment

[12] *Century of Light.*

> prayer can best provide. Laws and institutions, as viewed by Bahá'u'lláh, can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed. Otherwise religion will degenerate into a mere organization, and become a dead thing. The believers, particularly the young ones, should therefore fully realize the necessity of praying. For prayer is absolutely indispensable to their inner spiritual development, and this, already stated, is the very foundation and purpose of the Religion of God.[13]

Fostering unity – a crucial task for Bahá'ís

Viewed through the lens of personal relationships, the emergence of spirituality in individuals corresponds to the flowering of loving-kindness–an abundance of love, compassion and interconnectedness. From this perspective the unity of the human race, so often identified in the Bahá'í Writings as the essential prerequisite for the construction of a peaceful world, is not so much a concept to which one may give intellectual assent as a fundamental part of one's sense of identity and community as a human being. The Universal House of Justice writes:

> Fostering unity, by harmonizing disparate elements and nurturing in every heart a selfless love for humankind, is the task of religion. Great possibilities to cultivate fellowship and concord are open to religious leaders, but these same leaders can also incite violence by using their influence to stoke the fires of fanaticism and prejudice. Writing of religion, Bahá'u'lláh's words are emphatic: "… make it not", He warns, "the cause of dissension and strife." Peace, for "all who dwell on earth", is one of "the principles and ordinances of God"…
>
> 'Abdu'l-Bahá also emphasised the importance of the contribution that Bahá'ís are called on to make to the establishment of world peace:
>
>> … peace must first be established among individuals, until it leadeth in the end to peace among nations. Wherefore, O ye Bahá'ís, strive ye with all your might to create, through the power of the Word of God, genuine love, spiritual communion and durable bonds among individuals. This is your task.[14]

Unity is the central purpose of the Bahá'í Revelation, and there is no theme on which the Writings of the Faith are more emphatic. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

> The purpose of the appearance of the holy Manifestations hath ever been the establishment of fellowship and love in the world of humanity. The friends should therefore lay down their lives in this arena that they may exhilarate the people of the world with the wine of love for one another and may gladden the hearts of the whole human race. The more they strive for harmony, the greater their progress; the more they exert effort to achieve unity, the more they will witness the tokens of divine assistance… Root out the sources of dissension and raise up the foundations of harmony. Cling tenaciously to the hem of the love of God and cleanse your hearts of any trace of estrangement or conflict. Thus may the light of divine bestowal shine resplendent, and ye become the recipients of

[13] *Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Prayer and Devotional Life, no.71.*
[14] *The Universal House of Justice, 18 January 2019.*

> the effulgent glory of the Sun of truth. Let each one of you become the servant of the other; let each sacrifice himself for the sake of the other.[15]

The Universal House of Justice is equally forthright: "We look to every one of you—those who are occupied with rendering service to Bahá'u'lláh, labouring in every nation for the cause of peace—to fulfill your high calling."[16] May this new edition of *Pathways to Transformation* contribute in however small a way to the realization of this goal.

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[15] *'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Compilation for the 2018 Counsellors' Conference, No. 15.*
[16] *The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2019.*

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I must also acknowledge Dr Peter Khan and Dr Sirus Naraqi whose passing has deprived the Australian Bahá'í Community of two inspirational leaders and shining exemplars in the field of Bahá'í scholarship. Every young Bahá'í needs examples and role models, and I was fortunate to have come within their sphere of influence.

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My final thanks are to you, dear reader, who perchance may choose to read this book. In the springtime of the world we are all young, and all things remain possible.

John Davidson
7 April, 2020

Erica and I would like to dedicate

this work to our parents,

Annie and Alex Davidson and

Lorna and Joseph Salter

and beyond them to all those whose lives have

been touched by the Bahá'í Writings

drawing them into

the process of transformation.

PART ONE

THE BAHÁ'Í REVELATION: ITS ORIGIN AND PURPOSE

CHAPTER 1

THE AIMS OF BAHÁ'U'LLÁH

The Key to a Deeper Understanding of the Bahá'í Faith
1.1 Meditating on Bahá'u'lláh's Purpose for the Human Race 28

The Renewal of Religion
1.2 Recognition of the Re-appearance of Divine Revelation 29
1.3 The Restatement of Spiritual Truths 29
1.4 Adaptation to the Needs of the Age 30
1.5 The Fulfillment of Past Religions 31

The Spiritualisation of Human Beings
1.6 Attaining Spiritual Maturity 32

Living as a Global Community
1.7 Unity is Central to God's Purpose 33
1.8 Seven Lights of Unity 34
1.9 The Uniting of Peoples and Nations 35

Carrying Forward an Ever-Advancing Civilization
1.10 Everyone must Contribute to the Advancement of Civilization 36

The Key to a Deeper Understanding of the Bahá'í Faith

1.1 Meditating on Bahá'u'lláh's Purpose for the Human Race

Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power. To this beareth witness that which the Pen of Revelation hath revealed. Meditate upon this, O men of insight!

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 5.

The Blessed Perfection was a prisoner twenty-five years. During all this time He was subjected to the indignities and revilement of the people. He was persecuted, mocked and put in chains. In Persia His properties were pillaged and His possessions confiscated. First, there was banishment from Persia to Baghdád, then to Constantinople, then Adrianople, finally from Roumelia to the prison fortress of 'Akká.

During His lifetime He was intensely active. His energy was unlimited. Scarcely one night was passed in restful sleep. He bore these ordeals, suffered these calamities and difficulties in order that a manifestation of selflessness and service might become apparent in the world of humanity; that the Most Great Peace should become a reality; that human souls might appear as the angels of heaven; that heavenly miracles would be wrought among men; that human faith should be strengthened and perfected; that the precious, priceless bestowal of God—the human mind—might be developed to its fullest capacity in the temple of the body; and that man might become the reflection and likeness of God, even as it hath been revealed in the Bible, "Let us make man in our image".

Public talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 18 April 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

Dearly loved friends, this is the theme we must pursue in our efforts to deepen in the Cause. What is Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for the human race? For what ends did He submit to the appalling cruelties and indignities heaped upon Him? What does He mean by "a new race of men"? What are the profound changes which He will bring about? The answers are to be found in the Sacred Writings of our Faith and in their interpretation by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and our beloved Guardian. Let the friends immerse themselves in this ocean, let them organize regular study classes for its constant consideration, and as reinforcement to their effort, let them remember conscientiously the requirements of daily prayer and reading of the Word of God enjoined upon all Bahá'ís by Bahá'u'lláh.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 1967, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 42.24, pp. 107–108.

1.2 Recognition of the Re-appearance of Divine Revelation

O King! I was but a man like others, asleep upon My couch, when lo, the breezes of the All-Glorious were wafted over Me, and taught Me the knowledge of all that hath been. This thing is not from Me, but from One Who is Almighty and All-Knowing.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf.*

The Divine Springtime is come, O Most Exalted Pen, for the Festival of the All-Merciful is fast approaching. Bestir thyself, and magnify, before the entire creation, the name of God, and celebrate His praise, in such wise that all created things may be regenerated and made new.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XIV.

If it be your wish, O people, to know God and to discover the greatness of His might, look, then, upon Me with Mine own eyes, and not with the eyes of any one besides Me. Ye will, otherwise, be never capable of recognizing Me, though ye ponder My Cause as long as My Kingdom endureth, and meditate upon all created things throughout the eternity of God, the Sovereign Lord of all, the Omnipotent, the Ever-Abiding, the All-Wise.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXVII.

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the 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.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 1.

Know thou, verily, there are many veils in which the Truth is enveloped: gloomy veils; then delicate and transparent veils; then the envelopment of Light, the sight of which dazzles the eyes, as doth the sun which is enveloped only in its own light and, as we look at it, the sight is blinded and eyes are dazzled.

I beg of God to remove all the veilings and familiarize the light with all eyes, so that man may not be veiled from witnessing the Sun of Truth.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, Vol. 1.

1.3 The Restatement of Spiritual Truths

This is that which hath descended from the realm of glory, uttered by the tongue of power and might, and revealed unto the Prophets of old. We have taken the inner essence thereof and clothed it in the garment of brevity, as a token of grace unto the righteous, that they may stand faithful unto the Covenant of God, may fulfill in their lives His trust, and in the realm of spirit obtain the gem of Divine virtue.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, preface.

Every true Prophet hath regarded His Message as fundamentally the same as the Revelation of every other Prophet gone before Him.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXXIV.

There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God. The difference between the ordinances under which they abide should be attributed to the varying requirements and exigencies of the age in which they were revealed.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXI.

The fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, the followers of His Faith firmly believe, is that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ only in the non-essential aspects of their doctrines, and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society.

Shoghi Effendi, The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, *Guidance for Today and Tomorrow*, p. 2.

1.4 Adaptation to the Needs of the Age

Every Divine Revelation hath been sent down in a manner that befitted the circumstances of the age in which it hath appeared.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXXIV.

The distinguishing feature that marketh the pre-eminent character of this Supreme Revelation consisteth in that We have, on the one hand, blotted out from the pages of God's holy Book whatsoever hath been the cause of strife, of malice and mischief amongst the children of men, and have, on the other, laid down the essential prerequisites of concord, of understanding, of complete and enduring unity.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XLIII.

The Purpose of the one true God, exalted be His glory, in revealing Himself unto men is to lay bare those gems that lie hidden within the mine of their true and inmost selves. That the divers communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief, should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is, in this Day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion. These principles and laws, these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are the rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated.

... Religious fanaticism and hatred are a world-devouring fire, whose violence none can quench. ...

... Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXII.

1.5 The Fulfillment of Past Religions

The Revelation which, from time immemorial, hath been acclaimed as the Purpose and Promise of all the Prophets of God, and the most cherished Desire of His Messengers, hath now, by virtue of the pervasive Will of the Almighty and at His irresistible bidding, been revealed unto men. The advent of such a Revelation hath been heralded in all the sacred Scriptures.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, III.

In this most mighty Revelation all the Dispensations of the past have attained their highest and final consummation.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXV.

How vast is the tabernacle of the Cause of God! It hath overshadowed all the peoples and kindreds of the earth, and will, erelong, gather together the whole of mankind beneath its shelter.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XLIII.

The aim of Bahá'u'lláh, the Prophet of this new and great age which humanity has entered upon—He whose advent fulfills the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments as well as those of the Qur'án regarding the coming of the Promised One in the end of time, on the Day of Judgment—is not to destroy but to fulfill the Revelations of the past, to reconcile rather than accentuate the divergencies of the conflicting creeds which disrupt present-day society...

His mission is to proclaim that the ages of the infancy and of the childhood of the human race are past, that the convulsions associated with the present stage of its adolescence are slowly and painfully preparing it to attain the stage of manhood, and are heralding the approach of that Age of Ages when swords will be beaten into plowshares, when the Kingdom promised by Jesus Christ will have been established, and the peace of the planet definitely and permanently ensured. Nor does Bahá'u'lláh claim finality for His own Revelation, but rather stipulates that a fuller measure of the truth He has been commissioned by the Almighty to vouchsafe to humanity, at so critical a juncture in its fortunes, must needs be disclosed at future stages in the constant and limitless evolution of mankind.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, Guidance for Today and Tomorrow*, pp. 2-3.

In the *Bayán* the Báb says that every religion of the past was fit to become universal. The only reason why they failed to attain that mark was the incompetence of their followers. He then proceeds to give a definite promise that this would not be the fate of the revelation of "Him Whom God would make manifest", that it will become universal and include all the people of the world.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1275, p. 4.

The Spiritualisation of Human Beings

1.6 Attaining Spiritual Maturity

I swear by Thy glory! I have accepted to be tried by manifold adversities for no purpose except to regenerate all that are in Thy heaven and on Thy earth.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, CXVI.

O SON OF BEING!

Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent. Thy spirit is My place of revelation; cleanse it for My manifestation.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 59.

O CHILDREN OF ADAM!

Holy words and pure and goodly deeds ascend unto the heaven of celestial glory. Strive that your deeds may be cleansed from the dust of self and hypocrisy and find favor at the court of glory; for ere long the assayers of mankind shall, in the holy presence of the Adored One, accept naught but absolute virtue and deeds of stainless purity. This is the daystar of wisdom and of divine mystery that hath shone above the horizon of the divine will. Blessed are they that turn thereunto.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 69.

A race of men, incomparable in character, shall be raised up which, with the feet of detachment, will tread under all who are in heaven and on earth, and will cast the sleeve of holiness over all that hath been created from water and clay.

Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

The secret of the Day that is to come is now concealed. It can neither be divulged nor estimated. The newly born babe of that Day excels the wisest and most venerable men of this time, and the lowliest and most unlearned of that period shall surpass in understanding the most erudite and accomplished divines of this age.

Words of the Báb, *The Dawn-Breakers*.

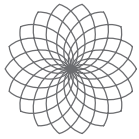
These children are neither Oriental nor Occidental, neither Asiatic nor American, neither European nor African, but they are of the Kingdom; their native home is heaven and their resort is the Kingdom of Abhá.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, Vol. III.

Pray that God may assist in this heavenly undertaking, that the world of mankind shall be saved from the ordeals of ignorance, blindness and spiritual death. Then will you behold light upon light, joy upon joy, absolute happiness reigning everywhere,

the people of the religions consorting together in fragrance and felicity, this world in its maturity becoming the reflection of the eternal Kingdom and this terrestrial abode of man the very paradise of God. Pray for this! Pray for this!

Public talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,17 November 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.



Living as a Global Community

1.7 Unity is Central to God's Purpose

Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. He Who is the Day-Star of Truth beareth Me witness! So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth. …

… At one time We spoke in the language of the lawgiver; at another in that of the truth-seeker and the mystic, and yet Our supreme purpose and highest wish hath always been to disclose the glory and sublimity of this station.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*.

… it is Our purpose, through the loving providence of God—exalted be His glory—and His surpassing mercy, to abolish, through the force of Our utterance, all disputes, war, and bloodshed, from the face of the earth.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*.

God's purpose in sending His Prophets unto men is twofold. The first is to liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance, and guide them to the light of true understanding. The second is to ensure the peace and tranquillity of mankind, and provide all the means by which they can be established.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXXIV.

The Bahá'í Faith upholds the unity of God, recognizes the unity of His Prophets, and inculcates the principle of the oneness and wholeness of the entire human race. It proclaims the necessity and the inevitability of the unification of mankind, asserts that it is gradually approaching, and claims that nothing short of the transmuting spirit of God, working through His chosen Mouthpiece in this day, can ultimately succeed in bringing it about.

It, moreover, enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all manner of prejudice and superstition, declares the purpose of religion to be the promotion of amity and concord, proclaims its essential harmony with science, and recognizes it as the foremost agency for the pacification and the orderly progress of human society. It unequivocally maintains the principle of equal

rights, opportunities and privileges for men and women, insists on compulsory education, eliminates extremes of poverty and wealth, abolishes the institution of priesthood, prohibits slavery, asceticism, mendicancy and monasticism, prescribes monogamy, discourages divorce, emphasizes the necessity of strict obedience to one's government, exalts any work performed in the spirit of service to the level of worship, urges either the creation or the selection of an auxiliary international language, and delineates the outlines of those institutions that must establish and perpetuate the general peace of mankind.

Shoghi Effendi, The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, *Guidance for Today and Tomorrow*, pp. 3-4.

1.8 Seven Lights of Unity

For none is self-sufficiency any longer possible, inasmuch as political ties unite all peoples and nations, and the bonds of trade and industry, of agriculture and education, are being strengthened every day. Hence the unity of all mankind can in this day be achieved. Verily this is none other but one of the wonders of this wondrous age, this glorious century. Of this past ages have been deprived, for this century—the century of light—hath been endowed with unique and unprecedented glory, power and illumination. Hence the miraculous unfolding of a fresh marvel every day. Eventually it will be seen how bright its candles will burn in the assemblage of man.

Behold how its light is now dawning upon the world's darkened horizon.

- The first candle is unity in the political realm, the early glimmerings of which can now be discerned.
- The second candle is unity of thought in world undertakings, the consummation of which will ere long be witnessed.
- The third candle is unity in freedom which will surely come to pass.
- The fourth candle is unity in religion which is the corner-stone of the foundation itself, and which, by the power of God, will be revealed in all its splendour.
- The fifth candle is the unity of nations—a unity which in this century will be securely established, causing all the peoples of the earth to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland.
- The sixth candle is unity of races, making of all that dwell on earth peoples and kindreds of one race.
- The seventh candle is unity of language, i.e., the choice of a universal tongue in which all peoples will be instructed and converse.

Each and every one of these will inevitably come to pass, inasmuch as the power of the kingdom of God will aid and assist in their realization.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 15.

1.9 The Uniting of Peoples and Nations

Verily the resplendent Light of God hath appeared in your midst … that ye may be guided aright to the ways of peace and, by the leave of God, step out of the darkness into the light and onto this far-extended Path of Truth.

The Báb, Excerpts from the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá', *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*.

The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXI.

The rulers and kings of the earth … must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men. Such a peace demandeth that the Great Powers should resolve, for the sake of the tranquillity of the peoples of the earth, to be fully reconciled among themselves. Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the purpose of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining internal order within their territories. …

… The day is approaching when all the peoples of the world will have adopted one universal language and one common script. When this is achieved, to whatsoever city a man may journey, it shall be as if he were entering his own home. These things are obligatory and absolutely essential.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXVII.

O ye the elected representatives of the people in every land! Take ye counsel together, and let your concern be only for that which profiteth mankind, and bettereth the condition thereof …

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet to Queen Victoria, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, para. 174.

It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXVII.

Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind—the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve—is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious co-operation among individual peoples and nations. … It calls for no less than the reconstruction and demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units.

Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, The Goal of A New World Order.

Carrying Forward an Ever-Advancing Civilization

1.10 Everyone must Contribute to the Advancement of Civilization

All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CIX.

The third Tajallí is concerning arts, crafts and sciences. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words. Great indeed is the claim of scientists and craftsmen on the peoples of the world. ... In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him. Thus hath the Tongue of Grandeur spoken in this Most Great Prison.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tajallíyát (Effulgences), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instil new life into every human frame ... Through the mere revelation of the word "Fashioner," issuing forth from His lips and proclaiming His attribute to mankind, such power is released as can generate, through successive ages, all the manifold arts that the hands of man can produce. ... In the days to come, ye will, verily, behold things of which ye have never heard before. ... In like manner, the moment the word expressing My attribute "The Omniscient" issueth forth from My mouth, every created thing will, according to its capacity and limitations, be invested with the power to unfold the knowledge of the most marvellous sciences, and will be empowered to manifest them in the course of time ...

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXIV.

CHAPTER 2

THE ORIGINS AND GROWTH OF THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

Overview
2.1 The First Century

The Ministry of the Báb
2.2 Its Essential Features
2.3 The Childhood and Early Life of the Báb
2.4 His Marriage to Khadíjih Bagum
2.5 The Birth of the Bábí Revelation
2.6 The Imprisonment of the Báb and His Declaration at Tabríz
2.7 The Covenant of the Báb concerning "Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest"
2.8 The Conference of Badasht
2.9 Upheavals in Mázindarán, Nayríz and Zanján
2.10 The Martyrdom of the Báb
2.11 The Martyrdom of Ṭáhirih
2.12 The Influence of the Báb's Ministry Throughout the World

The Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh
2.13 Overview
2.14 The Childhood and Early Life of Bahá'u'lláh
2.15 The Role of Bahá'u'lláh in the Ministry of the Báb
2.16 The Birth of the Bahá'í Revelation
2.17 The Exile of Bahá'u'lláh to 'Iráq
2.18 The Withdrawal of Bahá'u'lláh to Kurdistán
2.19 Return to Baghdád
2.20 The Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh
2.21 The Exile to Constantinople
2.22 The Exile of Bahá'u'lláh to Adrianople
2.23 The Rebellion of Mírzá Yaḥyá
2.24 The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh
2.25 Bahá'u'lláh's Incarceration in 'Akká
2.26 The Death of Mírzá Mihdí

2.27 Release from Prison
2.28 The Passing of Ásíyih Khánum and her High Station
2.29 The Passing of Bahá'u'lláh
2.30 The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh

The Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
2.31 Overview
2.32 The Role of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh
2.33 The Rebellion of Mírzá Muhammad 'Alí
2.34 The Rise of the Faith in the West
2.35 Renewal of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Incarceration
2.36 Entombment of the Báb's Remains on Mt. Carmel
2.37 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Travels in Africa, Europe and America
2.38 The Passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá
2.39 Bahíyyih Khánum: The Greatest Holy Leaf, Sister of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, an Archetype and Exemplar for the People of Bahá
2.40 The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The Formative Age
2.41 Overview
2.42 The Ministry of Shoghi Effendi followed by the Election of the Universal House of Justice
2.43 Successive Epochs of the Formative Age

The Growth of The Bahá'í Faith
2.44 Diffusing the Spirit of the Faith
2.45 The Inevitability of Opposition
2.46 The Dynamic of Crisis and Victory

Overview

2.1 The First Century

In its broadest outline the first century of the Bahá'í Era may be said to comprise the Heroic, the Primitive, the Apostolic Age of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and also the initial stages of the Formative, the Transitional, the Iron Age which is to witness the crystallization and shaping of the creative energies released by His Revelation. The first eighty years of this century may roughly be said to have covered the entire period of the first age, while the last two decades may be regarded as having witnessed the beginnings of the second. The former commences with the Declaration of the Báb, includes the mission of Bahá'u'lláh, and terminates with the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The latter is ushered in by His Will and Testament, which defines its character and establishes its foundation.

The century under our review may therefore be considered as falling into four distinct periods, of unequal duration, each of specific import and of tremendous and indeed unappraisable significance. These four periods are closely interrelated, and constitute successive acts of one, indivisible, stupendous and sublime drama, whose mystery no intellect can fathom, whose climax no eye can even dimly perceive, whose conclusion no mind can adequately foreshadow. Each of these acts revolves around its own theme, boasts of its own heroes, registers its own tragedies, records its own triumphs, and contributes its own share to the execution of one common, immutable Purpose. To isolate any one of them from the others, to dissociate the later manifestations of one universal, all-embracing Revelation from the pristine purpose that animated it in its earliest days, would be tantamount to a mutilation of the structure on which it rests, and to a lamentable perversion of its truth and of its history.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*.

The Ministry of the Báb

2.2 Its Essential Features

The first period (1844–1853), centres around the gentle, the youthful and irresistible person of the Báb, matchless in His meekness, imperturbable in His serenity, magnetic in His utterance, unrivalled in the dramatic episodes of His swift and tragic ministry. It begins with the Declaration of His Mission, culminates in

His martyrdom, and ends in a veritable orgy of religious massacre revolting in its hideousness. It is characterized by nine years of fierce and relentless contest, whose theatre was the whole of Persia, in which above ten thousand heroes laid down their lives, in which two sovereigns of the Qájár dynasty and their wicked ministers participated, and which was supported by the entire Shí'ah ecclesiastical hierarchy, by the military resources of the state, and by the implacable hostility of the masses.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.3 The Childhood and Early Life of the Báb

The Báb, whose name was Siyyid 'Alí-Muḥammad, was born in the city of Shíráz, on the first day of Muharram, in the year 1235 A.H. [20 October 1819 A.D.]. He belonged to a house which was renowned for its nobility and which traced its origin to Muḥammad Himself. ... In His early childhood He lost His father, Siyyid Muḥammad-Riḍá, a man who was known throughout the province of Fárs for his piety and virtue, and was held in high esteem and honour. Both His father and His mother were descendants of the Prophet, both were loved and respected by the people. He was reared by His maternal uncle, Ḥájí Mírzá Siyyid 'Alí, a martyr to the Faith, who placed Him, while still a child, under the care of a tutor named Shaykh 'Ábid. ...

Shaykh 'Ábid, known by his pupils as Shaykhuná, was a man of piety and learning. He had been a disciple of both Shaykh Aḥmad and Siyyid Káẓim. "One day," he related, "I asked the Báb to recite the opening words of the Qur'án: 'Bismi'lláhi'r-Raḥmáni'r-Raḥím.' He hesitated, pleading that unless He were told what these words signified, He would in no wise attempt to pronounce them. I pretended not to know their meaning. 'I know what these words signify,' observed my pupil; 'by your leave, I will explain them.' He spoke with such knowledge and fluency that I was struck with amazement. He expounded the meaning of 'Alláh' of 'Raḥmán', and 'Raḥím', in terms such as I had neither read nor heard. The sweetness of His utterance still lingers in my memory. I felt impelled to take Him back to His uncle and to deliver into his hands the Trust he had committed to my care. I determined to tell him how unworthy I felt to teach so remarkable a child. I found His uncle alone in his office. 'I have brought Him back to you,' I said, 'and commit Him to your vigilant protection. He is not to be treated as a mere child, for in Him I can already discern evidences of that mysterious power which the Revelation of the Ṣáḥibu'z-Zamán[1] alone can reveal. It is incumbent upon you to surround Him with your most loving care. Keep Him in your house, for He, verily, stands in no need of teachers such as I.'

Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers.*

He left Shíráz for Búshihr at the age of 17, and remained there for five years engaged in commercial pursuits. During this time he won the esteem of all the merchants with whom he was brought in contact, by his integrity and piety. He was extremely attentive to his religious duties, and gave away large sums to charity.

Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers.*

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[1] *"The Lord of the Age", one of the titles of the promised Qá'im.*

As I was already acquainted with Ḥájí Mírzá Siyyid ʻAlí, I was enabled to meet the Báb on several occasions. Every time I met Him, I found Him in such a state of humility and lowliness as words fail me to describe. His downcast eyes, His extreme courtesy, and the serene expression of His face made an indelible impression upon my soul. I often heard those who were closely associated with Him testify to the purity of His character, to the charm of His manners, to His self-effacement, to His high integrity, and to His extreme devotion to God.

Words of Ḥájí Siyyid Javád-i-Karbilá'í, *The Dawn-Breakers*.

2.4 His Marriage to Khadíjih Bagum

... the Báb was united in wedlock with the sister of Mírzá Siyyid Ḥasan and Mírzá Abu'l-Qásim. The child which resulted from this union, He named Aḥmad. He died in the year AH 1259, the year preceding the declaration of the Faith by the Báb.

Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*.

Speaking of the events of that memorable night, which, according to recollections of members of the Afnán family, occurred some time before the Báb declared His mission, Khadíjih Bagum related: 'An hour later, when the house was quiet and its occupants had gone to sleep, He rose from His bed and left the room. At first I took no particular notice of His absence, but when it lengthened to more than an hour I felt some concern... I went up the steps at the northern side of the courtyard. There I saw Him standing in the chamber, His hands raised heavenwards, intoning a prayer in a most melodious voice, with tears streaming down His face. And His face was luminous; rays of light radiated from it. He looked so majestic and resplendent that fear seized me, and I stood transfixed where I was, trembling uncontrollably... He made a gesture with His blessed hands, telling me to go back... Sleep was impossible that night...

At sunrise ... he went to His mother's room to take tea. I followed Him there and as soon as my eyes alighted on Him, that attitude and that majesty which I had witnessed the night before took shape before me... He passed me what was left of the tea in His own cup, which I drank. His kindness restored my courage, and when He asked what it was that troubled me I boldly replied that it was the change in Him that weighed heavily on my mind... He smiled and said that although He had not wished to be seen by me in the condition of the previous night, God had ordained otherwise. "It was the will of God". He said. "that you should have seen Me in the way you did last night, so that no shadow of doubt should ever cross your mind, and you should come to know with absolute certitude that I am that Manifestation of God Whose advent has been expected for a thousand years. This light radiates from My heart and from My Being." As soon as I heard these words I believed in Him. I prostrated myself before Him and my heart became calm and assured.'

H.M. Balyuzi, Khadíjih Bagum, the Wife of the Báb, pp. 10-14.

The wife of the Báb... perceived at the earliest dawn of His Revelation the glory and uniqueness of His Mission... To her the Báb confided the secret of His future sufferings, and unfolded to her eyes the significance of the events that were to transpire in His Day... He entrusted her with a special prayer, revealed and written

by Himself, the reading of which, He assured her, would remove her difficulties and lighten the burden of her woes. "In the hour of your perplexity," He directed her, "recite this prayer ere you go to sleep. I myself will appear to you and banish your anxiety."

Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*.

Thou shalt not be a woman, like other women, if thou obeyest God in the Cause of Truth, the greatest Truth. Know thou the great bounty conferred upon thee by the Ancient of Days, and take pride in being the consort of the Well-Beloved, Who is loved by God, the Greatest.

Assurance of the Báb to Khadíjih Bagum in the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá',
Khadíjih Bagum, the Wife of the Báb, p. 8.

2.5 The Birth of the Bábí Revelation

He Who communicated the original impulse to so incalculable a Movement was none other than the promised Qá'im (He who ariseth), the Ṣáḥibu'z-Zamán (the Lord of the Age), Who assumed the exclusive right of annulling the whole Qur'ánic Dispensation, Who styled Himself "*the Primal Point from which have been generated all created things … the Countenance of God Whose splendour can never be obscured, the Light of God Whose radiance can never fade*." The people among whom He appeared were the most decadent race in the civilized world, grossly ignorant, savage, cruel, steeped in prejudice, servile in their submission to an almost deified hierarchy … Fiercely fanatic, unspeakably corrupt, enjoying unlimited ascendancy over the masses, jealous of their position, and irreconcilably opposed to all liberal ideas, the members of this caste had for one thousand years invoked the name of the Hidden Imám, their breasts had glowed with the expectation of His advent …

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*.

O thou who art the first to believe in Me! Verily I say, I am the Báb, the Gate of God, and thou art the Bábu'l-Báb, the gate of that Gate. Eighteen souls must, in the beginning, spontaneously and of their own accord, accept Me and recognize the truth of My Revelation. … We shall instruct them to teach the Word of God and to quicken the souls of men.

Words of the Báb to Mullá Ḥusayn, *The Dawn-Breakers*.

He took up His pen and with incredible rapidity revealed the entire Súrih of Mulk, the first chapter of His commentary on the Súrih of Joseph. The overpowering effect of the manner in which He wrote was heightened by the gentle intonation of His voice which accompanied His writing. Not for one moment did He interrupt the flow of the verses which streamed from His pen. Not once did He pause till the Súrih of Mulk was finished.

Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*.

I sat spellbound by His utterance, oblivious of time and those who awaited me. Suddenly the call of the mu'adhdhin, summoning the faithful to their morning prayer, awakened me from the state of ecstasy into which I seemed to have fallen. All the delights, all the ineffable glories, which the Almighty has recounted in His

Book as the priceless possessions of the people of Paradise—these I seemed to be experiencing that night. Methinks I was in a place of which it could be truly said: "Therein no toil shall reach us, and therein no weariness shall touch us"; "No vain discourse shall they hear therein, nor any falsehood, but only the cry, 'Peace! Peace!'

Words of Mullá Ḥusayn, *The Dawn-Breakers*.

Say to Him, from me, "The effulgence of Thy face flashed forth, and the rays of Thy visage arose on high. Then speak the word, 'Am I not your Lord?' and 'Thou art, Thou art!' we will all reply."

Message of Ṭáhirih to the Báb, *The Dawn-Breakers*.

O My beloved friends! You are the bearers of the name of God in this Day. You have been chosen as the repositories of His mystery. It behoves each one of you to manifest the attributes of God, and to exemplify by your deeds and words the signs of His righteousness, His power and glory. The very members of your body must bear witness to the loftiness of your purpose, the integrity of your life, the reality of your faith, and the exalted character of your devotion. For verily I say, this is the Day spoken of by God in His book:[2] 'On that Day will We set a seal upon their mouths; yet shall their hands speak unto Us, and their feet shall bear witness to that which they shall have done.' … O My Letters! Verily I say, immensely exalted is this Day above the days of the Apostles of old. Nay, immeasurable is the difference! You are the witnesses of the Dawn of the promised Day of God. You are the partakers of the mystic chalice of His Revelation. Gird up the loins of endeavour, and be mindful of the words of God as revealed in His Book:[3] 'Lo, the Lord thy God is come, and with Him is the company of His angels arrayed before Him!' … I am preparing you for the advent of a mighty Day. Exert your utmost endeavour that, in the world to come, I, who am now instructing you, may, before the mercy-seat of God, rejoice in your deeds and glory in your achievements. … Heed not your weaknesses and frailty; fix your gaze upon the invincible power of the Lord, your God, the Almighty. … Arise in His name, put your trust wholly in Him, and be assured of ultimate victory.

Address of the Báb to the Letters of the Living, *The Dawn-Breakers*.

To the care of Mullá Ḥusayn He committed a mission, more specific in character and mightier in import. He affirmed that His covenant with him had been established, cautioned him to be forbearing with the divines he would encounter, directed him to proceed to Ṭihrán, and alluded, in the most glowing terms, to the as yet unrevealed Mystery enshrined in that city—a Mystery that would, He affirmed, transcend the light shed by both Ḥijáz and Shíráz.

Galvanized into action by the mandate conferred upon them, launched on their perilous and revolutionizing mission, these lesser luminaries who, together with the Báb, constitute the First Váḥid (Unity) of the Dispensation of the Bayán, scattered far and wide through the provinces of their native land, where, with matchless heroism, they resisted the savage and concerted onslaught of the forces arrayed against them, and immortalized their Faith by their own exploits and those of their co-

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2 *The Qur'án*

3 *The Qur'án*

religionists, raising thereby a tumult that convulsed their country and sent its echoes reverberating as far as the capitals of Western Europe.

It was not until, however, the Báb had received the eagerly anticipated letter of Mullá Ḥusayn, His trusted and beloved lieutenant, communicating the joyful tidings of his interview with Bahá'u'lláh, that He decided to undertake His long and arduous pilgrimage to the Tombs of His ancestors. In the month of Sha'bán, of the year A.H. 1260 (September, 1844) He Who, both on His father's and mother's side, was of the seed of the illustrious Fáṭimih, and Who was a descendant of the Imám Ḥusayn, the most eminent among the lawful successors of the Prophet of Islám, proceeded, in fulfillment of Islamic traditions, to visit the Kaaba.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.6 The Imprisonment of the Báb and His Declaration at Tabríz

The period of the Báb's banishment to the mountains of Ádhirbáyján, lasting no less than three years, constitutes the saddest, the most dramatic, and in a sense the most pregnant phase of His six year ministry. It comprises His nine months' unbroken confinement in the fortress of Máh-Kú, and His subsequent incarceration in the fortress of Chihríq, which was interrupted only by a brief yet memorable visit to Tabríz.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Upon His arrival in Máh-Kú, surnamed by Him Jabal-i-Básiṭ (the Open Mountain) no one was allowed to see Him for the first two weeks except His amanuensis, Siyyid Ḥusayn, and his brother. So grievous was His plight while in that fortress that, in the Persian Bayán, He Himself has stated that at night-time He did not even have a lighted lamp, and that His solitary chamber, constructed of sun-baked bricks, lacked even a door …

Secluded on the heights of a remote and dangerously situated mountain on the frontiers of the Ottoman and Russian empires; imprisoned within the solid walls of a four-towered fortress; cut off from His family, His kindred and His disciples; living in the vicinity of a bigoted and turbulent community who, by race, tradition, language and creed, differed from the vast majority of the inhabitants of Persia; guarded by the people of a district which, as the birthplace of the Grand Vizir, had been made the recipient of the special favours of his administration, the Prisoner of Máh-Kú seemed in the eyes of His adversary to be doomed to languish away the flower of His youth, and witness, at no distant date, the complete annihilation of His hopes. That adversary was soon to realize, however, how gravely he had misjudged both his Prisoner and those on whom he had lavished his favours. An unruly, a proud and unreasoning people were gradually subdued by the gentleness of the Báb, were chastened by His modesty, were edified by His counsels, and instructed by His wisdom. They were so carried away by their love for Him that their first act every morning, notwithstanding the remonstrations of the domineering 'Alí Khán, and the repeated threats of disciplinary measures received from Ṭihrán, was to seek

a place where they could catch a glimpse of His face, and beseech from afar His benediction upon their daily work.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Secret agents, however, charged to watch ʻAlí Khán, informed Ḥájí Mírzá Áqásí of the turn events were taking, whereupon he immediately decided to transfer the Báb to the fortress of Chihríq (about 10 April 1848), surnamed by Him the Jabal-i-Shadíd (the Grievous Mountain). There He was consigned to the keeping of Yaḥyá Khán, a brother-in-law of Muḥammad Sháh. Though at the outset he acted with the utmost severity, he was eventually compelled to yield to the fascination of his Prisoner. Nor were the Kurds, who lived in the village of Chihríq, and whose hatred of the Shíʻahs exceeded even that of the inhabitants of Máh-Kú, able to resist the pervasive power of the Prisoner's influence. They too were to be seen every morning, ere they started for their daily work, to approach the fortress and prostrate themselves in adoration before its holy Inmate. "So great was the confluence of the people," is the testimony of a European eye-witness, writing in his memoirs of the Báb, "that the courtyard, not being large enough to contain His hearers, the majority remained in the street and listened with rapt attention to the verses of the new Qur'án."

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

To allay the rising excitement the Báb was summoned to Tabríz. ...

The circumstances attending the examination of the Báb, as a result of so precipitate an act, may well rank as one of the chief landmarks of His dramatic career. The avowed purpose of that convocation was to arraign the Prisoner, and deliberate on the steps to be taken for the extirpation of His so-called heresy. It instead afforded Him the supreme opportunity of His mission to assert in public, formally and without any reservation, the claims inherent in His Revelation.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Upon His arrival, the Báb observed that every seat in the hall was occupied except one which had been reserved for the Valí-ʻAhd[4]. He greeted the assembly and, without the slightest hesitation, proceeded to occupy that vacant seat. The majesty of His gait, the expression of overpowering confidence which sat upon His brow—above all, the spirit of power which shone from His whole being, appeared to have for a moment crushed the soul out of the body of those whom he had greeted. A deep, a mysterious silence, suddenly fell upon them. Not one soul in that distinguished assembly dared to breathe a single word. At last the stillness which brooded over them was broken by the Niẓámu'l-ʻUlamá [5]. 'Who do you claim to be,' he asked the Báb, 'and what is the message you have brought?' 'I am,' thrice exclaimed the Báb, 'I am, I am, the promised One! I am the One whose name you have for a thousand years invoked, at whose mention you have risen, whose advent you have longed to witness, and the hour of whose Revelation you have prayed God to hasten. Verily I

[4] *The heir to the throne.*
[5] *The Prince's tutor.*

say, it is incumbent upon the peoples of both the East and the West to obey my word and pledge allegiance to My person.

Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers*.

I am the Mystic Fane which the Hand of Omnipotence hath reared. I am the Lamp which the Finger of God hath lit within its niche and caused to shine with deathless splendour. I am the Flame of that supernal Light that glowed upon Sinai in the gladsome Spot, and lay concealed in the midst of the Burning Bush.

The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*.

2.7 The Covenant of the Báb concerning "Him Whom God Shall Make Manifest"

I, indeed, beg to address Him Whom God shall make manifest, by Thy leave in these words: "Shouldst Thou dismiss the entire company of the followers of the Bayán in the Day of the Latter Resurrection by a mere sign of Thy finger even while still a suckling babe, Thou wouldst indeed be praised in Thy indication. And though no doubt is there about it, do Thou grant a respite of nineteen years as a token of Thy favor so that those who have embraced this Cause may be graciously rewarded by Thee. Thou art verily the Lord of grace abounding."

The Báb, Tablet to "Him Who Will Be Made Manifest", *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*.

When the Daystar of Bahá will shine resplendent above the horizon of eternity it is incumbent upon you to present yourselves before His Throne. Beware lest ye be seated in His presence or ask questions without His leave…

Beg ye of Him the wondrous tokens of His favor that He may graciously reveal for you whatever He willeth and desireth, inasmuch as on that Day all the revelations of divine bounty shall circle around the Seat of His glory and emanate from His presence, could ye but understand it.

The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*.

To this period of incarceration in the fortresses of Máh-Kú and Chihríq—a period of unsurpassed fecundity, yet bitter in its humiliations and ever-deepening sorrows—belong almost all the written references, whether in the form of warnings, appeals or exhortations, which the Báb, in anticipation of the approaching hour of His supreme affliction, felt it necessary to make to the Author of a Revelation that was soon to supersede His own. Conscious from the very beginning of His twofold mission, as the Bearer of a wholly independent Revelation and the Herald of One still greater than His own, He could not content Himself with the vast number of commentaries, of prayers, of laws and ordinances, of dissertations and epistles, of homilies and orations that had incessantly streamed from His pen. The Greater Covenant into which, as affirmed in His writings, God had, from time immemorial, entered, through the Prophets of all ages, with the whole of mankind, regarding the new-born Revelation, had already been fulfilled. It had now to be supplemented by a Lesser Covenant which He felt bound to make with the entire body of His followers concerning the One Whose advent He characterized as the fruit and ultimate purpose of His Dispensation. Such a Covenant had invariably

been the feature of every previous religion. It had existed, under various forms, with varying degrees of emphasis, had always been couched in veiled language, and had been alluded to in cryptic prophecies, in abstruse allegories, in unauthenticated traditions, and in the fragmentary and obscure passages of the sacred Scriptures. In the Bábí Dispensation, however, it was destined to be established in clear and unequivocal language, though not embodied in a separate document. Unlike the Prophets gone before Him, Whose Covenants were shrouded in mystery, unlike Bahá'u'lláh, Whose clearly defined Covenant was incorporated in a specially written Testament, and designated by Him as "*the Book of My Covenant*," the Báb chose to intersperse His Book of Laws, the *Persian Bayán*, with unnumbered passages, some designedly obscure, mostly indubitably clear and conclusive, in which He fixes the date of the promised Revelation, extols its virtues, asserts its pre-eminent character, assigns to it unlimited powers and prerogatives, and tears down every barrier that might be an obstacle to its recognition. "*He, verily,*" Bahá'u'lláh, referring to the Báb in His *Kitáb-i-Badí'*, has stated, "*hath not fallen short of His duty to exhort the people of the Bayán and to deliver unto them His Message. In no age or dispensation hath any Manifestation made mention, in such detail and in such explicit language, of the Manifestation destined to succeed Him.*"

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

A successor or vicegerent the Báb never named, an interpreter of His teachings He refrained from appointing. So transparently clear were His references to the Promised One, so brief was to be the duration of His own Dispensation, that neither the one nor the other was deemed necessary. All He did was, according to the testimony of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in "A Traveller's Narrative," to nominate on the advice of Bahá'u'lláh and of another disciple, Mírzá Yaḥyá, who would act solely as a figure-head pending the manifestation of the Promised One, thus enabling Bahá'u'lláh to promote, in relative security, the Cause so dear to His heart.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.8 The Conference of Badasht

The last three and most eventful years of the Báb's ministry had, as we have observed in the preceding pages, witnessed not only the formal and public declaration of His mission, but also an unprecedented effusion of His inspired writings, including both the revelation of the fundamental laws of His Dispensation and also the establishment of that Lesser Covenant which was to safeguard the unity of His followers and pave the way for the advent of an incomparably mightier Revelation. It was during this same period, in the early days of His incarceration in the fortress of Chihríq, that the independence of the new-born Faith was openly recognized and asserted by His disciples. The laws underlying the new Dispensation had been revealed by its Author in a prison-fortress in the mountains of Ádhirbáyján, while the Dispensation itself was now to be inaugurated in a plain on the border of Mázindarán, at a conference of His assembled followers.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

... suddenly the figure of Ṭáhirih , adorned and unveiled, appeared before the eyes of the assembled companions. Consternation immediately seized the entire gathering. All stood aghast before this sudden and most unexpected apparition. To behold her face unveiled was to them inconceivable. Even to gaze at her shadow was a thing which they deemed improper, inasmuch as they regarded her as the very incarnation of Fáṭimih, the noblest emblem of chastity in their eyes.

Quietly, silently, and with the utmost dignity Ṭáhirih stepped forward and, advancing towards Quddús, seated herself on his right-hand side. Her unruffled serenity sharply contrasted with the affrighted countenances of those who were gazing on her face. Fear, anger, and bewilderment stirred the depths of their souls. That sudden revelation seemed to have stunned their faculties. 'Abdu'l-Kháliq-i-Iṣfáhání was so gravely shaken that he cut his throat with his own hands. Covered with blood and shrieking with excitement, he fled away from the face of Ṭáhirih. ...

... She rose from her seat and, undeterred by the tumult she had raised in the hearts of her companions, began to address the remnant of that assembly. Without the least premeditation, and in a language that bore a striking resemblance to that of the Qur'án, she delivered her appeal with matchless eloquence and profound fervour. ...

... Ṭáhirih invited those who were present to celebrate befittingly this great occasion. 'This day is the day of festivity and universal rejoicing,' she added, 'the day on which the fetters of the past are burst asunder. Let those who have shared in this great achievement arise and embrace each other.'

That memorable day and those which immediately followed it witnessed the most revolutionary changes in the life and habits of the assembled followers of the Báb.

Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers.*

2.9 Upheavals in Mázindarán, Nayríz and Zanján

The Báb's captivity in a remote corner of Ádhirbáyján, immortalized by the proceedings of the Conference of Badasht, and distinguished by such notable developments as the public declaration of His mission, the formulation of the laws of His Dispensation and the establishment of His Covenant, was to acquire added significance through the dire convulsions that sprang from the acts of both His adversaries and His disciples. The commotions that ensued, as the years of that captivity drew to a close, and that culminated in His own martyrdom, called forth a degree of heroism on the part of His followers and a fierceness of hostility on the part of His enemies which had never been witnessed during the first three years of His ministry. Indeed, this brief but most turbulent period may be rightly regarded as the bloodiest and most dramatic of the Heroic Age of the Bahá'í Era.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

In remote and isolated Centres the scattered disciples of a persecuted community were pitilessly struck down by the sword of their foes, while in Centres where large numbers had congregated measures were taken in self-defence, which, misconstrued by a cunning and deceitful adversary, served in their turn to inflame still further the hostility of the authorities, and multiply the outrages perpetrated by the oppressor. In the East at Shaykh Ṭabarsí, in the south in Nayríz, in the west in Zanján, and in

the capital itself, massacres, upheavals, demonstrations, engagements, sieges, acts of treachery proclaimed, in rapid succession, the violence of the storm which had broken out, and exposed the bankruptcy, and blackened the annals, of a proud yet degenerate people.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Arise, ... and with complete detachment proceed, in the guise of a traveller, to Mázindarán, and there visit, on My behalf, the spot which enshrines the bodies of those immortals who, with their blood, have sealed their faith in My Cause. As you approach the precincts of that hallowed ground, put off your shoes and, bowing your head in reverence to their memory, invoke their names and prayerfully make the circuit of their shrine. Bring back to Me, as a remembrance of your visit, a handful of that holy earth that covers the remains of My beloved ones, Quddús and Mullá Ḥusayn. Strive to be back here ere the day of Naw-Rúz, that you may celebrate with Me that festival, the only one I probably shall ever see again.

Words of the Báb, Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers.*

2.10 The Martyrdom of the Báb

While the convulsions of Mázindarán and Nayríz were pursuing their bloody course the Grand Vizir of Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, anxiously pondering the significance of these dire happenings, and apprehensive of their repercussions on his countrymen, his government and his sovereign, was feverishly revolving in his mind that fateful decision which was not only destined to leave its indelible imprint on the fortunes of his country, but was to be fraught with such incalculable consequences for the destinies of the whole of mankind...

The siege of Zanján was still in progress when he, dispensing with an explicit order from his sovereign, and acting independently of his counsellors and fellow-ministers, dispatched his order to Prince Ḥamzih Mírzá, the Ḥishmatu'd-Dawlih, the governor of Ádhirbáyján, instructing him to execute the Báb... Confronted with a flat refusal by the indignant Prince to perform what he regarded as a flagitious crime, the Amír-Niẓám commissioned his own brother, Mírzá Ḥasan Khán, to execute his orders. The usual formalities designed to secure the necessary authorization from the leading mujtahids of Tabríz were hastily and easily completed. Neither Mullá Muḥammad-i-Mamáqání, however, who had penned the Báb's death-warrant on the very day of His examination in Tabríz, nor Ḥájí Mírzá Báqir, nor Mullá Murtaḍá-Qulí, to whose houses their Victim was ignominiously led by the farrásh-báshí, by order of the Grand Vizir, condescended to meet face to face their dreaded Opponent.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

The farrásh-báshí had abruptly interrupted the last conversation which the Báb was confidentially having in one of the rooms of the barracks with His amanuensis Siyyid Ḥusayn, and was drawing the latter aside, and severely rebuking him, when he was thus addressed by his Prisoner: "*Not until I have said to him all those things that I wish to say can any earthly power silence Me. Though all the world be armed against Me, yet shall it be powerless to deter Me from fulfilling, to the last word, My intention.*" To the Christian Sám Khán—the colonel of the Armenian regiment

ordered to carry out the execution—who, seized with fear lest his act should provoke the wrath of God, had begged to be released from the duty imposed upon him, the Báb gave the following assurance: "*Follow your instructions, and if your intention be sincere, the Almighty is surely able to relieve you of your perplexity.*"

Sám Khán accordingly set out to discharge his duty. A spike was driven into a pillar which separated two rooms of the barracks facing the square. Two ropes were fastened to it from which the Báb and one of his disciples, the youthful and devout Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí-i-Zunúzí, surnamed Anís, who had previously flung himself at the feet of his Master and implored that under no circumstances he be sent away from Him, were separately suspended. The firing squad ranged itself in three files, each of two hundred and fifty men. Each file in turn opened fire until the whole detachment had discharged its bullets. So dense was the smoke from the seven hundred and fifty rifles that the sky was darkened. As soon as the smoke had cleared away the astounded multitude of about ten thousand souls, who had crowded onto the roof of the barracks, as well as the tops of the adjoining houses, beheld a scene which their eyes could scarcely believe.

The Báb had vanished from their sight! Only his companion remained, alive and unscathed, standing beside the wall on which they had been suspended. The ropes by which they had been hung alone were severed. "The Siyyid-i-Báb has gone from our sight!" cried out the bewildered spectators. A frenzied search immediately ensued. He was found, unhurt and unruffled, in the very room He had occupied the night before, engaged in completing His interrupted conversation with His amanuensis. "*I have finished My conversation with Siyyid Ḥusayn*" were the words with which the Prisoner, so providentially preserved, greeted the appearance of the farrásh-báshí, "*Now you may proceed to fulfill your intention.*" Recalling the bold assertion his Prisoner had previously made, and shaken by so stunning a revelation, the farrásh-báshí quitted instantly the scene, and resigned his post.

Sám Khán, likewise, remembering, with feelings of awe and wonder, the reassuring words addressed to him by the Báb, ordered his men to leave the barracks immediately, and swore, as he left the courtyard, never again, even at the cost of his life, to repeat that act. Áqá Ján-i-Khamsih, colonel of the body-guard, volunteered to replace him. On the same wall and in the same manner the Báb and His companion were again suspended, while the new regiment formed in line and opened fire upon them. This time, however, their breasts were riddled with bullets, and their bodies completely dissected, with the exception of their faces which were but little marred. "*O wayward generation!*" were the last words of the Báb to the gazing multitude, as the regiment prepared to fire its volley, "*Had you believed in Me every one of you would have followed the example of this youth, who stood in rank above most of you, and would have willingly sacrificed himself in My path. The day will come when you will have recognized Me; that day I shall have ceased to be with you.*"

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

On the evening of the very day of the Báb's execution, which fell on the ninth of July 1850 [28th of Sha'bán 1266 A.H.], during the thirty–first year of His age and the seventh of His ministry, the mangled bodies were transferred from the courtyard of the barracks to the edge of the moat outside the gate of the city. Four companies,

each consisting of ten sentinels, were ordered to keep watch in turn over them. On the following morning the Russian Consul in Tabríz visited the spot, and ordered the artist who had accompanied him to make a drawing of the remains as they lay beside the moat. In the middle of the following night a follower of the Báb, Ḥájí Sulaymán Khán, succeeded, through the instrumentality of a certain Ḥájí Alláh-Yár, in removing the bodies to the silk factory owned by one of the believers of Mílán, and laid them, the next day, in a specially made wooden casket, which he later transferred to a place of safety. Meanwhile the mullás were boastfully proclaiming from the pulpits that, whereas the holy body of the Immaculate Imám would be preserved from beasts of prey and from all creeping things, this man's body had been devoured by wild animals. No sooner had the news of the transfer of the remains of the Báb and of His fellow-sufferer been communicated to Bahá'u'lláh than He ordered that same Sulaymán Khán to bring them to Ṭihrán, where they were taken to the Imám-Zádih-Ḥasan, from whence they were removed to different places, until the time when, in pursuance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's instructions, they were transferred to the Holy Land, and were permanently and ceremoniously laid to rest by Him in a specially erected mausoleum on the slopes of Mt. Carmel.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.11 The Martyrdom of Ṭáhirih

... entitled Ṭáhirih (the Pure One) by the "Tongue of Power and Glory;" and the only woman enrolled by the Báb as one of the Letters of the Living; she had, through a dream, referred to earlier in these pages, established her first contact with a Faith which she continued to propagate to her last breath, and in its hour of greatest peril, with all the ardor of her unsubduable spirit... Through her eloquent pleadings, her fearless denunciations, her dissertations, poems and translations, her commentaries and correspondence, she persisted in firing the imagination and in enlisting the allegiance of Arabs and Persians alike to the new Revelation, in condemning the perversity of her generation, and in advocating a revolutionary transformation in the habits and manners of her people...

One night, aware that the hour of her death was at hand, she put on the attire of a bride, and anointed herself with perfume, and, sending for the wife of the Kalantar, she communicated to her the secret of her impending martyrdom, and confided to her last wishes. Then, closeting herself in her chambers, she awaited, in prayer and meditation, the hour which was to witness her reunion with her Beloved. She was pacing the floor of her room, chanting a litany expressive of both grief and triumph, when the farráshes of 'Azíz Khán-i-Sardár arrived, in the dead of night, to conduct her to the Ílkhání garden, which lay beyond the city gates, and which was to be the site of her martyrdom. When she arrived the Sardár was in the midst of a drunken debauch with his lieutenants, and was roaring with laughter; he ordered offhand that she be strangled at once and thrown into a pit. With that same silken kerchief which she had intuitively reserved for that purpose, and delivered in her last moments to the son of Kalantar who accompanied her, the death of this immortal heroine was accomplished. Her body was lowered into a well, which was then filled with earth and stones, in the manner she herself had desired.

Thus ended the life of this great Bábí heroine, the first woman suffrage martyr, who, at her death, turning to the one in whose custody she had been placed, had boldly declared: "You can kill me as soon as you like, but you cannot stop the emancipation of women." Her career was as dazzling as it was brief, as tragic as it was eventful. Unlike her fellow-disciples, whose exploits remained, for the most part unknown, and unsung by their contemporaries in foreign lands, the fame of this immortal woman was noised abroad, and travelling with remarkable swiftness as far as the capitals of Western Europe, aroused the enthusiastic admiration and evoked the ardent praise of men and women of divers nationalities, callings and cultures. Little wonder that 'Abdu'l-Bahá should have joined her name to those of Sarah, of Ásíyih, of the Virgin Mary and of Fáṭimih, who, in the course of successive Dispensations, have towered, by reason of their intrinsic merits and unique position, above the rank and file of their sex.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.12 The Influence of the Báb's Ministry Throughout the World

Is there any Remover of difficulties save God? Say: Praised be God! He is God! All are His servants and all abide by His bidding!

The Báb, Prayers and Meditations, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb.*

"*Many persons from all parts of the world,*" is 'Abdu'l-Bahá's written assertion, "*set out for Persia and began to investigate wholeheartedly the matter.*" The Czar of Russia, a contemporary chronicler has written, had even, shortly before the Báb's martyrdom, instructed the Russian Consul in Tabríz to fully inquire into, and report the circumstances of so startling a Movement, a commission that could not be carried out in view of the Báb's execution. In countries as remote as those of Western Europe an interest no less profound was kindled, and spread with great rapidity to literary, artistic, diplomatic and intellectual circles. "All Europe," attests the above-mentioned French publicist, "was stirred to pity and indignation ... Among the littérateurs of my generation, in the Paris of 1890, the martyrdom of the Báb was still as fresh a topic as had been the first news of His death. We wrote poems about Him. Sarah Bernhardt entreated Catulle Mendès for a play on the theme of this historic tragedy." A Russian poetess, member of the Philosophic, Oriental and Bibliological Societies of St Petersburg, published in 1903 a drama entitled "The Báb," which a year later was played in one of the principal theatres of that city, was subsequently given publicity in London, was translated into French in Paris, and into German by the poet Fiedler, was presented again, soon after the Russian Revolution, in the Folk Theatre in Leningrad, and succeeded in arousing the genuine sympathy and interest of the renowned Tolstoy, whose eulogy of the poem was later published in the Russian press.

It would indeed be no exaggeration to say that nowhere in the whole compass of the world's religious literature, except in the Gospels, do we find any record relating to the death of any of the religion-founders of the past comparable to the martyrdom suffered by the Prophet of Shíráz.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

The Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh

2.13 Overview

The second period (1853–1892) derives its inspiration from the august figure of Bahá'u'lláh, pre-eminent in holiness, awesome in the majesty of His strength and power, unapproachable in the transcendent brightness of His glory. It opens with the first stirrings, in the soul of Bahá'u'lláh while in the Síyáh-Chál of Ṭihrán, of the Revelation anticipated by the Báb, attains its plenitude in the proclamation of that Revelation to the kings and ecclesiastical leaders of the earth, and terminates in the ascension of its Author in the vicinity of the prison-town of 'Akká. It extends over thirty–nine years of continuous, of unprecedented and overpowering Revelation, is marked by the propagation of the Faith to the neighbouring territories of Turkey, of Russia, of 'Iráq, of Syria, of Egypt and of India, and is distinguished by a corresponding aggravation of hostility, represented by the united attacks launched by the Sháh of Persia and the Sulṭán of Turkey, the two admittedly most powerful potentates of the East, as well as by the opposition of the twin sacerdotal orders of Shí'ah and Sunní Islám.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.14 The Childhood and Early Life of Bahá'u'lláh

When Bahá'u'lláh was still a child, the Vazír, His father, dreamed a dream. Bahá'u'lláh appeared to him swimming in a vast, limitless ocean. His body shone upon the waters with a radiance that illumined the sea. Around His head, which could distinctly be seen above the waters, there radiated, in all directions, His long, jet-black locks, floating in great profusion above the waves. As he dreamed, a multitude of fishes gathered round Him, each holding fast to the extremity of one hair. Fascinated by the effulgence of His face, they followed Him in whatever direction He swam. Great as was their number, and however firmly they clung to His locks, not one single hair seemed to have been detached from His head, nor did the least injury affect His person. Free and unrestrained, He moved above the waters and they all followed Him.

The Vazír, greatly impressed by this dream, summoned a soothsayer, who had achieved fame in that region, and asked him to interpret it for him. This man, as if inspired by a premonition of the future glory of Bahá'u'lláh, declared: "The limitless ocean that you have seen in your dream, O Vazír, is none other than the world of being. Single-handed and alone, your son will achieve supreme ascendancy over it. Wherever He may please, He will proceed unhindered. No one will resist His

march, no one will hinder His progress. The multitude of fishes signifies the turmoil which He will arouse amidst the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Around Him will they gather, and to Him will they cling. Assured of the unfailing protection of the Almighty, this tumult will never harm His person, nor will His loneliness upon the sea of life endanger His safety.

Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers.*

When Bahá'u'lláh was nearly fifteen years old, His elder sister Sárih Khánum and Mírzá Maḥmúd, the son of Mírzá Ismá'íl-i-Vazír of Yálrúd, were married. This Mírzá Maḥmúd, who never espoused the new Faith, had a younger sister, Ásíyih Khánum: winsome, vivacious and exceedingly beautiful. As soon as she came of age, and Bahá'u'lláh was nearly eighteen, Sárih Khánum requested her father, Mírzá Buzurg, to ask the hand of this sister-in-law for her Brother, Mírzá Ḥusayn-'Alí. Their marriage took place in Jamádíyu'l-Ukhrá (Jamádíyu'th-Thání) A.H. 1251 (about October 1835). Ásíyih Khánum was the mother of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

H. M. Balyuzi, *Bahá'u'lláh: The King of Glory*, p. 23.

2.15 The Role of Bahá'u'lláh in the Ministry of the Báb

He [6] it was Who, scarce three months after the Faith was born, received, through the envoy of the Báb, Mullá Ḥusayn, the scroll which bore to Him the first tidings of a newly announced Revelation, Who instantly acclaimed its truth, and arose to champion its cause. ... It was He Who, through His correspondence with the Author of the newly founded Faith, and His intimate association with the most distinguished amongst its disciples, such as Váḥid, Ḥujjat , Quddús, Mullá Ḥusayn and Ṭáhirih, was able to foster its growth, elucidate its principles, reinforce its ethical foundations, fulfill its urgent requirements, avert some of the immediate dangers threatening it and participate effectually in its rise and consolidation. ... He it was Who, in the hey-day of His life, flinging aside every consideration of earthly fame, wealth and position, careless of danger, and risking the obloquy of His caste, arose to identify Himself, first in Ṭihrán and later in His native province of Mázindarán, with the cause of an obscure and proscribed sect; won to its support a large number of the officials and notables of Núr, not excluding His own associates and relatives ... He it was Who unobtrusively and unerringly directed the proceedings of the Conference of Badasht; Who entertained as His guests Quddús, Ṭáhirih and the eighty–one disciples who had gathered on that occasion; Who revealed every day a Tablet and bestowed on each of the participants a new name; Who faced unaided the assault of a mob of more than five hundred villagers in Níyálá ... It was exclusively to His care that the documents of the Báb, His pen-case, His seals, and agate rings, together with a scroll on which He had penned, in the form of a pentacle, no less than three hundred and sixty derivatives of the word Bahá, were delivered, in conformity with instructions He Himself had issued prior to His departure from Chihríq. It was solely due to His initiative, and in strict accordance with His instructions, that the precious remains of the Báb were safely transferred from Tabríz to the capital, and

[6] *Bahá'u'lláh*

were concealed and safeguarded with the utmost secrecy and care throughout the turbulent years following His martyrdom.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

The first confinement that the Báb suffered at the hands of His enemies was in the house of 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd Khán, the chief constable of Shíráz; the first confinement of Bahá'u'lláh was in the home of the kad-khudás of Ṭihrán. The Báb's second imprisonment was in the castle of Máh-Kú; that of Bahá'u'lláh was in the private residence of the governor of Ámul. The Báb was scourged in the namáz-khánih of the Shaykhu'l-Islám of Tabríz; the same indignity was inflicted on Bahá'u'lláh in the namáz-khánih of the mujtahid of Ámul. The Báb's third confinement was in the castle of Chihríq; Bahá'u'lláh's was in the Síyáh-Chál of Ṭihrán. The Báb, whose trials and sufferings had preceded, in almost every case, those of Bahá'u'lláh, had offered Himself to ransom His beloved from the perils that beset that precious Life; whilst Bahá'u'lláh, on His part, unwilling that He who so greatly loved Him should be the sole Sufferer, shared at every turn the cup that touched His lips.

Nabíl, *The Dawn-Breakers.*

2.16 The Birth of the Bahá'í Revelation

One day I remember well, though I was only six years old at the time. It seemed that an attempt had been made on the life of the Sháh by a half-crazy young Bábí.

My father was away at his country house in the village of Níavirán, which was his property, the villagers of which were all and individually cared for by him.

Suddenly and hurriedly a servant came rushing in great distress to my mother.

The master, the master, he is arrested—I have seen him! He has walked many miles! Oh, they have beaten him! They say he has suffered the torture of the bastinado! His feet are bleeding! He has no shoes on! His turban has gone! His clothes are torn! There are chains upon his neck!

Words of Bahíyyih Khánum, *The Chosen Highway*, pp. 40–41.

As to the subterranean dungeon into which He was thrown, and which originally had served as a reservoir of water for one of the public baths of the capital, let His own words, recorded in His *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, bear testimony to the ordeal which He endured in that pestilential hole. "*We were consigned for four months to a place foul beyond comparison.... Upon Our arrival We were first conducted along a pitch-black corridor, from whence We descended three steep flights of stairs to the place of confinement assigned to Us. The dungeon was wrapped in thick darkness, and Our fellow-prisoners numbered nearly one hundred and fifty souls: thieves, assassins and highwaymen. Though crowded, it had no other outlet than the passage by which We entered. No pen can depict that place, nor any tongue describe its loathsome smell. Most of those men had neither clothes nor bedding to lie on. God alone knoweth what befell Us in that most foul-smelling and gloomy place!*" Bahá'u'lláh's feet were placed in stocks, and around His neck were fastened the Qará-Guhar chains of such galling weight that their mark remained imprinted upon His body all the days of His life. ... The place was chill and damp, filthy, fever-stricken, infested with vermin, and filled with a noisome stench. Animated by a relentless hatred His enemies went even so far

as to intercept and poison His food, in the hope of obtaining the favour of the mother of their sovereign, His most implacable foe—an attempt which, though it impaired His health for years to come, failed to achieve its purpose.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

We were placed in two rows, each facing the other. We had taught them to repeat certain verses which, every night, they chanted with extreme fervour. 'God is sufficient unto me; He verily is the All-sufficing!' one row would intone, while the other would reply: 'In Him let the trusting trust.' The chorus of these gladsome voices would continue to peal out until the early hours of the morning…

Every day Our gaolers, entering Our cell, would call the name of one of Our companions, bidding him arise and follow them to the foot of the gallows. With what eagerness would the owner of that name respond to that solemn call! Relieved of his chains, he would spring to his feet and, in a state of uncontrollable delight, would approach and embrace Us. We would seek to comfort him with the assurance of an everlasting life in the world beyond, and filling his heart with hope and joy, would send him forth to win the crown of glory. He would embrace, in turn, the rest of his fellow-prisoners and then proceed to die as dauntlessly as he had lived.

Words of Bahá'u'lláh, *The Dawn-Breakers.*

… at so critical an hour and under such appalling circumstances the "*Most Great Spirit,*" as designated by Himself, and symbolized in the Zoroastrian, the Mosaic, the Christian, and Muḥammadan Dispensations by the Sacred Fire, the Burning Bush, the Dove and the Angel Gabriel respectively, descended upon, and revealed itself, personated by a "*Maiden,*" to the agonized soul of Bahá'u'lláh.

"*One night in a dream,*" He Himself, calling to mind, in the evening of His life, the first stirrings of God's Revelation within His soul, has written, "*these exalted words were heard on every side: 'Verily, We shall render Thee victorious by Thyself and by Thy pen. Grieve Thou not for that which hath befallen Thee, neither be Thou afraid, for Thou art in safety. Ere long will God raise up the treasures of the earth—men who will aid Thee through Thyself and through Thy Name, wherewith God hath revived the hearts of such as have recognized Him.'*"

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

In His Súratu'l-Haykal (the Súrih of the Temple) He thus describes those breathless moments when the Maiden, symbolizing the "*Most Great Spirit*" proclaimed His mission to the entire creation: "*While engulfed in tribulations I heard a most wondrous, a most sweet voice, calling above My head. Turning My face, I beheld a Maiden—the embodiment of the remembrance of the name of My Lord—suspended in the air before Me. So rejoiced was she in her very soul that her countenance shone with the ornament of the good-pleasure of God, and her cheeks glowed with the brightness of the All-Merciful. Betwixt earth and heaven she was raising a call which captivated the hearts and minds of men. She was imparting to both My inward and outer being tidings which rejoiced My soul, and the souls of God's honoured servants. Pointing with her finger unto My head, she addressed all who are in heaven and all who are on earth, saying: 'By God! This is the Best-Beloved of the worlds, and yet ye comprehend not. This is the Beauty of God amongst you, and the power of His sovereignty within*

you, could ye but understand. This is the Mystery of God and His Treasure, the Cause of God and His glory unto all who are in the kingdoms of Revelation and of creation, if ye be of them that perceive.'"

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

I know not, O my God, what the Fire is which Thou didst kindle in Thy land. Earth can never cloud its splendor, nor water quench its flame. All the peoples of the world are powerless to resist its force. Great is the blessedness of him that hath drawn nigh unto it, and heard its roaring.

Some, O my God, Thou didst, through Thy strengthening grace, enable to approach it, while others Thou didst keep back by reason of what their hands have wrought in Thy days. Whoso hath hasted towards it and attained unto it hath, in his eagerness to gaze on Thy beauty, yielded his life in Thy path, and ascended unto Thee, wholly detached from aught else except Thyself.

I beseech Thee, O my Lord, by this Fire which blazeth and rageth in the world of creation, to rend asunder the veils that have hindered me from appearing before the throne of Thy majesty, and from standing at the door of Thy gate. Do Thou ordain for me, O my Lord, every good thing Thou didst send down in Thy Book, and suffer me not to be far removed from the shelter of Thy mercy.

Powerful art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee. Thou art, verily, the All-Powerful, the Most Generous.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh*, LIII.

2.17 The Exile of Bahá'u'lláh to 'Iráq

Not even for a single moment hath this Wronged One ever concealed Himself. Rather hath He at all times remained steadfast and conspicuous before the eyes of all men. Never have We retreated, nor shall We ever seek flight. In truth it is the foolish people who flee from Our presence. We left Our home country accompanied by two mounted escorts, representing the two honoured governments of Persia and Russia until We arrived in 'Iráq in the plenitude of glory and power. Praise be to God! The Cause whereof this Wronged One is the Bearer standeth as high as heaven and shineth resplendent as the sun. Concealment hath no access unto this station, nor is there any occasion for fear or silence.

Bahá'u'lláh, Ṭarázát (Ornaments), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

On the first day of the month of Rabí'u'th-Thání, of the year 1269 A.H., [January 12, 1853], nine months after His return from Karbilá, Bahá'u'lláh, together with some of the members of His family, and escorted by an officer of the Imperial body-guard and an official representing the Russian Legation, set out on His three months' journey to Baghdád. Among those who shared His exile was His wife, the saintly Navváb, entitled by Him the "Most Exalted Leaf," who, during almost forty years, continued to evince a fortitude, a piety, a devotion and a nobility of soul which earned her from the pen of her Lord the posthumous and unrivalled tribute of having been made His "*perpetual consort in all the worlds of God*." His nine-year-old son, later surnamed the "Most Great Branch," destined to become the Centre of His Covenant

and authorized Interpreter of His teachings, together with His seven-year-old sister, known in later years by the same title as that of her illustrious mother, and whose services until the ripe old age of four score years and six, no less than her exalted parentage, entitle her to the distinction of ranking as the outstanding heroine of the Bahá'í Dispensation, were also included among the exiles who were now bidding their last farewell to their native country. Of the two brothers who accompanied Him on that journey the first was Mírzá Músá, commonly called Áqáy-i-Kalím, His staunch and valued supporter, the ablest and most distinguished among His brothers and sisters, and one of the "*only two persons who,*" according to Bahá'u'lláh's testimony, "*were adequately informed of the origins*" of His Faith. The other was Mírzá Muḥammad-Qulí, a half-brother, who, in spite of the defection of some of his relatives, remained to the end loyal to the Cause he had espoused.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

This journey was filled with indescribable difficulties. My mother had no experience, no servants, no provisions and very little money left. My father was extremely ill, not having recovered from the ordeals of the torture and the prison. No one of all our friends and relations dared to come to our help, or even to say good-bye, but one old lady, the grandmother of Ásíyih Khánum.

… At length we started on that fearful journey, which lasted about four weeks; the weather was bitterly cold, snow was upon the ground.

On the way to Baghdád we sometimes encamped in wilderness places, but in that month of December, the cold was intense and we were not well prepared!

Words of Bahíyyih Khánum, *The Chosen Highway*, pp. 45–46.

2.18 The Withdrawal of Bahá'u'lláh to Kurdistán

One such crisis which, as it deepened, threatened to jeopardize His new-born Faith and to subvert its earliest foundations, overshadowed the first years of His sojourn in 'Iráq, the initial stage in His life-long exile, and imparted to them a special significance. Unlike those which preceded it, this crisis was purely internal in character, and was occasioned solely by the acts, the ambitions and follies of those who were numbered among His recognized fellow-disciples.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

As the character of the professed adherents of the Báb declined and as proofs of the deepening confusion that afflicted them multiplied, the mischief-makers, who were lying in wait, and whose sole aim was to exploit the progressive deterioration in the situation for their own benefit, grew ever more and more audacious. The conduct of Mírzá Yaḥyá, who claimed to be the successor of the Báb, and who prided himself on his high sounding titles of Mir'átu'l-Azalíyyih (Everlasting Mirror), of Ṣubḥ-i-Azal (Morning of Eternity), and of Ismu'l-Azal (Name of Eternity), and particularly the machinations of Siyyid Muḥammad, exalted by him to the rank of the first among the "*Witnesses*" of the Bayán, were by now assuming such a character that the prestige of the Faith was becoming directly involved, and its future security seriously imperilled.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

A clandestine opposition, whose aim was to nullify every effort exerted, and frustrate every design conceived, by Bahá'u'lláh for the rehabilitation of a distracted community, could now be clearly discerned. Insinuations, whose purpose was to sow the seeds of doubt and suspicion and to represent Him as a usurper, as the subverter of the laws instituted by the Báb, and the wrecker of His Cause, were being incessantly circulated.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Attired in the garb of a traveller, coarsely clad, taking with Him nothing but his kashkúl (alms-bowl) and a change of clothes, and assuming the name of Darvísh Muḥammad, Bahá'u'lláh retired to the wilderness, and lived for a time on a mountain named Sar-Galú, so far removed from human habitations that only twice a year, at seed sowing and harvest time, it was visited by the peasants of that region. Alone and undisturbed, He passed a considerable part of His retirement on the top of that mountain in a rude structure, made of stone, which served those peasants as a shelter against the extremities of the weather.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

When Bahá'u'lláh arrived in Sulaymániyyih none at first, owing to the strict silence and reserve He maintained, suspected Him of being possessed of any learning or wisdom. It was only accidentally, through seeing a specimen of His exquisite penmanship shown to them by one of the students who waited upon Him, that the curiosity of the learned instructors and students of that seminary was aroused, and they were impelled to approach Him and test the degree of His knowledge and the extent of His familiarity with the arts and sciences current amongst them. That seat of learning had been renowned for its vast endowments, its numerous takyihs, and its association with Ṣaláḥí'd-Dín-i-Ayyúbí and his descendants; from it some of the most illustrious exponents of Sunní Islám had gone forth to teach its precepts, and now a delegation, headed by Shaykh Ismá'íl himself, and consisting of its most eminent doctors and most distinguished students, called upon Bahá'u'lláh, and, finding Him willing to reply to any questions they might wish to address Him, they requested Him to elucidate for them, in the course of several interviews, the abstruse passages contained in the Futúḥát-i-Makkíyyih, the celebrated work of the famous Shaykh Muḥyi'd-Dín-i-'Arabí. "*God is My witness,*" was Bahá'u'lláh's instant reply to the learned delegation, "*that I have never seen the book you refer to. I regard, however, through the power of God, … whatever you wish me to do as easy of accomplishment.*" …

Amazed by the profundity of His insight and the compass of His understanding, they were impelled to seek from Him what they considered to be a conclusive and final evidence of the unique power and knowledge which He now appeared in their eyes to possess. "No one among the mystics, the wise, and the learned," they claimed, while requesting this further favour from Him, "has hitherto proved himself capable of writing a poem in a rhyme and meter identical with that of the longer of the two odes, entitled Qaṣídiy-i-Tá'íyyih composed by Ibn-i-Fáriḍ. We beg you to write for us a poem in that same meter and rhyme." This request was complied with, and no less than two thousand verses, in exactly the manner they had specified, were

dictated by Him, out of which He selected one hundred and twenty–seven, which He permitted them to keep, deeming the subject matter of the rest premature and unsuitable to the needs of the times. It is these same one hundred and twenty–seven verses that constitute the Qaṣídiy-i-Varqá'íyyih, so familiar to, and widely circulated amongst, His Arabic speaking followers.

Such was their reaction to this marvellous demonstration of the sagacity and genius of Bahá'u'lláh that they unanimously acknowledged every single verse of that poem to be endowed with a force, beauty and power far surpassing anything contained in either the major or minor odes composed by that celebrated poet.

This episode, by far the most outstanding among the events that transpired during the two years of Bahá'u'lláh's absence from Baghdád, immensely stimulated the interest with which an increasing number of the 'ulamás, the scholars, the Shaykhs, the doctors, the holy men and princes who had congregated in the seminaries of Sulaymáníyyih and Karkúk, were now following His daily activities. Through His numerous discourses and epistles He disclosed new vistas to their eyes, resolved the perplexities that agitated their minds, unfolded the inner meaning of many hitherto obscure passages in the writings of various commentators, poets and theologians, of which they had remained unaware, and reconciled the seemingly contradictory assertions which abounded in these dissertations, poems and treatises.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.19 Return to Baghdád

Within a few years after Bahá'u'lláh's return from Sulaymáníyyih the situation had been completely reversed. The house of Sulaymán-i-Ghannám , on which the official designation of the Bayt-i-A'ẓam (the Most Great House) was later conferred, known, at that time, as the house of Mírzá Músá, the Bábí, an extremely modest residence, situated in the Karkh quarter, in the neighbourhood of the western bank of the river, to which Bahá'u'lláh's family had moved prior to His return from Kurdistán, had now become the focal centre of a great number of seekers, visitors and pilgrims, including Kurds, Persians, Arabs and Turks, and derived from the Muslim, the Jewish and Christian Faiths. It had, moreover, become a veritable sanctuary to which the victims of the injustice of the official representative of the Persian government were wont to flee, in the hope of securing redress for the wrongs they had suffered.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Foremost among the priceless treasures cast forth from the billowing ocean of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation ranks the *Kitáb-i-Íqán (Book of Certitude)*, revealed within the space of two days and two nights, in the closing years of that period A.H.1278 [A.D. 1862]. It was written in fulfillment of the prophecy of the Báb, Who had specifically stated that the Promised One would complete the text of the unfinished Persian Bayán, and in reply to the questions addressed to Bahá'u'lláh by the as yet unconverted maternal uncle of the Báb, Ḥájí Mírzá Siyyid Muḥammad, while on a visit, with his brother, Ḥájí Mírzá Ḥasan-'Alí, to Karbilá. A model of Persian prose, of a style at once original, chaste and vigorous, and remarkably lucid, both cogent

in argument and matchless in its irresistible eloquence, this Book, setting forth in outline the Grand Redemptive Scheme of God, occupies a position unequalled by any work in the entire range of Bahá'í literature, except *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh's Most Holy Book.

... Well may it be claimed that of all the books revealed by the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation, this Book alone, by sweeping away the age-long barriers that have so insurmountably separated the great religions of the world, has laid down a broad and unassailable foundation for the complete and permanent reconciliation of their followers.

Next to this unique repository of inestimable treasures must rank that marvellous collection of gem-like utterances, the "Hidden Words" with which Bahá'u'lláh was inspired, as He paced, wrapped in His meditations, the banks of the Tigris. ...

To these two outstanding contributions to the world's religious literature, occupying respectively, positions of unsurpassed pre-eminence among the doctrinal and ethical writings of the Author of the Bahá'í Dispensation, was added, during that same period, a treatise that may well be regarded as His greatest mystical composition, designated as the *Seven Valleys*, which He wrote in answer to the questions of Shaykh Muḥyi'd-Dín, the Qáḍí of Khániqayn, in which He describes the seven stages which the soul of the seeker must needs traverse ere it can attain the object of its existence.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*.

Many learned and interesting people gathered round Bahá'u'lláh ... As he spoke to them of the 'Most Great Peace' which will come to the world, and showed his kindness to all who were in trouble and in want, and became known to the poor as 'Our Father of Compassion', they understood how it was that for the teaching of true peace and brotherhood and loving-kindness he was driven into exile, and all his vast possessions taken from him.

Words of Bahíyyih Khánum, *The Chosen Highway*, pp. 56–57.

I know not how to explain it, were all the sorrows of the world to be crowded into my heart they would, I feel, all vanish, when in the presence of Bahá'u'lláh. It is as if I had entered Paradise itself.

Words of Prince Zaynu'l-'Ábidín Khán, *God Passes By*.

The undeniable evidences of the range and magnificence of Bahá'u'lláh's rising power; His rapidly waxing prestige; the miraculous transformation which, by precept and example, He had effected in the outlook and character of His companions from Baghdád to the remotest towns and hamlets in Persia; the consuming love for Him that glowed in their bosoms; the prodigious volume of writings that streamed day and night from His pen, could not fail to fan into flame the animosity which smouldered in the breasts of His Shí'ah and Sunní enemies.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*.

Balked in his repeated attempts to achieve his malevolent purpose, Shaykh 'Abdu'l-Ḥusayn now diverted his energies into a new channel. He promised his accomplice he would raise him to the rank of a minister of the crown, if he succeeded

in inducing the government to recall Bahá'u'lláh to Ṭihrán, and cast Him again into prison. He despatched lengthy and almost daily reports to the immediate entourage of the Sháh. He painted extravagant pictures of the ascendancy enjoyed by Bahá'u'lláh by representing Him as having won the allegiance of the nomadic tribes of 'Iráq. He claimed that He was in a position to muster, in a day, fully one hundred thousand men ready to take up arms at His bidding. He accused Him of meditating, in conjunction with various leaders in Persia, an insurrection against the sovereign. By such means as these he succeeded in bringing sufficient pressure on the authorities in Ṭihrán to induce the Sháh to grant him a mandate, bestowing on him full powers, and enjoining the Persian 'ulamás and functionaries to render him every assistance. This mandate the Shaykh instantly forwarded to the ecclesiastics of Najaf and Karbilá, asking them to convene a gathering in Káẓimayn, the place of his residence. A concourse of shaykhs, mullás and mujtahids, eager to curry favour with the sovereign, promptly responded. Upon being informed of the purpose for which they had been summoned, they determined to declare a holy war against the colony of exiles, and by launching a sudden and general assault on it to destroy the Faith at its heart. To their amazement and disappointment, however, they found that the leading mujtahid amongst them, the celebrated Shaykh Murtaḍáy-i-Anṣárí, a man renowned for his tolerance, his wisdom, his undeviating justice, his piety and nobility of character, refused, when apprized of their designs, to pronounce the necessary sentence against the Bábís. ...

Frustrated in their designs, but unrelenting in their hostility, the assembled divines delegated the learned and devout Ḥájí Mullá Ḥasan-i-'Ammú, recognized for his integrity and wisdom, to submit various questions to Bahá'u'lláh for elucidation. When these were submitted, and answers completely satisfactory to the messenger were given, Ḥájí Mullá Ḥasan, affirming the recognition by the 'ulamás of the vastness of the knowledge of Bahá'u'lláh, asked, as an evidence of the truth of His mission, for a miracle that would satisfy completely all concerned. *"Although you have no right to ask this,"* Bahá'u'lláh replied, "*for God should test His creatures, and they should not test God, still I allow and accept this request .... The 'ulamás must assemble, and, with one accord, choose one miracle, and write that, after the performance of this miracle they will no longer entertain doubts about Me, and that all will acknowledge and confess the truth of My Cause. Let them seal this paper, and bring it to Me. This must be the accepted criterion: if the miracle is performed, no doubt will remain for them; and if not, We shall be convicted of imposture.*" This clear, challenging and courageous reply, unexampled in the annals of any religion, and addressed to the most illustrious Shí'ah divines, assembled in their time-honoured stronghold, was so satisfactory to their envoy that he instantly arose, kissed the knee of Bahá'u'lláh, and departed to deliver His message. Three days later he sent word that that august assemblage had failed to arrive at a decision, and had chosen to drop the matter, a decision to which he himself later gave wide publicity, in the course of his visit to Persia, and even communicated it in person to the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mírzá Sa'íd Khán.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

The nine months of unremitting endeavour exerted by His enemies, and particularly by Shaykh ʻAbdu'l-Ḥusayn and his confederate Mírzá Buzurg Khán, were about to yield their fruit. Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh and his ministers, on the one hand, and the Persian Ambassador in Constantinople, on the other, were incessantly urged to take immediate action to insure Bahá'u'lláh's removal from Baghdád.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.20 The Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh

The arrival of Bahá'u'lláh in the Najíbíyyih Garden, subsequently designated by His followers the Garden of Riḍván, signalizes the commencement of what has come to be recognized as the holiest and most significant of all Bahá'í festivals, the festival commemorating the Declaration of His Mission to His companions. So momentous a Declaration may well be regarded both as the logical consummation of that revolutionizing process which was initiated by Himself upon His return from Sulaymániyyih, and as a prelude to the final proclamation of that same Mission to the world and its rulers from Adrianople.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Undaunted by the prospect of the appalling adversities which, as predicted by Himself, were soon to overtake Him; on the eve of a second banishment which would be fraught with many hazards and perils, and would bring Him still farther from His native land, the cradle of His Faith, to a country alien in race, in language and in culture; acutely conscious of the extension of the circle of His adversaries, among whom were soon to be numbered a monarch more despotic than Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, and ministers no less unyielding in their hostility than either Ḥájí Mírzá Áqásí or the Amír-Niẓám; undeterred by the perpetual interruptions occasioned by the influx of a host of visitors who thronged His tent, Bahá'u'lláh chose in that critical and seemingly unpropitious hour to advance so challenging a claim, to lay bare the mystery surrounding His person, and to assume, in their plenitude, the power and the authority which were the exclusive privileges of the One Whose advent the Báb had prophesied.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Of the exact circumstances attending that epoch-making Declaration we, alas, are but scantily informed. The words Bahá'u'lláh actually uttered on that occasion, the manner of His Declaration, the reaction it produced, its impact on Mírzá Yaḥyá, the identity of those who were privileged to hear Him, are shrouded in an obscurity which future historians will find it difficult to penetrate. The fragmentary description left to posterity by His chronicler Nabíl is one of the very few authentic records we possess of the memorable days He spent in that garden. "Every day," Nabíl has related, "ere the hour of dawn, the gardeners would pick the roses which lined the four avenues of the garden, and would pile them in the center of the floor of His blessed tent. So great would be the heap that when His companions gathered to drink their morning tea in His presence, they would be unable to see each other across it. All these roses Bahá'u'lláh would, with His own hands, entrust to those whom He dismissed from His presence every morning to be delivered, on His behalf,

to His Arab and Persian friends in the city." "One night," he continues, "the ninth night of the waxing moon, I happened to be one of those who watched beside His blessed tent. As the hour of midnight approached, I saw Him issue from His tent, pass by the places where some of His companions were sleeping, and begin to pace up and down the moonlit, flower-bordered avenues of the garden. So loud was the singing of the nightingales on every side that only those who were near Him could hear distinctly His voice. He continued to walk until, pausing in the midst of one of these avenues, He observed: 'Consider these nightingales. So great is their love for these roses, that sleepless from dusk till dawn, they warble their melodies and commune with burning passion with the object of their adoration. How then can those who claim to be afire with the rose-like beauty of the Beloved choose to sleep?' For three successive nights I watched and circled round His blessed tent. Every time I passed by the couch whereon He lay, I would find Him wakeful, and every day, from morn till eventide, I would see Him ceaselessly engaged in conversing with the stream of visitors who kept flowing in from Baghdád. Not once could I discover in the words He spoke any trace of dissimulation."

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

As to the significance of that Declaration let Bahá'u'lláh Himself reveal to us its import. Acclaiming that historic occasion as the "*Most Great Festival,*" the "*King of Festivals,*" the "*Festival of God,*" He has, in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, characterized it as the Day whereon "*all created things were immersed in the sea of purification,*" whilst in one of His specific Tablets, He has referred to it as the Day whereon "t*he breezes of forgiveness were wafted over the entire creation.*" "*Rejoice, with exceeding gladness, O people of Bahá!*", He, in another Tablet, has written, "*as ye call to remembrance the Day of supreme felicity, the Day whereon the Tongue of the Ancient of Days hath spoken, as He departed from His House proceeding to the Spot from which He shed upon the whole of creation the splendours of His Name, the All-Merciful …*"

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

The Divine Springtime is come, O Most Exalted Pen, for the Festival of the All-Merciful is fast approaching. Bestir thyself, and magnify, before the entire creation, the name of God, and celebrate His praise, in such wise that all created things may be regenerated and made new. Speak, and hold not thy peace. The day star of blissfulness shineth above the horizon of Our name, the Blissful, inasmuch as the kingdom of the name of God hath been adorned with the ornament of the name of thy Lord, the Creator of the heavens. Arise before the nations of the earth, and arm thyself with the power of this Most Great Name, and be not of those who tarry.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XIV.

In the Rose Garden of changeless splendour a Flower hath begun to bloom, compared to which every other flower is but a thorn, and before the brightness of Whose glory the very essence of beauty must pale and wither. Arise, therefore, and, with the whole enthusiasm of your hearts, with all the eagerness of your souls, the full fervour of your will, and the concentrated efforts of your entire being, strive to attain the paradise of His presence, and endeavour to inhale the fragrance of

the incorruptible Flower, to breathe the sweet savours of holiness, and to obtain a portion of this perfume of celestial glory.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLI.

2.21 The Exile to Constantinople

Mounted on his steed, a red roan stallion of the finest breed, the best His lovers could purchase for Him, and leaving behind Him a bowing multitude of fervent admirers, He rode forth on the first stage of a journey that was to carry Him to the city of Constantinople. "Numerous were the heads," Nabíl himself a witness of that memorable "which, on every side, bowed to the dust at the feet of His horse, and kissed its hoofs, and countless were those who pressed forward to embrace His stirrups." "How great the number of those embodiments of fidelity, testifies a fellow-traveller, "who, casting themselves before that charger, preferred death to separation from their Beloved!"

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

The same tokens of devotion shown to Bahá'u'lláh at the time of His departure from His House, and later from the Garden of Riḍván, were repeated when, on the 20th of Dhi'l-Qa'dih (9 May 1863), accompanied by members of His family and twenty–six of His disciples, He left Firayját, His first stopping-place in the course of that journey. A caravan, consisting of fifty mules, a mounted guard of ten soldiers with their officer, and seven pairs of howdahs, each pair surmounted by four parasols, was formed, and wended its way, by easy stages, and in the space of no less than a hundred and ten days, across the uplands, and through the defiles, the woods, valleys and pastures, comprising the picturesque scenery of eastern Anatolia, to the port of Sámsún, on the Black Sea.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

With the arrival of Bahá'u'lláh at Constantinople, the capital of the Ottoman Empire and seat of the Caliphate (acclaimed by the Muḥammadans as "the Dome of Islám," but stigmatized by Him as the spot whereon the "*throne of tyranny*" had been established) the grimmest and most calamitous and yet the most glorious chapter in the history of the first Bahá'í century may be said to have opened. A period in which untold privations and unprecedented trials were mingled with the noblest spiritual triumphs was now commencing. The day-star of Bahá'u'lláh's ministry was about to reach its zenith. The most momentous years of the Heroic Age of His Dispensation were at hand. The catastrophic process, foreshadowed as far back as the year sixty by His Forerunner in the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá', was beginning to be set in motion.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.22 The Exile of Bahá'u'lláh to Adrianople

... in the Garden of Riḍván , on the eve of His banishment to Constantinople, the ten–year delay, ordained by an inscrutable Providence, had been terminated through the Declaration of His Mission and the visible emergence of what was to become the nucleus of a world-embracing Fellowship. What now remained to be

achieved was the proclamation, in the city of Adrianople, of that same Mission to the world's secular and ecclesiastical leaders ....

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

The initial phase of that Proclamation may be said to have opened in Constantinople with the communication (the text of which we, alas, do not possess) addressed by Bahá'u'lláh to Sulṭán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz himself, the self-styled vicar of the Prophet of Islám and the absolute ruler of a mighty empire. So potent, so august a personage was the first among the sovereigns of the world to receive the Divine Summons, and the first among Oriental monarchs to sustain the impact of God's retributive justice. The occasion for this communication was provided by the infamous edict the Sulṭán had promulgated, less than four months after the arrival of the exiles in his capital, banishing them, suddenly and without any justification whatsoever, in the depth of winter, and in the most humiliating circumstances, to Adrianople, situated on the extremities of his empire.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

No less a personage than the highly-respected brother-in-law of the Ṣadr-i-A'ẓam was commissioned to apprize the Captive of the edict pronounced against Him—an edict which evinced a virtual coalition of the Turkish and Persian imperial governments against a common adversary, and which in the end brought such tragic consequences upon the Sultanate, the Caliphate and the Qájár dynasty.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.23 The Rebellion of Mírzá Yaḥyá

... the monstrous behaviour of Mírzá Yaḥyá, one of the half-brothers of Bahá'u'lláh, the nominee of the Báb, and recognized chief of the Bábí community, brought in its wake a period of travail which left its mark on the fortunes of the Faith for no less than half a century. ... It perplexed and confused the friends and supporters of Bahá'u'lláh, and seriously damaged the prestige of the Faith in the eyes of its western admirers. ... It brought incalculable sorrow to Bahá'u'lláh, visibly aged Him, and inflicted, through its repercussions, the heaviest blow ever sustained by Him in His lifetime.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

A constant witness of the ever deepening attachment of the exiles to Bahá'u'lláh and of their amazing veneration for Him ... allowing himself[7] to be duped by the enticing prospects of unfettered leadership held out to him by Siyyid Muḥammad, the Antichrist of the Bahá'í Revelation, ... this arch-breaker of the Covenant of the Báb, spurred on by his mounting jealousy and impelled by his passionate love of leadership, was driven to perpetrate such acts as defied either concealment or toleration.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

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[7] *Mírzá Yaḥyá*

Desperate designs to poison Bahá'u'lláh and His companions, and thereby reanimate his own defunct leadership, began, approximately a year after their arrival in Adrianople, to agitate his mind. Well aware of the erudition of his half-brother, Áqáy-i-Kalím, in matters pertaining to medicine, he, under various pretexts, sought enlightenment from him regarding the effects of certain herbs and poisons, and then began, contrary to his wont, to invite Bahá'u'lláh to his home, where, one day, having smeared His tea-cup with a substance he had concocted, he succeeded in poisoning Him sufficiently to produce a serious illness which lasted no less than a month, and which was accompanied by severe pains and high fever, the aftermath of which left Bahá'u'lláh with a shaking hand till the end of His life.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

The moment had now arrived for Him Who had so recently, both verbally and in numerous Tablets, revealed the implications of the claims He had advanced, to acquaint formally the one who was the nominee of the Báb with the character of His Mission. Mírzá Áqá Jan was accordingly commissioned to bear to Mírzá Yaḥyá the newly revealed Súriy-i-Amr, which unmistakably affirmed those claims, to read aloud to him its contents, and demand an unequivocal and conclusive reply. Mírzá Yaḥyá's request for a one day respite, during which he could meditate his answer, was granted. The only reply, however, that was forthcoming was a counter-declaration, specifying the hour and the minute in which he had been made the recipient of an independent Revelation, necessitating the unqualified submission to him of the peoples of the earth in both the East and the West.

So presumptuous an assertion, made by so perfidious an adversary to the envoy of the Bearer of so momentous a Revelation was the signal for the open and final rupture between Bahá'u'lláh and Mírzá Yaḥyá—a rupture that marks one of the darkest dates in Bahá'í history. Wishing to allay the fierce animosity that blazed in the bosom of His enemies, and to assure to each one of the exiles a complete freedom to choose between Him and them, Bahá'u'lláh withdrew with His family to the house of Riḍá Big (Shavvál 22, 1282 A.H.), which was rented by His order, and refused, for two months, to associate with either friend or stranger, including His own companions. He instructed Áqáy-i-Kalím to divide all the furniture, bedding, clothing and utensils that were to be found in His home, and send half to the house of Mírzá Yaḥyá; to deliver to him certain relics he had long coveted, such as the seals, rings, and manuscripts in the handwriting of the Báb; and to insure that he received his full share of the allowance fixed by the government for the maintenance of the exiles and their families. He, moreover, directed Áqáy-i-Kalím to order to attend to Mírzá Yaḥyá's shopping, for several hours a day, any one of the companions whom he himself might select, and to assure him that whatever would henceforth be received in his name from Persia would be delivered into his own hands.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Bahá'u'lláh's reaction to this most distressful episode in His ministry was, as already observed, characterized by acute anguish. "*He who for months and years,*" He laments, "*I reared with the hand of loving-kindness hath risen to take My life.*" "*The cruelties inflicted by My oppressors,*" He wrote, in allusion to these perfidious

enemies, "*have bowed Me down, and turned My hair white. Shouldst thou present thyself before My throne, thou wouldst fail to recognize the Ancient Beauty for the freshness of His countenance is altered, and its brightness hath faded, by reason of the oppression of the infidels.*"

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Nor can this subject be dismissed without special reference being made to the Arch-Breaker of the Covenant of the Báb, Mírzá Yaḥyá, who lived long enough to witness, while eking out a miserable existence in Cyprus, termed by the Turks "the Island of Satan," every hope he had so maliciously conceived reduced to naught. … Eleven of the eighteen "Witnesses" he had appointed forsook him and turned in repentance to Bahá'u'lláh. He himself became involved in a scandal which besmirched his reputation and that of his eldest son, … It was this same eldest son who, through the workings of a strange destiny, sought years after, together with his nephew and niece, the presence of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the appointed Successor of Bahá'u'lláh and Centre of His Covenant, expressed repentance, prayed for forgiveness, was graciously accepted by Him, and remained, till the hour of his death, a loyal follower of the Faith which his father had so foolishly, so shamelessly and so pitifully striven to extinguish.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.24 The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh

Almost immediately after the "*Most Great Separation*" had been effected, the weightiest Tablets associated with His sojourn in Adrianople were revealed. The Súriy-i-Múlúk, the most momentous Tablet revealed by Bahá'u'lláh (Súrih of Kings) in which He, for the first time, directs His words collectively to the entire company of the monarchs of East and West, and in which the Sulṭán of Turkey, and his ministers, the kings of Christendom, the French and Persian Ambassadors accredited to the Sublime Porte, the Muslim ecclesiastical leaders in Constantinople, its wise men and inhabitants, the people of Persia and the philosophers of the world are separately addressed; the Kitáb-i-Badí', His apologia, written to refute the accusations levelled against Him by Mírzá Mihdíy-i-Rashtí, corresponding to the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, revealed in defence of the Bábí Revelation; the Munájátháy-i-Ṣiyám (Prayers for Fasting), written in anticipation of the Book of His Laws; the first Tablet to Napoleon III, in which the Emperor of the French is addressed and the sincerity of his professions put to the test; the Lawḥ-i-Sulṭán, His detailed epistle to Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, in which the aims, purposes and principles of His Faith are expounded and the validity of His Mission demonstrated; the Súriy-i-Ra'ís, begun in the village of Káshánih on His way to Gallipoli, and completed shortly after at Gyáwur-Kyuy—these may be regarded not only as the most outstanding among the innumerable Tablets revealed in Adrianople, but as occupying a foremost position among all the writings of the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.25 Bahá'u'lláh's Incarceration in 'Akká

The fateful decision was eventually arrived at to banish Bahá'u'lláh to the penal colony of 'Akká, and Mírzá Yaḥyá to Famagusta in Cyprus. This decision was embodied in a strongly worded Farmán, issued by Sulṭán'Abdü'l-'Azīz.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

All the townspeople had assembled to see the arrival of the prisoners ... Their yelling of curses and execrations filled us with fresh misery.

We were taken to the old fortress of 'Akká, where we were crowded together. There was no air; a small quantity of very bad coarse bread was provided; we were unable to get fresh water to drink; our sufferings were not diminished. Then an epidemic of typhoid broke out. Nearly all became ill.

Words of Bahíyyih Khánum, *The Chosen Highway*, p. 66.

The banishment, lasting no less than twenty-four years, to which two Oriental despots had, in their implacable enmity and shortsightedness, combined to condemn Bahá'u'lláh, will go down in history as a period which witnessed a miraculous and truly revolutionizing change in the circumstances attending the life and activities of the Exile Himself...

His arrival at the penal colony of 'Akká, far from proving the end of His afflictions, was but the beginning of a major crisis, characterized by bitter suffering, severe restrictions, and intense turmoil, which, in its gravity, surpassed even the agonies of the Síyáh-Chál of Ṭihrán, and to which no other event, in the history of the entire century can compare, except the internal convulsion that rocked the Faith in Adrianople. "*Know thou,*" Bahá'u'lláh, wishing to emphasize the criticalness of the first nine years of His banishment to that prison-city, has written, "*that upon Our arrival at this Spot, We chose to designate it as the 'Most Great Prison.' Though previously subjected in another land (Ṭihrán) to chains and fetters, We yet refused to call it by that name. Say: Ponder thereon, O ye endued with understanding!*"

The ordeal He endured, as a direct consequence of the attempt on the life of Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, was one which had been inflicted upon Him solely by the external enemies of the Faith. The travail in Adrianople, the effects of which all but sundered the community of the Báb's followers, was, on the other hand, purely internal in character. This fresh crisis which, during almost a decade, agitated Him and His companions, was, however, marked throughout not only by the assaults of His adversaries from without, but by the machinations of enemies from within, as well as by the grievous misdeeds of those who, though bearing His name, perpetrated what made His heart and His pen alike to lament.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Explicit orders had been issued by the Sulṭán and his ministers to subject the exiles, who were accused of having grievously erred and led others far astray, to the strictest confinement. Hopes were confidently expressed that the sentence of life-long imprisonment pronounced against them would lead to their eventual extermination. The farmán of Sulṭán 'Abdu'l-'Azíz, dated the fifth of Rabí'u'th-Thání 1285 A.H. [26 July 1868], not only condemned them to perpetual banishment, but

stipulated their strict incarceration, and forbade them to associate either with each other or with the local inhabitants. The text of the farmán itself was read publicly, soon after the arrival of the exiles, in the principal mosque of the city as a warning to the population.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

The Ancient Beauty hath consented to be bound with chains that mankind may be released from its bondage, and hath accepted to be made a prisoner within this most mighty Stronghold that the whole world may attain unto true liberty. He hath drained to its dregs the cup of sorrow, that all the peoples of the earth may attain unto abiding joy, and be filled with gladness. This is of the mercy of your Lord, the Compassionate, the Most Merciful.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XLV.

The writings of Bahá'u'lláh during this period, as we survey the vast field which they embrace, seem to fall into three distinct categories. The first comprises those writings which constitute the sequel to the proclamation of His Mission in Adrianople. The second includes the laws and ordinances of His Dispensation, which, for the most part, have been recorded in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, His Most Holy Book. To the third must be assigned those Tablets which partly enunciate and partly reaffirm the fundamental tenets and principles underlying that Dispensation.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

O Queen in London! Incline thine ear unto the voice of thy Lord, the Lord of all mankind, calling from the Divine Lote-Tree: Verily, no God is there but Me, the Almighty, the All-Wise! … He in truth, hath come unto the world in His most great glory, and all that hath been mentioned in the Gospel hath been fulfilled.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet to Queen Victoria, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, para. 171.

O Kings of the earth! …

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.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet to Queen Victoria, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, paras. 179-180.

O ye the elected representatives of the people in every land! Take ye counsel together and let your concern be only for that which profiteth mankind and bettereth the condition thereof…

… That which the Lord hath ordained as the sovereign remedy and mightiest instrument for the healing of all the world is the union of all its peoples in one universal Cause, one common Faith. This can in no wise be achieved except through the power of a skilled, an all-powerful and inspired Physician.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet to Queen Victoria, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, paras. 174 & 176.

Unique and stupendous as was this Proclamation, it proved to be but a prelude to a still mightier revelation of the creative power of its Author, and to what may well rank as the most signal act of His ministry—the promulgation of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. …

Revealed soon after Bahá'u'lláh had been transferred to the house of 'Údí Khammár (circa 1873), at a time when He was still encompassed by the tribulations that had afflicted Him, through the acts committed by His enemies and the professed adherents of His Faith, this Book, this treasury enshrining the priceless gems of His Revelation, stands out, by virtue of the principles it inculcates, the administrative institutions it ordains and the function with which it invests the appointed Successor of its Author, unique and incomparable among the world's sacred Scriptures.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.26 The Death of Mírzá Mihdí

To the galling weight of these tribulations was now added the bitter grief of a sudden tragedy—the premature loss of the noble, the pious Mírzá Mihdí, the Purest Branch, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's twenty–two year old brother, an amanuensis of Bahá'u'lláh and a companion of His exile from the days when, as a child, he was brought from Ṭihrán to Baghdád to join his Father after His return from Sulaymániyyih. He was pacing the roof of the barracks in the twilight, one evening, wrapped in his customary devotions, when he fell through the unguarded skylight onto a wooden crate, standing on the floor beneath, which pierced his ribs, and caused, twenty–two hours later, his death, on the 23rd of Rabí'u'l-Avval 1287 A.H. [June 23, 1870]. His dying supplication to a grieving Father was that his life might be accepted as a ransom for those who were prevented from attaining the presence of their Beloved.

In a highly significant prayer, revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in memory of His son—a prayer that exalts his death to the rank of those great acts of atonement associated with Abraham's intended sacrifice of His son, with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the martyrdom of the Imám Ḥusayn—we read the following: "*I have, O my Lord, offered up that which Thou hast given Me, that Thy servants may be quickened, and all that dwell on earth be united.*" And, likewise, these prophetic words, addressed to His martyred son: "*Thou art the Trust of God and His Treasure in this Land. Erelong will God reveal through thee that which He hath desired.*"

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Thy name is my healing, O my God, and remembrance of Thee is my remedy. Nearness to Thee is my hope, and love for Thee is my companion. Thy mercy to me is my healing and my succor in both this world and the world to come. Thou, verily, art the All-Bountiful, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLXX.

2.27 Release from Prison

The gradual recognition by all elements of the population of Bahá'u'lláh's complete innocence; the slow penetration of the true spirit of His teachings through the hard crust of their indifference and bigotry; the substitution of the sagacious and humane governor, Aḥmad Big Tawfíq, for one whose mind had been hopelessly poisoned against the Faith and its followers; the unremitting labours of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, now in the full flower of His manhood, Who, through His contacts with the rank and file of

the population, was increasingly demonstrating His capacity to act as the shield of His Father; the providential dismissal of the officials who had been instrumental in prolonging the confinement of the innocent companions—all paved the way for the reaction that was now setting in, a reaction with which the period of Bahá'u'lláh's banishment to 'Akká will ever remain indissolubly associated.

Such was the devotion gradually kindled in the heart of that governor, through his association with 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and later through his perusal of the literature of the Faith, which mischief-makers, in the hope of angering him, had submitted for his consideration, that he invariably refused to enter His presence without first removing his shoes, as a token of his respect for Him. It was even bruited about that his favoured counsellors were those very exiles who were the followers of the Prisoner in his custody. His own son he was wont to send to 'Abdu'l-Bahá for instruction and enlightenment. It was on the occasion of a long-sought audience with Bahá'u'lláh that, in response to a request for permission to render Him some service, the suggestion was made to him to restore the aqueduct which for thirty years had been allowed to fall into disuse—a suggestion which he immediately arose to carry out.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Though Bahá'u'lláh Himself practically never granted personal interviews, as He had been used to do in Baghdád, yet such was the influence He now wielded that the inhabitants openly asserted that the noticeable improvement in the climate and water of their city was directly attributable to His continued presence in their midst. The very designations by which they chose to refer to him, such as the "august leader," and "his highness" bespoke the reverence with which He inspired them. On one occasion, a European general who, together with the governor, was granted an audience by Him, was so impressed that he "remained kneeling on the ground near the door." Shaykh 'Alíy-i-Mírí, the Muftí of 'Akká, had even, at the suggestion of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to plead insistently that He might permit the termination of His nine–year confinement within the walls of the prison-city, before He would consent to leave its gates. The garden of Na'mayn, a small island, situated in the middle of a river to the east of the city, honoured with the appellation of Riḍván, and designated by Him the "*New Jerusalem*" and "*Our Verdant Isle,*" had, together with the residence of 'Abdu'lláh Pásha,—rented and prepared for Him by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and situated a few miles north of 'Akká—become by now the favourite retreats of One Who, for almost a decade, had not set foot beyond the city walls, and Whose sole exercise had been to pace, in monotonous repetition, the floor of His bed-chamber.

Two years later the palace of 'Údí Khammár, on the construction of which so much wealth had been lavished, while Bahá'u'lláh lay imprisoned in the barracks, and which its owner had precipitately abandoned with his family owing to the outbreak of an epidemic disease, was rented and later purchased for Him—a dwelling-place which He characterized as the "lofty mansion," the spot which "God hath ordained as the most sublime vision of mankind."

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

The drastic farmán of Sulṭán ʻAbdu'l-ʻAzíz, though officially unrepealed, had by now become a dead letter. Though Bahá'u'lláh was still nominally a prisoner, "*the doors of majesty and true sovereignty were,*" in the words of ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, "*flung wide open.*" *"The rulers of Palestine,"* He moreover has written, "*envied His influence and power. Governors and mutisarrifs, generals and local officials, would humbly request the honour of attaining His presence—a request to which He seldom acceded.*"

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

It was in that same mansion that the distinguished Orientalist, Prof. E. G. Browne of Cambridge, was granted his four successive interviews with Bahá'u'lláh, during the five days he was His guest at Bahjí (15–20 April 1890), interviews immortalized by the Exile's historic declaration that "*these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away and the 'Most Great Peace' shall come.*" "The face of Him on Whom I gazed," is the interviewer's memorable testimony for posterity, "I can never forget, though I cannot describe it. Those piercing eyes seemed to read one's very soul; power and authority sat on that ample brow .... No need to ask in whose presence I stood, as I bowed myself before one who is the object of a devotion and love which kings might envy and emperors sigh for in vain."

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.28 The Passing of Ásíyih Khánum and her High Station

During the final years of her life Ásíyih Khánum had high hopes of meeting the consort of the Herald of Bahá'u'lláh... The much anticipated meeting never took place... The untimely death of Khadíjih Bagum in 1882 made the Blessed Beauty very sad and deprived Ásíyih Khánum of meeting the person whose life in many ways resembled her own...

Baharieh Maʻani, *Leaves of the Twin Divine Trees*, p.116.

O Leaf that hath sprung from My Tree, and been My companion! My glory be upon thee, and My loving-kindness, and My mercy that hath surpassed all beings... God is well-pleased with thee, as a token of His grace and a sign of His mercy. He hath made thee to be His companion in every one of His worlds, and hath nourished thee with His meeting and presence, so long as His Name, and His Remembrance, and His Kingdom, and His Empire shall endure...

... O faithful ones! Should ye visit the resting-place of the Most Exalted Leaf, who hath ascended unto the Glorious Companion, stand ye and say: 'Salutation and blessing and glory upon thee, O Holy Leaf that hath sprung from the Divine Lote-Tree! I bear witness that thou hast believed in God and in His signs, and answered His Call, and turned unto Him, and held fast unto His cord, and clung to the hem of His grace, and fled thy home in His path, and chosen to live as a stranger, out of love for His presence and in thy longing to serve Him. May God have mercy upon him that draweth nigh unto thee, and remembereth thee through the things which My Pen hath voiced in this, the most great station. We pray God that He may forgive us, and forgive them that have turned unto thee, and grant their desires, and bestow upon them, through His wondrous grace, whatever be their wish. He, verily, is the

Bountiful, the Generous. Praise be to God, He Who is the Desire of all worlds; and the Beloved of all who recognize Him.'

Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *This Decisive Hour.*

2.29 The Passing of Bahá'u'lláh

Already nine months before His ascension Bahá'u'lláh, as attested by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, had voiced His desire to depart from this world. From that time onward it became increasingly evident, from the tone of His remarks to those who attained His presence, that the close of His earthly life was approaching, though He refrained from mentioning it openly to any one. On the night preceding the eleventh of Shavvál 1309 A.H. [May 8, 1892] He contracted a slight fever which, though it mounted the following day, soon after subsided. He continued to grant interviews to certain of the friends and pilgrims, but it soon became evident that He was not well. His fever returned in a more acute form than before, His general condition grew steadily worse, complications ensued which at last culminated in His ascension, at the hour of dawn, on the 2nd of Dhi'l-Qa'dih 1309 A.H. [May 29, 1892], eight hours after sunset, in the 75th year of His age. His spirit, at long last released from the toils of a life crowded with tribulations, had winged its flight to His "*other dominions,*" dominions "*whereon the eyes of the people of names have never fallen,*" and to which the "*Luminous Maid,*" "*clad in white,*" had bidden Him hasten, as described by Himself in the Lawḥ-i-Ru'yá (Tablet of the Vision), revealed nineteen years previously, on the anniversary of the birth of His Forerunner.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Six days before He passed away He summoned to His presence, as He lay in bed leaning against one of His sons, the entire company of believers, including several pilgrims, who had assembled in the Mansion, for what proved to be their last audience with Him. "*I am well pleased with you all,*" He gently and affectionately addressed the weeping crowd that gathered about Him. "*Ye have rendered many services, and been very assiduous in your labors. Ye have come here every morning and every evening. May God assist you to remain united. May He aid you to exalt the Cause of the Lord of being.*" To the women, including members of His own family, gathered at His bedside, He addressed similar words of encouragement, definitely assuring them that in a document entrusted by Him to the Most Great Branch He had commended them all to His care.

The news of His ascension was instantly communicated to Sulṭán 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd in a telegram which began with the words "the Sun of Bahá has set" and in which the monarch was advised of the intention of interring the sacred remains within the precincts of the Mansion, an arrangement to which he readily assented. …

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

For a full week a vast number of mourners, rich and poor alike, tarried to grieve with the bereaved family … Notables, among whom were numbered Shí'ahs, Sunnís, Christians, Jews and Druzes, as well as poets, 'ulamás and government officials, all joined in lamenting the loss, and in magnifying the virtues and greatness of Bahá'u'lláh, many of them paying to Him their written tributes, in verse and in

prose, in both Arabic and Turkish. From cities as far afield as Damascus, Aleppo, Beirut and Cairo similar tributes were received. These glowing testimonials were, without exception, submitted to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who now represented the Cause of the departed Leader, and Whose praises were often mingled in those eulogies with the homage paid to His Father.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.30 The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh

To direct and canalize these forces let loose by this Heaven-sent process, and to insure their harmonious and continuous operation after His ascension, an instrument divinely ordained, invested with indisputable authority, organically linked with the Author of the Revelation Himself, was clearly indispensable. That instrument Bahá'u'lláh had expressly provided through the institution of the Covenant, an institution which He had firmly established prior to His ascension. This same Covenant He had anticipated in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, had alluded to it as He bade His last farewell to the members of His family, who had been summoned to His bed-side, in the days immediately preceding His ascension, and had incorporated it in a special document which He designated as "the Book of My Covenant", and which He entrusted, during His last illness, to His eldest son 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Written entirely in His own hand; unsealed, on the ninth day after His ascension in the presence of nine witnesses chosen from amongst His companions and members of His Family; read subsequently, on the afternoon of that same day, before a large company assembled in His Most Holy Tomb, including His sons, some of the Báb's kinsmen, pilgrims and resident believers, this unique and epoch-making Document, designated by Bahá'u'lláh as His "Most Great Tablet," and alluded to by Him as the "Crimson Book" in His "Epistle to the Son of the Wolf," can find no parallel in the Scriptures of any previous Dispensation, not excluding that of the Báb Himself. For nowhere in the books pertaining to any of the world's religious systems, not even among the writings of the Author of the Bábí Revelation, do we find any single document establishing a Covenant endowed with an authority comparable to the Covenant which Bahá'u'lláh had Himself instituted.

"*So firm and mighty is this Covenant,*" He Who is its appointed Centre has affirmed, "*that from the beginning of time until the present day no religious Dispensation hath produced its like.*"

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

The Ministry of ʻAbdu'l-Bahá

2.31 Overview

The third period (1892–1921) revolves around the vibrant personality of ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, mysterious in His essence, unique in His station, astoundingly potent in both the charm and strength of His character. It commences with the announcement of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, a document without parallel in the history of any earlier Dispensation, attains its climax in the emphatic assertion by the Centre of that Covenant, in the City of the Covenant, of the unique character and far-reaching implications of that Document, and closes with His passing and the interment of His remains on Mt. Carmel. It will go down in history as a period of almost thirty years' duration, in which tragedies and triumphs have been so intertwined as to eclipse at one time the Orb of the Covenant, and at another time to pour forth its light over the continent of Europe, and as far as Australasia, the Far East and the North American continent.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

And now to crown the inestimable honors, privileges and benefits showered upon Him, in ever increasing abundance, throughout the forty years of His Father's ministry in Baghdád, in Adrianople and in ʻAkká, He had been elevated to the high office of Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, and been made the successor of the Manifestation of God Himself—a position that was to empower Him to impart an extraordinary impetus to the international expansion of His Father's Faith, to amplify its doctrine, to beat down every barrier that would obstruct its march, and to call into being, and delineate the features of, its Administrative Order…

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.32 The Role of ʻAbdu'l-Bahá in the Ministry of Bahá'u'lláh

That such a unique and sublime station should have been conferred upon ʻAbdu'l-Bahá did not, and indeed could not, surprise those exiled companions who had for so long been privileged to observe His life and conduct, nor the pilgrims who had been brought, however fleetingly, into personal contact with Him, nor indeed the vast concourse of the faithful who, in distant lands, had grown to revere His name and to appreciate His labours, nor even the wide circle of His friends and acquaintances who, in the Holy Land and the adjoining countries, were already well familiar with the position He had occupied during the lifetime of His Father.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

On Him Bahá'u'lláh, as the scope and influence of His Mission extended, had been led to place an ever greater degree of reliance, by appointing Him, on numerous occasions, as His deputy, by enabling Him to plead His Cause before the public, by assigning Him the task of transcribing His Tablets, by allowing Him to assume the responsibility of shielding Him from His enemies, and by investing Him with the function of watching over and promoting the interests of His fellow-exiles

and companions. He it was Who had been commissioned to undertake, as soon as circumstances might permit, the delicate and all-important task of purchasing the site that was to serve as the permanent resting-place of the Báb, of insuring the safe transfer of His remains to the Holy Land, and of erecting for Him a befitting sepulchre on Mt. Carmel. He it was Who had been chiefly instrumental in providing the necessary means for Bahá'u'lláh's release from His nine–year confinement within the city walls of 'Akká, and in enabling Him to enjoy, in the evening of His life, a measure of that peace and security from which He had so long been debarred.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Praise be to Him Who hath honoured the Land of Bá (Beirut) through the presence of Him round Whom all names revolve ... the Most Mighty Branch of God—His ancient and immutable Mystery—proceeding on its way to another land. Sorrow, thereby, hath enveloped this Prison-city, whilst another land rejoiceth.

Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Arḍ-i-Bá (Tablet of the Land of Bá), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh.*

2.33 The Rebellion of Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí

Far from being allayed by the provisions of a Will which had elevated him to the second-highest position within the ranks of the faithful, the fire of unquenchable animosity that glowed in the breast of Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí[8] burned even more fiercely as soon as he came to realize the full implications of that Document. All that 'Abdu'l-Bahá could do, during a period of four distressful years, His incessant exhortations, His earnest pleadings, the favours and kindnesses He showered upon him, the admonitions and warnings He uttered, even His voluntary withdrawal in the hope of averting the threatening storm, proved to be of no avail. Gradually and with unyielding persistence, through lies, half-truths, calumnies and gross exaggerations, this "Prime Mover of sedition" succeeded in ranging on his side almost the entire family of Bahá'u'lláh, as well as a considerable number of those who had formed his immediate entourage.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

'Abdu'l-Bahá's grief over so tragic a development, following so swiftly upon His Father's ascension, was such that, despite the triumphs witnessed in the course of His ministry, it left its traces upon Him till the end of His days. The intensity of the emotions which this sombre episode aroused within Him were reminiscent of the effect produced upon Bahá'u'lláh by the dire happenings precipitated by the rebellion of Mírzá Yaḥyá.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

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8 *Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí was the eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh's second wife, Fáṭimih Khánum. It is reported in "Leaves of the Twin Divine Trees" that Fáṭimih Khánum was a relative of Bahá'u'lláh and had been widowed for nearly six years at the time of their marriage. The marriage took place just before Bahá'u'lláh's exile from Iran, and at the request of family members that he marry her to take her under His protection.*

2.34 The Rise of the Faith in the West

The stout-hearted Thornton Chase, surnamed Thábit (Steadfast) by ʻAbdu'l-Bahá and designated by Him "the first American believer," who became a convert to the Faith in 1894, the immortal Louisa A. Moore, the mother teacher of the West, surnamed Livá (Banner) by ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, Dr. Edward Getsinger, to whom she was later married, Howard MacNutt, Arthur P. Dodge, Isabella D. Brittingham, Lillian F. Kappes, Paul K. Dealy, Chester I. Thatcher and Helen S. Goodall, whose names will ever remain associated with the first stirrings of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in the North American continent, stand out as the most prominent among those who, in those early years, awakened to the call of the New Day, and consecrated their lives to the service of the newly proclaimed Covenant.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

The arrival of fifteen pilgrims, in three successive parties, the first of which, including Dr and Mrs Getsinger, reached the prison-city of ʻAkká on 10 December 1898; the intimate personal contact established between the Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant and the newly arisen heralds of His Revelation in the West; the moving circumstances attending their visit to His Tomb and the great honour bestowed upon them of being conducted by ʻAbdu'l-Bahá Himself into its innermost chamber; the spirit which, through precept and example, despite the briefness of their stay, a loving and bountiful Host so powerfully infused into them; and the passionate zeal and unyielding resolve which His inspiring exhortations, His illuminating instructions and the multiple evidences of His divine love kindled in their hearts—all these marked the opening of a new epoch in the development of the Faith in the West, an epoch whose significance the acts subsequently performed by some of these same pilgrims and their fellow-disciples have amply demonstrated.

"Of that first meeting," one of these pilgrims, recording her impressions, has written, "I can remember neither joy nor pain, nor anything that I can name. I had been carried suddenly to too great a height, my soul had come in contact with the Divine Spirit, and this force, so pure, so holy, so mighty, had overwhelmed me … We could not remove our eyes from His glorious face; we heard all that He said; we drank tea with Him at His bidding; but existence seemed suspended; and when He arose and suddenly left us, we came back with a start to life; but never again, oh! never again, thank God, the same life on this earth."

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.35 Renewal of ʻAbdu'l-Bahá's Incarceration

Embittered by his abject failure to create a schism on which he had fondly pinned his hopes; stung by the conspicuous success which the standard-bearers of the Covenant had, despite his machinations, achieved in the North American continent; encouraged by the existence of a régime that throve in an atmosphere of intrigue and suspicion, and which was presided over by a cunning and cruel potentate; determined to exploit to the full the opportunities for mischief afforded him by the arrival of Western pilgrims at the prison-fortress of ʻAkká, as well as by the commencement of the construction of the Báb's sepulchre on Mt. Carmel, Mírzá Muḥammad-ʻAlí ,

seconded by his brother, Mírzá Badí'u'lláh, and aided by his brother-in-law, Mírzá Majdi'd-Dín, succeeded through strenuous and persistent endeavours in exciting the suspicion of the Turkish government and its officials, and in inducing them to reimpose on 'Abdu'l-Bahá the confinement from which, in the days of Bahá'u'lláh, He had so grievously suffered.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Such grave accusations, embodied in numerous reports, could not fail to perturb profoundly the mind of a despot already obsessed by the fear of impending rebellion among his subjects. A commission was accordingly appointed to inquire into the matter, and report the result of its investigations.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

In the early part of the winter of 1907 another Commission of four officers, headed by 'Árif Bey, and invested with plenary powers, was suddenly dispatched to 'Akká by order of the Sulṭán. A few days before its arrival 'Abdu'l-Bahá had a dream, which He recounted to the believers, in which He saw a ship cast anchor off 'Akká, from which flew a few birds, resembling sticks of dynamite, and which, circling about His head, as He stood in the midst of a multitude of the frightened inhabitants of the city, returned without exploding to the ship.

No sooner had the members of the Commission landed than they placed under their direct and exclusive control both the Telegraph and Postal services in 'Akká; arbitrarily dismissed officials suspected of being friendly to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, including the governor of the city …

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

… news was received that a bomb had exploded in the path of the Sulṭán while he was returning to his palace from the mosque where he had been offering his Friday prayers.

A few days after this attempt on his life the Commission submitted its report to him; but he and his government were too pre-occupied to consider the matter. The case was laid aside, and when, some months later, it was again brought forward it was abruptly closed forever by an event which, once and for all, placed the Prisoner of 'Akká beyond the power of His royal enemy. The "Young Turk" Revolution, breaking out swiftly and decisively in 1908, forced a reluctant despot to promulgate the constitution which he had suspended, and to release all religious and political prisoners held under the old régime. Even then a telegram had to be sent to Constantinople to inquire specifically whether 'Abdu'l-Bahá was included in the category of these prisoners, to which an affirmative reply was promptly received.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

When we said 'We are glad, oh! so full of gladness that you are free,' He said: 'Freedom is not a matter of place, but of condition. I was happy in that prison, for those days were passed in the path of service.'

'To me prison was freedom.'

'Troubles are a rest to me.'

'Death is life.'

'To be despised is honour.'

'Therefore was I full of happiness all through that prison time.'

'When one is released from the prison of self, that is indeed freedom! For self is the greatest prison.'

When this release takes place, one can never be imprisoned. Unless one accepts dire vicissitudes, not with dull resignation, but with radiant acquiescence, one cannot attain this freedom.'

Words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Chosen Highway*, p. 166.

2.36 Entombment of the Báb's Remains on Mt. Carmel

Within a few months of the historic decree which set Him free, in the very year that witnessed the downfall of Sulṭán 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd, that same power from on high which had enabled 'Abdu'l-Bahá to preserve inviolate the rights divinely conferred on Him, to establish His Father's Faith in the North American continent, and to triumph over His royal oppressor, enabled Him to achieve one of the most signal acts of His ministry: the removal of the Báb's remains from their place of concealment in Ṭihrán to Mt. Carmel. He Himself testified, on more than one occasion, that the safe transfer of these remains, the construction of a befitting mausoleum to receive them, and their final interment with His own hands in their permanent resting-place constituted one of the three principal objectives which, ever since the inception of His mission, He had conceived it His paramount duty to achieve. This act indeed deserves to rank as one of the outstanding events in the first Bahá'í century.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

No need to dwell on the manifold problems and pre-occupations which, for almost a decade, continued to beset 'Abdu'l-Bahá until the victorious hour when He was able to bring to a final consummation the historic task entrusted to Him by His Father.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

"*Every stone of that building, every stone of the road leading to it,*" He, many a time was heard to remark, "*I have with infinite tears and at tremendous cost, raised and placed in position.*" "*One night,*" He, according to an eye-witness, once observed, "*I was so hemmed in by My anxieties that I had no other recourse than to recite and repeat over and over again a prayer of the Báb which I had in My possession, the recital of which greatly calmed Me. The next morning the owner of the plot himself came to Me, apologized and begged Me to purchase his property.*"

Words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá , quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

... the day of the first Naw-Rúz (1909), which He celebrated after His release from His confinement, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had the marble sarcophagus transported with great labour to the vault prepared for it, and in the evening, by the light of a single lamp, He laid within it, with His own hands—in the presence of believers from the East and from the West and in circumstances at once solemn and moving—the wooden casket containing the sacred remains of the Báb and His companion.

When all was finished, and the earthly remains of the Martyr-Prophet of Shíráz were, at long last, safely deposited for their everlasting rest in the bosom of God's

holy mountain, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who had cast aside his turban, removed His shoes and thrown off His cloak, bent low over the still open sarcophagus, His silver hair waving about His head and His face transfigured and luminous, rested His forehead on the border of the wooden casket, and, sobbing aloud, wept with such a weeping that all those who were present wept with Him. That night He could not sleep, so overwhelmed was He with emotion.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.37 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Travels in Africa, Europe and America

'Abdu'l-Bahá's departure one hundred years ago from Haifa for Port Said signalled the opening of a glorious new chapter in the annals of the Faith. He was not to return to the Holy Land for three years. Referring to that historic moment the Guardian would later write: "The establishment of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in the Western Hemisphere—the most outstanding achievement that will forever be associated with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry—had ... set in motion such tremendous forces, and been productive of such far-reaching results, as to warrant the active and personal participation of the Centre of the Covenant Himself...."

With the inauguration of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's travels to the West, the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, hemmed in for more than half a century by the hosts of enmity and oppression, burst its restraints.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 August 2010.

'Abdu'l-Bahá was at this time broken in health. He suffered from several maladies brought on by the strains and stresses of a tragic life spent almost wholly in exile and imprisonment. He was on the threshold of three–score years and ten. Yet as soon as He was released from His forty–year long captivity, as soon as He had laid the Báb's body in a safe and permanent resting-place, and His mind was free of grievous anxieties connected with the execution of that priceless Trust, He arose with sublime courage, confidence and resolution to consecrate what little strength remained to Him, in the evening of His life, to a service of such heroic proportions that no parallel to it is to be found in the annals of the first Bahá'í century.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

It was in the course of these epoch-making journeys and before large and representative audiences, at times exceeding a thousand people, that 'Abdu'l-Bahá expounded, with brilliant simplicity, with persuasiveness and force, and for the first time in His ministry, those basic and distinguishing principles of His Father's Faith, which together with the laws and ordinances revealed in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* constitute the bed-rock of God's latest Revelation to mankind. The independent search after truth, unfettered by superstition or tradition; the oneness of the entire human race, the pivotal principle and fundamental doctrine of the Faith; the basic unity of all religions; the condemnation of all forms of prejudice, whether religious, racial, class or national; the harmony which must exist between religion and science; the equality of men and women, the two wings on which the bird of human kind is able to soar; the introduction of compulsory education; the adoption of a universal auxiliary language; the abolition of the extremes of wealth and poverty; the institution of a

world tribunal for the adjudication of disputes between nations; the exaltation of work, performed in the spirit of service, to the rank of worship; the glorification of justice as the ruling principle in human society, and of religion as a bulwark for the protection of all peoples and nations; and the establishment of a permanent and universal peace as the supreme goal of all mankind—these stand out as the essential elements of that Divine polity which He proclaimed to leaders of public thought as well as to the masses at large in the course of these missionary journeys.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*.

Whilst He sojourned in England the house placed at His disposal in Cadogan Gardens became a veritable mecca to all sorts and conditions of men, thronging to visit the Prisoner of 'Akká Who had chosen their great city as the first scene of His labours in the West. ... Every day, all day long, a constant stream, an interminable procession! Ministers and missionaries, oriental scholars and occult students, practical men of affairs and mystics, Anglicans, Catholics, and Non-conformists, Theosophists and Hindus, Christian Scientists and doctors of medicine, Muslims, Buddhists and Zoroastrians. There also called: politicians, Salvation Army soldiers and other workers for human good, women suffragists, journalists, writers, poets and healers, dressmakers and great ladies, artists and artisans, poor workless people and prosperous merchants, members of the dramatic and musical world, these all came; and none were too lowly, nor too great, to receive the sympathetic consideration of this holy Messenger, Who was ever giving His life for others' good.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*.

A reception was given by Sir Richard and Lady Stapley in honour of 'Abdu'l-Bahá ... Who spoke earnestly to us of the duty of each one of those assembled to work, body and soul and spirit, for the Most Great Peace. ['Abdu'l-Bahá said:]

'When a thought of war enters your mind, suppress it, and plant in its stead a positive thought of peace. These thoughts, vital and dynamic, will affect the minds of all with whom you come into contact, and like doves of peace, will grow and increase till they spread over all the land'

Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, p. 167.

"When 'Abdu'l-Bahá visited this country for the first time in 1912," a commentator on His American travels has written, "He found a large and sympathetic audience waiting to greet Him personally and to receive from His own lips His loving and spiritual message ... Beyond the words spoken there was something indescribable in His personality that impressed profoundly all who came into His presence. The dome-like head, the patriarchal beard, the eyes that seemed to have looked beyond the reach of time and sense, the soft yet clearly penetrating voice, the translucent humility, the never failing love—but above all, the sense of power mingled with gentleness that invested His whole being with a rare majesty of spiritual exaltation that both set Him apart, and yet that brought Him near to the lowliest soul,—it was all this, and much more that can never be defined, that have left with His many ... friends, memories that are ineffaceable and unspeakably precious.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*.

At the [Bowery] Mission, in April 1912, He spoke most lovingly to the several hundred men who were present: "You must be thankful to God that you are poor, for His Holiness Jesus Christ has said 'Blessed are the poor'; He never said Blessed are the rich. He said too that the kingdom is for the poor and that it is easier for a camel to enter a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter God's kingdom." And then He told them, "when Jesus Christ appeared it was the poor who first accepted Him, not the rich." …

He closed with characteristic humbleness, asking the men to accept Him as their servant. After the talk, He stood at the Mission Hall entrance. He took each hand and placed in each a number of coins—the price of a bed for the night. However, at least one man kept his money, explaining. "That was a heavenly man, and his quarter was not like other quarters, it will bring me luck!"

Annamarie Honnold, *Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 67–68.

Upstairs in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's room the Master was seen at the door greeting each boy with a handclasp or an arm around the shoulder, with warm smiles and boyish laughter. His happiest welcome seemed to be directed to the thirteen–year-old boy near the end of the line. He was quite dark-skinned and didn't seem too sure he would be welcome. The Master's face lighted up and in a loud voice that all could hear exclaimed with delight that 'here was a black rose'. The boy's face shone with happiness and love. Silence fell across the room as the boys looked at their companion with a new awareness.

Annamarie Honnold, *Vignettes from the Life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 89.

… He picked from it a long chocolate nougat; it was very black. He looked at it a moment and then around at the group of boys who were watching Him intently and expectantly. Without a word, He walked across the room to where the coloured boy was sitting, and, still without speaking, but with a humorously piercing glance that swept the group, laid the chocolate against the black cheek. His face was radiant as He laid His arm around the shoulder of the boy and that radiance seemed to fill the room. No words were necessary to convey His meaning … as for the boy himself, upon whom all eyes were now fixed, he seemed perfectly unconscious of all but 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Upon Him his eyes were fastened with an adoring, blissful look such as I had never seen upon any face.

Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom*, pp. 66–67.

On Wednesday, 1 May, the day 'Abdu'l-Bahá was to lay the foundation stone for the first Bahá'í House of Worship in the Western Hemisphere, weather forecasters in the *Chicago Daily News* predicted unsettled conditions "and probably occasional showers to-night." A marquee tent had been set up on the Temple site, with three hundred chairs arranged in nine sections separated by aisles leading to a central open area. A special entryway had been prepared for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's carriage in the middle of the eastern side of the tract. He arrived, instead, by taxi and entered on the northern side. Pacing back and forth before the filled chairs and two hundred additional persons who were standing, He spoke of the importance of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár.

They moved outside the tent and spadefuls of earth were turned by persons from Persia, Syria, Egypt, India, Japan, South Africa, England, France, Germany, Holland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark and by North American Indians; ʻAbdu'l-Bahá finished the effort and placed the stone.

Allan Ward, *239 Days: ʻAbdu'l-Bahá's Journey in America*, pp. 51–52.

It was a wonderful experience in the midst of the chaos of war conditions to visit the Master at His Mount Carmel home, which even at that time was a haven of peace and refreshment. I can remember Him, majestic yet gentle, pacing up and down His garden whilst He spoke to me about eternal realities, at a time when the whole material world was rocking on its foundations. The divine power of the spirit shone through His presence, giving one the feeling that a great prophet from Old Testament days had risen up in a war-stricken world, as an inspirer and spiritual guide for the human race.

Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, p. 224.

Preparation for war conditions had been made by ʻAbdu'l-Bahá even before His return to Palestine, after His world tour. The people of the villages of Nughayb, Samrih and ʻAdasíyyih were instructed by the Master how to grow corn, so as to produce prolific harvests, in the period before and during the lean years of the war.

A vast quantity of this corn was stored in pits, some of which had been made by the Romans, and were now utilized for this purpose. So it came about that ʻAbdu'l-Bahá was able to feed numberless poor of the people of Haifa, ʻAkká, and the neighbourhood in the famine years of 1914–1918.

We learned that when the British marched into Haifa there was some difficulty about the commissariat. The officer in command went to consult the Master.

"I have corn," was the reply.

"But for the army?" said the astonished soldier.

"I have corn for the British Army," said ʻAbdu'l-Bahá.

He truly walked the Mystic way with practical feet.

Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, p. 210.

The British Government, with its usual gesture of appreciating a heroic act, conferred a knighthood upon ʻAbdu'l-Bahá ʻAbbás, Who accepted this honour as a courteous gift "from a just king".

The dignitaries of the British crown from Jerusalem were gathered in Haifa, eager to do honour to the Master, Whom every one had come to love and reverence for His life of unselfish service. An imposing motor car had been sent to bring ʻAbdu'l-Bahá to the ceremony. The Master, however, could not be found. People were sent in every direction to look for Him, when suddenly from an unexpected side He appeared, alone, walking His kingly walk, with that simplicity of greatness which always enfolded Him.

Lady Blomfield, *The Chosen Highway*, p. 214.

2.38 The Passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

'Abdu'l-Bahá's great work was now ended. The historic Mission with which His Father had, twenty–nine years previously, invested Him had been gloriously consummated. A memorable chapter in the history of the first Bahá'í century had been written. The Heroic Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation, in which He had participated since its inception, and played so unique a rôle, had drawn to a close. He had suffered as no disciple of the Faith, who had drained the cup of martyrdom, had suffered, He had laboured as none of its greatest heroes had laboured. He had witnessed triumphs such as neither the Herald of the Faith nor its Author had ever witnessed.

At the close of His strenuous Western tours, which had called forth the last ounce of His ebbing strength, He had written: "*Friends, the time is coming when I shall be no longer with you. I have done all that could be done. I have served the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh to the utmost of My ability. I have laboured night and day all the years of My life. O how I long to see the believers shouldering the responsibilities of the Cause! … My days are numbered, and save this there remains none other joy for me.*"

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Till the very last day of His earthly life 'Abdu'l-Bahá continued to shower that same love upon high and low alike, to extend that same assistance to the poor and the down-trodden, and to carry out those same duties in the service of His Father's Faith, as had been His wont from the days of His boyhood.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

The news of His passing, so sudden, so unexpected, spread like wildfire throughout the town, and was flashed instantly over the wires to distant parts of the globe, stunning with grief the community of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh of the East and West. Messages from far and near, from high and low alike, through cablegrams and letters, poured in conveying to the members of a sorrow-stricken and disconsolate family expressions of praise, of devotion, of anguish and of sympathy.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

2.39 Bahíyyih Khánum: The Greatest Holy Leaf, Sister of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, an Archetype and Exemplar for the People of Bahá

Verily, We have elevated thee to the rank of one of the most distinguished among thy sex, and granted thee, in My court, a station such as none other woman hath surpassed.

Bahá'u'lláh, in *Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf.*

O faithful friends! It is right and fitting that out of honour to her most high station, in the gatherings of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, whether of the East or the West, all Bahá'í festivals and celebrations should be completely suspended for a period of nine months, and that in every city and village, memorial meetings should be held, with all solemnity, spirituality, lowliness and consecration—where, in the choicest of language, may be described at length the shining attributes of that most resplendent Leaf, that archetype of the people of Bahá…

Only future generations and pens abler than mine can, and will, pay a worthy tribute to the towering grandeur of her spiritual life, to the unique part she played throughout the tumultuous stages of Bahá'í history, to the expressions of unqualified praise that have streamed from the pen of both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of His Covenant, though unrecorded, and in the main unsuspected by the mass of her passionate admirers in East and West, the share she has had in influencing the course of some of the chief events in the annals of the Faith, the sufferings she bore, the sacrifices she made, the rare gifts of unfailing sympathy she so strikingly displayed—these, and many others stand so inextricably interwoven with the fabric of the Cause itself that no future historian of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh can afford to ignore or minimize...

Banishing from her mind and heart every earthly attachment, renouncing the very idea of matrimony, she, standing resolutely by the side of a Brother whom she was to aid and serve so well, arose to dedicate her life to the service of her Father's glorious Cause. Whether in the management of the affairs of His Household in which she excelled, or in the social relationships which she so assiduously cultivated in order to shield both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, whether in the unfailing attention she paid to the everyday needs of her Father, or in the traits of generosity, of affability and kindness, which she manifested, the Greatest Holy Leaf had by that time abundantly demonstrated her worthiness to rank as one of the noblest figures intimately associated with the life-long work of Bahá'u'lláh...

It would take me too long to make even a brief allusion to those incidents of her life, each of which eloquently proclaims her as a daughter, worthy to inherit that priceless heritage bequeathed to her by Bahá'u'lláh. A purity of life that reflected itself in even the minutest details of her daily occupations and activities; a tenderness of heart that obliterated every distinction of creed, class and colour; a resignation and serenity that evoked to the mind the calm and heroic fortitude of the Báb; a natural fondness of flowers and children that was so characteristic of Bahá'u'lláh; an unaffected simplicity of manners; an extreme sociability which made her accessible to all; a generosity, a love, at once disinterested and undiscriminating, that reflected so clearly the attributes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's character; a sweetness of temper; a cheerfulness that no amount of sorrow could becloud; a quiet and unassuming disposition that served to enhance a thousandfold the prestige of her exalted rank; a forgiving nature that instantly disarmed the most unyielding enemy—these rank among the outstanding attributes of a saintly life which history will acknowledge as having been endowed with a celestial potency that few of the heroes of the past possessed...

Whatever betide us, however distressing the vicissitudes which the nascent Faith of God may yet experience, we pledge ourselves, before the mercy-seat of thy glorious Father, to hand on, unimpaired and undivided, to generations yet unborn, the glory of that tradition of which thou hast been its most brilliant exemplar.

Shoghi Effendi, in *Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf.*

... the Greatest Holy Leaf, the '*well-beloved*' sister of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the '*Leaf that hath sprung*' from the '*Pre-existent Root*', the '*fragrance*' of Bahá'u'lláh's '*shining robe*', elevated by Him to a '*station such as none other woman hath surpassed*', and comparable in rank to those immortal heroines such as Sarah, Ásíyih, the Virgin

Mary, Fáṭimih and Ṭáhirih, each of whom has outshone every member of her sex in previous Dispensations.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*.

The Greatest Holy Leaf is described as "the outstanding heroine of the Bahá'í Dispensation" and as "the Last Survivor of a Glorious and heroic Age." She is also designated as the "archetype of the people of Bahá," whose "heavenly ways" are, according to the Guardian, "a model" for members of the religion to emulate, and her "celestial attributes" are "their prototype and their guide."

Janet Khan, *Prophet's Daughter*, pp. 7-8.

It is a charming Persian habit to wrap a gift in an embroidered silk or linen cloth, as fine in its way as the thing enclosed. So always, she gave a gift within the gift. You took the happy warmth of contentment you felt when you were with her and only later came to realize that this was the fine wrapping of a deeper joy, a richer core…

She would not weigh your worth and reward you according to your deserts; nor would she consider whether your pain were inflicted or self-provoked, as if she knew that suffering has a sanctity of its own. She never sat in judgment and was not concerned with separating the sheep from the goats. Not only did she not single out black from white in the flock, but in the inner fold of your own nature she did not call the fault dark nor see the white lamb of good action…

You were sure that if one tried to hurt her she would wish to console him for his own cruelty. For her love was unconditioned, could penetrate disguise and see hunger behind the mask of fury, and she knew that the most brutal self is secretly hoping to find gentleness in another.

Her room was the heart of the house… You left your shoes at the threshold of that room and you left too any outer covering of pose or manner you might have made for yourself for protection in a bleak world… All fear went out of you, all shyness, all timidity. Insensibly she tempered coldness and warmed indifference. You did not think, How good she is: how selfish am I. For the moment self was forgotten and, in the forgetting, conscious standards of comparison were lost. The current of intent that fed the ego was cut. You were free.

Although for so many years she had been the head of a great household, directing every detail of its ordering, she showed no urge to small activity. When there was something to be done she did it straightway, giving it her full attention. When she sat with folded hands she was wholly there: no part of her mind seemed to be busy with the next step, the duty to come. It was in keeping with her harmony with life that she gave herself in her entirety to her hours of companionship and so made them complete. Islands in time.

And she was not only in harmony with those who peopled it for her: she was never in conflict nor at variance within herself. In her inclinations you heard no dissident minority of hesitation, no murmur of reluctance that robs the act of its purity, its generosity. Her personality was so attuned to her spirit that integrity and purity were her natural expression, and her habit of recognizing and choosing the pure in all things was involuntary…

Something greater than forgiveness she had shown in meeting the cruelties and strictures in her own life. To be hurt and to forgive is saintly but far beyond this is the power to comprehend and not be hurt. This power she had. The word *mazlúm*, which signifies acceptance without complaint has come to be associated with her name. She was never known to complain or lament. It was not that she made the best of things, but rather that she found in everything, even in calamity itself, the germs of enduring wisdom…

Always she moved with the larger rhythm, the wider sweep, toward the ultimate goal. Surely, confidently, she followed the circle of her orbit round the sun of her existence, in that complete acquiescence, that perfect accord, which underlies faith itself.

Marjory Morten, Bahíyyih Khánum, in *The Bahá'í World*, Vol. V, pp. 181–185.

2.40 The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh had been instituted solely through the direct operation of His Will and purpose. The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, on the other hand, may be regarded as the offspring resulting from that mystic intercourse between Him Who had generated the forces of a God-given Faith and the One Who had been made its sole Interpreter and was recognized as its perfect Exemplar.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

The Document establishing that Order, the Charter of a future world civilization, which may be regarded in some of its features as supplementary to no less weighty a Book than *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*; signed and sealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá; entirely written with His own hand; its first section composed during one of the darkest periods of His incarceration in the prison-fortress of 'Akká, proclaims, categorically and unequivocally, the fundamental beliefs of the followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh; reveals, in unmistakable language, the twofold character of the Mission of the Báb; discloses the full station of the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation; asserts that "all others are servants unto Him and do His bidding"; stresses the importance of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*; establishes the institution of the Guardianship as a hereditary office and outlines its essential functions; provides the measures for the election of the International House of Justice, defines its scope and sets forth its relationship to that Institution; prescribes the obligations, and emphasizes the responsibilities, of the Hands of the Cause of God; and extols the virtues of the indestructible Covenant established by Bahá'u'lláh.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

The Formative Age

2.41 Overview

The fourth period (1921–1944) is motivated by the forces radiating from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that Charter of Bahá'u'lláh's New World Order, the offspring resulting from the mystic intercourse between Him Who is the Source of the Law of God and the mind of the One Who is the vehicle and interpreter of that Law. The inception of this fourth, this last period of the first Bahá'í century synchronizes with the birth of the Formative Age of the Bahá'í Era, with the founding of the Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh—a system which is at once the harbinger, the nucleus and pattern of His World Order. This period, covering the first twenty–three years of this Formative Age, has already been distinguished by an outburst of further hostility, of a different character, accelerating on the one hand the diffusion of the Faith over a still wider area in each of the five continents of the globe, and resulting on the other in the emancipation and the recognition of the independent status of several communities within its pale.

Shoghi Effendi *God Passes By.*

2.42 The Ministry of Shoghi Effendi followed by the Election of the Universal House of Justice

This Most Great Jubilee is the crowning victory of the lifework of Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Cause of God. He it was, and he alone, who unfolded the potentialities of the widely scattered, numerically small, and largely unorganized Bahá'í community which had been called into being during the Heroic Age of the Faith. He it was who unfolded the grand design of God's Holy Cause, set in motion the great plans of teaching already outlined by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, established the institutions and greatly extended the endowments at the World Centre, and raised the Temples of America, Africa, Australasia and Europe, developed the Administrative Order of the Cause throughout the world, and set the Ark of the Cause true on its course. He appointed the Hands of the Cause of God.

The Universal House of Justice, 30 April 1963, *Messages 1963–1886*, para. 1.2, pp. 5–6.

As head for thirty–six years (1921–1957) of the Bahá'í movement, Shoghi Effendi devoted himself to giving practical expression to Bahá'u'lláh's ideals.

In this effort he was brilliantly successful. Today, embracing people from more than 2,100 ethnic, racial and tribal groups, and established in the most remote corners of the earth, the community he inspired and shaped represents the most diverse organized body of people on the planet. Its unity and achievements pose searching challenges for materialistic theories of human nature.

Neither the scale nor the diversity of the expansion, however, adequately conveys the creative genius that achieved it. Faced with the need to inspire in the small, widely-scattered and heterogeneous body of Bahá'u'lláh's followers in various countries the passion and sense of common purpose needed for this enormous task, Shoghi Effendi found in himself a range of talents and resources whose rapid cultivation is

breathtaking to contemplate. His life offers an instance of that phenomenon—rare indeed in the twentieth century—for which an earlier age coined the term "uomo universale". Any one of the major pursuits that occupied his thirty–six years at the helm of Bahá'í activities would have distinguished the lifetime achievement of most professional careers. Driven by the historic imperative he found in Bahá'u'lláh's perception that contemporary civilization is breaking apart, Shoghi Effendi made of himself variously an author, an administrator, a historian, an inspired translator (from Arabic and Persian to English and the reverse), a daring patron of architecture, a trenchant analyst of world trends, and a master planner able to conceive in his mind the components of undertakings whose scope of operations was the entire planet.

Somehow, this awesome array of occupations left time for unhurried hours of informal conversations over the dinner table with a constant stream of collaborators and admirers drawn from all over the world to the international centre of his work in Haifa. Hundreds of written accounts speak of the impact of a personality that made the evenings spent at his table among the most memorable experiences of his guests' lives ...

Douglas Martin, Introduction to *Poems of the Passing.*

At the time of our beloved Shoghi Effendi's death it was evident, from the circumstances and from the explicit requirements of the Holy Texts, that it had been impossible for him to appoint a successor in accordance with the provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá...

Following the passing of Shoghi Effendi the international administration of the Faith was carried on by the Hands of the Cause of God with the complete agreement and loyalty of the National Spiritual Assemblies and the body of the believers...

The Guardian had given the Bahá'í world explicit and detailed plans covering the period until Riḍván 1963, the end of the Ten Year Crusade. From that point onward, unless the Faith were to be endangered, further divine guidance was essential...

Having been in charge of the Cause of God for six years, the Hands, with absolute faith in the Holy Writings, called upon the believers to elect the Universal House of Justice, and even went so far as to ask that they themselves be not voted for.

The Universal House of Justice, 9 March 1965.

2.43 Successive Epochs of the Formative Age

In disclosing the panoramic vision of the unfoldment of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, Shoghi Effendi refers to three major evolutionary stages through which the Faith must pass—the Apostolic or Heroic Age (1844–1921) associated with the Central Figures of the Faith; the Formative or Transitional Age (1921–), the "hallmark" of which is the rise and establishment of the Administrative Order, based on the execution of the provisions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament, and, the Golden Age which will represent the "consummation of this glorious dispensation.

The Universal House of Justice, 5 February 1986, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 451.3, p. 711.

The Formative Age, in which we now live and serve, was ushered in with the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Its major thrust is the shaping, development and consolidation of the local, national and international institutions of the Faith. It is clear from the

enumeration of the tasks associated with the Formative Age that their achievement will require increasingly mature levels of functioning of the Bahá'í community:

During this Formative Age of the Faith, and in the course of present and succeeding epochs, the last and crowning stage in the erection of the framework of the Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh—the election of the Universal House of Justice—will have been completed, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the Mother Book of His Revelation, will have been codified and its laws promulgated, the Lesser Peace will have been established, the unity of mankind will have been achieved and its maturity attained, the Plan conceived by 'Abdu'l-Bahá will have been executed, the emancipation of the Faith from the fetters of religious orthodoxy will have been effected, and its independent religious status will have been universally recognized, …[9]

The Epochs of the Formative Age mark progressive stages in the evolution of the organic Bahá'í community and signal the maturation of its institutions, thus enabling the Faith to operate at new levels and to initiate new functions.

The Universal House of Justice, 5 February 1986,
Messages 1963–1986, paras 451.5–451.6, pp. 711–712.

The First Epoch of the Formative Age: 1921–1944/46

The first epoch of this Age witnessed the "birth and primary stages in the erection of the framework of the Administrative Order of the Faith."[10] The epoch was characterized by concentration on the formation of local and national institutions in all five continents …

The Universal House of Justice, 5 February 1986, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 451.9, p. 713.

The second Epoch of the Formative Age: 1946–1963

This epoch extended the developments of the first epoch by calling for the "consummation of a laboriously constructed Administrative Order,"[11] and was to witness the formulation of a succession of teaching plans designed to facilitate the development of the Faith beyond the confines of the Western Hemisphere and the continent of Europe…

The internal consolidation and the administrative experience gained by the National Assemblies was utilized and mobilized by the Guardian with the launching of the Ten Year World Crusade—a crusade involving the simultaneous prosecution of the twelve national plans…

The second epoch thus clearly demonstrated the further maturation of the institutions of the Administrative Order. It witnessed the appointment of the Hands of the Cause, the introduction of the Auxiliary Boards, and the establishment of the International Bahá'í Council. The culminating event of the epoch was the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963. It further demonstrated the more effective and co-ordinated use of the administrative machinery to prosecute the goals of the

9 *Shoghi Effendi, The Citadel of Faith. Letter dated 5 June 1947 to the American Bahá'ís.*
10 *Shoghi Effendi, The Citadel of Faith. Letter dated 5 June 1947 to the American Bahá'ís.*
11 *Shoghi Effendi, The Citadel of Faith. Letter dated 5 June 1947 to the American Bahá'ís.*

first global spiritual crusade, and the emergence in ever sharper relief of the World Centre of the Faith.

The Universal House of Justice, 5 February 1986,
Messages 1963–1986, paras. 451.10-451.11, pp. 714-715.

The Third Epoch of the Formative Age: 1963–1986

The period of the third epoch encompassed three world plans, involving all National Spiritual Assemblies, under the direction of the Universal House of Justice, namely the Nine Year Plan (1964–1973), the Five Year Plan (1974–1979), and the Seven Year Plan (1979–1986). This third epoch witnessed the emergence of the Faith from obscurity and the initiation of activities designed to foster the social and economic development of communities. The institution of the Continental Boards of Counsellors was brought into existence leading to the establishment of the International Teaching Centre. Assistants to the Auxiliary Boards were also introduced. At the World Centre of the Faith, the historic construction and occupation of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice was a crowning event.

The Universal House of Justice, 5 February 1986, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 451.12b, p. 715.

The Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age: 1986–2001

Whereas national plans had previously derived largely from the World Centre, in this new epoch the specific goals for each national community will be formulated, within the framework of the overall objectives of the Plan, by means of consultation between the particular National Spiritual Assembly and the Continental Board of Counsellors.

The Universal House of Justice, 5 February 1986,
Messages 1963–1986, para. 451.13, pp. 715–716.

The Fifth Epoch of the Formative Age: 2001-

As we write you this message, the Conference of the Continental Counselors approaches a triumphant conclusion.

For eight days the Counselors from all the continents have consulted on the next phase of the process of entry by troops. While they were meeting during the first five days, 849 members of their Auxiliary Boards from 172 countries were arriving at the Bahá'í World Centre and paying their respects at the Holy Shrines in anticipation of the moment when they would all come together in a series of soul-stirring events: ascent of the newly built Terraces on Mount Carmel; circumambulation of the Shrine of the Báb; procession along the Arc path for a visit to the International Teaching Centre Building; a devotional ceremony to mark the occupation by the Teaching Center of its permanent seat; and subsequent joint consultations concerning their indispensable role in the Five Year Plan on which the Bahá'í world will embark at Riḍván 2001.

The deliberations of the Counselors themselves have been the heart of these stupendous activities. Their consultations have been marked by a combination of sobriety and effervescence that has refined the character of their discussions and

illumined understanding. It is clear from the confident atmosphere in which they have conferred that their institution has reached a new stage in its maturation....

As the time for the Conference drew near, there were signs that the Faith had arrived at a point in its development beyond which a new horizon opens before us. Such intimations were communicated in our report last Riḍván of the change in culture of the Bahá'í community as training institutes emerged, as the construction projects on Mount Carmel approached their completion, and as the internal processes of institutional consolidation and the external processes towards world unity became more fully synchronized. They were elaborated in the message we addressed to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counselors a few days ago. But the extraordinary dynamics at work throughout the Conference crystallized these indications into a recognizable reality.

With a spirit of exultation we are moved to announce to you: the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh now enters the fifth epoch of its Formative Age.

The Universal House of Justice, 16 January 2001.

Only three years remain of a quarter-century effort that began in 1996 focused on a single goal: a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. At Riḍván 2021, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh will embark on a Plan lasting a single year. Brief, but pregnant with portent, this one-year endeavour will begin a new wave of Plans bearing the ark of the Cause into the third century of the Bahá'í Era. During the course of this auspicious twelvemonth, the Bahá'í world's commemoration of the centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá will include a special gathering at the Bahá'í World Centre to which representatives of every National Spiritual Assembly and every Regional Bahá'í Council will be invited. This, however, is to be but the first in a sequence of events that will prepare the believers for the demands of the decades to come. The following January, the elapse of one hundred years since the first public reading of the Master's Will and Testament will be the occasion for a conference in the Holy Land bringing together the Continental Boards of Counsellors and all members of the Auxiliary Boards for Protection and Propagation. The spiritual energy released at these two historic gatherings must then be carried to all the friends of God in every land in which they reside. For this purpose, a series of conferences will be convened worldwide in the months that follow, a catalyst to the multi-year endeavour that shall succeed the coming One Year Plan.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2018.

Future Epochs

The last twenty–three years of the same century coincided with the first epoch of the second, the Iron and Formative, Age of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh—the first of a series of epochs which must precede the inception of the last and Golden Age of that Dispensation—a Dispensation which, as the Author of the Faith has Himself categorically asserted, must extend over a period of no less than one thousand years, and which will constitute the first stage in a series of Dispensations, to be established by future Manifestations, all deriving their inspiration from the Author

of the Bahá'í Revelation, and destined to last, in their aggregate, no less than five thousand centuries.

Shoghi Effendi, *Citadel of Faith*.

The tasks that remain to be accomplished during the course of the Formative Age are many and challenging. Additional epochs can be anticipated, each marking significant stages in the evolution of the Administrative Order and culminating in the Golden Age of the Faith. The Golden Age, itself, will involve "successive epochs" leading ultimately to the establishment of the Most Great Peace, the World Bahá'í Commonwealth and to the "birth and efflorescence of a world civilization."

The Universal House of Justice, 5 February 1986,
Messages 1963–1986, para. 451.14, p. 716.

The Growth of The Bahá'í Faith

2.44 Diffusing the Spirit of the Faith

The work that the members of your small family are doing in spreading the Cause and infusing its divine spirit among the people you meet, is a fact that no one familiar with your life can deny ... In time you will see how abundant the fruit of your services will be. It is not sufficient to number the souls that embrace the Cause to know the progress that it is making. The more important consequences of your activities are the spirit that is diffused into the life of the community, and the extent to which the teachings we proclaim become part of the consciousness and belief of the people that hear them. For it is only when the spirit has thoroughly permeated the world that the people will begin to enter the Faith in large numbers. At the beginning of spring only the few, exceptionally favoured seeds will sprout, but when the season gets in its full sway, and the atmosphere gets permeated with the warmth of true springtime, then masses of flowers will begin to appear, and a whole hillside suddenly blooms. We are still in the state when only isolated souls are awakened, but soon we shall have the full swing of the season and the quickening of whole groups and nations into the spiritual life breathed by Bahá'u'lláh.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 18 February 1932,
Promoting Entry by Troops, Letter No. 2, pp. 23–24.

Dear Mr and Mrs ... have a great ability for kindling in the hearts the love of God. It is for this wholesome, warming, spiritualizing love that the world is thirsting today. The Bahá'ís will never succeed in attracting large numbers to the Faith until they see

in our individual and community life acts, and the atmosphere, that bespeaks the love of God.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 17 February 1945,
Promoting Entry By Troops, Letter No. 11, p. 26.

There are two things which will contribute greatly to bringing more people into the Cause more swiftly: one is the maturity of the Bahá'ís within their Communities, functioning according to Bahá'í laws and in the proper spirit of unity, and the other is the disintegration of society and the suffering it will bring in its wake. When the old forms are seen to be hopelessly useless, the people will stir from their materialism and spiritual lethargy, and embrace the Faith.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 3 July 1948,
Promoting Entry By Troops, Letter No. 13, pp. 27–28.

This [is] the ebb of the tide. The Bahá'ís know that the tide will turn and come in, after mankind has suffered, with mighty waves of faith and devotion. Then people will enter the Cause of God in troops, and the whole condition will change. The Bahá'ís see ... the first glimpse of the dawn, before others are aware of it; and it is toward this that the Bahá'ís must work.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 5 October 1953, *Japan Will Turn Ablaze*.

2.45 The Inevitability of Opposition

In the beginning of every Revelation adversities have prevailed, which later on have been turned into great prosperity.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Crisis and Victory, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 258, p. 132.

Know ye that trials and tribulations have, from time immemorial, been the lot of the chosen Ones of God and His beloved, and such of His servants as are detached from all else but Him, they whom neither merchandise nor traffic beguile from the remembrance of the Almighty, they that speak not till He hath spoken, and act according to His commandment.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXVI.

All that hath befallen Us in the past hath advanced the interests of Our Revelation and blazoned its fame; and all that may befall Us in the future will have a like result.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXVI.

Now ye, as well, must certainly become my partners to some slight degree, and accept your share of tests and sorrows. But these episodes shall pass away, while that abiding glory and eternal life shall remain unchanged forever. Moreover, these afflictions shall be the cause of great advancement.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 196.

This day the powers of all the leaders of religion are directed towards the dispersion of the congregation of the All-Merciful, and the shattering of the Divine Edifice. The hosts of the world, whether material, cultural or political are from every side

launching their assault, for the Cause is great, very great. Its greatness is, in this day, clear and manifest to men's eyes.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

But after I leave, some people may arise in opposition, heaping persecutions upon you in their bitterness, and in the newspapers there may be articles published against the Cause. Rest ye in the assurance of firmness. Be well poised and serene, remembering that this is only as the harmless twittering of sparrows and that it will soon pass away. …

… Therefore, my purpose is to warn and strengthen you against accusations, criticisms, revilings and derision in newspaper articles or other publications. Be not disturbed by them. They are the very confirmation of the Cause, the very source of upbuilding to the Movement.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 10 November 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

2.46 The Dynamic of Crisis and Victory

Nor will it be my intention to ignore, whilst surveying the panorama which the revolution of a hundred years spreads before our gaze, the swift interweaving of seeming reverses with evident victories, out of which the hand of an inscrutable Providence has chosen to form the pattern of the Faith from its earliest days, or to minimize those disasters that have so often proved themselves to be the prelude to fresh triumphs which have, in turn, stimulated its growth and consolidated its past achievements. Indeed, the history of the first hundred years of its evolution resolves itself into a series of internal and external crises, of varying severity, devastating in their immediate effects, but each mysteriously releasing a corresponding measure of divine power, lending thereby a fresh impulse to its unfoldment, this further unfoldment engendering in its turn a still graver calamity, followed by a still more liberal effusion of celestial grace enabling its upholders to accelerate still further its march and win in its service still more compelling victories.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*.

The Faith advances, not at a uniform rate of growth, but in vast surges, precipitated by the alternation of crisis and victory. In a passage written on 18 July 1953, in the early months of the Ten Year Crusade, Shoghi Effendi, referring to the vital need to ensure through the teaching work a "steady flow" of "fresh recruits to the slowly yet steadily advancing army of the Lord of Hosts", stated that this flow would "presage and hasten the advent of the day which, as prophesied by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, will witness the entry by troops of peoples of divers nations and races into the Bahá'í world". This day the Bahá'í world has already seen in Africa, the Pacific, in Asia and in Latin America, and this process of entry by troops must, in the present plan, be augmented and spread to other countries for, as the Guardian stated in this same letter, it "will be the prelude to that long-awaited hour when a mass conversion on the part of these same nations and races, and as a direct result of a chain of events, momentous and possibly catastrophic in nature, and which cannot as yet be even dimly visualized, will suddenly revolutionize the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the

world, and reinforce a thousand–fold the numerical strength as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh".

This is the time for which we must now prepare ourselves; this is the hour whose coming it is our task to hasten.

The Universal House of Justice, 31 August 1987.

Who knows but that triumphs, unsurpassed in splendour, are not in store for the mass of Bahá'u'lláh's toiling followers? Surely, we stand too near the colossal edifice His hand has reared to be able, at the present stage of the evolution of His Revelation, to claim to be able even to conceive the full measure of its promised glory. Its past history, stained by the blood of countless martyrs, may well inspire us with the thought that, whatever may yet befall this Cause, however formidable the forces that may still assail it, however numerous the reverses it will inevitably suffer, its onward march can never be stayed, and that it will continue to advance until the very last promise, enshrined within the words of Bahá'u'lláh, shall have been completely redeemed.

Shoghi Effendi, in *The Dawn-Breakers*.

CHAPTER 3

THE BAHÁ'Í WORLDVIEW

Basic Concepts of the Bahá'í Faith

3.1 God's Transcendence and Loving Providence 100
3.2 The Purpose Underlying Creation 100
3.3 The Eternal Covenant 101
3.4 The Twofold Station of the Prophets or Manifestations of God 103
3.5 Progressive Revelation 104
3.6 Spiritual Development: God's Grace and Human Striving 105
3.7 The Immortality of the Soul and Its Progress after Death 106

The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh

3.8 The Central Figures 108
3.9 The Station of Bahá'u'lláh 108
3.10 The Station of the Báb 109
3.11 The Station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 110
3.12 The Significance of the Bahá'í Revelation 110

The Covenant in the Bahá'í Era

3.13 The Covenant of God with Humanity to Accept Bahá'u'lláh and Follow His Teachings 111
3.14 The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh with His Followers Concerning the Next Manifestation 113
3.15 The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh with His Followers Concerning the Succession 114
3.16 Excerpts from the Kitáb-i-'Ahd (Book of the Covenant) 114
3.17 Excerpts from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 115
3.18 The Significance of the Covenant 116
3.19 Firmness in the Covenant 117
3.20 Freedom of Thought and Expression in the Bahá'í Faith 117
3.21 Covenant Breaking 119
3.22 The Station to which Bahá'ís are Called 119

Basic Concepts of the Bahá'í Faith

3.1 God's Transcendence and Loving Providence

O SON OF MAN!

I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 4.

O CHILDREN OF THE DIVINE AND INVISIBLE ESSENCE!

Ye shall be hindered from loving Me and souls shall be perturbed as they make mention of Me. For minds cannot grasp Me nor hearts contain Me.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 66.

Beware, beware, lest thou be led to join partners with the Lord, thy God. He is, and hath from everlasting been, one and alone, without peer or equal, eternal in the past, eternal in the future, detached from all things, ever-abiding, unchangeable, and self-subsisting.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, section XCIV.

Know thou that the Divine Essence, which is called the Invisible of the Invisibles, never to be described, beyond the reach of mind—is sanctified above any mention, any definition or hint or allusion, any acclamation or praise. In the sense that It is that It is, the intellect can never grasp It, and the soul seeking knowledge of It is but a wanderer in the desert, and far astray. "No vision taketh in Him, but He taketh in all vision: He is the Subtile, the All-Informed."[1]

When, however, thou dost contemplate the innermost essence of all things, and the individuality of each, thou wilt behold the signs of thy Lord's mercy in every created thing, and see the spreading rays of His Names and Attributes throughout all the realm of being, with evidences which none will deny save the froward and the unaware. Then wilt thou observe that the universe is a scroll that discloseth His hidden secrets, which are preserved in the well-guarded Tablet. And not an atom of all the atoms in existence, not a creature from amongst the creatures but speaketh His praise and telleth of His attributes and names, revealeth the glory of His might and guideth to His oneness and His mercy: and none will gainsay this who hath ears to hear, eyes to see, and a mind that is sound.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 19.

3.2 The Purpose Underlying Creation

O SON OF MAN!

Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 3.

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1 *Qur'án 6:103*

Having created the world and all that liveth and moveth therein, He, through the direct operation of His unconstrained and sovereign Will, chose to confer upon man the unique distinction and capacity to know Him and to love Him—a capacity that must needs be regarded as the generating impulse and the primary purpose underlying the whole of creation ... Upon the inmost reality of each and every created thing He hath shed the light of one of His names, and made it a recipient of the glory of one of His attributes. Upon the reality of man, however, He hath focused the radiance of all of His names and attributes, and made it a mirror of His own Self. Alone of all created things man hath been singled out for so great a favor, so enduring a bounty.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, section XXVII.

The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence. To this most excellent aim, this supreme objective, all the heavenly Books and the divinely-revealed and weighty Scriptures unequivocally bear witness. Whoso hath recognized the Day Spring of Divine guidance and entered His holy court hath drawn nigh unto God and attained His Presence, a Presence which is the real Paradise, and of which the loftiest mansions of heaven are but a symbol.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXIX.

"What is the purpose of our lives?"

'Abdu'l-Bahá: "To acquire virtues. We come from the earth; why were we transferred from the mineral to the vegetable kingdom—from the plant to the animal kingdom? So that we may attain perfection in each of these kingdoms, that we may possess the best qualities of the mineral, that we may acquire the power of growing as in the plant, that we may be adorned with the instincts of the animal and possess the faculties of sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste, until from the animal kingdom we step into the world of humanity and are gifted with reason, the power of invention, and the forces of the spirit."

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*.

3.3 The Eternal Covenant

And (remember) when thy Lord brought forth from the Children of Adam, from their reins, their seed, and made them testify of themselves, (saying): Am I not your Lord? They said: Yea verily. We testify. (That was) lest ye should say at the Day of Resurrection: Lo! Of this we were unaware.

The Glorious Qur'án, Sura 7, verse 172, (Pickthall Translation).

O MY FRIENDS!

Have ye forgotten that true and radiant morn, when in those hallowed and blessed surroundings ye were all gathered in My presence beneath the shade of the tree of life, which is planted in the all-glorious paradise? Awestruck ye listened as I gave utterance to these three most holy words: O friends! Prefer not your will to Mine, never desire that which I have not desired for you, and approach Me not with lifeless hearts, defiled with worldly desires and cravings. Would ye but sanctify your souls,

ye would at this present hour recall that place and those surroundings, and the truth of My utterance should be made evident unto all of you.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 19.

At the time of the Revelation all men are equal in rank. By reason, however, of their acceptance or rejection, rise or fall, motion or stillness, recognition or denial, they come to differ thereafter. For instance, the one true God, magnified be His glory, speaking through the intermediary of His Manifestation, doth ask: "Am I not your Lord?" Every soul that answereth "Yea, verily!" is accounted among the most distinguished of all men in the sight of God. Our meaning is that ere the Word of God is delivered, all men are deemed equal in rank and their station is one and the same. It is only thereafter that differences appear, as thou hast no doubt observed.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Tabernacle of Unity.*

This is that which hath descended from the realm of glory, uttered by the tongue of power and might, and revealed unto the Prophets of old. We have taken the inner essence thereof and clothed it in the garment of brevity, as a token of grace unto the righteous, that they may stand faithful unto the Covenant of God, may fulfill in their lives His trust, and in the realm of spirit obtain the gem of divine virtue.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Preface.

The Lord of the universe hath never raised up a prophet nor hath He sent down a Book unless He hath established His covenant with all men, calling for their acceptance of the next Revelation and of the next Book; inasmuch as the outpourings of His bounty are ceaseless and without limit.

The Báb, Excerpts from the Persian Bayán, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb.*

When the Sun of Reality shed its endless bounties from the Dawning-Point of all desires, and this world of being was lit with that sacred light from pole to pole, with such intensity did it cast down its rays that it blotted out the Stygian dark forever, whereupon this earth of dust became the envy of the spheres of heaven, and this lowly place took on the state and panoply of the supernal realm... God's summons was proclaimed, the table of the Eternal Covenant was readied, the cup of the Testament was passed from hand to hand, the universal invitation was sent forth.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 2.

The divine religions embody two kinds of ordinances. First, there are those which constitute essential, or spiritual, teachings of the Word of God. These are faith in God, the acquirement of the virtues which characterize perfect manhood, praiseworthy moralities, the acquisition of the bestowals and bounties emanating from the divine effulgences—in brief, the ordinances which concern the realm of morals and ethics. This is the fundamental aspect of the religion of God, and this is of the highest importance because knowledge of God is the fundamental requirement of man. Man must comprehend the oneness of Divinity. He must come to know and acknowledge the precepts of God and realize for a certainty that the ethical development of humanity is dependent upon religion. He must get rid of all

defects and seek the attainment of heavenly virtues in order that he may prove to be the image and likeness of God…

Second, there are laws and ordinances which are temporary and nonessential. These concern human transactions and relations. They are accidental and subject to change according to the exigencies of time and place. These ordinances are neither permanent nor fundamental. For instance, during the time of Noah it was expedient that seafood be considered as lawful; therefore, God commanded Noah to partake of all marine animal life. During the time of Moses this was not in accordance with the exigencies of Israel's existence…

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 8 November 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

3.4 The Twofold Station of the Prophets or Manifestations of God

The door of the knowledge of the Ancient Being hath ever been, and will continue for ever to be, closed in the face of men. No man's understanding shall ever gain access unto His holy court. As a token of His mercy, however, and as a proof of His loving-kindness, He hath manifested unto men the Day Stars of His divine guidance, the Symbols of His divine unity, and hath ordained the knowledge of these sanctified Beings to be identical with the knowledge of His own Self. … Every one of them is the Way of God that connecteth this world with the realms above, and the Standard of His Truth unto everyone in the kingdoms of earth and heaven. They are the Manifestations of God amidst men, the evidences of His Truth, and the signs of His glory.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXI.

Know thou assuredly that the essence of all the Prophets of God is one and the same. … To prefer one in honour to another, to exalt certain ones above the rest, is in no wise to be permitted.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXXIV.

We have already in the foregoing pages assigned two stations unto each of the Luminaries arising from the Daysprings of eternal holiness. One of these stations, the station of essential unity, We have already explained. "No distinction do We make between any of them."[2] The other is the station of distinction, and pertaineth to the world of creation and to the limitations thereof. In this respect, each Manifestation of God hath a distinct individuality, a definitely prescribed mission, a predestined Revelation, and specially designated limitations. Each one of them is known by a different name, is characterized by a special attribute, fulfills a definite Mission, and is entrusted with a particular Revelation. Even as He saith: "Some of the Apostles We have caused to excel the others. To some God hath spoken, some He hath raised and exalted. And to Jesus, Son of Mary, We gave manifest signs, and We strengthened Him with the Holy Spirit."[3]

It is because of this difference in their station and mission that the words and utterances flowing from these Wellsprings of divine knowledge appear to diverge

[2] *Qur'án 2:136*
[3] *Qur'án 2:253*

and differ. Otherwise, in the eyes of them that are initiated into the mysteries of divine wisdom, all their utterances are in reality but the expressions of one Truth. As most of the people have failed to appreciate those stations to which We have referred, they therefore feel perplexed and dismayed at the varying utterances pronounced by Manifestations that are essentially one and the same.

It hath ever been evident that all these divergences of utterance are attributable to differences of station. Thus, viewed from the standpoint of their oneness and sublime detachment, the attributes of Godhead, Divinity, Supreme Singleness, and Inmost Essence, have been and are applicable to those Essences of being, inasmuch as they all abide on the throne of divine Revelation, and are established upon the seat of divine Concealment. Through their appearance the Revelation of God is made manifest, and by their countenance the Beauty of God is revealed. Thus it is that the accents of God Himself have been heard uttered by these Manifestations of the divine Being.

Viewed in the light of their second station—the station of distinction, differentiation, temporal limitations, characteristics and standards—they manifest absolute servitude, utter destitution and complete self-effacement.

Even as He saith: "I am the servant of God. I am but a man like you."

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán*, (The Book of Certitude).

3.5 Progressive Revelation

Every Prophet Whom the Almighty and Peerless Creator hath purposed to send to the peoples of the earth hath been entrusted with a Message, and charged to act in a manner that would best meet the requirements of the age in which He appeared.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXXIV.

It should also be borne in mind that, great as is the power manifested by this Revelation and however vast the range of the Dispensation its Author has inaugurated, it emphatically repudiates the claim to be regarded as the final revelation of God's will and purpose for mankind. To hold such a conception of its character and functions would be tantamount to a betrayal of its cause and a denial of its truth. It must necessarily conflict with the fundamental principle which constitutes the bedrock of Bahá'í belief, the principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is orderly, continuous and progressive and not spasmodic or final.

Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Unquestionably, the seminal force in the civilizing of human nature has been the influence of the succession of these Manifestations of the Divine that extends back to the dawn of recorded history.

The Universal House of Justice, April 2002, *Letter to the World's Religious Leaders*.

... Such an appeal does not call for abandonment of faith in the fundamental verities of any of the world's great belief systems. Far otherwise. Faith has its own imperative and is its own justification. What others believe—or do not believe—cannot be the authority in any individual conscience worthy of the name. What the above words do unequivocally urge is renunciation of all those claims to exclusivity

or finality that, in winding their roots around the life of the spirit, have been the greatest single factor in suffocating impulses to unity and in promoting hatred and violence.

The Universal House of Justice, April 2002, *Letter to the World's Religious Leaders*.

This salutary truth we maintain: that the peoples of the earth have always been remembered by their God. In every era of history, that unknowable Reality has opened the gates of grace to the world by sending an Emissary charged with providing the moral and spiritual stimulus that human beings need to cooperate and advance. Many of the names of these great Lights to humankind are lost. But some shine out from the annals of the past as having revolutionized thought, unlocked stores of knowledge, and inspired the rise of civilizations, and Their names continue to be honoured and praised. Each of these spiritual and social visionaries, stainless mirrors of virtue, set out teachings and truths that answered the urgent needs of the age.

As the world now faces its most pressing challenges yet, we acclaim Bahá'u'lláh, born two hundred years ago, as such a Figure—indeed, as the One Whose teachings will usher in that long-promised time when all humanity will live side by side in peace and unity.

The Universal House of Justice, October 2017, *To all who celebrate the Glory of God*.

3.6 Spiritual Development: God's Grace and Human Striving

Who is there that hath cried after Thee, and whose prayer hath remained unanswered? Where is he to be found who hath reached forth towards Thee, and whom Thou hast failed to approach? Who is he that can claim to have fixed his gaze upon Thee, and toward whom the eye of Thy loving-kindness hath not been directed? I bear witness that Thou hadst turned toward Thy servants ere they had turned toward Thee, and hadst remembered them ere they had remembered Thee. All grace is Thine, O Thou in Whose hand is the kingdom of Divine gifts and the source of every irrevocable decree.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, section CLXI.

The incomparable Creator hath created all men from one same substance, and hath exalted their reality above the rest of His creatures. Success or failure, gain or loss, must, therefore, depend upon man's own exertions. The more he striveth, the greater will be his progress.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXXIV.

Suffer not yourselves to be wrapt in the dense veils of your selfish desires, inasmuch as I have perfected in every one of you My creation, so that the excellence of My handiwork may be fully revealed unto men. It follows, therefore, that every man hath been, and will continue to be, able of himself to appreciate the Beauty of God, the Glorified. Had he not been endowed with such a capacity, how could he be called to account for his failure? If, in the Day when all the peoples of the earth will be gathered together, any man should, whilst standing in the presence of God, be asked: "Wherefore hast thou disbelieved in My Beauty and turned away from My Self," and

if such a man should reply and say: "Inasmuch as all men have erred, and none hath been found willing to turn his face to the Truth, I too, following their example, have grievously failed to recognize the Beauty of the Eternal," such a plea will, assuredly, be rejected. For the faith of no man can be conditioned by any one except himself.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXV.

3.7 The Immortality of the Soul and its Progress after Death

O My servants! Sorrow not if, in these days and on this earthly plane, things contrary to your wishes have been ordained and manifested by God, for days of blissful joy, of heavenly delight, are assuredly in store for you. Worlds, holy and spiritually glorious, will be unveiled to your eyes. You are destined by Him, in this world and hereafter, to partake of their benefits, to share in their joys, and to obtain a portion of their sustaining grace. To each and every one of them you will, no doubt, attain.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLIII.

Know, verily, that the soul is a sign of God, a heavenly gem whose reality the most learned of men hath failed to grasp, and whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXXII.

Know thou that the soul of man is exalted above, and is independent of all infirmities of body or mind. That a sick person showeth signs of weakness is due to the hindrances that interpose themselves between his soul and his body, for the soul itself remaineth unaffected by any bodily ailments.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXX.

And now concerning thy question regarding the soul of man and its survival after death. Know thou of a truth that the soul, after its separation from the body, will continue to progress until it attaineth the presence of God, in a state and condition which neither the revolution of ages and centuries, nor the changes and chances of this world, can alter. It will endure as long as the Kingdom of God, His sovereignty, His dominion and power will endure. It will manifest the signs of God and His attributes, and will reveal His loving kindness and bounty.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXXI.

The world beyond is as different from this world as this world is different from that of the child while still in the womb of its mother. When the soul attaineth the Presence of God, it will assume the form that best befitteth its immortality and is worthy of its celestial habitation.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXXI.

These blessed words were uttered by the Tongue of Grandeur in the Land of Mystery, exalted and glorified is His utterance:

One of the distinguishing characteristics of this most great Dispensation is that the kin of such as have recognized and embraced the truth of this Revelation and have, in the glory of His name, the Sovereign Lord, quaffed the choice, sealed wine

from the chalice of the love of the one true God, will, upon their death, if they are outwardly non-believers, be graciously invested with divine forgiveness and partake of the ocean of His Mercy.

This bounty, however, will be vouchsafed only to such souls as have inflicted no harm upon Him Who is the Sovereign Truth nor upon His loved ones. Thus hath it been ordained by Him Who is the Lord of the Throne on High and the Ruler of this world and of the world to come.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Family Life, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 823, p. 386.

In the heavenly Books, mention is made of the immortality of the spirit, which is the very foundation of the divine religions.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, talk 60, para. 2.

The ultimate rewards consist in spiritual bounties and bestowals, such as the manifold gifts of God that are vouchsafed after the ascension of the soul, the attainment of the heart's desire, and reunion with Him in the everlasting realm. Similarly, ultimate retributions and punishments consist in being deprived of the special bounties and unfailing bestowals of God and sinking to the lowest degrees of existence. And whoso is deprived of these favours, though he continue to exist after death, is accounted as dead in the eyes of the people of truth.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, talk 60, para. 4.

It is even possible for those who have died in sin and unbelief to be transformed, that is, to become the object of divine forgiveness. This is through the grace of God and not through His justice, for grace is to bestow without desert, and justice is to give that which is deserved. As we have the power to pray for those souls here, so too will we have the same power in the next world, the world of the Kingdom. Are not all the creatures in that world the creation of God? They must therefore be able to progress in that world as well. And just as they can seek illumination here through supplication, so too can they plead there for forgiveness and seek illumination through prayer and supplication. Thus, as souls can progress in this world through their entreaties and supplications, or through the prayers of holy souls, so too after death can they progress through their own prayers and supplications, particularly if they become the object of the intercession of the holy Manifestations.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, talk 62, para. 7.

... the Kingdom of God is sanctified (or free) from time and place; it is another world and another universe. But the holy souls are promised the gift of intercession. And know thou for a certainty, that in the divine worlds, the spiritual beloved ones (believers) will recognize each other, and will seek union (with each other), but a spiritual union. Likewise, a love that one may have entertained for any one will not be forgotten in the world of the Kingdom. Likewise, thou wilt not forget (there) the life that thou hast had in the material world.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, Vol. I.

Know then that the Lord God possesseth invisible realms which the human intellect can never hope to fathom nor the mind of man conceive. When once thou hast cleansed the channel of thy spiritual sense from the pollution of this worldly life, then wilt thou breathe in the sweet scents of holiness that blow from the blissful bowers of that heavenly land.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 156.

The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh

3.8 The Central Figures

Dearly-beloved friends! I feel it incumbent upon me by virtue of the obligations and responsibilities which as Guardian of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh I am called upon to discharge, to lay special stress, at a time when the light of publicity is being increasingly focused upon us, upon certain truths which lie at the basis of our Faith and the integrity of which it is our first duty to safeguard. These verities, if valiantly upheld and properly assimilated, will, I am convinced, powerfully reinforce the vigour of our spiritual life ...."

Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Dominating the entire range of this fascinating spectacle towers the incomparable figure of Bahá'u'lláh, transcendental in His majesty, serene, awe-inspiring, unapproachably glorious. Allied, though subordinate in rank, and invested with the authority of presiding with Him over the destinies of this supreme Dispensation, there shines upon this mental picture the youthful glory of the Báb, infinite in His tenderness, irresistible in His charm, unsurpassed in His heroism, matchless in the dramatic circumstances of His short yet eventful life. And finally there emerges, though on a plane of its own and in a category entirely apart from the one occupied by the twin Figures that preceded Him, the vibrant, the magnetic personality of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, reflecting to a degree that no man, however exalted his station, can hope to rival, the glory and power with which They who are the Manifestations of God are alone endowed.

Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

3.9 The Station of Bahá'u'lláh

Naught is seen in My temple but the Temple of God, and in My beauty but His Beauty, and in My being but His Being, and in My self but His Self, and in My movement but His Movement, and in My acquiescence but His Acquiescence, and

in My pen but His Pen, the Mighty, the All-Praised. There hath not been in My soul but the Truth, and in Myself naught could be seen but God."

Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Verily I say, this is the Day in which mankind can behold the Face, and hear the Voice, of the Promised One. The Call of God hath been raised, and the light of His countenance hath been lifted up upon men. It behoveth every man to blot out the trace of every idle word from the tablet of his heart, and to gaze, with an open and unbiased mind, on the signs of His Revelation, the proofs of His Mission, and the tokens of His glory.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, VII.

Say, O high priests! Ye are held in reverence because of My Name, and yet ye flee Me! Ye are the high priests of the Temple. Had ye been the high priests of the Omnipotent One, ye would have been united with Him, and would have recognized Him ...

Bahá'u'lláh, cited in *The Promised Day is Come*.

O people! Hearken unto that which hath been revealed by your All-Glorious Lord, and turn your faces unto God, the Lord of this world and of the world to come...

...If ye follow Me, ye shall behold that which ye were promised, and I will make you My companions in the dominion of My majesty and the intimates of My beauty in the heaven of My power forevermore.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, paras. 124-125.

"The foundation of the belief of the people of Bahá is this," thus proclaims one of the weightiest passages of that last document left to voice in perpetuity the directions and wishes of a departed Master, "His Holiness the Exalted One (the Báb) is the Manifestation of the unity and oneness of God and the Forerunner of the Ancient Beauty. His Holiness the Abhá Beauty (Bahá'u'lláh) (may my life be a sacrifice for His steadfast friends) is the supreme Manifestation of God and the Day-Spring of His most divine Essence. All others are servants unto Him and do His bidding."

Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

That Bahá'u'lláh should, notwithstanding the overwhelming intensity of His Revelation, be regarded as essentially one of these Manifestations of God, never to be identified with that invisible Reality, the Essence of Divinity itself, is one of the major beliefs of our Faith ...'

Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

3.10 The Station of the Báb

The substance wherewith God hath created Me is not the clay out of which others have been formed. He hath conferred upon Me that which the worldly-wise can never comprehend, nor the faithful discover ... I am one of the sustaining pillars of

the Primal Word of God. Whosoever hath recognized Me, hath known all that is true and right, and hath attained all that is good and seemly; …

The Báb, Extracts from an Epistle to Muḥammad Sháh, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb.*

All the keys of heaven God hath chosen to place on My right hand, and all the keys of hell on My left …

I am the Primal Point from which have been generated all created things. I am the Countenance of God Whose splendour can never be obscured, the Light of God Whose radiance can never fade.

The Báb, Extracts from an Epistle to Muḥammad Sháh, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb.*

That the Báb, notwithstanding the duration of His Dispensation, should be regarded primarily, not as the chosen Precursor of the Bahá'í Faith, but as One invested with the undivided authority assumed by each of the independent Prophets of the past, seemed to me yet another basic principle …

Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.*

3.11 The Station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

That 'Abdu'l-Bahá is not a Manifestation of God, that, though the successor of His Father, He does not occupy a cognate station, that no one else except the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh can ever lay claim to such a station before the expiration of a full thousand years—are verities which lie embedded in the specific utterances of both the Founder of our Faith and the Interpreter of His teachings."

Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.*

He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Centre and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue …

Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.*

3.12 The Significance of the Bahá'í Revelation

Great indeed is this Day! The allusions made to it in all the sacred Scriptures as the Day of God attest its greatness. The soul of every Prophet of God, of every Divine Messenger, hath thirsted for this wondrous Day. All the divers kindreds of the earth have, likewise, yearned to attain it. No sooner, however, had the Day Star of His Revelation manifested itself in the heaven of God's Will, than all, except those whom the Almighty was pleased to guide, were found dumbfounded and heedless.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, VII.

The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh should indeed be regarded, if we wish to be faithful to the tremendous implications of its message, as the culmination of a cycle, the final stage in a series of successive, of preliminary and progressive revelations. These, beginning with Adam and ending with the Báb, have paved the way and anticipated

with an ever-increasing emphasis the advent of that Day of Days in which He Who is the Promise of All Ages should be made manifest.

Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Nor does the Bahá'í Revelation, claiming as it does to be the culmination of a prophetic cycle and the fulfillment of the promise of all ages, attempt, under any circumstances, to invalidate those first and everlasting principles that animate and underlie the religions that have preceded it.

Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

It should also be borne in mind that, great as is the power manifested by this Revelation and however vast the range of the Dispensation its Author has inaugurated, it emphatically repudiates the claim to be regarded as the final revelation of God's will and purpose for mankind.

Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

The Covenant in the Bahá'í Era

3.13 The Covenant of God with Humanity to Accept Bahá'u'lláh and Follow His Teachings

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the 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. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed. It behoveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Source of Divine inspiration.

They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognize that the precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples. … They that have violated the Covenant of God by breaking His commandments, and have turned back on their heels, these have erred grievously in the sight of God, the All-Possessing, the Most High.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), paras 1–2.

If it be your wish, O people, to know God and to discover the greatness of His might, look, then, upon Me with Mine own eyes, and not with the eyes of any one

besides Me. Ye will, otherwise, be never capable of recognizing Me, though ye ponder My Cause as long as My Kingdom endureth, and meditate upon all created things throughout the eternity of God, the Sovereign Lord of all, the Omnipotent, the Ever-Abiding, the All-Wise. Thus have We manifested the truth of Our Revelation, that haply the people may be roused from their heedlessness, and be of them that understand.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, section CXXVII.

Blessed are the people of Bahá! God beareth Me witness! They are the solace of the eye of creation. Through them the universes have been adorned, and the Preserved Tablet embellished. They are the ones who have sailed on the ark of complete independence, with their faces set towards the Dayspring of Beauty. How great is their blessedness that they have attained unto what their Lord, the Omniscient, the All-Wise, hath willed. Through their light the heavens have been adorned, and the faces of them that have drawn nigh unto Him made to shine.

Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

In His Name who shines forth from the Horizon of Might! Verily the Tongue of the Ancient gives glad tidings to those who are in the world concerning the appearance of the Greatest Name, and who takes His Covenant among the nations. Verily, He is Myself; the Shining-Place of My Identity; the East of My Cause; the Heaven of My Bounty; the Sea of My Will; the Lamp of My Guidance; the Path of My Justice; the Standard of My Love. The one who hath turned to Him hath turned to My Face and is illumined through the lights of My Beauty; hath acknowledged My Oneness and confessed My Singleness. The one who hath denied Him hath been deprived of the Salsabíl of My Love, of the Kawthar of My Grace, the cup of My Mercy and of the Wine by which the sincere ones have been attracted and the monotheists have taken flight in the air of My Compassion, which no one hath known except him whom I have taught the matter revealed in My Hidden Tablet.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Scriptures*, No. 527, p. 255.

It should be made clear to every one reading those extracts that by the phrase "the Tongue of the Ancient" no one else is meant but God, and that the term "the Greatest Name" is an obvious reference to Bahá'u'lláh, and that "the Covenant" referred to is not the specific Covenant of which Bahá'u'lláh is the immediate Author and 'Abdu'l-Bahá the Centre but that general Covenant which, as inculcated by the Bahá'í teaching, God Himself invariably establishes with mankind when He inaugurates a new Dispensation. "The Tongue" that "gives," as stated in those extracts, the "glad-tidings" is none other than the Voice of God referring to Bahá'u'lláh, and not Bahá'u'lláh referring to 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

3.14 The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh with His Followers Concerning the Next Manifestation

God hath sent down His Messengers to succeed to Moses and Jesus, and He will continue to do so till 'the end that hath no end'; so that His grace may, from the heaven of Divine bounty, be continually vouchsafed to mankind.

Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Whoso layeth claim to a Revelation direct from God, ere the expiration of a full thousand years, such a man is assuredly a lying impostor. We pray God that He may graciously assist him to retract and repudiate such claim. Should he repent, God will, no doubt, forgive him. If, however, he persisteth in his error, God will, assuredly, send down one who will deal mercilessly with him. Terrible, indeed, is God in punishing! Whosoever interpreteth this verse otherwise than its obvious meaning is deprived of the Spirit of God and of His mercy which encompasseth all created things.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 37.

As regards the meaning of the Bahá'í Covenant: The Guardian considers the existence of two forms of Covenant both of which are explicitly mentioned in the literature of the Cause. First is the covenant that every prophet makes with humanity or more definitely with His people that they will accept and follow the coming Manifestation Who will be the reappearance of His reality. The second form of covenant is such as the one Bahá'u'lláh made with His people that they should accept the Master. This is merely to establish and strengthen the succession of the series of Lights that appear after every Manifestation. Under the same category falls the covenant the Master has made with the Bahá'ís that they should accept His administration after Him.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 21 October 1932, *Directives from the Guardian*, No. 43.

A Covenant in the religious sense is a binding agreement between God and man, whereby God requires of man certain behaviour in return for which He guarantees certain blessings, or whereby He gives man certain bounties in return for which He takes from those who accept them an undertaking to behave in a certain way. There is, for example, the Greater Covenant which every Manifestation of God makes with His followers, promising that in the fullness of time a new Manifestation will be sent, and taking from them the undertaking to accept Him when this occurs. There is also the Lesser Covenant that a Manifestation of God makes with His followers that they will accept His appointed successor after Him. If they do so, the Faith can remain united and pure. If not, the Faith becomes divided and its force spent. It is a Covenant of this kind that Bahá'u'lláh made with His followers regarding 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and that 'Abdu'l-Bahá perpetuated through the Administrative Order …

The Universal House of Justice, 23 March 1975, in The Covenant, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, p. 111.

3.15 The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh with His Followers Concerning the Succession

To direct and canalize these forces let loose by this Heaven-sent process, and to insure their harmonious and continuous operation after His ascension, an instrument divinely ordained, invested with indisputable authority, organically linked with the Author of the Revelation Himself, was clearly indispensable. That instrument Bahá'u'lláh had expressly provided through the institution of the Covenant, an institution which He had firmly established prior to His ascension. This same Covenant He had anticipated in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas … and had incorporated it in a special document which He designated as "the Book of My Covenant," …

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

… this Covenant has been bequeathed to posterity in a Will and Testament which, together with *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and several Tablets, in which the rank and station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are unequivocally disclosed, constitute the chief buttresses designed by the Lord of the Covenant Himself to shield and support, after His ascension, the appointed Centre of His Faith and the Delineator of its future institutions.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

Above all the Covenant that was to perpetuate the influence of that Faith, insure its integrity, safeguard it from schism, and stimulate its world-wide expansion, had been fixed on an inviolable basis.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

3.16 Excerpts from the *Kitáb-i-'Ahd* (Book of the Covenant)

The aim of this Wronged One in sustaining woes and tribulations, in revealing the Holy Verses and in demonstrating proofs hath been naught but to quench the flame of hate and enmity, that the horizon of the hearts of men may be illumined with the light of concord and attain real peace and tranquillity. … We exhort you, O peoples of the world, to observe that which will elevate your station. Hold fast to the fear of God and firmly adhere to what is right. Verily I say, the tongue is for mentioning what is good, defile it not with unseemly talk. God hath forgiven what is past. Henceforward everyone should utter that which is meet and seemly, and should refrain from slander, abuse and whatever causeth sadness in men. … Great and blessed is this Day—the Day in which all that lay latent in man hath been and will be made manifest. Lofty is the station of man, were he to hold fast to righteousness and truth and to remain firm and steadfast in the Cause. In the eyes of the All-Merciful a true man appeareth even as a firmament; its sun and moon are his sight and hearing, and his shining and resplendent character its stars. His is the loftiest station, and his influence educateth the world of being.

Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-'Ahd (Book of the Covenant), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh.*

O ye that dwell on earth! The religion of God is for love and unity; make it not the cause of enmity or dissension. In the eyes of men of insight and the beholders of the Most Sublime Vision, whatsoever are the effective means for safeguarding and promoting the happiness and welfare of the children of men have already been revealed by the Pen of Glory. …

O ye the loved ones and the trustees of God! Kings are the manifestations of the power, and the daysprings of the might and riches, of God. Pray ye on their behalf. He hath invested them with the rulership of the earth and hath singled out the hearts of men as His Own domain.

Conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book. This is a decree of God in this Most Great Revelation. It is divinely preserved from annulment and is invested by Him with the splendour of His confirmation.

Bahá'u'lláh, Kitáb-i-'Ahd (Book of the Covenant), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

In the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, moreover, Bahá'u'lláh solemnly and explicitly declares: "It is incumbent upon the Aghsán, the Afnán and My kindred to turn, one and all, their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch. Consider that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book: 'When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.' The object of this sacred verse is none other except the Most Mighty Branch ('Abdu'l-Bahá). Thus have we graciously revealed unto you our potent Will, and I am verily the Gracious, the All-Powerful."

Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

3.17 Excerpts from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

The sacred and youthful branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, as well as the Universal House of Justice to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God …

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.

O ye the faithful loved ones of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! It is incumbent upon you to take the greatest care of Shoghi Effendi …

For he is, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Guardian of the Cause of God, the Afnán, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause and the beloved of the Lord must obey him and turn unto him. … All must seek guidance and turn unto the Centre of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.

The Glory of Glories rest upon you!

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.

… the Hands of the Cause of God must be ever watchful and so soon as they find anyone beginning to oppose and protest against the Guardian of the Cause of God, cast him out from the congregation of the people of Bahá and in no wise accept any excuse from him. How often hath grievous error been disguised in the garb of truth, that it might sow the seeds of doubt in the hearts of men!

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.

And now, one of the greatest and most fundamental principles of the Cause of God is to shun and avoid entirely the Covenant-breakers, for they will utterly destroy the

Cause of God, exterminate His Law and render of no account all efforts exerted in the past.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.*

In these days, the most important of all things is the guidance of the nations and peoples of the world. Teaching the Cause is of utmost importance for it is the head corner-stone of the foundation itself. This wronged servant has spent his days and nights in promoting the Cause and urging the peoples to service. He rested not a moment, till the fame of the Cause of God was noised abroad in the world and the celestial strains from the Abhá Kingdom roused the East and the West. The beloved of God must also follow the same example. This is the secret of faithfulness, this is the requirement of servitude to the Threshold of Bahá!

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.*

3.18 The Significance of the Covenant

… A Covenant so firm and mighty that from the beginning of time until the present day no religious Dispensation hath produced its like.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.*

Today no power can conserve the oneness of the Bahá'í world save the Covenant of God; otherwise differences like unto a most great tempest will encompass the Bahá'í world. It is evident that the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant and nothing else.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of the Divine Plan.*

The confirmation of the Kingdom of Abhá shall descend uninterruptedly upon those souls who are firm in the Covenant. Thou hast well observed that every firm one is assisted and aided and every violator is degraded, humiliated, and lost. It is very astonishing that people are not admonished. They have observed how Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí, on account of violation of the Covenant, descended to the lowest degree of humiliation and yet they do not become mindful. They have seen how others through disobedience to the Testament, have fallen into a well of degradation, and yet they are not awakened.

This Covenant is the Covenant of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh. Now, its importance is not known befittingly, but in the future it shall attain to such a degree of importance that if a king violates to the extent of one atom, he shall be cut off immediately.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. IV: 14, 23 November 1913, p. 241.

To accept the Prophet of God in His time and to abide by His bidding are the two essential, inseparable duties which each soul was created to fulfill. One exercises these twin duties by one's own choice, an act constituting the highest expression of the free will with which every human being has been endowed by an all-loving Creator.

The vehicle in this resplendent Age for the practical fulfillment of these duties is the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh; it is, indeed, the potent instrument by which individual belief in Him is translated into constructive deeds. The Covenant comprises divinely

conceived arrangements necessary to preserve the organic unity of the Cause. It therefore engenders a motivating power which, as the beloved Master tells us, "like unto the artery, beats and pulsates in the body of the world." "It is indubitably clear," He asserts, "that the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant." Through it the meaning of the Word, both in theory and practice, is made evident in the life and work of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the appointed Interpreter, the perfect Exemplar, the Centre of the Covenant. Through it the processes of the Administrative Order—"this unique, this wondrous System"—are made to operate.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 1988, *Rights and Responsibilities*, p. 5.

3.19 Firmness in the Covenant

Although in the body of the universe there are innumerable nerves, yet the main artery, which pulsates, energizes, and invigorates all beings, is the power of the Covenant. All else is secondary to this. Nobody is assisted and confirmed save that soul who is firm. Consider it well that every soul who is firm in the Covenant is luminous, like unto a candle which emanates its light on those around it. While every wavering soul is an utter failure, frozen, lifeless, dead yet moving. This one proof is sufficient.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. XI: 18, 7 February 1921, p. 308.

3.20 Freedom of Thought and Expression in the Bahá'í Faith

... the Bahá'í Faith upholds the freedom of conscience which permits a person to follow his chosen religion; no one may be compelled to become a Bahá'í, or to remain a Bahá'í if he conscientiously wishes to leave the Faith. As to the thoughts of the Bahá'ís themselves—that is, those who have chosen to follow the religion of Bahá'u'lláh—the institutions do not busy themselves with what individual believers think unless those thoughts become expressed in actions which are inimical to the basic principles and vital interests of the Faith.

The Universal House of Justice, 8 February 1998,
Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith, p. 42.

As you well understand, not only the right but also the responsibility of each believer to explore truth for himself or herself are fundamental to the Bahá'í teachings. This principle is an integral feature of the coming of age of humankind, inseparable from the social transformation to which Bahá'u'lláh is calling the peoples of the world. It is as relevant to specifically scholarly activity as it is to the rest of spiritual and intellectual life. Every human being is ultimately responsible to God for the use which he or she makes of these possibilities; conscience is never to be coerced, whether by other individuals or institutions.

The Universal House of Justice, 8 February 1998,
Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith, p. 39.

In many of His utterances, 'Abdu'l-Bahá extols governments which uphold freedom of conscience for their citizens. As can be seen from the context, these statements

refer to the freedom to follow the religion of one's choice. In the original of a passage to which you refer in your email of ..., He gives the following analysis of freedom:

There are three types of freedom. The first is divine freedom, which is one of the inherent attributes of the Creator for He is unconstrained in His will, and no one can force Him to change His decree in any matter whatsoever ....

The second is the political freedom of Europeans, which leaves the individual free to do whatsoever he desires as long as his action does not harm his neighbour. This is natural freedom, and its greatest expression is seen in the animal world. Observe these birds and notice with what freedom they live. However much man may try, he can never be as free as an animal, because the existence of order acts as an impediment to freedom.

The third freedom is that which is born of obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Almighty. This is the freedom of the human world, where man severs his affections from all things. When he does so, he becomes immune to all hardship and sorrow. Wealth or material power will not deflect him from moderation and fairness, neither will poverty or need inhibit him from showing forth happiness and tranquillity. The more the conscience of man develops, the more will his heart be free and his soul attain unto happiness. In the religion of God, there is freedom of thought because God, alone, controls the human conscience, but this freedom should not go beyond courtesy. In the religion of God, there is no freedom of action outside the law of God. Man may not transgress this law, even though no harm is inflicted on one's neighbour. This is because the purpose of Divine law is the education of all—others as well as oneself—and, in the sight of God, the harm done to one individual or to his neighbour is the same and is reprehensible in both cases. Hearts must possess the fear of God. Man should endeavour to avoid that which is abhorrent unto God. Therefore, the freedom that the laws of Europe offer to the individual does not exist in the law of God. Freedom of thought should not transgress the bounds of courtesy, and actions, likewise, should be governed by the fear of God and the desire to seek His good pleasure.

The Universal House of Justice, 8 February 1998,
Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith, pp. 41–42.

It is not surprising that individual Bahá'ís hold and express different and sometimes defective understandings of the Teachings; this is but an evidence of the magnitude of the change that this Revelation is to effect in human consciousness. As believers with various insights into the Teachings converse—with patience, tolerance and open and unbiased minds—a deepening of comprehension should take place. The strident insistence on individual views, however, can lead to contention, which is detrimental not only to the spirit of Bahá'í association and collaboration but to the search for truth itself.

Beyond contention, moreover, is the condition in which a person is so immovably attached to one erroneous viewpoint that his insistence upon it amounts to an effort to change the essential character of the Faith. This kind of behaviour, if permitted to continue unchecked, could produce disruption in the Bahá'í community, giving birth to countless sects as it has done in previous Dispensations. The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh prevents this.

The Faith defines elements of a code of conduct, and it is ultimately the responsibility of the Universal House of Justice, in watching over the security of the Cause and upholding the integrity of its Teachings, to require the friends to adhere to standards thus defined.

The Universal House of Justice, 8 February 1998,
Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith, p. 38.

3.21 Covenant Breaking

… Bahá'u'lláh and the Master in many places and very emphatically have told us to shun entirely all Covenant-breakers as they are afflicted with what we might try and define as a contagious spiritual disease; They have also told us, however, to pray for them. These souls are not lost forever. In the *Aqdas* Bahá'u'lláh says that God will forgive Mírzá Yaḥyá if he repents. It follows therefore that God will forgive any soul *if he repents*. Most of them don't want to repent, unfortunately. If the leaders can be forgiven it goes without saying that their followers can also be forgiven.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, No. 45.

The institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, charged in the sacred Texts with the specific duties of protecting and propagating the Faith, has a particularly vital responsibility to discharge. In their capacity as protectors of the Faith, the Hands will continue to take action to expel Covenant-breakers and to reinstate those who sincerely repent, subject in each instance to the approval of the Universal House of Justice.

The Universal House of Justice, October 1963,
Messages 1963–1986, para. 6.4, pp. 15–16.

As for the protection of the rights of individuals, there is the following translation of a forceful passage which appears in a letter from Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of Iran, written in July 1925, in relation to a situation involving a Covenant-breaker:

… the mere fact of disaffection, estrangement, or recantation of belief, can in no wise detract from, or otherwise impinge upon, the legitimate civil rights of individuals in a free society, be it to the most insignificant degree. Were the friends to follow other than this course, it would be tantamount to a reversion on their part, in this century of radiance and light, to the ways and standards of a former age: they would reignite in men's breasts the fire of bigotry and blind fanaticism, cut themselves off from the glorious bestowals of this promised Day of God, and impede the full flow of divine assistance in this wondrous age.

The Universal House of Justice, 27 April 1995.

3.22 The Station to which Bahá'ís are Called

O people of Bahá! Ye are the breezes of spring that are wafted over the world. Through you We have adorned the world of being with the ornament of the knowledge of the Most Merciful. Through you the countenance of the world hath

been wreathed in smiles, and the brightness of His light shone forth. Cling ye to the Cord of steadfastness, in such wise that all vain imaginings may utterly vanish.

Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

Blessed are the people of Bahá! God beareth Me witness! They are the solace of the eye of creation. Through them the universes have been adorned, and the Preserved Tablet embellished. They are the ones who have sailed on the ark of complete independence, with their faces set towards the Dayspring of Beauty. How great is their blessedness that they have attained unto what their Lord, the Omniscient, the All-Wise, hath willed. Through their light the heavens have been adorned, and the faces of those that have drawn nigh unto Him made to shine.

Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

Such is the station ordained for the true believer that if to an extent smaller than a needle's eye the glory of that station were to be unveiled to mankind, every beholder would be consumed away in his longing to attain it. For this reason it hath been decreed that in this earthly life the full measure of the glory of his own station should remain concealed from the eyes of such a believer.

Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

PART TWO

GROWING AS A BAHÁ'Í

CHAPTER 4

THE PROCESS OF SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

The Spiritual Reality of Human Beings

4.1 The Mystery of Our Own Selves 124

4.2 Our Dual Nature 125

4.3 The Path of Self-knowledge 128

Relating to God and Developing Our Spiritual Powers

4.4 Faith and Steadfastness 129

4.5 Love and Sacrifice 130

4.6 Knowledge and Insight 133

4.7 Choice and Action 135

The Divine Education Programme

4.8 Reward and Punishment 137

4.9 Bestowals and Blessings 137

4.10 Tests and Difficulties 139

4.11 Guidance and Confirmations 141

The Spiritual Reality of Human Beings

4.1 The Mystery of Our Own Selves

Nay, whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God… To a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed. All these names and attributes are applicable to him. Even as He hath said: "Man is My mystery, and I am his mystery."

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* (The Book of Certitude).

O SON OF MAN!

Veiled in My immemorial being and in the ancient eternity of My essence, I knew My love for thee; therefore I created thee, have engraved on thee Mine image and revealed to thee My beauty.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 3.

O SON OF BEING!

Thou art My lamp and My light is in thee. Get thou from it thy radiance and seek none other than Me. For I have created thee rich and have bountifully shed My favour upon thee.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 11.

O SON OF BEING!

With the hands of power I made thee and with the fingers of strength I created thee; and within thee have I placed the essence of My light. Be thou content with it and seek naught else, for My work is perfect and My command is binding. Question it not, nor have a doubt thereof.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 12.

O SON OF SPIRIT!

I created thee rich, why dost thou bring thyself down to poverty? Noble I made thee, wherewith dost thou abase thyself? Out of the essence of knowledge I gave thee being, why seekest thou enlightenment from anyone beside Me? Out of the clay of love I moulded thee, how dost thou busy thyself with another? Turn thy sight unto thyself, that thou mayest find Me standing within thee, mighty, powerful and self-subsisting.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 13.

O SON OF MAN!

Thou art My dominion and My dominion perisheth not; wherefore fearest thou thy perishing? Thou art My light and My light shall never be extinguished, why dost thou dread extinction? Thou art My glory and My glory fadeth not; thou art My

robe and My robe shall never be outworn. Abide then in thy love for Me, that thou mayest find Me in the realm of glory.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 14.

O MY SERVANT!

Thou art even as a finely tempered sword concealed in the darkness of its sheath and its value hidden from the artificer's knowledge. Wherefore come forth from the sheath of self and desire that thy worth may be made resplendent and manifest unto all the world.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 72.

O MY FRIEND!

Thou art the day-star of the heavens of My holiness, let not the defilement of the world eclipse thy splendour. Rend asunder the veil of heedlessness, that from behind the clouds thou mayest emerge resplendent and array all things with the apparel of life.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 73.

Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXII.

Far, far from Thy glory be what mortal man can affirm of Thee, or attribute unto Thee, or the praise with which he can glorify Thee! Whatever duty Thou hast prescribed unto Thy servants of extolling to the utmost Thy majesty and glory is but a token of Thy grace unto them, that they may be enabled to ascend unto the station conferred upon their own inmost being, the station of the knowledge of their own selves.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, I.

O MY SERVANT!

Could ye apprehend with what wonders of My munificence and bounty I have willed to entrust your souls, ye would, of a truth, rid yourselves of attachment to all created things, and would gain a true knowledge of your own selves—a knowledge which is the same as the comprehension of Mine own Being. Ye would find yourselves independent of all else but Me, and would perceive, with your inner and outer eye, and as manifest as the revelation of My effulgent Name, the seas of My loving-kindness and bounty moving within you.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLIII.

True loss is for him whose days have been spent in utter ignorance of his self.

Bahá'u'lláh, Aṣl-i-Kullu'l-Khayr (Words of Wisdom), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

4.2 Our Dual Nature

These energies with which the Day Star of Divine bounty and Source of heavenly guidance hath endowed the reality of man lie, however, latent within him, even as the flame is hidden within the candle and the rays of light are potentially present in the lamp. The radiance of these energies may be obscured by worldly desires even

as the light of the sun can be concealed beneath the dust and dross which cover the mirror. Neither the candle nor the lamp can be lighted through their own unaided efforts, nor can it ever be possible for the mirror to free itself from its dross. It is clear and evident that until a fire is kindled the lamp will never be ignited, and unless the dross is blotted out from the face of the mirror it can never represent the image of the sun nor reflect its light and glory.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXVII.

O MAN OF TWO VISIONS!

Close one eye and open the other. Close one to the world and all that is therein, and open the other to the hallowed beauty of the Beloved.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 12.

O MY CHILDREN!

I fear lest, bereft of the melody of the dove of heaven, ye will sink back to the shades of utter loss, and, never having gazed upon the beauty of the rose, return to water and clay.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 13.

O SON OF SPIRIT!

Noble have I created thee, yet thou hast abased thyself. Rise then unto that for which thou wast created.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 22.

O SON OF MAN!

Wert thou to speed through the immensity of space and traverse the expanse of heaven, yet thou wouldst find no rest save in submission to Our command and humbleness before Our Face.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 40.

O SON OF MAN!

If thou lovest Me, turn away from thyself; and if thou seekest My pleasure, regard not thine own; that thou mayest die in Me and I may eternally live in thee.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 7.

O SON OF SPIRIT!!

There is no peace for thee save by renouncing thyself and turning unto Me; for it behooveth thee to glory in My name, not in thine own; to put thy trust in Me and not in thyself, since I desire to be loved alone and above all that is.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 8.

O SON OF MAN!

Upon the tree of effulgent glory I have hung for thee the choicest fruits, wherefore hast thou turned away and contented thyself with that which is less good? Return then unto that which is better for thee in the realm on high.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 21.

When a person becomes a Bahá'í, actually what takes place is that the seed of the spirit starts to grow in the human soul. This seed must be watered by the

outpourings of the Holy Spirit. These gifts of the spirit are received through prayer, meditation, study of the Holy Utterances and service to the Cause of God. The fact of the matter is that service in the Cause is like the plough which ploughs the physical soil when seeds are sown. It is necessary that the soil be ploughed up, so that it can be enriched, and thus cause a stronger growth of the seed. In exactly the same way the evolution of the spirit takes place through ploughing up the soil of the heart so that it is a constant reflection of the Holy Spirit. In this way the human spirit grows and develops by leaps and bounds.

Naturally there will be periods of distress and difficulty, and even severe tests; but if that person turns firmly towards the divine Manifestation, studies carefully His spiritual teachings and receives the blessings of the Holy Spirit, he will find that in reality these tests and difficulties have been the gifts of God to enable him to grow and develop.

Thus you might look upon your own difficulties in the path of service. They are the means of your spirit growing and developing. You will suddenly find that you have conquered many of the problems which upset you, and then you will wonder why they should have troubled you at all. An individual must centre his whole heart and mind on service to the Cause, in accordance with the high standards set by Bahá'u'lláh. When this is done, the Hosts of the Supreme Concourse will come to the assistance of the individual, and every difficulty and trial will gradually be overcome.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1334, pp. 24–25.

Regarding the questions you asked: self has really two meanings, or is used in two senses, in the Bahá'í writings; one is self, the identity of the individual created by God. This is the self mentioned in such passages as "he hath known God who hath known himself", etc. The other self is the ego, the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a monster of selfishness, brutality, lust and so on. It is this self we must struggle against, or this side of our natures, in order to strengthen and free the spirit within us and help it to attain perfection.

Self-sacrifice means to subordinate this lower nature and its desires to the more Godly and noble side of our selves. Ultimately, in its highest sense, self-sacrifice means to give our will and our all to God to do with as He pleases. Then He purifies and glorifies our true self until it becomes a shining and wonderful reality.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No.1318, pp. 18–19.

The only people who are truly free of the "dross of self" are the Prophets, for to be free of one's ego is a hall-mark of perfection. We humans are never going to become perfect, for perfection belongs to a realm we are not destined to enter. However, we must constantly mount higher, seek to be more perfect.

The ego is the animal in us, the heritage of the flesh which is full of selfish desires. By obeying the laws of God, seeking to live the life laid down in our teachings, and

prayer and struggle, we can subdue our egos. We call people "saints" who have achieved the highest degree of mastery over their egos.

There is no contradiction between *Gleanings* p. 66 and p. 262. In one place He says the mirror will never be free from dross, in the other place He says it will be "so cleared as to be able" etc. It is a relative thing; perfection will never be reached, but great and ever greater, progress can be made.

Shoghi Effendi, 8 January 1949, *Unfolding Destiny.*

4.3 The Path of Self-knowledge

O my eminent friend! They that seek to ascend to the heaven of mystic wayfaring are of four kinds only. I shall describe them in brief, that the signs and degrees of each may become plain and manifest to thee.

If the wayfarers be among them that seek after THE SANCTUARY OF THE DESIRED ONE, this plane pertaineth to the self—but the self which is intended is "the Self of God that pervadeth all His laws".[1] In this station the self is not rejected but beloved; it is regarded with favour and is not to be shunned. Although at the beginning this plane is the realm of conflict, yet it endeth in the ascent to the throne of glory. As it hath been said:

O Abraham of the Spirit and God's Friend in this day!

Slay! Slay these four thieving birds of prey![2] that after death the mystery of life may be unravelled.

This is the plane of the soul that is pleasing unto God, whereof He saith: "Enter thou among My servants, and enter thou My Paradise."[3]

This station hath myriad signs and countless tokens. Hence it is said: "We will surely show them Our signs in the world and within themselves, until it become plain to them that there is no God save Him."[4]

One must, then, read the book of one's own self, rather than the treatise of some grammarian. Wherefore He hath said, "Read thy Book: There needeth none but thyself to make out an account against thee this day."[5]

The story is told of a mystic knower who went on a journey with a learned grammarian for a companion. They came to the shore of the Sea of Grandeur. The knower, putting his trust in God, straightway flung himself into the waves, but the grammarian stood bewildered and lost in thoughts that were as words traced upon the water. The mystic called out to him, "Why dost thou not follow?" The grammarian answered, "O brother, what can I do? As I dare not advance, I must needs go back again." Then the mystic cried, "Cast aside what thou hast learned from Síbavayh and Qawlavayh, from Ibn-i-Ḥájib and Ibn-i-Málik, and cross the water!"[6]

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1 *From a prayer attributed to Imám 'Alí.*

2 *Cf. Rúmí. Here Rúmí tells a story of four evil birds which, when put to death, changed into four birds of goodness. The allegory refers to subduing evil qualities and replacing them with good.*

3 *Qur'án 89: 29–30.*

4 *Cf. Qur'án 41:53.*

5 *Qur'án 17:14.*

6 *Famed writers on grammar and rhetoric.*

With renunciation, not with grammar's rules, one must be armed:
Be nothing, then, and cross this sea unharmed.[7]

Likewise He saith, "And be ye not like those who forget God, and whom He hath therefore caused to forget their own selves. Such men are the evil doers."[8]

Bahá'u'lláh, The Four Valleys, vs. 8-14, *The Call of the Divine Beloved*.

Relating to God and Developing Our Spiritual Powers

4.4 Faith and Steadfastness

The supreme cause for creating the world and all that is therein is for man to know God. In this Day whosoever is guided by the fragrance of the raiment of His mercy to gain admittance into the pristine Abode, which is the station of recognizing the Source of divine commandments and the Dayspring of His Revelation, hath everlastingly attained unto all good. Having reached this lofty station a twofold obligation resteth upon every soul. One is to be steadfast in the Cause with such steadfastness that were all the peoples of the world to attempt to prevent him from turning to the Source of Revelation, they would be powerless to do so. The other is observance of the divine ordinances which have streamed forth from the wellspring of His heavenly-propelled Pen. For man's knowledge of God cannot develop fully and adequately save by observing whatsoever hath been ordained by Him and is set forth in His heavenly Book.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

The first and foremost duty prescribed unto men, next to the recognition of Him Who is the Eternal Truth, is the duty of steadfastness in His Cause.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXIV.

O SON OF MAN!

For everything there is a sign. The sign of love is fortitude under My decree, and patience under My trials.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 48.

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7 *Rúmí.*

8 *Qur'án 59:19.*

Oh, trust in God! for His bounty is everlasting, and in His blessings, for they are superb. Oh! put your faith in the Almighty, for He faileth not and His goodness endureth forever! His Sun giveth Light continually, and the Clouds of His Mercy are full of the Waters of Compassion with which He waters the hearts of all who trust in Him. His refreshing Breeze ever carries healing in its wings to the parched souls of men!

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*.

Never lose thy trust in God. Be thou ever hopeful, for the bounties of God never cease to flow upon man. If viewed from one perspective, they seem to decrease, but from another they are full and complete. Man is under all conditions immersed in a sea of God's blessings. Therefore, be thou not hopeless under any circumstances, but rather be firm in thy hope.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 178.

O thou who art turning thy face towards God! Close thine eyes to all things else, and open them to the realm of the All-Glorious. Ask whatsoever thou wishest of Him alone; seek whatsoever thou seekest from Him alone. With a look He granteth a hundred thousand hopes, with a glance He healeth a hundred thousand incurable ills, with a nod He layeth balm on every wound, with a glimpse He freeth the hearts from the shackles of grief. He doeth as He doeth, and what recourse have we? He carrieth out His Will, He ordaineth what He pleaseth. Then better for thee to bow down thy head in submission, and put thy trust in the All-Merciful Lord.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 22.

Faith is the magnet which draws the confirmation of the Merciful One. Service is the magnet which attracts the heavenly strength. I hope thou wilt attain both.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, Vol. I.

We must not only be patient with others, infinitely patient!, but also with our own poor selves, remembering that even the Prophets of God sometimes got tired and cried out in despair!

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 22 October 1946, *Unfolding Destiny*.

He urges you to persevere and add up your accomplishments, rather than to dwell on the dark side of things. Everyone's life has both a dark and bright side. The Master said: turn your back to the darkness and your face to Me.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 22 October 1946, *Unfolding Destiny*.

4.5 Love and Sacrifice

O SON OF MAN!

I loved thy creation, hence I created thee. Wherefore, do thou love Me, that I may name thy name and fill thy soul with the spirit of life.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 4.

O SON OF BEING!

Love Me, that I may love thee. If thou lovest Me not, My love can in no wise reach thee. Know this, O servant.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 5.

O SON OF MAN!

If thou lovest Me, turn away from thyself; and if thou seekest My pleasure, regard not thine own; that thou mayest die in Me and I may eternally live in thee.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 7.

O SON OF SPIRIT!

There is no peace for thee save by renouncing thyself and turning unto Me; for it behooveth thee to glory in My name, not in thine own; to put thy trust in Me and not in thyself, since I desire to be loved alone and above all that is.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 8.

O SON OF BEING!

My love is My stronghold; he that entereth therein is safe and secure, and he that turneth away shall surely stray and perish.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 9.

O SON OF UTTERANCE!

Thou art My stronghold; enter therein that thou mayest abide in safety. My love is in thee, know it, that thou mayest find Me near unto thee.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 10.

Let the flame of the love of God burn brightly within your radiant hearts. Feed it with the oil of Divine guidance, and protect it within the shelter of your constancy. Guard it within the globe of trust and detachment from all else but God, so that the evil whisperings of the ungodly may not extinguish its light.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLIII.

Know thou of a certainty that love is the secret of God's holy Dispensation, the manifestation of the All-Merciful, the fountain of spiritual outpourings. Love is heaven's kindly light, the Holy Spirit's eternal breath that vivifieth the human soul. Love is the cause of God's revelation unto man, the vital bond inherent, in accordance with the divine creation, in the realities of things. Love is the one means that ensureth true felicity both in this world and the next. Love is the light that guideth in darkness, the living link that uniteth God with man, that assureth the progress of every illumined soul. Love is the most great law that ruleth this mighty and heavenly cycle, the unique power that bindeth together the divers elements of this material world, the supreme magnetic force that directeth the movements of the spheres in the celestial realms. Love revealeth with unfailing and limitless power the mysteries latent in the universe. Love is the spirit of life unto the adorned body of mankind, the establisher of true civilization in this mortal world, and the shedder of imperishable glory upon every high-aiming race and nation.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 12.

There are four kinds of love. The first is the love that flows from God to man; it consists of the inexhaustible graces, the Divine effulgence and heavenly illumination. Through this love the world of being receives life. Through this love man is endowed with physical existence, until, through the breath of the Holy Spirit—this same love—he receives eternal life and becomes the image of the Living God. This love is the origin of all the love in the world of creation.

The second is the love that flows from man to God. This is faith, attraction to the Divine, enkindlement, progress, entrance into the Kingdom of God, receiving the Bounties of God, illumination with the lights of the Kingdom. This love is the origin of all philanthropy; this love causes the hearts of men to reflect the rays of the Sun of Reality.

The third is the love of God towards the Self or Identity of God. This is the transfiguration of His Beauty, the reflection of Himself in the mirror of His Creation. This is the reality of love, the Ancient Love, the Eternal Love. Through one ray of this Love all other love exists.

The fourth is the love of man for man. The love which exists between the hearts of believers is prompted by the ideal of the unity of spirits. This love is attained through the knowledge of God, so that men see the Divine Love reflected in the heart. Each sees in the other the Beauty of God reflected in the soul, and finding this point of similarity, they are attracted to one another in love. This love will make all men the waves of one sea, this love will make them all the stars of one heaven and the fruits of one tree. This love will bring the realization of true accord, the foundation of real unity.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*.

O thou son of the Kingdom! All things are beneficial if joined with the love of God; and without His love all things are harmful, and act as a veil between man and the Lord of the Kingdom.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 154.

For love of God and spiritual attraction do cleanse and purify the human heart and dress and adorn it with the spotless garment of holiness; and once the heart is entirely attached to the Lord, and bound over to the Blessed Perfection, then will the grace of God be revealed.

This love is not of the body but completely of the soul. And those souls whose inner being is lit by the love of God are even as spreading rays of light, and they shine out like stars of holiness in a pure and crystalline sky. For true love, real love, is the love for God, and this is sanctified beyond the notions and imaginings of men.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 174.

... to make a sacrifice is to receive a gift ...

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 200.

The mystery of sacrifice is a profound one, requiring detailed explanation, but briefly it may be stated that sacrificial love is the love shown by the moth towards the candle, by the parched wayfarer towards the living fountain, by the true lover

towards his beloved, ... The sacrificial lover, in other words, should become entirely forgetful of self, ... he should seek the good pleasure of the True One, desire to gaze upon His countenance, and wish to follow in His way. ... This is the first degree of sacrifice.

As for the second degree, it is in man's becoming rid of all attachment to the human world .... In this degree, the radiance of the All-Merciful should so suffuse and permeate his being that this nether world may pale into non-existence before the reality of the Kingdom. When a lump of iron is cast into the forge, its ferrous qualities of blackness, coldness and solidity, which symbolize the attributes of the human world, are concealed and disappear, while the fire's distinctive qualities of redness, heat and fluidity, which symbolize the virtues of the Kingdom, become visibly apparent in it, so that the iron may be said to have sacrificed its own qualities and characteristics to the fire, and to have acquired the virtues of that element. Even so is it with man: when, released from earthly bonds, from human imperfections, and from the darkness of the animal world, he ... partaketh of the outpourings of the unseen world, and acquireth divine virtues and perfections, then will he become a sacrificial lover of the Sun of Truth, and make haste with heart and soul to reach the place of sacrifice.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, Vol. II.

... nearness to God necessitates sacrifice of self, severance and the giving up of all to Him. Nearness is likeness.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 26 May 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

4.6 Knowledge and Insight

Know thou that, according to what thy Lord, the Lord of all men, hath decreed in His Book, the favours vouchsafed by Him unto mankind have been, and will ever remain, limitless in their range. First and foremost among these favours, which the Almighty hath conferred upon man, is the gift of understanding. His purpose in conferring such a gift is none other except to enable His creature to know and recognize the one true God—exalted be His glory. This gift giveth man the power to discern the truth in all things, leadeth him to that which is right, and helpeth him to discover the secrets of creation.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XCV.

... they that tread the path of faith, they that thirst for the wine of certitude, must cleanse themselves of all that is earthly—their ears from idle talk, their minds from vain imaginings, their hearts from worldly affections, their eyes from that which perisheth. They should put their trust in God, and, holding fast unto Him, follow in His way. Then will they be made worthy of the effulgent glories of the sun of divine knowledge and understanding, and become the recipients of a grace that is infinite and unseen, inasmuch as man can never hope to attain unto the knowledge of the All-Glorious, can never quaff from the stream of divine knowledge and wisdom, can never enter the abode of immortality, nor partake of the cup of divine nearness and

favour, unless and until he ceases to regard the words and deeds of mortal men as a standard for the true understanding and recognition of God and His Prophets.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* (The Book of Certitude).

Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 182.

O YE DWELLERS IN THE HIGHEST PARADISE!

Proclaim unto the children of assurance that within the realms of holiness, nigh unto the celestial paradise, a new garden hath appeared, round which circle the denizens of the realm on high and the immortal dwellers of the exalted paradise. Strive, then, that ye may attain that station, that ye may unravel the mysteries of love from its wind-flowers and learn the secret of divine and consummate wisdom from its eternal fruits. Solaced are the eyes of them that enter and abide therein!

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 18.

O SON OF MY HANDMAID!

Quaff from the tongue of the merciful the stream of divine mystery, and behold from the dayspring of divine utterance the unveiled splendour of the day-star of wisdom. Sow the seeds of My divine wisdom in the pure soil of the heart, and water them with the waters of certitude, that the hyacinths of knowledge and wisdom may spring up fresh and green from the holy city of the heart.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 78.

O SON OF THE THRONE!

Thy hearing is My hearing, hear thou therewith. Thy sight is My sight, do thou see therewith, that in thine inmost soul thou mayest testify unto My exalted sanctity, and I within Myself may bear witness unto an exalted station for thee.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 44.

The bestowals of God which are manifest in all phenomenal life are sometimes hidden by intervening veils of mental and mortal vision which render man spiritually blind and incapable, but when those scales are removed and the veils rent asunder, then the great signs of God will become visible, and he will witness the eternal light filling the world. The bestowals of God are all and always manifest. The promises of heaven are ever present. The favors of God are all-surrounding, but should the conscious eye of the soul of man remain veiled and darkened, he will be led to deny these universal signs and remain deprived of these manifestations of divine bounty. Therefore, we must endeavor with heart and soul in order that the veil covering the eye of inner vision may be removed, that we may behold the manifestations of the signs of God, discern His mysterious graces and realize that material blessings as compared with spiritual bounties are as nothing.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 4 May 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

Gazing with the eye of absolute insight, the wayfarer in this valley seeth in God's creation neither contradiction nor incongruity, and at every moment exclaimeth, "No defect canst thou see in the creation of the God of mercy. Repeat the gaze: Seest thou

a single flaw?"[9] He beholdeth justice in injustice, and in justice, grace. In ignorance he findeth many a knowledge hidden, and in knowledge a myriad wisdoms manifest. He breaketh the cage of the body and the hold of the passions, and communeth with the denizens of the immortal realm. He scaleth the ladders of inner truth and hasteneth to the heaven of inner meanings. He rideth in the ark of "We will surely show them Our signs in the world and within themselves", and saileth upon the sea of "until it become plain to them that it is the truth"[10]. And if he meeteth with injustice he shall have patience, and if he cometh upon wrath he shall manifest love.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Seven Valleys, *The Call of the Divine Beloved*.

O My servants! Were ye to discover the hidden, the shoreless oceans of My incorruptible wealth, ye would, of a certainty, esteem as nothing the world, nay, the entire creation. Let the flame of search burn with such fierceness within your hearts as to enable you to attain your supreme and most exalted goal—the station at which ye can draw nigh unto, and be united with, your Best-Beloved...

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CIII.

O Thou the Compassionate God. Bestow upon me a heart which, like unto a glass, may be illumined with the light of Thy love, and confer upon me thoughts which may change this world into a rose-garden through the outpourings of heavenly grace.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Prayers*.

4.7 Choice and Action

Whatsoever instilleth assurance into the hearts of men, whatsoever exalteth their station or promoteth their contentment, is acceptable in the sight of God. How lofty is the station which man, if he but chooseth to fulfill his high destiny, can attain!

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CI.

Wert thou to consider this world, and realize how fleeting are the things that pertain unto it, thou wouldst choose to tread no path except the path of service to the Cause of thy Lord. None would have the power to deter thee from celebrating His praise, though all men should arise to oppose thee.

Go thou straight on and persevere in His service.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXLIV.

O SON OF MY HANDMAID!

Guidance hath ever been given by words, and now it is given by deeds. Every one must show forth deeds that are pure and holy, for words are the property of all alike, whereas such deeds as these belong only to Our loved ones. Strive then with heart and soul to distinguish yourselves by your deeds. In this wise We counsel you in this holy and resplendent tablet.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 76.

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9 *Qur'án 67:3*

10 *Qur'án 41:53*

O MY SERVANTS!

Ye are the trees of My garden; ye must give forth goodly and wondrous fruits, that ye yourselves and others may profit therefrom. Thus it is incumbent on every one to engage in crafts and professions, for therein lies the secret of wealth, O men of understanding! For results depend upon means, and the grace of God shall be all-sufficient unto you. Trees that yield no fruit have been and will ever be for the fire.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 80.

How often the beloved Master was heard to say. Should each one of the friends take upon himself to carry out, in all its integrity and implications, only one of the teachings of the Faith, with devotion, detachment, constancy and perseverance and exemplify it in all his deeds and pursuits of life, the world would become another world and the face of the earth would mirror forth the splendours of the Abhá Paradise. Consider what marvellous changes would be effected if the beloved of the Merciful conducted themselves, both in their individual and collective capacities, in accordance with the counsels and exhortations which have streamed from the Pen of Glory.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 12 January 1923,
in Living the Life, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1266, p. 1.

The great thing is to "live the life"—to have our lives so saturated with the Divine teachings and the Bahá'í Spirit that people cannot fail to see a joy, a power, a love, a purity, a radiance, and efficiency in our character and work that will distinguish us from worldly-minded people and make people wonder what is the secret of this new life in us. We must become entirely selfless and devoted to God so that every day and every moment we seek to do only what God would have us do and in the way He would have us do it. If we do this sincerely then we shall have perfect unity and harmony with each other. Where there is want of harmony, there is lack of the true Bahá'í Spirit. Unless we can show this transformation in our lives, this new power, this mutual love and harmony, then the Bahá'í teachings are but a name to us.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 14 February 1925,
in Living the Life, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1271, p. 3.

A "best teacher" and an "exemplary believer" is ultimately neither more nor less than an ordinary Bahá'í who has consecrated himself to the work of the Faith, deepened his knowledge and understanding of its Teachings, placed his confidence in Bahá'u'lláh, and arisen to serve Him to the best of his ability. This door is one which we are assured will open before the face of every follower of the Faith who knocks hard enough, so to speak. When the will and the desire are strong enough, the means will be found and the way opened …

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 21 September 1957, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1340, p. 27. (revised July 1990.)

The Divine Education Programme

4.8 Reward and Punishment

O people of God! That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world.

Bahá'u'lláh, Bishárát (Glad-Tidings), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

For every act performed there shall be a recompense according to the estimate of God, and unto this the very ordinances and prohibitions prescribed by the Almighty amply bear witness. For surely if deeds were not rewarded and yielded no fruit, then the Cause of God—exalted is He—would prove futile. … However, unto them that are rid of all attachments a deed is, verily, its own reward.

Bahá'u'lláh, Súriy-i-Vafá (Tablet to Vafá), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

4.9 Bestowals and Blessings

In this day the breeze of God is wafted, and His Spirit hath pervaded all things. Such is the outpouring of His grace that the pen is stilled and the tongue is speechless.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* (The Book of Certitude).

… whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth is a direct evidence of the revelation within it of the attributes and names of God, inasmuch as within every atom are enshrined the signs that bear eloquent testimony to the revelation of that most great Light. Methinks, but for the potency of that revelation, no being could ever exist. How resplendent the luminaries of knowledge that shine in an atom, and how vast the oceans of wisdom that surge within a drop! To a supreme degree is this true of man, who, among all created things, hath been invested with the robe of such gifts, and hath been singled out for the glory of such distinction. For in him are potentially revealed all the attributes and names of God to a degree that no other created being hath excelled or surpassed. All these names and attributes are applicable to him. Even as He hath said: "Man is My mystery, and I am his mystery." Manifold are the verses that have been repeatedly revealed in all the heavenly Books and the holy Scriptures, expressive of this most subtle and lofty theme. Even as He hath revealed: "We will surely show them Our signs in the world and within themselves." Again He saith: "And also in your own selves: will ye not then behold the signs of God?" And yet again He revealeth: "And be ye not like those who forget God, and whom He hath therefore caused to forget their own selves." In this connection, He Who is the eternal King—may the souls of all that dwell within the

mystic Tabernacle be a sacrifice unto Him—hath spoken: "He hath known God who hath known himself."

I swear by God, O esteemed and honoured friend! Shouldst thou ponder these words in thine heart, thou wilt of a certainty find the doors of divine wisdom and infinite knowledge flung open before thy face.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* (The Book of Certitude).

And of all men, the most accomplished, the most distinguished and the most excellent are the Manifestations of the Sun of Truth. Nay, all else besides these Manifestations, live by the operation of their Will, and move and have their being through the outpourings of their grace. "But for Thee, I would have not created the heavens." Nay, all in their holy presence fade into utter nothingness, and are a thing forgotten. Human tongue can never befittingly sing their praise, and human speech can never unfold their mystery. These Tabernacles of holiness, these primal Mirrors which reflect the light of unfading glory, are but expressions of Him Who is the Invisible of the Invisibles. By the revelation of these gems of divine virtue all the names and attributes of God, such as knowledge and power, sovereignty and dominion, mercy and wisdom, glory, bounty and grace, are made manifest.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* (The Book of Certitude).

O SON OF BOUNTY!

Out of the wastes of nothingness, with the clay of My command I made thee to appear, and have ordained for thy training every atom in existence and the essence of all created things. Thus, ere thou didst issue from thy mother's womb, I destined for thee two founts of gleaming milk, eyes to watch over thee, and hearts to love thee. Out of My loving-kindness, 'neath the shade of My mercy I nurtured thee, and guarded thee by the essence of My grace and favour. And My purpose in all this was that thou mightest attain My everlasting dominion and become worthy of My invisible bestowals. And yet heedless thou didst remain, and when fully grown, thou didst neglect all My bounties and occupied thyself with thine idle imaginings, in such wise that thou didst become wholly forgetful, and, turning away from the portals of the Friend, didst abide within the courts of My enemy.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 29.

... God hath ordained every good thing, whether created in the heavens or in the earth, for such of His servants as truly believe in Him. Eat ye, O people, of the good things which God hath allowed you, and deprive not yourselves from His wondrous bounties.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXVIII.

Beseech ye the one true God to grant that ye may taste the savour of such deeds as are performed in His path, and partake of the sweetness of such humility and submissiveness as are shown for His sake. Forget your own selves, and turn your eyes towards your neighbour. Bend your energies to whatever may foster the education of men. Nothing is, or can ever be, hidden from God. If ye follow in His way, His incalculable and imperishable blessings will be showered upon you.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, V.

The blessings of Bahá'u'lláh are a shoreless sea, and even life everlasting is only a dewdrop therefrom. The waves of that sea are continually lapping against the hearts of the friends, and from those waves there come intimations of the spirit and ardent pulsings of the soul, until the heart giveth way, and willing or not, turneth humbly in prayer unto the Kingdom of the Lord. Wherefore do all ye can to disengage your inner selves, that ye may at every moment reflect new splendours from the Sun of Truth.

Ye live, all of you, within the heart of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and with every breath do I turn my face toward the Threshold of Oneness and call down blessings upon you, each and all.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 162.

4.10 Tests and Difficulties

O SON OF MAN!

If adversity befall thee not in My path, how canst thou walk in the ways of them that are content with My pleasure? If trials afflict thee not in thy longing to meet Me, how wilt thou attain the light in thy love for My beauty?

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 50.

O SON OF MAN!

My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy. Hasten thereunto that thou mayest become an eternal light and an immortal spirit. This is My command unto thee, do thou observe it.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 51.

O MY SERVANTS!

Sorrow not if, in these days and on this earthly plane, things contrary to your wishes have been ordained and manifested by God, for days of blissful joy, of heavenly delight, are assuredly in store for you. Worlds, holy and spiritually glorious, will be unveiled to your eyes. You are destined by Him, in this world and hereafter, to partake of their benefits, to share in their joys, and to obtain a portion of their sustaining grace. To each and every one of them you will, no doubt, attain.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLIII.

Tests are benefits from God, for which we should thank Him. Grief and sorrow do not come to us by chance, they are sent to us by the Divine mercy for our own perfecting.

While a man is happy he may forget his God; but when grief comes and sorrows overwhelm him, then will he remember his Father Who is in Heaven, and who is able to deliver him from his humiliations.

Men who suffer not, attain no perfection. The plant most pruned by the gardeners is that one which, when the summer comes, will have the most beautiful blossoms and the most abundant fruit.

The labourer cuts up the earth with his plough, and from that earth comes the rich and plentiful harvest. The more a man is chastened, the greater is the harvest of

spiritual virtues shown forth by him. A soldier is no good general until he has been in the front of the fiercest battle and has received the deepest wounds.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*.

Thou didst write of afflictive tests that have assailed thee. To the loyal soul, a test is but God's grace and favor; for the valiant doth joyously press forward to furious battle on the field of anguish, when the coward, whimpering with fright, will tremble and shake. So too, the proficient student, who hath with great competence mastered his subjects and committed them to memory, will happily exhibit his skills before his examiners on the day of his tests. So too will solid gold wondrously gleam and shine out in the assayer's fire.

It is clear, then, that tests and trials are, for sanctified souls, but God's bounty and grace, while to the weak, they are a calamity, unexpected and sudden.

These tests, even as thou didst write, do but cleanse the spotting of self from off the mirror of the heart, till the Sun of Truth can cast its rays thereon; for there is no veil more obstructive than the self, and however tenuous that veil may be, at the last it will completely shut a person out, and deprive him of his portion of eternal grace.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 155.

Everything of importance in this world demands the close attention of its seeker. The one in pursuit of anything must undergo difficulties and hardships until the object in view is attained and the great success is obtained. This is the case of things pertaining to the world. How much higher is that which concerns the Supreme Concourse! That Cause involves every favour, glory and eternal bliss in the world of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, Vol. II.

As to the subject of babes and infants and weak ones who are afflicted by the hands of oppressors: This contains great wisdom and this subject is of paramount importance. In brief, for those souls there is a recompense in another world and many details are connected with this matter. For those souls that suffering is the greatest mercy of God. Verily that mercy of the Lord is far better and preferable to all the comfort of this world and the growth and development of this place of mortality.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 372.

He is very happy to see that you have put into practice one of the most encouraging precepts of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which He said that we should try and make every stumbling-block a stepping-stone to progress. In the course of your past life you have all stumbled very gravely; but, far from being embittered or defeated by this experience, you are determined to make it a means of purifying your natures, improving your characters, and enabling you to become better citizens in the future. This is truly pleasing in the eyes of God.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1338, p. 26.

4.11 Guidance and Confirmations

That which is pre-eminent above all other gifts, is incorruptible in nature, and pertaineth to God Himself, is the gift of Divine Revelation. Every bounty conferred by the Creator upon man, be it material or spiritual, is subservient unto this. It is, in its essence, and will ever so remain, the Bread which cometh down from Heaven. It is God's supreme testimony, the clearest evidence of His truth, the sign of His consummate bounty, the token of His all-encompassing mercy, the proof of His most loving providence, the symbol of His most perfect grace. He hath, indeed, partaken of this highest gift of God who hath recognized His Manifestation in this Day.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XCV.

By the righteousness of God! Whoso openeth his lips in this Day and maketh mention of the name of his Lord, the hosts of Divine inspiration shall descend upon him from the heaven of My name, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. On him shall also descend the Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light. Thus hath it been foreordained in the realm of God's Revelation, by the behest of Him Who is the All-Glorious, the Most Powerful.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXIX.

He, verily, will aid everyone that aideth Him, and will remember everyone that remembereth Him. To this beareth witness this Tablet that hath shed the splendour of the loving-kindness of your Lord, the All-Glorious, the All-Compelling ...

Bahá'u'lláh, in The Power of Divine Assistance,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1646, p. 203.

O ye servants of the Sacred Threshold! The triumphant hosts of the Celestial Concourse, arrayed and marshalled in the Realms above, stand ready and expectant to assist and assure victory to that valiant horseman who with confidence spurs on his charger into the arena of service. Well is it with that fearless warrior, who armed with the power of true Knowledge, hastens unto the field, disperses the armies of ignorance, and scatters the hosts of error, who holds aloft the Standard of Divine Guidance, and sounds the Clarion of Victory. By the righteousness of the Lord! He hath achieved a glorious triumph and obtained the true victory.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 208.

Teaching is the source of Divine Confirmation. It is not sufficient to pray diligently for guidance, but this prayer must be followed by meditation as to the best methods of action and *then action itself.* Even if the action should not immediately produce results, or perhaps not be entirely correct, that does not make so much difference, because *prayers can only be answered through action* and if someone's action is wrong, God can use that method of showing the pathway which is right.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Guidelines for Teaching,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 2011, p. 325. (revised.)

The invisible hosts of the Kingdom are ready to extend to you all the assistance you need, and through them you will no doubt succeed in removing every obstacle in your way, and in fulfilling this most cherished desire of your heart. Bahá'u'lláh

has given us [a] promise that should we persevere in our efforts and repose all our confidence in Him the doors of success will be widely open before us …

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Power of Divine Assistance, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1705, p. 220.

CHAPTER 5

TURNING TOWARDS GOD

Requisites for Spiritual Growth
5.1 A Summary of the Essential Requirements 144

Prayer
5.2 Prayer: The Core of Religious Faith 144
5.3 How to Pray 146
5.4 The Obligatory Prayers 147
5.5 The Dynamics of Prayer 148

Meditation and Reading of the Sacred Scriptures
5.6 Daily Reading of the Sacred Writings 150
5.7 Systematic Study of the Teachings 151
5.8 Meditation 152
5.9 Meditation on the Greatest Name 154

Fasting
5.10 The Ordinance of Fasting 155
5.11 The Spiritual Significance of the Fast 155

Right Speech and Action
5.12 Striving to Bring Our Behaviour into Accordance with the Teachings 156

Teaching the Cause of God
5.13 Teaching: The Greatest Gift of God 159

Selfless Service in the Work of the Cause and One's Trade or Profession
5.14 Work is Exalted to the Rank of Worship 160

Voluntary Sharing of Wealth
5.15 The Right Use of Wealth 161
5.16 Ḥuqúqu'lláh 162

Bahá'í Pilgrimage
5.17 Sacred Sites for Pilgrimage 164
5.18 The Spiritual Meaning of Pilgrimage 165

Requisites for Spiritual Growth

5.1 A Summary of the Essential Requirements

Bahá'u'lláh has stated quite clearly in His writings the essential requisites for our spiritual growth, and these are stressed again and again by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His talks and Tablets. One can summarize them briefly in this way:

1. The recital each day of one of the Obligatory Prayers with pure-hearted devotion.
2. The regular reading of the Sacred Scriptures, specifically at least each morning and evening with reverence, attention and thought.
3. Prayerful meditation on the Teachings, so that we may understand them more deeply, fulfill them more faithfully, and convey them more accurately to others.
4. Striving every day to bring our behaviour more into accordance with the high standards that are set forth in the Teachings.
5. Teaching the Cause of God.
6. Selfless service in the work of the Cause and in the carrying on of our trade or profession.

Universal House of Justice, 1 September 1983.

Prayer

5.2 Prayer: The Core of Religious Faith

O SON OF LIGHT!

Forget all save Me and commune with My Spirit. This is of the essence of My command; therefore turn unto it.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 16.

Thou disappointest no one who hath sought Thee, nor dost Thou keep back from Thee any one who hath desired Thee.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh*, section CLVI.

I have wakened in Thy shelter, O my God, and it becometh him that seeketh that shelter to abide within the Sanctuary of Thy protection and the Stronghold of Thy defense. Illumine my inner being, O my Lord, with the splendors of the Day-Spring of Thy Revelation, even as Thou didst illumine my outer being with the morning light of Thy favor.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh*, section CLVIII.

Worship thou God in such wise that if thy worship lead thee to the fire, no alteration in thine adoration would be produced, and so likewise if thy recompense should be paradise. Thus and thus alone should be the worship which befitteth the one True God. Shouldst thou worship Him because of fear, this would be unseemly in the sanctified Court of His presence, and could not be regarded as an act by thee dedicated to the Oneness of His Being. Or if thy gaze should be on paradise, and thou shouldst worship Him while cherishing such a hope, thou wouldst make God's creation a partner with Him, notwithstanding the fact that paradise is desired by men.

Fire and paradise both bow down and prostrate themselves before God. That which is worthy of His Essence is to worship Him for His sake, without fear of fire, or hope of paradise.

Although when true worship is offered, the worshipper is delivered from the fire, and entereth the paradise of God's good-pleasure, yet such should not be the motive of his act. However, God's favour and grace ever flow in accordance with the exigencies of His inscrutable wisdom.

The most acceptable prayer is the one offered with the utmost spirituality and radiance; its prolongation hath not been and is not beloved by God. The more detached and the purer the prayer, the more acceptable is it in the presence of God.

The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb.*

... the core of religious faith is the mystic feeling which unites man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer. And this is the reason why Bahá'u'lláh has so much stressed the importance of worship. It is not sufficient for a believer merely to accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality which he can acquire chiefly by means of prayer ...

... The believers, particularly the young ones, should therefore fully realize the necessity of praying. For prayer is absolutely indispensable to their inner spiritual development, and this, as already stated, is the very foundation and purpose of the religion of God.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, No. 223.

The Twin Luminaries of this resplendent age have taught us this: Prayer is the essential spiritual conversation of the soul with its Maker, direct and without intermediation. It is the spiritual food that sustains the life of the spirit. Like the morning's dew, it brings freshness to the heart and cleanses it, purifying it from attachments of the insistent self. It is a fire that burns away the veils and a light that leads to the ocean of reunion with the Almighty. On its wings does the soul soar in the heavens of God and draw closer to the divine reality. Upon its quality depend the development of the limitless capacities of the soul and the attraction of the bounties of God, but the prolongation of prayer is not desirable. The powers latent in prayer are manifested when it is motivated by the love of God, beyond any fear or favour, and free from ostentation and superstition. It is to be expressed with a sincere and pure heart conducive to contemplation and meditation so that the rational faculty can be illumined by its effects. Such prayer will transcend the limitation of words

and go well beyond mere sounds. The sweetness of its melodies must gladden and uplift the heart and reinforce the penetrating power of the Word, transmuting earthly inclinations into heavenly attributes and inspiring selfless service to humankind.

The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran,
18 December 2014, www.payamha-iran.org

5.3 How to Pray

If one friend feels love for another he will wish to say so. Though he knows that the friend is aware that he loves him, he will still wish to say so. … God knows the wishes of all hearts, but the impulse to pray is a natural one, springing from man's love to God. …

… Prayer need not be in words, but rather in thought and action. But if this love and this desire are lacking, it is useless to try to force them. Words without love mean nothing. If a person talks to you as an unpleasant duty, with no love or pleasure in his meeting with you, do you wish to converse with him?

Words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, reported in *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*,
Prayer the Language of Love section.

We must strive to attain to that condition[1] by being separated from all things and from the people of the world and by turning to God alone. It will take some effort on the part of man to attain to that condition, but he must work for it, strive for it. We can attain to it by thinking and caring less for material things and more for the spiritual. The further we go from the one, the nearer we are to the other. The choice is ours.

Our spiritual perception, our inward sight must be opened, so that we can see the signs and traces of God's spirit in everything. Everything can reflect to us the light of the Spirit.

Words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, reported in *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*,
The Devotional Attitude section.

The wisdom of obligatory prayer is this: That it causeth a connection between the servant and the True One, because at that time man with all his heart and soul turneth his face towards the Almighty, seeking His association and desiring His love and companionship. For a lover, there is no greater pleasure than to converse with his beloved, and for a seeker, there is no greater bounty than intimacy with the object of his desire. It is the greatest longing of every soul who is attracted to the Kingdom of God to find time to turn with entire devotion to his Beloved, so as to seek His bounty and blessing and immerse himself in the ocean of communion, entreaty and supplication. Moreover, obligatory prayer and fasting produce awareness and awakening in man, and are conducive to his protection and preservation from tests.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*, VII, pp. 14-15.

If you find you need to visualize some one when you pray, think of the Master. Through Him you can address Bahá'u'lláh. Gradually try to think of the qualities of

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[1] *Spiritual condition in which conversation with God becomes possible.*

the Manifestation, and in that way a mental form will fade out, for after all the body is not the thing, His Spirit is there and is the essential, everlasting element.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Importance of Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Attitude, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1779, p. 242.

5.4 The Obligatory Prayers

I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee. I testify, at this moment, to my powerlessness and to Thy might, to my poverty and to Thy wealth.

There is none other God but Thee, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

Bahá'u'lláh, Short Obligatory Prayer (to be said at noon), *Bahá'í Prayers*.

O My brother! How great, how very great, can the law of obligatory prayer be, when, through His mercy and loving kindness, one is enabled to observe it. When a man commenceth the recitation of the Obligatory Prayer, he should see himself severed from all created things and regard himself as utter nothingness before the will and purpose of God, in such wise that he seeth naught but Him in the world of being. This is the station of God's well-favoured ones and those who are wholly devoted to Him. Should one perform the Obligatory Prayer in this manner, he will be accounted by God and the Concourse on high among those who have truly offered the prayer.

Bahá'u'lláh, in *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*, p. 4.

Obligatory prayer causeth the heart to become attentive to the Divine kingdom. One is alone with God, converseth with Him, and acquireth bounties. Likewise, if one performeth the Obligatory Prayer with his heart in a state of utmost purity, he will obtain the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, and this will entirely obliterate love of self. I hope that thou wilt persevere in the recitation of the Obligatory Prayer, and thus will come to witness the power of entreaty and supplication.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*, p. 17.

Obligatory prayer and supplication cause man to reach the kingdom of mystery, and the worship of the Supreme One. They bestow nearness unto His threshold. There is a pleasure in offering prayers that transcendeth all other pleasures, and there is sweetness in chanting and singing the verses of God which is the greatest desire of all the believers, men and women alike. While reciting the Obligatory Prayer, one converseth intimately and shareth secrets with the true Beloved. No pleasure is greater than this, if one proceedeth with a detached soul, with tears overflowing, with a trusting heart and an eager spirit. Every joy is earthly save this one, the sweetness of which is divine.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*, pp. 17–18.

The daily obligatory prayers are three in number. The shortest one consists of a single verse which has to be recited once in every twenty–four hours at midday. The medium, which begins with the words, "The Lord is witness that there is none other God but He", has to be recited three times a day, in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. This prayer is accompanied by certain physical acts and gestures. The long

prayer, which is the most elaborate of the three, has to be recited only once in every twenty–four hours, and at any time one feels inclined to do so.

The believer is entirely free to choose any one of these three prayers, but is under the obligation of reciting one of them, and in accordance with any specific directions with which it may be accompanied.

These daily obligatory prayers, together with a few other specific ones, such as the Healing Prayer, the Tablet of Ahmad, have been invested by Bahá'u'lláh with a special potency and significance, and should therefore be accepted as such and be recited by the believers with unquestioning faith and confidence, that through them they may enter into a much closer communion with God, and identify themselves more fully with His laws and precepts.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,10 January 1936,
Directives from the Guardian, No. 160.

The friends have long been familiar with the great importance which Bahá'u'lláh attaches to daily obligatory prayer and to the observance of the fast, but a number of aspects of the law, such as those concerning ablutions, travelling and the compensation for prayers missed, remained to be made universally applicable. This step is now taken. Thus all elements of the laws dealing with obligatory prayer and fasting are, without any exception, now applicable.

The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 1999.

Ablutions

Ablutions are specifically associated with certain prayers. They must precede the offering of the three Obligatory Prayers, the daily recitation of "Alláh-u-Abhá" ninety-five times, and the recital of the verse prescribed as an alternative to obligatory prayer and fasting for women in their courses (see note 20).

The prescribed ablutions consist of washing the hands and the face in preparation for prayer. In the case of the medium Obligatory Prayer, this is accompanied by the recitation of certain verses (see Some Texts Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh Supplementary to *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*).

That ablutions have a significance beyond washing may be seen from the fact that even should one have bathed oneself immediately before reciting the Obligatory Prayer, it would still be necessary to perform ablutions (Q and A 18).

When no water is available for ablutions, a prescribed verse is to be repeated five times (see note 16), and this provision is extended to those for whom the use of water would be physically harmful (Q and A 51).

The Universal House of Justice (Ed.), *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, (The Most Holy Book), Note 34.

5.5 The Dynamics of Prayer

O thou who art turning thy face towards God! Close thine eyes to all things else, and open them to the realm of the All-Glorious. Ask whatsoever thou wishest of Him alone; seek whatsoever thou seekest from Him alone. With a look He granteth a hundred thousand hopes, with a glance He healeth a hundred thousand incurable ills, with a nod He layeth balm on every wound, with a glimpse He freeth the hearts

from the shackles of grief. He doeth as He doeth, and what recourse have we? He carrieth out His Will, He ordaineth what He pleaseth.

Then better for thee to bow down thy head in submission, and put thy trust in the All-Merciful Lord.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 22.

God will answer the prayer of every servant if that prayer is urgent. His mercy is vast, illimitable. ...

But we ask for things which the divine wisdom does not desire for us, and there is no answer to our prayer.

Public talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 5 August 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

God is merciful. In His mercy He answers the prayers of all His servants when according to His supreme wisdom it is necessary.

Public talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 5 August 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

Although you seem to feel that your prayers have not so far been answered, and do no longer have any hope that your material conditions will ameliorate, the Guardian wishes you nevertheless not to allow such disappointments to undermine your faith in the power of prayer, but rather to continue entreating the Almighty to enable you to discover the great wisdom which may be hidden behind all these sufferings. For are not our sufferings often blessings in disguise, through which God wishes to test the sincerity and depth of our faith, and thereby make us firmer in His Cause?

... The true worshipper, while praying, should endeavour not so much to ask God to fulfill his wishes and desires, but rather to adjust these and make them conform to the Divine Will. Only through such an attitude can one derive that feeling of inner peace and contentment which the power of prayer alone can confer.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Importance of Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Attitude, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1768, pp. 239–240.

We cannot clearly distinguish between personal desire and guidance, but if the way opens, when we have sought guidance, then we may presume God is helping us.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, No. 205.

You mention that the answers to your prayers never seem to have come through clearly. Mrs Ruth Moffett has published her recollection of five steps of prayer for guidance that she was told by the beloved Guardian. When asked about these notes, Shoghi Effendi replied, in letters written by his secretary on his behalf, that these notes should be regarded as "personal suggestions", that he considered them to be "quite sound", but that the friends need not adopt them "strictly and universally". The House feels that they may be helpful to you, and indeed, you may already be familiar with them. They are as follows:

... use these five steps if we have a problem of any kind for which we desire a solution, or wish help.

Pray and meditate about it. Use the prayers of the Manifestations, as they have the greatest power. Learn to remain in the silence of contemplation for a few moments. During this deepest communion take the next step.

Arrive at a decision and hold to this. This decision is usually born in a flash at the close or during contemplation. It may seem almost impossible of accomplishment, but if it seems to be an answer to prayer or a way of solving the problem, then immediately take the next step.

Have determination to carry the decision through. Many fail here. The decision, budding into determination, is blighted and instead becomes a wish or a vague longing. When determination is born, immediately take the next step.

Have faith and confidence, that the Power of the Holy Spirit will flow through you, the right message will appear, the door will open, the right message, and the right thing will come to meet your need. Then as you rise from prayer take immediately the fifth step.

Act as though it had all been answered. Then act with tireless, ceaseless energy. And, as you act, you yourself, will become a magnet which will attract more power to your being, until you become an unobstructed channel for the Divine Power to flow through you.

The Universal House of Justice, 11 October 1978,
Messages 1963–1986, para. 214.5, pp. 384–385.

Meditation and Reading of the Sacred Scriptures

5.6 Daily Reading of the Sacred Writings

Recite ye the verses of God every morn and eventide. Whoso faileth to recite them hath not been faithful to the Covenant of God and His Testament, and whoso turneth away from these holy verses in this Day is of those who throughout eternity have turned away from God. Fear ye God, O My servants, one and all. Pride not yourselves on much reading of the verses or on a multitude of pious acts by night and day; for were a man to read a single verse with joy and radiance it would be better for him than to read with lassitude all the Holy Books of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 149.

Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men. Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of

its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner of later exercise its influence upon his soul. Thus have the mysteries of the Revelation of God been decreed by virtue of the Will of Him Who is the Source of power and wisdom.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXVI.

5.7 Systematic Study of the Teachings[2]

O My servants! My holy, My divinely ordained Revelation may be likened unto an ocean in whose depths are concealed innumerable pearls of great price, of surpassing lustre.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLIII.

Better is it for a person to write down but one of His verses than to transcribe the whole of the Bayán and all the books which have been written in the Dispensation of the Bayán. For everything shall be set aside except His Writings, which will endure until the following Revelation. And should anyone inscribe with true faith but one letter of that Revelation, his recompense would be greater than for inscribing all the heavenly Writings of the past and all that has been written during previous Dispensations. Likewise continue thou to ascend through one Revelation after another, knowing that thy progress in the Knowledge of God shall never come to an end, even as it can have no beginning.

The Báb, Excerpts from the Persian Bayán, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*.

... and every breast which committeth His Words to memory, God shall cause, if it were that of a believer, to be filled with His love.

The Báb, Excerpts from the Persian Bayán, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*.

... investigate and study the Holy Scriptures word by word so that you may attain knowledge of the mysteries hidden therein. Be not satisfied with words, but seek to understand the spiritual meanings hidden in the heart of the words.

Public talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 3 December 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

The Guardian hopes that along with whatever other studies you take up, you will continually study the teachings and endeavour to acquire a profound knowledge of them. The importance of young Bahá'ís becoming thoroughly steeped in every branch of the teachings cannot be over-emphasized ....

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Youth,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 2274, p. 431.

To deepen in the Cause means to read the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, and the Master so thoroughly as to be able to give it to others in its pure form. There are many who have some superficial idea of what the Cause stands for. They, therefore, present it together with all sorts of ideas that are their own. As the Cause is still in its early days we must be most careful lest we fall into this error and injure the Movement we so much adore. There is no limit to the study of the Cause. The more we read

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2 *See also 10.27, 11.4*

the Writings, the more truths we can find in Them, the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 451, p. 212.

Those who participate in such a campaign, whether in an organizing capacity, or as workers to whose care the execution of the task itself has been committed, must, as an essential preliminary to the discharge of their duties, thoroughly familiarize themselves with the various aspects of the history and teachings of their Faith. In their efforts to achieve this purpose they must study for themselves, conscientiously and painstakingly, the literature of their Faith, delve into its teachings, assimilate its laws and principles, ponder its admonitions, tenets and purposes, commit to memory certain of its exhortations and prayers, master the essentials of its administration, and keep abreast of its current affairs and latest developments. They must strive to obtain, from sources that are authoritative and unbiased, a sound knowledge of the history and tenets of Islám—the source and background of their Faith—and approach reverently and with a mind purged from pre-conceived ideas the study of the Qur'án which, apart from the sacred scriptures of the Bábí and Bahá'í Revelations, constitutes the only Book which can be regarded as an absolutely authenticated Repository of the Word of God. They must devote special attention to the investigation of those institutions and circumstances that are directly connected with the origin and birth of their Faith, with the station claimed by its Forerunner, and with the laws revealed by its Author.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

5.8 Meditation

One hour's reflection is preferable to seventy years of pious worship ....

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* (The Book of Certitude).

There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is learning and the use of the mind, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, 97.

It is an axiomatic fact that while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit. In that state of mind you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed.

You cannot apply the name 'man' to any being void of this faculty of meditation; without it he would be a mere animal, lower than the beasts.

Through the faculty of meditation man attains to eternal life; through it he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit—the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and meditation.

The spirit of man is itself informed and strengthened during meditation; through it affairs of which man knew nothing are unfolded before his view. Through it he receives Divine inspiration, through it he receives heavenly food.

Meditation is the key for opening the doors of mysteries. In that state man abstracts himself: in that state man withdraws himself from all outside objects; in that subjective mood he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and can unfold the secrets of things-in-themselves. To illustrate this, think of man as endowed with two kinds of sight; when the power of insight is being used the outward power of vision does not see.

This faculty of mediation frees man from the animal nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with God.

This faculty brings forth from the invisible plane the sciences and arts. Through the meditative faculty inventions are made possible, colossal undertakings are carried out; through it governments can run smoothly. Through this faculty man enters into the very Kingdom of God.

Nevertheless some thoughts are useless to man; they are like waves moving in the sea without result. But if the faculty of meditation is bathed in the inner light and characterized with divine attributes, the results will be confirmed.

The meditative faculty is akin to the mirror; if you put it before earthly objects it will reflect them. Therefore if the spirit of man is contemplating earthly subjects he will be informed of these.

But if you turn the mirror of your spirits heavenwards, the heavenly constellations and the rays of the Sun of Reality will be reflected in your hearts, and the virtues of the Kingdom will be obtained.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*.

It was the Divine Light which enabled the prophets to see two thousand years in advance what was going to take place and today we see the realization of their vision. Thus it is this Light which we must strive to seek, for it is greater than any other.

It was by this Light that Moses was enabled to see and comprehend the Divine Appearance, and to hear the Heavenly Voice which spoke to Him from the Burning Bush.

It is of this Light Muḥammad is speaking when He says, "Alláh is the light of the Heavens, and of the Earth."

Seek with all your hearts this Heavenly Light, so that you may be enabled to understand the realities, that you may know the secret things of God, that the hidden ways may be made plain before your eyes.

This light may be likened unto a mirror, and as a mirror reflects all that is before it, so this Light shows to the eyes of our spirits all that exists in God's Kingdom and causes the realities of things to be made visible. By the help of this effulgent Light all the spiritual interpretation of the Holy Writings has been made plain, the hidden things of God's Universe have become manifest, and we have been enabled to comprehend the Divine purposes for man.

I pray that God in His mercy may illumine your hearts and souls with His glorious Light, then shall each one of you shine as a radiant star in the dark places of the world.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Two Kinds of Light, *Paris Talks*.

As to meditation: This also is a field in which the individual is free. There are no set forms of meditation prescribed in the teachings, no plan as such, for inner development. The friends are urged—nay enjoined—to pray, and they also should meditate, but the manner of doing the latter is left entirely to the individual.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, No. 90.

Some believers may find that it is beneficial to them to follow a particular method of meditation, and they may certainly do so, but such methods should not be taught at Bahá'í Summer Schools or be carried out during a session of the School because, while they may appeal to some people, they may repel others. They have nothing to do with the Faith and should be kept quite separate so that inquirers will not be confused.

Universal House of Justice, 1 September 1983, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 375.8, pp. 589–590.

5.9 Meditation on the Greatest Name

We have also decided that it is timely for Bahá'ís in every land to take to their hearts the words of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*: "It hath been ordained that every believer in God, the Lord of Judgement, shall, each day, having washed his hands and then his face, seat himself and, turning unto God, repeat Alláh-u-Abhá ninety–five times. Such was the decree of the Maker of the Heavens when, with majesty and power, He established Himself upon the thrones of His Names."

Let all experience the spiritual enrichment brought to their souls by this simple act of worshipful meditation.

The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 1999, *Messages 1986 – 2001*, para. 315.6, p. 698.

Say, by reason of your remembering Him Whom God shall make manifest and by extolling His name, God will cause your hearts to be dilated with joy, and do ye not wish your hearts to be in such a blissful state? Indeed the hearts of them that truly believe in Him Whom God shall make manifest are vaster than the expanse of heaven and earth and whatever is between them. God hath left no hindrance in their hearts, were it but the size of a mustard seed. He will cheer their hearts, their spirits, their souls and their bodies and their days of prosperity or adversity, through the exaltation of the name of Him Who is the supreme Testimony of God and the promotion of the Word of Him Who is the Dayspring of the glory of their Creator.

The Báb, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb.*

The Greatest Name is the name of Bahá'u'lláh. "Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá" is an invocation meaning: "O Thou Glory of Glories"! "Alláh-u-Abhá" is a greeting which means: "God the All-Glorious". Both refer to Bahá'u'lláh. By Greatest Name is meant that Bahá'u'lláh has appeared in God's greatest name, in other words, that He is the supreme Manifestation of God.

Shoghi Effendi, *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand.*

Fasting

5.10 The Ordinance of Fasting

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. He hath exempted from this those who are weak from illness or age, as a bounty from His presence, and He is the Forgiving, the Generous.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 10.

We have enjoined upon you fasting during a brief period, and at its close have designated for you Naw-Rúz as a feast. …The traveller, the ailing, those who are with child or giving suck, are not bound by the fast …

… Abstain from food and drink from sunrise to sundown, and beware lest desire deprive you of this grace that is appointed in the Book.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), paras. 16–17.

In truth, I say that obligatory prayer and fasting occupy an exalted station in the sight of God. It is, however, in a state of health that their virtue can be realized. In time of ill-health it is not permissible to observe these obligations; such hath been the bidding of the Lord, exalted be His glory, at all times.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), Questions and Answers 93.

The age of maturity is fifteen for both men and women.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), Questions and Answers 20.

As regards fasting, it constitutes, together with the obligatory prayers, the two pillars that sustain the revealed Law of God. They act as stimulants to the soul, strengthen, revive and purify it, and thus insure its steady development.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, No. 71.

5.11 The Spiritual Significance of the Fast

Glory be to Thee, O Lord my God! These are the days whereon Thou hast bidden all men to observe the fast, that through it they may purify their souls and rid themselves of all attachment to any one but Thee, and that out of their hearts may ascend that which will be worthy of the court of Thy majesty and may well beseem the seat of the revelation of Thy oneness. Grant, O my Lord, that this fast may become a river of life-giving waters and may yield the virtue wherewith Thou hast endowed it. Cleanse Thou by its means the hearts of Thy servants whom the evils of the world have failed to hinder from turning towards Thine all-glorious Name, and who have

remained unmoved by the noise and tumult of such as have repudiated Thy most resplendent signs which have accompanied the advent of Thy Manifestation Whom Thou hast invested with Thy sovereignty, Thy power, Thy majesty and glory. These are the servants who, as soon as Thy call reached them, hastened in the direction of Thy mercy and were not kept back from Thee by the changes and chances of this world or by any human limitations.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, section LVI.

All praise be unto God, Who hath revealed the law of obligatory prayer as a reminder to His servants, and enjoined on them the Fast that those possessed of means may become apprised of the woes and sufferings of the destitute.

Bahá'u'lláh, in *The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting*, p. 2.

I have fasted for love of Thee and in pursuance of Thine injunction, and have broken my fast with Thy praise on my tongue and in conformity with Thy pleasure.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, section LVI.

Shouldst Thou regard him who hath broken the fast as one who hath observed it, such a man would be reckoned among them who from eternity had been keeping the fast. And shouldst Thou decree that he who hath observed the fast hath broken it, that person would be numbered with such as have caused the Robe of Thy Revelation to be stained with dust, and been far removed from the crystal waters of this living Fountain.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, section XLVI.

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. Its significance and purpose are, therefore, fundamentally spiritual in character. Fasting is symbolic, and a reminder of abstinence from selfish and carnal desires.

Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, No. 71.

Right Speech and Action

5.12 Striving to Bring Our Behaviour into Accordance with the Teachings

O CHILDREN OF ADAM!

Holy words and pure and goodly deeds ascend unto the heaven of celestial glory. Strive that your deeds may be cleansed from the dust of self and hypocrisy and find favour

at the court of glory; for ere long the assayers of mankind shall, in the holy presence of the Adored one, accept naught but absolute virtue and deeds of stainless purity.

This is the day-star of wisdom and of divine mystery that hath shone above the horizon of the divine will. Blessed are they that turn thereunto.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 69.

O SON OF MY HANDMAID!

Guidance hath ever been given by words, and now it is given by deeds. Every one must show forth deeds that are pure and holy, for words are the property of all alike, whereas such deeds as these belong only to Our loved ones. Strive then with heart and soul to distinguish yourselves by your deeds. In this wise We counsel you in this holy and resplendent tablet.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 76.

Every word is endowed with a spirit, therefore the speaker or expounder should carefully deliver his words at the appropriate time and place, for the impression which each word maketh is clearly evident and perceptible. The Great Being saith: One word may be likened unto fire, another unto light, and the influence which both exert is manifest in the world. Therefore an enlightened man of wisdom should primarily speak with words as mild as milk, that the children of men may be nurtured and edified thereby and may attain the ultimate goal of human existence which is the station of true understanding and nobility.

Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd (Tablet of Maqṣúd), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

O EMIGRANTS!

The tongue I have designed for the mention of Me, defile it not with detraction. If the fire of self overcome you, remember your own faults and not the faults of My creatures, inasmuch as every one of you knoweth his own self better than he knoweth others.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 66.

O SON OF BEING!

Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 31.

Reduce not the ordinances of God to fanciful imaginations of your own; rather observe all the things which God hath created at His behest with the eye of the spirit, even as ye see things with the eyes of your bodies.

The Báb, Excerpts from the Kitáb-i-Asmá', *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*.

Truthfulness is the foundation of all the virtues of the world of humanity. Without truthfulness, progress and success in all of the worlds of God are impossible for a soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also become realized.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

It is our duty and privilege to translate the love and devotion we have for our beloved Cause into deeds and actions that will be conducive to the highest good of mankind.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1269, p. 2.

The chosen ones of God … should not look at the depraved condition of the society in which they live, nor at the evidences of moral degradation and frivolous conduct which the people around them display. They should not content themselves merely with relative distinction and excellence. Rather they should fix their gaze upon nobler heights by setting the counsels and exhortations of the Pen of Glory as their supreme goal. Then it will be readily realized how numerous are the stages that still remain to be traversed, how far off the goal lies—a goal which is none other than exemplifying heavenly morals and virtues.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in A Chaste and Holy Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 122, p. 49.

The great thing is to 'live the life'—to have our lives so saturated with the Divine teachings and the Bahá'í Spirit that people cannot fail to see a joy, a power, a love, a purity, a radiance, an efficiency in our character and work that will distinguish us from worldly-minded people and make people wonder what is the secret of this new life in us. We must become entirely selfless and devoted to God so that every day and every moment we seek to do only what God would have us do and in the way He would have us do it. If we do this sincerely then we shall have perfect unity and harmony with each other. Where there is want of harmony, there is lack of true Bahá'í Spirit. Unless we can show forth this transformation in our lives, this new power, this mutual love and harmony, then the Bahá'í teachings are but a name to us.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1271, p. 3.

If we Bahá'ís cannot attain to cordial unity among ourselves, then we fail to realize the main purpose for which the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and the Beloved Master lived and suffered.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1272, p. 3.

Teaching the Cause of God

5.13 Teaching: The Greatest Gift of God

Behold how the generality of mankind hath been endued with the capacity to hearken unto God's most exalted Word—the Word upon which must depend the gathering together and spiritual resurrection of all men ...

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XLIII.

O SON OF MAN!

Magnify My cause that I may reveal unto thee the mysteries of My greatness and shine upon thee with the light of eternity.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 41.

O SON OF BEING!

Make mention of Me on My earth, that in My heaven I may remember thee, thus shall Mine eyes and thine be solaced.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 43.

This Day a door is open wider than both heaven and earth. The eye of the mercy of Him Who is the Desire of the worlds is turned towards all men. An act, however infinitesimal, is, when viewed in the mirror of the knowledge of God, mightier than a mountain. Every drop proffered in His path is as the sea in that mirror. For this is the Day which the one true God, glorified be He, hath announced in all His Books, unto His Prophets and His Messengers.

Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

Of all the gifts of God the greatest is the gift of Teaching. It draweth unto us the Grace of God and is our first obligation. Of such a gift how can we deprive ourselves? Nay, our lives, our goods, our comforts, our rest, we offer them all as a sacrifice for the Abhá Beauty and teach the Cause of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.

When the friends do not endeavour to spread the message, they fail to remember God befittingly, and will not witness the tokens of assistance and confirmation from the Abhá Kingdom nor comprehend the divine mysteries. However, when the tongue of the teacher is engaged in teaching, he will naturally himself be stimulated, will become a magnet attracting the divine aid and bounty of the Kingdom, and will be like unto the bird at the hour of dawn, which itself becometh exhilarated by its own singing, its warbling and its melody.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 211.

Such hindrances, no matter how severe and insuperable they may at first seem, can and should be effectively overcome through the combined and sustained power of prayer and of continued effort. For have not Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá both repeatedly assured us that the Divine and unseen hosts of victory will ever reinforce and strengthen those who valiantly and confidently labour in their name? This assurance should indeed enable you to overcome any feeling of unworthiness, of

incapacity to serve, and any inner or outer limitation which threatens to handicap your labours for the Cause. You should therefore arise, and with a heart filled with joy and confidence endeavour to contribute any share that is in your power toward the wider diffusion and greater consolidation of our beloved Faith.

Whatever the particular field of service you may choose, whether teaching or administrative, the essential is for you to persevere, and not to allow any consciousness of your limitations to dampen your zeal, much less deter you from serving joyously and actively.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1284, pp. 7–8.

... outside this Divine Refuge the people will not, we firmly believe, find inner conviction, peace and security.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Use of Radio and Television, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1891, p. 283.

Selfless Service in the Work of the Cause and One's Trade or Profession

5.14 Work is Exalted to the Rank of Worship

It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like. We have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship unto God, the True One. Ponder ye in your hearts the grace and the blessings of God and render thanks unto Him at eventide and at dawn. Waste not your time in idleness and sloth. Occupy yourselves with that which profiteth yourselves and others. Thus hath it been decreed in this Tablet from whose horizon the daystar of wisdom and utterance shineth resplendent.

Bahá'u'lláh, Bishárát (Glad-Tidings), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action. ... That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth. In another passage He hath proclaimed: It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXVII.

Voluntary Sharing of Wealth

5.15 The Right Use of Wealth

O CHILDREN OF DUST!

Tell the rich of the midnight sighing of the poor, lest heedlessness lead them into the path of destruction, and deprive them of the Tree of Wealth. To give and to be generous are attributes of Mine; well is it with him that adornest himself with My virtues.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 49.

O MY SERVANT!

The best of men are they that earn a livelihood by their calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God, the Lord of all worlds.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 82.

O YE RICH ONES ON EARTH!

The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 54.

O YE THAT PRIDE YOURSELVES ON MORTAL RICHES!

Know ye in truth that wealth is a mighty barrier between the seeker and his desire, the lover and his beloved. The rich, but for a few, shall in no wise attain the court of His presence nor enter the city of content and resignation. Well is it then with him, who, being rich, is not hindered by his riches from the eternal kingdom, nor deprived by them of imperishable dominion. By the Most Great Name! The splendour of such a wealthy man shall illuminate the dwellers of heaven, even as the sun enlightens the people of the earth!

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 53.

Nothing that existeth in the world of being hath ever been or ever will be worthy of mention. However, if a person be graciously favoured to offer a penny-worth—nay even less—in the path of God, this would in His sight be preferable and superior to all the treasures of the earth. It is for this reason that the one true God—exalted be His glory—hath in all His heavenly Scriptures praised those who observe His precepts and bestow their wealth for His sake.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, 1099, p. 489.

Thou hast written that they have pledged themselves to observe maximum austerity in their lives with a view to forwarding the remainder of their income to His exalted

presence. This matter was mentioned at His holy court. He said: Let them act with moderation and not impose hardship upon themselves. We would like them both to enjoy a life that is well-pleasing.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, 1155, p. 508.

We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has and is continually being refilled from an invisible source. To be continually giving out for the good of our fellows undeterred by fear of poverty and reliant on the unfailing bounty of the Source of all wealth and all good—this is the secret of right living.

Shoghi Effendi, in Bahá'í Funds and Contributions,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 1212, p. 529.

In the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, the nobility inherent to every human being is unequivocally asserted; it is a fundamental tenet of Bahá'í belief, upon which hope for the future of humankind is built. The soul's capacity to manifest all the names and attributes of God—He Who is the Compassionate, the Bestower, the Bountiful—is repeatedly affirmed in the Writings. Economic life is an arena for the expression of honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, generosity, and other qualities of the spirit. The individual is not merely a self-interested economic unit, striving to claim an ever-greater share of the world's material resources. "Man's merit lieth in service and virtue", Bahá'u'lláh avers, "and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches."

The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1 March 2017.

5.16 Ḥuqúqu'lláh[3]

In surveying the vast range of creation thou shalt perceive that the higher a kingdom of created things is on the arc of ascent, the more conspicuous are the signs and evidences of the truth that co-operation and reciprocity at the level of a higher order are greater than those that exist at the level of a lower order. For example the evident signs of this fundamental reality are more discernible in the vegetable kingdom than in the mineral, and still more manifest in the animal world than in the vegetable.

And thus when contemplating the human world thou beholdest this wondrous phenomenon shining resplendent from all sides with the utmost perfection, inasmuch as in this station acts of co-operation, mutual assistance and reciprocity are not confined to the body and to things that pertain to the material world, but for all conditions, whether physical or spiritual, such as those related to the minds, thoughts, opinions, manners, customs, attitudes, understandings, feelings or other human susceptibilities. In all these thou shouldst find these binding relationships securely established. The more this inter-relationship is strengthened and expanded, the more will human society advance in progress and prosperity. Indeed without these vital ties it would be wholly impossible for the world of humanity to attain true felicity and success.

[3] *For more details see 9.29*

Now consider, if among the people who are merely the manifestations of the world of being this significant matter is of such importance, how much greater must be the spirit of co-operation and mutual assistance among those who are the essences of the world of creation, who have sought the sheltering shadow of the heavenly Tree, and are favoured by the manifestations of divine grace; and how the evidences of this spirit should, through their earnest endeavour, their fellowship and concord, become manifest in every sphere of their inner and outer lives, in the realm of the spirit and divine mysteries and in all things related to this world and the next. Thus there can be no doubt that they must be willing even to offer up their lives for each other.

This is the basic principle on which the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is established, inasmuch as its proceeds are dedicated to the furtherance of these ends. Otherwise the one true God hath ever been and will always be independent of all else beside Him. Even as He hath enabled all created things to partake of His boundless grace and loving-kindness, likewise is He able to bestow riches upon His loved ones out of the treasuries of His power. However, the wisdom of this command is that the act of giving is well-pleasing in the sight of God. Consider how well-pleasing must this mighty act be in His estimation that He hath ascribed it unto His Own Self. Rejoice ye then, O people of generosity!

We earnestly hope that in this Most Great Cycle the wondrous attributes of the All-Merciful may, through the infinite bounty and blessings of the King of Glory, find expression in the lives of the servants of God in such wise that the sweet savours thereof will shed fragrance upon all regions. This matter needeth further details, but We have treated it in brief.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1159, pp. 509–510.

The question of the Ḥuqúq dependeth on the willingness of the individuals themselves. From every true believer who is willing to tender the Right of God spontaneously and with the utmost joy and radiance, the offering is graciously accepted, but not otherwise. Verily, thy Lord is independent of all mankind. Consider that which the All-Merciful hath revealed in the Qur'án: "O men! Ye are but paupers in need of God, but God is the Self-Sufficient, the All-Praised."

At all times one must have the utmost regard for the dignity and honour of the Cause of God.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1148, pp. 505–506.

Thou hast enquired about the Ḥuqúq. From one's annual income, all expenses during the year are deductible, and on what is left 19% is payable to the Ḥuqúq.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1163, p. 511.

5.17 Sacred Sites for Pilgrimage

The Lord hath ordained that those of you who are able shall make pilgrimage to the sacred House, and from this He hath exempted women as a mercy on His part. He, of a truth, is the All-Bountiful, the Most Generous.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 32.

Two sacred Houses are covered by this ordinance, the House of the Báb in Shíráz and the House of Bahá'u'lláh in Baghdád. Bahá'u'lláh has specified that pilgrimage to either of these two Houses fulfills the requirement of this passage (Q & A 25, 29). In two separate Tablets, known as Súriy-i-Hajj (Q & A 10), Bahá'u'lláh has prescribed specific rites for each of these pilgrimages. In this sense, the performance of a pilgrimage is more than simply visiting these two Houses.

After the passing of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá designated the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí as a place of pilgrimage. In a Tablet, He indicates that the "*Most Holy Shrine, the Blessed House in Baghdád and the venerated House of the Báb in Shíráz*" are "*consecrated to pilgrimage*", and that it is "*obligatory*" to visit these places "*if one can afford it and is able to do so, and if no obstacle stands in one's way*". No rites have been prescribed for pilgrimage to the Most Holy Shrine.

In the *Bayán*, the Báb enjoined the ordinance of pilgrimage once in a lifetime upon those of His followers who were financially able to undertake the journey. He stated that the obligation was not binding on women in order to spare them the rigours of travel.

Bahá'u'lláh likewise exempts women from His pilgrimage requirements. The Universal House of Justice has clarified that this exemption is not a prohibition, and that women are free to perform the pilgrimage.

The Universal House of Justice (Ed.), *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), Notes Nos. 54–55.

Equally significant has been the founding on Mt. Carmel of two international Archives, the one adjoining the shrine of the Báb, the other in the immediate vicinity of the resting-place of the Greatest Holy Leaf, where, for the first time in Bahá'í history, priceless treasures, hitherto scattered and often hidden for safekeeping, have been collected and are now displayed to visiting pilgrims. These treasures include portraits of both the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh; personal relics such as the hair, the dust and garments of the Báb; the locks and blood of Bahá'u'lláh and such articles as His pen-case, His garments, His brocaded tájes (head dresses), the kashkúl of His Sulaymáníyyih days, His watch and His Qur'án; manuscripts and Tablets of inestimable value, some of them illuminated, such as part of the Hidden Words written in Bahá'u'lláh's own hand, the *Persian Bayán*, in the handwriting of Siyyid Ḥusayn, the Báb's amanuensis, the original Tablets to the Letters of the Living penned by the Báb, and the manuscript of *Some Answered Questions*. This precious collection, moreover, includes objects and effects associated with 'Abdu'l-Bahá; the blood-stained garment of the Purest Branch, the ring of Quddús, the sword of Mullá

Ḥusayn, the seals of the Vazír, the father of Bahá'u'lláh, the brooch presented by the Queen of Rumania to Martha Root, the originals of the Queen's letters to her and to others, and of her tributes to the Faith, as well as no less than twenty volumes of prayers and Tablets revealed by the Founders of the Faith, authenticated and transcribed by Bahá'í Assemblies throughout the Orient, and supplementing the vast collection of their published writings.

Moreover, as a further testimony to the majestic unfoldment and progressive consolidation of the stupendous undertaking launched by Bahá'u'lláh on that holy mountain, may be mentioned the selection of a portion of the school property situated in the precincts of the Shrine of the Báb as a permanent resting-place for the Greatest Holy Leaf, the "*well-beloved*" sister of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the "*Leaf that hath sprung*" from the "*Pre-existent Root,*" the "*fragrance*" of Bahá'u'lláh's "*shining robe,*" elevated by Him to a "*station such as none other woman hath surpassed,*" and comparable in rank to those immortal heroines such as Sarah, Ásíyih, the Virgin Mary, Fáṭimih and Ṭáhirih, each of whom has outshone every member of her sex in previous Dispensations. And lastly, there should be mentioned, as a further evidence of the blessings flowing from the Divine Plan, the transfer, a few years later, to that same hallowed spot, after a separation in death of above half a century, and notwithstanding the protests voiced by the brother and lieutenant of the arch-breaker of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, of the remains of the Purest Branch, the martyred son of Bahá'u'lláh, "*created of the light of Bahá,*" the "T*rust of God*" and His "*Treasure*" in the Holy Land, and offered up by his Father as a "*ransom*" for the regeneration of the world and the unification of its peoples. To this same burial-ground, and on the same day the remains of the Purest Branch were interred, was transferred the body of his mother, the saintly Navváb, she to whose dire afflictions, as attested by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a Tablet, the 54th chapter of the Book of Isaiah has, in its entirety, borne witness, whose "*Husband*," in the words of that Prophet, is "*the Lord of Hosts,*" whose "*seed shall inherit the Gentiles,*" and whom Bahá'u'lláh in His Tablet, has destined to be "*His consort in every one of His worlds.*"

The conjunction of these three resting-places, under the shadow of the Báb's own Tomb, embosomed in the heart of Carmel, facing the snow-white city across the bay of 'Akká, the Qiblih of the Bahá'í world, set in a garden of exquisite beauty, reinforces, if we would correctly estimate its significance, the spiritual potencies of a spot, designated by Bahá'u'lláh Himself the seat of God's throne. It marks, too, a further milestone in the road leading eventually to the establishment of that permanent world Administrative Centre of the future Bahá'í Commonwealth, destined never to be separated from, and to function in the proximity of, the Spiritual Centre of that Faith, in a land already revered and held sacred alike by the adherents of three of the world's outstanding religious systems.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

5.18 The Spiritual Meaning of Pilgrimage

In all the Divine Books the promise of the Divine Presence hath been explicitly recorded. By this Presence is meant the Presence of Him Who is the Dayspring of the signs, and the Dawning-Place of the clear tokens, and the Manifestation of the

Excellent Names, and the Source of the attributes, of the true God, exalted be His glory. God in His Essence and in His own Self hath ever been unseen, inaccessible, and unknowable. By Presence, therefore, is meant the Presence of the One Who is His Vicegerent amongst men.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf.*

The purpose of God in creating man hath been, and will ever be, to enable him to know his Creator and to attain His Presence. To this most excellent aim, this supreme objective, all the heavenly Books and the divinely-revealed and weighty Scriptures unequivocally bear witness. Whoso hath recognized the Day Spring of Divine guidance and entered His holy court hath drawn nigh unto God and attained His Presence, a Presence which is the real Paradise, and of which the loftiest mansions of heaven are but a symbol.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XXIX.

I bear witness that he who hath known Thee hath known God, and he who hath attained unto Thy presence hath attained unto the presence of God. Great, therefore, is the blessedness of him who hath believed in Thee, and in Thy signs, and hath humbled himself before Thy sovereignty, and hath been honoured with meeting Thee, and hath attained the good pleasure of Thy will, and circled around Thee, and stood before Thy throne.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, section CLXXX.

Praise be to God that through His gracious bounty you were enabled to visit His exalted, His sacred and luminous Threshold, to refresh and perfume your nostrils with the sweet-scented fragrances of God diffused from these imperishable, holy Places. This wondrous gift calls for thanksgiving, and this heavenly bestowal warrants praise and glorification. And such praise is best expressed when one's pilgrimage, one's honour at attaining His holy Court and becoming the recipient of His favours and loving-kindness produce a profound effect and influence upon every aspect of one's life, upon one's bearing and demeanour, and one's activities. There is no doubt that it will be so.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahíyyih Khánum, The Greatest Holy Leaf.*

CHAPTER 6

CULTIVATING THE VIRTUES AND EMOTIONS OF THE KINGDOM

Putting the Teachings into Practice
6.1 Practising the Teachings: The Most Important Issue 169

Happiness
6.2 Happiness: The True Basis of the Life of Man 170
6.3 Gratitude 171
6.4 Inner Peace and Certitude 172

Purity and Detachment
6.5 A Pure Heart 173
6.6 Purity of Motive 174
6.7 Physical Cleanliness 174
6.8 Chastity 174
6.9 Avoidance of Alcohol and Habit Forming Drugs 176
6.10 Moderation 176

Love and Unity
6.11 The Essential Foundation of Every Religion 177
6.12 Friendship 178
6.13 Loving-kindness 179
6.14 Courtesy 181
6.15 Abstaining from Conflict and Contention 181
6.16 Freedom from Prejudice 182

Justice
6.17 Its Pre-eminence and Motivation 183
6.18 Not Causing Harm 184
6.19 Not Backbiting 184
6.20 Not Infringing on the Rights of Others 185
6.21 Some Prohibitions 186
6.22 Trustworthiness 186
6.23 Truthfulness 186

6.24 Integrity 187
6.25 Fairness 187
6.26 Courage 188
6.27 Protection of Oppressed People 189
6.28 Wisdom 189

Putting the Teachings into Practice

6.1 Practising the Teachings: The Most Important Issue

Say: Beware, O people of Bahá, lest ye walk in the ways of them whose words differ from their deeds. Strive that ye may be enabled to manifest to the peoples of the earth the signs of God, and to mirror forth His commandments. Let your acts be a guide unto all mankind, for the professions of most men, be they high or low, differ from their conduct. It is through your deeds that ye can distinguish yourselves from others. Through them the brightness of your light can be shed upon the whole earth. Happy is the man that heedeth My counsel, and keepeth the precepts prescribed by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXIX.

He heartily agrees with you that unless we *practise* the Teachings we cannot possibly expect the Faith to grow, because the fundamental purpose of all religions—including our own—is to bring man nearer to God, and to change his character, which is of the utmost importance. Too much emphasis is often laid on the social and economic aspects of the Teachings; but the moral aspect cannot be over-emphasized.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1311, p. 16.

Indeed when we see the increasing darkness in the world today we can fully realize that unless the Message of Bahá'u'lláh reaches into the hearts of men and transforms them, there can be no peace and no spiritual progress in the future.

His constant hope is that the believers will conduct themselves, individually and in their Bahá'í Community life, in such a manner as to attract the attention of others to the Cause. The world is not only starving for lofty principles and ideals, it is, above all, starving for a shining example which the Bahá'ís can and must provide.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1304, p. 14.

He was very happy to hear from you, and to learn that Green Acre this year was pervaded with a love and harmony that was instrumental in confirming many new souls in the Faith. This love among the believers is the magnet which will, above all else, attract the hearts and bring new souls into the Cause. Because obviously the teachings—however wonderful—cannot change the world unless the Spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's love is mirrored in the Bahá'í Communities.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1302, p. 13.

6.2 Happiness: The True Basis of the Life of Man

O SON OF SPIRIT!

My first counsel is this: Possess a pure, kindly and radiant heart, that thine may be a sovereignty ancient, imperishable and everlasting.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 1.

O SON OF SPIRIT!

The spirit of holiness beareth unto thee the joyful tidings of reunion; wherefore dost thou grieve? The spirit of power confirmeth thee in His cause; why dost thou veil thyself? The light of His countenance doth lead thee; how canst thou go astray?

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 34.

O SON OF MAN!

Rejoice in the gladness of thine heart, that thou mayest be worthy to meet Me and to mirror forth My beauty.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 36.

Let not the happenings of the world sadden you. I swear by God! The sea of joy yearneth to attain your presence, for every good thing hath been created for you, and will, according to the needs of the times, be revealed unto you.

Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

Joy gives us wings! In times of joy our strength is more vital, our intellect keener, and our understanding less clouded. We seem better able to cope with the world and to find our sphere of usefulness.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*.

I myself was in prison forty years—one year alone would have been impossible to bear—nobody survived that imprisonment more than a year! But, thank God, during all those forty years I was supremely happy! Every day, on waking, it was like hearing good tidings, and every night infinite joy was mine. Spirituality was my comfort, and turning to God was my greatest joy. If this had not been so, do you think it possible that I could have lived through those forty years in prison?

Thus, Spirituality is the greatest of God's gifts, and "Life Everlasting" means "Turning to God". May you, one and all, increase daily in spirituality, may you be strengthened in all goodness, may you be helped more and more by the Divine consolation, be made free by the Holy Spirit of God, and may the power of the Heavenly Kingdom live and work among you.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*.

Let God's beloved, each and every one, be the essence of purity, the very life of holiness, so that in every country they may become famed for their sanctity, independence of spirit, and meekness. Let them be cheered by draughts from the eternal cup of love for God, and make merry as they drink from the wine-vaults of Heaven. Let them behold the Blessed Beauty, and feel the flame and rapture of

that meeting, and be struck dumb with awe and wonder. This is the station of the sincere; this is the way of the loyal; this is the brightness that shineth on the faces of those nigh unto God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 174.

Know thou that there are two kinds of happiness—spiritual and material.

As to material happiness, it never exists; nay, it is but imagination, an image reflected in mirrors, a spectre and shadow. Consider the nature of material happiness. It is something, which but slightly removes one's afflictions; yet the people imagine it to be joy, delight, exultation and blessing. All the material blessings, including food, drink, etc., tend only to allay thirst, hunger and fatigue. They bestow no delight on the mind nor pleasure on the soul; nay, they furnish only the bodily wants. So this kind of happiness has no real existence.

As to spiritual happiness, this is the true basis of the life of man because life is created for happiness, not for sorrow; for pleasure, not for grief. Happiness is life; sorrow is death. Spiritual happiness is life eternal. This is a light which is not followed by darkness. This is an honour which is not followed by shame. This is a life that is not followed by death. This is an existence that is not followed by annihilation. This great blessing and precious gift is obtained by man only through the guidance of God.

... This happiness is the fundamental basis from which man is created, worlds are originated, the contingent beings have existence and the world of God appears like unto the appearance of the sun at mid-day.

This happiness is but the love of God.

... Were it not for this happiness the world of existence would not have been created.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Star of the West*, Vol. VII: 16, 31 December 1916, p. 163.

... what pleasure can compare the pleasure of bringing joy and hope to other hearts. The more we make others happy the greater will be our own happiness and the deeper our sense of having served humanity.

Shoghi Effendi, *Light of Divine Guidance*, Vol. I, p. 45.

6.3 Gratitude

Your eyes have been illumined, your ears are attentive, your hearts knowing. You must be free from prejudice and fanaticism, beholding no differences between the races and religions. You must look to God, for He is the real Shepherd, and all humanity are His sheep. He loves them and loves them equally. As this is true, should the sheep quarrel among themselves? They should manifest gratitude and thankfulness to God, and the best way to thank God is to love one another.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 5 December 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

Day and night I entreat and supplicate to the Kingdom of God and beg for you infinite assistance and confirmation. Do not take into consideration your own aptitudes and capacities, but fix your gaze on the consummate bounty, the divine bestowal and the power of the Holy Spirit—the power that converteth the drop into a sea and the star into a sun.

Praise be to God, the hosts of the Supreme Concourse secure the victory and the power of the Kingdom is ready to assist and to support. Should ye at every instant unloosen the tongue in thanksgiving and gratitude, ye would not be able to discharge yourselves of the obligation of gratitude for these bestowals.

Consider: eminent personages whose fame hath spread all over the world shall, erelong, fade into utter nothingness as the result of their deprivation of this heavenly bounty; no name and no fame shall they leave behind, and of them no fruit and trace shall survive. But as the effulgences of the Sun of Truth have dawned forth upon you and ye have attained everlasting life, ye shall shine and sparkle forevermore from the horizon of existence.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 68.

The glories of that Sun are shining now from out the high, immortal realms, and His glance is resting on His loved ones. The portals of everlasting blessings are opened wide. The succouring armies are standing ready, waiting to behold what efforts the loved ones will exert as they carry out the holy Will, as they boil up and roar like waves of the sea. Let them rest not for a moment, nor wish for quiet and repose; let them carry out all His behests and thus prove their loyal gratitude for all His endless grace.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahíyyih Khánum, The Greatest Holy Leaf.*

6.4 Inner Peace and Certitude

O SON OF SPIRIT!

With the joyful tidings of light I hail thee: rejoice! To the court of holiness I summon thee; abide therein that thou mayest live in peace for evermore.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 33.

O SON OF MAN!

Wert thou to speed through the immensity of space and traverse the expanse of heaven, yet thou wouldst find no rest save in submission to Our command and humbleness before Our Face.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 40.

O SON OF MY HANDMAID!

Quaff from the tongue of the merciful the stream of divine mystery, and behold from the day-spring of divine utterance the unveiled splendour of the day-star of wisdom. Sow the seeds of My divine wisdom in the pure soil of the heart, and water them with the waters of certitude, that the hyacinths of knowledge and wisdom may spring up fresh and green from the holy city of the heart.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 78.

Were men to meditate upon the lives of the Prophets of old, so easily would they come to know and understand the ways of these Prophets that they would cease to be veiled by such deeds and words as are contrary to their own worldly desires, and thus consume every intervening veil with the fire burning in the Bush of divine knowledge, and abide secure upon the throne of peace and certitude.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* (The Book of Certitude).

... Peace of mind is gained by the centring of the spiritual consciousness on the Prophet of God; therefore you should study the spiritual Teachings, and receive the Water of Life from the Holy Utterances. Then by translating these high ideals into action, your entire character will be changed, and your mind will not only find peace, but your entire being will find joy and enthusiasm.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 381, p. 112.

Purity and Detachment

6.5 A Pure Heart

O SON OF MAN!

The temple of being is My throne; cleanse it of all things, that there I may be established and there I may abide.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 58.

O SON OF BEING!

Thy heart is My home; sanctify it for My descent. Thy spirit is My place of revelation; cleanse it for My manifestation.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 59.

Create in me a pure heart, O my God, and renew a tranquil conscience within me, O my Hope! Through the spirit of power confirm Thou me in Thy Cause, O my Best-Beloved, and by the light of Thy glory reveal unto me Thy path, O Thou the Goal of my desire! Through the power of Thy transcendent might lift me up unto the heaven of Thy holiness, O Source of my being, and by the breezes of Thine eternity gladden me, O Thou Who art my God! Let Thine everlasting melodies breathe tranquility on me, O my Companion, and let the riches of Thine ancient countenance deliver me from all except Thee, O my Master, and let the tidings of the revelation of Thine incorruptible Essence bring me joy, O Thou Who art the most manifest of the manifest and the most hidden of the hidden!

Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLV.

... Christ has addressed the world, saying, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven"—that is, men must become pure in heart to know God. ... The hearts of all children are of the utmost purity. They are mirrors upon which no dust has fallen. But this purity is on account of weakness and innocence, not on account of any strength and testing, for as this

is the early period of their childhood, their hearts and minds are unsullied by the world. They cannot display any great intelligence. They have neither hypocrisy nor deceit. This is on account of the child's weakness, whereas the man becomes pure through his strength. Through the power of intelligence he becomes simple; through the great power of reason and understanding and not through the power of weakness he becomes sincere. When he attains to the state of perfection, he will receive these qualities; his heart becomes purified, his spirit enlightened, his soul is sensitized and tender—all through his great strength. This is the difference between the perfect man and the child. Both have the underlying qualities of simplicity and sincerity...

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 24 April 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

6.6 Purity of Motive

First and foremost, one should use every possible means to purge one's heart and motives, otherwise, engaging in any form of enterprise would be futile. It is also essential to abstain from hypocrisy and blind imitation, inasmuch as their foul odour is soon detected by every man of understanding and wisdom. ... One can hardly imagine what a great influence genuine love, truthfulness and purity of motives exert on the souls of men. But these traits cannot be acquired by any believer unless he makes a daily effort to gain them ...

Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1267, pp. 1–2.

6.7 Physical Cleanliness

O Friends of the Pure and Omnipotent God! To be pure and holy in all things is an attribute of the consecrated soul and a necessary characteristic of the unenslaved mind. The best of perfections is immaculacy and the freeing of oneself from every defect. Once the individual is, in every respect, cleansed and purified, then will he become a focal Centre reflecting the Manifest Light.

First in a human being's way of life must be purity, then freshness, cleanliness, and independence of spirit. First must the stream bed be cleansed; then may the sweet river waters be led into it. Chaste eyes enjoy the beatific vision of the Lord and know what this encounter meaneth; a pure sense inhaleth the fragrances that blow from the rose gardens of His grace; a burnished heart will mirror forth the comely face of truth.

... My meaning is this, that in every aspect of life, purity and holiness, cleanliness and refinement, exalt the human condition and further the development of man's inner reality. Even in the physical realm, cleanliness will conduce to spirituality, as the Holy Writings clearly state.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 129.

6.8 Chastity

The brightness of the light of chastity sheddeth its illumination upon the worlds of the spirit, and its fragrance is wafted even unto the Most Exalted Paradise.

Bahá'u'lláh, cited by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations. It demands daily vigilance in the control of one's carnal desires and corrupt inclinations. It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures... It condemns the prostitution of art and of literature, the practices of nudism and of companionate marriage, infidelity in marital relationships, and all manner of promiscuity, of easy familiarity, and of sexual vices.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

On page 25 of *The Advent of Divine Justice* the beloved Guardian is describing the requirements not only of chastity, but of "a chaste and holy life" – both adjectives are important. One of the signs of a decadent society, a sign which is very evident in the world today, is an almost frenetic devotion to pleasure and diversion, an insatiable thirst for amusement, a fanatical devotion to games and sport, a reluctance to treat any matter seriously, and a scornful and derisory attitude towards virtue and solid worth. Abandonment of "a frivolous conduct" does not imply that a Bahá'í must be sour-faced or perpetually solemn. Humor, happiness, joy are characteristics of a true Bahá'í life. Frivolity palls and eventually leads to boredom and emptiness, but true happiness and joy and humor that are parts of a balanced life that includes serious thought, compassion and humble servitude to God are characteristics that enrich life and add to its radiance.

The Universal House of Justice, 8 May 1979, *Messages 1963-1986*, para. 224.2, p. 413.

We must reach a spiritual plane where God comes first and great human passions are unable to turn us away from Him. All the time we see people who either through the force of hate or the passionate attachment they have to another person, sacrifice principle or bar themselves from the Path of God.

We must love God, and in this state, a general love for all men becomes possible. We cannot love each human being for himself, but our feeling towards humanity should be motivated by our love for the Father Who created all men.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No.1327, p. 22.

We have received your letter of 19 June 1973 and can sympathize with the problems that Bahá'í youth face when trying to live up to the Bahá'í standards of behaviour. It is, perhaps, natural that in the bewildering amoral environment in which Bahá'í youth are growing up they feel the need for specific instructions on which intimacies are permissible and which are not. However, we feel it would be most unwise for any Bahá'í institution to issue detailed instructions about this.

The Bahá'í youth should study the teachings on chastity and, with these in mind, should avoid any behaviour which would arouse passions which would tempt them to violate them. In deciding what acts are permissible to them in the light of these considerations the youth must use their own judgement, following the guidance of their consciences and the advice of their parents.

If Bahá'í youth combine such personal purity with an attitude of uncensorious forbearance towards others they will find that those who have criticized or even mocked them will come, it time, to respect them. They will, moreover, be laying a firm foundation for future married happiness.

The Universal House of Justice, 9 July 1973, *Messages 1963–1986*, paras 133.1–3, p. 253.

6.9 Avoidance of Alcohol and Habit Forming Drugs

It is inadmissible that man, who hath been endowed with reason, should consume that which stealeth it away. Nay, rather it behoveth 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.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 119.

It[1] requires total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks, from opium and from similar habit-forming drugs.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

Concerning smoking: It is not forbidden in the Bahá'í teachings and no one can enforce its prohibition. It is strongly discouraged as a habit which is not very clean or very healthy. But it is a matter left entirely to the conscience of the individual and not of major importance, whereas the use of alcohol is definitely forbidden and thus not left optional to the conscience of the believer.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 1189, pp. 355–356.

... Bahá'ís should not use hallucinogenic agents, including LSD, peyote and similar substances, except when prescribed for medical treatment. Neither should they become involved in experiments with such substances.

The Universal House of Justice, 11 November 1967, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 1184, p. 354.

6.10 Moderation

Whoso cleaveth to justice, can, under no circumstances, transgress the limits of moderation. He discerneth the truth in all things, through the guidance of Him Who is the All-Seeing. The civilization, so often vaunted by the learned exponents of arts and sciences, will, if allowed to overleap the bounds of moderation, bring great evil upon men. Thus warneth you He Who is the All-Knowing. If carried to excess, civilization will prove as prolific a source of evil as it had been of goodness when kept within the restraints of moderation. Meditate on this, O people, and be not of them that wander distraught in the wilderness of error.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLXIV.

... God hath ordained every good thing, whether created in the heavens or in the earth, for such of His servants as truly believe in Him. Eat ye, O people, of the good things which God hath allowed you, and deprive not yourselves from His wondrous bounties.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXVIII.

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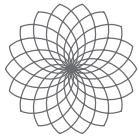
[1] *A chaste and holy life.*

Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.



Love and Unity

6.11 The Essential Foundation of Every Religion

O CHILDREN OF MEN!

Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. Such is My counsel to you, O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 68.

... consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship ....

They that are endued with sincerity and faithfulness should associate with all the peoples and kindreds of the earth with joy and radiance, inasmuch as consorting with people hath promoted and will continue to promote unity and concord, which in turn are conducive to the maintenance of order in the world and to the regeneration of nations. Blessed are such as hold fast to the cord of kindliness and tender mercy and are free from animosity and hatred.

Bahá'u'lláh, Ṭarázát (Ornaments), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Real love is impossible unless one turn his face towards God and be attracted to His beauty.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 364.

The love which exists between the hearts of believers is prompted by the ideal of the unity of spirits. This love is attained through the knowledge of God, so that men see the Divine love reflected in the heart. Each sees in the other the beauty of God

reflected in the soul, and finding this point of similarity, they are attracted to one another in love.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*.

... that love of God, and consequently of men, is the essential foundation of every religion, our own included. A greater degree of love will produce a greater unity, because it enables people to bear with each other, to be patient and forgiving.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1299, p. 12.

... when you meet those whose opinions differ from your own, do not turn away your face from them. All are seeking truth, and there are many roads leading thereto. Truth has many aspects, but it remains always and forever one.

Do not allow difference of opinion, or diversity of thought to separate you from your fellow-men, or to be the cause of dispute, hatred and strife in your hearts.

Rather, search diligently for the truth, and make all men your friends.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*.

6.12 Friendship

O SON OF MY HANDMAID!

Wouldst thou seek the grace of the Holy Spirit, enter into fellowship with the righteous, for he hath drunk the cup of eternal life at the hands of the immortal Cup-bearer and even as the true morn doth quicken and illumine the hearts of the dead.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 58.

The second condition:[2] Fellowship and love amongst the believers. The divine friends must be attracted to and enamoured of each other and ever be ready and willing to sacrifice their own lives for each other. Should one soul from amongst the believers meet another, it must be as though a thirsty one with parched lips has reached to the fountain of the water of life, or a lover has met his true beloved. For one of the greatest divine wisdoms regarding the appearance of the Holy Manifestations is this: The souls may come to know each other and become intimate with each other; the power of the love of God may make all of them the waves of one sea, the flowers of one rose garden, and the stars of one heaven. This is the wisdom for the appearance of the Holy Manifestations! When the most great bestowal reveals itself in the hearts of the believers, the world of nature will be transformed, the darkness of the contingent being will vanish, and heavenly illumination will be obtained. Then the whole world will become the Paradise of Abhá, every one of the believers of God will become a blessed tree, producing wonderful fruits.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Tablets of the Divine Plan*.

There is no teaching in the Bahá'í Faith that "soul mates" exist. What is meant is that marriage should lead to a profound friendship of spirit, which will endure in the next world, where there is no sex, and no giving and taking in marriage; just the way we should establish with our parents, our children, our brothers and sisters

[2] *Conditions to attain the station of an Apostle of Bahá'u'lláh.*

and friends a deep spiritual bond which will be everlasting, and not merely physical bonds of human relationship.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Preserving Bahá'í Marriages, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2332, p. 452.

We know absence of light is darkness, but no one would assert darkness was not a fact. It exists even though it is only the absence of something else. So evil exists too, and we cannot close our eyes to it, even though it is a negative existence. We must seek to supplant it by good, and if we see an evil person is not influenceable by us, then we should shun his company for it is unhealthy.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*.

Chastity in no way implies withdrawal from human relationships. It liberates people from the tyranny of the ubiquity of sex. A person who is in control of his sexual impulses is enabled to have profound and enduring friendships with many people, both men and women…

The Universal House of Justice, 8 May 1979, *Messages 1963-1986*, para. 224.5, p. 413.

6.13 Loving-kindness

Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself.

Bahá'u'lláh, Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih (Words of Paradise), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

If ye meet the abased or the down-trodden, turn not away disdainfully from them, for the King of Glory ever watcheth over them and surroundeth them with such tenderness as none can fathom except them that have suffered their wishes and desires to be merged in the Will of your Lord, the Gracious, the All-Wise. O ye rich ones of the earth! Flee not from the face of the poor that lieth in the dust, nay rather befriend him and suffer him to recount the tale of the woes with which God's inscrutable Decree hath caused him to be afflicted. By the righteousness of God! Whilst ye consort with him, the Concourse on high will be looking upon you, will be interceding for you, will be extolling your names and glorifying your action. Blessed are the learned that pride not themselves on their attainments; and well is it with the righteous that mock not the sinful, but rather conceal their misdeeds, so that their own shortcomings may remain veiled to men's eyes.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXLV.

Every human creature is the servant of God. All have been created and reared by the power and favour of God; all have been blessed with the bounties of the same Sun of Divine truth; all have quaffed from the fountain of the infinite mercy of God; and all in His estimation and love are equal as servants. He is beneficent and kind to all. Therefore no one should glorify himself over another; no one should manifest pride or superiority toward another; no one should look upon another with scorn and contempt; and no one should deprive or oppress a fellow creature. All must be considered as submerged in the ocean of God's mercy. We must associate with all humanity with gentleness and kindliness. We must love all with love of the heart. Some are ignorant; they must be trained and educated. One is sick; he must be healed. Another is as a child; we must assist him to attain maturity. We must not

detest him who is ailing, neither shun him, scorn nor curse him; but care for him with the utmost kindness and tenderness. An infant must not be treated with disdain simply because it is an infant. Our responsibility is to train, educate and develop it in order that it may advance toward maturity.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 25 April 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

Be in perfect unity. Never become angry with one another.... Love the creatures for the sake of God and not for themselves. You will never become angry or impatient if you love them for the sake of God. Humanity is not perfect. There are imperfections in every human being, and you will always become unhappy if you look toward the people themselves. But if you look toward God, you will love them and be kind to them, for the world of God is the world of perfection and complete mercy. Therefore, do not look at the shortcomings of anybody; see with the sight of forgiveness. The imperfect eye beholds imperfections. The eye that covers faults looks towards the Creator of souls. He created them, trains and provides for them, endows them with capacity and life, sight and hearing; therefore, they are the signs of His grandeur. You must love and be kind to everybody, care for the poor, protect the weak, heal the sick, teach and educate the ignorant.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 5 May 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

To look always at the good and not at the bad. If a man has ten good qualities and one bad one, to look at the ten and forget the one; and if a man has ten bad qualities and one good one, to look at the one and forget the ten.

Words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, reported by J. E. Esselmont,
Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, The Sincovering Eye.

We should all visit the sick. When they are in sorrow and suffering, it is a real help and benefit to have a friend come. Happiness is a great healer to those who are ill. ... The people in the East show the utmost kindness and compassion to the sick and suffering. This has greater effect than the remedy itself. You must always have this thought of love and affection when you visit the ailing and afflicted.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 17 June 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

Briefly, it is not only their fellow human beings that the beloved of God must treat with mercy and compassion, rather must they show forth the utmost loving-kindness to every living creature. For in all physical respects, and where the animal spirit is concerned, the selfsame feelings are shared by animal and man. Man hath not grasped this truth, however, and he believeth that physical sensations are confined to human beings, wherefore is he unjust to the animals, and cruel.

And yet in truth, what difference is there when it cometh to physical sensations? The feelings are one and the same, whether ye inflict pain on man or on beast. There is no difference here whatever. ...

Train your children from their earliest days to be infinitely tender and loving to animals. If an animal be sick, let the children try to heal it, if it be hungry, let them feed it, if thirsty, let them quench its thirst, if weary, let them see that it rests.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 138.

6.14 Courtesy

O people of God! I admonish you to observe courtesy, for above all else it is the prince of virtues. Well is it with him who is illumined with the light of courtesy and is attired with the vesture of uprightness. Whoso is endued with courtesy hath indeed attained a sublime station. It is hoped that this Wronged One and everyone else may be enabled to acquire it, hold fast unto it, observe it, and fix our gaze upon it. This is a binding command which hath streamed forth from the Pen of the Most Great Name.

Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Dunyá (Tablet of the World), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Let truthfulness and courtesy be your adorning. Suffer not yourselves to be deprived of the robe of forbearance and justice, that the sweet savors of holiness may be wafted from your hearts upon all created things.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXIX.

6.15 Abstaining from Conflict and Contention

Verily I say unto thee: Of all men the most negligent is he that disputeth idly and seeketh to advance himself over his brother. Say: O brethren! Let deeds, not words, be your adorning.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 5.

If any differences arise amongst you, behold Me standing before your face, and overlook the faults of one another for My name's sake and as a token of your love for My manifest and resplendent Cause.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXLVI.

Nothing whatever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than dissension and strife, contention, estrangement and apathy, among the loved ones of God. Flee them, through the power of God and His sovereign aid, and strive ye to knit together the hearts of men, in His Name, the Unifier, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, V.

O ye beloved of the Lord! In this sacred Dispensation, conflict and contention are in no wise permitted. Every aggressor deprives himself of God's grace. It is incumbent upon everyone to show the utmost love, rectitude of conduct, straightforwardness and sincere kindliness unto all the peoples and kindreds of the world, be they friends or strangers. So intense must be the spirit of love and loving kindness, that the stranger may find himself a friend, the enemy a true brother, no difference whatsoever existing between them. For universality is of God and all limitations earthly.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.

I charge you all that each one of you concentrate all the thoughts of your heart on love and unity. When a thought of war comes, oppose it by a stronger thought of peace. A thought of hatred must be destroyed by a more powerful thought of love. Thoughts of war bring destruction to all harmony, well-being, restfulness and

content. Thoughts of love are constructive of brotherhood, peace, friendship, and happiness.

Public Talk of ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*.

6.16 Freedom from Prejudice

The Great Being saith: O well-beloved ones! The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. We cherish the hope that the light of justice may shine upon the world and sanctify it from tyranny.

Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd (Tablet of Maqṣúd), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

The second Glad-Tidings

It is permitted that the peoples and kindreds of the world associate with one another with joy and radiance. O people! Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship.

Bahá'u'lláh, Bishárát (Glad-Tidings), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

We remember every one of you, men and women, and from this Spot—the Scene of incomparable glory—regard you all as one soul and send you the joyous tidings of divine blessings which have preceded all created things, and of My remembrance that pervadeth everyone, whether young or old. The glory of God rest upon you, O people of Bahá. Rejoice with exceeding gladness through My remembrance, for He is indeed with you at all times.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

"*O ye discerning ones!*" Bahá'u'lláh has written, "*Verily, the words which have descended from the heaven of the Will of God are the source of unity and harmony for the world. Close your eyes to racial differences, and welcome all with the light of oneness.*" "*We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations,*" He proclaims, "*…that all nations should become one in faith and all men as brothers; that the bonds of affection and unity between the sons of men should be strengthened; that diversity of religion should cease, and differences of race be annulled.*" "*Bahá'u'lláh hath said,*" writes ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, "*that the various races of humankind lend a composite harmony and beauty of color to the whole. Let all associate, therefore, in this great human garden even as flowers grow and blend together side by side without discord or disagreement between them.*" "*Bahá'u'lláh,*" ʻAbdu'lBahá moreover has said, "*once compared the colored people to the black pupil of the eye surrounded by the white. In this black pupil is seen the reflection of that which is before it, and through it the light of the spirit shineth forth.*"

"*God,*" ʻAbdu'l-Bahá Himself declares, "*maketh no distinction between the white and the black. If the hearts are pure both are acceptable unto Him. God is no respecter of persons on account of either color or race.*"

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

When a man turns his face to God he finds sunshine everywhere. All men are his brothers. Let not conventionality cause you to seem cold and unsympathetic when

you meet strange people from other countries. Do not look at them as though you suspected them of being evildoers, thieves and boors. You think it necessary to be very careful, not to expose yourselves to the risk of making acquaintance with such, possibly, undesirable people.

I ask you not to think only of yourselves. Be kind to the strangers, whether come they from Turkey, Japan, Persia, Russia, China or any other country in the world.

Help to make them feel at home; find out where they are staying, ask if you may render them any service; try to make their lives a little happier.

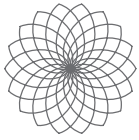
In this way, even if, sometimes, what you at first suspected should be true, still go out of your way to be kind to them—this kindness will help them to become better.

After all, why should any foreign people be treated as strangers?

Let those who meet you know, without your proclaiming the fact, that you are indeed a Bahá'í.

Put into practice the Teaching of Bahá'u'lláh, that of kindness to all nations. Do not be content with showing friendship in words alone, let your heart burn with loving kindness for all who may cross your path.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*.



Justice

6.17 Its Pre-eminence and Motivation

O SON OF SPIRIT

The best beloved of all things in My sight is Justice; turn not away therefrom if thou desirest Me, and neglect it not that I may confide in thee. By its aid thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbour. Ponder this in thy heart; how it behoveth thee to be. Verily justice is My gift to thee and the sign of My loving-kindness. Set it then before thine eyes.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 2.

The light of men is Justice. Quench it not with the contrary winds of oppression and tyranny. The purpose of justice is the appearance of unity among men. The ocean of divine wisdom surgeth within this exalted word, while the books of the world cannot contain its inner significance.

Bahá'u'lláh, Kalimát-Firdawsíyyih (Words of Paradise), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world.

Bahá'u'lláh, Ishráqát (Splendours), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

A good character is, verily, the best mantle for men from God. With it He adorneth the temples of His loved ones. By My life! The light of a good character surpasseth the light of the sun and the radiance thereof. Whoso attaineth unto it is accounted as a jewel among men. The glory and the upliftment of the world must needs depend upon it.

Bahá'u'lláh, Ṭarázát (Ornaments), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

It is Our wish and desire that every one of you may become a source of all goodness unto men, and an example of uprightness to mankind. Beware lest ye prefer yourselves above your neighbors. Fix your gaze upon Him Who is the Temple of God amongst men. He, in truth, hath offered up His life as a ransom for the redemption of the world.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXLVI.

The Tongue of My power hath, from the heaven of My omnipotent glory, addressed to My creation these words: "Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty." Happy is the lover that hath inhaled the divine fragrance of his Best-Beloved from these words, laden with the perfume of a grace which no tongue can describe.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 4.

6.18 Not Causing Harm

... beware lest your hands or tongues cause harm unto anyone among mankind.

Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Dunyá (Tablet of the World), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

O army of God! Beware lest ye harm any soul, or make any heart to sorrow; lest ye wound any man with your words, be he known to you or a stranger, be he friend or foe. Pray ye for all; ask ye that all be blessed, all be forgiven. Beware, beware, lest any of you seek vengeance, even against one who is thirsting for your blood. Beware, beware, lest ye offend the feelings of another, even though he be an evil-doer, and he wish you ill. Look ye not upon the creatures, turn ye to their Creator. See ye not the never-yielding people, see but the Lord of Hosts. Gaze ye not down upon the dust, gaze upward at the shining sun, which hath caused every patch of darksome earth to glow with light.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 35.

6.19 Not Backbiting

O SON OF MAN!

Breathe not the sins of others so long as thou art thyself a sinner. Shouldst thou transgress this command, accursed wouldst thou be, and to this I bear witness.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 27.

Do not complain of others. Refrain from reprimanding them, and if you wish to give admonition or advice, let it be offered in such a way that it will not burden the bearer.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 2 December 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

As regards backbiting, i.e. discussing the faults of others, in their absence, the teachings are very emphatic. In a Tablet to an American friend the Master wrote: "The worst human quality and the most great sin is backbiting, more especially when it emanates from the tongues of the believers of God. If some means were devised so that the doors of backbiting were shut eternally and each one of the believers unsealed his lips in praise of others, then the teachings of His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh would spread, the hearts be illumined, the spirits glorified, and the human world would attain to everlasting felicity." (Quoted in *Star of the West*, Vol. IV, p. 192.) Bahá'u'lláh says in the *Hidden Words*: "Breathe not the sins of others so long as thou art a sinner. Shouldst thou transgress this command ACCURSED ART THOU." The condemnation of backbiting could hardly be couched in stronger language than in these passages, and it is obviously one of the foremost obligations for Bahá'ís to set their faces against this practice. Even if what is said against another person be true, the mentioning of his faults to others still comes under the category of backbiting, and is forbidden.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 305, p. 88.

6.20 Not Infringing on the Rights of Others

O MY FRIENDS!

Walk ye in the ways of the good pleasure of the Friend, and know that His pleasure is in the pleasure of His creatures. That is: no man should enter the house of his friend save at his friend's pleasure, nor lay hands upon his treasures nor prefer his own will to his friend's, and in no wise seek an advantage over him. Ponder this, ye that have insight!

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 43.

Some have regarded it as lawful to infringe on the integrity of the substance of their neighbor, and have made light of the injunction of God as prescribed in His Book…

Say: Be ashamed, O ye that call yourselves the lovers of the Ancient Beauty! Be ye admonished by the tribulation He hath suffered, by the burden of anguish He hath carried for the sake of God. Let your eyes be opened…

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 neighbor, however vile and worthless he may be.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXVII.

I hope that each one of you will become just, and direct your thoughts towards the unity of mankind; that you will never harm your neighbors nor speak ill of anyone;

that you will respect the rights of all men, and be more concerned for the interests of others than for your own.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*.

6.21 Some Prohibitions

- Adultery
- Asceticism
- Calumny
- Contention and conflict
- Gambling
- Mendicancy
- Striking or wounding a person
- Arson
- Backbiting
- Carrying arms unless essential
- Cruelty to animals
- Idleness and sloth
- Murder
- Theft

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas (The Most Holy Book), Synopsis and Codification, section IV.D.1.y.

6.22 Trustworthiness

... We gazed on one of the Beauties of the Most Sublime Paradise, standing on a pillar of light, and calling aloud saying: "O inmates of earth and heaven! Behold ye My beauty, and My radiance, and My revelation, and My effulgence. By God, the True One! I am Trustworthiness and the revelation thereof, and the beauty thereof. I will recompense whosoever will cleave unto Me, and recognize My rank and station, and hold fast unto My hem. I am the most great ornament of the people of Bahá, and the vesture of glory unto all who are in the kingdom of creation. I am the supreme instrument for the prosperity of the world, and the horizon of assurance unto all beings."

Bahá'u'lláh, Ṭarázát (Ornaments), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

It [rectitude of conduct] must characterize the attitude of every loyal believer towards non-acceptance of political posts, non-identification with political parties, non-participation in political controversies, and non-membership in political organizations and ecclesiastical institutions. It must reveal itself in the uncompromising adherence of all, whether young or old, to the clearly enunciated and fundamental principles laid down by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His addresses, and to the laws and ordinances revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in His Most Holy Book.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

6.23 Truthfulness

Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues. Without truthfulness progress and success, in all the worlds of God, are impossible for any soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also be acquired.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

Consider that the worst of all qualities and the most odious of all attributes, and the very foundation of all evil, is lying, and that no more evil or reprehensible quality can be imagined in all existence. It brings all human perfections to naught and gives

rise to countless vices. There is no worse attribute than this, and it is the foundation of all wickedness.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, talk 57, para. 12.

As to the question whether it is right to tell an untruth in order to save another, he feels that under no condition should we tell an untruth but at the same time try and help the person in a more legitimate manner. Of course it is not necessary to be too outspoken until the question is directly put to us.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1273, p. 4.

6.24 Integrity

O SON OF BEING!

Ascribe not to any soul that which thou wouldst not have ascribed to thee, and say not that which thou doest not. This is My command unto thee, do thou observe it.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No. 29.

O CHILDREN OF ADAM!

Holy words and pure and goodly deeds ascend unto the heaven of celestial glory. Strive that your deeds may be cleansed from the dust of self and hypocrisy and find favor at the court of glory; for ere long the assayers of mankind shall, in the holy presence of the Adored One, accept naught but absolute virtue and deeds of stainless purity. This is the daystar of wisdom and of divine mystery that hath shone above the horizon of the divine will. Blessed are they that turn thereunto.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 69.

O SON OF MY HANDMAID!

Guidance hath ever been given by words, and now it is given by deeds. Everyone must show forth deeds that are pure and holy, for words are the property of all alike, whereas such deeds as these belong only to Our loved ones. Strive then with heart and soul to distinguish yourselves by your deeds. In this wise We counsel you in this holy and resplendent tablet.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 76.

O SON OF BEING!

Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, No 31.

6.25 Fairness

Be fair to yourselves and to others, that the evidences of justice may be revealed, through your deeds, among Our faithful servants.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXVIII.

... equity is the most fundamental among human virtues. The evaluation of all things must needs depend upon it.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, C.

Observe equity in your judgement, ye men of understanding heart! He that is unjust in his judgement is destitute of the characteristics that distinguish man's station.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, C.

... if thine eyes be turned towards justice, choose thou for thy neighbour that which thou choosest for thyself.

Bahá'u'lláh, Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih (Words of Paradise), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Such rectitude of conduct must manifest itself, with ever-increasing potency, in every verdict which the elected representatives of the Bahá'í community, in whatever capacity they may find themselves, may be called upon to pronounce. It must be constantly reflected in the business dealings of all its members, in their domestic lives, in all manner of employment, and in any service they may, in the future, render their government or people. It must be exemplified in the conduct of all Bahá'í electors, when exercising their sacred rights and functions. ... It must be demonstrated in the impartiality of every defender of the Faith against its enemies, in his fair-mindedness in recognizing any merits that enemy may possess, and in his honesty in discharging any obligations he may have towards him.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

To discriminate against any race, on the ground of its being socially backward, politically immature, and numerically in a minority, is a flagrant violation of the spirit that animates the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

6.26 Courage

The source of courage and power is the promotion of the Word of God, and steadfastness in His Love.

Bahá'u'lláh, Aṣl-i-Kullu'l-Khayr (Words of Wisdom), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Be not dismayed if your endeavors are dismissed as utopian by the voices that would oppose any suggestion of fundamental change. Trust in the capacity of this generation to disentangle itself from the embroilments of a divided world. To discharge your responsibilities, you will have to show forth courage, the courage of those who cling to standards of rectitude, who champion the cause of justice, whose lives are characterized by purity of thought and action, and whose purpose is directed by love and indomitable faith.

The Universal House of Justice, 20 July 2000.

6.27 Protection of Oppressed People

O YE RICH ONES ON EARTH!

The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 54.

... every organized community, enlisted under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh should feel it to be its first and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

The House of Justice is deeply concerned at the plight of so many of the indigenous and aboriginal peoples in various parts of the world who have been denied their rights as a consequence of actions by oppressive majorities. Such inequities and injustices are to be found in many countries. The purpose of the coming of Bahá'u'lláh is to lift the yoke of oppression from His loved ones, to liberate all the people of the world, and to provide the means for their abiding happiness.

The Universal House of Justice, 15 June 1987.

6.28 Wisdom

O YE DWELLERS IN THE HIGHEST PARADISE!

Proclaim unto the children of assurance that within the realms of holiness, nigh unto the celestial paradise, a new garden hath appeared, round which circle the denizens of the realm on high and the immortal dwellers of the exalted paradise. Strive, then, that ye may attain that station, that ye may unravel the mysteries of love from its windflowers and learn the secret of divine and consummate wisdom from its eternal fruits. Solaced are the eyes of them that enter and abide therein!

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 18.

Take heed, O concourse of the rulers of the world! There is no force on earth that can equal in its conquering power the force of justice and wisdom. I, verily, affirm that there is not, and hath never been, a host more mighty than that of justice and wisdom. Blessed is the king who marcheth with the ensign of wisdom unfurled before him, and the battalions of justice massed in his rear. He verily is the ornament that adorneth the brow of peace and the countenance of security. There can be no doubt whatever that if the day-star of justice, which the clouds of tyranny have obscured, were to shed its light upon men, the face of the earth would be completely transformed.

Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd (Tablet of Maqṣúd), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

O ye wise men of the City and philosophers of the world! Beware lest human learning and wisdom cause you to wax proud before God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Know ye that true wisdom is to fear God, to know Him, and to recognize His Manifestations. This wisdom, however, can be attained only by those who detach

themselves from the world, and who walk in the ways of the good pleasure of their Lord.

Bahá'u'lláh, Súriy-i-Mulúk (Súriy to the Kings), *The Summons of the Lord of Hosts*, para. 113.

CHAPTER 7

TEACHING THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH

Our Attitude to Teaching

7.1 Value Teaching 192
7.2 Teach for the Sake of God 193
7.3 We Must Learn to Depend on the Holy Spirit and Persevere 193

Preparing for Teaching

7.4 Study the Courses of the Training Institute 194
7.5 Memorize Points from the Writings 195
7.6 Plan Ways to Contact People 195
7.7 Prepare for Teaching Opportunities 196

The Practice of Personal Teaching

7.8 Set an Example of Bahá'í Life 196
7.9 Show Sincere Friendship to All 197
7.10 Interest People in the Faith 198
7.11 Speak with Confidence, Humility and Spiritual Attraction 199
7.12 Accept the Response of the Hearer 200
7.13 Learn from Experience 201

Various Teaching Activities

7.14 Firesides 202
7.15 Home Visits 202
7.16 Travelling 203
7.17 Pioneering 203
7.18 Arts and Music 203
7.19 Writing 204

Supporting New Believers

7.20 Receive Declarations of Belief 205
7.21 Nurture and Accompany New Believers 206
7.22 Maintain Love and Unity in the Community 206

Our Attitude to Teaching

7.1 Value Teaching

O SON OF MAN!

Magnify My cause that I may reveal unto thee the mysteries of My greatness and shine upon thee with the light of eternity.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words,* Arabic, No. 41.

It is better to guide one soul than to possess all that is on earth, for as long as that guided soul is under the shadow of the Tree of Divine Unity, he and the one who hath guided him will both be recipients of God's tender mercy, whereas possession of earthly things will cease at the time of death. The path to guidance is one of love and compassion, not of force and coercion. This hath been God's method in the past, and shall continue to be in the future!

The Báb, Excerpts from the Persian Bayán, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb.*

Of all the gifts of God the greatest is the gift of Teaching. It draweth unto us the Grace of God and is our first obligation. Of such a gift how can we deprive ourselves?

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.*

The greatest glory and honour which can come to an individual is to bring the light of guidance to some new soul. The quickening power of the Holy Spirit, which has come into the world through Bahá'u'lláh, is the source of immortal life; and those who are quickened by this spirit in this world will find themselves in great honour and glory in the next world. The most meritorious service which anyone could render is to bring the light of divine guidance and the quickening power of the spirit to an entirely new area. Humanity is crying for salvation; and it is only by the Bahá'ís going into the various areas of the world, that it can be brought to them. This is the reason the Guardian has encouraged all of the friends to disperse to new territories, for this is the hour for the quickening of the world.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Guidelines for Teaching,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1994, p. 321.

The Bahá'ís are the leaven of God, which must leaven the lump of their nation. In direct ratio to their success will be the protection vouchsafed, not only to them but to their country. These are the immutable laws of God, from which there is no escape: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required."

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1340, p. 27.

Our lot, dear brothers and sisters, is to be consciously involved in a vast historic process the like of which has not ever been experienced before by any people. As a global community, we have, thus far, attained a unique and magnificent success in being representative of the full spectrum of the human race—thanks to the inestimable expenditure of life, effort and treasure willingly made by thousands of our spiritual forebears. There is no other aggregation of human beings who can

claim to have raised up a system with the demonstrated capacity to unite all of God's children in one world-embracing Order. This achievement places us not only in a position of incomparable strength, but more particularly in one of inescapable responsibility. Does not every one of us therefore have a divine obligation to fulfill, a sacred duty to perform towards every other one who is not yet aware of the call of God's latest Manifestation? Time does not stop, does not wait. With every passing hour a fresh affliction strikes at a distracted humanity. Dare we linger?

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 155 [1998].

7.2 Teach for the Sake of God

Say: To assist Me is to teach My Cause. This is a theme with which whole Tablets are laden. This is the changeless commandment of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. Comprehend this, O ye men of insight.

Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Siyyid-i-Mihdíy-i-Dahají (Tablet to Siyyid Mihdíy-Dahají), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Teach ye the Cause of God, O people of Bahá, for God hath prescribed unto every one the duty of proclaiming His Message, and regardeth it as the most meritorious of all deeds.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXVIII.

Centre your energies in the propagation of the Faith of God. Whoso is worthy of so high a calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is his duty to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation, whose power hath caused the foundations of the mightiest structures to quake, every mountain to be crushed into dust, and every soul to be dumbfounded.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, XCVI.

7.3 We Must Learn to Depend on the Holy Spirit and Persevere

By the Lord of the Kingdom! If one arise to promote the Word of God with a pure heart, overflowing with the love of God and severed from the world, the Lord of Hosts will assist him with such a power as will penetrate the core of the existent beings.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in The Power of Divine Assistance, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1676, p. 211.

Do not feel discouraged if your labours do not always yield an abundant fruitage. For a quick and rapidly-won success is not always the best and the most lasting. The harder you strive to attain your goal, the greater will be the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh, and the more certain you can feel to attain success. Be cheerful, therefore, and exert yourself with full faith and confidence.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*.

There is no time to lose. There is no room left for vacillation. Multitudes hunger for the bread of life. The stage is set. The firm and irrevocable promise is given. God's own Plan has been set in motion. It is gathering momentum with every passing

day. The powers of heaven and earth mysteriously assist in its execution. Such an opportunity is irreplaceable. Let the doubter arise and himself verify the truth of such assertions. To try, to persevere, is to insure ultimate and complete victory.

Shoghi Effendi, *This Decisive Hour.*

To be most effective, teaching needs more than proclamation. The message needs to be conveyed personally from one soul to another in a spirit of love. Shoghi Effendi talks about the "art" of teaching. To excel in such an art requires courage, effort, constant application, the pain of uncertainty, and an enormous willingness to take risks and suffer rebuffs … To them must be added audacity, joy, and confident reliance on the Holy Spirit. Ingenuity is also required and perseverance. Although it may not be easy to meet people to teach them the Faith, let the friends never lose heart. There are ways if one seeks them with sufficient determination.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, in C. Samimi, *Firesides*, p. ix.

Preparing for Teaching

7.4 Study the Courses of the Training Institute

Central to the pattern of action evolving in a cluster is the individual and collective transformation effected through the agency of the Word of God. From the beginning of the sequence of courses, a participant encounters Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation in considering such weighty themes as worship, service to humanity, the life of the soul, and the education of children and youth. As a person cultivates the habit of study and deep reflection upon the Creative Word, this process of transformation reveals itself in an ability to express one's understanding of profound concepts and to explore spiritual reality in conversations of significance. These capacities are visible not only in the elevated discussions that increasingly characterize interactions within the community, but in the ongoing conversations that reach well beyond—not least between the Bahá'í youth and their peers—extending to include parents whose daughters and sons are benefiting from the community's programmes of education. Through exchanges of this kind, consciousness of spiritual forces is raised, apparent dichotomies yield to unexpected insights, a sense of unity and common calling is fortified, confidence that a better world can be created is strengthened, and a commitment to action becomes manifest. Such distinctive conversations gradually attract ever-larger numbers to take part in a range of community activities. Themes of faith and certitude surface naturally, prompted by the receptivity and experiences of those involved. What is clear, then, is that as the institute process in a cluster gains

momentum, the act of teaching comes to assume greater prominence in the lives of the friends.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015.

In their efforts to present the essentials of the Faith plainly and unequivocally, the believers have benefited greatly from the illustrative example in Book 6 of the Ruhi Institute. Where the logic underlying that presentation is appreciated, and the urge to convert it into a formula overcome, it gives rise to a conversation between two souls—a conversation distinguished by the depth of understanding achieved and the nature of the relationship established. To the extent that the conversation continues beyond the initial encounter and veritable friendships are formed, a direct teaching effort of this kind can become a catalyst for an enduring process of spiritual transformation. Whether the first contact with such newly found friends elicits an invitation for them to enrol in the Bahá'í community or to participate in one of its activities is not an overwhelming concern. More important is that every soul feel welcome to join the community in contributing to the betterment of society, commencing a path of service to humanity on which, at the outset or further along, formal enrolment can occur.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2010.

7.5 Memorize Points from the Writings

The sanctified souls should ponder and meditate in their hearts regarding the methods of teaching. From the texts of the wondrous, heavenly Scriptures they should memorize phrases and passages bearing on various instances, so that in the course of their speech they may recite divine verses whenever the occasion demandeth it, inasmuch as these holy verses are the most potent elixir, the greatest and mightiest talisman. So potent is their influence that the hearer will have no cause for vacillation. I swear by My life! This Revelation is endowed with such a power that it will act as the lodestone for all nations and kindreds of the earth. Should one pause to meditate attentively he would recognize that no place is there, nor can there be, for anyone to flee to.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawh-i-Siyyid-Mihdíy-i-Dahají* (Tablet to Siyyid Mihdíy-Dahají), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

7.6 Plan Ways to Contact People

Having on his own initiative, and undaunted by any hindrances with which either friend or foe may, unwittingly or deliberately, obstruct his path, resolved to arise and respond to the call of teaching, let him carefully consider every avenue of approach which he might utilize in his personal attempts to capture the attention, maintain the interest, and deepen the faith, of those whom he seeks to bring into the fold of his Faith. Let him survey the possibilities which the particular circumstances in which he lives offer him, evaluate their advantages, and proceed intelligently and systematically to utilize them for the achievement of the object he has in mind. Let him also attempt to devise such methods as association with clubs, exhibitions, and societies, lectures on subjects akin to the teachings and ideals of his Cause such as

temperance, morality, social welfare, religious and racial tolerance, economic co-operation, Islám, and Comparative Religion, or participation in social, cultural, humanitarian, charitable, and educational organizations and enterprises which, while safeguarding the integrity of his Faith, will open up to him a multitude of ways and means whereby he can enlist successively the sympathy, the support, and ultimately the allegiance of those with whom he comes in contact.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

The believers ought to give the Message even to those who do not seem to be ready for it, because they can never judge the real extent to which the Word of God can influence the hearts and minds of the people, even those who appear to lack any power of receptivity to the Teachings.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Guidelines for Teaching,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1950, p. 310.

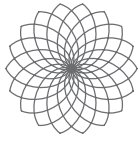
7.7 Prepare for Teaching Opportunities

O God, my God! Aid Thou Thy trusted servants to have loving and tender hearts. Help them to spread, amongst all the nations of the earth, the light of guidance that cometh from the Company on high. Verily Thou art the Strong, the Powerful, the Mighty, the All-Subduing, the Ever-Giving. Verily Thou art the Generous, the Gentle, the Tender, the Most Bountiful.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 7.

... make a special point of praying ardently not only for success in general, but that God may send to you the souls that are ready. There are such souls in every city ....

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Guidelines for Teaching,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1975, p. 316.



The Practice of Personal Teaching

7.8 Set an Example of Bahá'í Life

Whoso ariseth among you to teach the Cause of his Lord, let him, before all else, teach his own self, that his speech may attract the hearts of them that hear him. Unless he teacheth his own self, the words of his mouth will not influence the heart of the seeker.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXVIII.

Not all of us are capable of serving in the same way, but the one way every Bahá'í can spread the Faith is by example. This moves the hearts of people far more deeply than words ever can.

The love we show others, the hospitality and understanding, the willingness to help them, these are the very best advertisements of the Faith.. They will want to hear about it when they see these things in our lives.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1291, p. 10.

Until the public sees in the Bahá'í Community a true pattern, in action, of something better than it already has, it will not respond to the Faith in large numbers.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Promoting Entry by Troops*, Letter No.10, p. 26.

Of these spiritual prerequisites of success, which constitute the bedrock on which the security of all teaching plans, Temple projects, and financial schemes, must ultimately rest, the following stand out as pre-eminent and vital, which the members of the American Bahá'í community will do well to ponder. ... These requirements are none other than a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities, absolute chastity in their individual lives, and complete freedom from prejudice in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or colour.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

Not by the force of numbers, not by the mere exposition of a set of new and noble principles, not by an organized campaign of teaching—no matter how world-wide and elaborate in its character—not even by the staunchness of our faith or the exaltation of our enthusiasm, can we ultimately hope to vindicate in the eyes of a critical and sceptical age the supreme claim of the Abhá Revelation. One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely, the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendour of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh.

Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*.

7.9 Show Sincere Friendship to All

To gather jewels have I come to this world. If one speck of a jewel lie hid in a stone and that stone be beyond the seven seas, until I have found and secured that jewel my hand shall not stay from its search.

Bahá'u'lláh, in"*Gems of Nabíl*", Trans. Shoghi Effendi and J. E. Esselmont, *The Bahá'í World*, Vol. VIII (1938-1940), p. 934; and *The Bahá'í World*, Vol. Xl (1946-1950), p. 775.

The friends of God should weave bonds of fellowship with others and show absolute love and affection towards them. These links have a deep influence on people and they will listen. When the friends sense receptivity to the Word of God, they should deliver the Message with wisdom. They must first try and remove any apprehensions in the people they teach.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Guidelines for Teaching, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1924, p. 300.

Let him remember the example set by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and His constant admonition to shower such kindness upon the seeker, and exemplify to such a degree the spirit of the teachings he hopes to instil into him, that the recipient will be spontaneously impelled to identify himself with the Cause embodying such teachings.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

The Guardian attaches the utmost importance, as you know, to the teaching of the natives of America.

In the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, the Master pays the utmost attention to this most important matter. He states that if the Power of the Holy Spirit today properly enters into the minds and the hearts of the natives of the great American continents that they will become great standard bearers of the Faith, similar to the Nomads (Arabians) who became the most cultured and enlightened people under the Mohammedan civilization.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 1776, p. 524.

He attaches great importance to teaching the aboriginal Australians, and also in converting more Maoris to the Faith, and hopes that the Bahá'ís will devote some attention to contacting both of these minority groups.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand.

The Cause of God has room for all. It would, indeed, not be the Cause of God if it did not take in and welcome everyone—poor and rich, educated and ignorant, the unknown, and the prominent—God surely wants them all, as He created them all.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Guidelines for Teaching,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1953, p. 311.

7.10 Interest People in the Faith

This is the day in which to speak. It is incumbent upon the people of Bahá to strive, with the utmost patience and forbearance, to guide the peoples of the world to the Most Great Horizon.

Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

One word may be likened unto fire, another unto light, and the influence which both exert is manifest in the world. Therefore an enlightened man of wisdom face should primarily speak with words as mild as milk, that the children of men may be nurtured and edified thereby and may attain the ultimate goal of human existence which is the station of true understanding and nobility. And likewise He saith: One word is like unto springtime causing the tender saplings of the rose-garden of knowledge to become verdant and flourishing, while another word is even as a deadly poison. It behoveth a prudent man of wisdom to speak with utmost leniency and forbearance so that the sweetness of his words may induce everyone to attain that which befitteth man's station.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd* (Tablet of Maqṣúd), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

In accordance with the divine teachings in this glorious dispensation we should not belittle anyone and call him ignorant, saying: "You know not, but I know". Rather, we should look upon others with respect, and when attempting to explain and demonstrate, we should speak as if we are investigating the truth, saying: "Here these things are before us. Let us investigate to determine where and in what form the truth can be found." The teacher should not consider himself as learned and others ignorant. Such a thought breedeth pride, and pride is not conducive to influence. The teacher should not see in himself any superiority; he should speak with the utmost kindliness, lowliness and humility, for such speech exerteth influence and educateth the souls.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 15.

Yet, if we but call to mind the practice generally adopted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, we cannot fail to perceive the wisdom, nay the necessity, of gradually and cautiously disclosing to the eyes of an unbelieving world the implications of a Truth which, by its own challenging nature, it is so difficult for it to comprehend and embrace.

It was He, our beloved 'Abdu'l-Bahá, our true and shining Exemplar, who with infinite tact and patience, whether in His public utterances or in private converse, adapted the presentation of the fundamentals of the Cause to the varying capacities and the spiritual receptiveness of His hearers. He never hesitated, however, to tear the veil asunder and reveal to the spiritually ripened those challenging verities that set forth in its true light the relationship of this Supreme Revelation with the Dispensations of the past.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*.

In teaching the Cause, much depends on the personality of the teacher and on the method he chooses for presenting the message. Different personalities and different classes and types of individuals need different methods of approach. And it is the sign of an able teacher to know how to best adapt his methods to various types of people whom he happens to meet. There is no one method one can follow all through. But there should be as many ways of approach as there are types of individual seekers. Flexibility and variety of method is, therefore, an essential prerequisite for the success of every teaching activity.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Guidelines for Teaching,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1941, p. 308.

7.11 Speak with Confidence, Humility and Spiritual Attraction

O Friends! You must all be so ablaze in this day with the fire of the love of God that the heat thereof may be manifest in all your veins, your limbs and members of your body, and the peoples of the world may be ignited by this heat and turn to the horizon of the Beloved.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Guidelines for Teaching,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1898, p. 293.

The teacher, when teaching, must be himself fully enkindled, so that his utterance, like unto a flame of fire, may exert influence and consume the veil of self and passion.

He must also be utterly humble and lowly so that others may be edified, and be totally self-effaced and evanescent so that he may teach with the melody of the Concourse on high—otherwise his teaching will have no effect.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 217.

Speak, therefore; speak out with great courage at every meeting. When thou art about to begin thine address, turn first to Bahá'u'lláh, and ask for the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, then open thy lips and say whatever is suggested to thy heart; this, however, with the utmost courage, dignity and conviction. It is my hope that from day to day your gatherings will grow and flourish, and that those who are seeking after truth will hearken therein to reasoned arguments and conclusive proofs.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 216.

The first and most important qualification of a Bahá'í teacher is, indeed, unqualified loyalty and attachment to the Cause. Knowledge is, of course, essential, but compared to devotion it is secondary in importance.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, No. 186.

7.12 Accept the Response of the Hearer

Be unrestrained as the wind, while carrying the Message of Him Who hath caused the Dawn of Divine Guidance to break. Consider, how the wind, faithful to that which God hath ordained, bloweth upon all the regions of the earth, be they inhabited or desolate. Neither the sight of desolation, nor the evidences of prosperity, can either pain or please it. It bloweth in every direction, as bidden by its Creator. So should be every one that claimeth to be a lover of the one true God. It behoveth him to fix his gaze upon the fundamentals of His Faith, and to labour diligently for its propagation. Wholly for the sake of God he should proclaim His Message, and with that same spirit accept whatever response his words may evoke in his hearer. He who shall accept and believe, shall receive his reward; and he who shall turn away, shall receive none other than his own punishment.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLXI.

O SON OF DUST!

The wise are they that speak not unless they obtain a hearing, even as the cup-bearer, who proffereth not his cup till he findeth a seeker, and the lover who crieth not out from the depths of his heart until he gazeth upon the beauty of his beloved.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 36.

Beware lest ye contend with any one, nay, strive to make him aware of the truth with kindly manner and most convincing exhortation. If your hearer respond, he will have responded to his own behoof, and if not, turn ye away from him, and set your faces towards God's sacred Court, the seat of resplendent holiness.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXVIII.

Consort with all men, O people of Bahá, in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship. If ye be aware of a certain truth, if ye possess a jewel, of which others are deprived, share it with them in a language of utmost kindliness and good-will. If it be accepted,

if it fulfill its purpose, your object is attained. If any one should refuse it, leave him unto himself, and beseech God to guide him. Beware lest ye deal unkindly with him. A kindly tongue is the lodestone of the hearts of men. It is the bread of the spirit, it clotheth the words with meaning, it is the fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXII.

7.13 Learn from Experience

Teaching is the source of Divine Confirmation. It is not sufficient to pray diligently for guidance, but this prayer must be followed by meditation as to the best methods of action and then action itself. Even if the action should not immediately produce results, or perhaps not be entirely correct, that does not make so much difference, because prayers can only be answered through action and if someone's action is wrong, God can use that method of showing the pathway which is right ...

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Guidelines for Teaching,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 2011, p. 325.

Perhaps the reason why you have not accomplished so much in the field of teaching is the extent you looked upon your own weaknesses and inabilities to spread the message. Bahá'u'lláh and the Master have both urged us repeatedly to disregard our own handicaps and lay our whole reliance upon God. He will come to our help if we only arise and become an active channel for God's grace. Do you think it is the teachers who make converts and change human hearts? No, surely not. They are only pure souls who take the first step, and then let the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh move them and make use of them. If any one of them should even for a second consider his achievements as due to his own capacities, his work is ended and his fall starts. This is in fact the reason why so many competent souls have after wonderful services suddenly found themselves absolutely impotent and perhaps thrown aside by the Spirit of the Cause as useless souls. The criterion is the extent to which we are ready to have the will of God operate through us.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Guidelines for Teaching,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1939, p. 307.

The House of Justice is sure that ways will be found through prayer, intelligent analysis, and dedicated consultation to increase the rate of enrolment of believers in Australia.

The Universal House of Justice, Bahá'í Scholarship: A Compilation and Essays, pp. 44–45.

7.14 Firesides

Blessed art thou for having opened the door of thy home unto the people to come and hear of the Kingdom.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, Vol. I.

Know that in every home where God is praised and prayed to, and His Kingdom proclaimed, that home is a garden of God and a paradise of His happiness.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, Vol. I.

It should not be overlooked, however, that the most powerful and effective teaching medium that has been found so far is the fireside meeting, because in the fireside meeting, intimate personal questions can be answered, and the student find the spirit of the Faith more abundant there.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Guidelines for Teaching, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1983, pp. 317–318.

With so firm a foundation in place, the foremost thought in the mind of each and every believer should be teaching. Whether in their personal efforts they teach their friends in firesides and then involve them in the core activities or use these activities as their primary instrument for teaching, whether in their collective endeavours they visit families in teams as part of an intensive campaign or call on seekers in their homes periodically over time—these are decisions that can only be made according to the circumstances and possibilities of the friends and the nature of the populations with whom they interact.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2007.

7.15 Home Visits

Clearly, the institute process raises capacity for a broad range of undertakings; from the earliest courses, participants are encouraged to visit their friends at their homes and study a prayer together or share with them a theme from the Bahá'í teachings…

Conversations about the Person of Bahá'u'lláh and the purpose of His mission occur in a variety of settings, including firesides and visits to homes. The actions undertaken during this phase allow abilities developed through studying the relevant institute materials to be exercised and refined. As experience grows, the friends become more adept at discerning when they have found a hearing ear, at deciding when to be more direct in sharing the message, at removing obstacles to understanding, and at helping seekers to embrace the Cause. The approach of working in teams allows the friends to serve together, offer mutual support, and build confidence—but even when carrying out actions individually, they are coordinating their efforts to greater effect.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015.

7.16 Travelling

The movement itself from place to place, when undertaken for the sake of God hath always exerted, and can now exert, its influence in the world. In the Books of old the station of them that have voyaged far and near in order to guide the servants of God hath been set forth and written down.

Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

7.17 Pioneering

They that have forsaken their country for the purpose of teaching Our Cause—these shall the Faithful Spirit strengthen through its power. A company of Our chosen angels shall go forth with them, as bidden by Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Wise. How great the blessedness that awaiteth him that hath attained the honour of serving the Almighty!

By My life! No act, however great, can compare with it, except such deeds as have been ordained by God, the All-Powerful, the Most Mighty. Such a service is, indeed, the prince of all goodly deeds, and the ornament of every goodly act.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLVII.

7.18 Arts and Music

In this Cause the art of music is of paramount importance. The Blessed Perfection, when He first came to the barracks (ʿAkká) repeated this statement: "If among the immediate followers there had been those who could have played some musical instrument, i.e., flute or harp, or could have sung, it would have charmed every one." In short, musical melodies form an important role in the associations, or outward and inward characteristics, or qualities of man, for it is the inspirer or motive power of both the material and spiritual susceptibilities. What a motive power it is in all feelings of love! When man is attached to the Love of God, music has a great effect upon him.

ʿAbdu'l-Bahá, in Music, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1421, pp. 77–78.

Shoghi Effendi was very much interested to learn of the success of the "Pageant of the Nations" you produced. He sincerely hopes that all those who attended it were inspired by the same spirit that animated you while arranging it.

It is through such presentations that we can arouse the interest of the greatest number of people in the spirit of the Cause. The day will come when the Cause will spread like wildfire when its spirit and teachings will be presented on the stage or in art and literature as a whole. Art can better awaken such noble sentiments than cold rationalizing, especially among the mass of the people.

We have to wait only a few years to see how the spirit breathed by Bahá'u'lláh will find expression in the work of the artists. What you and some other Bahá'ís are attempting are only faint rays that precede the effulgent light of a glorious morn. We cannot yet value the part the Cause is destined to play in the life of society. We have to give it time. The material this spirit has to mould is too crude and unworthy,

but it will at last give way and the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh will reveal itself in its full splendour.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Arts and Crafts,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 26, pp. 7–8.

7.19 Writing

If any man were to arise to defend, in his writings, the Cause of God against its assailants, such a man, however inconsiderable his share, shall be so honoured in the world to come that the Concourse on high would envy his glory. No pen can depict the loftiness of his station, neither can any tongue describe its splendour.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLIV.

At this early stage of the Cause all works by Bahá'ís which deal with the Faith, whether in the form of books, pamphlets, translations, poems, songs, radio and television scripts, films, recordings, etc. must be approved before submission for publication, whether to a Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í publisher. In the case of material for purely local consumption the competent authority is the Local Spiritual Assembly, otherwise the National Spiritual Assembly (through its Reviewing Committee) is the approving authority.

... this measure is both obligatory and temporary ...

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 1971, *Messages 1963–1986*,
paras. 94.3a–94.3b, pp. 185–186.

Bahá'í authors may submit their works for review to any National Spiritual Assembly, and may send their works, once approved, to any publisher they like, Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í, at home or abroad. It should be remembered, however, that the approval should be given by the National Spiritual Assembly of the country where the work is to be first published. And in the case of a non-Bahá'í publisher the author should insist on use of the system of transliteration at present used by the Faith for languages employing the Roman alphabet.

It is hoped that Bahá'í authors will provide a constant stream of new works. Introductory books, commentaries, dissertations on various aspects of the Revelation, text books, histories, reviews, audio-visual material are all needed to stimulate study of the Faith and to promote the vital teaching work.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 1971, *Messages 1963–1986*,
paras. 94.3p - 94.3q, p. 188.

7.20 Receive Declarations of Belief

The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the 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. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good; and whoso is deprived thereof hath gone astray, though he be the author of every righteous deed.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 1.

The Bahá'í Community shall consist of all persons recognized by the Universal House of Justice as possessing the qualifications of Bahá'í faith and practice.

The Universal House of Justice, *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice*, By-Laws, section I.

When enrolling new believers, we must be wise and gentle, and not place so many obstacles in their way that they feel it impossible to accept the Faith.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*.

The prime motive should always be the response of man to God's Message, and the recognition of His Messenger. Those who declare themselves as Bahá'ís should become enchanted with the beauty of the Teachings; and touched by the love of Bahá'u'lláh. The declarants need not know all the proofs, history, laws, and principles of the Faith, but in the process of declaring themselves they must, in addition to catching the spark of faith, become basically informed about the Central Figures of the Faith, as well as the existence of laws they must follow and an administration they must obey.

The Universal House of Justice, 13 July 1964, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 18.4, p. 39.

What one believes is an internal and personal matter, and it is not for any person or institution to insist upon what others should believe. Since there is a wide range of meanings in the Sacred Scriptures, there are bound to be different ways in which individuals understand many of the Bahá'í teachings. However, it is necessary for the viability of the Bahá'í community that its members share a common understanding of fundamentals. This implies a commitment by each member to function within the framework established by such an understanding.

This framework includes, for example, cognizance of the existence of a Divine Revelation brought by Bahá'u'lláh, the Manifestation of God for this age, and acceptance of the two primary duties prescribed by God, as expressed in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the Most Holy Book of the Bahá'í Revelation. These are: "recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws," and observance of "every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world." "These twin duties," the Aqdas firmly states, "are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other."

Furthermore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Whom Bahá'u'lláh appointed as the Interpreter of His writings, reaffirms these fundamentals of Bahá'í belief. In His Will and Testament

He writes: "This is the foundation of the belief of the people of Bahá (may my life be offered up for them): 'His Holiness, the Exalted One (the Báb), is the Manifestation of the Unity and Oneness of God and the Forerunner of the Ancient Beauty. His Holiness the Abhá Beauty (may my life be a sacrifice for His steadfast friends) is the Supreme Manifestation of God and the Dayspring of His Most Divine Essence. All others are servants unto Him and do His bidding.'"

It is within the context of these statements of basic belief that membership in the Bahá'í Faith is determined. Acknowledging that the matter of ascertaining the qualification of a true believer is a "delicate and complex question", Shoghi Effendi, the appointee of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as Guardian of the Cause and authorized interpreter of its teachings, set down for Spiritual Assembles the "principal factors that must be taken into consideration before deciding whether a person may be regarded as a true believer or not": "Full recognition of the station of the Forerunner, the Author, and the True Exemplar of the Bahá'í Cause, as set forth in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Testament; unreserved acceptance of, and submission to, whatsoever has been revealed by their Pen; loyal and steadfast adherence to every clause of our Beloved's sacred Will; and close association with the spirit as well as the form of the present day Bahá'í administration throughout the world."

Letter written on behalf of The Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 28 February 1997, extract provided.

7.21 Nurture and Accompany New Believers

Let him refrain, at the outset, from insisting on such laws and observances as might impose too severe a strain on the seeker's newly awakened faith, and endeavour to nurse him, patiently, tactfully, and yet determinedly, into full maturity, and aid him to proclaim his unqualified acceptance of whatever has been ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. Let him, as soon as that stage has been attained, introduce him to the body of his fellow-believers, and seek, through constant fellowship and active participation in the local activities of his community, to enable him to contribute his share to the enrichment of its life, the furtherance of its tasks, the consolidations of its interests, and the co-ordination of its activities with those of its sister communities. Let him not be content until he has infused into his spiritual child so deep a longing as to impel him to arise independently, in his turn, and devote his energies to the quickening of other souls, and the upholding of the laws and principles laid down by his newly-adopted Faith.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

7.22 Maintain Love and Unity in the Community

Too great emphasis cannot be laid on the importance of the unity of the friends, for only by manifesting the greatness of their love for and patience with each other can they hope to attract large numbers to their ranks.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Promoting Entry by Troops*, No. 8, p. 26.

The thing the world needs today is the Bahá'í spirit. People are craving for love, for a high standard to look up to, as well as for solutions to their many grave problems.

The Bahá'ís should shower on those whom they meet the warm and living spirit of the Cause, and this, combined with teaching, cannot but attract the sincere truth-seekers to the Faith.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1298, p. 12.

PART THREE

THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY AND ITS INSTITUTIONS

CHAPTER 8

BAHÁ'Í MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

Bahá'í Marriage
8.1 The Nature of Bahá'í Marriage 213
8.2 Laws of Bahá'í Marriage 214

The Marriage Relationship
8.3 Love 215
8.4 Equality and Mutual Respect 215
8.5 Chastity and Fidelity 216

The Bahá'í Family
8.6 Children and Family Planning 217
8.7 Family Roles, Relationships and Responsibilities 218
8.8 Prayers for Family Members 219

Rearing and Educating Children
8.9 Developing Spirituality 221
8.10 Moral Education 222
8.11 Fostering Learning 223

Work and Wise Financial Management
8.12 Pursuing a Beneficial Occupation 224
8.13 Wise Financial Management 224

Creating and Maintaining Family Harmony
8.14 Harmony in the Home 225
8.15 Consultation 227
8.16 Seeking Outside Help When Problems Threaten a Marriage 228
8.17 Divorce 229
8.18 The Year of Patience 229

Sexual Relationships
8.19 Legitimate Sexual relationships are Confined to Marriage 231
8.20 The Bahá'í Attitude to Same-Sex Relationships 232

Death, Burial and Inheritance

8.21 Wills 232
8.22 Bahá'í Burial 233

Bahá'í Marriage

8.1 The Nature of Bahá'í Marriage

Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, (The Most Holy Book)*, para. 63.

... man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty. Having attained the stage of fulfillment and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy in the estimation of men of wisdom...

Bahá'u'lláh, Ṭarázát (Ornaments), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart. Each must, however, exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever. Their purpose must be this: to become loving companions and comrades and at one with each other for time and eternity ...

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 86.

Marriage, among the mass of the people, is a physical bond, and this union can only be temporary, since it is foredoomed to a physical separation at the close.

Among the people of Bahá, however, marriage must be a union of the body and of the spirit as well, for here both husband and wife are aglow with the same wine, both are enamoured of the same matchless Face, both live and move through the same spirit, both are illumined by the same glory. This connection between them is a spiritual one, hence it is a bond that will abide forever. Likewise do they enjoy strong and lasting ties in the physical world as well, for if the marriage is based both on the spirit and the body, that union is a true one, hence it will endure. If, however, the bond is physical and nothing more, it is sure to be only temporary, and must inexorably end in separation.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 84.

There is no teaching in the Bahá'í Faith that "soul mates" exist. What is meant is that marriage should lead to a profound friendship of spirit, which will endure in the next world, where there is no sex, and no giving and taking in marriage; just the way we should establish with our parents, our children, our brothers and sisters and friends a deep spiritual bond which will be everlasting, and not merely physical bonds of human relationship.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Preserving Bahá'í Marriages, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2332, p. 452.

There is a difference between character and faith; it is often very hard to accept this fact and put up with it, but the fact remains that a person may believe in and love the Cause—even to being ready to die for it—and yet not have a good personal character, or possess traits at variance with the teachings. We should try to change, to let the Power of God help recreate us and make us true Bahá'ís in deed as well as in belief. But sometimes the process is slow, sometimes it never happens because the individual does not try hard enough.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Unfolding Destiny*

A couple should study each other's character and spend time getting to know each other before they decide to marry, and when they do marry it should be with the intention of establishing an eternal bond.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 1269, p. 380.

8.2 Laws of Bahá'í Marriage

And when He desired to manifest grace and beneficence to men, and to set the world in order, He revealed observances and created laws; among them He established the law of marriage, made it as a fortress for well-being and salvation, and enjoined it upon us in that which was sent down out of the heaven of sanctity in His Most Holy Book. He saith, great is His glory: "Marry, O people, that from you may appear he who will remember Me amongst My servants; this is one of My commandments unto you; obey it as an assistance to yourselves.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Bahá'í Prayers*.

The true marriage of Bahá'ís is this, that husband and wife should be united both physically and spiritually, that they may ever improve the spiritual life of each other, and may enjoy everlasting unity throughout all the worlds of God. This is Bahá'í marriage.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 86.

It hath been laid down ... that marriage is dependent upon the consent of both parties. Desiring to establish love, unity and harmony amidst Our servants, We have conditioned it, once the couple's wish is known, upon the permission of their parents, lest enmity and rancour should arise amongst them. And in this We have yet other purposes. Thus hath Our commandment been ordained.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 65.

As for the question regarding marriage under the Law of God: first thou must choose one who is pleasing to thee, and then the matter is subject to the consent of father and mother. Before thou makest thy choice, they have no right to interfere.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 85.

Bahá'u'lláh has clearly stated the consent of all living parents is required for a Bahá'í marriage. This applies whether the parents are Bahá'ís or non-Bahá'ís, divorced for years or not. This great law He has laid down to strengthen the social fabric, to knit closer the ties of the home, to place a certain gratitude and respect in the hearts of

children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator. We Bahá'ís must realize that in present-day society the exact opposite process is taking place: young people care less and less for their parents' wishes, divorce is considered a natural right, and obtained on the flimsiest and most unwarrantable and shabby pretexts. ... The Bahá'ís must, through rigid adherence to the Bahá'í laws and teachings, combat these corrosive forces which are so rapidly destroying home life and the beauty of family relationships, and tearing down the moral structure of society.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Family Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 892, p. 406.

... the bride and groom, before two witnesses, must state "We will all, verily, abide by the Will of God."

... The witnesses can be any two trustworthy people whose testimony is acceptable to the Spiritual Assembly under whose jurisdiction the marriage is performed.

The Universal House of Justice, *Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook*,
Nos. 10.6.1, 10.10.2, pp. 274, 282.

The Marriage Relationship

8.3 Love

O ye two believers in God! The Lord, peerless is He, hath made woman and man to abide with each other in the closest companionship, and to be even as a single soul. They are two helpmates, two intimate friends, who should be concerned about the welfare of each other.

If they live thus, they will pass through this world with perfect contentment, bliss, and peace of heart, and become the object of divine grace and favour in the Kingdom of heaven. But if they do other than this, they will live out their lives in great bitterness, longing at every moment for death, and will be shamefaced in the heavenly realm.

Strive, then, to abide, heart and soul, with each other as two doves in the nest, for this is to be blessed in both worlds.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 92.

8.4 Equality and Mutual Respect

All should know, and in this regard attain the splendours of the sun of certitude, and be illumined thereby: Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God. The Dawning-Place of the Light of God sheddeth its radiance

upon all with the same effulgence. Verily God created women for men, and men for women. The most beloved of people before God are the most steadfast and those who have surpassed others in their love for God, exalted be His glory ....

The friends of God must be adorned with the ornament of justice, equity, kindness and love. As they do not allow themselves to be the object of cruelty and transgression, in like manner they should not allow such tyranny to visit the handmaidens of God. He, verily, speaketh the truth and commandeth that which benefitteth His servants and handmaidens. He is the Protector of all in this world and the next.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Women, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2145, p. 379.

The happiness of mankind will be realized when women and men co-ordinate and advance equally, for each is the complement and helpmeet of the other.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 9 June 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

According to the spirit of this age, women must advance and fulfill their mission in all departments of life, becoming equal to men. They must be on the same level as men and enjoy equal rights. This is my earnest prayer and it is one of the fundamental principles of Bahá'u'lláh.

Words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, reported by J. E. Esselmont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*.

It is also evident from Bahá'í teachings that no husband should subject his wife to abuse of any kind, and that such a reprehensible action is the antithesis of the relationship of mutual respect and equality enjoined by the Bahá'í writings—a relationship governed by the principles of consultation and devoid of the use of force to compel obedience to one's will.

The Universal House of Justice, 22 July 1987, in Women,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 2344, p. 458.

8.5 Chastity and Fidelity

Let your eye be chaste, your hand faithful, your tongue truthful and your heart enlightened.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ-i-Ḥikma*t (Tablet of Wisdom), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

It is clear that the Bahá'í teachings call for an absolute standard of fidelity in the relationship between husband and wife. An excerpt from a letter dated 28 September 1941 to an individual believer written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, quoted in "Messages from The Universal House of Justice, 1968–1973", page 108, states:

The question you raise as to the place in one's life that a deep bond of love with someone we meet other than our husband or wife can have is easily defined in view of the teachings. Chastity implies both before and after marriage an unsullied, chaste sex life. Before marriage absolutely chaste, after marriage absolutely faithful to one's chosen companion. Faithful in all sexual acts, faithful in word and in deed.

The Universal House of Justice, 22 July 1987, in Women,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 2344, p. 458.

The Bahá'í Family

8.6 Children and Family Planning

As to thy question concerning the husband and wife, the tie between them and the children given to them by God: Know thou, verily, the husband is one who hath sincerely turned unto God, is awakened by the call of the Beauty of El-Bahá and chanteth the verses of Oneness in the great assemblies; the wife is a being who wisheth to be overflowing with and seeketh after the attributes of God and His names; and the tie between them is none other than the Word of God. Verily, it [the Word of God] causeth the multitudes to assemble together and the remote ones to be united. Thus the husband and wife are brought into affinity, are united and harmonized, even as though they were one person. Through their mutual union, companionship and love great results are produced in the world, both material and spiritual. The spiritual result is the appearance of divine bounties.

The material result is the children who are born in the cradle of the love of God, who are nurtured by the breast of the knowledge of God, who are brought up in the bosom of the gift of God, and who are fostered in the lap of the training of God. Such children are those of whom it was said by Christ, "Verily, they are the children of the Kingdom!"

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Family Life, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 839, pp. 390-391.

... it was for the husband and wife to decide how many children they would have. A decision to have no children at all would vitiate the primary purpose of marriage unless, of course, there were some medical reason why such a decision would be required.

The Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 1163, p. 347.

As you know, abortion and irreversible surgical operations for the purpose of preventing the birth of unwanted children are forbidden in the Cause unless there are circumstances which justify such actions on medical grounds, in which case the decision, at present, is left to the consciences of those concerned who must carefully weigh the medical advice in the light of the general guidance given in the Teachings. Although the primary purpose of marriage is, as Bahá'u'lláh indicates, the procreation of children, this is not the only purpose of marriage; it would be entirely permissible for a Bahá'í couple to use birth-control methods, provided they do not choose a method which has the effect of aborting the fertilized ovum after conception has taken place.

The Universal House of Justice, 11 January 1988, to an individual believer, extract provided.

8.7 Family Roles, Relationships and Responsibilities

The fruits that best befit the tree of human life are trustworthiness and godliness, truthfulness and sincerity; but greater than all, after recognition of the unity of God, praised and glorified be He, is regard for the rights that are due to one's parents. This teaching hath been mentioned in all the Books of God, and reaffirmed by the Most Exalted Pen.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), Questions and Answers, No. 106.

Beware lest ye commit that which would sadden the hearts of your fathers and mothers. ... Should anyone give you a choice between the opportunity to render a service to Me and a service to them, choose ye to serve them, and let such service be a path leading you to Me.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Family Life, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 824, p. 387.

Unto every father hath been enjoined the instruction of his son and daughter in the art of reading and writing and in all that hath been laid down in the Holy Tablet. He that putteth away that which is commanded unto him, the Trustees are then to take from him that which is required for their instruction if he be wealthy and, if not, the matter devolveth upon the House of Justice. Verily have We made it a shelter for the poor and needy. He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My glory, My loving-kindness, My mercy, that have compassed the world.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 48.

If love and agreement are manifest in a single family, that family will advance, become illumined and spiritual ...

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 25 May 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

According to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the family, being a human unit, must be educated according to the rules of sanctity. All the virtues must be taught the family. The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honour of one, the honour of all.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 2 June 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

The mother is the first teacher of the child. For children, at the beginning of life, are fresh and tender as a young twig, and can be trained in any fashion you desire. If you rear the child to be straight, he will grow straight, in perfect symmetry. It is clear that the mother is the first teacher and that it is she who establisheth the character and conduct of the child.

Wherefore, O ye loving mothers, know ye that in God's sight, the best of all ways to worship Him is to educate the children and train them in all the perfections of humankind; and no nobler deed than this can be imagined.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Bahá'í Education, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 639, pp. 288–289.

No less pertinent to the success of the Bahá'í enterprise today are the Guardian's forthright comments on the importance of a chaste and holy life, "with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness". He was unequivocal in his language, summoning the friends to a life unsullied "by the indecencies, the vices, the false standards, which an inherently deficient moral code tolerates, perpetuates, and fosters". We need not provide for you here evidence of the influence that such a deficient code now exerts on humanity as a whole; even the remotest spots on the globe are captivated by its enticements. Yet we feel compelled to mention a few points related specifically to the theme of purity. The forces at work on the hearts and minds of the young, to whom the Guardian directed his appeal most fervently, are pernicious indeed. Exhortations to remain pure and chaste will only succeed to a limited degree in helping them to resist these forces. What needs to be appreciated in this respect is the extent to which young minds are affected by the choices parents make for their own lives, when, no matter how unintentionally, no matter how innocently, such choices condone the passions of the world—its admiration for power, its adoration of status, its love of luxuries, its attachment to frivolous pursuits, its glorification of violence, and its obsession with self-gratification. It must be realized that the isolation and despair from which so many suffer are products of an environment ruled by an all-pervasive materialism. And in this the friends must understand the ramifications of Bahá'u'lláh's statement that "the present-day order" must "be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead." Throughout the world today, young people are among the most enthusiastic supporters of the Plan and the most ardent champions of the Cause; their numbers will, we are certain, increase from year to year. May every one of them come to know the bounties of a life adorned with purity and learn to draw on the powers that flow through pure channels.

The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010.

8.8 Prayers for Family Members

Thou seest, O Lord, our suppliant hands lifted up towards the heaven of Thy favour and bounty. Grant that they may be filled with the treasures of Thy munificence and bountiful favour. Forgive us, and our fathers and our mothers, and fulfill whatsoever we have desired from the ocean of Thy grace and Divine generosity. Accept, O Beloved of our hearts, all our works in Thy path. Thou art, verily, the Most Powerful, the Most Exalted, the Incomparable, the One, the Forgiving, the Gracious.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXVIII.

It is seemly that the servant should, after each prayer, supplicate God to bestow mercy and forgiveness upon his parents. Thereupon God's call will be raised:

"Thousand upon thousand of what thou hast asked for thy parents shall be thy recompense!" Blessed is he who remembereth his parents when communing with God. There is, verily, no God but Him, the Mighty, the Well-Beloved.

The Báb, Excerpts from the Persian Bayán, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb.*

Glory be unto Thee, O my God! Verily, this Thy servant and this Thy maid-servant have gathered under the shadow of Thy mercy and they are united through Thy favour and generosity. O Lord! Assist them in this Thy world and Thy Kingdom and destine for them every good through Thy bounty and grace. O Lord! Confirm them in Thy servitude and assist them in Thy service. Suffer them to become the signs of Thy Name in Thy world and protect them through Thy bestowals, which are inexhaustible in this world and in the world to come. O Lord! They are supplicating the kingdom of Thy mercifulness and invoking the realm of Thy singleness. Verily they are married in obedience to Thy command. Cause them to become the signs of harmony and unity until the end of time. Verily, Thou art the Omnipotent, the Omnipresent and the Almighty!

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Prayers.*

O Thou kind Lord! These lovely children are the handiwork of the fingers of Thy might and the wondrous signs of Thy greatness. O God! Protect these children, graciously assist them to be educated and enable them to render service to the world of humanity. O God! These children are pearls, cause them to be nurtured within the shell of Thy loving-kindness. Thou art the Bountiful, the All-Loving.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Prayers.*

O Thou most glorious Lord! Make this little maidservant of Thine blessed and happy; cause her to be cherished at the threshold of Thy oneness and let her drink deep from the cup of Thy love so that she may be filled with rapture and ecstasy and diffuse sweet-scented fragrance. Thou art the Mighty and the Powerful, and Thou art the All-Knowing, the All-Seeing.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Prayers.*

O Lord! Make this youth radiant, and confer Thy bounty upon this poor creature. Bestow upon him knowledge, grant him added strength at the break of every morn and guard him within the shelter of Thy protection so that he may be freed from error, may devote himself to the service of Thy Cause, may guide the wayward, lead the hapless, free the captives and awaken the heedless, that all may be blessed with Thy remembrance and praise. Thou art the Mighty and the Powerful.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Prayers.*

Oh God, guide me, protect me, make of me a shining lamp and a brilliant star. Thou art the mighty and powerful.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Prayers.*

Rearing and Educating Children[1]

8.9 Developing Spirituality

Strain every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections, for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both within and without. It is not desirable that a man be left without knowledge or skills, for he is then but a barren tree. Then, so much as capacity and capability allow, ye needs must deck the tree of being with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception and eloquent speech.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Bahá'í Education, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, 560, p. 247.

Teach ye your children the verses that have been divinely revealed, that they may recite them in most melodious voices. This is what hath been set down in His mighty book.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Bahá'í Education, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 572, p. 250.

... from the very beginning, the children must receive divine education and must continually be reminded to remember their God. Let the love of God pervade their inmost being, commingled with their mother's milk.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 99.

It is the hope of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that those youthful souls in the schoolroom of the deeper knowledge will be tended by one who traineth them to love.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 107.

Through the power and charm of music the spirit of man is uplifted. It has wonderful sway and effect in the hearts of children, for their hearts are pure, and melodies have great influence in them.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 24 April 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

From their childhood instil in their hearts the love of God so they may manifest in their lives the fear of God and have confidence in the bestowals of God.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 24 April 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

And now we wish to address a few words to parents who bear the primary responsibility for the upbringing of their children. We appeal to them to give constant attention to the spiritual education of their children. Some parents appear to think that this is the exclusive responsibility of the community; others believe that in order to preserve the independence of children to investigate truth, the Faith

[1] *See also 10.5-10.6, 11.9-11.10*

should not be taught to them. Still others feel inadequate to take on such a task. None of this is correct. The beloved Master has said that "it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son," adding that, "should they neglect this matter, they shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord." Independent of the level of their education, parents are in a critical position to shape the spiritual development of their children. They should not ever underestimate their capacity to mould their children's moral character. For they exercise indispensable influence through the home environment they consciously create by their love of God, their striving to adhere to His laws, their spirit of service to His Cause, their lack of fanaticism, and their freedom from the corrosive effects of backbiting. Every parent who is a believer in the Blessed Beauty has the responsibility to conduct herself or himself in such a way as to elicit the spontaneous obedience to parents to which the Teachings attach so high a value. Of course, in addition to the efforts made at home, the parents should support Bahá'í children's classes provided by the community. It must be borne in mind, too, that children live in a world that informs them of harsh realities through direct experience with the horrors already described or through the unavoidable outpourings of the mass media. Many of them are thereby forced to mature prematurely, and among these are those who look for standards and discipline by which to guide their lives. Against this gloomy backdrop of a decadent society, Bahá'í children should shine as the emblems of a better future.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2000.

8.10 Moral Education

That which is of paramount importance for the children, that which must precede all else, is to teach them the oneness of God and the Laws of God. ...

The parents must exert every effort to rear their offspring to be religious, for should the children not attain this greatest of adornments, they will not obey their parents, which in a certain sense means they will not obey God.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Bahá'í Education, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 565, p. 248.

Among the greatest of all services that can possibly be rendered by man to Almighty God is the education and training of children...

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 198.

He [the child] should be trained, his natural inclinations harmonized, adjusted and controlled, and if necessary suppressed or regulated, so as to ensure his healthy physical and moral development.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Bahá'í Education, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 673, p. 303.

Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible to

strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 95.

The child must not be oppressed or censured because it is undeveloped; it must be patiently trained.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 9 June 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

The children must be carefully trained to be most courteous and well-behaved.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 110.

8.11 Fostering Learning

Encourage the children from their earliest years to master every kind of learning, and make them eager to become skilled in every art—the aim being that through the favouring grace of God, the heart of each one may become even as a mirror disclosing the secrets of the universe, penetrating the innermost reality of all things; and that each may earn world-wide fame in all branches of knowledge, science and the arts.

Certainly, certainly, neglect not the education of the children. Rear them to be possessed of spiritual qualities, and be assured of the gifts and favours of the Lord.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Bahá'í Education, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 601, pp. 267–268.

It is for this reason that, in this new cycle, education and training are recorded in the Book of God as obligatory and not voluntary. That is, it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son, to nurse them from the breast of knowledge and to rear them in the bosom of sciences and arts. Should they neglect this matter, they shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 98.

I hope thou wilt acquire great proficiency in writing literature, composition, eloquence of tongue and fluency of speech … becoming an esteemed servant in the Threshold of Oneness and partaking of a share of the heavenly gifts, and progressing day by day until thou attain to the apex of the excellencies of this human world.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, Vol. III.

… consider how much the art of music is admired and praised. Try, if thou canst, to use spiritual melodies, songs and tunes, and to bring the earthly music into harmony with the celestial melody. Then thou wilt notice what a great influence music hath and what heavenly joy and life it conferreth.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Music, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1419, p. 76.

Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 102.

Work and Wise Financial Management

8.12 Pursuing a Beneficial Occupation

It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like. We have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship unto God, the True One. Ponder ye in your hearts the grace and the blessings of God and render thanks unto Him at eventide and at dawn. Waste not your time in idleness and sloth. Occupy yourselves with that which profiteth yourselves and others. Thus hath it been decreed in this Tablet from whose horizon the daystar of wisdom and utterance shineth resplendent.

Bahá'u'lláh, Bishárát (Glad-Tidings), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

"Every person must have an occupation, a trade or a craft," explains the Master, "so that he may carry other people's burdens, and not himself be a burden to others." The poor are urged by Bahá'u'lláh to "exert themselves and strive to earn the means of livelihood", while they who are possessed of riches "must have the utmost regard for the poor". "Wealth", 'Abdu'l-Bahá has affirmed, "is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes." At the same time, the *Hidden Words* is replete with warnings of its perilous allure, that wealth is a "mighty barrier" between the believer and the proper Object of his adoration.

The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1 March 2017.

8.13 Wise Financial Management

The first Ṭaráz and the first effulgence which hath dawned from the horizon of the Mother Book is that man should know his own self and recognize that which leadeth unto loftiness or lowliness, glory or abasement, wealth or poverty. Having attained the stage of fulfillment and reached his maturity, man standeth in need of wealth, and such wealth as he acquireth through crafts or professions is commendable and praiseworthy in the estimation of men of wisdom, and especially in the eyes of servants who dedicate themselves to the education of the world and to the edification of its peoples.

Bahá'u'lláh, Ṭarázát (Ornaments), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

O MY SERVANT!

The best of men are they that earn a livelihood by their calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God, the Lord of all worlds.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 82.

O YE RICH ONES ON EARTH!

The poor in your midst are My trust; guard ye My trust, and be not intent only on your own ease.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Persian, No. 54.

Every choice a Bahá'í makes—as employee or employer, producer or consumer, borrower or lender, benefactor or beneficiary—leaves a trace, and the moral duty to lead a coherent life demands that one's economic decisions be in accordance with lofty ideals, that the purity of one's aims be matched by the purity of one's actions to fulfill those aims. Naturally, the friends habitually look to the teachings to set the standard to which to aspire. But the community's deepening engagement with society means that the economic dimension of social existence must receive ever more concentrated attention. Particularly in clusters where the community-building process is beginning to embrace large numbers, the exhortations contained in the Bahá'í Writings should increasingly inform economic relationships within families, neighbourhoods, and peoples.

... Examining one's life to determine what is a necessity and then discharging with joy one's obligation in relation to the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is an indispensable discipline to bring one's priorities into balance, purify whatever wealth one possesses, and ensure that the share which is the Right of God provides for the greater good. At all times, contentment and moderation, benevolence and fellow feeling, sacrifice and reliance on the Almighty are qualities that befit the God-fearing soul.

The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World, 1 March 2017.

Creating and Maintaining Family Harmony

8.14 Harmony in the Home

My home is the home of peace. My home is the home of joy and delight. My home is the home of laughter and exultation. Whosoever enters through the portals of this home, must go out with gladsome heart. This is the home of light; whosoever enters here must become illumined ...

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Family Life, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 859, p. 397.

It is highly important for man to raise a family. So long as he is young, because of youthful self-complacency, he does not realize its significance, but this will be a source of regret when he grows old ... In this glorious Cause the life of a married couple should resemble the life of the angels in heaven—a life full of joy and spiritual delight, a life of unity and concord, a friendship both mental and physical. The home should be orderly and well-organized. Their ideas and thoughts should be like the rays of the sun of truth and the radiance of the brilliant stars in the heavens. Even as two birds they should warble melodies upon the branches of the tree of fellowship and harmony. They should always be elated with joy and gladness and be a source of happiness to the hearts of others. They should set an example to their fellow-men, manifest a true and sincere love towards each other and educate their children in such a manner as to blazon the fame and glory of their family.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Family Life, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 860, p. 397.

Surely Shoghi Effendi would like to see you and the other friends give their whole time and energy to the Cause, for we are in great need for competent workers, but the home is an institution that Bahá'u'lláh has come to strengthen and not to weaken. Many unfortunate things have happened in Bahá'í homes just for neglecting this point. Serve the Cause but also remember your duties towards your home. It is for you to find the balance and see that neither makes you neglect the other.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Family Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 865, p. 399.

The members of a family all have duties and responsibilities towards one another and to the family as a whole, and these duties and responsibilities vary from member to member because of their natural relationships.

The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 1980, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 272.4, p. 471.

In considering the problems that you and your wife are experiencing, the House of Justice points out that the unity of your family should take priority over any other consideration. ... For example, service to the Cause should not produce neglect of the family. It is important for you to arrange your time so that your family life is harmonious and your household receives the attention it requires.

The Universal House of Justice, 1 August 1978, in Family Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 914, p. 412.

You ask how to deal with anger. The House of Justice suggests that you call to mind the admonitions found in our Writings on the need to overlook the shortcomings of others; to forgive and conceal their misdeeds, not to expose their bad qualities, but to search for and affirm their praiseworthy ones, and to endeavour to be always forbearing, patient, and merciful. Such passages as the following extracts from letters written on behalf of the beloved Guardian will be helpful:

There are qualities in everyone which we can appreciate and admire, and for which we can love them; and perhaps, if you determine to think only of these qualities which your husband possesses, this will help to improve the situation ... You should turn your thoughts away from the things which upset you, and constantly pray to Bahá'u'lláh to help you. Then you will find how that pure love, enkindled by God,

which burns in the soul when we read and study the Teachings, will warm and heal, more than anything else. Each of us is responsible for one life only, and that is our own. Each of us is immeasurably far from being "perfect as our heavenly father is perfect" and the task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will-power and energy ...

The Universal House of Justice, 17 July 1979, in Preserving Bahá'í Marriages, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2339, p. 455.

8.15 Consultation

The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrances, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold. Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Bahá shall be vouchsafed to them.

The members thereof must take counsel together in such wise that no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed. The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, Nos. 43–44.

They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 45.

... if such differences do occur, they should not reach the point of causing conflict, hatred and antagonism ... you should immediately postpone discussion of the subject, until wranglings, disputations, and loud talk vanish, and a propitious time is at hand.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Consultation, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 184, p. 98.

Bahá'u'lláh also stressed the importance of consultation. We should not think this worthwhile method of seeking solutions is confined to the administrative institutions of the Cause. Family consultation employing full and frank discussion, and animated by awareness of the need for moderation and balance, can be the panacea for domestic conflict. Wives should not attempt to dominate their husbands, nor husbands their wives ...

The Universal House of Justice, 1 August 1978, in Preserving Bahá'í Marriages, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2336, p. 453.

In any group, however loving the consultation, there are nevertheless points on which, from time to time, agreement cannot be reached. In a Spiritual Assembly this dilemma is resolved by a majority vote. There can, however, be no majority

where only two parties are involved, as in the case of a husband and wife. There are, therefore, times when a wife should defer to her husband, and times when a husband should defer to his wife, but neither should ever unjustly dominate the other.

The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 1980, in Family Life, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 916, p. 415.

You have asked, however, for specific rules of conduct to govern the relationships of husbands and wives. This the House of Justice does not wish to do, and it feels that there is already adequate guidance included in the compilation on this subject; for example, the principle that the rights of each and all in the family unit must be upheld, and the advice that loving consultation should be the keynote, that all matters must be settled in harmony and love, and that there are times when the husband and wife should defer to the wishes of the other. Exactly under what circumstances such deference should take place is a matter for each couple to determine.

The Universal House of Justice, 16 May 1982, in Preserving Bahá'í Marriages, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2341, p. 456.

Bahá'ís should be profoundly aware of the sanctity of marriage and should strive to make their marriages an eternal bond of unity and harmony. This requires effort and sacrifice and wisdom and self-abnegation.

The Universal House of Justice, 3 November 1982, in Preserving Bahá'í Marriages, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2342, p. 457.

8.16 Seeking Outside Help When Problems Threaten a Marriage

It is a great pity that two believers … should not be able to live together really harmoniously, and he feels you should take constructive action and not allow the situation to get worse. When the shadow of separation hangs over a husband and wife they should leave no stone unturned in their effort to avert its becoming a reality.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Preserving Bahá'í Marriages, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2329, p. 451.

… no husband should subject his wife to abuse of any kind, whether emotional, mental or physical …

When a Bahá'í wife finds herself in such a situation and feels it cannot be resolved through consultation with her husband, she could well turn to the Local Spiritual Assembly for advice and guidance, and might also find it highly advantageous to seek the assistance of competent professional counsellors. If the husband is also a Bahá'í, the Local Spiritual Assembly can bring to his attention the need to avoid abusive behaviour and can, if necessary, take firm measures to encourage him to conform to the admonitions of the teachings.

The Universal House of Justice, 6 August 1989, in Preserving Bahá'í Marriages, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2347, p. 459.

The House of Justice is distressed to learn that you and your husband are continuing to experience marital difficulties. It has frequently advised believers in such situations to turn to the Spiritual Assemblies for advice and counsel, and to

follow this advice in their efforts to preserve the unity for their marital relationship. It has been found useful in many instances to also seek the assistance of competent professional marriage counsellors, who can provide useful insights and guidance in the use of constructive measures to bring about a greater degree of unity.

The Universal House of Justice, 17 July 1989, in Preserving Bahá'í Marriages, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2346, p. 459.

8.17 Divorce

Truly, the Lord loveth union and harmony and abhorreth separation and divorce. Live ye one with another, O people, in radiance and joy. By My life! All that are on earth shall pass away, while good deeds alone shall endure; to the truth of My words God doth Himself bear witness. Compose your differences, O My servants; then heed ye the admonition of Our Pen of Glory and follow not the arrogant and wayward.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 70.

For while, according to the Bahá'í law, divorce is permissible, yet it is highly discouraged, and should be resorted to only when every effort to prevent it has proved to be vain and ineffective.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Divorce, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 536, p. 239.

Regarding the Bahá'í Teachings on divorce. While the latter has been made permissible by Bahá'u'lláh yet He has strongly discouraged its practice, for if not checked and seriously controlled it leads gradually to the disruption of family life and to the disintegration of society.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 16 November, 1936, *Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook*, No. 12.1.2, p. 360.

He feels that you should by all means make every effort to hold your marriage together, especially for the sake of your children, who, like all children of divorced parents, cannot but suffer from conflicting loyalties, for they are deprived of the blessings of a father and mother in one home, to look after their interests and love them jointly.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Preserving Bahá'í Marriages, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2331, p. 452.

8.18 The Year of Patience

If, however, antipathy or resentment develop between the marriage partners, divorce is permissible after the lapse of one full year. During this year of patience, the husband is obliged to provide for the financial support of his wife and children, and the couple is urged to reconcile their differences.

The Universal House of Justice (Ed.), *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), Notes No.100.

The Bahá'í Law, requires that the parties separate for one full year before the divorce may be realized. This contemplates complete physical separation in the sense that they should not reside in the same dwelling.

The Universal House of Justice, *Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook*, No. 12.3.4, p. 365.

In the strict legal sense there are no 'grounds' for a Bahá'í divorce. No question of misbehaviour of either party is involved and the only condition under which a Bahá'í divorce may be considered is the irreconcilable antipathy of the parties.

The Universal House of Justice, *Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook*, No. 12.2.4, p. 362.

Either party may apply for the year of waiting without the consent of the other.

The Universal House of Justice, *Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook*, No. 12.2.3, p. 362.

... Bahá'ís who apply for divorce should be so counselled and left in no doubt that it is the duty of the Spiritual Assembly concerned, according to the emphatic command of our Scripture, to do everything possible to bring about a reconciliation.

The Universal House of Justice, *Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook*, No. 12.2.4, p. 362.

Irreconcilable antipathy arising between the parties to a marriage is not merely a lack of love for one's spouse but an antipathy which cannot be resolved.

The Universal House of Justice, *Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook*, No. 12.2.4, p. 363.

... if the Assembly finds that it is unable to persuade the party concerned to withdraw the application for divorce, it must conclude that, from its point of view, there appears to be an irreconcilable antipathy, and it has no alternative to setting the date for the beginning of the year of waiting.

The Universal House of Justice, *Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook*, No. 12.2.4, p. 364.

One party to a divorce, acting alone, cannot petition for a termination of the year of waiting.

The Universal House of Justice, *Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook*, No. 12.3.13, p. 367.

... if, at the end of the year, harmony is not established, the Bahá'í divorce becomes effective, unless further waiting is necessary before the civil divorce is granted since the Bahá'í divorce cannot be granted before the civil divorce is finalized. Other than this, there is no possibility for extending the period of waiting. Moreover, Bahá'ís should not prolong the process longer than is necessary.

The Universal House of Justice, *Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook*, No. 12.3.12, p. 367.

Sexual Relationships

8.19 Legitimate Sexual Relationships are Confined to Marriage

Enter ye into wedlock, that after you another may arise in your stead. We, verily, have forbidden you lechery, and not that which is conducive to fidelity... But for man, who, on My earth, would remember Me, and how could My attributes and My names be revealed?

Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf.*

Concerning your question whether there are any legitimate forms of expression of the sex instinct outside of marriage; according to the Bahá'í Teachings no sexual act can be considered lawful unless performed between lawfully married persons. Outside of marital life there can be no lawful or healthy use of the sex impulse. The Bahá'í youth should, on the one hand, be taught the lesson of self-control which, when exercised, undoubtedly has a salutary effect on the development of character and of personality in general, and on the other should be advised, nay even encouraged, to contract marriage while still young and in full possession of their physical vigour. Economic factors, no doubt, are often a serious hindrance to early marriage, but in most cases are only an excuse, and as such should not be overstressed.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in A Chaste and Holy Life, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 146, p. 56.

The standard inculcated by Bahá'u'lláh seeks, under no circumstances, to deny anyone the legitimate right and privilege to derive the fullest advantage and benefit from the manifold joys, beauties, and pleasures with which the world has been so plentifully enriched by an All-Loving Creator. "*Should a man,*" Bahá'u'lláh Himself reassures us, "*wish to adorn himself with the ornaments of the earth, to wear its apparels, or partake of the benefits it can bestow, no harm can befall him, if he alloweth nothing whatever to intervene between him and God, for God hath ordained every good thing, whether created in the heavens or in the earth, for such of His servants as truly believe in Him...*"

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice.*

Concerning the positive aspects of chastity, the Universal House of Justice states that the Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse and holds that the institution of marriage has been established as the channel of its rightful expression. Bahá'ís do not believe that the sex impulse should be suppressed but that it should be regulated and controlled.

Chastity in no way implies a withdrawal from human relationships. It liberates people from the tyranny of the ubiquity of sex. A person who is in control of his sexual impulses is enabled to have profound and enduring friendships with many people, both men and women...

The Universal House of Justice, 8 May 1979, *Messages 1963-1986*, paras.224.4 & 224.5, p. 413.

8.20 The Bahá'í Attitude to Same-Sex Relationships

The purpose of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh is the realization of the organic unity of the entire human race, and Bahá'ís are enjoined to eliminate from their lives all forms of prejudice and to manifest respect towards all. Therefore, to regard those with a homosexual orientation with prejudice or disdain would be against the spirit of the Faith. Furthermore, a Bahá'í is exhorted to be "an upholder and defender of the victim of oppression", and it would be entirely appropriate for a believer to come to the defense of those whose fundamental rights are being denied or violated.

At the same time, you are no doubt aware of the relevant teachings of the Faith that govern the personal conduct of Bahá'ís. The Bahá'í Writings state that marriage is a union between a man and a woman and that sexual relations are restricted to a couple who are married to each other. Other passages from the Writings state that the practice of homosexuality is not permitted. The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh on personal morality are binding on Bahá'ís, who strive, as best they can, to live up to the high standards He has established.

In attempting to reconcile what may appear to be conflicting obligations, it is important to understand that the Bahá'í community does not seek to impose its values on others, nor does it pass judgment on others on the basis of its own moral standards. It does not see itself as one among competing social groups and organizations, each vying to establish its particular social agenda. In working for social justice, Bahá'ís must inevitably distinguish between those dimensions of public issues that are in keeping with the Bahá'í Teachings, which they can actively support, and those that are not, which they would neither promote nor necessarily oppose. In connection with issues of concern to homosexuals, the former would be freedom from discrimination and the latter the opportunity for civil marriage. Such distinctions are unavoidable when addressing any social issue. For example, Bahá'ís actively work for the establishment of world peace but, in the process, do not engage in partisan political activities directed against particular governments.

The Universal House of Justice, 27 October 2010, to an individual believer, extract provided.

Death, Burial and Inheritance

8.21 Wills

According to the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, the making of a will is essentially an obligation of the individual Bahá'í. Each believer is free to dispose of his estate

in whatever manner he chooses, within the limits imposed by civil law and after payment of burial expenses and other debts and obligations.

The Universal House of Justice, 1 October, 1980,
Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook, No. 13.1.4, p. 384.

The Bahá'í laws of inheritance apply only in case of intestacy, that is, when the individual dies without leaving a will. In *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh instructs every believer to write a will. He elsewhere clearly states that the individual has full jurisdiction over his property and is free to determine the manner in which his or her estate is to be divided and to designate, in the will, those, whether Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í, who should inherit. In this connection, a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi explains that:

... even though a Bahá'í is permitted in his will to dispose of his wealth in the way he wishes, yet he is morally and conscientiously bound to always bear in mind, while writing his will, the necessity of his upholding the principle of Bahá'u'lláh regarding the social function of wealth, and the consequent necessity of avoiding its over-accumulation and concentration in a few individuals or groups of individuals.

The Universal House of Justice (Ed.), *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), Notes No. 38.

The civil law in relation to the making of wills is sometimes quite complex. It is, therefore, highly advisable for an individual to consult a lawyer when he makes his will to ensure that his intention is not nullified by some possible breach of the requirements of the law in the drawing up or execution of the will.

The Universal House of Justice, *Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook*, No. 13.1.7, p. 384.

The friends should be strongly advised to make wills specifying that they want their funerals to be conducted under the auspices of the Bahá'í Faith or at least in conformity with its requirements and they should make this known both to the Local Spiritual Assembly and to their own relatives, while they are still alive. In this way it is quite possible that agreements may be reached with non-Bahá'í relatives, before death takes place.

The Universal House of Justice, *Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook*, No. 13.1.11, p. 386.

8.22 Bahá'í Burial

In brief, the Bahá'í law for the burial of the dead states that it is forbidden to carry the body for more than one hour's journey from the place of death; that the body should be wrapped in a shroud of white silk or cotton, and on its finger should be placed a ring bearing the inscription "*I came forth from God, and return unto Him, detached from all save Him, holding fast to His Name, the Merciful, the Compassionate*"; and that the coffin should be of crystal, stone or hard fine wood. A specific Prayer for the Dead is ordained, to be said before interment. As affirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian, this law precludes cremation of the dead. The formal prayer and the ring are meant to be used for those who have attained the age of maturity ....

The Universal House of Justice (Ed.), *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), Notes No. 149.

For the burial of the dead the only requirements now binding in the West are to bury the body (not to cremate it), not to carry it more than a distance of one hour's

journey from the place of death, and to say the Prayer for the Dead if the deceased is a believer over the age of 15.

The Universal House of Justice, 9 June 1974, in Bahá'í Burial,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 39, p. 12.

Regarding the Bahá'í funeral service: it is extremely simple, as it consists only of a congregational prayer to be read before burial. ... your National Spiritual Assembly should take great care lest any uniform procedure or ritual in this matter be adopted or imposed upon the friends. The danger in this, as in some other cases regarding Bahá'í worship, is that a definite system of rigid rituals and practices be developed among the believers. The utmost simplicity and flexibility should be observed, and a selection from the Bahá'í Sacred Writing[s] should serve the purpose at the present time, provided this selection is not rigidly and uniformly adopted on all such occasions.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, No. 85.

The Prayer for the Dead is ... the only Bahá'í obligatory prayer which is to be recited in congregation; it is to be recited by one believer while all present stand in silence ... there is no requirement to face the Qiblih when reciting this prayer.

The Universal House of Justice (Ed.), *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), Notes No. 10.

As a funeral is not a legal ceremony ... the family of the deceased may want some particular Bahá'í friend to officiate.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, No. 121.

CHAPTER 9

THE BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER:

THE PRIMARY AGENCY FOR SPIRITUAL & SOCIAL CHANGE

The Nature of the Bahá'í Administrative Order

9.1 Its Principal Institutions 237
9.2 Its Animating Purpose 237
9.3 Its Source and Foundation 237
9.4 Abolition of a Professional Clergy and Leadership 238
9.5 The Distinctive Character of the Bahá'í Administrative Order 239

The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice

9.6 Their Authority and Infallible Guidance 241
9.7 Appointment of Shoghi Effendi as Guardian 242
9.8 Events Following the Passing of Shoghi Effendi 242
9.9 The Universal House Of Justice 243
9.10 Election of The Universal House of Justice 244
9.11 Signature of The Universal House of Justice 245
9.12 The Bahá'í International Community 246

The Hands of the Cause of God, Boards of Counsellors and Auxiliary Boards

9.13 The Institution of the Learned 246
9.14 The Hands of the Cause of God 247
9.15 The International Teaching Centre 248
9.16 The Continental Boards of Counsellors 249
9.17 The Auxiliary Boards 252
9.18 Assistants to Auxiliary Board Members 254

National Institutions of the Faith

9.19 The National Spiritual Assembly 254
9.20 National and Unit Conventions 258
9.21 National Committees and Agencies 261

Regional Agencies

9.22 Regional Bahá'í Councils 261
9.23 Regional Teaching Institutes 263

The Local Spiritual Assembly

9.24 The Establishment of Local Spiritual Assemblies 264
9.25 The Functions of Local Spiritual Assemblies 264

The Bahá'í Funds

9.26 The Establishment of Bahá'í Funds 267
9.27 The Spirit of Giving 268
9.28 Only Bahá'ís May Contribute 268
9.29 Ḥuqúqu'lláh 269

Bahá'í Elections

9.30 The Character and Practice of Bahá'í Elections 272
9.31 Service on Bahá'í Institutions: An Unsought Privilege 273

Bahá'í Consultation and Decision Making

9.32 Requisites for Consultation 275
9.33 How to Consult 275
9.34 Making Decisions 276
9.35 Carrying Out Decisions 277
9.36 Appeals and Criticismx 278

Re-Visioning Relationships

9.37 The Administrative Institutions and the Community 280

The Nature of the Bahá'í Administrative Order

9.1 Its Principal Institutions

The Universal House of Justice is the supreme institution of an Administrative Order whose salient features, whose authority and whose principles of operation are clearly enunciated in the Sacred Writings of the Bahá'í Faith and their authorized interpretations. This Administrative Order consists, on the one hand, of a series of elected councils, universal, secondary and local, in which are vested legislative, executive and judicial powers over the Bahá'í community and, on the other, of eminent and devoted believers appointed for the specific purposes of protecting and propagating the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh under the guidance of the Head of that Faith.

The Universal House of Justice, *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice*, preamble.

9.2 Its Animating Purpose

... the purpose underlying this most mighty Revelation is none other than the rehabilitation of the world and its nations: that perchance the power of utterance may prevail over the power of arms, and the world's affairs be administered through the potency of love.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Trustworthiness, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2032, p. 332.

And now, it behooves us to reflect on the animating purpose and the primary functions of these divinely-established institutions, the sacred character and the universal efficacy of which can be demonstrated only by the spirit they diffuse and the work they actually achieve. I need not dwell upon what I have already reiterated and emphasized that the administration of the Cause is to be conceived as an instrument and not a substitute for the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, that it should be regarded as a channel through which His promised blessings may flow, that it should guard against such rigidity as would clog and fetter the liberating forces released by His Revelation. ... Who, I may ask, when viewing the international character of the Cause, its far-flung ramifications, the increasing complexity of its affairs, the diversity of its adherents, and the state of confusion that assails on every side the infant Faith of God, can for a moment question the necessity of some sort of administrative machinery that will insure, amid the storm and stress of a struggling civilization, the unity of the Faith, the preservation of its identity, and the protection of its interests?

Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

9.3 Its Source and Foundation

In His Will and Testament 'Abdu'l-Bahá conferred the mantle of Guardian of the Cause and infallible Interpreter of its teachings upon His eldest grandson, Shoghi Effendi, and confirmed the authority and guarantee of divine guidance decreed by Bahá'u'lláh for the Universal House of Justice on all matters "*which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book*". The Guardianship and the Universal

House of Justice can thus be seen to be, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, the "Twin Successors" of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. They are the supreme institutions of the Administrative Order which was founded and anticipated in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and elaborated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will.

During the thirty–six years of his ministry, Shoghi Effendi raised up the structure of elected Spiritual Assemblies—the Houses of Justice referred to in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, now in their embryonic stage—and with their collaboration initiated the systematic implementation of the Divine Plan that 'Abdu'l-Bahá had laid out for the diffusion of the Faith throughout the world. He also set in motion, on the basis of the strong administrative structure that had been established, the processes which were an essential preparation for the election of the Universal House of Justice. This body, which came into existence in April 1963, is elected through secret ballot and plurality vote in a three-stage election by adult Bahá'ís throughout the world. The revealed Word of Bahá'u'lláh, together with the interpretations and expositions of the Centre of the Covenant and the Guardian of the Cause, constitute the binding terms of reference of the Universal House of Justice and are its bedrock foundation.

The Universal House of Justice (Ed.), *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), Introduction.

It should be carefully borne in mind that the local as well as the international Houses of Justice have been expressly enjoined by *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*; that the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly, as an intermediary body, and referred to in the Master's Will as the "Secondary House of Justice," has the express sanction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; and that the method to be pursued for the election of the International and National Houses of Justice has been set forth by Him in His Will, as well as in a number of His Tablets. Moreover, the institutions of the local and national Funds, that are now the necessary adjuncts to all local and national spiritual assemblies, have not only been established by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in the Tablets He revealed to the Bahá'ís of the Orient, but their importance and necessity have been repeatedly emphasized by Him in His utterances and writings. The concentration of authority in the hands of the elected representatives of the believers; the necessity of the submission of every adherent of the Faith to the considered judgement of Bahá'í Assemblies; His preference for unanimity in decision; the decisive character of the majority vote; and even the desirability for the exercise of close supervision over all Bahá'í publications, have been sedulously instilled by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as evidenced by His authenticated and widely-scattered Tablets.

Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

9.4 Abolition of a Professional Clergy and Leadership

Collateral with His summons to the pursuit of knowledge, Bahá'u'lláh has abolished entirely that feature of all past religions by which a special caste of persons such as the Christian priesthood or the Islamic 'ulamá came to exercise authority over the religious understanding and practice of their fellow believers. In a letter written in Persian on his behalf to the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Istanbul, the Guardian is at some pains to underline the importance of this marked departure from past religious history:

But praise be to God that the Pen of Glory has done away with the unyielding and dictatorial views of the learned and the wise, dismissed the assertions of individuals as an authoritative criterion, even though they were recognized as the most accomplished and learned among men, and ordained that all matters be referred to authorized centres and specified assemblies.

The Bahá'í Dispensation is described in the words of its Founder as "a day that shall not be followed by night". Through His Covenant, Bahá'u'lláh has provided an unfailing source of divine guidance that will endure throughout the Dispensation. Authority to administer the affairs of the community and to ensure both the integrity of the Word of God and the promotion of the Faith's message is conferred upon the Administrative Order to which the Covenant has given birth. It is solely by the process of free election or by unsought appointment that the members of the institutions of this Order are assigned to their positions in it. There is no profession in either the teaching of the Faith or its administration for which one can train or to which a believer can properly aspire. Cautionary words of Bahá'u'lláh are particularly relevant:

Ever since the seeking of preference and distinction came into play, the world hath been laid waste. It has become desolate ....

Indeed, man is noble, inasmuch as each one is a repository of the sign of God. Nevertheless, to regard oneself as superior in knowledge, learning or virtue, or to exalt oneself or seek preference is a grievous transgression.

The Universal House of Justice, 14 March 1996.

9.5 The Distinctive Character of the Bahá'í Administrative Order

The Bahá'í Commonwealth of the future, of which this vast Administrative Order is the sole framework, is, both in theory and practice, not only unique in the entire history of political institutions, but can find no parallel in the annals of any of the world's recognized religious systems. No form of democratic government; no system of autocracy or of dictatorship, whether monarchical or republican; no intermediary scheme of a purely aristocratic order; nor even any of the recognized types of theocracy, whether it be the Hebrew Commonwealth, or the various Christian ecclesiastical organizations, or the Imámate or the Caliphate in Islám—none of these can be identified or be said to conform with the Administrative Order which the master-hand of its perfect Architect has fashioned.

This new-born Administrative Order incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognized forms of secular government, without being in any sense a mere replica of any one of them, and without introducing within its machinery any of the objectionable features which they inherently possess. It blends and harmonizes, as no government fashioned by mortal hands has as yet accomplished, the salutary truths which each of these systems undoubtedly contains without vitiating the integrity of those God-given verities on which it is ultimately founded.

The Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh must in no wise be regarded as purely democratic in character inasmuch as the basic assumption which requires all democracies to depend fundamentally upon getting their mandate from the people

is altogether lacking in this Dispensation. In the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith, in the enactment of the legislation necessary to supplement the laws of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, the members of the Universal House of Justice, it should be borne in mind, are not, as Bahá'u'lláh's utterances clearly imply, responsible to those whom they represent, nor are they allowed to be governed by the feelings, the general opinion, and even the convictions of the mass of the faithful, or of those who directly elect them. They are to follow, in a prayerful attitude, the dictates and promptings of their conscience. They may, indeed they must, acquaint themselves with the conditions prevailing among the community, must weigh dispassionately in their minds the merits of any case presented for their consideration, but must reserve for themselves the right of an unfettered decision. "God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth," is Bahá'u'lláh's incontrovertible assurance. They, and not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them, have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation. Moreover, he who symbolizes the hereditary principle in this Dispensation has been made the interpreter of the words of its Author, and ceases consequently, by virtue of the actual authority vested in him, to be the figurehead invariably associated with the prevailing systems of constitutional monarchies.

Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

It should be noted that in this connection that this Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything that any Prophet has previously established, inasmuch as Bahá'u'lláh has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person to interpret His Word and conferred the necessary authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances. Therein lies the secret of its strength, its fundamental distinction, and the guarantee against disintegration and schism.

Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

No machinery falling short of the standard inculcated by the Bahá'í Revelation, and at variance with the sublime pattern ordained in His teachings … can ever hope to achieve anything above or beyond that "Lesser Peace" to which the Author of our Faith has Himself alluded in His writings. …

The Most Great Peace, on the other hand, as conceived by Bahá'u'lláh—a peace that must inevitably follow as the practical consequence of the spiritualization of the world and the fusion of all its races, creeds, classes and nations—can rest on no other basis, and can be preserved through no other agency, except the divinely appointed ordinances that are implicit in the World Order that stands associated with His Holy Name.

Shoghi Effendi, The Unfoldment of World Civilization, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

The Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice

9.6 Their Authority and Infallible Guidance

The sacred and youthful branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty ... Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God ....

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.

Their common, their fundamental object is to insure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings. Acting in conjunction with each other these two inseparable institutions administer its affairs, co-ordinate its activities, promote its interests, execute its laws and defend its subsidiary institutions.

Shoghi Effendi, The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Shoghi Effendi was asked several times during his ministry to define the sphere of his operation and his infallibility. The replies he gave and which were written on his behalf are most illuminating. He explains that he is not an infallible authority on subjects such as economics and science, nor does he go into technical matters since his infallibility is confined to "matters which are related strictly to the Cause". He further points out that "he is not, like the Prophet, omniscient at will", that his "infallibility covers interpretation of the revealed word, and its application", and that he is also "infallible in the protection of the Faith". Furthermore, in one of the letters, the following guideline is set forth:

It is not for individual believers to limit the sphere of the Guardian's authority, or to judge when they have to obey the Guardian and when they are free to reject his judgement. Such an attitude would evidently lead to confusion and to schism. The Guardian being the appointed interpreter of the Teachings, it is his responsibility to state what matters, affecting the interests of the Faith, demand on the part of the believers complete and unqualified obedience to his instructions...

It must always be remembered that authoritative interpretation of the Teachings was, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the exclusive right of the Guardian, and fell within the "sacred and prescribed domain" of the Guardianship, and therefore the Universal House of Justice cannot and will not infringe upon that domain. The exclusive sphere of the Universal House of Justice is to "pronounce upon and deliver the final judgement on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed". Apart from this fundamental difference in the functions of the twin pillars of the Order

of Bahá'u'lláh, insofar as the other duties of the Head of the Faith are concerned, the Universal House of Justice shares with the Guardian the responsibility for the application of the revealed word, the protection of the Faith, as well as the duty "to insure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its Teachings". However, the Universal House of Justice is not omniscient; like the Guardian, it wants to be provided with facts when called upon to render a decision, and like him, it may well change its decision when new facts emerge.

The Universal House of Justice, 22 August 1977, *Lights of Guidance*, Nos. 1050–1051, p. 311.

The Universal House of Justice, which the Guardian said would be regarded by posterity as "the last refuge of a tottering civilization," is now, in the absence of the Guardian, the sole infallibly guided institution in the world to which all must turn, and on it rests the responsibility for ensuring the unity and progress of the Cause of God in accordance with the revealed Word.

The Universal House of Justice, 27 May 1966, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 35.17, p. 89.

9.7 Appointment of Shoghi Effendi as Guardian

O my loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon the Aghsán (Branches), the Afnán (Twigs) of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and loved ones of the Abhá Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi—the youthful branch branched from the two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees and the fruit grown from the union of the two offshoots of the Tree of Holiness, —as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, he unto whom all the Aghsán, the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause of God and His loved ones must turn. He is the Interpreter of the Word of God and after him will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendants.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.

O ye the faithful loved ones of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! It is incumbent upon you to take the greatest care of Shoghi Effendi …

For he is, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Guardian of the Cause of God, the Afnán, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause and the beloved of the Lord must obey him and turn unto him. He that obeyeth him not, hath not obeyed God … All must seek guidance and turn unto the Centre of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.

9.8 Events Following the Passing of Shoghi Effendi

On the following morning, 19 November, nine Hands of the Cause, selected from the Holy Land and the several continents of East and West, with Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum, broke the seals placed upon the beloved Guardian's safe and desk and made careful examination of their precious contents. These same Hands, rejoining the other Hands assembled in the Mansion of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí,

certified that Shoghi Effendi had left no Will and Testament. It was likewise certified that the beloved Guardian had left no heir. The Aghsán (branches) one and all are either dead or have been declared violators of the Covenant by the Guardian for their faithlessness to the Master's *Will and Testament* and their hostility to him named first Guardian in that sacred document.

The first effect of the realization that no successor to Shoghi Effendi could have been appointed by him was to plunge the Hands of the Cause into the very abyss of despair. ...

From this dark abyss, however, contemplation of the Guardian's own life of complete sacrifice and his peerless services gradually redeemed our anguished hearts.

First Conclave of the Hands of the Cause, *Ministry of the Custodians*, pp. 35–36.

At the time of our beloved Shoghi Effendi's death it was evident, from the circumstances and from the explicit requirements of the Holy Texts, that it had been impossible for him to appoint a successor in accordance with the provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The Universal House of Justice, 9 March 1965.

After prayerful and careful study of the Holy Texts bearing upon the question of the appointment of the successor to Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, and after prolonged consideration of the views of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, the Universal House of Justice finds that there is no way to appoint or legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi.

The Universal House of Justice, 6 October 1963.

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is unbroken, its all-encompassing power inviolate. The two unique features which distinguish it from all religious covenants of the past are unchanged and operative. The revealed Word, in its original purity, amplified by the divinely guided interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, remains immutable, unadulterated by any man-made creeds or dogmas, unwarrantable inferences or unauthorized interpretations. The channel of Divine guidance, providing flexibility in all the affairs of mankind, remains open through that Institution which was founded by Bahá'u'lláh and endowed by Him with supreme authority and unfailing guidance, and of which the Master wrote: "Unto this body all things must be referred." How clearly we can see the truth of Bahá'u'lláh's assertion: "The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure."

The Universal House of Justice, October 1963, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 6.3, p. 15.

9.9 The Universal House of Justice

It is incumbent upon the Trustees of the House of Justice to take counsel together regarding those things which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book, and to

enforce that which is agreeable to them. God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth, and He, verily, is the Provider, the Omniscient.

Bahá'u'lláh, Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih (Words of Paradise), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn, and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself. ...

It is incumbent upon these members (of the Universal House of Justice) to gather in a certain place and deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book. Whatsoever they decide has the same effect as the Text itself. Inasmuch as the House of Justice hath power to enact laws that are not expressly recorded in the Book and bear upon daily transactions, so also it hath power to repeal the same. ... The House of Justice is both the initiator and the abrogator of its own laws.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.

The provenance, the authority, the duties, the sphere of action of the Universal House of Justice all derive from the revealed Word of Bahá'u'lláh which, together with the interpretations and expositions of the Centre of the Covenant and of the Guardian of the Cause—who, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is the sole authority in the interpretation of Bahá'í Scripture—constitute the binding terms of reference of the Universal House of Justice and are its bedrock foundation. The authority of these Texts is absolute and immutable until such time as Almighty God shall reveal His new Manifestation to Whom will belong all authority and power.

There being no successor to Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, the Universal House of Justice is the Head of the Faith and its supreme institution, to which all must turn, and on it rests the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the unity and progress of the Cause of God.

The Universal House of Justice, *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice*, Declaration of Trust.

9.10 Election of The Universal House of Justice

At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme House of Justice.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted by the Universal House of Justice, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 23.13, p. 53.

The Universal House of Justice shall consist of nine men ...

The members of the Universal House of Justice shall be elected by secret ballot by the members of all National Spiritual Assemblies at a meeting to be known as the International Bahá'í Convention.

An election of the Universal House of Justice shall be held once every five years unless otherwise decided by the Universal House of Justice, and those elected shall

continue in office until such time as their successors shall be elected and the first meeting of these successors is duly held.

The Universal House of Justice, *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice*, By-Laws, section V.

According to the ordinances of the Faith of God, women are the equals of men in all rights save only that of membership on the Universal House of Justice, for as hath been stated in the text of the Book, both the head and the members of the House of Justice are men. However, in all other bodies, such as the Temple Construction Committee, the Teaching Committee, the Spiritual Assembly, and in charitable and scientific associations, women share equally in all rights with men.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted by J. & P. Khan, *Advancement of Women*, pp. 123–124.

As regards your question concerning the membership of the Universal House of Justice: there is a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which He definitely states that the membership of the Universal House is confined to men, and that the wisdom of it will be fully revealed and appreciated in the future. In the local as well as the national Houses of Justice, however, women have the full right of membership. It is, therefore, only to the International House that they cannot be elected. The Bahá'ís should accept this statement of the Master in a spirit of deep faith, confident that there is a divine guidance and wisdom behind it which will be gradually unfolded to the eyes of the world.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Women, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2118, p. 369.

While individuals are free to speculate on the reason for membership of the Universal House of Justice being confined to men, there is no authoritative text to support the assertion that it is due to women being so compassionate as to be unable to make objective decisions. Indeed, it might well be argued that if this were the reason, the teachings would have provided also for the exclusion of women from Local and National Spiritual Assemblies ...

The Universal House of Justice, quoted by J. & P. Khan, *Advancement of Women*, p. 129.

Bahá'ís believe that to gain a fuller understanding of the reason women are excused from membership of the Universal House of Justice, we must await the evolution of society, and we are confident that the wisdom of women's exclusion will become manifest as society develops and becomes more united.

The Universal House of Justice, quoted by J. & P. Khan, *Advancement of Women*, p. 127.

9.11 Signature of The Universal House of Justice

The signature of the Universal House of Justice shall be the words "The Universal House of Justice" or in Persian "Baytu'l-'Adl-i-A'ẓam" written by hand by any one of its members upon authority of the Universal House of Justice, to which shall be affixed in each case the Seal of the Universal House of Justice.

The Universal House of Justice, *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice*, By-Laws, section V.5.

9.12 The Bahá'í International Community

Under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, its governing authority, the Bahá'í International Community comprises 148 national affiliates (the National Spiritual Assemblies). At the international level it operates through branches specialized for different aspects of its work. At the present time these are three in number: the Secretariat, located at the World Centre of the Faith in Israel; the United Nations Office, based in New York City with a branch in Geneva; and the Office of Public Information, with its headquarters in Israel and a bureau in New York. Both the United Nations Office and the Office of Public Information have representatives in a number of major centres of the world.

The Bahá'í International Community, quoted in *A Basic Bahá'í Dictionary*, p. 37.

JOYFULLY ANNOUNCE BAHÁ'Í WORLD ATTAINMENT CONSULTATIVE STATUS UNITED NATIONS ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL THEREBY FULFILLING LONG CHERISHED HOPE BELOVED GUARDIAN AND WORLD CENTRE GOAL NINE YEAR PLAN. SUSTAINED PERSISTENT EFFORTS MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS ACCREDITED REPRESENTATIVES BAHÁ'Í INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY UNITED NATIONS DEVOTED SUPPORT BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT WORLD FINALLY REWARDED. SIGNIFICANT ACHIEVEMENT ADDS PRESTIGE INFLUENCE RECOGNITION EVER ADVANCING FAITH BAHÁ'U'LLÁH. OFFERING PRAYERS GRATITUDE HOLY SHRINES.

The Universal House of Justice, 18 February 1970, *Messages 1963-1986*, para. 78.1, p. 167.

The Hands of the Cause of God, Boards of Counsellors and Auxiliary Boards

9.13 The Institution of the Learned

In the Kitáb-i-'Ahdí (the Book of His Covenant) Bahá'u'lláh wrote "Blessed are the rulers and the learned among the people of Bahá," and referring to this very passage the beloved Guardian wrote on 4 November 1931:

In this holy cycle the "learned" are, on the one hand, the Hands of the Cause of God, and, on the other, the teachers and diffusers of His teachings who do not rank as Hands, but who have attained an eminent position in the teaching work. As to the "rulers" they refer to the members of the Local, National and International Houses of Justice. The duties of each of these souls will be determined in the future. (Translated from the Persian.)

The Hands of the Cause of God, the Counsellors and the members of the Auxiliary Boards fall within the definition of the "learned" given by the beloved Guardian.

Thus they are all intimately interrelated and it is not incorrect to refer to the three ranks collectively as one institution.

However, each is also a separate institution in itself.

The Universal House of Justice, 24 April 1972.

The existence of institutions of such exalted rank, comprising individuals who play such a vital role, who yet have no legislative, administrative or judicial authority, and are entirely devoid of priestly functions or the right to make authoritative interpretations, is a feature of Bahá'í administration unparalleled in the religions of the past. The newness and uniqueness of this concept make it difficult to grasp; only as the Bahá'í Community grows and the believers are increasingly able to contemplate its administrative structure uninfluenced by concepts of past ages, will the vital interdependence of the "rulers" and "learned" in the Faith be properly understood, and the inestimable value of their interaction be fully recognized.

The Universal House of Justice, 24 April 1972.

9.14 The Hands of the Cause of God

Light and glory, greeting and praise be upon the Hands of His Cause, through whom the light of fortitude hath shone forth and the truth hath been established that the authority to choose rests with God, the Powerful, the Mighty, the Unconstrained, through whom the ocean of bounty hath surged and the fragrance of the gracious favours of God, the Lord of mankind, hath been diffused.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Lawḥ-i-Dunyá* (Tablet of the World), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

O friends! The Hands of the Cause of God must be nominated and appointed by the Guardian of the Cause of God. All must be under his shadow and obey his command. Should any, within or without the company of the Hands of the Cause of God disobey and seek division, the wrath of God and His vengeance will be upon him, for he will have caused a breach in the true Faith of God.

The obligations of the Hands of the Cause of God are to diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to promote learning, to improve the character of all men and to be, at all times and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things. They must manifest the fear of God by their conduct, their manners, their deeds and their words.

This body of the Hands of the Cause of God is under the direction of the Guardian of the Cause of God. He must continually urge them to strive and endeavour to the utmost of their ability to diffuse the sweet savours of God, and to guide all the peoples of the world, for it is the light of Divine Guidance that causeth all the universe to be illumined.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.

... the Hands of the Cause of God must be ever watchful and so soon as they find anyone beginning to oppose and protest against the Guardian of the Cause of God, cast him out from the congregation of the people of Bahá and in no wise accept any excuse from him.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*.

The rank and position of the Hands of the Cause are superior to the position of the National Assemblies.

Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 1086, p. 324.

When, following the passing of Shoghi Effendi, the Universal House of Justice decided that it could not legislate to make possible the appointment of further Hands of the Cause, it became necessary for it to create a new institution, appointed by itself, to extend into the future the functions of protection and propagation vested in the Hands of the Cause...

The Universal House of Justice, 24 April 1972.

9.15 The International Teaching Centre

ANNOUNCE ESTABLISHMENT HOLY LAND LONG ANTICIPATED INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTRE DESTINED EVOLVE INTO ONE THOSE WORLD-SHAKING WORLD-EMBRACING WORLD-DIRECTING ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS ORDAINED BY BAHÁ'U'LLÁH ANTICIPATED BY 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ ELUCIDATED BY SHOGHI EFFENDI. MEMBERSHIP THIS NASCENT INSTITUTION COMPRISES ALL HANDS CAUSE GOD AND INITIALLY THREE COUNSELLORS WHO WITH HANDS PRESENT HOLY LAND WILL CONSTITUTE NUCLEUS ITS VITAL OPERATIONS. CALLING UPON HOOPER DUNBAR FLORENCE MAYBERRY 'AZÍZ YAZDÍ PROCEED HOLY LAND ASSUME THIS HIGHLY MERITORIOUS SERVICE. OFFERING PRAYERS HEARTFELT GRATITUDE SACRED THRESHOLD THIS FURTHER EVIDENCE ORGANIC EVOLUTION ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER BAHÁ'U'LLÁH.

The Universal House of Justice, 5 June 1973.

The International Teaching Centre has nine members appointed as International Counsellors by the Universal House of Justice from among all the adult believers in the world for a five-year term, each term starting on 23 May immediately following the International Bahá'í Convention...

The work of the Teaching Centre is essentially corporate in character. Its responsibilities call on it to serve as a source of information and analysis for the Universal House of Justice and to provide guidance and resources to the Continental Counsellors. It is required to be fully informed of the situation of the Cause in all parts of the world and alert to possibilities for the expansion of the Faith, the consolidation of its institutions, and the development of Bahá'í community life. It has to analyse these possibilities in relation to global plans, anticipating needs world-wide and ensuring that the necessary resources become available to national communities. In this context, it gives particular attention to the development of human resources, helping communities increase their capacity to endow growing contingents of believers with spiritual insight, knowledge of the Faith, and skills and abilities of service.

The International Teaching Centre is invested with the mandate to watch over the security and ensure the protection of the Faith of God. It must investigate all cases of incipient Covenant-breaking — employing, as necessary, the services of the Continental Counsellors and their auxiliaries and evaluating their reports — and decide whether the offender should be expelled from the Cause, submitting the

decision to the Universal House of Justice for its consideration. It follows a similar procedure for the reinstatement of a contrite Covenant-breaker. More broadly, it needs to be attentive to the spiritual health of the Bahá'í community, urging the Counsellors and their auxiliaries to strengthen the believers to resist the influence of both external and internal sources of opposition to the Cause, and to assist National and Local Spiritual Assemblies in resolving questions that could raise doubt about the integrity of the Faith and its Teachings.

The Universal House of Justice, January 2001, *The Institution of the Counsellors*, pp. 6-7.

9.16 The Continental Boards of Counsellors

... the Universal House of Justice decided, as announced in its recent cable, to establish Continental Boards of Counsellors for the protection and propagation of the Faith. Their duties will include directing the Auxiliary Boards in their respective areas, consulting and collaborating with National Spiritual Assemblies, and keeping the Hands of the Cause and the Universal House of Justice informed concerning the conditions of the Cause in their areas.

... One member of each Continental Board of Counsellors has been designated as Trustee of the Continental Fund for its area.

The Auxiliary Boards for Protection and Propagation will henceforth report to the Continental Boards of Counsellors, who will appoint or replace members of the Auxiliary Boards as circumstances may require.

The Universal House of Justice, 24 June 1968, *Messages 1963–1986*, paras 59.2, 59.4, and 59.5, pp. 131–132.

The institution of the Boards of Counsellors was brought into being by the Universal House of Justice to extend into the future the specific functions of protection and propagation conferred upon the Hands of the Cause of God. The members of these boards are appointed by the Universal House of Justice.

1. The term of office of a Counsellor, the number of Counsellors on each Board, and the boundaries of the zone in which each Board of Counsellors shall operate, shall be decided by the Universal House of Justice.
2. A Counsellor functions as such only within his zone and should he move his residence out of the zone for which he is appointed he automatically relinquishes his appointment.
3. The rank and specific duties of a Counsellor render him ineligible for service on local or national administrative bodies. If elected to the Universal House of Justice he ceases to be a Counsellor.

The Universal House of Justice, *The Constitution of The Universal House of Justice*, By-Laws, section IX.

Presently, five Continental Boards of Counsellors serve the five major regions of the world: Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australasia and Europe. The term of office of the Counsellors and the precise boundaries of the region in which each Board operates are fixed by the Universal House of Justice, as is the number on each Board. The

term of office — first established to begin on the Day of the Covenant, 26 November 1980 — is currently five years…

The Universal House of Justice, January 2001, *The Institution of the Counsellors*, p.7.

Duties of the Continental Counsellors and their Auxiliaries

The Continental Boards of Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies both have specific functions relating to the protection and propagation of the Faith. The duties of the Counsellors include directing the Auxiliary Board members, consulting and collaborating with National Spiritual Assemblies, and keeping the International Teaching Centre and thus the Universal House of Justice informed about the conditions of the Cause in their areas.

Counsellors have the duty to stimulate on each continent the expansion and consolidation of the Faith and to promote the spiritual, intellectual, and social aspects of Bahá'í life. The spiritual health of the community and the vitality of the faith of the individual, the strengthening of the foundations of family life, and the study of the Teachings receive special attention from the Counsellors and those called upon to assist them. They are likewise concerned with enhancing the capacity of the friends and their institutions to devise systematic plans of action, to execute them energetically, and to learn from experience in the course of building the world civilization envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh.

In this context, promoting a culture of growth within the Bahá›í community is fundamental to the work of the Counsellors…

The Universal House of Justice, January 2001, *The Institution of the Counsellors*, pp. 12-13

Collaboration with National Spiritual Assemblies

The relationship of the Continental Boards of Counsellors to National Spiritual Assemblies is one of loving cooperation between two institutions of the Faith that are serving the same ends and are eager to see the same divine confirmations descend upon the efforts of the friends to promote and firmly establish the Cause. It is an evolving relationship that becomes richer as the two institutions face the challenge of building Bahá'í communities and witness with pride the onward march of the Faith.

As Continental Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies work together to ensure the expansion and consolidation of the community, the National Assemblies make all the necessary executive decisions and take responsibility for their implementation. The Counsellors bring to their functions a continental perspective which, when offered to the Assembly in the form of counsel, advice, recommendations, suggestions or commentary, enriches the latter's understanding, acquaints it with a broader experience than its own, and encourages it to maintain a world-embracing vision.

As appointees of the Universal House of Justice, the Counsellors assist the Head of the Faith to broaden the base, foster the strength and ensure the security of the National Spiritual Assemblies and the institutions and communities under their jurisdiction. Through the Auxiliary Boards, the Counsellors spread the benefits of their functions to the Local Spiritual Assemblies and the grassroots of the community.

The Counsellors, in the discharge of their responsibilities, support the initiatives adopted by a National Spiritual Assembly, initiatives that often arise from joint deliberations of the two institutions. The Auxiliary Board members explain to the friends the nature and purpose of these initiatives, motivate them to rise and respond to the call of the Assembly, and encourage them to persist in unified action. The Counsellors, of course, have a wide latitude in determining in what manner their institution will carry out these tasks…

The Universal House of Justice, January 2001, *The Institution of the Counsellors*, p. 15.

Involvement with Institutes

Involvement in the operation of a training institute, by both Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members, has to be considered in a special light. Institutes are regarded as centres of learning, and their character harmonizes with, and provides scope for the exercise of, the educational responsibilities of the Auxiliary Board members. These centres offer the Counsellors and Board members immediate access to a formal means of educating the believers, in addition to other avenues available to them such as conferences, summer schools, and meetings with the friends…

The Universal House of Justice, January 2001, *The Institution of the Counsellors*, p 19.

Protection of the Cause

The pivot of the oneness of humankind is the power of the Covenant, and this power quickens every distinguishing element of Bahá'í life. It is in the context of this unique characteristic of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation that the institution of the Counsellors approaches its sacred duty to protect the Faith. Auxiliary Board members, particularly those assigned to protection, have to be ever conscious of the imperative need for a centre on which all must focus: `Abdul-Bahá the Centre of the Covenant and His designated successors, the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice.

In discharging their obligations related to protection, the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members endeavour to nourish the roots of certitude, fan the flame of an all-embracing love in the hearts of the friends, combat the age-old habit of conflict and contention and fortify bonds of friendship and unity, promote adherence to principle and the ethical standards enshrined in the Teachings, raise the believers› sight above the limitations of self-centredness that they may dedicate their energies to the welfare of the human race, and strengthen their allegiance to the Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Helping the believers to meet high moral standards does not require prying into their private lives. The nature of this responsibility is essentially educative. The loving advice Board members offer Local Assemblies, on the one hand, and the warm fellowship they and their assistants cultivate with the friends, on the other, are ready means through which they are able to advance this educational process. The cumulative effect of these efforts, combined with the benefits the friends derive from formal courses, for instance those offered by the training institute, contributes greatly to the creation of healthy and vibrant local communities. This educational process includes the imposition of sanctions by the Spiritual Assemblies, whenever it becomes absolutely necessary. In such cases the

advice of the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members to the Assembly can be of particular value.

Although deepening the friends' understanding of the Covenant and increasing their love and loyalty to it are of paramount importance, the duties of the Auxiliary Board members for Protection do not end here. The Board members must remain ever vigilant, monitoring the actions of those who, driven by the promptings of ego, seek to sow the seeds of doubt in the minds of the friends and undermine the Faith. In general, whenever believers become aware of such problems, they should immediately contact whatever institution they feel moved to turn to, whether it be a Counsellor, an Auxiliary Board member, the National Spiritual Assembly or their own Local Assembly. It then becomes the duty of that institution to ensure that the report is fed into the correct channels and that all the other institutions affected are promptly informed. Not infrequently, the responsibility will fall on an Auxiliary Board member, in coordination with the Assembly concerned, to take some form of action in response to the situation. This involvement will include counselling the believer in question; warning him, if necessary, of the consequences of his actions; and bringing to the attention of the Counsellors the gravity of the situation, which may call for their intervention. Naturally, the Board member has to exert every effort to counteract the schemes and arrest the spread of the influence of those few who, despite attempts to guide them, eventually break the Covenant.

The Universal House of Justice, January 2001, *The Institution of the Counsellors*, pp. 26-27.

9.17 The Auxiliary Boards

In each zone there shall be two Auxiliary Boards, one for the protection and one for the propagation of the Faith, the numbers of whose members shall be set by the Universal House of Justice. The members of these Auxiliary Boards shall serve under the direction of the Continental Boards of Counsellors and shall act as their deputies, assistants and advisers.

1. The members of the Auxiliary Boards shall be appointed from among the believers of that zone by the Continental Board of Counsellors.
2. Each Auxiliary Board member shall be allotted a specific area in which to serve and, unless specifically deputized by the Counsellors, shall not function as a member of the Auxiliary Board outside that area.
3. An Auxiliary Board member is eligible for any elective office but if elected to an administrative post on a national or local level must decide whether to retain membership on the Board or accept the administrative post, since he may not serve in both capacities at the same time. If elected to the Universal House of Justice he ceases to be a member of the Auxiliary Board.

The Universal House of Justice, *The Constitution of The Universal House of Justice*, By-Laws, section X.

Authority and direction flow from the Assemblies, whereas the power to accomplish the tasks resides primarily in the entire body of the believers. It is the principal task of the Auxiliary Boards to assist in arousing and releasing this power. This is a vital activity, and if they are to be able to perform it adequately they must avoid

becoming involved in the work of administration. For example, when Auxiliary Board members arouse believers to pioneer, any believer who expresses his desire to do so should be referred to the appropriate committee which will then organize the project. Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members should not, themselves, organize pioneering or travel teaching projects. Thus it is seen that the Auxiliary Boards should work closely with the grass roots of the community: the individual believers, groups and Local Spiritual Assemblies, advising, stimulating and assisting them. The Counsellors are responsible for stimulating, counselling and assisting National Spiritual Assemblies, and also work with individuals, groups, and Local Assemblies.

The Universal House of Justice, 1 October 1969, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 72.3, pp. 150–151.

The Auxiliary Boards for Protection and Propagation have distinct functions. They do have certain tasks in common, however, especially in the area of deepening and consolidation. From the outset, the Guardian envisioned that the Auxiliary Boards would assist the Hands "in the discharge of their dual and sacred task of safeguarding the Faith and of promoting its teaching activities."

The Universal House of Justice, January 2001, *The Institution of the Counsellors*, p. 13.

Stimulating individual initiative is one of the paramount duties of the Auxiliary Board members, a duty they can perform with the help of assistants they must carefully select, train and nurture. It involves constant encouragement of the friends, evoking the valour of the heroes of the Faith and bringing to their attention the importance of exemplifying in their lives the glory of the Teachings. It calls for fervent and moving appeals to the believers to be the cause of unity and harmony at all times, to attract receptive souls to the Cause, to teach them, nourish their faith and lead them to the shores of certitude. It requires building confidence and changing fear and hesitation into courage and perseverance. It asks of the Board members and those they serve alike to forget their own weaknesses and fix their reliance on the power of divine confirmations. Further, it implies accompanying the friends in their endeavours as they develop the capabilities of effective service.

The Universal House of Justice, January 2001, *The Institution of the Counsellors*, pp. 20-21.

Bahá'í life, whether individual or collective, should be marked by generosity of spirit. The Auxiliary Board members promote this spirit as they educate the members of the community about the funds of the Faith, instilling in them the desire to give sacrificially and helping them to experience its liberating effects.

Both the Auxiliary Board member for Protection and the Auxiliary Board member for Propagation take it upon themselves to ensure that proper attention is devoted to the various components of the community. They see to it that current impediments to the full participation of women in the larger society are, one by one, removed from the Bahá'í community. They nurture the habits of scholarship among the friends and the spirit of tolerance that it needs in order to flourish. They keep before everyone's eyes the imperative of the spiritual education of children and do everything in their power to help establish and maintain regular classes for the children. And, with complete confidence in the capacity of youth for heroic service to the Cause, they

assist them in realizing their full potential as vital agents for the expansion of the Faith and the transformation of society.

It is clear that such a formidable set of responsibilities cannot be discharged properly by one or two individuals in relation to a growing number of local communities. It is here that the significance of the freedom given the Auxiliary Board members to name assistants for a wide variety of tasks, to direct them and to lovingly supervise their activities becomes evident.

The Universal House of Justice, January 2001, *The Institution of the Counsellors*, p. 22.

9.18 Assistants to Auxiliary Board Members

Each Continental Board of Counsellors authorizes individual Auxiliary Board members to appoint assistants. The correct designation is "assistants to the Auxiliary Board members" and not "assistants to the Auxiliary Board". An assistant is appointed by an Auxiliary Board member to work in a specified area and functions as an assistant only in relation to that area. Assistants, like Auxiliary Board members, operate as individuals, not as a consultative body.

The duration of service of assistants is left to each Continental Board to decide for itself and need not be universally standardized. Auxiliary Board members may name some assistants for definite terms, others not. Appointments may be made for a limited period, such as a year or two, with the possibility of reappointment. In certain cases a Board of Counsellors may wish to permit Auxiliary Board members to name assistants for a particular project or projects, some of which may be of very short term.

The Universal House of Justice, January 2001, *The Institution of the Counsellors*, p. 10.

National Institutions of the Faith

9.19 The National Spiritual Assembly

... the Guardian wishes me to again affirm his view that the authority of the National Spiritual Assembly is undivided and unchallengeable in all matters pertaining to the administration of the Faith ... and that, therefore, the obedience of individual Bahá'ís, delegates, groups, and Assemblies to that authority is imperative, and should be whole-hearted and unqualified.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The National Spiritual Assembly, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1458, p. 105.

Its immediate purpose is to stimulate, unify and co-ordinate by frequent personal consultations, the manifold activities of the friends as well as the local Assemblies; and by keeping in close and constant touch with the Holy Land, initiate measures, and direct in general the affairs of the Cause in that country.

It serves also another purpose, no less essential than the first, as in the course of time it shall evolve into the National House of Justice (referred to in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will as the "secondary House of Justice"), which according to the explicit text of the Testament will have, in conjunction with the other National Assemblies throughout the Bahá'í world, to elect directly the members of the International House of Justice, that Supreme Council that will guide, organize and unify the affairs of the Movement throughout the world.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*.

Let it be made clear to every inquiring reader that among the most outstanding and sacred duties incumbent upon those who have been called upon to initiate, direct and co-ordinate the affairs of the Cause, are those that require them to win by every means in their power the confidence and affection of those whom it is their privilege to serve.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*.

Above all, the National Spiritual Assembly shall ever seek to attain that station of unity in devotion to the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh which will attract the confirmations of the Holy Spirit and enable the Assembly to serve the founding of the Most Great Peace. In all its deliberation and action the National Assembly shall have constantly before it as Divine guide and standard the utterance of Bahá'u'lláh:

"It behooveth them (i.e., members of the Spiritual Assemblies) to be the trusted ones of the Merciful among men and to regard themselves as the guardians appointed of God for all that dwell on earth. It is incumbent upon them to take counsel together and to have regard for the interests of the servants of God, for His sake, even as they regard their own interests, and to choose that which is meet and seemly."

Declaration of Trust and By-Laws of a National Spiritual Assembly, By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, By-Laws of the National Spiritual Assembly, Article 1, pp. 6–7.

Role in Expansion and Consolidation

The evolution of the Plan imposes a three–fold obligation, which all individual believers, all Local Assemblies, as well as the National Assembly itself, must respectively recognize and conscientiously fulfill... As to the National Assembly, whose inescapable responsibility is to guard the integrity, co-ordinate the activities, and stimulate the life, of the entire community, its chief concern at the present moment should be to anxiously deliberate as how best to enable both individual believers and local Assemblies to fulfill their respective tasks. Through their repeated appeals, through their readiness to dispel all misunderstandings and remove all obstacles, through the example of their lives, and their unrelaxing vigilance, their high sense of justice, their humility, consecration and courage, they must demonstrate to those whom they represent their capacity to play their part in the progress of the Plan in which they, no less than the rest of the community, are involved. May the all-

conquering Spirit of Bahá'u'lláh be so infused into each component part of this harmoniously functioning System as to enable it to contribute its proper share to the consummation of the Plan.

Shoghi Effendi, *This Decisive Hour.*

Training of the friends and their striving, through serious individual study, to acquire knowledge of the Faith, to apply its principles and administer its affairs, are indispensable to developing the human resources necessary to the progress of the Cause. But knowledge alone is not adequate; it is vital that training be given in a manner that inspires love and devotion, fosters firmness in the Covenant, prompts the individual to active participation in the work of the Cause and to taking sound initiatives in the promotion of its interests. Special efforts to attract people of capacity to the Faith will also go far towards providing the human resources so greatly needed at this time. Moreover, these endeavours will stimulate and strengthen the ability of Spiritual Assemblies to meet their weighty responsibilities.

The proper functioning of these institutions depends largely on the efforts of their members to familiarize themselves with their duties and to adhere scrupulously to principle in their personal behaviour and in the conduct of their official responsibilities. Of relevant importance, too, are their resolve to remove all traces of estrangement and sectarian tendencies from their midst, their ability to win the affection and support of the friends under their care and to involve as many individuals as possible in the work of the Cause.

By their constantly aiming at improving their performance, the communities they guide will reflect a pattern of life that will be a credit to the Faith and will, as a welcome consequence, rekindle hope among the increasingly disillusioned members of society.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 150 [1993].

Maintenance of Harmony and Bahá'í Standards

Such a rectitude of conduct must manifest itself, with ever-increasing potency, in every verdict which the elected representatives of the Bahá'í community, in whatever capacity they may find themselves, may be called upon to pronounce. … It must be exemplified in the conduct of all Bahá'í electors, when exercising their sacred rights and functions. … It must constitute the brightest ornament of the life, the pursuits, the exertions, and the utterances of every Bahá'í teacher, whether labouring at home or abroad, whether in the front ranks of the teaching force, or occupying a less active and responsible position. It must be made the hallmark of that numerically small, yet intensely dynamic and highly responsible body of the elected national representatives of every Bahá'í community, which constitutes the sustaining pillar, and the sole instrument for the election, in every community, of that Universal House whose very name and title, as ordained by Bahá'u'lláh, symbolizes that rectitude of conduct which is its highest mission to safeguard and enforce.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice.*

It would be impossible to overestimate the obligation resting upon you to refine your dealings with the community in the ways already described. You cannot at any

time afford to forget that the manner of the use of authority is critical to the success of your work. With this in mind, you must also attend seriously to the behaviour of those, more particularly your officers, who must of necessity act on your behalf in carrying out your decisions and conveying your instructions to others. Further, it is sometimes the case that staff members at your National Centre, in their eagerness to be exactly and completely obedient, carry out the instruction of your Assembly with a sharpness of manner and tone that hurts people and provokes resentment against the very body the staff are striving to serve with loyalty and devotion. The staff should be sensitized to the situation and made to realize, through your loving and persistent guidance, that the spiritual requisites for good and respectful relations with others must be conscientiously applied in their interactions with the friends because to do so is not only virtuous in itself but will also minimize the incidence of bad feeling towards your Assembly.

The temperament of authority in the administration of justice varies according to the degree of gravity of each case. Some cases require that the Assembly take action that is firm or drastic. Even so, Assembly members have always to be mindful that the authority they wield must in general be expressed with love, humility and a genuine respect for others. Thus exercised, authority strikes a natural note and accords with that which is acceptable to spiritually attuned and fair-minded souls. The following guidance of Shoghi Effendi, as conveyed by his secretary, is especially relevant: "The administrators of the Faith of God must be like unto shepherds. Their aim should be to dispel all the doubts, misunderstandings and harmful differences which may arise in the community of the believers. And this they can adequately achieve provided they are motivated by a true sense of love for their fellow-brethren coupled with firm determination to act with justice in all cases which are submitted to them for consideration."

The Universal House of Justice, 19 May 1994.

The aim of any Spiritual Assembly should be to develop a warm and loving relationship with the believers in its community, so that it can most effectively nurture and encourage them in the acquisition of a deeper understanding of the teachings, and can assist them to follow the Bahá'í principles in their personal conduct. The Assembly should aspire to being regarded by the members of the community as a loving parent, wise in its understanding of the varying degrees of maturity of those entrusted to its care, compassionate in dealing with the problems which arise as a result of any shortcomings, ever prepared to guide them to the correct path, and very patient as they strive to effect the necessary changes in their behavior. Such an approach is far removed from the harshly judgmental and punitive approach which so often characterizes the administration of law in the wider society. The Bahá'í application of justice, firmly rooted in spiritual principle and animated by the desire to foster the spiritual development of the members of the community, will increasingly be seen as a distinctive and highly attractive feature of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh...

A survey of the letters written on behalf of the Guardian shows that he advised the National Spiritual Assemblies that they should resort to the severe sanction of deprivation of a believer's administrative rights only for such matters as "disgraceful

conduct, flagrantly contrary to our Teachings," "seriously injuring the Faith in the eyes of the public through his conduct or flagrantly breaking the laws of God," "gross immorality and open opposition to the administrative functions of the Faith, and disregard for the laws of personal status," "conduct which is disgracing the Cause," and "breaking of laws, such as the consent of parents to marriage," or "acts of such an immoral character as to damage the good name of the Faith."

It is clear that the removal of voting rights is a serious action which an Assembly should take reluctantly when the circumstances require that the Bahá'í community or its reputation in the eyes of the public must be protected from the effects of an individual's behavior, and where the authority of the laws of the Faith must be upheld. It should be the hope and prayer of the Assembly that the believer who has been administratively expelled from membership in the Bahá'í community will come to see that his behavior is in violation of the teachings, will endeavor to rectify his conduct, and will thus open the way to being welcomed back into the community so that he can lend his support to the vital and glorious task of establishing *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*...

If a believer advises you of an appeal to the Universal House of Justice against your decision to withdraw his voting rights, he remains without these rights while the merit of his appeal is being assessed by the House of Justice...

When a believer is deprived of his administrative rights, he is entitled to clear information on the requirements to be fulfilled in order that his rights may be restored; these may include the passage of a prescribed period of time, the performance of certain remedial actions, or the alteration of an attitude or pattern of behavior which is considered unworthy or harmful. A condition for the restoration of voting rights is that the believer be repentant, as evidenced by his statement to that effect or by his demeanor and conduct. A believer should not feel compelled to admit his past errors in order to be regarded as repentant; you can infer repentance from his behavior, his manifest spirit of cooperation with the Assembly, and his evident desire to scrupulously adhere to the teachings. Should he display a rebellious or resentful attitude, or be contemptuous of Bahá'í law and the consequence of violation of its provisions, you would be justified in denying him the right to reenter the Bahá'í community.

The Universal House of Justice, 9 December 1991.

9.20 National and Unit Conventions

In view of the growth of the Faith and the developing life of the Bahá'í communities, the Universal House of Justice has decided that, notwithstanding that in some countries the number of believers and of Local Spiritual Assemblies is still small, the time has come for delegates to National Conventions everywhere to be elected on the basis of electoral units, but with the option of introducing certain differences from the procedures followed to date. These differences are explained below and are designed to make the system adaptable to the variations in the make-up of the many Bahá'í communities and in the geography of the lands in which they are situated.

... When establishing the electoral unit basis for the election of delegates, a National Spiritual Assembly should divide the territory under its jurisdiction into

electoral units, based on the number of adult Bahá'ís in each area, in such a way that each unit will be responsible for electing preferably one delegate only.

The Universal House of Justice, 21 July 1985.

... the assembled accredited representatives of the ... believers should exercise not only the vital and responsible right of electing the National Assembly, but should also fulfill the functions of an enlightened, consultative and co-operative body that will enrich the experience, enhance the prestige, support the authority, and assist the deliberations of the National Spiritual Assembly. It is my firm conviction that it is the bounden duty, in the interest of the Cause we all love and serve, of the members of the incoming National Assembly, once elected by the delegates at Convention time, to seek and have the utmost regard, individually as well as collectively, for the advice, the considered opinion and the true sentiments of the assembled delegates. Banishing every vestige of secrecy, of undue reticence, of dictatorial aloofness, from their midst, they should radiantly unfold to the eyes of the delegates, by whom they are elected, their plans, their hopes, and their cares. They should familiarize the delegates with the various matters that will have to be considered in the current year, and calmly and conscientiously study and weigh the opinions and judgements of the delegates.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*.

Consultation, frank and unfettered, is the bedrock of this unique Order. Authority is concentrated in the hands of the elected members of the National Assembly. Power and initiative are primarily vested in the entire body of the believers acting through their local representatives. To generate those forces which must give birth to the body of their national administrators, and to confer, freely and fully and at fixed intervals, with both the incoming and outgoing National Assemblies, are the twofold functions, the supreme responsibility and sole prerogative of the delegates assembled in Convention. Nothing short of close and constant interaction between these various organs of Bahá'í administration can enable it to fulfill its high destiny.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The National Spiritual Assembly,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1456, p. 103.

Concerning the status of members of the National Spiritual Assembly at Convention sessions the Guardian feels that the members of both the incoming and the outgoing Assemblies should be given the full right to participate in the Convention discussions. Those members of the National Spiritual Assembly who have been elected delegates will, in addition to the right of participation, be entitled to vote. The Guardian wishes thereby to render more effective the deliberations and the recommendations of the national representatives. He feels that the exercise of such a right by the members of the National Spiritual Assembly will enable them to consult more fully with the assembled delegates, to exchange fully and frankly with them their views, and to consider collectively the interests, needs and requirements of the Cause. This, he believes, is one of the primary functions of the Convention.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The National Spiritual Assembly,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1457, pp. 104–105.

Direction comes from Assembly decisions, but its effectiveness depends not only on the clarity with which it is given but also on a number of spiritual and moral factors which must be blended in the general attitude of the individual believers, on the one hand, and the manner and style of functioning of the Assembly, on the other. The following advice of Shoghi Effendi, addressed in an early letter to the Western friends, deals with these two aspects:

"Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candour and courage on the other.

"The duties of those whom the friends have freely and conscientiously elected as their representatives are no less vital and binding than the obligations of those who have chosen them. Their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and to consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent.... They should never be led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles. They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavour, by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candour, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they should serve, but also their esteem and real affection."[1]

These instructions of the beloved Guardian get to the very heart of what must be more deeply internalized by the members of your Assembly at this time. We repeat for emphasis the terms "extreme humility", "open-mindedness", "candour", "modesty"; and we underscore the openness which is implicit in candour, because the co-operation which must be fostered between your Assembly and the friends will depend significantly on the degree to which, with wise discretion, you share your concerns with the community. Your greatest opportunity for this is the annual National Convention, when the representatives of the entire community come together to consult with you. It is not sufficient that you give only good news and encouraging statistics to the delegates. Do as Shoghi Effendi advised you: "Banishing every vestige of secrecy, of undue reticence, of dictatorial aloofness, from their midst, they should radiantly and abundantly unfold to the eyes of the delegates, by whom they are elected, their plans, their hopes, and their cares. They should familiarize the delegates with the various matters that will have to be considered in the current year, and calmly and conscientiously study and weigh the opinions and judgements of the delegates."

Even if the delegates find themselves unable to offer useful recommendations toward the resolution of particular issues, by your bringing them into your confidence, they will develop an appreciation, as would be impossible otherwise, of the serious matters confronting the cause. With this understanding, they will

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1 *Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration.*

be equipped to assist the community to respond effectively to your decisions, no matter how challenging these may turn out to be. Moreover, it will relieve you of any overwhelming sense of burden to know that such a responsible body of believers shares your innermost concerns; and even more than that, the effect of your openness will be to strengthen the delegates' support for your authority, which it is their sacred duty to give. Besides, as it is neither possible nor practicable for your Assembly to meet with all the believers, nor for the members to be constantly travelling throughout the community, the friends' feeling that you are remote can be ameliorated, though not entirely removed, by the effectiveness of your interactions with the delegates.

The Universal House of Justice, 19 May 1994.

9.21 National Committees and Agencies

Large issues in such spiritual activities that affect the Cause in general in that land, … far from being under the exclusive jurisdiction of any local assembly or group of friends, must each be minutely and fully directed by a special board, elected by the National Body, constituted as a committee thereof, responsible to it and upon which the National Body shall exercise constant and general supervision.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*.

As it has been observed already, the role of these committees set up by the National Spiritual Assembly, the renewal, the membership and functions of which should be reconsidered separately each year by the incoming National Assembly, is chiefly to make thorough and expert study of the issue entrusted to their charge, advise by their reports, and assist in the execution of the decisions which in vital matters are to be exclusively and directly rendered by the National Assembly.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*.

Regional Agencies

9.22 Regional Bahá'í Councils

The expansion of the Bahá'í community and the growing complexity of the issues which are facing National Spiritual Assemblies in certain countries have brought the Cause to a new stage in its development. They have caused us in recent years to examine various aspects of the balance between centralization and decentralization. In a few countries we have authorized the National Spiritual Assemblies to establish State Bahá'í Councils or Regional Teaching and Administrative Committees. From

the experience gained in the operation of these bodies, and from detailed examination of the principles set forth by Shoghi Effendi, we have reached the conclusion that the time has arrived for us to formalize a new element of Bahá'í administration, between the local and national levels, comprising institutions of a special kind, to be designated as "Regional Bahá'í Councils".

Regional Bahá'í Councils will be brought into being only with our permission and only in countries where conditions make this step necessary. Nevertheless, we find it desirable to inform all National Spiritual Assemblies of the nature of this historic development, and to make clear its place in the evolution of national and local Bahá'í institutions.

The institutions of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh, rooted in the provisions of His Revelation, have emerged gradually and organically, as the Bahá'í community has grown through the power of the divine impulse imparted to humankind in this age. The characteristics and functions of each of these institutions have evolved, and are still evolving, as are the relationships between them. The writings of the beloved Guardian expound the fundamental elements of this mighty System and make it clear that the Administrative Order, although different in many ways from the World Order which it is the destiny of the Bahá'í Revelation to call into being, is both the "nucleus" and "pattern" of that World Order. Thus, the evolution of the institutions of the Administrative Order, while following many variants to meet changing conditions in different times and places, should strictly follow the essential principles of Bahá'í administration which have been laid down in the Sacred Text and in the interpretations provided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian.

One of the subtle qualities of the Bahá'í Administrative Order is the balance between centralization and decentralization. This balance must be correctly maintained, but different factors enter into the equation, depending upon the institutions involved. For example, the relationship between a National or Local Spiritual Assembly and its committees is of a different nature from that between National and Local Spiritual Assemblies. The former is a relationship between a central administrative body and "its assisting organs of executive and legislative action",[2] while the latter is a relationship between national and local levels of the House of Justice, each of which is a divinely ordained institution with clearly prescribed jurisdiction, duties and prerogatives.

Regional Bahá'í Councils partake of some, but not all, characteristics of Spiritual Assemblies, and thus provide a means of carrying forward the teaching work and administering related affairs of a rapidly growing Bahá'í community in a number of situations. Without such an institution, the development of a national committee structure required to cover the needs in some countries would run the danger of over-complexity through adding a further layer of committees under the regional committees, or the danger of excessive decentralization through conferring too much autonomy on committees which are characterized by the Guardian as "bodies that should be regarded in no other light than that of expert advisers and executive assistants."

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[2] *Letter of 18 October, 1927 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada.*

The distinguishing effects of the establishment of Regional Bahá'í Councils are the following:

- It provides for a level of autonomous decision making on both teaching and administrative matters, as distinct from merely executive action, below the National Assembly and above the Local Assemblies.
- It involves the members of Local Spiritual Assemblies of the area in the choice of the members of the Council, thus reinforcing the bond between it and the local believers while, at the same time, bringing into public service capable believers who are known to the friends in their own region.
- It establishes direct consultative relationships between the Continental Counsellors and the Regional Bahá'í Councils.
- It offers the possibility of forming a Regional Bahá'í Council in an ethnically distinct region which covers parts of two or more countries. In such a situation the Council is designated to work directly under one of the National Assemblies involved, providing copies of its reports and minutes to the other National Assembly.
- The greater degree of decentralization involved in the devolution of authority upon Regional Bahá'í Councils requires a corresponding increase in the capacity of the National Spiritual Assembly itself to keep fully informed of what is proceeding in all parts of the territory over which it has ultimate jurisdiction.

The Universal House of Justice, 30 May 1997.

9.23 Regional Teaching Institutes

To effect the possibilities of expansion and consolidation implied by entry by troops, a determined, world-wide effort to develop human resources must be made. The endeavour of individuals to conduct study classes in their homes, the sponsorship by the institutions of occasional courses of instruction, and the informal activities of the community, though important, are not adequate for the education and training of a rapidly expanding community. It is therefore of paramount importance that systematic attention be given to devising methods for educating large numbers of believers in the fundamental verities of the Faith and for training and assisting them to serve the Cause as their God-given talents allow. There should be no delay in establishing permanent institutes designed to provide well-organized, formally conducted programmes of training on a regular schedule. Access of the institute to physical facilities will of course be necessary, but it may not require a building of its own.

This matter calls for an intensification of the collaboration between the Continental Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies. For the success of these training institutes will depend in very large measure on the active involvement of the Continental Counsellors and the Auxiliary Board members in their operation. Particularly will it be necessary for Auxiliary Board members to have a close working relationship with institutes and, of course, with the Local Spiritual Assemblies whose communities will benefit from institute programmes.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 153 [1996].

The Local Spiritual Assembly

9.24 The Establishment of Local Spiritual Assemblies

The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather counsellors to the number of Bahá[3], and should it exceed this number it does not matter. … It behoveth them to be the trusted ones of the Merciful among men and to regard themselves as the guardians appointed of God for all that dwell on earth.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 30.

Addressing the nations, the Ancient Beauty ordaineth that in every city in the world a house be established in the name of justice wherein shall gather pure and steadfast souls to the number of the Most Great Name. At this meeting they should feel as if they were entering the Presence of God, inasmuch as this binding command hath flowed from the Pen of Him Who is the Ancient of Days. The glances of God are directed towards this Assembly.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Local Spiritual Assemblies, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1356, p. 39.

'Abdu'l-Bahá is constantly engaged in ideal communication with any Spiritual Assembly which is instituted through the divine bounty, and the members of which, in the utmost devotion, turn to the divine Kingdom and are firm in the Covenant. To them he is whole-heartedly attached and with them he is linked by everlasting ties.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 46.

These Spiritual Assemblies are aided by the Spirit of God. Their defender is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Over them He spreadeth His wings. What bounty is there greater than this? These Spiritual Assemblies are shining lamps and heavenly gardens, from which the fragrances of holiness are diffused over all regions, and the lights of knowledge are shed abroad over all created things. From them the spirit of life streameth in every direction. They, indeed, are the potent sources of the progress of man, at all times and under all conditions.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 38.

9.25 The Functions of Local Spiritual Assemblies

The Spiritual Assembly, in the fulfillment of its obligations and responsibilities under this Corporation, shall have exclusive jurisdiction and authority over all the

[3] *Nine*

local activities and affairs of the Bahá'í community of [city, shire, etc.], including paramount authority in the administration of this Corporation. It shall be responsible for maintaining the integrity and accuracy of all Bahá'í teaching, whether written or oral, undertaken throughout the local community. It shall make available the published literature of the Faith. It shall represent the community in its relations to the National Spiritual Assembly, in its relations to the Universal House of Justice, to other local Bahá'í communities, and to the general public in [city, shire, etc.]. It shall be charged with the recognition of all applicants requesting membership in the local Bahá'í community. It shall pass upon the right of any and all members of the community whose membership is in question to retain their status as voting members of the community. It shall call the meetings of the community, including the Bahá'í Anniversaries and Feasts, the Meetings of consultation, and the annual meeting at which the members of the Assembly are elected. It shall appoint and supervise all committees of the Bahá'í community. It shall collect and disburse all funds intended for the maintenance of this Corporation. It shall have full and complete custody of the headquarters or meeting place of the Bahá'í community. It shall have exclusive authority to conduct Bahá'í marriage ceremonies and issue Bahá'í marriage certificates within the area of its jurisdiction.

It shall report to the National Spiritual Assembly annually, or when requested, the membership roll of the Bahá'í community, for the information and approval of the National Spiritual Assembly.

Declaration of Trust and By-Laws of a National Spiritual Assembly, By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, Article 111, pp. 15–16.

Among the more salient objectives to be attained by the Local Spiritual Assembly in its process of development to full maturity are to act as a loving shepherd to the Bahá'í flock, promote unity and concord among the friends, direct the teaching work, protect the Cause of God, arrange for Feasts, Anniversaries and regular meetings of the community, familiarize the Bahá'ís with its plans, invite the community to offer its recommendations, promote the welfare of youth and children, and participate, as circumstances permit, in humanitarian activities. In its relationship to the individual believer, the Assembly should continuously invite and encourage him to study the Faith, to deliver its glorious message, to live in accordance with its teachings, to contribute freely and regularly to the Fund, to participate in community activities and to seek refuge in the Assembly for advice and help, when needed.

The Universal House of Justice, 30 July 1972.

In its own meetings it must endeavour to develop skill in the difficult but highly rewarding art of Bahá'í consultation, a process which will require great self-discipline on the part of all members and complete reliance on the power of Bahá'u'lláh. It should hold regular meetings and ensure that all its members are currently informed of the activities of the Assembly, that its Secretary carries out his duties, and its Treasurer holds and disburses the funds of the Faith to its satisfaction, keeping proper accounts and issuing receipts for all contributions. Many Assemblies find that some of their activities such as teaching, observance of Feasts and Anniversaries, solution

of personal problems, and other duties are best dealt with by committees appointed by the Assembly and responsible to it.

The Universal House of Justice, 30 July 1972.

In all cases submitted for its consideration the Assembly must uphold the standard of justice in delivering its verdict, and in all its dealings with the community and the outside world it must strive to evince the qualities of leadership. The following quotation from a letter of the Guardian summarizes in simple terms the immediate goal every Assembly should set for itself in its efforts to pursue the exalted standard of perfection inculcated in our writings:

"The first quality for leadership both among individuals and Assemblies, is the capacity to use the energy and competence that exists amongst the rank and file of its followers. Otherwise the more competent members of the group will go at a tangent and try to find elsewhere a field of work where they could use their energy.

"Shoghi Effendi hopes that the Assemblies will do their utmost in planning such teaching activities that every single soul will be kept busy."[4]

The Universal House of Justice, 30 July 1972.

The evolution of local and national Bahá'í Assemblies at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part of their members as well as on the part of those who elect them, for the Bahá'í community is engaged in an immense historical process that is entering a critical stage. Bahá'u'lláh has given to the world institutions to operate in an Order designed to canalize the forces of a new civilization. Progress towards that glorious realization requires a great and continuous expansion of the Bahá'í community, so that adequate scope is provided for the maturation of these institutions. This is a matter of immediate importance to Bahá'u'lláh's avowed supporters in all lands.

For such an expansion to be stimulated and accommodated, the Spiritual Assemblies must rise to a new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities as channels of divine guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the multitudes. They can realize these prospects through increasing the ability of their members to take counsel together in accordance with the principles of the Faith and to consult with the friends under their jurisdiction, through fostering the spirit of service, through spontaneously collaborating with the Continental Counsellors and their auxiliaries, and through cultivating their external relations. Particularly must the progress in the evolution of the institutions be manifest in the multiplication of localities in which the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly enhances the individual believers' capacity to serve the Cause and fosters unified action. In sum, the maturity of the Spiritual Assembly must be measured not only by the regularity of its meetings and the efficiency of its functioning, but also by the continuity of the growth of Bahá'í membership, the effectiveness of the interaction between the Assembly and the members of its community, the quality of the spiritual and social life of

[4] *From letter dated 30 August 1930 written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada.*

the community, and the overall sense of vitality of a community in the process of dynamic, ever-advancing development.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 153 [1996].

The Bahá'í Funds

9.26 The Establishment of Bahá'í Funds

And as the progress and execution of spiritual activities is dependent and conditioned upon material means, it is of absolute necessity that immediately after the establishment of local as well as national Spiritual Assemblies, a Bahá'í Fund be established, to be placed under the exclusive control of the Spiritual Assembly. All donations and contributions should be offered to the Treasurer of the Assembly, for the express purpose of promoting the interests of the Cause, throughout that locality or country. It is the sacred obligation of every conscientious and faithful servant of Bahá'u'lláh who desires to see His Cause advance, to contribute freely and generously for the increase of that Fund. The members of the Spiritual Assembly will at their own discretion expend it to promote the Teaching Campaign, to help the needy, to establish educational Bahá'í institutions, to extend in every way possible their sphere of service.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*.

... the Guardian would advise your Assembly to continue impressing upon the believers the necessity of their contributing regularly to the national fund, irrespective of whether there is an emergency to be met or not. Nothing short of a continuous flow of contributions to that fund can, indeed, ensure the financial stability upon which so much of the progress of the institutions of the Faith must now inevitably depend.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Bahá'í Funds and Contributions, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1230, p. 538.

As the activities of the American Bahá'í community expand, and its world-wide prestige correspondingly increases, the institution of the national Fund, the bedrock on which all other institutions must necessarily rest and be established, acquires added importance, and should be increasingly supported by the entire body of the believers, both in their individual capacities, and through their collective efforts, whether organized as groups or as Local Assemblies. The supply of funds, in support of the national Treasury, constitutes, at the present time, the life-blood of these nascent institutions which you are labouring to erect. Its importance cannot

surely be overestimated. Untold blessings shall no doubt crown every effort directed to that end. I am eagerly and prayerfully awaiting the news of an unprecedented expansion in so vital an organ of the Administrative Order of our Faith.

Shoghi Effendi, in Bahá'í Funds and Contributions,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 1231, pp. 538–539.

Regarding your question about contributions: it is up to the individual to decide; if he wishes to denote a sum to a specific purpose, he is free to do so; but the friends should recognize the fact that too much labelling of contributions will tie the hands of the Assembly and prevent it from meeting its many obligations in various fields of Bahá'í activity.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to Canada*.

9.27 The Spirit of Giving

You asked concerning some plans whereby funds could be gathered for the Temple. Shoghi Effendi believes that the best and noblest method is to have free donations that are made spontaneously and with the sense of making some sacrifice in furthering the Cause. It is with sacrifice that this Temple is to be built. That is the truly worthy method.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Bahá'í Funds and Contributions,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 1225, p. 536.

... I feel urged to remind you of the necessity of ever bearing in mind the cardinal principle that all contributions to the Fund are to be purely and strictly voluntary in character. It should be made clear and evident to every one that any form of compulsion, however slight and indirect, strikes at the very root of the principle underlying the formation of the Fund ever since its inception.

Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, No. 42.

We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has and is continually being refilled from an invisible source. To be continually giving out for the good of our fellows undeterred by the fear of poverty and reliant on the unfailing bounty of the Source of all wealth and all good—that is the secret of right living.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, No. 83.

9.28 Only Bahá'ís May Contribute

He wishes me to stress again that under no circumstances the believers should accept any financial help from non-Bahá'ís for use in connection with specific administrative activities of the Faith such as the Temple construction fund, and other local or national Bahá'í administrative funds. The reason for this is twofold: First because the Institutions which the Bahá'ís are gradually building are in the nature of gifts from Bahá'u'lláh to the world; and secondly the acceptance of funds from non-believers for specific Bahá'í use would, sooner or later, involve the Bahá'ís into

unforeseen complications and difficulties with others, and thus cause incalculable harm to the body of the Cause.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Bahá'í Funds and Contributions, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1259, p. 548.

9.29 Ḥuqúqu'lláh

Should a person acquire one hundred mithqáls of gold, nineteen mithqáls thereof belong unto God, the Creator of earth and heaven. Take heed, O people, lest ye deprive yourselves of this great bounty. We have prescribed this law unto you while We are wholly independent of you and of all that are in the heavens and on the earth. Indeed there lie concealed in this command, mysteries and benefits which are beyond the comprehension of anyone save God, the All-Knowing, the All-Informed. Say, through this injunction God desireth to purify your possessions and enable you to draw nigh unto such stations as none can attain, except those whom God may please. Verily, He is the Generous, the Gracious, the Bountiful.

O people! Act not treacherously in the matter of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and dispose not of it, except by his leave. Thus hath it been ordained in His Epistles as well as in this glorious Tablet.

Whoso dealeth dishonestly with God will in justice be exposed, and whoso fulfilleth the things he hath been commanded, divine blessings will descend upon him from the heaven of the bounty of his Lord, the Bestower, the Bountiful, the Most Generous, the Ancient of Days. Verily, He desireth for you the things that are inscrutable to you at present, though the people themselves will readily discover them when their souls take their flight and the trappings of their earthly gaieties are rolled up. Thus warneth you the Author of the Preserved tablet.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1108, pp. 491–492.

To discharge one's obligations is highly praiseworthy in the sight of God. However, it is not permitted to solicit Ḥuqúq from anyone. Beseech ye the one true God to enable His loved ones to offer that which is the Right of God, inasmuch as the observance of this injunction would cause one's possessions to be purified and protected and would become the means of attracting goodly gifts and heavenly blessings.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1144, p. 504.

Ḥuqúqu'lláh is indeed a great law. It is incumbent upon all to make this offering, because it is the source of grace, abundance, and of all good. It is a bounty which shall remain with every soul in every world of the worlds of God, the All-Possessing, the All-Bountiful.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1105, p. 490.

The benefits accruing from benevolent works shall fall to the individuals concerned. In such matters only a word would suffice. Should anyone offer Ḥuqúq with utmost joy and radiance, manifesting a spirit of resignation and content, his offering shall be acceptable before God, otherwise He can dispense with all the peoples of the earth … Well is it with them that have fulfilled that which is prescribed in the Book of

God. It is incumbent upon everyone to observe that which God hath purposed, for whatsoever hath been set forth in the Book by the Pen of Glory is an effective means for the purging, the purification and sanctification of the souls of men and a source of prosperity and blessing. Happy are they that have observed His commandments.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1138, p. 502.

It is clear and evident that the payment of the Right of God is conducive to prosperity, to blessing, and to honour and divine protection.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1104, p. 490.

For a number of years Ḥuqúq was not accepted. How numerous the offerings that on reaching Our presence were returned to the donors, because they were not needed then. However in recent years We have, in view of the exigencies of the times, accepted the payment of the Ḥuqúq, but have forbidden solicitation thereof. Everyone must have the utmost regard for the dignity of the Word of God and for the exaltation of His Cause. Were a person to offer all the treasures of the earth at the cost of debasing the honour of the Cause of God, were it even less than a grain of mustard, such an offering would not be permissible. All the world hath belonged and will always belong to God. If one spontaneously offereth Ḥuqúq with the utmost joy and radiance it will be acceptable, and not otherwise. The benefit of such deeds reverteth unto the individuals themselves. This measure hath been ordained in view of the necessity for material means, for "averse is God from putting aught into effect through its means." Thus instructions were given to receive the Ḥuqúq.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1125, pp. 497–498.

O my heavenly friends! It is certain and evident that the Incomparable One is always praised for His absolute wealth, distinguished for His all-embracing mercy, characterized by His eternal grace, and known for His gifts to the world of existence. Nonetheless, in accordance with His inscrutable wisdom and in order to apply a unique test to distinguish the friend from the stranger, He hath enjoined the Ḥuqúq upon His servants and made it obligatory.

Those who have observed this weighty ordinance have received heavenly blessings and in both worlds their faces shone radiantly and their nostrils perfumed by the sweet savours of God's tender mercy. One of the tokens of His consummate wisdom is that the payment of the Ḥuqúq will enable the donors to become firm and steadfast and will exert a great influence on their hearts and souls. Furthermore the Ḥuqúq will be used to [for] charitable purposes.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1160, pp. 510–511.

The Blessed Beauty—may my life be offered up for His Dust—hath emphasized through His decisive Word that the utmost honesty hath to be observed in matters related to the Ḥuqúq. The institution of Ḥuqúq is sacred.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1170, p. 513.

Regarding the Ḥuqúqu'lláh ... this is applied to one's merchandise, property and income. After deducting the necessary expenses, whatever is left as profit, and is an addition to one's capital, such a sum is subject to Ḥuqúq. When one has paid Ḥuqúq

once on a particular sum, that sum is no longer subject to Ḥuqúq, unless it should pass from one person to another. One's residence, and the household furnishings are exempt from Ḥuqúq ... Ḥuqúqu'lláh is paid to the Centre of the Cause.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 1178, p. 515.

It is clear from the Writings that a person is exempt from paying Ḥuqúqu'lláh on his residence and such household and professional equipment as are needful. It is left to the discretion of the individual to decide which items are necessary and which are not. It is obvious that the friends should not spend lavishly on residences and furnishings and rationalize on these expenditures in their desire to avoid payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. No specific text has been found exempting capital used to earn income. The Universal House of Justice leaves such matters to the consciences of the individual believers.

The Universal House of Justice, 9 April 1980, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 1204, p. 524.

... many details in the computation of Ḥuqúqu'lláh have been left by Bahá'u'lláh to the judgement and conscience of the individual believer. For example, He exempts such household equipment and furnishings as are needful, but He leaves it to the individual to decide which items are necessary and which are not. Contributions to the funds of the Faith cannot be considered as part of one's payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh; moreover, if one owes Ḥuqúqu'lláh and cannot afford to both pay it and to make contributions to the Fund, the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh should take priority over making contributions. But as to whether contributions to the Fund may be treated as expenses in calculating the amount of one's assets on which Ḥuqúqu'lláh is payable; this is left to the judgement of each individual in the light of his own circumstances.

The Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf that "one mithqál consists of nineteen nakhuds. The weight of twenty–four nakhuds equals four and three–fifths grammes. Calculations may be made on this basis". Nineteen mithqáls therefore equal 69.191667 grammes. One troy ounce equals 31.103486 grammes, thus 19 mithqáls equal 2.224563 oz. At the current rate of $339.10 per ounce, 19 mithqáls of gold would amount to $754.35. Thus on a savings of $754.35 an amount of $143.33 (i.e. 19%) would be payable as Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

The Universal House of Justice, 16 September 1979, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 1203, pp. 523–524.

The House of Justice further points out that however weighty are the obligations resting upon the believers to pay the Ḥuqúqu'lláh and to support other funds of the Faith, these are spiritual obligations which are to be fulfilled voluntarily, and under no circumstances may contributions to any of these funds, even the Ḥuqúqu'lláh, be demanded or solicited from individual believers. Appeals and exhortations must always be made to the generality of the friends, not to individuals.

The Universal House of Justice, 7 May 1980, in Ḥuqúqu'lláh,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 1205, p. 524

Bahá'í Elections

9.30 The Character and Practice of Bahá'í Elections

In order to preserve the spiritual character and purpose of Bahá'í elections the practices of nomination or electioneering, or any other procedure or activity detrimental to that character and purpose shall be eschewed. A silent and prayerful atmosphere shall prevail during the election so that each elector may vote for none but those whom prayer and reflection inspire him to uphold.

1. All Bahá'í elections, except elections of officers of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies and committees, shall be by plurality vote taken by secret ballot.
2. Election of the officers of a Spiritual Assembly or committee shall be by majority vote of the Assembly or committee taken by secret ballot.
3. In case by reason of a tie vote or votes the full membership of an elected body is not determined on the first ballot, then one or more additional ballots shall be taken on the persons tied until all members are elected.
4. The duties and rights of a Bahá'í elector may not be assigned nor may they be exercised by proxy.

The Universal House of Justice, *The Constitution of The Universal House of Justice*, By-Laws, section Vl.

In order to be eligible to vote and hold elective office, a Bahá'í must have attained the age of twenty–one years.

The Universal House of Justice, *The Constitution of The Universal House of Justice*, By-Laws, section I.

On the election day, the friends must wholeheartedly participate in the elections, in unity and amity, turning their hearts to God, detached from all things but Him, seeking His guidance and supplicating His aid and bounty.

Shoghi Effendi, in The Spiritual Character of Bahá'í Elections, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 706, p. 315.

… I earnestly appeal to every one of you … to make … yet another effort, this time more spontaneous and selfless than before, and endeavour to approach your task … with that purity of spirit that can alone obtain our Beloved's most cherished desire. Let us recall His explicit and often repeated assurances that every Assembly elected in that rarefied atmosphere of selflessness and detachment is in truth appointed of God ….

Shoghi Effendi, in The Spiritual Character of Bahá'í Elections, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 707, p. 315.

If we but turn our gaze to the high qualifications of the members of Bahá'í Assemblies, ... we are filled with feelings of unworthiness and dismay, and would feel truly disheartened but for the comforting thought that if we rise to play nobly our part every deficiency in our lives will be more than compensated by the all-conquering spirit of His grace and power. Hence it is incumbent upon the chosen delegates to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, the names of only those who can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience.

Shoghi Effendi, in The Spiritual Character of Bahá'í Elections,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 708, pp. 315–316.

I feel that reference to personalities before the election would give rise to misunderstanding and differences. What the friends should do is to get thoroughly acquainted with one another, to exchange views, to mix freely and discuss among themselves the requirements and qualifications for such a membership without reference or application, however indirect, to particular individuals. We should refrain from influencing the opinion of others, of canvassing for any particular individual, but should stress the necessity of getting fully acquainted with the qualifications of membership referred to in our Beloved's Tablets and of learning more about one another through direct, personal experience rather than through the reports and opinions of our friends.

Shoghi Effendi, in The Spiritual Character of Bahá'í Elections,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 709, p. 316.

The strength and progress of the Bahá'í community depend upon the election of pure, faithful and active souls ... Canvassing is deprecated ....

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Spiritual Character of Bahá'í Elections,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 715, p. 317.

Among the "necessary qualities" specified by the Guardian are those "of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience". With a heightened awareness of the functions to be performed by the elected body, the believer can properly assess those for whom a vote should be cast. From among the pool of those whom the elector believes to be qualified to serve, selection should be made with due consideration given to such other factors as age distribution, diversity, and gender. The elector should make his choice after careful thought over an extended period before the actual election.

The Universal House of Justice, 25 March 2007.

9.31 Service on Bahá'í Institutions: An Unsought Privilege

It is our earnest hope that, in your efforts over the next Plan to promote the sound and harmonious development of Bahá'í administration at all levels, from the local to the national, you will do your utmost to help the friends carry out their functions in the context of the organic process of growth gathering momentum across the globe. The realization of this hope will hinge, to a large extent, on the degree to which those who have been called upon to render such service—whether elected to a

Spiritual Assembly or named to one of its agencies, whether designated an institute coordinator or appointed one of your deputies—recognize the great privilege that is theirs and understand the boundaries which this privilege establishes for them.

Service on the institutions and agencies of the Faith is indeed a tremendous privilege, but not one that is sought by the individual; it is a duty and responsibility to which he or she may be called at any given time. It is understandable, of course, that all those involved in Bahá'í administration would rightly feel they have been invested with a singular honour in forming part, in whatever way, of a structure designed to be a channel through which the spirit of the Cause flows. Yet they should not imagine that such service entitles them to operate on the periphery of the learning process that is everywhere gaining strength, exempt from its inherent requirements. Nor should it be supposed that membership on administrative bodies provides an opportunity to promote one's own understanding of what is recorded in the Sacred Text and how the teachings should be applied, steering the community in whatever direction personal preferences dictate. Referring to members of Spiritual Assemblies, the Guardian wrote that they "must disregard utterly their own likes and dislikes, their personal interests and inclinations, and concentrate their minds upon those measures that will conduce to the welfare and happiness of the Bahá'í Community and promote the common weal." Bahá'í institutions do exercise authority to guide the friends, and exert moral, spiritual and intellectual influence on the lives of individuals and communities. However, such functions are to be performed with the realization that an ethos of loving service pervades Bahá'í institutional identity. Qualifying authority and influence in this manner implies sacrifice on the part of those entrusted to administer the affairs of the Faith. Does not 'Abdu'l-Bahá tell us that "when a lump of iron is cast into the forge, its ferrous qualities of blackness, coldness and solidity, which symbolize the attributes of the human world, are concealed and disappear, while the fire's distinctive qualities of redness, heat and fluidity, which symbolize the virtues of the Kingdom, become visibly apparent in it." As He averred, "ye must in this matter—that is, the serving of humankind—lay down your very lives, and as ye yield yourselves, rejoice."

The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010.

Bahá'í Consultation and Decision Making

9.32 Requisites for Consultation

Consultation He (Bahá'u'lláh) establishes as one of the fundamental principles of His Faith, describes it as "*the lamp of guidance,*" as "*the bestower of understanding,*" and as one of the two "*luminaries*" of the "*heaven of Divine wisdom.*"

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrances, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 43.

9.33 How To Consult

With love and unity

The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the assembly. They must be wholly free from estrangement and must manifest in themselves the Unity of God .... Should harmony of thought and absolute unity be non-existent, that gathering shall be dispersed and that Assembly be brought to naught.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 45.

Seek Divine guidance

The second condition is that ... They must, when coming together, turn their faces to the Kingdom on High and ask aid from the Realm of Glory.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 45.

Seek out the truth

They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 45.

Consult the Writings

Should differences arise amongst you over any matter, refer it to God while the Sun still shineth above the horizon of this Heaven and, when it hath set, refer ye to whatsoever hath been sent down by Him.

Bahá'u'lláh , *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 53.

Consult with frankness and courtesy

They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care, and moderation to express their views. … The honoured members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another, nay, he must with moderation set forth the truth ….

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 45.

Be willing to sacrifice personal feelings and opinions

Should any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed. The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 44.

The successful reconciliation of opposites requires a true Bahá'í spirit

Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candour, and courage on the other.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*.

9.34 Making Decisions

The ideal of Bahá'í consultation is to arrive at a unanimous decision. When this is not possible a vote must be taken. In the words of the beloved Guardian: "… when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious, and cordial consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote and abide by the voice of the majority, which we are told by the Master to be the voice of truth, never to be challenged, and always to be whole-heartedly enforced."

As soon as a decision is reached it becomes the decision of the whole Assembly, not merely of those members who happened to be among the majority.

When it is proposed to put a matter to the vote, a member of the Assembly may feel that there are additional facts or views which must be sought before he can make up his mind and intelligently vote on the proposition. He should express this feeling to the Assembly, and it is for the Assembly to decide whether or not further consultation is needed before voting.

Whenever it is decided to vote on a proposition all that is required is to ascertain how many of the members are in favour of it; if this is a majority of those present, the motion is carried; if it is a minority the motion is defeated. Thus the whole question of "abstaining" does not arise in Bahá'í voting. A member who does not vote in favour of a proposition is, in effect, voting against it, even if at that moment he himself feels that he has been unable to make up his mind on the matter.

The Universal House of Justice, 6 March 1970, *Messages 1963–1986*, paras 79.3–79.6, pp. 167–168.

9.35 Carrying Out Decisions

It is again not permitted that any one of the honoured members object to or censure, whether in or out of the meeting, any decision arrived at previously, though that decision be not right, for such criticism would prevent any decision from being enforced.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 45.

But once the opinion of the majority has been ascertained, all the members should automatically and unreservedly obey it, and faithfully carry it out.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Consultation,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 198, pp. 104–105.

In short, whatsoever thing is arranged in harmony and with love and purity of motive, its result is light, and should the least trace of estrangement prevail the result shall be darkness upon darkness ....

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 45.

So strong is the emphasis on unity that, for example, once a decision has been made by an Assembly, everyone is expected to support that decision wholeheartedly, relying confidently on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's assurance that, even if the decision is wrong, "as it is in unity the truth will be revealed and the wrong made right". This principle of unity is supplemented by other, related guidelines covering such issues as how criticism can be expressed, how the wrongdoing of members of the community is to be corrected, how the principle of justice is to be applied and appeals admitted, and how the integrity of individuals, the institutions and the Cause is to be upheld.

The Universal House of Justice, 2 July 1996, *Rights and Responsibilities*, p. 51.

The functioning of one's conscience, then, depends upon one's understanding of right and wrong; the conscience of one person may be established upon a disinterested striving after truth and justice, while that of another may rest on an unthinking predisposition to act in accordance with that pattern of standards, principles and prohibitions which is a product of his social environment. Conscience, therefore, can serve either as a bulwark of an upright character or can represent an accumulation of prejudices learned from one's forebears or absorbed from a limited social code.

A Bahá'í recognizes that one aspect of his spiritual and intellectual growth is to foster the development of his conscience in the light of divine Revelation—a Revelation which, in addition to providing a wealth of spiritual and ethical principles, exhorts man "to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye." This process of development, therefore, involves a clear-sighted examination of the conditions of the world with both heart and mind. A Bahá'í will understand that an upright life is based upon observance of certain principles which stem from Divine Revelation and which he recognizes as essential for the well-being of both the individual and society. In order to uphold such principles, he knows that, in certain cases, the voluntary submission of the promptings of his own personal conscience to the decision of the

majority is a conscientious requirement, as in wholeheartedly accepting the majority decision of an Assembly at the outcome of consultation.

The Universal House of Justice, 8 February 1998,
Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith, p. 40.

9.36 Appeals and Criticism

Appeal can be made from the Local Assembly's decision to the National Assembly, and from the National Assembly's decision to the Guardian. But the principle of authority invested in our elected bodies must be upheld. This is not something which can be learned without trial and test.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The National Spiritual Assembly,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1511, p. 131.

The Guardian believes that a great deal of the difficulties from which the believers … feel themselves to be suffering are caused by their neither correctly understanding nor putting into practice the administration. They seem—many of them—to be prone to continually challenging and criticizing the decisions of their Assemblies. If the Bahá'ís undermine the very bodies which are, however immaturely, seeking to co-ordinate Bahá'í activities and administer Bahá'í affairs, if they continually criticize their acts and challenge or belittle their decisions, they not only prevent any real rapid progress in the Faith's development from taking place, but they repel outsiders who quite rightly may ask how we ever expect to unite the whole world when we are so disunited among ourselves!

There is only one remedy for this: to study the administration, to obey the Assemblies, and each believer seek to perfect his own character as a Bahá'í. We can never exert the influence over others which we can exert over ourselves. If we are better, if we show love, patience, and understanding of the weaknesses of others; if we seek to never criticize but rather encourage, others will do likewise, and we can really help the Cause through our example and spiritual strength. The Bahá'ís everywhere, when the administration is first established, find it very difficult to adjust themselves. They have to learn to obey, even when the Assembly may be wrong, for the sake of unity. They have to sacrifice their personalities, to a certain extent, in order that the community life may grow and develop as a whole.

These things are difficult—but we must realize that they will lead us to a very much greater, more perfect, way of life when the Faith is properly established according to the administration.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The National Spiritual Assembly,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1469, pp. 111–112.

Bahá'ís are "fully entitled to address criticisms to their Assemblies" and offer their recommendations. When Bahá'ís have addressed their criticisms, suggestions and advice to their Assemblies, including their views "about policies or individual members of elected bodies", they must "whole-heartedly accept the advice or decision of the Assembly".

There is a clear distinction between, on the one hand, the prohibition of backbiting, which would include adverse comments about individuals or institutions made to

other individuals privately or publicly, and, on the other hand, the encouragement to unburden oneself of one's concerns to a Spiritual Assembly, Local or National (or now, also, to confide in a Counsellor or Auxiliary Board member). Thus, although one of the principal functions of the Nineteen Day Feast is to provide a forum for "open and constructive criticism and deliberation regarding the state of affairs within the local Bahá'í community", complaints about the actions of an individual member of an Assembly should be made directly and confidentially to the Assembly itself, not made to other individuals or even raised at a Nineteen Day Feast.

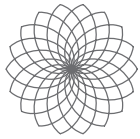
While constructive criticism is encouraged, destructive criticism, such as the pattern of "continually challenging and criticizing the decisions" of the Assemblies, prevents the rapid growth of the Faith and repels those who are yet outside the community. Indeed "all criticisms and discussions of a negative character which may result in undermining the authority of the Assembly as a body should be strictly avoided. For otherwise the order of the Cause itself will be endangered, and confusion and discord will reign in the community." "Vicious criticism is indeed a calamity", the root of which is "lack of faith in the system of Bahá'u'lláh" and failure to follow the "Bahá'í laws in voting, in electing, in serving, and in abiding by Assembly decisions".

The questions of how criticism is expressed and acted upon in the Bahá'í community, and how the Spiritual Assemblies administer justice in regard to individual believers, are but elements of far greater concepts and should become second nature in the social discourse of Bahá'ís. The Bahá'í community is an association of individuals who have voluntarily come together, on recognizing Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be the Manifestation of God for this age, to establish certain patterns of personal and social behaviour and to build the institutions that are to promote these patterns. There are numerous individuals who share the ideals of the Faith and draw inspiration from its Teachings, while disagreeing with certain of its features, but those who actually enter the Bahá'í community have accepted, by their own free will, to follow the Teachings in their entirety, understanding that, if doubts and disagreements arise in the process of translating the Teachings into practice, the final arbiter is, by the explicit authority of the Revealed Text, the Universal House of Justice.

It is the ardent prayer of the Universal House of Justice that any friends who find themselves at odds in this endeavour will have confidence in the guidance it provides for them, will renew their study of the Teachings and, for the sake of Bahá'u'lláh, strengthen their love for one another. As the beloved Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf to an individual believer on 25 October 1949: "Without the spirit of real love for Bahá'u'lláh, for His Faith and its Institutions, and the believers for each other, the Cause can never really bring in large numbers of people. For it is not preaching and rules the world wants, but love and action." The world-wide undertakings on which the Cause of God is embarked are far too significant, the need of the peoples of the world for the Message of Bahá'u'lláh far too urgent, the perils facing mankind far too grave, the progress of events far too swift, to permit His followers to squander their time and efforts in fruitless contention. Now, if ever, is the time for love among

the friends, for unity of understanding and endeavour, for self-sacrifice and service by Bahá'ís in every part of the world.

The Universal House of Justice, 2 July 1996,
Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith, pp. 26–28.



Re-Visioning Relationships

9.37 The Administrative Institutions and the Community

The great emphasis on the distinctiveness of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh is not meant to belittle existing systems of government. Indeed, they are to be recognized as the fruit of a vast period of social evolution, representing an advanced stage in the development of social organization. What motivates us is the knowledge that the supreme mission of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, the Bearer of that Order, is, as Shoghi Effendi pointed out, "none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations," indicating the "coming of age of the entire human race." The astounding implication of this is the near prospect of attaining an age-old hope, now made possible at last by the coming of Bahá'u'lláh. In practical terms, His mission signals the advent of "an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced." It is a fresh manifestation of the direct involvement of God in history, a reassurance that His children have not been left to drift, a sign of the outpouring of a heavenly grace that will enable all humanity to be free at last from conflict and contention to ascend the heights of world peace and divine civilization. Beyond all else, it is a demonstration of that love for His children, which He knew in the depth of His "immemorial being" and in the "ancient eternity" of His Essence, and which caused Him to create us all. In the noblest sense, then, attention to the requirements of His World Order is a reciprocation of that love.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 1988.

The aggressiveness and competitiveness which animate a dominantly capitalistic culture; the partisanship inherent in a fervidly democratic system; the suspicion of public-policy institutions and the scepticism towards established authority ingrained in the political attitude of the people and which trace their origins to the genesis of American society; the cynical disregard of the moderating principles and rules of civilized human relationships resulting from an excessive liberalism and its immoral consequences—such unsavoury characteristics inform entrenched habits of American life, which imperceptibly at first but more obviously in the long run have come to exert too great a sway over the manner of management of the Bahá'í

community and over the behaviour of portions of its rank and file in relation to the Cause. This unwholesome influence must be arrested by immediate, deliberate effort—an effort which must surely begin within your Assembly itself. Further accommodation of it will severely impede the progress of your community, despite the abundant possibilities of an imminent breakthrough. It was due to this concern in particular that we welcomed your request for a meeting with us.

The guarantee of well-being and success in all your endeavours to serve the Cause of God can be stated in one word: unity. It is the alpha and omega of all Bahá'í objectives. Among the first admonitions addressed to National Spiritual Assemblies by Shoghi Effendi was the following assertion: "It is, I firmly believe, of the utmost urgent importance that, with unity of purpose and action firmly established in our midst, and with every trace of animosity and mistrust of the past banished from their hearts, we should form one united front, and combat, wisely and tactfully, every force that might darken the spirit of the Movement, cause division in its ranks, and narrow it by dogmatic and sectarian belief." He then stated that "it is primarily upon the elected members of the National Spiritual Assemblies throughout the Bahá'í world that this highly important duty devolves", warning that, "should such a representative and responsible body fail to realize this fundamental requisite for all successful achievement, the whole structure is sure to crumble".

Unity within the Assembly itself is, of course, of immediate importance to the wider unity your actions are intended to foster and sustain. At no time can any member of your Assembly afford to be unmindful of this basic requirement nor neglect to work towards upholding it. Of particular relevance is the attitude that the members adopt towards their membership on that exalted body. There needs to be a recognition on their part of the Assembly's spiritual character and a feeling in their hearts of respect for the institution based upon a perception of it as something beyond or apart from themselves, as a sacred entity whose powers they have the privilege to engage and canalize by coming together in harmony and acting in accordance with divinely revealed principles. With such a perspective the members will be able better to acquire an appropriate posture in relation to the Assembly itself, to appreciate their role as Trustees of the Merciful and to counteract any impression that they have assumed ownership and control of the institution in the manner of major stockholders of a business enterprise.

Also relevant to effecting unity is the attitude of the friends, whether serving on any Assembly or not, towards the exercise of authority in the Bahá'í community. People generally tend to be suspicious of those in authority. The reason is not difficult to understand, since human history is replete with examples of the disastrous misuse of authority and power. A reversal of this tendency is not easily achievable, but the Bahá'í friends must be freed of suspicion towards their institutions if the wheels of progress are to turn with uninterrupted speed. A rigorous discipline of thought and action on the part of both the friends and the National Assembly will succeed in meeting this challenge; both must live up to their responsibilities in this regard by recognizing some fundamental realities.

The oneness of humanity, which is the primary principle and ultimate goal of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, implies, as Shoghi Effendi said, an "organic change in

the structure of present-day society". So fundamental a change in the structural conception of society must imply a new pattern for the administration of community affairs in a Bahá'í context. The insights offered by the beloved Guardian, as conveyed by his secretary in a letter dated 14 October 1941, shed light on this critical subject.

> The friends must never mistake the Bahá'í administration for an end in itself. It is merely the instrument of the spirit of the Faith. This Cause is a Cause which God has revealed to humanity as a whole. It is designed to benefit the entire human race, and the only way it can do this is to reform the community life of mankind, as well as seeking to regenerate the individual. The Bahá'í Administration is only the first shaping of what in future will come to be the social life and laws of community living.

Shoghi Effendi's advice to an individual in another instance provides a further perspective: "He urges you to do all you can to promote unity and love amongst the members of the Community there, as this seems to be their greatest need. So often young communities, in their desire to administer the Cause, lose sight of the fact that these spiritual relationships are far more important and fundamental than the rules and regulations which must govern the conduct of community affairs."

It can therefore be deduced that the importance of the Bahá'í administration is its value in serving as a facilitator of the emergence and maintenance of community life in a wholly new mode, and in catering to the requirements of the spiritual relationships which flow from love and unity among the friends. This touches upon a distinguishing characteristic of Bahá'í life which such spiritual relationships foster, namely, the spirit of servitude to God, expressed in service to the Cause, to the friends and to humanity as a whole. The attitude of the individual as a servant, an attitude pre-eminently exemplified in the life and person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is a dynamic that permeates the activities of the Faith; it acquires collective, transformative force in the normal functioning of a community. In this regard, the institutions of the Faith stand as channels for the promotion of this salient characteristic. It is in this framework that the concepts of rulership and leadership, authority and power are properly understood and actualized.

The appearance of a united, firmly based and self-sustaining community must be a major goal of a Spiritual Assembly. Composed of a membership reflecting a diversity of personalities, talents, abilities and interests, such a community requires a level of internal interaction between the Assembly and the body of the believers based on a commonly recognized commitment to service, and in which a sense of partnership based on appreciation of each other's distinctive sphere of action is fully recognized and unfailingly upheld, and no semblance of a dichotomy between the two appears. In such a community leadership is that expression of service by which the Spiritual Assembly invites and encourages the use of the manifold talents and abilities with which the community is endowed, and stimulates and guides the diverse elements of the community towards goals and strategies by which the effects of a coherent force for progress can be realized.

The maintenance of a climate of love and unity depends largely upon the feeling among the individuals composing the community that the Assembly is part of

themselves, that their co-operative interactions with that divinely ordained body allow them a fair latitude for initiative and that the quality of their relationships with both the institution and their fellow believers encourages a spirit of enterprise invigorated by an awareness of the revolutionizing purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, by a consciousness of the high privilege of their being associated with efforts to realize that purpose, and by a consequent, ever-present sense of joy. In such a climate, the community is transformed from being the mere sum of its parts to assuming a wholly new personality as an entity in which its members blend without losing their individual uniqueness. The possibilities for manifesting such a transformation exist most immediately at the local level, but it is a major responsibility of the National Assembly to nurture the conditions in which they may flourish.

The authority to direct the affairs of the Faith locally, nationally and internationally, is divinely conferred on elected institutions. However, the power to accomplish the tasks of the community resides primarily in the mass of the believers. The authority of the institutions is an irrevocable necessity for the progress of humanity; its exercise is an art to be mastered. The power of action in the believers is unlocked at the level of individual initiative and surges at the level of collective volition. In its potential, this mass power, this mix of individual potentialities, exists in a malleable form susceptible to the multiple reactions of individuals to the sundry influences at work in the world. To realize its highest purpose, this power needs to express itself through orderly avenues of activity. Even though individuals may strive to be guided in their actions by their personal understanding of the Divine Texts, and much can be accomplished thereby, such actions, untempered by the overall direction provided by authorized institutions, are incapable of attaining the thrust necessary for the unencumbered advancement of civilization.

Individual initiative is a pre-eminent aspect of this power; it is therefore a major responsibility of the institutions to safeguard and stimulate it. Similarly, it is important for individuals to recognize and accept that the institutions must act as a guiding and moderating influence on the march of civilization. In this sense, the divine requirement that individuals obey the decisions of their Assemblies can clearly be seen as being indispensable to the progress of society. Indeed, individuals must not be abandoned entirely to their own devices with respect to the welfare of society as a whole, neither should they be stifled by the assumption of a dictatorial posture by members of the institutions.

The successful exercise of authority in the Bahá'í community implies the recognition of separate but mutually reinforcing rights and responsibilities between the institutions and the friends in general, a recognition that in turn welcomes the need for co-operation between these two interactive forces of society. As was stated in advice given by Shoghi Effendi: "The individuals and Assemblies must learn to co-operate, and to co-operate intelligently, if they desire to adequately discharge their duties and obligations towards the Faith. And no such co-operation is possible without mutual confidence and trust."

The Universal House of Justice, 19 May 1994.

CHAPTER 10

THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY: THE MATRIX OF TRANSFORMATION

The Flourishing of the Community

10.1 Creating Unity and Dynamism 287

Fostering Universal Participation

10.2 The Need for Universal Participation 288

10.3 Encouragement of Individual Enterprise 289

10.4 The Full Involvement of Women is Essential 291

Providing Spiritual Education for Children and Youth

10.5 The Education of Children 292

10.6 Drawing Upon the Vitality of the Youth 293

10.7 Youth Year of Service 296

Appreciating and Encouraging Minorities

10.8 The Importance of Reaching Indigenous and Other Minorities 296

10.9 The Protection and Support of Minorities 297

Preserving Spiritual Relationships

10.10 The Importance of Love and Unity 298

10.11 Overcoming Disharmony 299

The Badí' Calendar

10.12 Explanation of the Badí Calendar 301

10.13 Bahá'í Dates 177 to 221 B.E. 304

Bahá'í Holy Days

10.14 Suspension of Work 307

10.15 Remembrance 307

10.16 Naw Rúz 308

10.17 Times for Holy Day Commemorations 308

The Nineteen-Day Feast

10.18 The Nature of the Nineteen-Day Feast 309
10.19 Decentralization of the Feast in Urban Centres 310
10.20 Programme 310
10.21 Attendance of those who are not Bahá'ís 311
10.22 Choice of Language and Adapting to Changing Circumstances 312
10.23 Attaining the Spiritual Reality of the Bahá'í Feast 312

The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár

10.24 A Gathering Place for Worship 313
10.25 The Dynamic Coherence of the Spiritual and the Practical 315

National and Local Bahá'í Centres: Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds

10.26 Administrative and Community Centres 316

Gatherings for Deepening

10.27 Gatherings for Deepening, and Summer and Winter Schools 317

The Flourishing of the Community

10.1 Creating Unity and Dynamism

The community, as distinguished from the individual and the institutions, assumes its own character and identity as it grows in size. This is a necessary development to which much attention is required both with respect to places where large-scale enrolment has occurred and in anticipation of more numerous instances of entry by troops. A community is of course more than the sum of its membership; it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders; it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress. Since Bahá'ís everywhere are at the very beginning of the process of community building, enormous effort must be devoted to the tasks at hand.

As we have said in an earlier message, the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behaviour: those patterns by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly are manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth. This calls for the integration of the component elements—adults, youth and children—in spiritual, social, educational and administrative activities; and their engagement in local plans of teaching and development. It implies a collective will and sense of purpose to perpetuate the Spiritual Assembly through annual elections. It involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Bahá'í centres, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.

To effect the possibilities of expansion and consolidation implied by entry by troops, a determined, world-wide effort to develop human resources must be made. The endeavour of individuals to conduct study classes in their homes, the sponsorship by the institutions of occasional courses of instruction, and the informal activities of the community, though important, are not adequate for the education and training of a rapidly expanding community. It is therefore of paramount importance that systematic attention be given to devising methods for educating large numbers of believers in the fundamental verities of the Faith and for training and assisting them to serve the Cause as their God-given talents allow. There should be no delay in establishing permanent institutes designed to provide well-organized, formally conducted programmes of training on a regular schedule.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 153 [1996].

At the heart of all activities, the spiritual, intellectual and community life of the believers must be developed and fostered, requiring: the prosecution with increased vigour of the development of Local Spiritual Assemblies so that they may exercise their beneficial influence and guidance on the life of Bahá'í communities; the

nurturing of a deeper understanding of Bahá'í family life; the Bahá'í education of children, including the holding of regular Bahá'í classes and, where necessary, the establishment of tutorial schools for the provision of elementary education; the encouragement of Bahá'í youth in study and service; and the encouragement of Bahá'í women to exercise to the full their privileges and responsibilities in the work of the community—may they befittingly bear witness to the memory of the Greatest Holy Leaf, the immortal heroine of the Bahá'í Dispensation, as we approach the fiftieth anniversary of her passing.

The Universal House of Justice, Naw-Ruz 1979, In Women,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 2207, p. 404.

Fostering Universal Participation

10.2 The Need for Universal Participation

In our message to you of April, 1964, announcing the Nine Year Plan, we called attention to two major themes of that Plan, namely "a huge expansion of the Cause of God and universal participation by all believers in the life of that Cause."

… In that same message we indicated the meaning of universal participation: "the dedicated effort of every believer in teaching, in living the Bahá'í life, in contributing to the Fund, and particularly in the persistent effort to understand more and more the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. In the words of the beloved Guardian, 'One thing and only one thing will unfailingly and alone secure the undoubted triumph of this sacred Cause, namely the extent to which our own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendour of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh.'"

"Regard the world as the human body," wrote Bahá'u'lláh to Queen Victoria. We can surely regard the Bahá'í world, the army of God, in the same way. In the human body, every cell, every organ, every nerve has its part to play. When all do so the body is healthy, vigorous, radiant, ready for every call made upon it. No cell, however humble, lives apart from the body, whether it is serving it or receiving from it. This is true of the body of mankind in which God "hast endowed each and all with talents and faculties," and is supremely true of the body of the Bahá'í World Community, for this body is already an organism, united in its aspirations, unified in its methods, seeking assistance and confirmation from the same Source, and illumined with the conscious knowledge of its unity. Therefore, in this organic, divinely guided, blessed and illumined body the participation of every believer is of the utmost importance, and is a source of power and vitality as yet unknown to us. For extensive and deep as

has been the sharing in the glorious work of the Cause, who would claim that every single believer has succeeded in finding his or her fullest satisfaction in the life of the Cause? The Bahá'í World Community, growing like a healthy new body, develops new cells, new organs, new functions and powers as it presses on to its maturity, when every soul, living for the Cause of God, will receive from that Cause, health, assurance and the overflowing bounties of Bahá'u'lláh which are diffused through His divinely ordained order.

In addition to teaching every believer can pray. Every believer can strive to make his "own inner life and private character mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendour of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh." Every believer can contribute to the Fund. Not all believers can give public talks, not all are called upon to serve on administrative institutions. But all can pray, fight their own spiritual battles, and contribute to the fund. If every believer will carry out these sacred duties, we shall be astonished at the accession of power which will result to the whole body, and which in its turn will give rise to further growth and the showering of greater blessings on all of us.

The real secret of universal participation lies in the Master's oft expressed wish that the friends should love each other, constantly encourage each other, work together, be as one soul in one body, and in so doing become a true, organic, healthy body illumined by the spirit. In such a body all will receive spiritual health and vitality from the organism itself, and the most perfect flowers and fruits will be brought forth.

Our prayers for the happiness and success of the friends everywhere are constantly offered at the Holy Shrines.

The Universal House of Justice, September 1964, *Messages 1963–1986*, paras. 19.1, and 19.2–19.7, pp. 42–43.

10.3 Encouragement of Individual Enterprise

It is the duty and privilege of the National and Local Assemblies if they find that the pressing requirements of their local and national budgets have been adequately met, to encourage individuals and groups to initiate and conduct, with their knowledge and consent, any undertaking that would serve to enhance the work which they have set themselves to achieve. Not content with appeals addressed to each and every believer to offer any constructive suggestions or plan that would remedy an existing grievance, they should, by every means in their power, stimulate the spirit of enterprise among the believers in order to further the teaching as well as the administrative work of the Cause. They should endeavour by personal contact and written appeals, to imbue the body of the faithful with a deep sense of personal responsibility, and urge every believer, whether high or low, poor or wealthy, to conceive, formulate and execute such measures and projects as would redound, in the eyes of their representatives, to the power and the fair name of this sacred Cause.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*.

Shoghi Effendi underscored the absolute necessity of individual initiative and action. He explained that without the support of the individual, "at once

wholehearted, continuous and generous," every measure and plan of his National Spiritual Assembly is "foredoomed to failure," the purpose of the Master's Divine Plan is "impeded"; furthermore, the sustaining strength of Bahá'u'lláh Himself "will be withheld from every and each individual who fails in the long run to arise and play his part." Hence, at the very crux of any progress to be made is the individual believer, who possesses the power of execution which only he can release through his own initiative and sustained action. Regarding the sense of inadequacy that sometimes hampers individual initiative, a letter written on his behalf conveys the Guardian's advice: "Chief among these, you mention the lack of courage and of initiative on the part of the believers, and a feeling of inferiority which prevents them from addressing the public. It is precisely these weaknesses that he wishes the friends to overcome, for these do not only paralyse their efforts but actually serve to quench the flame of faith in their hearts. Not until all the friends come to realize that every one of them is able, in his own measure, to deliver the Message, can they ever hope to reach the goal that has been set before them by a loving and wise Master ... Everyone is a potential teacher. He has only to use what God has given him and thus prove that he is faithful to his trust."

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 153 [1996].

As to your worry about over-controlling the friends: by appreciating the nature of the power of action which they possess, you will be able to gauge how best to guide and direct them. A wide latitude for action must be allowed them, which means that a large margin for mistakes must also be allowed. Your National Spiritual Assembly and the Local Spiritual Assemblies must not react automatically to every mistake, but distinguish between those that are self-correcting with the passage of time and do no particular harm to the community and those which require Assembly intervention. Related to this is the tendency of the friends to criticize each other at the slightest provocation, whereas the teachings call upon them to encourage each other. Such tendencies are of course motivated by a deep love for the Faith, a desire to see it free of any flaw. But human beings are not perfect. The Local Assemblies and the friends must be helped through your example and through loving counsel to refrain from such a pattern of criticism, which stunts the growth and development of the community. You should also be fearful of laying down too many rules and regulations. The Cause is not so fragile that a degree of mistakes cannot be tolerated. When you feel that certain actions may become trends with harmful consequences, you may, instead of making a new rule, discuss the matter with the Counsellors, enlisting their support in educating the friends in a manner that will improve their understanding and conduct.

A new burst of energy would accrue to the operation of the Three year Plan if the friends, both individually and collectively, could feel a greater sense of freedom to engage in a wide range of activities originating with themselves. Even if you are doing nothing deliberately to discourage such freedom, their accumulated impression of institutional disapproval, however derived, and their fear of criticism are, to a considerable extent, inhibiting their exercise of initiative. At this exact time in history when the peoples of the world are weighed down with soul-crushing difficulties and the shadow of despair threatens to eclipse the light of hope, there

must be revived among the individual believers a sense of mission, a feeling of empowerment to minister to the urgent need of humanity for guidance and thus to win victories for the Faith in their own sphere of life. The community as a whole should be involved in efforts to resolve such issues. A single answer would, of course, be inadequate, there being so many diverse elements and interests in the community. These matters require not only your own independent consultation but consultation with the Counsellors as well. Although Spiritual Assemblies are good at specifying goals, they have not yet mastered the art of making use of the talents of individuals and rousing the mass of friends to action in fulfillment of such goals. Removing this deficiency would be a mark of the maturation of these institutions. May your assembly lead the way.

The Universal House of Justice, 19 May 1994.

10.4 The Full Involvement of Women is Essential

In this day the duty of everyone, whether man or woman, is to teach the Cause. In America, the women have outdone the men in this regard and have taken the lead in this field. They strive harder in guiding the peoples of the world, and their endeavours are greater. They are confirmed by divine bestowals and blessings. It is my hope that in the East the handmaids of the Merciful will also exert such effort, reveal their powers, and manifest their capacities ....

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Women, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2191, p. 398.

Woman must endeavour then to attain greater perfection, to be man's equal in every respect, to make progress in all in which she has been backward, so that man will be compelled to acknowledge her equality of capacity and attainment.

In Europe women have made greater progress than in the East, but there is still much to be done! When students have arrived at the end of their school term an examination takes place, and the result thereof determines the knowledge and capacity of each student. So will it be with woman; her actions will show her power, there will no longer be any need to proclaim it by words.

It is my hope that women of the East, as well as their Western sisters, will progress rapidly until humanity shall reach perfection.

God's Bounty is for all and gives power for all progress. When men own the equality of women there will be no need for them to struggle for their rights! One of the principles then of Bahá'u'lláh is the equality of sex.

Women must make the greatest effort to acquire spiritual power and to increase in the virtue of wisdom and holiness until their enlightenment and striving succeeds in bringing about the unity of mankind. They must work with a burning enthusiasm to spread the Teaching of Bahá'u'lláh among the peoples, so that the radiant light of the Divine Bounty may envelop the souls of all the nations of the world!

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*.

His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh has greatly strengthened the cause of women, and the rights and privileges of women is one of the greatest principles of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Rest ye assured! Ere long the days shall come when the men addressing the women, shall say: 'Blessed are ye! Blessed are ye! Verily ye are worthy of every gift. Verily ye

deserve to adorn your heads with the crown of everlasting glory, because in sciences and arts, in virtues and perfections ye shall become equal to man, and as regards tenderness of heart and the abundance of mercy and sympathy ye are superior'

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*.

The youth have long been in the forefront of the teaching work, and now our hearts rejoice to see the women, in so many lands where previously their capacities were largely left unused, devoting their capable services to the life of the Bahá'í community.

The Universal House of Justice, *Messages 1963–1986*, Riḍván 1978, para. 207.10, pp. 379–380.

Providing Spiritual Education for Children and Youth[1]

10.5 The Education of Children

Blessed is that teacher who shall arise to instruct the children.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Bahá'í Education, *The Compilation of Compilations*, I, No. 576, p. 251.

The root cause of wrongdoing is ignorance, and we must therefore hold fast to the tools of perception and knowledge. Good character must be taught. Light must be spread afar, so that, in the school of humanity, all may acquire the heavenly characteristics of the spirit, and see for themselves beyond any doubt that there is no fiercer hell, no more fiery abyss, than to possess a character that is evil and unsound; no more darksome pit nor loathsome torment than to show forth qualities which deserve to be condemned.

The individual must be educated to such a high degree that he would rather have his throat cut than tell a lie, and would think it easier to be slashed with a sword or pierced with a spear than to utter calumny or be carried away by wrath.

Thus will be kindled the sense of human dignity and pride, to burn away the reapings of lustful appetites. Then will each one of God's beloved shine out as a bright moon with qualities of the spirit, and the relationship of each to the Sacred Threshold of his Lord will be not illusory but sound and real, will be as the very foundation of the building, not some embellishment on its facade.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 111.

According to the explicit divine text, teaching the children is indispensable and obligatory. It followeth that teachers are servants of the Lord God, since they have

[1] *See also 11.9, 11.10*

arisen to perform this task, which is the same as worship. You must therefore offer praise with every breath, for you are educating your spiritual children.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Bahá'í Education, *The Compilation of Compilations*, I, No. 614, p. 273-4.

Even though children's activities have been a part of past Plans, these have fallen short of the need. Spiritual education of children and junior youth are of paramount importance to the further progress of the community. It is therefore imperative that this deficiency be remedied. Institutes must be certain to include in their programmes the training of teachers of children's classes, who can make their services available to local communities. But although providing spiritual and academic education for children is essential, this represents only a part of what must go into developing their characters and shaping their personalities. The necessity exists, too, for individuals and the institutions at all levels, which is to say the community as a whole, to show a proper attitude towards children and to take a general interest in their welfare. Such an attitude should be far removed from that of a rapidly declining order.

Children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in them are the promise and guarantee of the future. They bear the seeds of the character of future society which is largely shaped by what the adults constituting the community do or fail to do with respect to children. They are a trust no community can neglect with impunity. An all-embracing love of children, the manner of treating them, the quality of the attention shown them, the spirit of adult behaviour toward them—these are all among the vital aspects of the requisite attitude. Love demands discipline, the courage to accustom children to hardship, not to indulge their whims or leave them entirely to their own devices. An atmosphere needs to be maintained in which children feel that they belong to the community and share in its purpose. They must lovingly but insistently be guided to live up to Bahá'í standards, to study and teach the Cause in ways that are suited to their circumstances.

Among the young ones in the community are those known as junior youth, who fall between the ages of, say, 12 and 15. They represent a special group with special needs as they are somewhat in between childhood and youth when many changes are occurring within them. Creative attention must be devoted to involving them in programmes of activity that will engage their interests, mould their capacities for teaching and service, and involve them in social interaction with older youth. The employment of the arts in various forms can be of great value in such activity.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2000.

10.6 Drawing Upon the Vitality of the Youth

Blessed is he who in the prime of his youth and the heyday of his life will arise to serve the Cause of the Lord of the beginning and of the end, and adorn his heart with His love. The manifestation of such a grace is greater than the creation of the heavens and of the earth. Blessed are the steadfast and well is it with those who are firm.

Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by the Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 1982, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 321.5a, p. 538.

No greater demonstration can be given to the peoples of both continents of the youthful vitality and the vibrant power animating the life, and the institutions of the nascent Faith of Bahá'u'lláh than an intelligent, persistent, and effective participation of the Bahá'í youth, of every race, nationality, and class, in both the teaching and administrative spheres of Bahá'í activity. Through such a participation the critics and enemies of the Faith, watching with varying degrees of scepticism and resentment, the evolutionary processes of the Cause of God and its institutions, can best be convinced of the indubitable truth that such a Cause is intensely alive, is sound to its very core, and its destinies in safe keeping.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

The Bahá'í youth must be taught how to teach the Cause of God. Their knowledge of the fundamentals of the Faith must be deepened and the standard of their education in science and literature enhanced. They must become thoroughly familiar with the language used and the example set by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His public addresses throughout the West. They must also be acquainted with those essential prerequisites of teaching as recorded in the Holy Books and Tablets.

Shoghi Effendi, in The Importance of Deepening, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 431, p. 206.

I need not tell you what great hopes he cherishes for the future role which young Bahá'ís will be inevitably called upon to play in the teaching as well as in the administrative fields of Bahá'í activity. It is on them that he centres his essential and vital hopes for the effective and wide spread of the Message, and for the strengthening of the basis of the nascent Bahá'í administrative institutions which are gradually taking shape amidst storms of an unprecedented severity, and under extremely tragic circumstances.

His brotherly advice to you, and to all loyal and ardent young believers like you, is that you should deepen your knowledge of the history and of the tenets of the Faith, not merely by means of careful and thorough study, but also through active, wholehearted and continued participation in all the activities, whether administrative or otherwise, of your community. The Bahá'í community life provides you with an indispensable laboratory, where you can translate into living and constructive action the principles which you imbibe from the Teachings. By becoming a real part of that living organism you can catch the real spirit which runs throughout the Bahá'í Teachings. To study the principles, and to try to live according to them, are, therefore, the two essential mediums through which you can ensure the development and progress of your inner spiritual life and of your outer existence as well.

May Bahá'u'lláh enable you to attain this high station, and may He keep the torch of faith for ever burning in your heart!

Shoghi Effendi, in Youth, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2259, pp. 424–425.

What impressed him most in the account of your services was the statement that the old and the young Bahá'ís are firmly united and co-operating in bearing the burdens of the Faith in that locality. Nothing will attract God's blessings and grace more than the unity of the friends, and nothing is more destructive of their highest

purpose than divisions and misunderstandings. Cling therefore to unity if you desire to succeed and abide by the will of your Lord Bahá'u'lláh; for that is the true objective of His Mission in this world.

Shoghi Effendi, in Youth, The Compilation of Compilatins, Vol. II, No. 2252, p. 421.

Three great fields of service lie open before young Bahá'ís, in which they will simultaneously be remaking the character of human society and preparing themselves for the work that they can undertake in their later lives.

First, the foundation of all their other accomplishments is their study of the teachings, the spiritualisation of their lives and the forming of their characters in accordance with the standards of Bahá'u'lláh. As the moral standards of the people around us collapse and decay, whether of the centuries-old civilizations of the East, the more recent cultures of Christendom and Islám; or of the rapidly changing tribal societies of the world, the Bahá'ís must increasingly stand out as pillars of righteousness and forbearance. The life of a Bahá'í will be characterized by truthfulness and decency; he will walk uprightly among his fellowmen, dependent upon none save God, yet linked by bonds of love and brotherhood with all mankind; he will be entirely detached from the loose standards, the decadent theories, the frenetic experimentation, the desperation of present-day society, will look upon his neighbours with a bright and friendly face and be a beacon of light and a haven for all those who would emulate his strength of character and assurance of soul.

The second field of service, which is linked intimately with the first, is teaching the Faith, particularly to their fellow-youth, among whom are some of the most open and seeking minds in the world. Not yet having acquired all the responsibilities of a family or a long-established home and job, youth can more easily choose where they will live and study or work. In the world at large young people travel hither and thither seeking amusements, education and experiences. Bahá'í youth, bearing the incomparable treasure of the Word of God for this Day, can harness this mobility into service for mankind and can choose their places of residence, their areas of travel and their types of work with the goal in mind of how they can best serve the Faith.

The third field of service is the preparation of the youth for their later years. It is the obligation of a Bahá'í to educate his children; likewise it is the duty of the children to acquire knowledge of the arts and sciences and to learn a trade or profession whereby they, in turn, can earn a living and support their families. This, for a Bahá'í youth, is in itself a service to God, a service, moreover, which can be combined with teaching the Faith and often with pioneering. The Bahá'í community will need men and women of many skills and qualifications; for, as it grows in size the sphere of its activities in the life of society will increase and diversify. Let Bahá'í youth, therefore, consider the best ways in which they can use and develop their creative abilities for the service of mankind and the Cause of God, whether this be as farmers, teachers, doctors, artisans, musicians or any one of the multitude of livelihoods that are open to them.

The Universal House of Justice, 10 June 1966, *Messages 1963–1986*, No. 37.4–37.7, pp. 93–94.

10.7 Youth Year of Service

Further to these aspirations is the need for a mighty mobilization of teaching activities reflecting regularity in the patterns of service rendered by young Bahá'ís. … One pattern of this mobilization could be short-term projects, carried out at home or in other lands, dedicated to both teaching the Faith and improving the living conditions of people. Another could be that, while still young and unburdened by family responsibilities, you give attention to the idea of volunteering a set period, say, one or two years, to some Bahá'í service, on the home front or abroad, in the teaching or development field. It would accrue to the strength and stability of the community if such patterns could be followed by succeeding generations of youth. Regardless of the modes of service, however, youth must be understood to be fully engaged, at all times, in all climes and under all conditions. In your varied pursuits you may rest assured of the loving support and guidance of the Bahá'í institutions operating at every level.

The Universal House of Justice, 3 January 1984, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 386.8, pp. 616–617.

Appreciating and Encouraging Minorities

10.8 The Importance of Reaching Indigenous and Other Minorities

Shoghi Effendi is also most anxious for the Message to reach the aboriginal inhabitants of the Americas. These people, for the most part downtrodden and ignorant, should receive from the Bahá'ís a special measure of love, and every effort be made to teach them. Their enrolment in the Faith will enrich them and us and demonstrate our principle of the Oneness of Man far better than words or the wide conversion of the ruling races ever can.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 1775, p. 524.

He urges you all to devote particular attention to the contact with racial minorities. In a country which has such a large element of prejudice against its coloured citizens as the United States, it is of the greatest importance that the Bahá'ís—and more especially the youth—should demonstrate actively our complete lack of prejudice and, indeed, our prejudice in favour of minorities.

We cannot very well prosecute a teaching campaign successfully in Africa if we do not in our home communities demonstrate to the fullest extent our love for the people who spring from the African population!

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Youth, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2295, p. 437.

The beloved Guardian feels that sufficient attention is not being paid to the matter of contacting minorities in the United States. A great impetus could be lent to the work in the European countries, in certain far-eastern areas, and in Latin America if the Bahá'ís residing in the big cities and university towns would make a determined and sufficient effort to extend friendship and hospitality to students and nationals from countries where the Bahá'ís are struggling so hard to establish the Faith. They would not only have the possibility of making more local believers, but they might also increase the membership of communities abroad, by sending back Bahá'ís from the United States. This has happened already a number of times with Chinese and Japanese friends, etc., to the great advantage of the Cause.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Youth, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2300, p. 438.

Your Assembly should bear in mind ... the importance of increasing the representation of minority races, such as the Aborigines and Maoris, within the Bahá'í Community. Special effort should be made to contact these people and to teach them; and the Bahá'ís in Australia and New Zealand should consider that every one of them that can be won to the Faith is a precious acquisition.

Shoghi Effendi, *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand*.

10.9 The Protection and Support of Minorities

Unlike the nations and peoples of the earth, be they of the East or of the West, democratic or authoritarian, communist or capitalist, whether belonging to the Old World or the New, who either ignore, trample upon, or extirpate, the racial, religious, or political minorities within the sphere of their jurisdiction, every organized community enlisted under the banner of Bahá'u'lláh should feel it to be its first and inescapable obligation to nurture, encourage, and safeguard every minority belonging to any faith, race, class, or nation within it. So great and vital is this principle that in such circumstances, as when an equal number of ballots have been cast in an election, or where the qualifications for any office are balanced as between the various races, faiths or nationalities within the community, priority should unhesitatingly be accorded the party representing the minority, and this for no other reason except to stimulate and encourage it, and afford it an opportunity to further the interests of the community. In the light of this principle, and bearing in mind the extreme desirability of having the minority elements participate and share responsibility in the conduct of Bahá'í activity, it should be the duty of every Bahá'í community so to arrange its affairs that in cases where individuals belonging to the divers minority elements within it are already qualified and fulfill the necessary requirements, Bahá'í representative institutions, be they Assemblies, conventions, conferences, or committees, may have represented on them as many of these divers elements, racial or otherwise, as possible. The adoption of such a course, and faithful adherence to it, would not only be a source of inspiration and encouragement to those elements that are numerically small and inadequately represented, but would demonstrate to the world at large the universality and representative character of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and the freedom of His followers from the taint of those

prejudices which have already wrought such havoc in the domestic affairs, as well as the foreign relationships, of the nations.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

To discriminate against any tribe because they are in a minority is a violation of the spirit that animates the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. As followers of God's Holy Faith it is our obligation to protect the just interests of any minority element within the Bahá'í Community. In fact in the administration of our Bahá'í affairs, representatives of minority groups are not only enabled to enjoy equal rights and privileges, but they are even favoured and accorded priority. Bahá'ís should be careful never to deviate from this noble standard even if the course of events of public opinion should bring pressure to bear upon them.

The principles in the Writings are clear, but usually it is when these principles are applied that questions arise.

The Universal House of Justice, 8 February 1970, *Messages 1963–1986*, paras 77.11–77.12, p. 166.

Preserving Spiritual Relationships

10.10 The Importance of Love and Unity

Most important of all is that love and unity should prevail in the Bahá'í Community, as this is what people are most longing for in the present dark state of the world. Words without the living example will never be sufficient to breathe hope into the hearts of a disillusioned and often cynical generation.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1307, p. 15.

He was very pleased to hear that the Convention was so well attended, and the believers enthusiastic and united. One of the most paramount needs of the Cause in … is that the friends should unite, should become really keenly conscious of the fact that they are one spiritual family, held together by bonds more sacred and eternal than those physical ties which make people of the same family. If the friends will forget all personal differences and open their hearts to a great love for each other for the sake of Bahá'u'lláh, they will find that their powers are vastly increased; they will attract the heart of the public, and will witness a rapid growth of the Holy Faith in … The National Spiritual Assembly should do all in its power to foster unity among the believers, and to educate them in the Administration as this is the channel through

which their community life must flow, and which, when properly understood and practiced, will enable the work of the Cause to go ahead by leaps and bounds.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Dawn of a New Day*.

If we Bahá'ís cannot attain to cordial unity among ourselves, then we fail to realize the main purpose for which the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and the Beloved Master lived and suffered.

In order to achieve this cordial unity one of the first essentials insisted on by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá is that we resist the natural tendency to let our attention dwell on the faults and failings of others rather than on our own. Each of us is responsible for one life only, and that is our own. Each of us is immeasurably far from being "perfect as our heavenly father is perfect" and the task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will-power and energy. If we allow our attention and energy to be taken up in efforts to keep others right and remedy their faults, we are wasting precious time. We are like ploughmen each of whom has his team to manage and his plough to direct, and in order to keep his furrow straight he must keep his eye on his goal and concentrate on his own task. If he looks to this side and that to see how Tom and Harry are getting on and to criticize their ploughing, then his own furrow will assuredly become crooked.

On no subject are the Bahá'í teachings more emphatic than on the necessity to abstain from faultfinding and backbiting while being ever eager to discover and root out our own faults and overcome our own failings.

If we profess loyalty to Bahá'u'lláh, to our Beloved Master and our dear Guardian, then we must show our love by obedience to these explicit teachings. Deeds not words are what they demand, and no amount of fervour in the use of expressions of loyalty and adulation will compensate for failure to live in the spirit of the teachings.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1272, pp. 3–4.

10.11 Overcoming Disharmony

Ye have been forbidden in the Book of God to engage in contention and conflict, to strike another, or to commit similar acts whereby hearts and souls may be saddened. … Wish not for others what ye wish not for yourselves; fear God and be not of the prideful. Ye are all created out of water, and unto dust shall ye return.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 148.

It is Our wish and desire that every one of you may become a source of all goodness unto men, and an example of uprightness to mankind. Beware lest ye prefer yourselves above your neighbours. Fix your gaze upon Him Who is the Temple of God amongst men. He, in truth, hath offered up His life as a ransom for the redemption of the world. He, verily, is the All-Bountiful, the Gracious, the Most High. If any differences arise amongst you, behold Me standing before your face, and overlook the faults of one another for My name's sake and as a token of your love for My manifest and resplendent Cause. We love to see you at all times consorting in amity and concord within the paradise of My good-pleasure, and to inhale from your acts the fragrance of friendliness and unity, of loving-kindness and fellowship.

Thus counselleth you the All-Knowing, the Faithful. We shall always be with you; if We inhale the perfume of your fellowship, Our heart will assuredly rejoice, for naught else can satisfy Us. To this beareth witness every man of true understanding.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXLVI.

However, he feels very strongly that if ... is in the state your letter would seem to indicate it is certainly conducting its affairs in the wrong way. This does not mean the Assembly, it means everyone. For where is Bahá'í love? Where is putting unity and harmony first? Where is the willingness to sacrifice one's personal feelings and opinions to achieve love and harmony? What makes the Bahá'ís think that when they sacrifice the spiritual laws the administrative laws are going to work? ...

He urges you to exert your utmost to get the ... Bahá'ís to put aside such obnoxious terms as "radical", "conservative", "progressive", "enemies of the Cause", "squelching the teachings", etc. If they paused for one moment to think for what purpose the Báb and the Martyrs gave their lives, and Bahá'u'lláh and the Master accepted so much suffering, they would never let such definitions and accusations cross their lips when speaking of each other. As long as the friends quarrel amongst themselves their efforts will not be blessed for they are disobeying God.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1325, p. 21.

Since you have turned to him for guidance, he will very frankly give you his opinion.

He feels that the present inharmony prevailing amongst you ... is very detrimental to the advancement of the Cause, and can only lead to disruption and the chilling of the interest of new believers. You ... should forget about your personal grievances, and unite for the protection of the Faith which he well knows you are all loyally devoted to and ready to sacrifice for.

Perhaps the greatest test Bahá'ís are ever subjected to is from each other; but for the sake of the Master they should be ever ready to overlook each other's mistakes, apologize for harsh words they have uttered, forgive and forget. He strongly recommends to you this course of action.

Also he feels that you and ... should not remain away from the meetings and Feasts in ...; you have now got an enthusiastic group of young Bahá'ís in ..., and you should show them a strong example of Bahá'í discipline and the unity which can and must prevail amongst the Community of the Most Great Name.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Living the Life,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1308, p. 15.

The Bahá'ís are fully entitled to address criticisms to their Assemblies; they can freely air their views about policies or individual members of elected bodies to the Assembly, Local or National, but then they must whole-heartedly accept the advice or decision of the Assembly, according to the principles already laid down for such matters in Bahá'í administration.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand.

The Badí' Calendar

10.12 Explanation of the Badí' Calendar

The Bahá'í year consists of 19 months of 19 days each (i.e., 361 days), with the addition of certain "intercalary days" ... between the eighteenth and nineteenth months in order to adjust the calendar to the solar year. The Báb named the months after the attributes of God. The Bahá'í New Year, like the ancient Persian New Year, is astronomically fixed, commencing at the March equinox..., and the Bahá'í era commences with the year of the Báb's declaration (i.e., A.D. 1844 A.H. 1260).

J. E. Esselmont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, The Bahá'í Calendar.

The Bahá'í day starts and ends at sunset, and consequently the date of the celebration of Bahá'í feasts should be adjusted to conform to the Bahá'í calendar time.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, No. 79.

The Báb has, moreover, in His Writings revealed in the Arabic tongue, divided the years following the date of His Revelation into cycles of nineteen years each... Each cycle of nineteen years is called a Váhid. Nineteen cycles constitute a period called a Kull-i-Shay'.

The Bahá'í World, volume 17, p. 389.

In keeping with the principle governing the gradual unfoldment and progressive application of the Teachings, the provisions of the Badí' calendar have been set forth over time. The Báb introduced the calendar and its broad pattern of periods and cycles, months and days. Bahá'u'lláh provided essential clarifications and additions. Aspects were elucidated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and arrangements for its adoption in the West were put in place at the direction of Shoghi Effendi, as described in the volumes of The Bahá'í World. Still, ambiguities surrounding some Islamic and Gregorian dates, as well as difficulties in the correlation of historical observances and astronomical events with explicit statements in the Text, left certain issues unresolved. When responding to questions concerning the calendar, both 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi left these matters to the Universal House of Justice. Of its many features, three require clarification for the calendar's uniform application: the means for the determination of Naw-Rúz, the accommodation of the lunar character of the Twin Holy Birthdays within the solar year, and the fixing of the dates of the Holy Days within the Badí' calendar.

"The Festival of Naw-Rúz falleth on the day that the sun entereth the sign of Aries," Bahá'u'lláh explains in His Most Holy Book, "even should this occur no more than one minute before sunset." However, details have, until now, been left undefined. We have decided that Ṭihrán, the birthplace of the Abhá Beauty, will be the spot on the earth that will serve as the standard for determining, by means of astronomical computations from reliable sources, the moment of the vernal equinox in the northern hemisphere and thereby the day of Naw-Rúz for the Bahá'í world.

The Festivals of the Twin Birthdays, the Birth of the Báb and the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh, have, in the East, been traditionally observed according to their correspondence to the first and second days of Muḥarram in the Islamic calendar. "These two days are accounted as one in the sight of God", Bahá'u'lláh affirms. Yet, a letter written on behalf of the Guardian states, "In the future, no doubt all of the Holy Days will follow the Solar calendar, and provisions be made as to how the Twin Festivals will be celebrated universally." How to satisfy the intrinsic lunar character of these blessed Days within the context of a solar calendar has hitherto been unanswered. We have decided that they will now be observed on the first and the second day following the occurrence of the eighth new moon after Naw-Rúz, as determined in advance by astronomical tables using Ṭihrán as the point of reference. This will result in the observance of the Twin Birthdays moving, year to year, within the months of Mashíyyat, 'Ilm, and Qudrat of the Badí' calendar, or from mid-October to mid-November according to the Gregorian calendar. Next year, the Birth of the Báb will occur on 10 Qudrat and the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh on 11 Qudrat. With joy and eager anticipation, we look to the upcoming bicentennial anniversaries of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh and the Birth of the Báb, in 174 and 176 B.E., respectively, which the entire Bahá'í world will celebrate according to a common calendar.

The dates of the remaining Holy Days will be fixed within the solar calendar in accordance with explicit statements of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi; we have decided to set aside certain discrepancies in the historical record. The dates are: Naw-Rúz, 1 Bahá; the Festival of Riḍván, 13 Jalál to 5 Jamál; the Declaration of the Báb, 8 'Aẓamat; the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, 13 'Aẓamat; the Martyrdom of the Báb, 17 Raḥmat; the Day of the Covenant, 4 Qawl; and the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 6 Qawl.

Unless specifically abrogated by these new provisions, previous guidance and clarifications pertaining to the calendar and the observance of the Nineteen Day Feast and Holy Days remain binding, such as the beginning of the day at sunset, the suspension of work, and the hours at which certain Holy Days are commemorated. In future, a change in circumstances may well require additional measures.

It will be evident from the decisions delineated that Bahá'ís of both East and West will find some elements of the calendar to be different from those to which they have been accustomed. The alignment of the dates of the Badí' calendar with other calendars will shift depending on the occurrence of Naw-Rúz. The number of days of Ayyám-i-Há will vary according to the timing of the vernal equinox in successive years; the year commencing on Naw-Rúz 172 B.E. will include four such days. A table prepared at the Bahá'í World Centre that sets out the dates for Naw-Rúz and

the Twin Holy Birthdays covering half a century will be provided to all National Spiritual Assemblies in due course.

The adoption of a new calendar in each dispensation is a symbol of the power of Divine Revelation to reshape human perception of material, social, and spiritual reality. Through it, sacred moments are distinguished, humanity's place in time and space reimagined, and the rhythm of life recast. Next Naw-Rúz will mark yet another historic step in the manifestation of the unity of the people of Bahá and the unfoldment of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order.

The Universal House of Justice, 10 July, 2014.

10.13 Bahá'í Dates 177 to 221 B.E.

BAHÁ'Í DATES 177 to 199 B.E.

Dates of Naw-Rúz, the Twin Holy Birthdays, and Ayyám-i-Há

Naw-Rúz		The Birth of the Báb & The Birth of Bahá'u'lláh		Ayyám-i-Há	
Bahá'í Dates	**Gregorian Equivalent**	**Bahá'í Dates**	**Gregorian Equivalent**	**Bahá'í Dates**	**Gregorian Equivalent**
1 Bahá 177	20 Mar 2020	4, 5 'Ilm	18, 19 Oct 2020	1–4	25–28 Feb 2021
1 Bahá 178	20 Mar 2021	4, 5 Qudrat	6, 7 Nov 2021	1–5	25 Feb–1 Mar 2022
1 Bahá 179	21 Mar 2022	11, 12 'Ilm	26, 27 Oct 2022	1–4	26 Feb–1 Mar 2023
1 Bahá 180	21 Mar 2023	1, 2 'Ilm	16, 17 Oct 2023	1–4	26–29 Feb 2024
1 Bahá 181	20 Mar 2024	19 'Ilm, 1 Qudrat	2, 3 Nov 2024	1–4	25–28 Feb 2025
1 Bahá 182	20 Mar 2025	8, 9 'Ilm	22, 23 Oct 2025	1–5	25 Feb–1 Mar 2026
1 Bahá 183	21 Mar 2026	7, 8 Qudrat	10, 11 Nov 2026	1–4	26 Feb–1 Mar 2027
1 Bahá 184	21 Mar 2027	15, 16 'Ilm	30, 31 Oct 2027	1–4	26–29 Feb 2028
1 Bahá 185	20 Mar 2028	5, 6 'Ilm	19, 20 Oct 2028	1–4	25–28 Feb 2029
1 Bahá 186	20 Mar 2029	5, 6 Qudrat	7, 8 Nov 2029	1–4	25–28 Feb 2030
1 Bahá 187	20 Mar 2030	14, 15 'Ilm	28, 29 Oct 2030	1–5	25 Feb–1 Mar 2031
1 Bahá 188	21 Mar 2031	2, 3 'Ilm	17, 18 Oct 2031	1–4	26–29 Feb 2032
1 Bahá 189	20 Mar 2032	2, 3 Qudrat	4, 5 Nov 2032	1–4	25–28 Feb 2033
1 Bahá 190	20 Mar 2033	10, 11 'Ilm	24, 25 Oct 2033	1–4	25–28 Feb 2034
1 Bahá 191	20 Mar 2034	10, 11 Qudrat	12, 13 Nov 2034	1–5	25 Feb–1 Mar 2035
1 Bahá 192	21 Mar 2035	17, 18 'Ilm	1, 2 Nov 2035	1–4	26–29 Feb 2036
1 Bahá 193	20 Mar 2036	6, 7 'Ilm	20, 21 Oct 2036	1–4	25–28 Feb 2037
1 Bahá 194	20 Mar 2037	6, 7 Qudrat	8, 9 Nov 2037	1–4	25–28 Feb 2038
1 Bahá 195	20 Mar 2038	15, 16 'Ilm	29, 30 Oct 2038	1–5	25 Feb–1 Mar 2039
1 Bahá 196	21 Mar 2039	4, 5 'Ilm	19, 20 Oct 2039	1–4	26–29 Feb 2040
1 Bahá 197	20 Mar 2040	4, 5 Qudrat	6, 7 Nov 2040	1–4	25–28 Feb 2041
1 Bahá 198	20 Mar 2041	12, 13 'Ilm	26, 27 Oct 2041	1–4	25–28 Feb 2042
1 Bahá 199	20 Mar 2042	1, 2 'Ilm	15, 16 Oct 2042	1–5	25 Feb–1 Mar 2043

BAHÁ'Í DATES 200 to 221 B.E.

Dates of Naw-Rúz, the Twin Holy Birthdays, and Ayyám-i-Há

Naw-Rúz		The Birth of the Báb & The Birth of Bahá'u'lláh		Ayyám-i-Há	
Bahá'í Dates	**Gregorian Equivalent**	**Bahá'í Dates**	**Gregorian Equivalent**	**Bahá'í Dates**	**Gregorian Equivalent**
1 Bahá 200	21 Mar 2043	19 'Ilm, 1 Qudrat	3, 4 Nov 2043	1–4	26–29 Feb 2044
1 Bahá 201	20 Mar 2044	8, 9 'Ilm	22, 23 Oct 2044	1–4	25–28 Feb 2045
1 Bahá 202	20 Mar 2045	8, 9 Qudrat	10, 11 Nov 2045	1–4	25–28 Feb 2046
1 Bahá 203	20 Mar 2046	16, 17 'Ilm	30, 31 Oct 2046	1–5	25 Feb–1 Mar 2047
1 Bahá 204	21 Mar 2047	5, 6 'Ilm	20, 21 Oct 2047	1–4	26–29 Feb 2048
1 Bahá 205	20 Mar 2048	5, 6 Qudrat	7, 8 Nov 2048	1–4	25–28 Feb 2049
1 Bahá 206	20 Mar 2049	14, 15 'Ilm	28, 29 Oct 2049	1–4	25–28 Feb 2050
1 Bahá 207	20 Mar 2050	3, 4 'Ilm	17, 18 Oct 2050	1–5	25 Feb–1 Mar 2051
1 Bahá 208	21 Mar 2051	2, 3 Qudrat	5, 6 Nov 2051	1–4	26–29 Feb 2052
1 Bahá 209	20 Mar 2052	10, 11 'Ilm	24, 25 Oct 2052	1–4	25–28 Feb 2053
1 Bahá 210	20 Mar 2053	9, 10 Qudrat	11, 12 Nov 2053	1–4	25–28 Feb 2054
1 Bahá 211	20 Mar 2054	18, 19 'Ilm	1, 2 Nov 2054	1–5	25 Feb –1 Mar 2055
1 Bahá 212	21 Mar 2055	6, 7 'Ilm	21, 22 Oct 2055	1–4	26–29 Feb 2056
1 Bahá 213	20 Mar 2056	6, 7 Qudrat	8, 9 Nov 2056	1–4	25–28 Feb 2057
1 Bahá 214	20 Mar 2057	15, 16 'Ilm	29, 30 Oct 2057	1–4	25–28 Feb 2058
1 Bahá 215	20 Mar 2058	4, 5 'Ilm	18, 19 Oct 2058	1–4	25–28 Feb 2059
1 Bahá 216	20 Mar 2059	4, 5 Qudrat	6, 7 Nov 2059	1–5	25–29 Feb 2060
1 Bahá 217	20 Mar 2060	11, 12 'Ilm	25, 26 Oct 2060	1–4	25–28 Feb 2061
1 Bahá 218	20 Mar 2061	19 Mashíyyat, 1 'Ilm	14, 15 Oct 2061	1–4	25–28 Feb 2062
1 Bahá 219	20 Mar 2062	19 'Ilm, 1 Qudrat	2, 3 Nov 2062	1–4	25–28 Feb 2063
1 Bahá 220	20 Mar 2063	9, 10 'Ilm	23, 24 Oct 2063	1–5	25–29 Feb 2064
1 Bahá 221	20 Mar 2064	8, 9 Qudrat	10, 11 Nov 2064	1–4	25–28 Feb 2065

Note: The Bahá'í day ends and a new one begins at sunset; consequently, the day on which a Feast or Holy Day is observed begins at sunset of the day before the Gregorian calendar dates given above.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT DATES

Bahá'í Dates		**Gregorian equivalent**	
Other Holy Days		In a year when Naw-Rúz is the same as 20 March	In a year when Naw-Rúz is the same as 21 March
First Day of Riḍván	13 Jalál	20 April	21 April
Ninth Day of Riḍván	2 Jamál	28 April	29 April
Twelfth Day of Riḍván	5 Jamál	1 May	2 May
Declaration of the Báb	8 'Aẓamat	23 May	24 May
Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh	13 'Aẓamat	28 May	29 May
Martyrdom of the Báb	17 Raḥmat	9 July	10 July
Day of the Covenant	4 Qawl	25 November	26 November
Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá	6 Qawl	27 November	28 November
Feast Days			
Bahá (Splendour)	1 Bahá	20 March	21 March
Jalál (Glory)	1 Jalál	8 April	9 April
Jamál (Beauty)	1 Jamál	27 April	28 April
'Aẓamat (Grandeur)	1 'Aẓamat	16 May	17 May
Núr (Light)	1 Núr	4 June	5 June
Raḥmat (Mercy)	1 Raḥmat	23 June	24 June
Kalimát (Words)	1 Kalimát	12 July	13 July
Kamál (Perfection)	1 Kamál	31 July	1 August
Asmá' (Names)	1 Asmá'	19 August	20 August
'Izzat (Might)	1 'Izzat	7 September	8 September
Mashíyyat (Will)	1 Mashíyyat	26 September	27 September
'Ilm (Knowledge)	1 'Ilm	15 October	16 October
Qudrat (Power)	1 Qudrat	3 November	4 November
Qawl (Speech)	1 Qawl	22 November	23 November
Masá'il (Questions)	1 Masá'il	11 December	12 December
Sharaf (Honour)	1 Sharaf	30 December	31 December
Sulṭán (Sovereignty)	1 Sulṭán	18 January	19 January
Mulk (Dominion)	1 Mulk	6 February	7 February
'Alá' (Loftiness)	1 'Alá'	(see below)	(see below)
The Fast			
The month of 'Alá'	1–19 'Alá'	The month of fasting begins when Ayyám-i-Há ends. The dates for Ayyám-i-Há are given in Table above.	

Note: The Bahá'í day ends and a new one begins at sunset; consequently, the day on which a Feast or Holy Day is observed begins at sunset of the day before the Gregorian calendar dates given above.

10.14 Suspension of Work

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in one of His Tablets addressed to a believer of Nayríz, Persia, has written the following: "Nine days in the year have been appointed on which work is forbidden. Some of these days have been specifically mentioned in the Book. The rest follows as corollaries to the Text. ... Work on the Day of the Covenant (Fête Day of 'Abdu'l-Bahá), however, is not prohibited. ... Its observance is not obligatory. The days pertaining to the Abhá Beauty (Bahá'u'lláh) and the Primal Point (the Báb), that is to say these nine days, are the only ones on which work connected with trade, commerce, industry and agriculture is not allowed. In like manner, work connected with any form of employment, whether governmental or otherwise, should be suspended."

As a corollary of this Tablet it follows that the anniversaries of the birth and ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are not to be regarded as days on which work is prohibited. The celebration of these two days, however, is obligatory.

Bahá'ís in East and West, holding administrative positions, whether public or private, should exert the utmost effort to obtain special leave from their superiors to enable them to observe these nine holy days.

The Bahá'í World, Vol. Xl (1946–1950), p. 346; and Vol. XV (1968-1973), p. 689.

10.15 Remembrance

Forget not My bounties while I am absent. Remember My days during thy days, and My distress and banishment in this remote prison.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Ahmad, *Bahá'í Prayers*.

The praise which hath dawned from Thy most august Self, and the glory which hath shone forth from Thy most effulgent Beauty, rest upon Thee, O Thou Who art the Manifestation of Grandeur, and the King of Eternity, and the Lord of all who are in heaven and on earth! I testify that through Thee the sovereignty of God and His dominion, and the majesty of God and His grandeur, were revealed, and the Daystars of ancient splendour have shed their radiance in the heaven of Thine irrevocable decree, and the Beauty of the Unseen hath shone forth above the horizon of creation.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Visitation, *Bahá'í Prayers*.

The enhancement of the devotional character of a community also has an effect on the Nineteen Day Feast and can be felt at other times when the friends come together. Holy Day commemorations hold a special position in this regard. The Tablets recited, and the prayers, stories, songs, and sentiments voiced—all of them expressions of love for those sacred Figures Whose lives and missions are being remembered—stir the heart and fill the soul with awe and wonder.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December, 2015.

10.16 Naw Rúz

On this blessed day of Naw-Rúz, our hearts are drawn ever closer to you. This is a happy and joyous season. The fields and meadows are adorned with blossoms, and the air is fragrant with their perfume. In the northern hemisphere, nature stirs with new life, arrayed in spectacular beauty. The world of existence is rejuvenated, and all created things are in a state of motion and change. This is particularly true of the blessed land of Iran—the very envy of paradise—extolled by the beloved Master as a land that "fostereth love", whose "heavenly meadows teem with sweet herbs and flowers".

The pure-hearted people of Iran, following a tradition stretching back several thousand years, observe as a national festival this day that marks the commencement of spring. They put aside all grievances from the preceding year and focus their thoughts on loving fellowship. Bahá'ís across the globe, of every nation and ethnicity, likewise celebrate with great jubilation the festival of Naw-Rúz, as explicitly ordained in the Most Holy Book, and regard it as an opportunity to foster friendship and unity among the peoples of the world.

The year now drawing to a close witnessed events so painful and heart-rending, both for you and your compatriots, that it may be difficult for many to share in the joy of this season. But you who have surrendered your hearts to the Blessed Beauty have no doubt of the bright future of Iran. You know well that the world of humanity is ripe with promise and that the agony and suffering, the upheaval and commotion everywhere experienced are but a part of the long and arduous journey towards the unification of humankind and the birth of a global civilization.

The Universal House of Justice to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith, 21 March 2010.

10.17 Times for Holy Day Commemorations

The Guardian would advise that, if feasible, the Friends should commemorate certain of the feasts and anniversaries at the following time:

The anniversary of the declaration of the Báb… at about two hours after sunset.

The first day of Riḍván, at about 3 p.m. …

The anniversary of the Martyrdom of the Báb … at about noon.

The anniversary of the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh … at 3 a.m.

The Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá … at 1 a.m.

The other anniversaries the believers are free to gather at any time during the day which they find convenient.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Principles of Bahá'í Administration*.

He would like to point out that if the believers gather before sundown on a certain date it does not matter if the meeting continues after sunset; it may still be considered as being held on the day they gathered.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, U.S.A. *Bahá'í News*, supplement No. 108, March 1967, p. 3.

The Nineteen-Day Feast

10.18 The Nature of the Nineteen-Day Feast

This festivity, which is held on a day of the nineteen-day month, was established by His Holiness the Báb, and the Blessed Beauty [Bahá'u'lláh] directed, confirmed and warmly encouraged the holding of it. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance. You should unquestionably see to it with the greatest care, and make its value known, so that it may become solidly established on a permanent basis. Let the beloved of God gather together and associate most lovingly and spiritually and happily with one another, conducting themselves with the greatest courtesy and self-restraint. Let them read the holy verses, as well as essays which are of benefit, and the letters of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; encourage and inspire one another to love each and all; chant the prayers with serenity and joy; give eloquent talks, and praise the matchless Lord.

The host, with complete self-effacement, showing kindness to all, must be a comfort to each one, and serve the friends with his own hands.

If the Feast is befittingly held, in the manner described, then this supper will verily be the Lord's Supper, for its fruits will be the very fruits of that Supper, and its influence the same.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, Vol. II.

Concerning the nature of the Nineteen-Day Feast, in the *Aqdas*, Bahá'u'lláh clearly revealed the spiritual and social character of this Institution. Its administrative significance, however, has been stressed by the Guardian in direct response to the growing needs of the Bahá'í Community in this formative period of the Bahá'í era for better training in the principles and practice of Bahá'í administration.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, No. 74.

"If this feast be held in the proper fashion," 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, "the friends will, once in nineteen days, find themselves spiritually restored, and endued with a power that is not of this world." To ensure this glorious outcome the concept of the Feast must be adequately understood by all the friends. The Feast is known to have three distinct but related parts: the devotional, the administrative, and the social. The first entails the recitation of prayers and reading from the Holy Texts. The second is a general meeting where the Local Spiritual Assembly reports its activities, plans and problems to the community, shares news and messages from the World Center and the National Assembly, and receives the thoughts and recommendations of the friends through a process of consultation. The third involves the partaking of refreshments and engaging in other activities meant to foster fellowship in a

culturally determined diversity of forms which do not violate principles of the Faith or the essential character of the Feast.

Even though the observance of the Feast requires strict adherence to the threefold aspects in the sequence in which they have been defined, there is much room for variety in the total experience. For example, music may be introduced at various stages, including the devotional portion; 'Abdu'l-Bahá recommends that eloquent, uplifting talks be given; originality and variety in expressions of hospitality are possible; the quality and range of the consultation are critical to the spirit of the occasion. The effects of different cultures in all these respects are welcome factors which can lend the Feast a salutary diversity, representative of the unique characteristics of the various societies in which it is held, and therefore conducive to the upliftment and enjoyment of its participants.

The Universal House of Justice, 27 August 1989.

… we feel that all friends, whatever their circumstances, should be encouraged to observe the Nineteen Day Feast. Obviously it can only be an official administrative occasion where there is a Local Spiritual Assembly to take charge of it, present reports to the friends, and receive recommendations. But groups, spontaneous gatherings of friends, and even isolated believers should certainly remember the day and say prayers together. In the case of a group it may well hold the Feast in the manner in which a Local Spiritual Assembly would do so, recognizing of course that it has no official administrative standing.

The Universal House of Justice, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 806, pp. 242–243.

10.19 Decentralization of the Feast in Urban Centres

The decentralization of the Nineteen Day Feast in urban centres, where a significant percentage of humanity currently resides, is an inevitable consequence of the growth of the Faith, marking a significant stage in the organic development of a local community. While care should be taken to avoid instituting this practice precipitously when the number of believers in the entire city is relatively small, a Local Spiritual Assembly should not feel obliged to prolong the pattern of hosting a community-wide Feast if it is no longer propitious…

In this connection, we are requested to draw your attention to the 27 December 2005 message of the House of Justice which indicated that, as the process of growth continued to gather momentum worldwide, urban centres would need to be divided into progressively smaller areas, perhaps ultimately into neighbourhoods, as a means of facilitating planning and implementation. Not only would such areas become focal points of activity, the message suggested, but in each the Nineteen Day Feast would be conducted. Already in some cities around the world the Feast is held at the intimate level of the neighbourhood.

The Universal House of Justice, 17 May, 2009.

10.20 Programme

The Writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh can certainly be read any time at any place; likewise the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá are read freely during the spiritual part

of the Feast. The Guardian has instructed that during the spiritual part of the Feast, his own writings should not be read. In other words, during the spiritual part of the Feast, readings should be confined to the Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and, to a lesser extent, of the Master; but during that part of the Feast the Guardian's writings should not be read. During the period of administrative discussion of the Feast, then the Guardian's Writings may be read. Of course during the administrative part of the Feast there can be no objection to the reading of the Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Nineteen Day Feast, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 989, p. 450.

With regard to your question concerning the use of music in the Nineteen Day Feasts, he wishes you to assure all the friends that not only he approves of such a practice, but thinks it even advisable that the believers should make use in their meetings of hymns composed by Bahá'ís themselves, and also of such hymns, poems and chants as are based on the Holy Words.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Nineteen Day Feast, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 982, p. 448.

... although one of the principal functions of the Nineteen Day Feast is to provide a forum for "open and constructive criticism and deliberation regarding the state of affairs within the local Bahá'í community", complaints about the actions of an individual member of an Assembly should be made directly and confidentially to the Assembly itself, not made to other individuals or even raised at a Nineteen Day Feast.

The Universal House of Justice, 2 July 1996, *Rights and Responsibilities*, p. 54.

10.21 Attendance of those who are not Bahá'ís

The Nineteen Day Feast is an institution of the Cause, which serves, in part, as a means for the Bahá'í community to address its affairs in a full and frank manner, without fear of creating misunderstandings among those unfamiliar with its purpose. It is for this reason that participation is limited to members of the Bahá'í community.

In general, the believers are discouraged from inviting those who are not Bahá'ís to the commemoration of the Feast. However, friends of the Faith do sometimes appear unexpectedly, and they are not to be turned away. Courtesy and the spirit of fellowship require that they be warmly received... The House of Justice has decided that, in such instances, rather than eliminating the administrative portion completely or asking the visitors to withdraw, those conducting the programme can modify this part of the Feast to accommodate the guests. The sharing of local and national news and information about social events, as well as consultation on topics of general interest, such as the teaching work, service projects, the Fund, and so on, can take place as usual, while discussion of sensitive or problematic issues related to these or other topics can be set aside for another time when the friends can express themselves freely without being inhibited by the presence of visitors.

A similar approach to the administrative portion may be adopted when the Feast is celebrated in the home of a family with some members who are not Bahá'ís. As part of planning these occasions, careful thought must be given, on the one hand, to the

requisites of hospitality and love, and, on the other, to those of confidentiality and unfettered discussion on important and sensitive subjects. The Local Assembly, in consultation with the believers who have such relatives, should endeavour to find a satisfactory way to resolve each situation that arises.

The Universal House of Justice, 17 May 2009.

10.22 Choice of Language and Adapting to Changing Circumstances

As a general principle, the Nineteen Day Feast and other official Bahá'í gatherings should be conducted in the conventional language spoken by the people of the locality. However, as social and economic conditions throughout the world continue to change, it is not unreasonable to assume that more and more people will be forced to migrate to urban centres, forming pockets of minorities, each with a distinct language, as can already be seen, for example, in the concentrations of Spanish-speaking populations in North America or of certain tribal populations in Africa. In such instances, when the Feast is decentralized, the question may well arise as to whether the programme can be conducted in the language spoken by the minority population most prevalent in a neighbourhood. At this stage, the House of Justice does not wish to lay down any hard and fast rules, and it is left to the discretion of the Local Spiritual Assembly concerned to decide, under the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly, how to address the matter, approaching it with both flexibility and an attitude of learning.

The Universal House of Justice, 17 May 2009.

10.23 Attaining the Spiritual Reality of the Bahá'í Feast

… when the friends have the intention of entering in these meetings and assemblies, they must first make the purpose pure, disengage the heart from all other reflections, ask the inexhaustible divine confirmation and with the utmost devotion and humility set their feet in the gathering-place.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, p. 407.

Make ye an effort in every meeting that the Lord's Supper may become realized and the heavenly food descend. This heavenly food is knowledge, understanding, faith, assurance, love, affinity, kindness, purity of purpose, attraction of hearts and the union of souls. It was this manner of the Lord's Supper which descended from the heavenly kingdom in the day of Christ. When the meeting is conducted after this manner, then 'Abdu'l-Bahá also is present in heart and soul, though His body may not be with you.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í World Faith*, pp. 407–8.

The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár

10.24 A Gathering Place for Worship

The term "Mashriqu'l-Adhkár" has been used in the Writings to describe various things: the gathering of the friends for prayers at dawn; a building where this activity takes place; the complete institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, with its dependencies; the central edifice of that institution, often described as a "House of Worship" or "Temple". These variants can all be seen as denoting stages or aspects of the gradual introduction of Bahá'u'lláh's concept as promulgated in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*.

The Universal House of Justice, 20 April 1997, quote 73,
Compilation on The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár.

Blessed is he who, at the hour of dawn, centring his thoughts on God, occupied with His remembrance, and supplicating His forgiveness, directeth his steps to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár and, entering therein, seateth himself in silence to listen to the verses of God, the Sovereign, the Mighty, the All-Praised. Say: The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is each and every building which hath been erected in cities and villages for the celebration of My praise. Such is the name by which it hath been designated before the throne of glory, were ye of those who understand.

They who recite the verses of the All-Merciful in the most melodious of tones will perceive in them that with which the sovereignty of earth and heaven can never be compared. From them they will inhale the divine fragrance of My worlds—worlds which today none can discern save those who have been endowed with vision through this sublime, this beauteous Revelation. Say: These verses draw hearts that are pure unto those spiritual worlds that can neither be expressed in words nor intimated by allusion. Blessed be those who hearken.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), paras. 115–116.

QUESTION: Concerning the remembrance of God in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár "at the hour of dawn".

ANSWER: Although the words "at the hour of dawn" are used in the Book of God, it is acceptable to God at the earliest dawn of day, between dawn and sunrise, or even up to two hours after sunrise.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), Question and Answers, No. 15.

Teach your children the verses revealed from the heaven of majesty and power, so that, in most melodious tones, they may recite the Tablets of the All-Merciful in the alcoves within the Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs. Whoever hath been transported by the rapture born of adoration for My Name, the Most Compassionate, will recite the verses of God in such wise as to captivate the hearts of those yet wrapped in slumber.

Well is it with him who hath quaffed the Mystic Wine of everlasting life from the utterance of his merciful Lord in My Name—a Name through which every lofty and majestic mountain hath been reduced to dust.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 150.

You had asked about places of worship and the underlying reason therefor. The wisdom in raising up such building is that at a given hour, the people should know it is time to meet, and all should gather together, and, harmoniously attuned one to another, should engage in prayer; with the result that out of this coming together, unity and affection shall grow and flourish in the human heart.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 58.

Praised be God, ye two have demonstrated the truth of your words by your deeds, and have won the confirmations of the Lord God. Every day at first light, ye gather the Bahá'í children together and teach them the communes and prayers. This is a most praiseworthy act, and bringeth joy to the children's hearts: that they should, at every morn, turn their faces toward the Kingdom and make mention of the Lord and praise His Name, and in the sweetest of voices, chant and recite.

These children are even as young plants, and teaching them the prayers is as letting the rain pour down upon them, that they may wax tender and fresh, and the soft breezes of the love of God may blow over them, making them to tremble with joy.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 115.

As to the character of the meetings in the Auditorium of the Temple, he feels that they should be purely devotional in character; Bahá'í addresses and lectures should be strictly excluded. … Shoghi Effendi would urge that choir singing by men, women and children be encouraged in the Auditorium and that rigidity in the Bahá'í service be scrupulously avoided. The more universal and informal the character of Bahá'í worship in the Temple the better. Images and pictures, with the exception of the Greatest Name, should be strictly excluded. Prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master as well as sacred Writings of the Prophets should be read or chanted as well as hymns based upon Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í sacred Writings."

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 11 April 1931, quote 45,
Compilation on *The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár.*

Your Assembly is free to use its discretion in choosing excerpts from the generally recognized scriptures of the older religions…

Music in the House of Worship is to be vocal only, whether by singers or a singer. It does not matter if a guest, a capella choir or soloist is used, provided such use is not made the occasion to publicize services of Worship and the precautions you mention are taken. No doubt the excellent recordings available today would assure the highest quality of performance at low cost, but all references to vocal music in the central Edifice imply the physical presence of the singers.

The Universal House of Justice, 13 March 1974, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 2063, p. 609.

Lyrics used in songs being performed in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár need not be confined to the Writings; rather, what is required is that they be based upon Bahá'í or other sacred writings and contain Bahá'í themes. It should be noted that the standard for lyrics used in songs performed is somewhat different from the standard for Writings and prayers to be read or chanted in devotional programmes in Houses

of Worship. There is therefore no objection to the use of songs based on the Writings and talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

The Universal House of Justice, 2 November 2015, quote 81,
Compilation on *The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár.*

10.25 The Dynamic Coherence of the Spiritual and the Practical

The Bahá'í House of Worship is dedicated to the praise of God. The House of Worship forms the central edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár (the Dawning-place of the Praise of God), a complex which, as it unfolds in the future, will comprise in addition to the House of Worship a number of dependencies dedicated to social, humanitarian, educational, and scientific pursuits. 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár as "*one of the most vital institutions in the world*", and Shoghi Effendi indicates that it exemplifies in tangible form the integration of "Bahá'í worship and service". Anticipating the future development of this institution, Shoghi Effendi envisages that the House of Worship and its dependencies "shall afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant". In the future, Bahá'í Houses of Worship will be constructed in every town and village.

The Universal House of Justice (Ed.), *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), Note 53.

From the beginning of His stupendous mission, Bahá'u'lláh urged upon the attention of nations the necessity of ordering human affairs in such a way as to bring into being a world unified in all the essential aspects of its life. In unnumbered verses and tablets He repeatedly and variously declared the "progress of the world" and the "development of nations" as being among the ordinances of God for this day. The oneness of mankind, which is at once the operating principle and ultimate goal of His Revelation, implies the achievement of a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth. The indispensability of this coherence is unmistakably illustrated in His ordination of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, the spiritual centre of every Bahá'í community round which must flourish dependencies dedicated to the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific advancement of mankind.

The Universal House of Justice, 20 October 1983.

As the place from which spiritual forces are to radiate, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is the focal point for dependencies to be raised up for the well-being of humanity and is the expression of a common will and eagerness to serve. These dependencies—centres of education and scientific learning as well as cultural and humanitarian endeavour—embody the ideals of social and spiritual progress to be achieved through the application of knowledge, and demonstrate how, when religion and science are in harmony, they elevate the station of the human being and lead to the flourishing of civilization. As your lives amply demonstrate, worship, though essential to the inner life of the human being and vital to spiritual development, must also lead to deeds that give outward expression to that inner transformation. This concept of worship—inseparable from service—is promulgated by the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. In this connection Shoghi Effendi states:

Divorced from the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific pursuits centring around the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, Bahá'í worship, however exalted in its conception, however passionate in fervour, can never hope to achieve beyond the meagre and often transitory results produced by the contemplations of the ascetic or the communion of the passive worshiper. It cannot afford lasting satisfaction and benefit to the worshiper himself, much less to humanity in general, unless and until translated and transfused into that dynamic and disinterested service to the cause of humanity which it is the supreme privilege of the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to facilitate and promote.

The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran,
18 December 2014, www.payamha-iran.org

National and Local Bahá'í Centres: Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds

10.26 Administrative and Community Centres

Simultaneous with the establishment and incorporation of local and national Bahá'í Assemblies, with the formation of their respective committees, the formulation of national and local Bahá'í constitutions and the founding of Bahá'í endowments, undertakings of great institutional significance were initiated by these newly founded Assemblies, among which the institution of the Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds—the seat of the Bahá'í National Spiritual Assembly and pivot of all Bahá'í administrative activity in future—must rank as one of the most important. ... Complementary in its functions to those of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár—an edifice exclusively reserved for Bahá'í worship—this institution, whether local or national, will, as its component parts, such as the Secretariat, the Treasury, the Archives, the Library, the Publishing Office, the Assembly Hall, the Council Chamber, the Pilgrims' Hostel, are brought together and made jointly to operate in one spot, be increasingly regarded as the focus of all Bahá'í administrative activity, and symbolize, in a befitting manner, the ideal of service animating the Bahá'í community in its relation alike to the Faith and to mankind in general.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

When a Local Spiritual Assembly acquires a Bahá'í Centre, it should regard this meeting place as an embryonic Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds and should do everything possible to foster in the community a proper attitude of respect for the Centre ...

When a community grows in size and in the resources at its disposal. The Assembly may well acquire a community centre for recreational and other uses, in addition to

the Bahá'í Centre. However, if it is able to acquire only one centre, that meeting place should be designated as the Bahá'í Centre since it is the focus of Bahá'í community activity and the seat of the Spiritual Assembly, in addition to its being identified with the Bahá'í Faith in the eyes of the public.

The Universal House of Justice, 26 July 1989, *Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook*, No. 19.1.2, p. 500.

As we have said in an earlier message, the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behaviour: those patterns by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly are manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth. ... It involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Bahá'í centres, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 153 [1996].

Gatherings for Deepening

10.27 Gatherings for Deepening, and Summer at Winter Schools

Equally important as a factor in the evolution of the Administrative Order has been the remarkable progress achieved, particularly in the United States of America, by the institution of the summer schools designed to foster the spirit of fellowship in a distinctly Bahá'í atmosphere, to afford the necessary training for Bahá'í teachers, and to provide facilities for the study of the history and teachings of the Faith, and for a better understanding of its relation to other religions and to human society in general.

Established in three regional centers... these three embryonic Bahá'í educational institutions have, through a steady expansion of their programs, set an example worthy of emulation by other Bahá'í communities in both the East and the West. Through the intensive study of Bahá'í Scriptures and of the early history of the Faith; through the organization of courses on the teachings and history of Islám; through conferences for the promotion of inter-racial amity; through laboratory courses designed to familiarize the participants with the processes of the Bahá'í Administrative Order; through special sessions devoted to Youth and child training; through classes in public speaking; through lectures on Comparative Religion; through group discussion on the manifold aspects of the Faith; through the establishment of libraries; through teaching classes; through courses on Bahá'í

ethics and on Latin America; through the introduction of winter school sessions; through forums and devotional gatherings; through plays and pageants; through picnics and other recreational activities, these schools, open to Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís alike, have set so noble an example as to inspire other Bahá'í communities in Persia, in the British Isles, in Germany, in Australia, in New Zealand, in India, in 'Iráq and in Egypt to undertake the initial measures designed to enable them to build along the same lines institutions that bid fair to evolve into the Bahá'í universities of the future.

Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By.*

To read the writings of the Faith and to strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation are obligations laid on every one of His followers. All are enjoined to delve into the ocean of His Revelation and to partake, in keeping with their capacities and inclinations, of the pearls of wisdom that lie therein. In this light, local deepening classes, winter and summer schools, and specially arranged gatherings in which individual believers knowledgeable in the writings were able to share with others insights into specific subjects emerged naturally as prominent features of Bahá'í life. Just as the habit of daily reading will remain an integral part of Bahá'í identity, so will these forms of study continue to hold a place in the collective life of the community.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2010.

PART FOUR

THE GROWTH OF THE BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITY

CHAPTER 11

DEVELOPING CAPACITY FOR SERVICE

The Context: The Interaction of Dynamic Forces

11.1 The Global Processes of Integration and Destruction 322
11.2 The Tablets of the Divine Plan: The Charter of Growth 324
11.3 Expansion and Consolidation: Two Essential Movements 325

The Institute Process

11.4 The Training Institute 329
11.5 Elements of the First Series of Books in the Ruhi Curriculum: Units, their Purpose and Practice Components 332

Service Activities Related to the Institute Process

11.6 The Four Core Activities 334
11.7 Holding Devotional Meetings 335
11.8 Making Home Visits 336
11.9 Providing Children's Education 336
11.10 Empowering Junior Youth 337
11.11 Teaching the Faith 338
11.12 Tutoring Study Circles 338
11.13 Accompanying One Another 339

Becoming Active Agents of Our Own Learning

11.14 Attracting the Play of Spiritual Forces 340
11.15 Harmonising Our Lives with the Teachings 341
11.16 Learning through the Institute Process 344
11.17 Studying the Guidance of the Universal House of Justice 344
11.18 Learning by Study, Action, Reflection and Consultation 345

The Context: The Interaction of Dynamic Forces

11.1 The Global Processes of Integration and Destruction

More than seventy years ago Shoghi Effendi penned his World Order letters in which he provided a penetrating analysis of the forces operating in the world. With an eloquence that was his alone, he described two great processes that have been set in motion by Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, one destructive and the other integrative, both of which are propelling humanity towards the World Order He conceived. We were cautioned by the Guardian not to be "misled by the painful slowness characterizing the unfoldment of the civilization" being laboriously established or to be "deluded by the ephemeral manifestations of returning prosperity which at times appear to be capable of checking the disruptive influence of the chronic ills afflicting the institutions of a decaying age." No review of the course of events in recent decades can fail to acknowledge the gathering momentum of the processes he analyzed then with such precision.

One need only consider the deepening moral crisis engulfing humanity to appreciate the extent to which the forces of disintegration have rent the fabric of society. Have not the evidences of selfishness, of suspicion, of fear and of fraud, which the Guardian perceived with such clarity, become so widespread as to be readily apparent to even the casual observer? Does not the threat of terrorism of which he spoke loom so large on the international scene as to preoccupy the minds of young and old alike in every corner of the globe? Have not the unquenchable thirst for, and the feverish pursuit after, earthly vanities, riches and pleasures so consolidated their power and influence as to assume authority over such human values as happiness, fidelity and love? …

The Guardian lays the greatest share of the blame for humanity's moral downfall on the decline of religion as a social force… Attempts at reinvigorating it have only given rise to a fanaticism that, if left unchecked, could destroy the foundation of civilized relationships among people…

There is no need to comment extensively on the impotence of statesmanship, another theme treated so masterfully by the Guardian in his World Order letters. The widening economic divide between the rich and the poor, the persistence of age-old animosities among nations, the swelling numbers of the displaced, the extraordinary rise in organized crime and violence, the pervasive sense of insecurity, the breakdown of basic services in so many regions, the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources… This is not to say that sincere efforts have not been exerted, in fact, have not multiplied decade after decade. Yet these efforts, no matter how ingenious, fall well short of removing "the root cause of the evil that has so rudely upset the equilibrium of present-day society." … "What else," he confidently affirmed, "but the unreserved acceptance of the Divine Program" enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, "embodying in its essentials God's divinely appointed scheme for the unification of mankind in this age, coupled with an indomitable conviction in the unfailing efficacy of each and all of its provisions, is eventually capable of withstanding the

forces of internal disintegration which, if unchecked, must needs continue to eat into the vitals of a despairing society."

Penetrating, indeed, is Shoghi Effendi's depiction of the process of disintegration accelerating in the world. Equally striking is the accuracy with which he analyzed the forces associated with the process of integration. He spoke of a "gradual diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity which is spontaneously arising out of the welter of a disorganized society" as an indirect manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh's conception of the principle of the oneness of humankind. This spirit of solidarity has continued to spread over the decades, and today its effect is apparent in a range of developments, from the rejection of deeply ingrained racial prejudices to the dawning consciousness of world citizenship, from heightened environmental awareness to collaborative efforts in the promotion of public health, from the concern for human rights to the systematic pursuit of universal education, from the establishment of interfaith activities to the efflorescence of hundreds of thousands of local, national and international organizations engaged in some form of social action.

Yet for the followers of Bahá'u'lláh the most significant developments in the process of integration are those directly related to the Faith, many of which were nurtured by the Guardian himself and which have advanced tremendously since their modest beginnings. From the small nucleus of believers to whom he imparted his first teaching plans has grown a worldwide community with a presence in thousands of localities, each following a well-established pattern of activity that embodies the Faith's principles and aspirations. Upon the foundation of the Administrative Order he so painstakingly laid during the early decades of his ministry has been raised a large, closely knit network of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies diligently administering the affairs of the Cause in more than one hundred and eighty countries... The evolution of the World Administrative Center of the Faith, within the precincts of its World Spiritual Center, a process to which the Guardian consecrated so much energy, has crossed a crucial threshold with the occupation by the Universal House of Justice of its Seat on Mount Carmel and the subsequent completion of the International Teaching Centre Building and the Centre for the Study of the Texts... The efforts of the Guardian to raise the profile of the Faith in international circles have developed into an extensive external affairs system, capable of both defending the interests of the Faith and proclaiming its universal message. The respect the Faith enjoys in international fora, whenever its representatives speak, is a most noteworthy accomplishment. The loyalty and devotion that the members of a community reflecting the diversity of the entire human race evince towards the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh constitute a storehouse of strength the like of which no other organized group can claim.

The Guardian foresaw that, in succeeding epochs of the Formative Age, the Universal House of Justice would launch a series of worldwide enterprises which would "symbolize the unity and coordinate and unify the activities" of National Spiritual Assemblies. Over the course of three successive epochs now, the Bahá'í community has labored assiduously within the framework of the global Plans issued by the House of Justice and has succeeded in establishing a pattern of Bahá'í life that

promotes the spiritual development of the individual and channels the collective energies of its members towards the spiritual revival of society…

It is in the context of the interplay of the forces described here that the imperative of advancing the process of entry by troops must be viewed. The Five Year Plan now opening requires that you concentrate your energies on this process and ensure that the two complementary movements at its heart are accelerated. This should be your dominant concern.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2006.

The Four Year Plan aims at one major accomplishment: a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. As we have stated earlier, such an advance is to be achieved through marked progress in the activity and development of the individual believer, of the institutions, and of the local community.

The phrase "advance in the process of entry by troops" accommodates the concept that current circumstances demand and existing opportunities allow for a sustained growth of the Bahá'í world community on a large scale; that this upsurge is necessary in the face of world conditions; that the three constituent participants in the upbuilding of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh—the individual, the institutions, and the community—can foster such growth first by spiritually and mentally accepting the possibility of it, and then by working towards embracing masses of new believers, setting in motion the means for effecting their spiritual and administrative training and development, thereby multiplying the number of knowledgeable, active teachers and administrators whose involvement in the work of the Cause will ensure a constant influx of new adherents, an uninterrupted evolution of Bahá'í Assemblies, and a steady consolidation of the community.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 153 [1996].

… a steady flow of reinforcements is absolutely vital and is of extreme urgency… This flow moreover, will presage and hasten the advent of the day which, as prophesised by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, will witness the entry by troops of people of divers nations and races into the Bahá'í world – a day which, viewed in its proper perspective, will be a prelude to that long-awaited hour when a mass conversion on the part of those same nations and races, and as a direct result of a chain of events , momentous and possibly catastrophic in nature and which cannot as yet be even dimly visualised, will suddenly revolutionise the fortunes of the Faith, derange the equilibrium of the world, and reinforce a thousandfold the numerical strength as well as the material power and the spiritual authority of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 25 June 1953, *Turning Point*.

11.2 The Tablets of the Divine Plan The Charter of Growth

O ye heavenly heralds:

These are the days of Naw-Rúz. I am always thinking of those kind friends! I beg for each and all of you confirmations and assistance from the threshold of oneness, so that those gatherings may become ignited like unto candles, in the republics of America, enkindling the light of the love of God in the hearts; thus the rays of the

heavenly teachings may begem and brighten the states of America like the infinitude of immensity with the stars of the Most Great Guidance.

The Northeastern States on the shores of the Atlantic—Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Vermont, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York—in some of these states believers are found, but in some of the cities of these states up to this date people are not yet illumined with the lights of the Kingdom and are not aware of the heavenly teachings; therefore, whenever it is possible for each one of you, hasten ye to those cities and shine forth like unto the stars with the light of the Most Great Guidance…

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from the First Tablet of the Divine Plan, 26 March 1916.

The Divine Plan, that sublime series of letters addressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the Bahá'ís of North America between 26 March 1916 and 8 March 1917, constitutes one of the mighty Charters of His Father's Faith. Set forth in those fourteen Tablets, Shoghi Effendi explains, is "the mightiest Plan ever generated through the creative power of the Most Great Name." It is "impelled by forces beyond our power to predict or appraise" and "claims as the theatre for its operation territories spread over five continents and the islands of the seven seas." Within it are held "the seeds of the world's spiritual revival and ultimate redemption."

In the *Tablets of the Divine Plan* 'Abdu'l-Bahá not only provided the broad vision necessary to carry out the responsibilities entrusted by Bahá'u'lláh to His loved ones, but He also outlined spiritual concepts and practical strategies necessary for success. In His exhortations to teach and to travel to teach; to arise personally or deputize others; to move to all parts of the world and open countries and territories, each meticulously named; to learn the relevant languages and translate and disseminate the Sacred Texts; to train the teachers of the Faith and especially youth; to teach the masses and, particularly, indigenous peoples; to be firm in the Covenant and protect the Faith; and to sow seeds and cultivate them in a process of organic growth, we find hallmarks of the entire series of Plans—each a specific stage of the Divine Plan shaped by the Head of the Faith—that will continue to unfold throughout the Formative Age…

The Divine Plan continues at the present time with the intensive effort to establish a pattern of community life that can embrace thousands upon thousands in clusters that cover the face of the planet. Let every Bahá'í appreciate, more deeply than ever before, that the provisions of the next stage of the Divine Plan set forth in our recent message to the Counsellors' Conference comprise the challenging requirements of the present hour—requirements both urgent and sacred, which, when sacrificially and persistently addressed, may hasten "the advent of that Golden Age which must witness the proclamation of the Most Great Peace and the unfoldment of that world civilization which is the offspring and primary purpose of that Peace."

The Universal House of Justice, 26 March 2016.

11.3 Expansion and Consolidation: Two Essential Movements

Every outward thrust into new fields, every multiplication of Bahá'í institutions, must be paralleled by a deeper thrust of the roots which sustain the spiritual life of

the community and ensure its sound development. From this vital, this ever-present need, attention must at no time be diverted; nor must it be, under any circumstances, neglected, or subordinated to the no less vital and urgent task of ensuring the outer expansion of Bahá'í administrative institutions. That this community, so alive, so devoted, so strikingly and rapidly developing, may maintain a proper balance between these two essential aspects of its development, and march forward with rapid strides and along sound lines toward the goal of the Plan it has adopted, is the ardent hope of my heart and my constant prayer.

Shoghi Effendi, *Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand.*

The immediate effect of the winning of the Ten Year Crusade and the establishment of the Universal House of Justice was to give a powerful impetus to the advance of the Cause. This time the progress—which affected virtually every aspect of Bahá'í life—took the form of long-range developments that are best appreciated when the entire period since 1963 is viewed as a whole...

Envisioning the course that the growth of the Cause would follow, Shoghi Effendi had written of "the launching of worldwide enterprises destined to be embarked upon, in future epochs of that same [Formative] Age, by the Universal House of Justice, that will symbolize the unity and coordinate and unify the activities of ... National Assemblies.[1]" These global undertakings began in 1964 with the Nine Year Plan, to be followed by a Five Year Plan (1974), a Seven Year Plan (1979), a Six Year Plan (1986), a Three Year Plan (1993), a Four Year Plan (1996), and a Twelve Month Plan that ended the century...

As believers from urban centres set out on sustained campaigns to reach the mass of the world's peoples living in villages and rural areas, they encountered a receptivity to Bahá'u'lláh's message far beyond anything they had imagined possible. While the response usually took forms very different from the ones with which the teachers had been familiar, the new declarants were eagerly welcomed. Tens of thousands of new Bahá'ís poured into the Cause throughout Africa, Asia and Latin America, often representing the greater part of whole rural villages...

It soon became apparent that individual initiative alone, however inspired and energetic, could not respond adequately to the opportunities opening up. The result was to launch Bahá'í communities on a wide range of collective teaching and proclamation projects recalling the heroic days of the dawn-breakers. Teams of ardent teachers found that it was now possible to introduce the message of the Faith not merely to a succession of inquirers, but to entire groups and even whole communities. The tens of thousands became hundreds of thousands. The Faith's growth meant that members of Spiritual Assemblies, whose experience had been limited to confirming the understanding of the Faith of individual applicants raised in cultures of doubt or religious fanaticism, had to adjust to expressions of belief on the part of whole groups of people to whom religious awareness and response were normal features of daily life.

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[1] *The Universal House of Justice, 9 March 1965, Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963-1986.*

No segment of the community made a more energetic or significant contribution to this dramatic process of growth than did Bahá'í youth…

The burst of enrolments brought with it, however, equally great problems. At the immediate level, the resources of Bahá'í communities engaged in the work were soon overwhelmed by the task of providing the sustained deepening the masses of new believers needed and the consolidation of the resulting communities and Spiritual Assemblies. Beyond that, cultural challenges like those encountered by the early Persian believers who had first sought to introduce the Faith in Western lands now replicated themselves throughout the world. Theological and administrative principles that might be of consuming interest to pioneers and teachers were seldom those that were central to the concern of new declarants from very different social and cultural backgrounds. Often, differences of view about even such elementary matters as the use of time or simple social conventions created gaps of understanding that made communication extremely difficult.

The principal effect of the setbacks, however, was that they brought home to communities that the high expectations of the early years were in some respects quite unrealistic. Although the easy successes of the initial teaching activities were encouraging, they did not, by themselves, build a Bahá'í community life that could meet the needs of its new members and be self-generating. Rather, pioneers and new believers alike faced questions for which Bahá'í experience in Western lands—or even Iran—offered few answers. How were Local Spiritual Assemblies to be established—and once established, how were they to function—in areas where large numbers of new believers had joined the Cause overnight, simply on the strength of their spiritual apprehension of its truth? How, in societies dominated by men since the dawn of time, were women to be accorded an equal voice? How was the education of large numbers of children to be systematically addressed in cultural situations where poverty and illiteracy prevailed? What priorities should guide Bahá'í moral teaching, and how could these objectives best be related to prevailing indigenous conventions? How could a vibrant community life be cultivated that would stimulate the spiritual growth of its members? What priorities, too, should be set with respect to the production of Bahá'í literature, particularly given the sudden explosion that had taken place in the number of languages represented in the community? How could the integrity of the Bahá'í institution of the Nineteen Day Feast be maintained, while opening this vital activity to the enriching influence of diverse cultures? And, in all areas of concern, how were the necessary resources to be recruited, funded, and coordinated?

The pressure of these urgent and interlocking challenges launched the Bahá'í world on a learning process that has proved to be as important as the expansion itself. It is safe to say that during these years there was virtually no type of teaching activity, no combination of expansion, consolidation and proclamation, no administrative option, no effort at cultural adaptation that was not being energetically tried in some part of the Bahá'í world… Had it not been for the painstaking, always difficult and often frustrating consolidation work pursued during these years, however, the subsequent strategy of systematizing the promotion of entry by troops would have had very little with which to work.

The fact that the Bahá'í message was now penetrating the lives not merely of small groups of individuals but of whole communities also had the effect of reviving a vital feature of an earlier stage in the advancement of the Cause. For the first time in decades, the Faith found itself once more in a situation where teaching and consolidation were inseparably bound up with social and economic development…

The Four Year Plan, which was a major advance on those that immediately preceded it, was designed to take advantage of the opportunities and insights thus offered. The goal of advancing the process of entry by troops became the single-minded aim of the enterprise. The lessons that had been learned during earlier Plans now placed the emphasis on developing the capacities of believers—wherever they might be—so that all could arise as confident protagonists of the Faith's mission…

By far the most significant advance in this latter respect occurred over a period of more than two decades, beginning in the 1970s in Colombia, where a systematic and sustained programme of education in the Writings was devised and soon adopted in neighbouring countries. Influenced by the Colombian community's parallel efforts in the field of social and economic development, the breakthrough was all the more impressive in the fact that it was achieved against a background of violence and lawlessness that was deranging the life of the surrounding society.

The Colombian achievement proved a source of great inspiration and example to Bahá'í communities elsewhere in the world. By the time the Four Year Plan ended, over one hundred thousand believers were involved world-wide in the programmes of the more than three hundred permanent training institutes. In accomplishing this goal, a majority of regional institutes had carried the process a stage further by creating networks of "study circles" which utilize the talents of believers to replicate the work of the institute at a local level. It is already apparent that the success of the institute work has significantly reinforced the long-term process by which a universal system of Bahá'í education will take shape.

Bahá'í World Centre, *Century of Light*.

The Five Year Plan, which will undoubtedly be the focus of your consultations over the next few days, requires concentrated and sustained attention to two essential movements. The first is the steady flow of believers through the sequence of courses offered by training institutes, for the purpose of developing the human resources of the Cause. The second, which receives its impetus from the first, is the movement of geographic clusters from one stage of growth to the next.

The Universal House of Justice, 22 December 2001, in *Turning Point*.

11.4 The Training Institute

The next four years will represent an extraordinary period in the history of our Faith, a turning point of epochal magnitude. What the friends throughout the world are now being asked to do is to commit themselves, their material resources, their abilities and their time to the development of a network of training institutes on a scale never before attempted. These centers of Bahá'í learning will have as their goal one very practical outcome, namely, the raising up of large numbers of believers who are trained to foster and facilitate the process of entry by troops with efficiency and love.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 153 [1996].

Elements of a system that can meet the training needs of large numbers of believers have already been tested worldwide and have proven themselves. Study circles, reinforced by extension courses and special campaigns, have shown their ability to lend structure to the process of spiritual education at the grassroots. The value of a sequence of courses, each one following the other in a logical pattern and each one building on the achievements of the previous ones, has become abundantly clear.

The Universal House of Justice, 9 January 2001, Messages 1986-2001, para. 348.5, p. 763.

... the House of Justice has stated that the development of human resources in a country may be likened to an ever-expanding pyramid, whose base must be constantly broadened. An increasing number of friends are recruited to enter the first basic course, and relatively significant percentages are then helped to reach higher and higher courses, enhancing thereby their capacity for service.

Letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 14 April 1998, *Turning Point*.

There is little need to describe in detail the achievements of the individual believer, for we have already noted these in our message of 17 January 2003... Developments since then have served only to demonstrate further the efficacy of a sequence of courses that seeks to build capacity for service by concentrating on the application of the spiritual insights gained through profound study of the Writings. Participants are exposed to a body of knowledge that fosters a set of related habits, attitudes and qualities and are assisted in sharpening certain skills and abilities needed to carry out acts of service. Discussions that revolve around the Creative Word, in the serious and uplifting atmosphere of a study circle, raise the level of consciousness about one's duties to the Cause and create an awareness of the joy one derives from teaching the Faith and serving its interests. The spiritual context in which specific deeds are addressed endows them with significance. Confidence is patiently built as the friends engage in progressively more complex and demanding acts of service. Yet, above all, it is reliance on God that sustains them in their endeavors. How abundant the accounts of believers who enter the teaching field with trepidation only to find themselves bolstered by confirmations on all sides..

The Universal House of Justice, 27 December, 2005.

When in our message dated 26 December 1995 we underscored the need for a formal program of training, we were aware that certain elements of a curriculum meeting the necessary requirements existed in the materials of the Ruhi Institute. It was our conviction, however, that the accumulated experience at that point did not justify our recommending a specific set of materials to be used by training institutes throughout the world... By the time the Four Year Plan came to a close, it was all too apparent that national communities which had vigorously set out to implement the sequence of courses designed by the Ruhi Institute were far ahead of those who had attempted to develop their own program.

It was the Five Year Plan, however, that served to convince Counsellors, National Assemblies and boards everywhere of the merits of the Ruhi Institute curriculum. The introduction of the seventh book in the Institute's main sequence at the start of the Plan enabled many to appreciate more the intimate connection between the flow of individuals through a sequence of courses and the movement of clusters from one stage of growth to the next. Indeed, as progress was achieved in hundreds of clusters, it became clear to institutions at all levels that the content and order of the main sequence prepared the friends to carry out those acts of service required by the pattern of growth being established in a cluster...

With these thoughts in mind, we have reached the conclusion that the books of the Ruhi Institute should constitute the main sequence of courses for institutes everywhere, at least through the final years of the first century of the Formative Age when the Bahá'í community will be focused on advancing the process of entry by troops within the framework for action set forth in our 27 December message...

The institutions of the Faith will continue to respect the wishes of those who, for whatever reason, do not feel inclined to participate in the study of the books of the Ruhi Institute. Those not so disposed should recognize that there are many avenues of service open to them, including, above all, individual teaching which is the paramount duty of every Bahá'í. Local deepening classes and summer and winter schools, which remain an important feature of Bahá'í community life, will provide ample opportunities for them to deepen their knowledge of the teachings. What we ask of such friends, as we have in the past, is that they not allow their personal preferences to hamper in any way the unfoldment of an educational process that has shown the potential to embrace millions of souls from divers backgrounds.

The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2005.

To read the writings of the Faith and to strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation are obligations laid on every one of His followers. All are enjoined to delve into the ocean of His Revelation and to partake, in keeping with their capacities and inclinations, of the pearls of wisdom that lie therein. In this light, local deepening classes, winter and summer schools, and specially arranged gatherings in which individual believers knowledgeable in the writings were able to share with others insights into specific subjects emerged naturally as prominent features of Bahá'í life. Just as the habit of daily reading will remain an integral part of Bahá'í identity, so will these forms of study continue to hold a place in the collective life of the community. But understanding the implications of the Revelation, both in terms of

individual growth and social progress, increases manifold when study and service are joined and carried out concurrently. There, in the field of service, knowledge is tested, questions arise out of practice, and new levels of understanding are achieved. In the system of distance education that has now been established in country after country—the principal elements of which include the study circle, the tutor and the curriculum of the Ruhi Institute—the worldwide Bahá'í community has acquired the capacity to enable thousands, nay millions, to study the writings in small groups with the explicit purpose of translating the Bahá'í teachings into reality, carrying the work of the Faith forward into its next stage: sustained large-scale expansion and consolidation.

Let no one fail to appreciate the possibilities thus created. Passivity is bred by the forces of society today. A desire to be entertained is nurtured from childhood, with increasing efficiency, cultivating generations willing to be led by whoever proves skilful at appealing to superficial emotions. Even in many educational systems students are treated as though they were receptacles designed to receive information. That the Bahá'í world has succeeded in developing a culture which promotes a way of thinking, studying, and acting, in which all consider themselves as treading a common path of service—supporting one another and advancing together, respectful of the knowledge that each one possesses at any given moment and avoiding the tendency to divide the believers into categories such as deepened and uninformed—is an accomplishment of enormous proportions. And therein lie the dynamics of an irrepressible movement.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2010.

11.5 Elements of the First Series of Books in the Ruhi Curriculum: Units, their Purpose and Practice Components

Book 1	***Reflections on the Life of the Spirit***
Unit 1	*Understanding the Bahá'í Writings*
	To strengthen the habit of reading passages from the Holy Writings every day and reflecting on their meaning.
Unit 2	*Prayer*
	To reflect on the significance of prayer and to reinforce the habit of praying regularly.
Unit 3	*Life and Death*
	To appreciate that life does not consist merely of the changes and chances of this world but finds its true significance in the development of the soul.

Book 2	***Arising to Serve***
Unit 1	*The Joy of Teaching*
	To understand that the joy of teaching is in the very act of sharing with others the Word of God, independent of results.
Unit 2	*Deepening Themes*
	To develop the capability of making periodic visits to the homes of new believers and sharing with them a number of deepening themes.
	Visit a few families and study with them at least the first three themes presented in this unit.
Unit 3	*Introducing Bahá'í Beliefs*
	To acquire the ability to introduce Bahá'í ideas into a conversation.

Book 3	***Teaching Children's Classes Grade 1***
Unit 1	*Some Principles of Bahá'í Education*
	To understand some of the basic principles of Bahá'í education of children.
Unit 2	*Lessons for Children's Classes, Grade 1*
	To learn to teach simple children's classes consisting of memorisation of prayers and quotations, songs, stories, games and coloring.
Unit 3	*Conducting Classes for Children*
	To develop skills and abilities needed to conduct classes for children, managing the class with a great deal of love and understanding and, at the same time, with the discipline necessary to create a proper learning environment.

Book 4	***The Twin Manifestations***

Unit 1	*The Greatness of this Day*
	To gain spiritual insights into the significance of this Day and the promise it holds for humanity.
Unit 2	*The Life of the Báb*
	To learn to narrate the story of the Báb's life and gain an appreciation of the potency of His short and dramatic Ministry.
	Visit a few families and share with them a simple illustrated presentation of the Báb's life.
Unit 3	*The Life of the Bahá'u'lláh*
	To learn to narrate the story of Bahá'u'lláh's life and gain an appreciation of the magnitude of the spiritual forces released by Him.
	Visit a few families and share with them a simple illustrated presentation of Bahá'u'lláh's life.

Book 5	***Releasing the Power of Junior Youth***
Unit 1	*Life's Springtime*
	To gain an understanding of some of the characteristics that are to distinguish youth, as a prerequisite for engaging junior youth in a program for their spiritual empowerment.
Unit 2	*An Age of Promise*
	To explore the immense potentialities of young people between the ages of twelve and fifteen and to appreciate the significance of providing them with an environment conducive to their spiritual empowerment
	To converse with a few junior youth in one's village, town, or neighbourhood about their views of life and their aspirations for the future.
Unit 3	*Serving as an Animator*
	To reflect on concepts that shape the junior youth spiritual empowerment program.
	To join a more experienced animator in a few meetings of a junior youth group or to help, with the aid of such a friend if necessary, several junior youth to come together as a group and engage in the program.

Book 6	***Teaching the Cause***
Unit 1	*The Spiritual Nature of Teaching*
	To understand that teaching is an act of particular spiritual significance. To appreciate that effective teaching involves both "being" and "doing – attention to one's inner condition as well as constant activity.

Unit 2	*The Qualities and Attitudes of the Teacher*
	To reflect on the qualities and attitudes of a teacher of the Cause. To understand that effectiveness in teaching can be developed if we approach it in a posture of learning – engaging in activity, reflecting on what we have said and done, and turning regularly to the writings for insights and guidance.
Unit 3	*The Act of Teaching*
	To become familiar with some of the approaches and methods of personal teaching endeavors and collective campaigns.
	To design and implement your own The Practice of Personal Teaching plan and to participate in at least one teaching campaign.

Book 7	***Walking Together on a Path of Service***
Unit 1	*The Spiritual Path*
	To gain increased awareness of the spiritual dynamics of advancing along a path of service to the Cause and acquire an understanding of the forces at work.
Unit 2	*Becoming a Tutor of Books 1-6*
	To explore some of the concepts and acquire some of the attitudes and skills that contribute to the capability of helping a group of friends go through Books 1-6.
	To form a study circle and accompany it through at least one book.
Unit 3	*Promoting the Arts at the Grassroots*
	To appreciate the role of artistic endeavours in the activity of a study circle.

Service Activities Related to the Institute Process

11.6 The Four Core Activities

On several occasions we have made reference to the coherence that is brought to the process of growth through the establishment of study circles, devotional meetings and children's classes. The steady multiplication of core activities, propelled by the training institute, creates a sustainable pattern of expansion and consolidation that

is at once structured and organic. As seekers join these activities and declare their faith, individual and collective teaching endeavors gather momentum.

The Universal House of Justice, 27 December 2005.

So impressed are we by the results already achieved, and so compelling is the need, that we will urge all National Assemblies to consider the junior youth groups formed through programs implemented by their training institutes a fourth core activity in its own right and to promote its wide-scale multiplication.

The Universal House of Justice, 27 December 2005.

11.7 Holding Devotional Meetings

As we have said in an earlier message, the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behavior: those patterns by which the collective expression of the virtues of the individual members and the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly are manifest in the unity and fellowship of the community and the dynamism of its activity and growth. This calls for the integration of the component elements—adults, youth and children—in spiritual, social, educational and administrative activities; and their engagement in local plans of teaching and development. It implies a collective will and sense of purpose to perpetuate the Spiritual Assembly through annual elections. It involves the practice of collective worship of God. Hence, it is essential to the spiritual life of the community that the friends hold regular devotional meetings in local Bahá'í centers, where available, or elsewhere, including the homes of believers.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 153 [1996].

… the members of our worldwide community also gave more attention to drawing on the power of prayer, to meditating on the sacred Word, and to deriving the spiritual benefits of participation in devotional gatherings. It is through the workings of these elements of an intensified individual and collective transformation that the size of the community is increasing.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2000.

The systematic pursuit of the Plan in all its dimensions gives rise to a pattern of collective endeavour distinguished not only for its commitment to service, but also for its attraction to worship. The intensification of activity which the next five years requires will further enrich the devotional life shared by those who serve side by side in clusters around the world. This process of enrichment is already much advanced: witness, for instance, how gatherings for worship have been integrated into the core of community life. Devotional meetings are occasions where any soul may enter, inhale the heavenly fragrances, experience the sweetness of prayer, meditate upon the Creative Word, be transported on the wings of the spirit, and commune with the one Beloved. Feelings of fellowship and common cause are generated, particularly in the spiritually heightened conversations that naturally occur at such times and through which the "city of the human heart" may be opened. By convening a gathering for worship at which adults and children of any background are welcome, the spirit of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is evoked in any locality. The enhancement of the devotional

character of a community also has an effect on the Nineteen Day Feast and can be felt at other times when the friends come together.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015.

11.8 Making Home Visits

Even an act of service as simple as visiting the home of a new believer, whether in a village in the Pacific Islands or in a vast metropolitan area like London, reinforces ties of fellowship that bind the members of the community together. Conceived as a means for exposing believers to the fundamentals of the Faith, "home visits" are giving rise to an array of deepening efforts, both individual and collective, in which the friends are delving into the Writings and exploring their implications for their lives.

The Universal House of Justice, 27 December 2005.

If a home visit, to take another example, is defined in the courses as an opportunity to enter into deep conversation on spiritual matters, then it should not be reduced to a mere social call in which the Faith may not even be mentioned. In short, the educational process in which the friends have engaged over so many weeks and months should give shape to the individual and collective activities they now undertake.

The Universal House of Justice, 18 August 2005, *Turning Point*.

11.9 Providing Children's Education

Among the greatest of all services that can possibly be rendered by man to Almighty God is the education and training of children…

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 106.

Concern for the spiritual education of children has long been an element of the culture of the Bahá'í community, a concern that resulted in two, coexisting realities. One, emulating the achievements of the Bahá'ís of Iran, was characterized by the capacity to offer systematic classes, from grade to grade, to children from Bahá'í families, generally with the aim of imparting basic knowledge of the history and teachings of the Faith to rising generations. In most parts of the world, the number who benefited from such classes has been relatively small. The other reality emerged in areas where large-scale enrolments took place, both rural and urban. A more inclusive attitude dominated that experience. Yet while children from households of all kinds were at once eager and welcome to attend Bahá'í classes, various factors prevented lessons from being conducted with the required degree of regularity, year after year. How pleased we are to see this duality, a consequence of historical circumstances, begin to fall away as friends trained by institutes everywhere strive to offer classes, open to all, on a systematic basis.

Such promising beginnings have now to be vigorously pursued. In every cluster with an intensive programme of growth in operation, efforts need to be made to systematize further the provision of spiritual education to increasing numbers of children, from families of many backgrounds—a requisite of the community-

building process gathering momentum in neighbourhoods and villages. This will be a demanding task, one that calls for patience and cooperation on the part of parents and institutions alike. The Ruhi Institute has already been requested to expedite plans to complete its courses for training children's class teachers at different levels including the corresponding lessons, starting with youngsters aged 5 or 6 and proceeding to those aged 10 or 11, in order to close the present gap between existing lessons and its textbooks for junior youth, such as *Spirit of Faith* and the forthcoming *Power of the Holy Spirit*, which provide a distinctly Bahá'í component to the programme for that age group. As these additional courses and lessons become available, institutes in every country will be able to prepare the teachers and the coordinators required to put in place, grade by grade, the core of a programme for the spiritual education of children, around which secondary elements can be organized.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2010.

11.10 Empowering Junior Youth

Among the young ones in the community are those known as junior youth, who fall between the ages of, say, 12 and 15. They represent a special group with special needs as they are somewhat in between childhood and youth when many changes are occurring within them. Creative attention must be devoted to involving them in programs of activity that will engage their interests, mold their capacities for teaching and service, and involve them in social interaction with older youth. The employment of the arts in various forms can be of great value in such activity.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2000.

The rapid spread of the programme for the spiritual empowerment of junior youth is yet another expression of cultural advance in the Bahá'í community. While global trends project an image of this age group as problematic, lost in the throes of tumultuous physical and emotional change, unresponsive and self-consumed, the Bahá'í community—in the language it employs and the approaches it adopts—is moving decidedly in the opposite direction, seeing in junior youth instead altruism, an acute sense of justice, eagerness to learn about the universe and a desire to contribute to the construction of a better world. Account after account, in which junior youth in countries all over the planet give voice to their thoughts as participants in the programme, testifies to the validity of this vision. There is every indication that the programme engages their expanding consciousness in an exploration of reality that helps them to analyse the constructive and destructive forces operating in society and to recognize the influence these forces exert on their thoughts and actions, sharpening their spiritual perception, enhancing their powers of expression and reinforcing moral structures that will serve them throughout their lives. At an age when burgeoning intellectual, spiritual and physical powers become accessible to them, they are being given the tools needed to combat the forces that would rob them of their true identity as noble beings and to work for the common good.

That the major component of the programme explores themes from a Bahá'í perspective, but not in the mode of religious instruction, has opened the way for its

extension to junior youth in a variety of settings and circumstances. In many such instances, then, those who implement the programme enter confidently into the area of social action, encountering a range of questions and possibilities, which are being followed and organized in a global process of learning by the Office of Social and Economic Development in the Holy Land. Already the accumulating body of knowledge and experience has given rise to the capacity in several clusters scattered across the globe to each sustain over one thousand junior youth in the programme. To help others advance swiftly in this direction, the Office is establishing a network of sites in all continents, with the assistance of a corps of believers, that can be used to provide training to coordinators from scores upon scores of clusters. These resource persons continue to support coordinators upon their return to their respective clusters, enabling them to create a spiritually charged environment in which the junior youth programme can take root.

Further knowledge is sure to accrue in this area of endeavour, although a pattern of action is already clear. Only the capacity of the Bahá'í community limits the extent of its response to the demand for the programme by schools and civic groups.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2010.

11.11 Teaching the Faith

Nowhere has the rise in individual initiative been more clearly demonstrated than in the field of teaching. Whether in the form of firesides or study circles, individual efforts to teach the Faith are indisputably on the increase. Equipped with skills and methods, effective and accessible to all, and encouraged by the response their actions elicit, the believers are entering into closer association with people of many walks of life, engaging them in earnest conversation on themes of spiritual import. With greater and greater spiritual perception, they are able to sense receptivity and recognize thirst for the vivifying waters of Bahá'u'lláh's message. From among all those they encounter—parents of neighborhood children, peers at school, colleagues at work, casual acquaintances—they seek out souls with whom they can share a portion of that which He has so graciously bestowed on humanity. Increased experience enables them to adapt their presentation to the seeker's needs, employing direct teaching methods that draw on the Writings to offer the message in a manner both forthcoming and inviting.

The Universal House of Justice, 27 December 2005.

11.12 Tutoring Study Circles

What is imperative is that the quality of the educational process fostered at the level of the study circle rise markedly over the next year so that the potential of local populations to create such dynamics is realized. Much will fall on those who serve as tutors in this respect. Theirs will be the challenge to provide the environment that is envisioned in the institute courses, an environment conducive to the spiritual empowerment of individuals, who will come to see themselves as active agents of their own learning, as protagonists of a constant effort to apply knowledge to effect individual and collective transformation. Failing this, no matter how many study

circles are formed in a cluster, the force necessary to propel change will not be generated.

If the work of the tutor is to reach higher and higher degrees of excellence, it must be remembered that primary responsibility for the development of human resources in a region or country rests with the training institute. While striving to increase the number of its participants, the institute as a structure—from the board, to the coordinators at different levels, to the tutors at the grassroots—must lay equal stress on the effectiveness of the system in its entirety, for, in the final analysis, sustained quantitative gains will be contingent on qualitative progress. At the level of the cluster, the coordinator must bring both practical experience and dynamism to his or her efforts to accompany those who serve as tutors. He or she should arrange periodic gatherings for them to reflect on their endeavours. Events organized to repeat the study of segments selected from the institute material may occasionally prove helpful, provided they do not inculcate a need for perpetual training. The capabilities of a tutor develop progressively as an individual enters the field of action and assists others in contributing to the aim of the present series of global Plans, through study of the sequence of courses and implementation of their practical component. And as men and women of various ages move along the sequence and complete their study of each course with the help of tutors, others must stand ready to accompany them in acts of service undertaken according to their strengths and interests—particularly the coordinators responsible for children's classes, for junior youth groups and for study circles, acts of service crucial to the perpetuation of the system itself. To ensure that the proper measure of vitality is pulsating through this system should continue to be the object of intense learning in every country over the course of the next twelve months.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2010.

11.13 Accompanying One Another

The developments we have mentioned thus far... are all reinforced, in no small measure, by yet another advance at the level of culture, the implications of which are far-reaching indeed. This evolution in collective consciousness is discernable in the growing frequency with which the word "accompany" appears in conversations among the friends, a word that is being endowed with new meaning as it is integrated into the common vocabulary of the Bahá'í community. It signals the significant strengthening of a culture in which learning is the mode of operation, a mode that fosters the informed participation of more and more people in a united effort to apply Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to the construction of a divine civilization, which the Guardian states is the primary mission of the Faith. Such an approach offers a striking contrast to the spiritually bankrupt and moribund ways of an old social order that so often seeks to harness human energy through domination, through greed, through guilt or through manipulation.

In relationships among the friends, then, this development in culture finds expression in the quality of their interactions. Learning as a mode of operation requires that all assume a posture of humility, a condition in which one becomes forgetful of self, placing complete trust in God, reliant on His all-sustaining power

and confident in His unfailing assistance, knowing that He, and He alone, can change the gnat into an eagle, the drop into a boundless sea. And in such a state souls labour together ceaselessly, delighting not so much in their own accomplishments but in the progress and services of others. So it is that their thoughts are centred at all times on helping one another scale the heights of service to His Cause and soar in the heaven of His knowledge. This is what we see in the present pattern of activity unfolding across the globe, propagated by young and old, by veteran and newly enrolled, working side by side.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2010.

Becoming Active Agents of Our Own Learning

11.14 Attracting the Play of Spiritual Forces

The role of the individual is of unique importance in the work of the Cause. It is the individual who manifests the vitality of faith upon which the success of the teaching work and the development of the community depend. Bahá'u'lláh's command to each believer to teach His Faith confers an inescapable responsibility which cannot be transferred to, or assumed by, any institution of the Cause. The individual alone can exercise those capacities which include the ability to take initiative, to seize opportunities, to form friendships, to interact personally with others, to build relationships, to win the cooperation of others in common service to the Faith and society, and to convert into action the decisions made by consultative bodies. It is the individual's duty to "consider every avenue of approach which he might utilize in his personal attempts to capture the attention, maintain the interest, and deepen the faith, of those whom he seeks to bring into the fold of his Faith."

To optimize the use of these capacities, the individual draws upon his love for Bahá'u'lláh, the power of the Covenant, the dynamics of prayer, the inspiration and education derived from regular reading and study of the Holy Texts, and the transformative forces that operate upon his soul as he strives to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles. In addition to these, the individual, having been given the duty to teach the Cause, is endowed with the capacity to attract particular blessings promised by Bahá'u'lláh. "Whoso openeth his lips in this Day," the Blessed Beauty asserts, "and maketh mention of the name of his Lord, the hosts of Divine inspiration shall descend upon him from the heaven of My name, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. On him shall also descend the Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light."

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 153 [1996].

11.15 Harmonising Our Lives with the Teachings

When the North American Bahá'í community embarked on its first Seven Year Plan, in pursuit of the responsibilities with which it had been charged in the *Tablets of the Divine Plan*, the Guardian addressed to the friends in that land a letter of considerable length and great potency, dated 25 December 1938, subsequently published under the title *The Advent of Divine Justice*. Elaborating on the nature of the tasks at hand, the letter made reference to what the Guardian described as spiritual prerequisites for the success of all Bahá'í undertakings. Of these, three, he indicated, "stand out as preeminent and vital": rectitude of conduct, a chaste and holy life, and freedom from prejudice. Given the conditions of the world today, you would do well to reflect on the implications of his observations for the global effort of the Bahá'í community to infuse cluster after cluster with the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.

Referring to rectitude of conduct, Shoghi Effendi spoke of the "justice, equity, truthfulness, honesty, fair-mindedness, reliability, and trustworthiness" that must "distinguish every phase of the life of the Bahá'í community." Though applicable to all its members, this requisite was directed principally, he underscored, to its "elected representatives, whether local, regional, or national," whose sense of moral rectitude should stand in clear contrast to "the demoralizing influences which a corruption-ridden political life so strikingly manifests". The Guardian called for "an abiding sense of undeviating justice" in a "strangely disordered world" and quoted extensively from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, setting the sights of the friends on the highest standards of honesty and trustworthiness. He appealed to the believers to exemplify rectitude of conduct in every aspect of their lives—in their business dealings, in their domestic lives, in all manner of employment, in every service they render to the Cause and to their people—and to observe its requirements in their uncompromising adherence to the laws and principles of the Faith…

No less pertinent to the success of the Bahá'í enterprise today are the Guardian's forthright comments on the importance of a chaste and holy life, "with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness". He was unequivocal in his language, summoning the friends to a life unsullied "by the indecencies, the vices, the false standards, which an inherently deficient moral code tolerates, perpetuates, and fosters". We need not provide for you here evidence of the influence that such a deficient code now exerts on humanity as a whole; even the remotest spots on the globe are captivated by its enticements…

The Guardian next addressed the subject of prejudice, stating patently that "any division or cleavage" in the ranks of the Faith "is alien to its very purpose, principles, and ideals." He made clear that the friends should manifest "complete freedom from prejudice in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or colour." … While it is true that, at the level of public discourse, great strides have been taken in refuting the falsehoods that give rise to prejudice in whatever form, it still permeates the structures of society and is systematically impressed on the individual consciousness. It should be apparent to all that the process set in motion by the current series of global Plans seeks, in the approaches it takes and the methods it employs, to build capacity in every human group, with no regard for class or religious

background, with no concern for ethnicity or race, irrespective of gender or social status, to arise and contribute to the advancement of civilization. We pray that, as it steadily unfolds, its potential to disable every instrument devised by humanity over the long period of its childhood for one group to oppress another may be realized…

Apart from the spiritual requisites of a sanctified Bahá'í life, there are habits of thought that affect the unfoldment of the global Plan, and their development has to be encouraged at the level of culture. There are tendencies, as well, that need to be gradually overcome. Many of these tendencies are reinforced by approaches prevalent in society at large, which, not altogether unreasonably, enter into Bahá'í activity. The magnitude of the challenge facing the friends in this respect is not lost on us. They are called upon to become increasingly involved in the life of society, benefiting from its educational programmes, excelling in its trades and professions, learning to employ well its tools, and applying themselves to the advancement of its arts and sciences. At the same time, they are never to lose sight of the aim of the Faith to effect a transformation of society, remoulding its institutions and processes, on a scale never before witnessed. To this end, they must remain acutely aware of the inadequacies of current modes of thinking and doing—this, without feeling the least degree of superiority, without assuming an air of secrecy or aloofness, and without adopting an unnecessarily critical stance towards society.

The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010.

Throughout the world, in diverse cultures, Bahá'ís encounter values and practices that stand in sharp contrast to the teachings of the Faith. Some are embedded in social structures, for instance, racial prejudice and gender discrimination, economic exploitation and political corruption. Others pertain to personal conduct, especially with respect to the use of alcohol and drugs, to sexual behaviour, and to self-indulgence in general. If Bahá'ís simply surrender to the mores of society how will conditions change? … Young Bahá'ís especially need to take care, lest they imagine they can live according to the mores of contemporary society while adhering to Bahá'í ideals at some minimal level to assuage their conscience or to satisfy the community, for they will find themselves consumed in a struggle to obey even the most basic of the Faith's moral teachings and powerless to take up the challenges of their generation… The inner joy that every individual seeks, unlike a passing emotion, is not contingent on outside influences; it is a condition, born of certitude and conscious knowledge, fostered by a pure heart, which is able to distinguish between that which has permanence and that which is superficial…

The duty to obey the laws brought by Bahá'u'lláh for a new age, then, rests primarily on the individual believer. It lies at the heart of the relationship between the lover and the beloved; 'Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty,' is Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation. Yet what is expected in this connection is effort sustained by earnest desire, not instantaneous perfection. The qualities and habits of thought and action that characterise Bahá'í life are developed through daily exertion. 'Bring thyself to account each day', writes Bahá'u'lláh. 'Let each morn be better than its eve', He advises, 'and each morrow richer than its yesterday.' The friends should not lose heart in their personal struggles to attain to the Divine standard, nor be seduced by the argument that, since mistakes will inevitably be made and perfection is impossible,

it is futile to exert an effort. They are to steer clear of the pitfalls of hypocrisy on the one hand–that is, saying one thing yet doing another–and heedlessness, on the other–that is, disregard for the laws, ignoring or explaining away the need to follow them. So too, is paralysis engendered by guilt to be avoided; indeed, preoccupation with a particular moral failing can, at times, make it more challenging for it to be overcome…

What the friends need to remember in this respect is that, in their efforts to achieve personal growth and to uphold Bahá'í ideals, they are not isolated individuals withstanding alone the onslaught of the forces of moral decay operating in society. They are members of a purposeful community, global in scope, pursuing a bold spiritual mission–working to establish a pattern of activity and administrative structures suited to humanity entering its age of maturity. Giving shape to the community's efforts is a framework for action defined by the global plans of the Faith. This framework promotes the transformation of the individual in conjunction with social transformation, as two inseparable processes. Specifically, the courses of the institute are intended to set the individual on a path in which qualities and attitudes, skills and abilities, are gradually acquired through service–service intended to quell the insistent self, helping to lift the individual out of its confines and placing him or her in a dynamic process of community building.

In this context, then, every individual finds himself or herself immersed in a community that serves increasingly as an environment conducive to the cultivation of those attributes that are to distinguish a Bahá'í life–an environment in which a spirit of unity animates one and all; in which the ties of fellowship bind them; in which mistakes are treated with tolerance and fear of failure is diminished; in which criticism of others is avoided and backbiting and gossip give way to mutual support and encouragement; in which young and old work shoulder to shoulder, studying the Creative Word together and accompanying one another in their efforts to serve; in which children are reared through an educational process that strives to sharpen their spiritual faculties and imbue them with the spirit of the Faith; in which young people are helped to detect the false messages spread by society, recognize its fruitless preoccupations, and resist its pressures, directing their energies instead towards its betterment. The institutions of the Faith, for their part, strive to ensure that such an environment is fostered. They do not pry into the personal lives of individuals. Nor are they vindictive and judgmental, eager to punish those who fall short of the Bahá'í standard. Except in extreme cases of blatant and flagrant disregard for the law that could potentially harm the Cause and may require them to administer sanctions, their attention is focused on encouragement, assistance, counsel and education.

The Universal House of Justice, 19 April 2013, The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh, Unit 3, Ruhi Institute, pp. 69-74.

As you know, taking to an extreme the exhortation that a teacher should, before all else, teach his own self can lead to a decline in the level of teaching activity as more and more attention becomes focused on one's own perfection. There are, of course, numerous passages in the Writings which ask us to make daily effort so that our inner lives increasingly reflect the Teachings of the Faith. Moreover, it is evident that our inner state has a direct bearing on the success of our teaching efforts. But the

Writings also tell us not to look at our own shortcomings, but to rely on the power of divine assistance in delivering His Message. The question of the development of one's inner life and its relation to teaching has to be viewed in this broader context. In doing so, we should remember that all Bahá'ís are called upon to teach the Cause, whatever their spiritual attainments may be. Furthermore, the act of sharing the Word of God with others profoundly affects the refinement of one's inner life.

The Universal House of Justice, 9 April 1996, *Turning Point*.

11.16 Learning through the Institute Process

As made clear in our Riḍván message, in the system thus created to develop its human resources, the community of the Greatest Name possesses an instrument of limitless potentialities. Under a wide diversity of conditions, in virtually any cluster, it is possible for an expanding nucleus of individuals to generate a movement towards the goal of a new World Order.

The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010.

As individuals progress through institute courses, they deepen their knowledge of the Faith, gain insights, and acquire skills of service. Some of the courses devoted to teaching will no doubt treat the subject in general terms. Others will focus on various means of sharing Bahá'u'lláh's message with specific segments of society, incorporating the wisdom gleaned from the teaching endeavors of the friends. This combined process of action, learning and training will endow communities with an ever-increasing number of capable and eager teachers of the Cause.

The Universal House of Justice, 9 January 2001.

11.17 Studying the Guidance of the Universal House of Justice

It is heartening to note that the friends are approaching the study of the messages of the Universal House of Justice related to the Plan with such diligence. The level of discussion generated as they strive to put into practice the guidance received, and to learn from experience, is impressive. We cannot help noticing, however, that achievements tend to be more enduring in those regions where the friends strive to understand the totality of the vision conveyed in the messages, while difficulties often arise when phrases and sentences are taken out of context and viewed as isolated fragments. The institutions and agencies of the Faith should help the believers to analyse but not reduce, to ponder meaning but not dwell on words, to identify distinct areas of action but not compartmentalize. We realize that this is no small task. Society speaks more and more in slogans. We hope that the habits the friends are forming in study circles to work with full and complex thoughts and to achieve understanding will be extended to various spheres of activity.

Closely related to the habit of reducing an entire theme into one or two appealing phrases is the tendency to perceive dichotomies, where, in fact, there are none. It is essential that ideas forming part of a cohesive whole not be held in opposition to one another. In a letter written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi warned: "We must take the teachings as a great, balanced whole, not seek out and oppose to each other two strong statements that have different meanings; somewhere in between, there

are links uniting the two." How encouraged we have been to note that many of the misunderstandings of the past have fallen away as appreciation for the provisions of the Plan has grown. Expansion and consolidation, individual action and collective campaigns, refinement of the inner character and consecration to selfless service—the harmonious relationship between these facets of Bahá'í life is now readily acknowledged. It brings us equal pleasure to know that the friends are on their guard, lest new false dichotomies be allowed to pervade their thinking...

Finally, a significant advance in culture, one which we have followed with particular interest, is marked by the rise in capacity to think in terms of process. That, from the outset, the believers have been asked to be ever conscious of the broad processes that define their work is apparent from a careful reading of even the earliest communications of the Guardian related to the first national plans of the Faith. However, in a world focused increasingly on the promotion of events, or at best projects, with a mindset that derives satisfaction from the sense of expectation and excitement they generate, maintaining the level of dedication required for long-term action demands considerable effort. The expansion and consolidation of the Bahá'í community encompasses a number of interacting processes, each of which contributes its share to the movement of humanity towards Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a new World Order. The lines of action associated with any given process provide for the organization of occasional events, and from time to time, activities take the shape of a project with a clear beginning and a definite end. If, however, events are imposed on the natural unfoldment of a process, they will disrupt its sound evolution. If the projects undertaken in a cluster are not made subordinate to the explicit needs of the processes unfolding there, they will yield little fruit.

The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010.

11.18 Learning by Study, Action, Reflection and Consultation

If learning is to be the primary mode of operation in a community, then visions, strategies, goals and methods have to be re-examined time and again. As tasks are accomplished, obstacles removed, resources multiplied and lessons learned, modifications have to be made in goals and approaches, but in a way that continuity of action is maintained.

The Universal House of Justice. *The Institution of the Counsellors*, 2001, p. 24.

The friends in every continent are engaged in study of the Writings for the explicit purpose of learning to apply the teachings to the growth of the Faith. Remarkable numbers are now shouldering responsibility for the spiritual vitality of their communities; energetically, they are carrying out those acts of service befitting a healthy pattern of growth. As they have persevered in the field of service to the Cause, maintaining a humble posture of learning, their courage and wisdom, zeal and acuity, fervour and circumspection, determination and trust in God have combined all the more to reinforce one another.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2008.

The signs of their progress are more and more apparent: … in the readiness of institutions, agencies, and individuals to think in terms of process, to read their immediate reality and assess their resources in the places where they live, and to make plans on that basis; in the now familiar dynamic of study, consultation, action, and reflection that has cultivated an instinctive posture of learning…

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2016.

CHAPTER 12

COMMUNITY BUILDING IN CLUSTERS

Clusters and Cluster Development

12.1 The Division of Regions into Clusters 348

12.2 Cluster Development: The Second of the Two Essential Movements 348

The Continuum of Cluster Development

12.3 Opening New Areas 350

12.4 Achieving a Programme of Growth – the First Milestone 350

12.5 An Intensive Programme of Growth – The Second Milestone 352

12.6 Embracing Large Numbers and Managing Complexity – The Third Milestone 355

12.7 Developing Clusters with a Significant Percentage of the Population Engaged in Community-Building Activities – a Fourth Milestone 358

Key Requirements for Growth

12.8 The Three Protagonists – the Individual, the Community and the Institutions must all Develop and Contribute 359

12.9 Bahá'í Communities must Learn, Maintain Focus, and Act Systematically 359

12.10 Individual Initiative and Collective Activities are Both Needed 360

12.11 Open Bahá'í Community Development Activities to All 360

12.12 Reach Receptive Populations 361

The Vital Role of Youth

12.13 A Message to 114 Youth Conferences throughout the World (2013) 362

12.14 Progressing Along a Path of Service 340

Enhancing Institutional Capacity

12.15 Local Spiritual Assemblies 365

12.16 Regional and National Institutions 368

12.17 Counsellors, Auxiliary Board Members and Assistants 370

12.18 Developing and Utilising Financial Resources 372

Clusters and Cluster Development

12.1 The Division of Regions into Clusters

There are many countries where increased institutional capacity, particularly at the level of the region, now makes it possible to focus attention on smaller geographic areas. Most of these will consist of a cluster of villages and towns, but, sometimes, a large city and its suburbs may constitute an area of this kind. Among the factors that determine the boundaries of a cluster are culture, language, patterns of transport, infrastructure, and the social and economic life of the inhabitants. The areas into which a region divides will fall into various categories of development. Some will not yet be open to the Faith, while others will contain a few isolated localities and groups; in some, established communities will be gaining strength through a vigorous institute process; in a few, strong communities of deepened believers will be in a position to take on the challenges of systematic and accelerated expansion and consolidation.

The Universal House of Justice, 9 January 2001.

During the initial months of the Plan, National Spiritual Assemblies proceeded with relative ease to divide the territories under their jurisdiction into areas consisting of adjacent localities, called clusters, using criteria that were purely geographic and social and did not relate to the strength of local Bahá'í communities. Reports received at the World Centre indicate that there are now close to 17,000 clusters worldwide, excluding those countries where, for one reason or another, the operation of the Faith is restricted. The number of clusters per country varies widely—from India with its 1,580 to Singapore, which necessarily sees itself as one cluster. Some of the groupings are sparsely populated areas with only a few thousand inhabitants, while the boundaries of others encompass several million people. For the most part, large urban centers under the jurisdiction of one Local Spiritual Assembly have been designated single clusters, these in turn being divided into sectors, so as to facilitate planning and implementation.

The Universal House of Justice, 17 January 2003.

12.2 Cluster Development: The Second of the Two Essential Movements

The Five Year Plan, which will undoubtedly be the focus of your consultations over the next few days, requires concentrated and sustained attention to two essential movements. The first is the steady flow of believers through the sequence of courses offered by training institutes, for the purpose of developing the human resources of the Cause. The second, which receives its impetus from the first, is the movement of geographic clusters from one stage of growth to the next.

The Universal House of Justice, 22 December 2001, *Turning Point*.

With the various countries and territories divided into manageable areas, national communities moved quickly ahead to categorize clusters according to the stages of the development of the Faith mentioned in our 9 January message. The exercise

afforded a realistic means for viewing the prospects of the community, but the task of refining the criteria needed for valid assessments is proving to be an ongoing challenge to institutions. To assign a cluster to one or another category is not to make a statement about status. Rather, it is a way of evaluating its capacity for growth, in order that an approach compatible with its evolving development can be adopted. Rigid criteria are obviously counterproductive, but a well-defined scheme to carry out evaluation is essential. Two criteria seem especially important: the strength of the human resources raised up by the training institute for the expansion and consolidation of the Faith in the cluster, and the ability of the institutions to mobilize these resources in the field of service.

The Universal House of Justice, 17 January 2003.

In most clusters, movement from one stage of growth to the next is being defined in terms of the multiplication of study circles, devotional meetings and children's classes, and the expansion they engender. Devotional meetings begin to flourish as consciousness of the spiritual dimension of human existence is raised among the believers in an area through institute courses. Children's classes, too, are a natural outgrowth of the training received early in the study of the main sequence. As both activities are made open to the wider community through a variety of well-conceived and imaginative means, they attract a growing number of seekers, who, more often than not, are eager to attend firesides and join study circles. Many go on subsequently to declare their faith in Bahá'u'lláh and, from the outset, view their role in the community as that of active participants in a dynamic process of growth. Individual and collective exertions in the teaching field intensify correspondingly, further fuelling the process. Established communities are revitalized, and newly formed ones soon gain the privilege of electing their Local Spiritual Assemblies.

The coherence thus achieved through the establishment of study circles, devotional meetings and children's classes provides the initial impulse for growth in a cluster, an impulse that gathers strength as these core activities multiply in number. Campaigns that help a sizeable group of believers advance far enough in the main sequence of courses to perform the necessary acts of service lend impetus to this multiplication of activity.

The Universal House of Justice, 17 January 2003.

12.3 Opening New Areas

The clearly defined plans now in place multiply teaching opportunities for those wishing to serve the Faith in the international field as short- or long-term pioneers. Most of the needs of the clusters in a given country should increasingly be met by homefront pioneers as the plan unfolds. But, given the sheer number of geographic areas which require systematic attention in order to advance, international pioneers will have a notable role to play. Their participation will be especially effective in the programs of growth spreading throughout the world if they have developed abilities to foster the institute process. Beyond this, international pioneers and traveling teachers can contribute significantly to the work of the Faith in such spheres of activity as administration, proclamation, and social and economic development… The movement of pioneers and traveling teachers from one place to another is an indispensable feature of the Bahá'í community.

The Universal House of Justice, 10 January 2002, *Turning Point*.

In the Five Year Plan now ending, the task facing the believers has been to apply all that had been learned from previous Plans to the work of extending the process of growth to thousands of new clusters. What this has shown is that much depends on the ability of the institutions to draw on help from friends in other clusters, reinforcing the actions of an existing Bahá'í community by, for example, arranging the support of visiting teaching teams or tutors. In many places, the institute process begins with the assistance of believers from stronger neighbouring communities who find creative ways of reaching out to the local population, youth in particular, and supporting them as they start to engage in service. Efforts to stimulate activity in a cluster, especially one that has not yet been opened to the Faith, are greatly enhanced if one or more individuals settle there as homefront pioneers, concentrating their attention on part of a village or even a single street where there is heightened receptivity. Well over 4,500 believers have already arisen to serve in this way during the present Plan, an astonishing accomplishment.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015.

12.4 Achieving a Programme of Growth – the First Milestone

Invariably, opportunities afforded by the personal circumstances of the believers initially involved—or perhaps a single homefront pioneer—to enter into meaningful and distinctive conversation with local residents dictate how the process of growth begins in a cluster. A study circle made up of a few friends or colleagues, a class offered for several neighbourhood children, a group formed for junior youth during after-school hours, a devotional gathering hosted for family and friends—any one of these can serve as a stimulus to growth. What happens next follows no predetermined course. Conditions may justify that one core activity be given precedence, multiplying at a rate faster than the others. It is equally possible that all four would advance at a comparable pace. Visiting teams may be called upon to

provide impetus to the fledgling set of activities. But irrespective of the specifics, the outcome must be the same. Within every cluster, the level of cohesion achieved among the core activities must be such that, in their totality, a nascent programme for the sustained expansion and consolidation of the Faith can be perceived. That is to say, in whatever combination and however small in number, devotional gatherings, children's classes and junior youth groups are being maintained by those progressing through the sequence of institute courses and committed to the vision of individual and collective transformation they foster. This initial flow of human resources into the field of systematic action marks the first of several milestones in a process of sustainable growth.

The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010.

Cluster Decision Making, Reflection Meetings, and Consultation

As learning has come to distinguish the community's mode of operation, certain aspects of decision making related to expansion and consolidation have been assigned to the body of the believers, enabling planning and implementation to become more responsive to circumstances on the ground. Specifically, a space has been created, in the agency of the reflection meeting, for those engaged in activities at the cluster level to assemble from time to time in order to reach consensus on the current status of their situation, in light of experience and guidance from the institutions, and to determine their immediate steps forward. A similar space is opened by the institute, which makes provision for those serving as tutors, children's class teachers, and animators of junior youth groups in a cluster to meet severally and consult on their experience. Intimately connected to this grassroots consultative process are the agencies of the training institute and the Area Teaching Committee, together with the Auxiliary Board members, whose joint interactions provide another space in which decisions pertaining to growth are taken, in this case with a higher degree of formality. The workings of this cluster-level system, born of exigencies, point to an important characteristic of Bahá'í administration: Even as a living organism, it has coded within it the capacity to accommodate higher and higher degrees of complexity, in terms of structures and processes, relationships and activities, as it evolves under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2010.

Cycles and Phases of Activity

The impulse to learn through action is, of course, present among the friends from the very start. The introduction of quarterly cycles of activity capitalizes on this emerging capacity and allows it to be steadily reinforced. Although this capacity is specifically associated with the reflection and planning phase of a cycle, especially the reflection gathering that regulates its pulsating heartbeat, it also comes to be exercised at all other points of the cycle by those pursuing related lines of action. We note that, as learning accelerates, the friends grow more capable of overcoming setbacks, whether small or large—diagnosing their root causes, exploring the underlying principles, bringing to bear relevant experience, identifying remedial steps, and assessing progress, until the process of growth has been fully reinvigorated.

Central to the pattern of action evolving in a cluster is the individual and collective transformation effected through the agency of the Word of God. From the beginning of the sequence of courses, a participant encounters Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation in considering such weighty themes as worship, service to humanity, the life of the soul, and the education of children and youth…

As progress continues, the rising capacity for meaningful conversation is harnessed in the plans of the institutions. By the time cycles of activity have formally emerged, this capacity is being further stimulated through the expansion phase that does so much to determine the outcome of each cycle. The precise objectives of each expansion phase vary, of course, depending on conditions in the cluster and the circumstances of the Bahá'í community. In some instances, its main aim is to increase participation in the core activities; in others, readiness to enrol in the Faith is discovered. Conversations about the Person of Bahá'u'lláh and the purpose of His mission occur in a variety of settings, including firesides and visits to homes. The actions undertaken during this phase allow abilities developed through studying the relevant institute materials to be exercised and refined… The approach of working in teams allows the friends to serve together, offer mutual support, and build confidence—but even when carrying out actions individually, they are coordinating their efforts to greater effect. Their focus and investment of time endow this short but decisive phase of the cycle with the intensity it demands. This spirit of high resolve serves to multiply the community's powers, and in each cycle the friends learn to depend more and more on the potent confirmations from the divine realm that their actions attract.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015.

12.5 An Intensive Programme of Growth – The Second Milestone

Before long, there forms a nucleus of friends in a cluster who are working and consulting together and arranging activities. For the process of growth to advance further, the number of people sharing this commitment must rise, and their capacity for undertaking systematic action within the framework of the Plan must correspondingly increase. And similar to the development of a living organism, growth can occur quickly when the right conditions are in place.

Foremost among these conditions is an institute process gaining in strength, given its centrality to fostering the movement of populations. The friends who have begun studying institute materials, and are also investing their energies in organizing children's classes, junior youth groups, gatherings for collective worship, or other related activities, are being assisted to proceed further through the sequence of courses, while the number of those starting their study continues to rise. With the flow of participants through institute courses and into the field of action being maintained, the company of those who are sustaining the growth process expands…

Of course, it is not the provision of training by itself that brings about progress. Efforts to build capacity fall short if arrangements are not swiftly made to accompany individuals into the arena of service. An adequate level of support extends far beyond encouraging words. When preparing to take on an unfamiliar task, working alongside a person with some experience increases consciousness of what is possible.

An assurance of practical help can give a tentative venturer the courage to initiate an activity for the first time. Souls then advance their understanding together, humbly sharing the insights each possesses at a given moment and eagerly seeking to learn from fellow wayfarers on the path of service. Hesitation recedes and capacity develops to the point where an individual can carry out activities independently and, in turn, accompany others on the same path.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015.

Arrangements for Planning and Coordination

Where the institute is concerned, the flow of participants through its courses creates a growing need for them to be systematically supported as they begin serving as teachers of children, as animators, and as tutors. Opportunities naturally arise for those among the core of believers who have already gained a measure of experience in the educational activities to assist those who are newer to them. An individual's readiness to help others move forward in their efforts to serve might lead to specific responsibilities being assigned to him or her. In this manner, coordinators of each of the three stages of the educational process gradually emerge as needs demand. Their actions are always motivated by a desire to see capacity develop in others and to foster friendships founded on cooperation and reciprocity.

Clearly, the institute process raises capacity for a broad range of undertakings; from the earliest courses, participants are encouraged to visit their friends at their homes and study a prayer together or share with them a theme from the Bahá'í teachings. Arrangements for supporting the friends in these endeavours, which may have been largely informal, eventually prove inadequate, signalling the need for an Area Teaching Committee to appear. Its principal focus is the mobilization of individuals, often through the formation of teams, for the continued spread of the pattern of activity in a cluster. Its members come to see everyone as a potential collaborator in a collective enterprise, and they appreciate their own part in nurturing a spirit of common purpose in the community…

Just like individuals, the agencies emerging in a cluster need assistance as they take up their duties... The capacity to serve ably at the cluster level increases when spaces are created in which the believers involved can study guidance, reflect on their actions in its light and draw insights therefrom, and also become connected with the wider body of knowledge being generated in surrounding clusters and further afield. Instead of formulating plans in the abstract, consultations conducted in such spaces often aim at capturing the reality of the cluster at that particular moment and identifying the immediate next steps to facilitate progress. Those serving at the regional or national level may do much to advise the friends and expand their vision of what can be accomplished, but they would not seek to impose their own expectations on the planning process; rather, they are helping the believers who are labouring in a cluster to gradually enhance their ability to devise and implement a course of action informed by the experience accumulating at the grassroots of the community and familiarity with actual conditions.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015.

Working with Receptive Populations to Achieve an intensive Programme of Growth

Five years ago, most of the clusters where an intensive programme of growth had been established were those where a reasonable number of Bahá'ís already lived, often geographically spread out. Efforts on the part of those believers to advance the work by inviting the participation of friends, co-workers, extended family, and acquaintances did much to raise the level of activity throughout the cluster. Indeed, widening the circle of participation in this way has become a familiar aspect of Bahá'í life and remains essential. At the same time, experience indicates that, for growth to accelerate through a steady flow of new participants entering the institute process, more is required. The pattern of community life has to be developed in places where receptivity wells up, those small centres of population where intense activity can be sustained. It is here, when carrying out the work of community building within such a narrow compass, that the interlocking dimensions of community life are most coherently expressed, here that the process of collective transformation is most keenly felt—here that, in time, the society-building power inherent in the Faith becomes most visible.

Therefore, a significant task facing you and your auxiliaries at the outset of the coming Plan will be to assist the friends everywhere to appreciate that, for existing programmes of growth to continue to gain strength, the strategy of initiating community-building activities in neighbourhoods and villages that show promise must be widely adopted and systematically followed. Individuals serving in such areas learn how to explain the purpose of those activities, how to demonstrate through deeds the purity of their motives, how to nurture environments where the hesitant can be reassured, how to help the inhabitants see the rich possibilities created by working together, and how to encourage them to arise to serve the best interests of their society...

As the friends in a cluster continue to reinforce and expand the community-building activities taking shape around them, it becomes evident that distinctive progress has been made. All the elements of a system necessary for growth to be sustained are now in place. Reaching the second milestone along the continuum of development, which we described to you five years ago, is accompanied by advances qualitative, but also quantitative—such as a rise in the number of those involved in conversations that enable receptivity to be discovered and nurtured, in how many homes are being visited, in core activities and participation, in how many individuals are beginning the sequence of courses or supporting others as they gain the confidence to serve. Attendance at gatherings to mark the Nineteen Day Feast and Bahá'í Holy Days is being fostered by Local Spiritual Assemblies. Such advances are the more visible signs of a much finer development: the gradual spread,

within a population, of a pattern of community life based on Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. And, naturally, the number of believers grows.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015.

12.6 Embracing Large Numbers and Managing Complexity – The Third Milestone

Whereas, when a programme of growth is nascent in a cluster, there might be a handful of individuals who are involved in its promotion and those who are participating might come from only several households, by the time a programme has become intensive, these figures, as one would expect, have grown: perhaps tens of individuals active in the work of expansion and consolidation, while those participating might well surpass a hundred. But being able to reach out to large numbers—mobilizing a hundred people or more, whose service connects them with many hundreds or even thousands—requires the capacity to adapt to a substantial increase in complexity.

As the growth process continues to gain intensity, the friends' efforts to engage in meaningful conversations bring them into many social spaces, allowing a wider array of people to become familiar with the teachings and consider seriously the contribution they can make to the betterment of society. In addition, more and more homes are provided as venues for community-building activities, making each a point for the diffusion of the light of divine guidance. The institute process comes to be supported by a growing number of friends serving capably as tutors who, cycle after cycle, offer the full sequence of institute courses between them, at times with marked intensity. Thus, human resource development proceeds with minimal interruption and generates a constantly expanding pool of workers. While it continues to draw on a diverse range of the cluster's inhabitants, those taking its courses in the greatest numbers are often the youth. The transformative effect of studying the Word of God is experienced by the many whose lives are touched in some way by the community's activities. And as the flow of people beginning a path of service swells, considerable progress is made in all aspects of the community-building efforts of the friends. Animators of junior youth groups and teachers of children's classes multiply in number, fuelling an expansion of these two vital programmes. Children are enabled to move from one grade of the classes to another, while groups of junior youth progress from year to year and ground their learning in service to society. Cluster agencies, bolstered by the support of Local Spiritual Assemblies, encourage and foster the natural passage of participants from one stage of the educational process to the next. An educational system with all its component elements, capable of expanding to welcome large numbers, is now firmly rooted within the cluster.

This kind of progress requires the concerted efforts of the friends wherever in the cluster they reside. Nevertheless, experience in the present Plan demonstrates that a pattern of action that is able to embrace large numbers comes chiefly from working to bring more neighbourhoods and villages—places where the convergence of spiritual forces is effecting rapid change within a body of people—to the point where they can sustain intense activity. A core of individuals from within each is assuming responsibility for the process of building capacity in its inhabitants. A broader cross section of the population is being engaged in conversations, and activities are being opened up to whole groups at once—bands of friends and neighbours, troops of youth, entire families—enabling them to realize how society

around them can be refashioned. The practice of gathering for collective worship, sometimes for dawn prayers, nurtures within all a much deeper connection with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Prevailing habits, customs, and modes of expression all become susceptible to change—outward manifestations of an even more profound inner transformation, affecting many souls. The ties that bind them together grow more affectionate. Qualities of mutual support, reciprocity, and service to one another begin to stand out as features of an emerging, vibrant culture among those involved in activities. The friends in such locations help the cluster agencies extend the growth process to different parts of the cluster, for they are eager to introduce others to the vision of transformation they have themselves already glimpsed.

In the course of their endeavours, the believers encounter receptivity within distinct populations who represent a particular ethnic, tribal, or other group and who may be concentrated in a small setting or present throughout the cluster and well beyond it. There is much to be learned about the dynamics involved when a population of this kind embraces the Faith and is galvanized through its edifying influence. We stress the importance of this work for advancing the Cause of God: every people has a share in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, and all must be gathered together under the banner of the oneness of humanity.

As growth in the cluster advances further, greater demands are being placed on the organizational scheme of the training institute. Additional coordinators are now required, some of whom might focus their efforts on a particular part of the cluster…

Meanwhile, the Area Teaching Committee is rising to a new level of functioning. It is engaged in a more thorough reading of circumstances in the whole cluster: on the one hand, accurately assessing the capacities of the community and the effects being produced by sustained growth, and on the other, understanding the implications of various social realities for community building in the long term. In the plans it makes each cycle, the Committee relies heavily on those shouldering the greatest share of the work of expansion and consolidation, but given that the number of those connected in some way with the pattern of activity is now large, a variety of questions become more pressing: how to mobilize the entire company of believers in support of teaching goals; how to organize systematic home visits to the friends who would benefit from deepening and discussions that connect them with the community; how to strengthen spiritual bonds with the parents of children and junior youth; how to build on the interest of those who have shown goodwill towards the Faith but have yet to take part in its activities. Promoting the widespread holding of devotional meetings is another concern, so that hundreds of people, eventually thousands, are engaged in worship in the company of their households and their neighbours.

For its part, and in response to growing numbers attending activities, the Local Assembly is enhancing its capacity to discharge the many responsibilities it carries on behalf of an expanding community. It seeks to create an environment in which all feel encouraged to contribute to the community's common enterprise... It sees to it that gatherings for the Nineteen Day Feast, Holy Day commemorations, and Bahá'í elections become opportunities to reinforce the high ideals of the community, strengthen its shared sense of commitment, and fortify its spiritual character. As numbers in the community grow larger, the Assembly gives thought to when it

could be beneficial to decentralize such meetings so as to facilitate ever-greater participation on these important occasions.

A notable characteristic of advanced clusters is a mode of learning that permeates the whole community and acts as a spur to the rise in institutional capacity. Accounts that offer insight into a method, an approach, or a complete process continually flow to and from pockets of activity. The cluster-wide reflection meeting, at which so much of this learning is presented, is often complemented by meetings for smaller areas, which generate a stronger feeling of responsibility among those attending. This sense of collective ownership becomes more apparent from cycle to cycle—the force released by a united body of people taking charge of their spiritual development over generations to come. And as they do so, the support they receive from regional and national Bahá'í institutions and their agencies is experienced as an unceasing flow of love.

A natural outcome of the rise both in resources and in consciousness of the implications of the Revelation for the life of a population is the stirrings of social action. Not infrequently, initiatives of this kind emerge organically out of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme or are prompted by consultations about local conditions that occur at community gatherings. The forms that such endeavours can assume are diverse and include, for example, tutorial assistance to children, projects to better the physical environment, and activities to improve health and prevent disease… However humble an instance of social action might be at the beginning, it is an indication of a people cultivating within themselves a critical capacity, one that holds infinite potential and significance for the centuries ahead: learning how to apply the Revelation to the manifold dimensions of social existence. All such initiatives also serve to enrich participation, at an individual and collective level, in prevalent discourses of the wider community. As expected, the friends are being drawn further into the life of society—a development which is inherent in the pattern of action in a cluster from the very start, but which is now much more pronounced.

For the movement of a population to have come this far demonstrates that the process which brought it about is strong enough to achieve and sustain a high degree of participation in all aspects of the capacity-building endeavour and manage the complexity entailed. This is another milestone for the friends to pass, the third in succession since the process of growth in a cluster was begun. It denotes the appearance of a system for extending, in centre after centre, a dynamic pattern of community life that can engage a people—men and women, youth and adults—in the work of their own spiritual and social transformation. This has already come about in around two hundred clusters, covering a range of socio-economic circumstances, and we anticipate that, by the conclusion of the coming Plan, it will be observable in several hundred more. It is a future to which the friends labouring in thousands of clusters elsewhere can aspire.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015.

Beloved Friends: The extremes of wealth and poverty in the world are becoming ever more untenable. As inequity persists, so the established order is seen to be unsure of itself, and its values are being questioned. Whatever the tribulations that

a conflicted world must confront in the future, we pray that the Almighty will help His loved ones to overcome every obstacle in their path and assist them to serve humanity. The larger the presence of a Bahá'í community in a population, the greater its responsibility to find ways of addressing the root causes of the poverty in its surroundings.

The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017.

12.7 Developing Clusters with a Significant Percentage of the Population Engaged in Community-Building Activities – a Fourth Milestone

In some of the clusters where growth has advanced to this extent, an even more thrilling development has occurred. There are locations within these clusters where a significant percentage of the entire population is now involved in community-building activities. For instance, there are small villages where the institute has been able to engage the participation of all the children and junior youth in its programmes. When the reach of activity is extensive, the societal impact of the Faith becomes more evident. The Bahá'í community is afforded higher standing as a distinctive moral voice in the life of a people and is able to contribute an informed perspective to the discourses around it on, say, the development of the younger generations. Figures of authority from the wider society start to draw on the insight and experience arising from initiatives of social action inspired by Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. Conversations influenced by those teachings, concerned with the common weal, permeate an ever-broader cross section of the population, to the point where an effect on the general discourse in a locality can be perceived. Beyond the Bahá'í community, people are coming to regard the Local Spiritual Assembly as a radiant source of wisdom to which they too can turn for illumination.

We recognize that developments like these are yet a distant prospect for many, even in clusters where the pattern of activity embraces large numbers. But in some places, this is the work of the moment. In such clusters, while the friends continue to be occupied with sustaining the process of growth, other dimensions of Bahá'í endeavour claim an increasing share of their attention. They are seeking to understand how a flourishing local population can transform the society of which it is an integral part. This will be a new frontier of learning for the foreseeable future, where insights will be generated that will ultimately benefit the whole Bahá'í world.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015.

Key Requirements for Growth

12.8 The Three Protagonists – the Individual, the Community and the Institutions must all Develop and Contribute

At Riḍván 1996, the Bahá'ís of the world will embark on a global enterprise aimed at one major accomplishment: a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. This is to be achieved through marked progress in the activity and development of the individual believer, of the institutions, and of the local community. That an advance in this process depends on the progress of all three of these intimately connected participants is abundantly clear.

The Universal House of Justice, 26 December 1995.

12.9 Bahá'í Communities must Learn, Maintain Focus, and Act Systematically

O ye beloved of the Lord! This day is the day of union, the day of the ingathering of all mankind. "Verily God loveth those who, as though they were a solid wall, do battle for His Cause in serried lines!"1 Note that He saith "in serried lines"—meaning crowded and pressed together, one locked to the next, each supporting his fellows. To do battle, as stated in the sacred verse, doth not, in this greatest of all dispensations, mean to go forth with sword and spear, with lance and piercing arrow—but rather weaponed with pure intent, with righteous motives, with counsels helpful and effective, with godly attributes, with deeds pleasing to the Almighty, with the qualities of heaven. It signifieth education for all mankind, guidance for all men, the spreading far and wide of the sweet savors of the spirit, the promulgation of God's proofs, the setting forth of arguments conclusive and divine, the doing of charitable deeds.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 207.

Our 26 December 1995 message, which focused the Bahá'í world on a path of intense learning about the sustained, rapid growth of the Faith, described in general terms the nature of the work that would have to be undertaken in meeting the challenges ahead. As a first step, Bahá'í communities were urged to systematize their efforts to develop the human resources of the Cause through a network of training institutes.

The Universal House of Justice, 27 December 2005.

... the capacity for learning, which represented such a priceless legacy of previous Plans, is being extended beyond the realm of expansion and consolidation to encompass other areas of Bahá'í endeavour, notably social action and participation in the prevalent discourses of society. We see a community fortified with the gifts of strength and hard-won experience that come from two decades of unremitting effort focused on a common aim: a significant advance in the process of entry by troops.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015.

12.10 Individual Initiative and Collective Activities are Both Needed

On the one hand is the initiative that it is the duty and privilege of the individual to take in teaching the Cause and in obtaining a deeper understanding of the purpose and requirements of the Faith. Parallel with the exercise of such initiative is the necessity of the individual's participation in collective endeavors, such as community functions and projects.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 152 [1995].

The teaching work, both that organized by institutions of the Faith and that which is the fruit of individual initiative, must be actively carried forward so that there will be growing numbers of believers, leading more countries to the stage of entry by troops and ultimately to mass conversion.

The Universal House of Justice, Naw Rúz 1979.

12.11 Open Bahá'í Community Development Activities to All

From a careful reading of the messages regarding the Five Year Plan, it should be clear that the House of Justice is not calling on the friends to forgo all activities except devotional meetings, children's classes and study circles in their efforts to attract people to the Cause. Through a variety of endeavors, including regular firesides, seekers should be helped to reach the point where they eagerly embrace the Faith and join the Bahá'í community. Yet it is equally evident that the core activities of the Plan are proving to be an excellent means for the friends everywhere to widen their circle of influence and share Bahá'u'lláh's message with a growing number of people from different segments of society. Further, where such an open attitude exists among the believers, the distinction between those who are formally enrolled in the Faith and those who are drawing close to it does not define the level of their involvement in these core activities. Specifically, experience around the world suggests that many seekers, though certainly not all, welcome the opportunity to study the full sequence of institute courses, and even engage in acts of service that contribute to Bahá'í community life, for instance hosting devotional meetings and teaching children's classes. Such participation has often been instrumental in the eventual confirmation of their faith and in their formal declaration. Care should be taken, therefore, that we do not allow our own expectations to set limits on people which, in reality, may not exist.

The Universal House of Justice, 27 April 2004, *Turning Point*.

The friends who participate in these intensive programs of growth should bear in mind that the purpose is to ensure that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh reaches the masses of humanity and enables them to achieve spiritual and material progress through the application of the Teachings. Vast numbers among the peoples of the world are ready, indeed yearn, for the bounties that Bahá'u'lláh alone can bestow upon them once they have committed themselves to building the new society He has envisioned.

In learning to systematize their large-scale teaching work, Bahá'í communities

are becoming better equipped to respond to this longing. They cannot withhold whatever effort, whatever sacrifice, may be called for.

The Universal House of Justice, 9 January 2001.

12.12 Reach Receptive Populations

In many parts of the world, bringing large numbers into the ranks of Bahá'u'lláh's followers has traditionally not been a formidable task. It is therefore encouraging to see that, in some of the more developed clusters, carefully designed projects are being added to the existing pattern of growth to reach receptive populations and lift the rate of expansion to a higher level. Such projects accelerate the tempo of teaching, already on the rise through the efforts of individuals. And, where large-scale enrolment is beginning to result, provision is being made to ensure that a certain percentage of the new believers immediately enter the institute program,

The Universal House of Justice, 17 January 2003.

Where clusters have advanced to such a degree that they are ready to take up the challenge of intensive growth, nothing is more promising than to encounter a significant opening among a minority population like the Chines-speaking Canadians. Seizing such opportunities requires a major shift from the gradualist approach that meets the needs of clusters at earlier stages of progress.

The Universal House of Justice, 5 August 2004, *Turning Point*.

Together with your increased involvement in the affairs of society, you will need to make a concerted effort to attract receptive souls from diverse groups, teaching them and confirming them in the Faith. In this respect, the climate of search prevailing among both the leaders and the masses in your countries, which has emerged following the ideological upheaval of recent years, is of special significance. Two sectors have been particularly and differently affected and are athirst for the life-giving waters of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation: on the one hand, the teachers in the national school systems and, on the other, university students and their professors. Historically, both have exerted widespread influence in your societies, and should you teach them systematically, you will certainly reap abundant fruits.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 153 [1996].

12.13 A Message to 114 Youth Conferences through out the World (2013)

To the participants in the forthcoming 114 youth conferences throughout the world

Dearly loved Friends,

When the exalted figure of the Báb, aged just twenty-five, arose to deliver His revolutionizing message to the world, many among those who accepted and spread His teachings were young, even younger than the Báb Himself. Their heroism, immortalized in all its dazzling intensity in *The Dawn-Breakers*, will illumine the annals of human history for centuries to come. Thus began a pattern in which every generation of youth, drawing inspiration from the same divine impulse to cast the world anew, has seized the opportunity to contribute to the latest stage in the unfolding process that is to transform the life of humankind. It is a pattern that has suffered no interruption from the time of the Báb to this present hour…

With this in mind, we are delighted that so many of you are already engaged in service by conducting community-building activities, as well as by organizing, coordinating, or otherwise administering the efforts of others; in all of these endeavours you are taking an increasing level of responsibility upon your shoulders. Not surprisingly, it is your age group that is gaining the most experience at aiding junior youth, and children too, with their moral and spiritual development, fostering in them capacity for collective service and true friendship. After all, aware of the world which these young souls will need to navigate, with its pitfalls and also its opportunities, you readily appreciate the importance of spiritual strengthening and preparation. Conscious, as you are, that Bahá'u'lláh came to transform both the inner life and external conditions of humanity, you are assisting those younger than yourselves to refine their characters and prepare to assume responsibility for the well-being of their communities. As they enter adolescence, you are helping them to enhance their power of expression, as well as enabling a strong moral sensibility to take root within them. In so doing, your own sense of purpose is becoming more clearly defined as you heed Bahá'u'lláh's injunction: "Let deeds, not words, be your adorning."

To follow a path of service, whatever form one's activity assumes, requires faith and tenacity. In this connection, the benefit of walking that path in the company of others is immense. Loving fellowship, mutual encouragement, and willingness to learn together are natural properties of any group of youth sincerely striving for the same ends, and should also characterize those essential relationships that bind together the components of society. Given this, we hope the bonds you develop through association with other conference participants will prove abiding. Indeed, long after the gatherings close, may these ties of friendship and common calling help keep your feet firm.

The possibilities presented by collective action are especially evident in the work of community building, a process that is gaining momentum in many a cluster and in neighbourhoods and villages throughout the world that have become centres of

intense activity. Youth are often at the forefront of the work in these settings—not only Bahá'í youth, but those of like mind who can see the positive effects of what the Bahá'ís have initiated and grasp the underlying vision of unity and spiritual transformation. In such places, the imperative to share the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh with receptive hearts and explore the implications of His message for today's world is keenly felt. When so much of society invites passivity and apathy or, worse still, encourages behaviour harmful to oneself and others, a conspicuous contrast is offered by those who are enhancing the capacity of a population to cultivate and sustain a spiritually enriching pattern of community life.

Yet, although many admire your dynamism and ideals, the true significance of these endeavours is less apparent to the world at large. You, however, are aware of your part in a mighty, transforming process that will yield, in time, a global civilization reflecting the oneness of humankind. You know well that the habits of mind and spirit that you are nurturing in yourselves and others will endure, influencing decisions of consequence that relate to marriage, family, study, work, even where to live. Consciousness of this broad context helps to shatter the distorting looking glass in which everyday tests, difficulties, setbacks, and misunderstandings can seem insurmountable. And in the struggles that are common to each individual's spiritual growth, the will required to make progress is more easily summoned when one's energies are being channelled towards a higher goal—the more so when one belongs to a community that is united in that goal…

The Universal House of Justice, 1 July 2013.

12.14 Progressing Along a Path of Service

The marvellous exploits of the youth in the field of service are one of the finest fruits of the present Plan. If any proof were needed of the extraordinary potential that the youth possess, it has been incontrovertibly delivered. In the wake of the youth conferences convened in 2013, the surge of energy which was imparted to the work being carried out in clusters demonstrates clearly how the community of the Greatest Name is able to give shape to the highest aspirations of young people. How pleased we are to see that, following the participation of more than 80,000 youth in these conferences, an additional cohort of over 100,000 have joined them in taking part in numerous encounters held since then. Measures to encourage the full engagement of these growing contingents in the activities of the community must constitute a major component of the new Plan.

The enthusiastic participation of the youth also highlighted the fact that they represent a most responsive element of every receptive population to which the friends have sought to reach out. What has been learned in this regard is how to help young people become aware of the contribution they can make to the improvement of their society. As consciousness is raised, they increasingly identify with the aims of the Bahá'í community and express eagerness to lend their energies to the work under way. Conversations along these lines kindle interest in how the physical and spiritual powers available to them at this time of life can be channelled towards providing for the needs of others, particularly for younger generations. Special gatherings for youth, now occurring more frequently at the level of the cluster and

even the neighbourhood or village, have proved to be ideal occasions for bringing an intensity to this ongoing conversation, and they are an increasingly common feature of cycles of activity in many clusters.

Experience suggests that a discussion about contributing to the betterment of society fails to tap the deepest springs of motivation if it excludes exploration of spiritual themes. The importance of "doing", of arising to serve and to accompany fellow souls, must be harmonized with the notion of "being", of increasing one's understanding of the divine teachings and mirroring forth spiritual qualities in one's life. And so it is that, having been introduced to the vision of the Faith for humanity and the exalted character of its mission, the youth naturally feel a desire to be of service, a desire to which training institutes swiftly respond. Indeed, releasing the capacity of the youth is, for each training institute, a sacred charge. Yet fostering that capacity as it develops is a responsibility of every institution of the Cause. The readiness youth demonstrate to take initiative, whatever lines of action they choose, can obscure the fact that they need sustained support from institutions and agencies in the cluster beyond the early steps.

Youth also support each other in this regard, coming together in groups to engage in further study and discuss their service, to reinforce one another's efforts and build resolve, looking to ever extend the circle of friendship more widely. The encouragement offered in this way by a network of peers provides young people with a much-needed alternative to those siren voices that beckon towards the snares of consumerism and compulsive distractions, as well as a counter to the calls to demonize others. It is against this backdrop of enervating materialism and splintering societies that the junior youth programme reveals its particular value at this time. It offers the youth an ideal arena in which to assist those younger than themselves to withstand the corrosive forces that especially target them.

As youth advance along the path of service, their endeavours are integrated seamlessly into the activities of the cluster, and as a consequence, the entire community thrives as a cohesive whole. Reaching out to the families of young people is a natural way of strengthening community building. Institutions and agencies are being challenged to increase their own capacity in order to find ways of systematically realizing the potential of the youth. With a greater awareness of this age group's circumstances and dynamics, they are able to plan accordingly—for instance, providing opportunities for youth to study courses intensively, perhaps immediately upon the conclusion of a youth gathering. The infusion of energy from a vibrant band of youth allows the tempo of the work within the cluster to be accelerated.

While it is right to expect great things from those who have so much to give in the path of service, the friends must guard against adopting a narrow outlook on what development to maturity entails. Freedom of movement and availability of time enable many youth to serve in ways that are directly related to the needs of the community, but as they advance further into their twenties, their horizons broaden. Other dimensions of a coherent life, equally demanding and highly meritorious, begin to make stronger claims on their attention. For many, an immediate priority will be further education, academic or vocational, according to the possibilities before them, and new spaces for interaction with society open up. Moreover, young

women and men become acutely conscious of the exhortations of the Supreme Pen to "enter into wedlock" that they may "bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants" and to "engage in crafts and professions". Having taken up an occupation, youth naturally try to contribute to their field, or even to advance it in light of the insights they gain from their continued study of the Revelation, and they strive to be examples of integrity and excellence in their work. Bahá'u'lláh extols those "that earn a livelihood by their calling and spend upon themselves and upon their kindred for the love of God, the Lord of all worlds." This generation of youth will form families that secure the foundations of flourishing communities. Through their growing love for Bahá'u'lláh and their personal commitment to the standard to which He summons them will their children imbibe the love of God, "commingled with their mother's milk", and always seek the shelter of His divine law. Clearly, then, the responsibility of a Bahá'í community towards young people does not end when they first start serving. The significant decisions they make about the direction of their adult lives will determine whether service to the Cause of God was only a brief and memorable chapter of their younger years, or a fixed centre of their earthly existence, a lens through which all actions come into focus. We rely on you and your auxiliaries to ensure that the spiritual and material prospects of the youth are given due weight in the deliberations of families, communities, agencies, and institutions.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015.

Enhancing Institutional Capacity

12.15 Local Spiritual Assemblies

Throughout the Plan, we have watched with the keenest interest the effects of these developments on the functioning of Local Spiritual Assemblies…

What has brought us particular joy is to see that the process of growth unfolding around the world is gathering momentum in urban centers as well as rural areas. An important step taken in many large cities early in the current Plan was to divide them into sectors. This proved crucial to planning for sustained growth. As communities expand, however, it is not unreasonable to expect that cities will need to be divided into smaller areas—perhaps ultimately into neighborhoods—in each of which the Nineteen Day Feast is conducted. Maintaining a vision of the potential size of future communities is essential for the further development of Local Assemblies. To administer the affairs of communities whose membership will swell into the thousands, and to fulfill their purpose as the "trusted ones of the Merciful among men," those who serve on Spiritual Assemblies will necessarily undergo intense

periods of learning in the years ahead. We intend to monitor the development of Local Spiritual Assemblies closely during the coming Plan and, as the size of the Bahá'í population and other circumstances in a locality demand, authorize a two-stage electoral process on a case-by-case basis, following the pattern developed in Ṭihrán during the ministry of the Guardian.

The Universal House of Justice, 27 December 2005.

Evolving relationships among administrative structures have brought the Local Spiritual Assembly to the threshold of a new stage in the exercise of its responsibilities to diffuse the Word of God, to mobilize the energies of the believers, and to forge an environment that is spiritually edifying. On previous occasions we have explained that the maturity of a Spiritual Assembly cannot be assessed by the regularity of its meetings and the efficiency of its functioning alone. Rather its strength must be measured, to a large extent, by the vitality of the spiritual and social life of the community it serves—a growing community that welcomes the constructive contributions of both those who are formally enrolled and those who are not. It is gratifying to see that current approaches, methods and instruments are providing the means for Local Spiritual Assemblies, even those newly formed, to fulfill these responsibilities as they set about to ensure that the requirements of the Five Year Plan are adequately met in their localities. Indeed, the Assembly's proper involvement with the Plan becomes crucial to every attempt to embrace large numbers—itself a requisite for the manifestation of the full range of its powers and capacities.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2010.

The aim of any Spiritual Assembly should be to develop a warm and loving relationship with the believers in its community, so that it can most effectively nurture and encourage them in the acquisition of a deeper understanding of the teachings, and can assist them to follow the Bahá'í principles in their personal conduct.

The Universal House of Justice, 9 December 1991.

Early on in each locality, the Local Spiritual Assembly comes into existence, and its steady development follows a trajectory parallel with, and intimately tied to, the fledgling process of growth unfolding in the village. And not unlike the evolution of other facets of this process, the development of the Local Assembly can best be understood in terms of capacity building.

What needs to occur in the first instance is relatively straightforward: Individual awareness of the process of growth gathering momentum in the village, born of each member's personal involvement in the core activities, must coalesce into a collective consciousness that recognizes both the nature of the transformation under way and the obligation of the Assembly to foster it. Without doubt, some attention will have to be given to certain basic administrative functions—for example, meeting with a degree of regularity, conducting the Nineteen Day Feast and planning Holy Day observances, establishing a local fund, and holding annual elections in accordance with Bahá'í principle. However, it should not prove difficult for the Local Assembly to begin, concomitant with such efforts and with encouragement from an assistant to an Auxiliary Board member, to consult as a body on one or two specific issues with immediate relevance to the life of the community: how the devotional

character of the village is being enhanced through the efforts of individuals who have completed the first institute course; how the spiritual education of the children is being addressed by teachers raised up by the institute; how the potential of junior youth is being realized by the programme for their spiritual empowerment; how the spiritual and social fabric of the community is being strengthened as the friends visit one another in their homes. As the Assembly consults on such tangible matters and learns to nurture the process of growth lovingly and patiently, its relationship with the Area Teaching Committee and the training institute gradually becomes cemented in a common purpose. But, of still greater importance, it will begin to lay the foundations on which can be built that uniquely affectionate and genuinely supportive relationship, described by the beloved Guardian in many of his messages, which Local Spiritual Assemblies should establish with the individual believer.

Clearly, learning to consult on specific issues related to the global Plan, no matter how crucial, represents but one dimension of the capacity-building process in which the Local Spiritual Assembly must engage. Its continued development implies adherence to the injunction laid down by 'Abdu'l-Bahá that "discussions must all be confined to spiritual matters that pertain to the training of souls, the instruction of children, the relief of the poor, the help of the feeble throughout all classes in the world, kindness to all peoples, the diffusion of the fragrances of God and the exaltation of His Holy Word." Its steady advancement requires an unbending commitment to promote the best interests of the community and a vigilance in guarding the process of growth against the forces of moral decay that threaten to arrest it. Its ongoing progress calls for a sense of responsibility that extends beyond the circle of friends and families engaged in the core activities to encompass the entire population of the village. And sustaining its gradual maturation is unshakable faith in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's assurance that He will enfold every Spiritual Assembly within the embrace of His care and protection.

Associated with this rise in collective consciousness is the Assembly's growing ability to properly assess and utilize resources, financial and otherwise, both in support of community activities and in discharging its administrative functions, which may in time include the judicious appointment of committees and the maintenance of modest physical facilities for its operations. No less vital is its ability to nurture an environment conducive to the participation of large numbers in unified action and to ensure that their energies and talents contribute towards progress. In all these respects, the spiritual well-being of the community remains uppermost in the Assembly's mind. And when inevitable problems arise, whether in relation to some activity or among individuals, they will be addressed by a Local Spiritual Assembly which has so completely gained the confidence of the members of the community that all naturally turn to it for assistance. This implies that the Assembly has learned through experience how to help the believers put aside the divisive ways of a partisan mindset, how to find the seeds of unity in even the most perplexing and thorny situations and how to nurture them slowly and lovingly, upholding at all times the standard of justice.

As the community grows in size and in capacity to maintain vitality, the friends will, we have indicated in the past, be drawn further into the life of society and

be challenged to take advantage of the approaches they have developed to respond to a widening range of issues that face their village. The question of coherence, so essential to the growth achieved thus far, and so fundamental to the Plan's evolving framework for action, now assumes new dimensions. Much will fall on the Local Assembly, not as an executor of projects but as the voice of moral authority, to make certain that, as the friends strive to apply the teachings of the Faith to improve conditions through a process of action, reflection and consultation, the integrity of their endeavours is not compromised.

The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010.

12.16 Regional and National Institutions

The development that we are sure to witness in Local Spiritual Assemblies over the next several years is made possible by the growing strength of National Spiritual Assemblies, whose ability to think and act strategically has risen perceptibly, especially as they have learned to analyse the community-building process at the grassroots with increasing acuity and effectiveness and to inject into it, as needed, assistance, resources, encouragement, and loving guidance. In countries where conditions demand it, they have devolved a number of their responsibilities in this respect to Regional Councils, decentralizing certain administrative functions, enhancing institutional capacity in areas under their jurisdiction, and fostering more sophisticated sets of interactions. It is no exaggeration to say that the full engagement of National Assemblies was instrumental in creating the final thrust required to attain the goal of the current Plan, and we expect to see further developments in this direction as, in concert with the Counsellors, they exert in the course of the critical, fleeting months ahead a supreme effort to ready their communities to embark on the next five-year enterprise.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2010.

In the Riḍván message we expressed pleasure at noting the growing strength of National Assemblies, and we look to the coming five years with optimism, certain that we will see significant leaps forward in this respect. Moreover, we have no doubt that, in concert with National Assemblies, you will be able to help Regional Councils enhance their institutional capacity. There are currently 170 such administrative bodies in 45 countries worldwide, and their number is sure to climb during the next Plan. It will be imperative that all Regional Councils pay close attention to the operation of the training institute and the functioning of Area Teaching Committees. With this in mind, they will find it necessary to create and refine mechanisms that serve to further the pattern of growth unfolding at the cluster level and the learning process associated with it. These will include a well-functioning regional office that provides the secretary with basic organizational support; a sound system of accounting that accommodates divers channels for the flow of funds to and from clusters; an efficient means of communication that takes into consideration the reality of life in villages and neighbourhoods; and, where warranted, physical structures that facilitate intensified and focused activity. What is important to acknowledge in this respect is that only if the Councils themselves are engaged in a process of

learning will such mechanisms prove to be effective. Otherwise, while ostensibly created to support learning in action by an increasing number of participants in neighbourhoods and villages, systems being developed may well work against it in subtle ways, stifling, unintentionally, rising aspirations at the grassroots.

The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010.

As indicated earlier, the movement of clusters along a continuum depends on there being a commitment from the institutions to guide and support cluster agencies and provide resources as necessary. This work is a critical responsibility of Regional Bahá'í Councils and regional training institutes. The number of Councils in the world rose from 170 to 203 in the last five years, reflecting the growing need and the rising capacity for work to be undertaken at this level, and in some countries where Councils are yet to be formed, specific steps were taken to build experience in anticipation of their emergence, such as the appointment of regional teams. In some regions that stretch across a large territory, Councils have made arrangements for nurturing the development of groups of adjoining clusters. Meanwhile, in smaller countries that do not require the establishment of Regional Councils, National Assemblies are increasingly giving thought to ways of helping clusters advance, in some instances by forming a working group charged with this task; you are encouraged to stimulate learning in this area, with the aim that, in due course, formal structures can be defined that would assume this responsibility in much the same way that Councils do in other countries. And, as is the case with Councils, we envisage that any such structure which emerges at the national level will benefit from interaction with the institution of the Counsellors.

To discharge their duties effectively, regional and national institutions will need to remain fully acquainted with developments at the grassroots and what is being learned in the clusters whose progress they oversee. Timely access to information about the movement of clusters and the work of the institute in their jurisdictions is required for institutions to support their agencies and take the many decisions that concern, for instance, the deployment of pioneers, the allocation of funds, the creation and promotion of Bahá'í literature, and the planning of institutional meetings; it allows them to accurately read the reality of their communities and act on the basis of clearly understood needs when marshalling the energies of the friends towards meeting the exigencies of the hour. At various intervals a National Assembly, in consultation with you, may find it advisable to formally adopt and disseminate certain aspects of the lessons that have been learned, especially in relation to organizational schemes at the cluster and regional levels. The need to stay well informed about the community's accumulating experience holds particular implications for National Assemblies in larger countries that have several Regional Councils, notably so when the Assembly has devolved to Councils the work of administering the institute. Here, new arrangements at the national level have sometimes been necessary to provide the Assembly with cogent analysis of what is being learned across all regions.

Of course, a National Spiritual Assembly ultimately has responsibility for fostering all aspects of a Bahá'í community's development. Although it pursues various lines of action itself, in many cases it fulfills this responsibility by ensuring that Regional Councils or specialized agencies are able to take steps to advance areas of

endeavour entrusted to them. As the capacity of the friends increases and the size of a community grows, the work of a National Assembly in its manifold dimensions becomes commensurately more complex. Therefore, and in view of the magnitude of the task before the institutions in the coming Plan, National Assemblies—as well as Councils—will benefit from periodically considering, in collaboration with you, whether their administrative operations, and indeed elements of their own functioning, could be adjusted or enhanced in ways that would better support the growth process.

Attaining a higher level of functioning is similarly a pressing concern of training institutes. The community's efforts to fortify programmes of growth in thousands of clusters and sustain their intensification will place heavy demands on these agencies. Their focus, of course, is the unfoldment of the three stages of the educational process they oversee and the strengthening of the process of learning associated with each, so that both the quality of the institute's activities and the capacity to extend them to ever-growing numbers are constantly rising. While it is important that institutes attend to day-to-day operational matters, the scale of what must be accomplished requires that they also become occupied with considerations of strategy. Training institute boards need to maintain an ongoing consultation with national or regional coordinators, as well as with Auxiliary Board members, about how an activity in a cluster gains strength, how it can be adequately resourced, what approaches prove effective in different settings, and how experience can be shared. We have in mind a systematic and concentrated effort by this collaborative group to gather and apply insights emerging from the grassroots regarding the promotion of children's classes, junior youth groups, and study circles. Addressing other dimensions of the institute's work—such as schemes of coordination at the cluster level, enhancing the capacity of coordinators, and the management of statistics and finances—will be essential too. In your work with training institutes, you will no doubt wish to arrange that they draw on the experience of other institutes in the same part of the world. Sites for the dissemination of learning about the junior youth programme also offer a rich source of insight for the institutes of nearby countries or regions.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015.

12.17 Counsellors, Auxiliary Board Members and Assistants

All of the institutions and agencies promoting the aim of the current series of global Plans need to exercise the measure of agility that the birth of such a dynamic process demands—but none more so than the Auxiliary Board members. To help the friends visualize this first important milestone, and the multiplicity of ways in which it can be reached, is central to the functioning of every Auxiliary Board member and an increasing number of his or her assistants. In this, as in all their work, they must display breadth of vision and clarity of thought, flexibility and resourcefulness. They should stand shoulder to shoulder with the friends, supporting them through their struggles and partaking in their joys. Some of these friends will quickly move to the forefront of activity, while others will step forward more tentatively; yet all require support and encouragement, offered not in the abstract but on the basis of that intimate knowledge which is only acquired by working side by side in

the field of service. Faith in the capacity of every individual who shows a desire to serve will prove essential to the efforts of those who are to elicit from the believers wholehearted participation in the Plan. Unqualified love free of paternalism will be indispensable if they are to help turn hesitation into courage born of trust in God and transform a yearning for excitement into a commitment to long-term action. Calm determination will be vital as they strive to demonstrate how stumbling blocks can be made stepping stones for progress. And a readiness to listen, with heightened spiritual perception, will be invaluable in identifying obstacles that may prevent some of the friends from appreciating the imperative of unified action.

The Universal House of Justice, 28 December 2010.

We direct these statements to you in recognition of the unique responsibility that you, your deputies, and their assistants shoulder in helping the friends to advance their understanding in numerous areas, not least, of course, with respect to the dynamics of growth. As we have previously indicated, in the institution of the Counsellors the Bahá'í community has a system through which the lessons learned in the remotest parts of the planet can benefit the worldwide process of learning in which every follower of Bahá'u'lláh can take part. As a progressively deeper understanding of the Five Year Plan emerges among the believers over time, insights that arise from applying the guidance are recognized, articulated, absorbed, and shared. In this regard, an immense debt of gratitude is owed by the community of the Greatest Name to the International Teaching Centre, which has done so much in recent years, and with such diligence, to lovingly nurture and energetically promulgate a mode of learning that has now become well established.

The essential elements of the coming Plan, like those that came before it, are straightforward. Nevertheless, a profound understanding of its various facets requires an appreciation of the sophisticated set of operations through which a cluster develops. We rely on your institution being so familiar with the relevant guidance that the friends in general, and institutions and their agencies in particular, can depend on you to illuminate their deliberations by calling attention to pertinent considerations. Clearly, however, the need to assist the friends in at least 5,000 clusters where the pattern of action is being intensified will be a considerable challenge, one with implications for your own mode of functioning—but more especially for that of Auxiliary Board members. Clusters that are in the front ranks of the growth process in their areas will inevitably claim a large share of their time; also, administrative arrangements at the regional level will more frequently require their support. They are concerned with much of what occurs in the community; attentive both to the development of each stage of the educational process and to the strengthening of the cycles of activity, they promote coherence among the lines of action being advanced in a cluster and fan into flame a passion for teaching. In the exercise of their responsibility to foster learning and to help the friends enter the arena of service, they draw heavily on the training institute, aspects of whose work align closely with theirs. But their other duties are equally demanding. As such, they will need to consider how, in order to fulfill those wide-ranging responsibilities, they can draw on the help of their assistants more extensively and more creatively. Assistants, of course, may be assigned any task—simple or complex, general or highly specific—

and this versatility constitutes a distinctive strength. While some assistants might be occupied with the development of a local community, others might be given tasks that relate to an entire cluster. By properly orienting them, guiding them as capacity expands, and gradually increasing their duties, Auxiliary Board members will be able to better exploit the possibilities that exist. Much is sure to be learned as a result, and you are encouraged to derive insights from the experience of your auxiliaries.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015.

12.18 Developing and Utilising Financial Resources

As institutions and agencies seek to accelerate the processes of expansion and consolidation in every land, the question of financial resources will surely claim increased attention. Indeed, an important aspect of enhancing institutional capacity over the coming years will be the ongoing development of local and national Funds. For this to occur, the generality of the friends must be invited to consider afresh the responsibility of all believers to support the work of the Faith through their own means and, further, to manage their financial affairs in the light of the teachings.

The future civilization envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh is a prosperous one, in which the vast resources of the world will be directed towards humanity's elevation and regeneration, not its debasement and destruction. The act of contributing to the Fund, then, is imbued with profound meaning: it is a practical way of hastening the advent of that civilization, and a necessary one, for as Bahá'u'lláh Himself has explained, "He Who is the Eternal Truth—exalted be His glory—hath made the fulfillment of every undertaking on earth dependent on material means." Bahá'ís conduct their lives in the midst of a society acutely disordered in its material affairs. The process of community building they are advancing in their clusters cultivates a set of attitudes towards wealth and possessions very different from those holding sway in the world. The habit of regularly giving to the Funds of the Faith—including in-kind contributions particularly in certain places—arises from and reinforces a sense of personal concern for the welfare of the community and the progress of the Cause. The duty to contribute, just like the duty to teach, is a fundamental aspect of Bahá'í identity which strengthens faith. The sacrificial and generous contributions of the individual believer, the collective consciousness promoted by the community of the needs of the Fund, and the careful stewardship of financial resources exercised by the institutions of the Faith can be regarded as expressions of the love that binds these three actors more closely together. And ultimately, voluntary giving fosters an awareness that managing one's financial affairs in accordance with spiritual principles is an indispensable dimension of a life lived coherently. It is a matter of conscience, a way in which commitment to the betterment of the world is translated into practice.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 December 2015.

PART FIVE

THE ADVANCEMENT OF CIVILIZATION

CHAPTER 13

CONTRIBUTING TO THE WORLD COMMUNITY BY SOCIAL ACTION

Principles of Global Transformation

13.1 Real Civilization is Founded on Good Character, Fellowship and Unity, and the Wellbeing of Every Individual 376

Developing Capacity for Social Action

13.2 Aims and Fundamental Elements of Social Action 378
13.3 Bahá'í Involvement in Social and Economic Development 379
13.4 Developing Individual Capacity 381
13.5 The Contribution of Bahá'í-inspired Organisations 382
13.6 Collaboration with Other Groups 383
13.7 Planning and Engaging in Social Action 384
13.8 The Necessary Flow of Resources 385

Projects to Achieve Material Benefit for a Community

13.9 The Complexity of Development Needs 387
13.10 Education 389
13.11 Provision of Health Services 389
13.12 The Development of Agriculture 390
13.13 Protection of the Environment 390

Addressing Social Division and Disadvantage

13.14 Eradicating Poverty 392
13.15 Advancement of Women 392
13.16 Racial Unity 394
13.17 Harmony Between Religions 395
13.18 Education for World Citizenship: Transcending Nationalism 397

Principles of Global Transformation

13.1 Real Civilization is Founded on Good Character, Fellowship and Unity, and the Wellbeing of Every Individual

The All-Knowing Physician hath His finger on the pulse of mankind. He perceiveth the disease, and prescribeth, in His unerring wisdom, the remedy. Every age hath its own problem, and every soul its particular aspiration. The remedy the world needeth in its present-day afflictions can never be the same as that which a subsequent age may require. Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in, and centre your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CVI.

The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct.

Bahá'u'lláh, cited by Shoghi Effendi in *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

The purpose of religion as revealed from the heaven of God's holy Will is to establish unity and concord amongst the peoples of the world; make it not the cause of dissension and strife. The religion of God and His divine law are the most potent instruments and the surest of all means for the dawning of the light of unity amongst men. The progress of the world, the development of nations, the tranquillity of peoples, and the peace of all who dwell on earth are among the principles and ordinances of God. Religion bestoweth upon man the most precious of all gifts, offereth the cup of prosperity, imparteth eternal life, and showereth imperishable benefits upon mankind.

Bahá'u'lláh, Ishráqát (Splendours), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

All the peoples of Europe, notwithstanding their vaunted civilization, sink and drown in this terrifying sea of passion and desire, and this is why all the phenomena of their culture come to nothing. Let no one wonder at this statement or deplore it. The primary purpose, the basic objective, in laying down powerful laws and setting up great principles and institutions dealing with every aspect of civilization, is human happiness; and human happiness consists only in drawing closer to the Threshold of Almighty God, and in securing the peace and well-being of every individual member, high and low alike, of the human race; and the supreme agencies for accomplishing these two objectives are the excellent qualities with which humanity has been endowed.

A superficial culture, unsupported by a cultivated morality, is as "a confused medley of dreams,"[39] and external luster without inner perfection is "like a vapor in the desert which the thirsty dreameth to be water."[40] For results which would win the good pleasure of God and secure the peace and well-being of man, could never be fully achieved in a merely external civilization…

It is certain that the greatest of instrumentalities for achieving the advancement and the glory of man, the supreme agency for the enlightenment and the redemption of the world, is love and fellowship and unity among all the members of the human

race. Nothing can be effected in the world, not even conceivably, without unity and agreement, and the perfect means for engendering fellowship and union is true religion. "Hadst Thou spent all the riches of the earth, Thou couldst not have united their hearts; but God hath united them…"

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*.

No matter how far the material world advances, it cannot establish the happiness of mankind. Only when material and spiritual civilization are linked and coordinated will happiness be assured. Then material civilization will not contribute its energies to the forces of evil in destroying the oneness of humanity, for in material civilization good and evil advance together and maintain the same pace. For example, consider the material progress of man in the last decade. Schools and colleges, hospitals, philanthropic institutions, scientific academies and temples of philosophy have been founded, but hand in hand with these evidences of development, the invention and production of means and weapons for human destruction have correspondingly increased…

All this is the outcome of material civilization; therefore, although material advancement furthers good purposes in life, at the same time it serves evil ends… If the moral precepts and foundations of divine civilization become united with the material advancement of man, there is no doubt that the happiness of the human world will be attained and that from every direction the glad tidings of peace upon earth will be announced. Then humankind will achieve extraordinary progress, the sphere of human intelligence will be immeasurably enlarged, wonderful inventions will appear, and the spirit of God will reveal itself; all men will consort in joy and fragrance, and eternal life will be conferred upon the children of the Kingdom.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, 7 May 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

But however inspiring the conception of Bahá'í worship, as witnessed in the central Edifice of this exalted Temple, it cannot be regarded as the sole, nor even the essential, factor in the part which the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, as designed by Bahá'u'lláh, is destined to play in the organic life of the Bahá'í community. Divorced from the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific pursuits centering around the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, Bahá'í worship, however exalted in its conception, however passionate in fervor, can never hope to achieve beyond the meagre and often transitory results produced by the contemplations of the ascetic or the communion of the passive worshiper. It cannot afford lasting satisfaction and benefit to the worshiper himself, much less to humanity in general, unless and until translated and transfused into that dynamic and disinterested service to the cause of humanity which it is the supreme privilege of the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to facilitate and promote. Nor will the exertions, no matter how disinterested and strenuous, of those who within the precincts of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár will be engaged in administering the affairs of the future Bahá'í Commonwealth, fructify and prosper unless they are brought into close and daily communion with those spiritual agencies centering in and radiating from the central Shrine of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. Nothing short of direct and constant interaction between the spiritual forces emanating from this House of Worship centering in the heart of the

Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, and the energies consciously displayed by those who administer its affairs in their service to humanity can possibly provide the necessary agency capable of removing the ills that have so long and so grievously afflicted humanity. For it is assuredly upon the consciousness of the efficacy of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, reinforced on one hand by spiritual communion with His Spirit, and on the other by the intelligent application and the faithful execution of the principles and laws He revealed, that the salvation of a world in travail must ultimately depend. And of all the institutions that stand associated with His Holy Name, surely none save the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár can most adequately provide the essentials of Bahá'í worship and service, both so vital to the regeneration of the world. Therein lies the secret of the loftiness, of the potency, of the unique position of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár as one of the outstanding institutions conceived by Bahá'u'lláh.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*.

Developing Capacity for Social Action

13.2 Aims and Fundamental Elements of Social Action

In our Riḍván 2008 message we indicated that, as the friends continued to labour at the level of the cluster, they would find themselves drawn further and further into the life of society and would be challenged to extend the process of systematic learning in which they are engaged to encompass a widening range of human endeavours… Once human resources in a cluster are in sufficient abundance, and the pattern of growth firmly established, the community's engagement with society can, and indeed must, increase. At this crucial point in the unfoldment of the Plan, when so many clusters are nearing such a stage, it seems appropriate that the friends everywhere would reflect on the nature of the contributions which their growing, vibrant communities will make to the material and spiritual progress of society. In this respect, it will prove fruitful to think in terms of two interconnected, mutually reinforcing areas of activity: involvement in social action and participation in the prevalent discourses of society…

Most appropriately conceived in terms of a spectrum, social action can range from fairly informal efforts of limited duration undertaken by individuals or small groups of friends to programmes of social and economic development with a high level of complexity and sophistication implemented by Bahá'í-inspired organizations. Irrespective of its scope and scale, all social action seeks to apply the teachings and principles of the Faith to improve some aspect of the social or economic life of a population, however modestly. Such endeavours are distinguished, then, by their

stated purpose to promote the material well-being of the population, in addition to its spiritual welfare. That the world civilization now on humanity's horizon must achieve a dynamic coherence between the material and spiritual requirements of life is central to the Bahá'í teachings. Clearly this ideal has profound implications for the nature of any social action pursued by Bahá'ís, whatever its scope and range of influence. Though conditions will vary from country to country, and perhaps from cluster to cluster, eliciting from the friends a variety of endeavours, there are certain fundamental concepts that all should bear in mind. One is the centrality of knowledge to social existence. The perpetuation of ignorance is a most grievous form of oppression; it reinforces the many walls of prejudice that stand as barriers to the realization of the oneness of humankind, at once the goal and operating principle of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. Access to knowledge is the right of every human being, and participation in its generation, application and diffusion a responsibility that all must shoulder in the great enterprise of building a prosperous world civilization—each individual according to his or her talents and abilities. Justice demands universal participation. Thus, while social action may involve the provision of goods and services in some form, its primary concern must be to build capacity within a given population to participate in creating a better world. Social change is not a project that one group of people carries out for the benefit of another. The scope and complexity of social action must be commensurate with the human resources available in a village or neighbourhood to carry it forward. Efforts best begin, then, on a modest scale and grow organically as capacity within the population develops. Capacity rises to new levels, of course, as the protagonists of social change learn to apply with increasing effectiveness elements of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, together with the contents and methods of science, to their social reality. This reality they must strive to read in a manner consistent with His teachings—seeing in their fellow human beings gems of inestimable value and recognizing the effects of the dual process of integration and disintegration on both hearts and minds, as well as on social structures.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2010.

Bahá'í activity in the field of social and economic development seeks to promote the well-being of people of all walks of life, whatever their beliefs or background. It represents the efforts of the Bahá'í community to effect constructive social change, as it learns to apply the teachings of the Faith, together with knowledge accumulated in different fields of human endeavour, to social reality. Its purpose is neither to proclaim the Cause nor to serve as a vehicle for conversion.

Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre, 26 November 2012.

13.3 Bahá'í Involvement in Social and Economic Development

The endeavours of the worldwide Bahá'í community can be seen in terms of a number of interacting processes... Social and economic development is among them. This particular process, pursued most notably through a variety of educational activities down the years, received considerable impetus in 1983, when the House of Justice, in a message dated 20 October, asked for "systematic attention" to be given to

this area of activity following the rapid expansion of the Bahá'í community during the 1970s.

The 1983 message emphasized that progress in the development field would depend largely on natural stirrings at the grassroots of the community. It also announced the establishment of the Office of Social and Economic Development (OSED) at the Bahá'í World Centre to "promote and coordinate the activities of the friends" in this field. Bahá'ís in every continent sought to respond to the call raised in the message in a number of ways, and the ensuing ten years constituted a period of experimentation, characterized simultaneously by enthusiasm and hesitation, thoughtful planning and haphazard action, achievements and setbacks…

In 2001, the Universal House of Justice introduced to the Bahá'í world the concept of a cluster—a geographic construct, generally defined as a group of villages or as a city with its surrounding suburbs, intended to assist in planning and implementing activities associated with community life… Efforts in a cluster were initially to focus on the multiplication of certain core activities, open to all of the inhabitants, but with a view to developing the collective capacity needed to address in due time various aspects of the social and economic life of the population as well.

In the decade that followed, then, social action would increasingly come to be conceived within the context of the cluster… Today, in the establishment of continental and subcontinental offices—each serving either a network of sites for the dissemination of learning about the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme or a group of Bahá'í-inspired organizations dedicated to the promotion of some other educational programme—can be seen the first fruits of OSED's efforts to raise up structures across the globe to enhance collective capacity for this purpose.

Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre, 26 November 2012.

… on this sacred occasion of the Festivals of the Twin Birthdays, we are pleased to announce that the Office of Social and Economic Development now effloresces into a new world-embracing institution established at the World Centre, the Bahá'í International Development Organization. In addition, a Bahá'í Development Fund will be inaugurated, from which the new organization will draw to assist both long-standing and emerging development efforts worldwide; it will be supported by the House of Justice, and individuals and institutions may contribute to it.

A five-member board of directors will be appointed which will function as a consultative body to promote and coordinate the efforts of the worldwide community in social and economic development. The directors will serve for a term of five years beginning on the Day of the Covenant. Operating at the spiritual and administrative centre of the Faith, the board will consult with the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre to ensure that the development work is coherent with the many endeavors of the Bahá'í world. The new institution will begin by assuming the functions and mandate previously carried out by the Office of Social and Economic Development and then gradually grow in capacity to discharge them on an expanding scale and at higher levels of complexity. It will reinforce the efforts of Bahá'í individuals, communities, and institutions worldwide to extend and consolidate the range of their activities. It will help to strengthen institutional capacity for social and economic development in national communities, including

through the creation of new agencies and the emergence of advanced development organizations. It will promote, on an international scale, approaches to development and methodologies that have proven effective. It will keep abreast of findings in the development field and explore their application in consonance with spiritual principles with assistance from Bahá'ís with relevant training. It will form networks of resource persons and such institutional arrangements across continents as are necessary for carrying out its various lines of action. Above all, like the Office of Social and Economic Development before it, its primary purpose will be to facilitate learning about development by fostering and supporting action, reflection on action, study, consultation, the gathering and systematization of experience, conceptualization, and training—all carried out in the light of the Teachings of the Faith.

Upon the Arc on Mount Carmel that surrounds the resting places of members of the Holy Family, Shoghi Effendi anticipated both the raising of edifices and the establishment of international institutions—administrative, scientific, and social—that would flourish under the auspices of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. This new institution for social and economic development will grow and evolve over the decades and centuries ahead according to the needs of humanity and under the direction of the House of Justice until the material and spiritual civilization anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh is realized in this contingent world.

The Universal House of Justice, 9 November 2018.

Bahá'í efforts in the field of development comprise a spectrum of activities. Generally speaking, they are initiated by individuals and small groups of friends in a locality, or by the Faith's administrative institutions—local or national governing councils. The vast majority are simple grassroots endeavors of limited duration. Conservative estimates indicate that there are close to 40,000 such activities undertaken over the course of a year… Some efforts evolve into projects of a more sustained nature, with a commensurate degree of administrative structure. Examples may include schools, radio stations, and community gardens. Over 1,400 sustained projects of this scale are currently being carried out addressing any one of several areas of community life such as education, health, agriculture, or media. In more than 130 instances, projects have developed further—typically over the course of many years coordinating a growing number of lines of action—and taken the form of nonprofit, nongovernmental organizations. Generally referred to as "Bahá'í-inspired organizations," these entities operate at a higher level of sophistication and often manage several programs and projects.

Office of Social and Economic Development, Bahá'í International Community, *For the Betterment of the World*, 2018, p. 9

13.4 Developing Individual Capacity

The guidance of Bahá'u'lláh is the foundation upon which you build. His instruction is clear: "This servant appealeth to every diligent and enterprising soul to exert his utmost endeavor and arise to rehabilitate the conditions in all regions and to quicken the dead with the living waters of wisdom and utterance, by virtue of the

love he cherisheth for God, the One, the Peerless, the Almighty, the Beneficent." His divine remedy has been prescribed: "God, the True One, beareth Me witness, and every atom in existence is moved to testify that such means as lead to the elevation, the advancement, the education, the protection and the regeneration of the peoples of the earth have been clearly set forth by Us and are revealed in the Holy Books and Tablets by the Pen of Glory." And His assurance is engraved on every faithful heart: "The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct."

The Universal House of Justice, 9 November 2018.

Ultimately, of course, the work of Bahá'í social and economic development rests in the hands of the friends everywhere. To take full advantage of the opportunities emerging, one need look no further for encouragement and insight than to the perfect Exemplar of the Bahá'í teachings. Consider His words: "We should continually be establishing new bases for human happiness and creating and promoting new instrumentalities toward this end. How excellent, how honorable is man if he arises to fulfill his responsibilities; how wretched and contemptible, if he shuts his eyes to the welfare of society and wastes his precious life in pursuing his own selfish interests and personal advantages. Supreme happiness is man's, and he beholds the signs of God in the world and in the human soul, if he urges on the steed of high endeavor in the arena of civilization and justice."

The Universal House of Justice, 9 November 2018.

At the level of the individual, the influence of the training institute is vital. As it helps to equip individuals with the spiritual insights and knowledge, the qualities and attitudes, and the skills and abilities needed to carry out acts of service integral to Bahá'í community life, the institute creates a pool of human resources that makes it possible for endeavours of social and economic development to flourish. The participants in such endeavours are able to acquire, in turn, knowledge and skills pertinent to the specific areas of action in which they are engaged—health, agricultural production, and education, to name but a few—while continuing to strengthen those capacities already cultivated by the institute, for instance, fostering unity in diversity, promoting justice, participating effectively in consultation, and accompanying others in their efforts to serve humanity.

Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre, 26 November 2012.

13.5 The Contribution of Bahá'í-inspired Organisations

At some point, members of the community may also be able to take advantage of educational programmes promoted by a Bahá'í-inspired organization operating in the region, supported by OSED… Yet, here again, whatever the ultimate vision, care is taken to begin work in a single area of action and to expand activities gradually over time. A community school, for example, can in principle become a centre for activities such as agricultural production, health education, and family counselling. But, in most cases, it is advisable for it to start simply as a school, focusing all of its resources on the children it proposes to serve…

Typically brought into being by a small group of believers, a Bahá'í-inspired organization—while remaining under the general guidance and moral authority of Bahá'í institutions—can pursue a range of development initiatives in a region with a degree of latitude in administrating its daily affairs. When such an organization is established, emphasis is naturally placed on the quality of its activities; clarity about an optimal size is gradually achieved as the notion that "bigger is better" is set aside. Bahá'í institutions and agencies, including OSED, provide encouragement and direction and, where appropriate, channel resources to these organizations. A small handful of these have, over many years, evolved into fully fledged development organizations with the capacity to engage in relatively complex areas of activity and to establish working relations with the agencies of government and civil society.

However useful the concept of a Bahá'í-inspired organization may be, its application under divers circumstances requires careful consideration... Its establishment cannot be haphazard, nor can its creation proceed solely from the longing of two or three individuals to fulfill a personal, albeit altruistic, desire. A Bahá'í-inspired organization operating in a region derives meaning, in part, from its relationship to other activities; it is one of several interacting endeavours through which consistent progress is achieved. The value of such organizations in the different regions of the world to the development work is evident. Yet, the transformative power of thousands upon thousands of simple actions undertaken at the grassroots tied together in a common framework should not be underestimated.

Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre, 26 November 2012.

13.6 Collaboration with Other Groups

An especially notable feature of the last twelve months has been the frequency with which the Bahá'í community is being identified, in a wide variety of contexts, with efforts to bring about the betterment of society in collaboration with like-minded people. From the international arena to the grassroots of village life, leaders of thought in all kinds of settings have expressed their awareness that not only do Bahá'ís have the welfare of humanity at heart, but they possess a cogent conception of what needs to be accomplished and effective means for realizing their aspirations. These expressions of appreciation and support have also come from some previously unexpected quarters. For example, even in the Cradle of the Faith, despite formidable obstacles placed by the oppressor in their path, the Bahá'ís are increasingly recognized for the profound implications their message holds for the state of their nation and respected for their unbending determination to contribute to the progress of their homeland.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2013.

First and foremost, Bahá'ís endeavour, whether as individuals or as a community, to put into practice the command of Bahá'u'lláh: "They that are endued with sincerity and faithfulness should associate with all the peoples and kindreds of the earth with joy and radiance, inasmuch as consorting with people hath promoted and will continue to promote unity and concord, which in turn are conducive to the maintenance of order in the world and to the regeneration of nations." It is through

"association and meeting", 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained further, that "we find happiness and development, individual and collective." "That which is conducive to association and attraction and unity among the sons of men", He has written in this connection, "is the means of the life of the world of humanity, and whatever causeth division, repulsion and remoteness leadeth to the death of humankind." Even in the case of religion, He has made it clear that it "must be the cause of love and fellowship. Should religion become the cause of contention and enmity, its absence is preferable…"

It is with such thoughts in mind that Bahá'ís enter into collaboration, as their resources permit, with an increasing number of movements, organizations, groups and individuals, establishing partnerships that strive to transform society and further the cause of unity, promote human welfare, and contribute to world solidarity. Indeed, the standard set by passages such as the above inspires the Bahá'í community to become actively engaged in as many aspects of contemporary life as feasible. In choosing areas of collaboration, Bahá'ís are to bear in mind the principle, enshrined in their teachings, that means should be consistent with ends; noble goals cannot be achieved through unworthy means. Specifically, it is not possible to build enduring unity through endeavours that require contention or assume that an inherent conflict of interests underlies all human interactions, however subtly. It should be noted here that, despite the limitations imposed by adherence to this principle, the community has not experienced a shortage of opportunities for collaboration; so many people in the world today are working intensely towards one or another aim which Bahá'ís share. In this respect, they also take care not to overstep certain bounds with their colleagues and associates. They are not to regard any joint undertaking as an occasion to impose religious convictions. Self-righteousness and other unfortunate manifestations of religious zeal are to be utterly avoided. Bahá'ís do, however, readily offer to their collaborators the lessons they have learned through their own experience, just as they are happy to incorporate into their community-building efforts insights gained through such association.

The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'í of Iran, 2 March 2013.

13.7 Planning and Engaging in Social Action

Reading society and formulating a vision

Every development effort can be said to represent a response to some understanding of the nature and state of society, its challenges, the institutions operating in it, the forces influencing it, and the capacities of its peoples…

According to their reading of society, those engaged in social action form and refine a vision of their work within the social space available to them…

Consultation

If learning in action is to be the primary mode of operation in the area of social and economic development, the Bahá'í principle of consultation needs to be fully appreciated. Whether concerned with analysing a specific problem, attaining higher

degrees of understanding on a given issue, or exploring possible courses of action, consultation may be seen as collective search for truth…

a consultative spirit pervades the interactions of those engaged in social action, of whatever size and complexity, and the population they serve. This does not imply that formal mechanisms are necessarily in place for this purpose. It suggests, rather, that the aspirations of the people, their observations and ideas, are ever present and are consciously incorporated into plans and programmes…

Action and reflection on action

At the heart of every development endeavour is consistent, systematic action. Action, however, needs to be accompanied by constant reflection to ensure that it continues to serve the aims of the endeavour.

Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre, 26 November 2012.

13.8 The Necessary Flow of Resources

… Social and economic development requires the flow of resources, both material and intellectual. Bahá'í communities are linked by institutions and agencies at the local, regional, national, continental, and international levels, each committed to upholding the principle of the oneness of humankind. These institutional arrangements allow for resources to flow in a structured and systematic manner, and communities in rural areas as well as in highly industrialized regions benefit equally from them. The practice of dividing the world into dichotomous groups of "the developed" and "the underdeveloped", of "the advanced" and "the backward", is foreign to Bahá'í efforts in the field of development—indeed, to all Bahá'í endeavours.

However, it should be acknowledged plainly that poverty cannot be alleviated without a just distribution of material wealth among the peoples of the world. In fact, the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh provides a powerful means for fostering the prosperity of humankind. As they observe the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, which requires them to offer a percentage of their excess wealth, Bahá'ís across the globe understand that, by placing funds at the disposal of the Universal House of Justice, they are facilitating the transfer of material resources in ways that promote the welfare of society…

Apart from the funds accessible through the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and regular contributions made to other institutions, including those earmarked specifically for social action, efforts in the area of social and economic development can tap into resources available from governments and donor agencies. Yet, irrespective of their sources, in no way do such funds set the agenda for development efforts in the communities that accept assistance. The relationship of dependence so prevalent in the world today, whereby certain regions are beholden to others for access to resources, is unacceptable.

Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre, 26 November 2012.

Economic life is an arena for the expression of honesty, integrity, trustworthiness, generosity, and other qualities of the spirit. The individual is not merely a self-interested economic unit, striving to claim an ever-greater share of the world's material resources. "Man's merit lieth in service and virtue", Bahá'u'lláh avers, "and

not in the pageantry of wealth and riches…" At the outset of His celebrated treatise *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, ʻAbdu'l-Bahá states:

"And the honour and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world's multitudes should become a source of social good."

The Universal House of Justice, 1 March 2017.

"Social change", the Universal House of Justice made clear in its Riḍván 2010 message, "is not a project that one group of people carries out for the benefit of another", and in general Bahá'ís from one area do not establish development projects for others. The movement of individuals from community to community, and across borders, does occur however, and here every Bahá'í is guided by the words of Bahá'u'lláh: "Shut your eyes to estrangement, then fix your gaze upon unity." When Bahá'ís move residence or travel to another place in the context of some work, they form part of the collectivity of their new local communities, and all the others also see them as such. They now come under the guidance of local institutions, which are responsible for facilitating the flow of knowledge and for channelling the energies of every member of their communities; the idea of an expert from outside being allowed to impose his or her professional aspirations on the local population is thus avoided.

Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre, 26 November 2012.

However modest the amounts expended may be, it is vital that a system be put in place to oversee the proper management of finances. The integrity of an endeavour is, of course, secured by the trustworthiness and honesty of its participants. Yet, a proven system of financial management within an organization serves to protect against an atmosphere of carelessness and imprecision that can open the door to temptation…

There is also a wealth of spiritual and intellectual resources upon which endeavours can draw, whatever the material resources available... What the Bahá'í community has so far achieved in the work of expansion and consolidation with limited material means is a testimony to the efficacy of these spiritual resources, which should be increasingly extended to the sphere of social action.

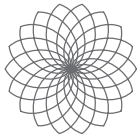
Those involved in social action also need to be constantly aware of the solemn responsibility for the money that has been placed at their disposal. In this connection, it is helpful to keep in mind the attitude Bahá'ís evince in relation to the sacred funds of the Faith—contributions are offered liberally, joyfully, and sacrificially, and institutions observe prudence and a high degree of economy in the expenditure of that money.

Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre, 26 November 2012.

… on this sacred occasion of the Festivals of the Twin Birthdays, we are pleased to announce that the Office of Social and Economic Development now effloresces into a new world-embracing institution established at the World Centre, the Bahá'í International Development Organization. In addition, a Bahá'í Development Fund will be inaugurated, from which the new organization will draw to assist both long-

standing and emerging development efforts worldwide; it will be supported by the House of Justice, and individuals and institutions may contribute to it.

The Universal House of Justice, 9 November 2018.



Projects to Achieve Material Benefit for a Community

13.9 The Complexity of Development Needs

That the development process is inherently complex is undeniable. It can involve activity in areas such as agriculture and animal husbandry, manufacturing and marketing, the management of funds and natural resources, health and sanitation, education and socialization, communication and community organization. The knowledge that must be brought to bear on the development concerns of the communities of the world, then, does not fit into a single area or discipline. Interdisciplinary and multisectoral action is clearly called for. Yet the capacity to pursue such coordinated action will only appear in the Bahá'í community over the course of decades, as will the capacity to address development issues at increasingly higher levels of complexity and effectiveness.

Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre, 26 November 2012.

13.10 Education

Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess. Through a word proceeding out of the mouth of God he was called into being; by one word more he was guided to recognize the Source of his education; by yet another word his station and destiny were safeguarded. The Great Being saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXII.

Bend your minds and wills to the education of the peoples and kindreds of the earth, that haply the dissensions that divide it may, through the power of the Most Great Name, be blotted out from its face, and all mankind become the upholders of one Order, and the inhabitants of one City.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLIV.

The education and training of children is among the most meritorious acts of humankind and draweth down the grace and favour of the All-Merciful, for education is the indispensable foundation of all human excellence and alloweth man to work his way to the heights of abiding glory. If a child be trained from his infancy, he will, through the loving care of the Holy Gardener, drink in the crystal waters of the spirit and of knowledge, like a young tree amid the rilling brooks. And certainly he will gather to himself the bright rays of the Sun of Truth, and through its light and heat will grow ever fresh and fair in the garden of life.

Therefore must the mentor be a doctor as well: that is, he must, in instructing the child, remedy its faults; must give him learning, and at the same time rear him to have a spiritual nature. Let the teacher be a doctor to the character of the child, thus will he heal the spiritual ailments of the children of men.

If, in this momentous task, a mighty effort be exerted, the world of humanity will shine out with other adornings, and shed the fairest light. Then will this darksome place grow luminous, and this abode of earth turn into Heaven.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 103.

They must promote by every means in their power the material as well as the spiritual enlightenment of youth, the means for the education of children, institute, whenever possible, Bahá'í educational institutions, organize and supervise their work and provide the best means for their progress and development.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*.

The establishment of schools has been a significant feature of Bahá'í experience in the field of development. More than 800 Bahá'í-inspired academic schools have been established worldwide. Over half of these are in Africa, about 200 are in Asia, some 100 are in Australasia, and a few dozen are in the Americas and in Europe. These educational centers exist in a variety of settings and range from simple kindergartens serving tens of children to large schools at elementary and secondary levels offering education to thousands of students. All aim at academic excellence and place special emphasis on service to the community through the application of moral values and spiritual principles, and each strives to meet the particular needs of the society in which it operates.

Office of Social and Economic Development, Bahá'í International Community, *For the Betterment of the World*, 2018, p.28.

Moral education is basic to the curricula of all academic schools operated by Bahá'ís. In Russia… the Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education has published ten titles on moral education and disseminated over 100,000 copies to teachers in some 2,000 schools in Russia, the Ukraine, Belarus and Latvia…

The Virtues project, to cite another example, strives to cultivate in individuals and families time-honoured moral and spiritual values. Five texts are used as the basis of programs in schools, day-care centres, corporations, diverse faith communities, and traditional cultural settings. Beyond Canada, where it originated, the Virtues

Project has been implemented directly or has inspired similar approaches in several other countries.

Office of Social and Economic Development, Bahá'í International Community, *For the Betterment of the World*, 2003, p. 16.

13.11 Provision of Health Services

Resort ye, in times of sickness, to competent physicians; We have not set aside the use of material means, rather have We confirmed it through this Pen, which God hath made to be the Dawning-place of His shining and glorious Cause.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 113.

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 medicament. Abstain from drugs when the health is good, but administer them when necessary.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Health and Healing, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1019, p. 460.

The child must, from the day of his birth, be provided with whatever is conducive to his health; and know ye this: so far as possible, the mother's milk is best for, more agreeable and better suited to the child, unless she should fall ill or her milk should run entirely dry....

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Health and Healing, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1026, p. 461.

... you should not neglect your health, but consider it the means which enables you to serve. It—the body—is like a horse which carries the personality and spirit, and as such should be well cared for so it can do its work! You should certainly safeguard your nerves, and force yourself to take time, and not only for prayer and meditation, but for real rest and relaxation ....

Shoghi Effendi, in Health and Healing, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1076, p. 482.

Bahá'í activities in the health field take diverse forms including clinics, dispensaries, and medical and dental camps, as well as primary health care and health education...

Bahá'ís are also eager to respond to calls for assistance in the health-related endeavours of others. Since 1997, for instance, the Bahá'ís of Cameroon have been collaborating with the government and the World Health Organisation (WHO) in combatting onchocerciasis, also known as river blindness. One oral dose of the drug supplied by WHO is required for each person in an affected population annually over an extended period...

Office of Social and Economic Development, Bahá'í International Community, *For the Betterment of the World*, 2003, pp.18-19.

13.12 The Development of Agriculture

Special regard must be paid to agriculture. Although it hath been mentioned in the fifth place, unquestionably it precedeth the others.

Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Dunyá (Tablet of the World), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

... coming to man, we see he hath neither hooked teeth nor sharp nails or claws, nor teeth like iron sickles. From this it becometh evident and manifest that the food of man is cereals and fruit. Some of the teeth of man are like millstones to grind the grain, and some are sharp to cut the fruit. Therefore he is not in need of meat, nor is he obliged to eat it. Even without eating meat he would live with the utmost vigour and energy. For example, the community of the Brahmins in India do not eat meat; notwithstanding this they are not inferior to other nations in strength, power, vigour, outward senses or intellectual virtues. Truly, the killing of animals and the eating of their meat is somewhat contrary to pity and compassion, and if one can content oneself with cereals, fruit, oil and nuts, such as pistachios, almonds and so on, it would undoubtedly be better and more pleasing.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Health and Healing, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 1028, p. 462.

When deciding what course of training to follow, youth can consider acquiring those skills and professions that will be of benefit in education, rural development, agriculture, economics, technology, health, radio and in many other areas of endeavor that are so urgently needed in the developing countries of the world.

The Universal House of Justice to the European Youth Conference in Innsbruck, 4 July 1983.

Bahá'í sponsored agricultural projects seek to bring the advances of science and technology to bear on production processes–usually of a microregion–while respecting traditional knowledge systems and paying close attention to the social dimension of development. In this sense agricultural production is seen as one approach to community development.

A striking example is the Community Garden Project in Erdenebulgan, Mongolia...

Office of Social and Economic Development, Bahá'í International Community, *For the Betterment of the World*, 2003, p. 18.

... several Bahá'í-inspired schools and universities in Africa and Latin America have included agricultural sciences as a main component of their curricula in order to foster in young people a love for agriculture and to help in the dissemination of knowledge. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for example, the Bahá'í community has operated an agricultural school called Institut Technique Agricole Tshilaka for some three decades to raise up youth who can provide technical assistance to local farmers.

Office of Social and Economic Development, Bahá'í International Community, *For the Betterment of the World*, 2003, p.32.

13.13 Protection of the Environment

Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, the Creator. Its manifestations are diversified by varying causes, and in this diversity there are signs

for men of discernment. Nature is God's Will and is its expression in and through the contingent world. It is a dispensation of Providence ordained by the Ordainer, the All-Wise.

Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat (Tablet of Wisdom), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Were one to observe with an eye that discovereth the realities of all things, it would become clear that the greatest relationship that bindeth the world of being together lieth in the range of created things themselves, and that co-operation, mutual aid and reciprocity are essential characteristics in the unified body of the world of being, inasmuch as all created things are closely related together and each is influenced by the other or deriveth benefit therefrom, either directly or indirectly.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Conservation of the Earth's Resources, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 2.1.1, p. 71.

Shoghi Effendi links the preservation and reclamation of the earth's resources with both the "protection [of the] physical world and [the] heritage [of] future generations". He affirms that the work of such groups as the Men of the Trees and the World Forestry Charter is "essentially humanitarian", and he applauds their "noble objective" of reclaiming the "desert areas [of] Africa".

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Conservation of the Earth's Resources, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 3.1, p. 83.

We cannot segregate the human heart from the environment outside us and say that once one of these is reformed everything will be improved. Man is organic with the world. His inner life moulds the environment and is itself also deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions.

No movement in the world directs its attention upon both these aspects of human life and has full measures for their improvement, save the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. And this is its distinctive feature. If we desire therefore the good of the world we should strive to spread those teachings and also practice them in our own life. Through them will the human heart be changed, and also our social environment provides the atmosphere in which we can grow spiritually and reflect in full the light of God shining through the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Conservation of the Earth's Resources, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 3.3, pp. 84–85.

...assisting in endeavors to conserve the environment in ways which blend with the rhythm of life of our community must assume more importance in Bahá'í activities.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 1989, *Messages 1986-1989*, para. 64.9, p.125.

In the field of Environment, Bahá'í projects generally take a community based approach...

Besides such community-based initiatives, the International Environmental Forum operating in Europe links environmental professionals and activists worldwide...

Office of Social and Economic Development, Bahá'í International Community, *For the Betterment of the World*, 2003, p.18.

Addressing Social Division and Disadvantage

13.14 Eradicating Poverty

No deed of man is greater before God than helping the poor. Spiritual conditions are not dependent upon the possession of worldly treasures or the absence of them. When one is physically destitute, spiritual thoughts are more likely. Poverty is a stimulus toward God. Each one of you must have great consideration for the poor and render them assistance. Organize in an effort to help them and prevent increase of poverty. The greatest means for prevention is that whereby the laws of the community will be so framed and enacted that it will not be possible for a few to be millionaires and many destitute. One of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings is the adjustment of means of livelihood in human society. Under this adjustment there can be no extremes in human conditions as regards wealth and sustenance. For the community needs financier, farmer, merchant and labourer just as an army must be composed of commander, officers and privates. All cannot be commanders; all cannot be officers or privates. Each in his station in the social fabric must be competent—each in his function according to ability but with justness of opportunity for all.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá,1 July 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

The inordinate disparity between rich and poor, a source of acute suffering, keeps the world in a state of instability, virtually on the brink of war. Few societies have dealt effectively with this situation. The solution calls for the combined application of spiritual, moral and practical approaches. A fresh look at the problem is required, entailing consultation with experts from a wide spectrum of disciplines, devoid of economic and ideological polemics, and involving the people directly affected in the decisions that must urgently be made. It is an issue that is bound up not only with the necessity for eliminating extremes of wealth and poverty but also with those spiritual verities the understanding of which can produce a new universal attitude. Fostering such an attitude is itself a major part of the solution.

The Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World, October 1985, The Promise of World Peace, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 438.30, p.688.

13.15 Advancement of Women

Praised be God, the Pen of the Most High hath lifted distinctions from between His servants and handmaidens, and, through His consummate favours and all-encompassing mercy, hath conferred upon all a station and rank on the same plane.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Women, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 2093, p. 357.

Until the reality of equality between man and woman is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible. Even granted that woman is inferior to man in some degree of capacity or accomplishment, this or any other distinction would continue to be productive of discord and trouble. The only remedy is education, opportunity; for equality means equal qualification. …

… And let it be known once more that until woman and man recognize and realize equality, social and political progress here or anywhere will not be possible.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 2 May 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed. Without equality this will be impossible because all differences and distinction are conducive to discord and strife. Equality between men and women is conducive to the abolition of warfare for the reason that women will never be willing to sanction it.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 9 June 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavour will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.

The Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World, October 1985,
The Promise of World Peace, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 438.3, p. 689.

The equality of men and women is a cardinal principle of the Bahá'í Faith. Central to every project undertaken by Bahá'ís is a commitment to the goal of ensuring that men and women are allowed to work shoulder to shoulder in all fields of human endeavour–scientific, political, economic, social and cultural–with the same rewards and in equal conditions. Specific programs aim at eliminating prejudices against women, at establishing mechanisms to protect their interests, and providing the education they need to take their rightful place in society.

Office of Social and Economic Development, Bahá'í International Community,
For the Betterment of the World, 2003, p.17.

Another example is the Tahirih Justice Center in the United States, which provides free legal and social services to immigrant women and girls who are seeking protection from gender-based violence. Since its establishment in 1997, the Center has assisted nearly 22,000 women and girls fleeing abuse and has reached thousands more through advocacy, training, and public education programs. In the area of public policy advocacy, the Tahirih Justice Center launched a campaign to end exploitation of foreign-born women by international marriage brokers, which led to the signing into law of the International Marriage Broker Regulation Act. The

Center's Forced Marriage Initiative that was launched in 2011 strives to protect vulnerable children across the United States from child marriage and has served to initiate a movement to reform laws on the minimum age of marriage in the country.

Office of Social and Economic Development, Bahá'í International Community, *For the Betterment of the World*, 2018, pp. 38-39.

13.16 Racial Unity

The Great Being saith: O well-beloved ones! The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch.

Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd (Tablet of Maqṣúd), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

The diversity in the human family should be the cause of love and harmony, as it is in music where many different notes blend together in the making of a perfect chord. If you meet those of a different race and colour from yourself, do not mistrust them and withdraw yourself into your shell of conventionality, but rather be glad and show them kindness.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, 28 October 1912.

I hope that ye may cause that downtrodden race to become glorious, and to be joined with the white race, to serve the world of man with the utmost sincerity, faithfulness, love, and purity. This opposition, enmity, and prejudice among the white race and the coloured cannot be effaced except through faith, assurance, and the teachings of the Blessed Beauty. This question of the union of the white and the black is very important for if it is not realized, erelong great difficulties will arise, and harmful results will follow. If this matter remaineth without change, enmity will be increased day by day, and the final result will be hardship and may end in bloodshed.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

Let the white make a supreme effort in their resolve to contribute their share to the solution of this problem, to abandon once for all their usually inherent and at times subconscious sense of superiority, to correct their tendency towards revealing a patronizing attitude towards the members of the other race, to persuade them through their intimate, spontaneous and informal association with them of the genuineness of their friendship and the sincerity of their intentions, and to master their impatience of any lack of responsiveness on the part of a people who have received, for so long a period, such grievous and slow-healing wounds. Let the Negroes, through a corresponding effort on their part, show by every means in their power the warmth of their response, their readiness to forget the past, and their ability to wipe out every trace of suspicion that may still linger in their hearts and minds. Let neither think that the solution of so vast a problem is a matter that exclusively concerns the other. Let neither think that such a problem can either easily or immediately be resolved. Let neither think that they can wait confidently for the solution of this problem until the initiative has been taken, and the favourable circumstances created, by agencies that stand outside the orbit of their Faith. Let neither think that anything short of genuine love, extreme patience, true humility,

consummate tact, sound initiative, mature wisdom, and deliberate, persistent, and prayerful effort, can succeed in blotting out the stain which this patent evil has left on the fair name of their common country.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

... RECALL WITH PROFOUND EMOTION MESSAGE BELOVED GUARDIAN OCCASION 1953 CONFERENCE WHEREIN HE EXTOLLED PUREHEARTED SPIRITUAL RECEPTIVE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AFRICA WHOM BAHÁ'U'LLÁH COMPARED PUPIL EYE THROUGH WHICH LIGHT OF SPIRIT SHINETH FORTH AND FOR WHOSE CONVERSION BOTH GUARDIAN AND MASTER BEFORE HIM YEARNED AND LABOURED ...

The Universal House of Justice, cable to the International Conference, Kampala, Uganda, 6 October 1967, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 1783, p. 525.

Racism, one of the most baneful and persistent evils, is a major barrier to peace. Its practice perpetrates too outrageous a violation of the dignity of human beings to be countenanced under any pretext. Racism retards the unfoldment of the boundless potentialities of its victims, corrupts its perpetrators, and blights human progress. Recognition of the oneness of mankind, implemented by appropriate legal measures, must be universally upheld if this problem is to be overcome.

The Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World, October 1985, The Promise of World Peace, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 438.29, p. 688.

In the United States, the Institute for the Healing of Racism helps participants in its workshops to understand the subtleties of racial intolerance and recognize the principle of the oneness of mankind as the true basis for relating to people of different cultures and appearance. Conducted in an atmosphere of respect and appreciation, and bringing together racially diverse participants, the workshops have been held across North America for civil and corporate groups, police departments, and schools and universities.

Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre, *For the Betterment of the World*, 2003, p. 17.

13.17 Harmony Between Religions

There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God. The difference between the ordinances under which they abide should be attributed to the varying requirements and exigencies of the age in which they were revealed.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXI.

Gird up the loins of your endeavour, O people of Bahá, that haply the tumult of religious dissension and strife that agitateth the peoples of the earth may be stilled, that every trace of it may be completely obliterated.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*.

Most regrettable of all is the state of difference and divergence we have created between each other in the name of religion, imagining that a paramount duty in our religious belief is that of alienation and estrangement, that we should shun each other and consider each other contaminated with error and infidelity. In reality, the foundations of the divine religions are one and the same.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 8 November 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

All religions teach that we should love one another; that we should seek out our own shortcomings before we presume to condemn the faults of others, that we must not consider ourselves superior to our neighbors! We must be careful not to exalt ourselves lest we be humiliated.

Who are *we* that we should judge? How shall *we* know who, in the sight of God, is the most upright man? God's thoughts are not like our thoughts! How many men who have seemed saint-like to their friends have fallen into the greatest humiliation…

Let us therefore be humble, without prejudices, preferring others' good to our own! Let us never say, "I am a believer but he is an infidel," "I am near to God, whilst he is an outcast." We can never know what will be the final judgment! Therefore let us help all who are in need of any kind of assistance.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Fifth Principle: The Abolition of Prejudices, *Paris Talks*.

Religious strife, throughout history, has been the cause of innumerable wars and conflicts, a major blight to progress, and is increasingly abhorrent to the people of all faiths and no faith. Followers of all religions must be willing to face the basic questions which this strife raises, and to arrive at clear answers. How are the differences between them to be resolved, both in theory and in practice? The challenge facing the religious leaders of mankind is to contemplate, with hearts filled with the spirit of compassion and a desire for truth, the plight of humanity, and to ask themselves whether they cannot, in humility before their Almighty Creator, submerge their theological differences in a great spirit of mutual forbearance that will enable them to work together for the advancement of human understanding and peace.

The Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World, October 1985,
The Promise of World Peace, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 438.32, p. 689.

Those who have held blindly and selfishly to their particular orthodoxies, who have imposed on their votaries erroneous and conflicting interpretations of the pronouncements of the Prophets of God, bear heavy responsibility for this confusion—a confusion compounded by the artificial barriers erected between faith and reason, science and religion. For from a fair-minded examination of the actual utterances of the Founders of the great religions, and of the social milieus in which they were obliged to carry out their missions, there is nothing to support the contentions and prejudices deranging the religious communities of mankind and therefore all human affairs.

The teaching that we should treat others as we ourselves would wish to be treated, an ethic variously repeated in all the great religions, lends force to this latter observation in two particular respects: it sums up the moral attitude, the peace-inducing aspect, extending through these religions irrespective of their place or time

of origin; it also signifies an aspect of unity which is their essential virtue, a virtue mankind in its disjointed view of history has failed to appreciate.

Had humanity seen the Educators of its collective childhood in their true character, as agents of one civilizing process, it would no doubt have reaped incalculably greater benefits from the cumulative effects of their successive missions. This, alas, it failed to do.

The Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World, October 1985,
The Promise of World Peace, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 438.15–438.17, pp. 684–685.

... the Bahá'í community has been a vigorous promoter of interfaith activities from the time of their inception. Apart from cherished associations that these activities create, Bahá'ís see in the struggle of diverse religions to draw closer together a response to the Divine Will for a human race that is entering on its collective maturity.

The Universal House of Justice to the World's Religious Leaders, April 2002.

Religious prejudice forms a formidable barrier to the progress and well-being of humanity. This prejudice, along with many others, permeates the structures of society and is systematically impressed on individual and collective consciousness. In fact, it is often deliberately fostered and exploited through manipulation and propaganda, using methods that ignore truth and promote self-serving agendas for political or other expediencies...

The destructive consequences of religious prejudice are thus of great concern to the Bahá'í community. The oneness of humankind is, after all, the pivot around which all of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve and is at once the operating principle and ultimate goal of the Bahá'í Faith. The betterment of the world, its ultimate objective, is retarded by this affliction. Further, the Bahá'í community itself has suffered the direct consequences of religious prejudice for nearly two centuries, particularly in the land of its birth...

As individuals, Bahá'ís strive daily to live according to the teachings and to embody and express the principles of the Faith in action. "So free must be your thoughts and actions of any trace of prejudice—racial, religious, economic, national, tribal, class, or cultural", the House of Justice has stated, addressing the Bahá'ís of the world, "that even the stranger sees in you loving friends." Bahá'ís are taught from the earliest age about the common foundation of all the world religions, to accept and love the Founders of all of them as their own, and to embrace those of all religions or none with friendliness and fellowship.

The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 27 December 2017.

13.18 Education for World Citizenship: Transcending Nationalism

That one indeed is a man who, today, dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race. The Great Being saith: Blessed and happy is he that ariseth to promote the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth. In another passage He hath proclaimed: It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country,

but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.

Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd (Tablet of Maqṣúd), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

No nation can achieve success unless education is accorded all its citizens. Lack of resources limits the ability of many nations to fulfill this necessity, imposing a certain ordering of priorities. The decision-making agencies involved would do well to consider giving first priority to the education of women and girls, since it is through educated mothers that the benefits of knowledge can be most effectively and rapidly diffused throughout society. In keeping with the requirements of the times, consideration should also be given to teaching the concept of world citizenship as part of the standard education of every child.

The Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World, October 1985,
The Promise of World Peace, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 438.34, p. 689.

In sorely tried Kosovo, a group of young people has established the Global Perspective Development Center, to reach across ethnic divisions and forge collective action based on moral leadership and service to the community. The Center, which carries out training seminars in the use of the media to promote unity and moral education, has received the backing of several influential agencies, including UNICEF.

Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre,
For the Betterment of the World, 2003, p. 17.

CHAPTER 14

ENDING THE CURSE OF WAR AND ITS MISERIES

Universal Peace: The Most Critical Stage in Global Development

14.1 A Prayer for World Peace 400

14.2 It's Time for the Human Race to Reach a Higher Level of Maturity 400

14.3 Universal Peace: Both Necessary and Achievable 401

14.4 The Challenging Path to Peace 402

Creating Unity: The Foundation of World Peace

14.5 The First and Fundamental Prerequisite of World Peace: Conscious Recognition of the Oneness of Humanity 405

14.6 Unity of Conscience is Essential 406

14.7 Religions Must Become a Force for Unity 407

14.8 Fostering Friendship, Development and Collaboration 408

14.9 Overcoming Divisions and Prejudice 409

Steps Towards a Peaceful World Federal System

14.10 The Evolution of the United Nations and Global Institutions Necessary for World Peace 410

14.11 A Global Convocation to Enact a Covenant of Peace 412

14.12 Global Federation and Demilitarisation 413

14.13 The Collaborative Role of the Bahá'í Community in the Transformation to a Unified World Order: The Lesser Peace 414

The Bahá'í Approach to National and Regional Governance

14.14 Loyalty and Obedience to Government 417

14.15 Non-involvement in Politics 419

14.16 Contributing to Social Change while Avoiding Partisan Politics 421

14.17 The Bahá'í Attitude to Military Service 425

Universal Peace: The Most Critical Stage in Global Development

14.1 A Prayer for World Peace

O Thou kind Lord! Thou hast created all humanity from the same stock. Thou hast decreed that all shall belong to the same household. In Thy Holy Presence they are all Thy servants, and all mankind are sheltered beneath Thy Tabernacle; all have gathered together at Thy Table of Bounty; all are illumined through the light of Thy Providence.

O God! Thou art kind to all, Thou hast provided for all, dost shelter all, conferrest life upon all. Thou hast endowed each and all with talents and faculties, and all are submerged in the Ocean of Thy Mercy.

O Thou kind Lord! Unite all. Let the religions agree and make the nations one, so that they may see each other as one family and the whole earth as one home. May they all live together in perfect harmony.

O God! Raise aloft the banner of the oneness of mankind.

O God! Establish the Most Great Peace.

Cement Thou, O God, the hearts together.

O Thou kind Father, God! Gladden our hearts through the fragrance of Thy love. Brighten our eyes through the Light of Thy Guidance. Delight our ears with the melody of Thy Word, and shelter us all in the Stronghold of Thy Providence.

Thou art the Mighty and Powerful, Thou art the Forgiving and Thou art the One Who overlooketh the shortcomings of all mankind.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Bahá'í Prayers.*

14.2 It's Time for the Human Race to Reach a Higher Level of Maturity

Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind—the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve—is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and good-will among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious coöperation among individual peoples and nations... It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units.

It represents the consummation of human evolution—an evolution that has had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, its subsequent development in the achievement of tribal solidarity, leading in turn to the constitution of the city-state, and expanding later into the institution of independent and sovereign nations.

The principle of the Oneness of Mankind, as proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, carries with it no more and no less than a solemn assertion that attainment to this final stage in this stupendous evolution is not only necessary but inevitable, that its realization

is fast approaching, and that nothing short of a power that is born of God can succeed in establishing it.

Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

A candid acknowledgement that prejudice, war and exploitation have been the expression of immature stages in a vast historical process and that the human race is today experiencing the unavoidable tumult which marks its collective coming of age is not a reason for despair but a prerequisite to undertaking the stupendous enterprise of building a peaceful world. That such an enterprise is possible, that the necessary constructive forces do exist, that unifying social structures can be erected, is the theme we urge you to examine.

The Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World, October 1985, *Messages 1963–1986*, The Promise of World Peace, para. 438.10, p. 683.

14.3 Universal Peace: Both Necessary and Achievable

... it is Our purpose, through the loving providence of God—exalted be His glory—and His surpassing mercy, to abolish, through the force of Our utterance, all disputes, war, and bloodshed, from the face of the earth.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*.

... for the good and happiness of all mankind, arise, with firm resolve and clear vision, to establish the Cause of Universal Peace...

... A few, unaware of the power latent in human endeavour, consider this matter as highly impracticable, nay even beyond the scope of man's utmost efforts. Such is not the case, however. On the contrary, thanks to the unfailing grace of God, the loving-kindness of His favoured ones, the unrivalled endeavours of wise and capable souls, and the thoughts and ideas of the peerless leaders of this age, nothing whatsoever can be regarded as unattainable. Endeavour, ceaseless endeavour, is required. Nothing short of an indomitable determination can possibly achieve it. Many a cause which past ages have regarded as purely visionary, yet in this day has become most easy and practicable. Why should this most great and lofty Cause—the daystar of the firmament of true civilization and the cause of the glory, the advancement, the well-being and the success of all humanity—be regarded as impossible of achievement? Surely the day will come when its beauteous light shall shed illumination upon the assemblage of man.

The apparatus of conflict will, as preparations go on at their present rate, reach the point where war will become something intolerable to mankind.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*.

In cycles gone by, though harmony was established, yet, owing to the absence of means, the unity of all mankind could not have been achieved. Continents remained widely divided, nay even among the peoples of one and the same continent association and interchange of thought were well nigh impossible. Consequently intercourse, understanding and unity amongst all the peoples and kindreds of the earth were unattainable... Of this past ages have been deprived, for this century—the century of light—has been endowed with unique and unprecedented glory,

power and illumination. Hence the miraculous unfolding of a fresh marvel every day. Eventually it will be seen how bright its candles will burn in the assemblage of man.

Behold how its light is now dawning upon the world's darkened horizon. The first candle is unity in the political realm, the early glimmerings of which can now be discerned. The second candle is unity of thought in world undertakings, the consummation of which will ere long be witnessed. The third candle is unity in freedom which will surely come to pass. The fourth candle is unity in religion which is the corner-stone of the foundation itself, and which, by the power of God, will be revealed in all its splendour. The fifth candle is the unity of nations—a unity which in this century will be securely established, causing all the peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland. The sixth candle is unity of races, making of all that dwell on earth peoples and kindreds of one race. The seventh candle is unity of language, i.e., the choice of a universal tongue in which all peoples will be instructed and converse. Each and every one of these will inevitably come to pass, inasmuch as the power of the Kingdom of God will aid and assist in their realization.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 15.

The Great Peace towards which people of goodwill throughout the centuries have inclined their hearts, of which seers and poets for countless generations have expressed their vision, and for which from age to age the sacred scriptures of mankind have constantly held the promise, is now at long last within the reach of the nations. For the first time in history it is possible for everyone to view the entire planet, with all its myriad diversified peoples, in one perspective. World peace is not only possible but inevitable. It is the next stage in the evolution of this planet—in the words of one great thinker, "the planetization of mankind."

Whether peace is to be reached only after unimaginable horrors precipitated by humanity's stubborn clinging to old patterns of behaviour, or is to be embraced now by an act of consultative will, is the choice before all who inhabit the earth. At this critical juncture when the intractable problems confronting nations have been fused into one common concern for the whole world, failure to stem the tide of conflict and disorder would be unconscionably irresponsible.

The Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World, October 1985,
The Promise of World Peace, *Messages 1963–1986*, paras. 438.1–438.2, p. 681.

14.4 The Challenging Path to Peace

… Shoghi Effendi could discern "the progress, however fitful, of the forces working in harmony with the spirit of the age". These forces have continued to move humanity towards an age of peace—not merely a peace which rules out armed conflict, but a collective state of being, manifesting unity. Notwithstanding, it remains a long journey, and it proceeds in fits and starts…

There have been at least three historical moments in the last one hundred years when it seemed as if the human race was reaching for real, lasting peace, albeit always falling short because of weaknesses it could not overcome. The first moment,

as a result of the Paris Conference, was the establishment of the League of Nations, an organization intended by its founders to secure peace at the international level. It was the means by which, for the first time in history, the system of collective security enjoined on the world's rulers by Bahá'u'lláh was "seriously envisaged, discussed and tested". But ultimately the peace agreement that concluded the war was fatally flawed, and the League was not able to prevent a second World War, judged by historians to be the deadliest conflict in human history. Just as the first significant step towards world peace followed a period of appalling conflict, so did the second, when not only was the United Nations Organization formed from the ashes of the League, but a system of international economic institutions came into being, and historic advances were made relating to human rights and international law. In rapid succession, many territories under colonial rule became independent nations, and arrangements for regional cooperation grew markedly in depth and range. The post-war decades, however, were also characterized by an atmosphere of brooding and often open hostility between the world's two major power blocs. Known familiarly as the Cold War, it spilled over into actual wars in various regions of the world, and brought humanity perilously close to a conflict involving nuclear weapons. Its peaceful termination, towards the end of the twentieth century, was an occasion for relief, giving rise to explicit calls for the establishment of a new global order. This was the third moment when universal peace seemed to be within grasp. Efforts to put in place new systems for international cooperation and to strengthen existing ones received great impetus, as a series of world conferences on themes of importance to humanity's future were convened by the United Nations. New opportunities for consensus emerged, and the spirit of collaboration propelling progress also found expression in the mandates given to certain international institutions charged with administering justice. This purposeful, deliberative process culminated at the turn of the century in the Millennium Forum, a meeting of representatives of over a thousand civil society organizations from more than a hundred countries, followed by the Millennium Summit, an unparalleled gathering of world leaders which led to agreement on a set of objectives representing a shared ambition of humanity. Styled the Millennium Development Goals, they became rallying points for collective action in the ensuing years. These various advances—despite their many limitations and imperfections and the horrifying conflicts that continued to unfold during this time—stand nonetheless as signs of a widespread, gradual but inexorable rise in global consciousness on the part of the earth's peoples and their attraction to universal justice, to solidarity, to collaboration, to compassion, and to equality.

As the present century opened, new challenges began to loom. With time, these intensified, leading to a retreat from the promising steps forward with which the previous century had closed. Today, many of the dominant currents in societies everywhere are pushing people apart, not drawing them together. Even as global poverty of the most extreme form has decreased, political and economic systems have enabled the enrichment of small coteries with grossly exorbitant wealth—a condition that fuels fundamental instability in world affairs. The interactions of the individual citizen, governing institutions, and society as a whole are often fraught, as those arguing for the primacy of one or the other show more and more intransigence in

their thinking. Religious fundamentalism is warping the character of communities, even nations. The failings of so many organizations and institutions of society have understandably led to a decline in public trust, but this has been systematically exploited by vested interests seeking to undermine the credibility of all sources of knowledge. Certain shared ethical principles, which seemed to be in the ascendant at the start of this century, are eroded, threatening the prevailing consensus about right and wrong that, in various arenas, had succeeded in holding humanity's basest tendencies in check. And the will to engage in international collective action, which twenty years ago represented a powerful strain of thinking among world leaders, has been cowed, assailed by resurgent forces of racism, nationalism, and factionalism.

Thus do the forces of disintegration regroup and gain ground. So be it. The unification of humanity is unstoppable by any human force; the promises made by the prophets of old and by the Author of the Cause of God Himself testify to this truth. Yet the course humanity takes to achieve its destiny may very well be tortuous. The tumult raised by the contending peoples of the earth threatens to drown out the voices of those noble-minded souls in every society who call for an end to conflict and struggle. As long as that call goes unheeded, there is no reason to doubt that the world's current state of disorder and confusion will worsen—possibly with catastrophic consequences—until a chastened humanity sees fit to take another significant step, perhaps this time decisive, towards enduring peace.

Universal peace is the destination towards which humanity has been moving throughout the ages under the influence of the Word of God that has been progressively imparted by the Creator to His creation. Shoghi Effendi described humanity's advance towards a new, global stage in its collective life in terms of social evolution, "an evolution that has had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, its subsequent development in the achievement of tribal solidarity, leading in turn to the constitution of the city-state, and expanding later into the institution of independent and sovereign nations." Now, with the coming of Bahá'u'lláh, the human race stands on the threshold of its maturity. World unity is finally possible. A global order that unifies the nations with the assent of humanity is the only adequate answer to the destabilizing forces that threaten the world.

The Universal House of Justice, 18 January 2019.

Creating Unity: The Foundation of World Peace

14.5 The First and Fundamental Prerequisite of World Peace: Conscious Recognition of the Oneness of Humanity

Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch. Deal ye one with another with the utmost love and harmony, with friendliness and fellowship. He Who is the Day-Star of Truth beareth Me witness! So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth…

… At one time We spoke in the language of the lawgiver; at another in that of the truth-seeker and the mystic, and yet Our supreme purpose and highest wish hath always been to disclose the glory and sublimity of this station.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf.*

"In every Dispensation," writes 'Abdu'lBahá, "the light of Divine Guidance has been focussed upon one central theme… In this wondrous Revelation, this glorious century, the foundation of the Faith of God and the distinguishing feature of His Law is the consciousness of the Oneness of Mankind."

'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.*

Acceptance of the oneness of mankind is the first fundamental prerequisite for reorganization and administration of the world as one country, the home of humankind. Universal acceptance of this spiritual principle is essential to any successful attempt to establish world peace. It should therefore be universally proclaimed, taught in schools, and constantly asserted in every nation as preparation for the organic change in the structure of society which it implies.

In the Bahá'í view, recognition of the oneness of mankind "calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units."

The Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World, October 1985,
The Promise of World Peace, *Messages 1963–1986*, paras. 438.40–438.41, p. 690.

However, though world unity is possible—nay, inevitable—it ultimately cannot be achieved without unreserved acceptance of the oneness of humankind, described by the Guardian as "the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve"…

The realization of such a vision will require, sooner or later, an historic feat of statesmanship from the leaders of the world. Alas, the will to attempt this feat is still wanting. Humanity is gripped by a crisis of identity, as various peoples and groups struggle to define themselves, their place in the world, and how they should act. Without a vision of shared identity and common purpose, they fall into competing ideologies and power struggles… It is through love for all people, and by subordinating lesser loyalties to the best interests of humankind, that the unity of

the world can be realized and the infinite expressions of human diversity find their highest fulfillment.

The Universal House of Justice, 18 January 2019.

14.6 Unity of Conscience is Essential

The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXI.

There is not one soul whose conscience does not testify that in this day there is no more important matter in the world than that of universal peace. Every just one bears witness to this and adores that esteemed Assembly because its aim is that this darkness may be changed into light, this bloodthirstiness into kindness, this torment into bliss, this hardship into ease and this enmity and hatred into fellowship and love. Therefore, the effort of those esteemed souls is worthy of praise and commendation.

But the wise souls who are aware of the essential relationships emanating from the realities of things consider that one single matter cannot, by itself, influence the human reality as it ought and should, for until the minds of men become united, no important matter can be accomplished. At present universal peace is a matter of great importance, but unity of conscience is essential, so that the foundation of this matter may become secure, its establishment firm and its edifice strong.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 227.

Two points bear emphasizing in all these issues. One is that the abolition of war is not simply a matter of signing treaties and protocols; it is a complex task requiring a new level of commitment to resolving issues not customarily associated with the pursuit of peace. Based on political agreements alone, the idea of collective security is a chimera. The other point is that the primary challenge in dealing with issues of peace is to raise the context to the level of principle, as distinct from pure pragmatism. For, in essence, peace stems from an inner state supported by a spiritual or moral attitude, and it is chiefly in evoking this attitude that the possibility of enduring solutions can be found.

There are spiritual principles, or what some call human values, by which solutions can be found for every social problem. Any well-intentioned group can in a general sense devise practical solutions to its problems, but good intentions and practical knowledge are usually not enough. The essential merit of spiritual principle is that it not only presents a perspective which harmonizes with that which is immanent in human nature, it also induces an attitude, a dynamic, a will, an aspiration, which facilitate the discovery and implementation of practical measures. Leaders of governments and all in authority would be well served in their efforts to solve problems if they would first seek to identify the principles involved and then be guided by them.

The Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World, October 1985,
The Promise of World Peace, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 438.36–438.37, pp. 689–690.

14.7 Religions Must Be a Force for Unity

Unquestionably, the seminal force in the civilizing of human nature has been the influence of the succession of these Manifestations of the Divine that extends back to the dawn of recorded history.

This same force, that operated with such effect in ages past, remains an inextinguishable feature of human consciousness. Against all odds, and with little in the way of meaningful encouragement, it continues to sustain the struggle for survival of uncounted millions, and to raise up in all lands heroes and saints whose lives are the most persuasive vindication of the principles contained in the scriptures of their respective faiths. As the course of civilization demonstrates, religion is also capable of profoundly influencing the structure of social relationships. Indeed, it would be difficult to think of any fundamental advance in civilization that did not derive its moral thrust from this perennial source. Is it conceivable, then, that passage to the culminating stage in the millennia-long process of the organization of the planet can be accomplished in a spiritual vacuum? If the perverse ideologies let loose on our world during the century just past contributed nothing else, they demonstrated conclusively that the need cannot be met by alternatives that lie within the power of human invention…

The implications for today are summed up by Bahá'u'lláh in words written over a century ago and widely disseminated in the intervening decades:

There can be no doubt whatever that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God. The difference between the ordinances under which they abide should be attributed to the varying requirements and exigencies of the age in which they were revealed. All of them, except a few which are the outcome of human perversity, were ordained of God, and are a reflection of His Will and Purpose. Arise and, armed with the power of faith, shatter to pieces the gods of your vain imaginings, the sowers of dissension amongst you. Cleave unto that which draweth you together and uniteth you.

Such an appeal does not call for abandonment of faith in the fundamental verities of any of the world's great belief systems. Far otherwise. Faith has its own imperative and is its own justification. What others believe—or do not believe—cannot be the authority in any individual conscience worthy of the name. What the above words do unequivocally urge is renunciation of all those claims to exclusivity or finality that, in winding their roots around the life of the spirit, have been the greatest single factor in suffocating impulses to unity and in promoting hatred and violence.

The Universal House of Justice to the World's Religious Leaders, April 2002.

Fostering unity, by harmonizing disparate elements and nurturing in every heart a selfless love for humankind, is the task of religion. Great possibilities to cultivate fellowship and concord are open to religious leaders, but these same leaders can also incite violence by using their influence to stoke the fires of fanaticism and prejudice. Writing of religion, Bahá'u'lláh's words are emphatic: "… make it not", He warns,

"the cause of dissension and strife." Peace, for "all who dwell on earth", is one of "the principles and ordinances of God".

The Universal House of Justice, 18 January 2019.

14.8 Fostering Friendship, Development and Collaboration

They that are endued with sincerity and faithfulness should associate with all the peoples and kindreds of the earth with joy and radiance, inasmuch as consorting with people hath promoted and will continue to promote unity and concord, which in turn are conducive to the maintenance of order in the world and to the regeneration of nations. Blessed are such as hold fast to the cord of kindliness and tender mercy and are free from animosity and hatred.

Bahá'u'lláh, Ṭarázát (Ornaments), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Let truthfulness and courtesy be your adorning. Suffer not yourselves to be deprived of the robe of forbearance and justice, that the sweet savors of holiness may be wafted from your hearts upon all created things.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXXIX.

The cause of universal education, which has already enlisted in its service an army of dedicated people from every faith and nation, deserves the utmost support that the governments of the world can lend it. For ignorance is indisputably the principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples and the perpetuation of prejudice. No nation can achieve success unless education is accorded all its citizens. Lack of resources limits the ability of many nations to fulfill this necessity, imposing a certain ordering of priorities. The decision-making agencies involved would do well to consider giving first priority to the education of women and girls, since it is through educated mothers that the benefits of knowledge can be most effectively and rapidly diffused throughout society. In keeping with the requirements of the times, consideration should also be given to teaching the concept of world citizenship as part of the standard education of every child.

A fundamental lack of communication between peoples seriously undermines efforts towards world peace. Adopting an international auxiliary language would go far to resolve this problem and necessitates the most urgent attention.

The Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World, October 1985,
The Promise of World Peace, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 438.34–438.35, p. 689.

The inordinate disparity between rich and poor, a source of acute suffering, keeps the world in a state of instability, virtually on the brink of war. Few societies have dealt effectively with this situation. The solution calls for the combined application of spiritual, moral and practical approaches. A fresh look at the problem is required, entailing consultation with experts from a wide spectrum of disciplines, devoid of economic and ideological polemics, and involving the people directly affected in the decisions that must urgently be made. It is an issue that is bound up not only with the necessity for eliminating extremes of wealth and poverty but also with those

spiritual verities the understanding of which can produce a new universal attitude. Fostering such an attitude is itself a major part of the solution.

The Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World, October 1985,
The Promise of World Peace, *Messages 1963–1986*, 438.30, p. 688.

14.9 Overcoming Divisions and Prejudice

… let your heart burn with loving kindness for all who may cross your path.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*.

Trustworthiness is the greatest portal leading unto the tranquillity and security of the people. In truth the stability of every affair hath depended and doth depend upon it.

Bahá'u'lláh, Ṭarázát (Ornaments), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

… equity is the most fundamental among human virtues. The evaluation of all things must needs depend upon it.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, C.

All the peoples of Europe, notwithstanding their vaunted civilization, sink and drown in this terrifying sea of passion and desire…

Time and again down the centuries, the German state has subdued the French; over and over, the kingdom of France has governed German land. Is it permissible that in our day 600,000 helpless creatures should be offered up as a sacrifice to such nominal and temporary uses and results? No, by the Lord God! Even a child can see the evil of it. Yet the pursuit of passion and desire will wrap the eyes in a thousand veils that rise out of the heart to blind the sight and the insight as well.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*.

Racism, one of the most baneful and persistent evils, is a major barrier to peace. Its practice perpetrates too outrageous a violation of the dignity of human beings to be countenanced under any pretext. Racism retards the unfoldment of the boundless potentialities of its victims, corrupts its perpetrators, and blights human progress. Recognition of the oneness of mankind, implemented by appropriate legal measures, must be universally upheld if this problem is to be overcome…

Unbridled nationalism, as distinguished from a sane and legitimate patriotism, must give way to a wider loyalty, to the love of humanity as a whole. Bahá'u'lláh's statement is: "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens." The concept of world citizenship is a direct result of the contraction of the world into a single neighborhood through scientific advances and of the indisputable interdependence of nations. Love of all the world's peoples does not exclude love of one's country. The advantage of the part in a world society is best served by promoting the advantage of the whole. Current international activities in various fields which nurture mutual affection and a sense of solidarity among peoples need greatly to be increased.

Religious strife, throughout history, has been the cause of innumerable wars and conflicts, a major blight to progress, and is increasingly abhorrent to the people of all faiths and no faith. Followers of all religions must be willing to face the basic questions which this strife raises, and to arrive at clear answers. How are

the differences between them to be resolved, both in theory and in practice? The challenge facing the religious leaders of mankind is to contemplate, with hearts filled with the spirit of compassion and a desire for truth, the plight of humanity, and to ask themselves whether they cannot, in humility before their Almighty Creator, submerge their theological differences in a great spirit of mutual forbearance that will enable them to work together for the advancement of human understanding and peace.

The emancipation of women, the achievement of full equality between the sexes, is one of the most important, though less acknowledged prerequisites of peace. The denial of such equality perpetrates an injustice against one half of the world's population and promotes in men harmful attitudes and habits that are carried from the family to the workplace, to political life, and ultimately to international relations. There are no grounds, moral, practical, or biological, upon which such denial can be justified. Only as women are welcomed into full partnership in all fields of human endeavor will the moral and psychological climate be created in which international peace can emerge.

The Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World, October 1985,
The Promise of World Peace, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 438.29–438.33, pp. 688–689.

Steps Towards a Peaceful World Federal System

14.10 The Evolution of the United Nations and Global Institutions Necessary for World Peace

The world is in greatest need of international peace. Until it is established, mankind will not attain composure and tranquillity. It is necessary that the nations and governments organize an international tribunal to which all their disputes and differences shall be referred. The decision of that tribunal shall be final. Individual controversy will be adjudged by a local tribunal. International questions will come before the universal tribunal, and so the cause of warfare will be taken away.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 1 September 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

As an international organization, the United Nations has demonstrated humanity's capacity for united action in health, agriculture, education, environmental protection, and the welfare of children. It has affirmed our collective moral will to build a better future, evinced in the widespread adoption of international human rights Covenants. It has revealed the human race's deep-seated compassion, evidenced by the devotion of financial and human resources to the assistance of people in distress. And in

the all-important realms of peace-building, peace-making and peace-keeping, the United Nations has blazed a bold path toward a future without war.

Yet the overall goals set out in the Charter of the United Nations have proved elusive. Despite the high hopes of its founders, the establishment of the United Nations some fifty years ago did not usher in an era of peace and prosperity for all. Although the United Nations has surely played a role in preventing a third world war, the last half decade has nevertheless been marked by numerous local, national and regional conflicts costing millions of lives. No sooner had improved relations between the superpowers removed the ideological motivation for such conflicts, than long-smouldering ethnic and sectarian passions surfaced as a new source of conflagration. In addition, although the end of the Cold War has reduced the threat of a global, terminal war, there remain instruments and technologies—and to some extent the underlying passions—which could bring about planet-wide destruction.

The Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, section I.

Extraordinary care must be taken in designing the architecture of the international order so that it does not over time degenerate into any form of despotism, of oligarchy, or of demagogy corrupting the life and machinery of the constituent political institutions.

In 1955, during the first decade review of the UN charter, the Bahá'í International Community offered a statement to the United Nations, based on ideas articulated nearly a century before by Bahá'u'lláh. "The Bahá'í concept of world order is defined in these terms: A world Super-State in whose favour all the nations of the world will have ceded every claim to make war, certain rights to impose taxation and all rights to maintain armaments, except for the purposes of maintaining internal order within their respective dominions. This State will have to include an International Executive adequate to enforce supreme and unchallengeable authority on every recalcitrant member of the Commonwealth; a World Parliament whose members are elected by the peoples in their respective countries and whose election is confirmed by their respective governments; a Supreme Tribunal whose judgement has a binding effect even in cases where the parties concerned have not voluntarily agreed to submit their case to its consideration."

While we believe this formulation of a world government is at once the ultimate safeguard and the inevitable destiny of humankind, we do recognize that it represents a long-term picture of a global society. Given the pressing nature of the current state of affairs, the world requires bold, practical and actionable strategies that go beyond inspiring visions of the future. Nevertheless, by focusing on a compelling concept, a clear and consistent direction for evolutionary change emerges from the mire of contradictory views and doctrines.

The Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, section II.

An evolutionary mindset implies the ability to envision an institution over a long time frame perceiving its inherent potential for development, identifying the fundamental principles governing its growth, formulating high-impact strategies for short-term implementation, and even anticipating radical discontinuities along its path.

Studying the United Nations from this perspective unveils significant opportunities to strengthen the current system without the wholesale restructuring of its principal institutions or the intensive re-engineering of its core processes. In fact, we submit that no proposal for UN reform can produce high impact unless its recommendations are internally consistent and direct the UN along a projected evolutionary path toward a distinctive and relevant role within the future international order.

We believe the combination of recommendations described herein meets these conditions and that their adoption would represent a measured but significant step toward building a more just world order.

The Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, section III.

We see in the current United Nations system the foundation for a strengthened World Court. Established in 1945 as the principal judicial organ of the United Nations, the International Court of Justice is characterized by many positive elements. The current system for the selection of judges, for example, seeks to create a judicial panel which is representative of a wide range of peoples, regions, and judicial systems.

The Court's primary shortcoming is that it lacks the authority to issue legally binding decisions, except in those cases where states have chosen in advance to be bound by its decisions. Without jurisdiction, the Court is powerless to administer justice. In time, the decisions of the World Court may become binding and enforceable upon all states…

The Bahá'í International Community, *Turning Point For All Nations*, section IIIC.

14.11 A Global Convocation to Enact a Covenant of Peace

The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men.

Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd (Tablet of Maqṣúd), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Concerning the proceedings for this world gathering, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh and authorized interpreter of his teachings, offered these insights: "They must make the Cause of Peace the object of general consultation, and seek by every means in their power to establish a Union of the nations of the world. They must conclude a binding treaty and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world and obtain for it the sanction of all the human race. This supreme and noble undertaking—the real source of the peace and well-being of all the world—should be regarded as sacred by all that dwell on earth. All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to ensure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant. In this all-embracing Pact the limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly fixed, the principles underlying the relations of governments towards one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and obligations ascertained. In like manner, the size of the armaments of every government should be strictly limited, for if the preparations for war and the military forces of any nation should

be allowed to increase, they will arouse the suspicion of others. The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government. Should this greatest of all remedies be applied to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and will remain eternally safe and secure."

The holding of this mighty convocation is long overdue.

With all the ardor of our hearts, we appeal to the leaders of all nations to seize this opportune moment and take irreversible steps to convoke this world meeting. All the forces of history impel the human race towards this act which will mark for all time the dawn of its long-awaited maturity.

The Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World, October 1985,
The Promise of World Peace, *Messages 1963–1986*, paras. 438.48-438.50, p. 693.

14.12 Global Federation and Demilitarisation

The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens.

Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Maqṣúd (Tablet of Maqṣúd), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

In the Bahá'í view, recognition of the oneness of mankind "calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units."

Elaborating the implications of this pivotal principle, Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, commented in 1931 that: "Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, it seeks to broaden its basis, to remold its institutions in a manner consonant with the needs of an ever-changing world. It can conflict with no legitimate allegiances, nor can it undermine essential loyalties. Its purpose is neither to stifle the flame of a sane and intelligent patriotism in men's hearts, nor to abolish the system of national autonomy so essential if the evils of excessive centralization are to be avoided. It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. It calls for a wider loyalty, for a larger aspiration than any that has animated the human race. It insists upon the subordination of national impulses and interests to the imperative claims of a unified world. It repudiates excessive centralization on one hand, and disclaims all attempts at uniformity on the other. Its watchword is unity in diversity."

The achievement of such ends requires several stages in the adjustment of national political attitudes, which now verge on anarchy in the absence of clearly defined laws or universally accepted and enforceable principles regulating the relationships between nations. The League of Nations, the United Nations, and the many organizations and agreements produced by them have unquestionably been helpful in attenuating some of the negative effects of international conflicts, but they have

shown themselves incapable of preventing war. Indeed, there have been scores of wars since the end of the Second World War; many are yet raging.

The predominant aspects of this problem had already emerged in the nineteenth century when Bahá'u'lláh first advanced his proposals for the establishment of world peace. The principle of collective security was propounded by him in statements addressed to the rulers of the world. Shoghi Effendi commented on his meaning: "What else could these weighty words signify," he wrote, "if they did not point to the inevitable curtailment of unfettered national sovereignty as an indispensable preliminary to the formation of the future Commonwealth of all the nations of the world? Some form of a world superstate must needs be evolved, in whose favor all the nations of the world will have willingly ceded every claim to make war, certain rights to impose taxation and all rights to maintain armaments, except for purposes of maintaining internal order within their respective dominions. Such a state will have to include within its orbit an international executive adequate to enforce supreme and unchallengeable authority on every recalcitrant member of the commonwealth; a world parliament whose members shall be elected by the people in their respective countries and whose election shall be confirmed by their respective governments; and a supreme tribunal whose judgment will have a binding effect even in such cases where the parties concerned did not voluntarily agree to submit their case to its consideration.

"... A world community in which all economic barriers will have been permanently demolished and the interdependence of Capital and Labor definitely recognized; in which the clamor of religious fanaticism and strife will have been forever stilled; in which the flame of racial animosity will have been finally extinguished; in which a single code of international law—the product of the considered judgment of the world's federated representatives—shall have as its sanction the instant and coercive intervention of the combined forces of the federated units; and finally a world community in which the fury of a capricious and militant nationalism will have been transmuted into an abiding consciousness of world citizenship—such indeed, appears, in its broadest outline, the Order anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh, an Order that shall come to be regarded as the fairest fruit of a slowly maturing age."

The Universal House of Justice to the Peoples of the World, October 1985, *Messages 1963–1986*, The Promise of World Peace, paras. 438.31-438.45, pp. 690-692.

14.13 The Collaborative Role of the Bahá'í Community in the Transformation to a Unified World Order: The Lesser Peace

Bahá'u'lláh's principal mission in appearing at this time in human history is the realization of the oneness of mankind and the establishment of peace among the nations; therefore, all the forces which are focused on accomplishing these ends are influenced by His Revelation. We know, however, that peace will come in stages. First, there will come the Lesser Peace, when the unity of nations will be achieved, then gradually the Most Great Peace—the spiritual as well as social and political unity of mankind, when the Bahá'í World Commonwealth, operating in strict accordance with the laws and ordinances of the Most Holy Book of the Bahá'í Revelation, will have been established through the efforts of the Bahá'ís.

As to the Lesser Peace, Shoghi Effendi has explained that this will initially be a political unity arrived at by decision of the governments of various nations; it will not be established by direct action of the Bahá'í community. This does not mean, however, that the Bahá'ís are standing aside and waiting for the Lesser Peace to come before they do something about the peace of mankind. Indeed, by promoting the principles of the Faith, which are indispensable to the maintenance of peace, and by fashioning the instruments of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, which we are told by the beloved Guardian is the pattern for future society, the Bahá'ís are constantly engaged in laying the groundwork for a permanent peace, the Most Great Peace being their ultimate goal.

The Lesser Peace itself will pass through stages; at the initial stage the governments will act entirely on their own without the conscious involvement of the Faith; later on, in God's good time, the Faith will have a direct influence on it in ways indicated by Shoghi Effendi in his "The Goal of a New World Order". In connection with the steps that will lead to this latter stage, the Universal House of Justice will certainly determine what has to be done, in accordance with the guidance in the Writings, such as the passage you quoted from *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, page 89. In the meantime, the Bahá'ís will undoubtedly continue to do all in their power to promote the establishment of peace.

The Universal House of Justice, 31 January 1985, *Messages 1963–1986*, paras 422.2–422.4, pp. 655–656.

Guided by the external affairs strategy communicated to National Spiritual Assemblies in 1994, the community's capacity in the fields of diplomatic and public information likewise expanded at an astonishing rate, placing the Bahá'í community in a dynamic relationship with the United Nations, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the media. The strategy focused activities at international and national levels on two key objectives: to influence the processes towards world peace, and to defend the Faith. Through the measures adopted for the defense of our dearly loved coreligionists in Iran, the Bahá'í International Community won a new measure of respect and support that created opportunities for other aims of the strategy to be pursued…

With regard to the other objective of the external affairs strategy, the lines of action were guided by four themes—human rights, the status of women, global prosperity, and moral development. Our records show a huge step forward in the work on human rights and the status of women.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2000.

What should be stated plainly here is that Bahá'ís do not believe the transformation thus envisioned will come about exclusively through their own efforts. Nor are they trying to create a movement that would seek to impose on society their vision of the future. Every nation and every group—indeed, every individual—will, to a greater or lesser degree, contribute to the emergence of the world civilization towards which humanity is irresistibly moving. Unity will progressively be achieved, as foreshadowed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in different realms of social existence, for instance, "unity in the political realm", "unity of thought in world undertakings", "unity of

races" and the "unity of nations". As these come to be realized, the structures of a politically united world, which respects the full diversity of culture and provides channels for the expression of dignity and honour, will gradually take shape.

The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran, 2 March 2013.

The establishment of peace is a duty to which the entire human race is called. The responsibility that Bahá'ís bear to aid that process will evolve over time, but they have never been mere spectators—they lend their share of assistance to the operation of those forces leading humanity towards unity. They are summoned to be as leaven to the world. Consider Bahá'u'lláh's words:

> Address yourselves to the promotion of the well-being and tranquillity of the children of men. Bend your minds and wills to the education of the peoples and kindreds of the earth, that haply the dissensions that divide it may, through the power of the Most Great Name, be blotted out from its face, and all mankind become the upholders of one Order, and the inhabitants of one City.

'Abdu'l-Bahá also emphasised the importance of the contribution that Bahá'ís are called on to make to the establishment of world peace:

> ... peace must first be established among individuals, until it leadeth in the end to peace among nations. Wherefore, O ye Bahá'ís, strive ye with all your might to create, through the power of the Word of God, genuine love, spiritual communion and durable bonds among individuals. This is your task.

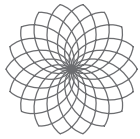
"The Promise of World Peace", the message we addressed to the peoples of the world in 1985, set out the Bahá'í perspective on the condition of the world and the prerequisites of universal peace. It also offered the global Bahá'í community as a model for study that could reinforce hope in the possibility of uniting the human race. In the years since, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh have been patiently refining that model and working with others around them to build up and broaden a system of social organization based on His teachings...

The friends are also developing their capacity for engaging those around them, regardless of creed, culture, class, or ethnicity, in conversations about how to bring about spiritual and material well-being through systematic application of the divine teachings. One gratifying result of this growing capacity is the community's increased ability to make meaningful contributions to various important discourses prevalent in society... Sensitized as they are to the importance of harmony and the fruitlessness of conflict, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh seek to cultivate those conditions that are most conducive to the emergence of unity in any setting. We are heartened to see the believers expanding their efforts to participate in the discourses of society—especially those friends who, in their professional capacity, are able to contribute to discourses directly related to peace.

For Bahá'ís, the attainment of peace is not simply an aspiration to which they are sympathetic or a goal complementary to their other aims—it has always been a central concern. In a second Tablet 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace in the Hague, He asserted that "our desire for peace is not derived

merely from the intellect: It is a matter of religious belief and one of the eternal foundations of the Faith of God."

The Universal House of Justice, 18 January 2019.



The Bahá'í Approach to National and Regional Governance

14.14 Loyalty and Obedience to Government

The cardinal principle which we must follow, (in connection with your questions), is obedience to the Government prevailing in any land in which we reside. We cannot, because, say, we do not personally like a totalitarian form of government, refuse to obey it when it becomes the ruling power. Nor can we join underground Movements which are a minority agitating against the prevailing government.

If a state of Revolution and complete chaos exist in a Country, so that it is impossible to say there is one government in power, then the friends must consult with their National or their Local Assembly, and be guided by what the Assembly considers the proper action to take; in other words which party might be best considered the legal governing authority.

We see, therefore, that we must do two things—shun politics like the plague, and be obedient to the Government in power in the place where we reside. We cannot start judging how a particular government came into power, and therefore whether we should obey it or not. This would immediately plunge us into politics. We must obey in all cases except where a spiritual principle is involved, such as denying our Faith. For these spiritual principles we must be willing to die.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 1453, p. 446.

For whereas the friends should obey the government under which they live, even at the risk of sacrificing all their administrative affairs and interests, they should under no circumstances suffer their inner religious beliefs and convictions to be violated and transgressed by any authority whatever. A distinction of a fundamental importance must, therefore, be made between spiritual and administrative matters. Whereas the former are sacred and inviolable, and hence cannot be subject to compromise, the latter are secondary

and can consequently be given up and even sacrificed for the sake of obedience to the laws and regulations of the government. Obedience to the state is so vital a principle of the Cause that should authorities in ... decide today to prevent the Bahá'ís from holding any meeting or publishing any literature they should obey ... But, as already pointed out, such an allegiance is confined merely to administrative matters which if checked can only retard the progress of the Faith for some time. In matters of belief, however, no compromise whatever should be allowed, even though the outcome of it be death or expulsion.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 1455, p. 534.

Let them proclaim that in whatever country they reside, and however advanced their institutions, or profound their desire to enforce the laws, and apply the principles, enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, they will, unhesitatingly, subordinate the operation of such laws and the application of such principles to the requirements and legal enactments of their respective governments. Theirs is not the purpose, while endeavouring to conduct and perfect the administrative affairs of their Faith, to violate, under any circumstances, the provisions of their country's constitution, much less to allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries.

Shoghi Effendi, The Golden Age of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

... Bahá'ís obey the laws, Federal or state, unless submission to these laws amounts to a denial of their Faith. We live the Bahá'í life, fully and continuously, unless prevented by the authorities. This implies, if it does not categorically state, that a Bahá'í is not required to make a judgement as to the precedence of Federal or state law—this is for the courts to decide.

The Universal House of Justice, 30 March 1965, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 1462, p. 449.

Bahá'ís do not seek political power. They will not accept political posts in their respective governments, whatever the particular system in place, though they will take up positions which they deem to be purely administrative in nature. They will not affiliate themselves with political parties, become entangled in partisan issues, or participate in programmes tied to the divisive agendas of any group or faction. At the same time, Bahá'ís respect those who, out of a sincere desire to serve their countries, choose to pursue political aspirations or to engage in political activity. The approach adopted by the Bahá'í community of non-involvement in such activity is not intended as a statement expressing some fundamental objection to politics in its true sense; indeed, humanity organizes itself through its political affairs. Bahá'ís vote in civil elections, as long as they do not have to identify themselves with any party in order to do so. In this connection, they view government as a system for maintaining the welfare and orderly progress of a society, and they undertake, one and all, to observe the laws of the land in which they reside, without allowing their inner religious beliefs to be violated. Bahá'ís will not be party to any instigation to overthrow a government. Nor will they interfere in political relations between the governments of different nations. This does not mean that they are naive about political processes in the world today and make no distinction between just and tyrannical rule. The rulers of the earth have sacred obligations to fulfill towards their people, who should

be seen as the most precious treasure of any nation. Wherever they reside, Bahá'ís endeavour to uphold the standard of justice, addressing inequities directed towards themselves or towards others, but only through lawful means available to them, eschewing all forms of violent protest. Moreover, in no way does the love they hold in their hearts for humanity run counter to the sense of duty they feel to expend their energies in service to their respective countries.

The approach, or strategy if you will, with the simple set of parameters outlined in the foregoing paragraph enables the community, in a world where nations and tribes are pitted one against the other and people are divided and separated by social structures, to maintain its cohesion and integrity as a global entity and to ensure that the activities of the Bahá'ís in one country do not jeopardize the existence of those elsewhere. Guarded against competing interests of nations and political parties, the Bahá'í community is thus able to build its capacity to contribute to processes that promote peace and unity.

The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'í of Iran, 2 March 2013.

14.15 Non-involvement in Politics

I feel it, therefore, incumbent upon me to stress, now that the time is ripe, the importance of an instruction which, at the present stage of the evolution of our Faith, should be increasingly emphasized, irrespective of its application to the East or to the West. And this principle is no other than that which involves the non-participation by the adherents of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, whether in their individual capacities or collectively as local or national Assemblies, in any form of activity that might be interpreted, either directly or indirectly, as an interference in the political affairs of any particular government. ...

Let them refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their governments and the schemes and programmes of parties and factions. In such controversies they should assign no blame, take no side, further no design, and identify themselves with no system prejudicial to the best interests of that world-wide Fellowship which it is their aim to guard and foster.

Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

As the number of the Bahá'í communities in various parts of the world multiplies and their power, as a social force, becomes increasingly apparent, they will no doubt find themselves increasingly subjected to the pressure which men of authority and influence, in the political domain, will exercise in the hope of obtaining the support they require for the advancement of their aims. These communities will, moreover, feel a growing need of the good-will and the assistance of their respective governments in their efforts to widen the scope, and to consolidate the foundations, of the institutions committed to their charge. Let them beware lest, in their eagerness to further the aims of their beloved Cause, they should be led unwittingly to bargain with their Faith, to compromise with their essential principles, or to sacrifice, in

return for any material advantage which their institutions may derive, the integrity of their spiritual ideals.

Shoghi Effendi, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

Such a rectitude of conduct must manifest itself, with ever-increasing potency, in every verdict which the elected representatives of the Bahá'í community, in whatever capacity they may find themselves, may be called upon to pronounce. ... It must characterize the attitude of every loyal believer towards non-acceptance of political posts, non-identification with political parties, non-participation in political controversies, and non-membership in political organizations and ecclesiastical institutions.

Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

If a Bahá'í were to insist on his right to support a political party, he could not deny the same degree of freedom to other believers. This would mean that within the ranks of the Faith, whose primary mission is to unite all men as one great family under God, there would be Bahá'ís opposed to each other. Where, then, would be the example of unity and harmony which the world is seeking?

If the institutions of the Faith, God forbid, became involved in politics, the Bahá'ís would find themselves arousing antagonism instead of love. If they took one stand in one country, they would be bound to change the views of the people in another country about the aims and purposes of the Faith. By becoming involved in political disputes, the Bahá'ís instead of changing the world or helping it, would themselves be lost and destroyed. The world situation is so confused and moral issues which were once clear have become so mixed up with selfish and battling factions, that the best way Bahá'ís can serve the highest interests of their country and the cause of true salvation for the world, is to sacrifice their political pursuits and affiliations and whole-heartedly and fully support the divine system of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Faith is not opposed to the true interests of any nation, nor is it against any party or faction. It holds aloof from all controversies and transcends them all, while enjoining upon its followers loyalty to government and a sane patriotism. This love for their country the Bahá'ís show by serving its well-being in their daily activity, or by working in the administrative channels of the government instead of through party politics or in diplomatic or political posts. The Bahá'ís may, indeed are encouraged to, mix with all strata of society, with the highest authorities and with leading personalities as well as with the mass of the people, and should bring the knowledge of the Faith to them; but in so doing they should strictly avoid becoming identified, or identifying the Faith, with political pursuits and party programmes.

The Universal House of Justice, 8 February 1970, *Messages 1963–1986*, paras 77.4c–77.4e, p. 164.

The Guardian wishes me to draw the attention of the friends through you that they should be very careful in their public utterance not to mention any political figures ... either to side with them or denounce them. This is the first thing to bear in mind. Otherwise they will involve the friends in political matters, which is infinitely dangerous for the Cause.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, No. 149.

Regarding your question: the Guardian does not see how Bahá'í participation, with other organizations and religious bodies in a non-political meeting to promote civic unity and welfare along some line can be considered political. Much as the friends must guard against in any way ever seeming to identify themselves or the Cause with any political party, they must also guard against the other extreme of never taking part with other progressive groups, in conferences or committees designed to promote some activity in entire accord with our teachings—such as, for instance, better race relations.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 1815, p. 5.

Fully aware of the repeated statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that universality is of God, Bahá'ís in every land are ready, nay anxious, to associate themselves by word and deed with any association of men which, after careful scrutiny, they feel satisfied is free from every tinge of partisanship and politics and is wholly devoted to the interests of all mankind. In their collaboration with such associations they would extend any moral and material assistance they can afford, after having fulfilled their share of support to those institutions that affect directly the interests of the Cause.

Shoghi Effendi, *Bahá'í Administration*.

The troubling conditions facing the world's peoples and the persistent problems caused by disunity within and between nations have, as you know, been a prominent theme in the messages of the Universal House of Justice. Bahá'ís, of course, are ever mindful of the state of the world. The well-being of humanity and its peace and tranquillity are the constant desire of all those who have taken to heart Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation to "be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in". It is abundantly clear, moreover, that the longing of the believers to contribute to the betterment of the world and to participate constructively in the life of society is in no way contradicted by their non-involvement in politics. While consciousness of the hardships afflicting so many strengthens a commitment to fundamental social change, political activity by Bahá'ís would only dissipate the community's energies and fail to bring about this change. It must arise from the spiritual transformation of society. These concepts were explored by the House of Justice much more fully in its message dated 2 March 2013 to the Bahá'ís of Iran, a message which many communities have found it useful to revisit from time to time.

The Universal House of Justice, 1 December 2019.

14.16 Contributing to Social Change while Avoiding Partisan Politics

… you inquire about the extent to which a Bahá'í, particularly one who is a social scientist or academic, may speak publicly on sociopolitical issues…

You are, of course, well aware of the principle of noninvolvement in politics enunciated by Shoghi Effendi. Bahá'ís are to "refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their governments and the schemes and programs of parties and factions." … This principle, which demands strict avoidance of any type of partisan political activity, must be scrupulously upheld. However, as society and its political processes evolve and as the Faith grows, the interaction between the two becomes

increasingly complex. The House of Justice will provide the necessary guidance over time to apply this principle to existing circumstances.

The term "politics" can have a broad meaning, and therefore it is important to distinguish between partisan political activity and the discourse and action intended to bring about constructive social change. While the former is proscribed, the latter is enjoined; indeed, a central purpose of the Bahá'í community is social transformation. 'Abdu'l-Bahá's treatise *The Secret of Divine Civilization* amply demonstrates the Faith's commitment to promoting social change without entering into the arena of partisan politics. So too, innumerable passages in the Bahá'í Writings encourage the believers to contribute to the betterment of the world. "Be anxiously concerned with the needs of the age ye live in," Bahá'u'lláh states, "and center your deliberations on its exigencies and requirements." …

When the Bahá'í community was small, its contribution to social well-being was naturally limited. In 1983 the House of Justice announced that the growth of the Faith had given rise to the need for a greater involvement in the life of society. Bahá'ís began to engage more systematically in the work of social and economic development through activities of varying degrees of complexity. Efforts to contribute to social transformation also include participation in the public discourse on issues of concern to humanity, such as peace, the elimination of prejudices of all kinds, the spiritual and moral empowerment of youth, and the promotion of justice. These two types of activity have steadily increased over the past twenty-five years and will grow in scope and influence in the future.

The organized endeavors of the Bahá'í community in these areas are reinforced by the diverse initiatives of individual believers working in various fields—as volunteers, professionals, and experts—to contribute to social change. The distinctive nature of their approach is to avoid conflict and the contest for power while striving to unite people in the search for underlying moral and spiritual principles and for practical measures that can lead to the just resolution of the problems afflicting society. Bahá'ís perceive humanity as a single body. All are inseparably bound to one another. A social order structured to meet the needs of one group at the expense of another results in injustice and oppression. Instead, the best interest of each component part is achieved by considering its needs in the context of the well-being of the whole.

Involvement in social discourse and action will at times require that Bahá'ís become associated with the development of public policy. In this regard, the term "policy," like the term "politics," has a broad meaning. While refraining from discussion of policies pertaining to political relations between nations or partisan political affairs within a country, Bahá'ís will no doubt contribute to the formulation and implementation of policies that address certain social concerns. Examples of such concerns are safeguarding the rights of women, extending effective education to all children, curbing the spread of infectious disease, protecting the environment, and eliminating the extremes of wealth and poverty.

It is evident, then, that as a Bahá'í who is a political scientist you have a great deal of latitude to comment on social issues. Yet it is also possible to participate in the generation and application of knowledge in your field by dealing with topics that are more directly political in nature. You are no doubt aware of the general

advice, written on behalf of the Guardian, that one way to criticize the social and political order of the day without siding with or opposing an existing regime is to offer a deeper analysis on the level of political theory rather than practical politics. Another approach would be to contribute to scientific inquiry and shed light on differing viewpoints to seek common understanding and effective solutions without succumbing to partisan advocacy and obfuscation. Bahá'u'lláh states that "every matter related to state affairs which ye raise for discussion falls under the shadow of one of the words sent down from the heaven of His glorious and exalted utterance." You have the opportunity to mine the gems of His Revelation and to prepare and present them in a manner that is attractive to those seeking new insights. You will have to learn over time how to find a balance between the principles and concepts you hold as true that come from the Teachings of the Faith and from your discipline.

Challenges will inevitably arise. For example, you may find that an issue pertaining to social action has been co-opted by the political debate among competing factions, and wisdom will be required to determine whether to adjust your approach or let the matter rest for a time. In some cases it may be necessary to forgo opportunities that would thrust you into political debate or criticism of partisan policies of governments. In other instances there may be special sensitivities, such as topics related to countries where the Bahá'í community faces hardship or oppression, when comments could create the impression that the friends are engaged in political activity against the interests of a particular government. These same considerations arise when evaluating invitations from the media to comment or engage in discussion on the political affairs of the day. Your National Spiritual Assembly is available to assist you in clarifying particular questions should the need arise.

The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 23 December 2008.

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter dated 11 January 2010 inquiring about the principles that, under present conditions, should guide the Iranian believers in their participation in the life of society. ...

As you are well aware, in present-day Iran, fundamental questions of social justice and public welfare have become entangled with sectarian political concerns. This has made it difficult for Bahá'ís, who love their country and cherish great aspirations for its progress, to determine the best course of action to take. It is hoped that the following comments will be of assistance to the friends in choosing how to proceed.

Members of the Bahá'í community, wherever they reside, avoid engaging in partisan politics or meddling in political relations among governments, refraining at all times from becoming involved in the contest for worldly power. They have chosen this path in accordance with the teachings of their Faith, that they might focus their attention on working towards the greater goal of establishing a united and prosperous society. This choice is not intended as a criticism of any particular political party or of the approach taken by other groups. Needless to say, in following this path Bahá'ís categorically reject any form of sedition or recourse to violence.

While eschewing partisan political activity, Bahá'ís are to vigorously engage in constructive public discourse and in a wide range of social endeavours aimed at the betterment of the world and the progress of their respective nations. They undertake such activities with humility, discernment and respect for prevailing laws and social

conditions, in a spirit of learning and in collaboration with like-minded groups and individuals, fully confident in the power inherent in the principle of unity in diversity and in the efficacy of mutual aid and cooperation.

As to the question of taking part in demonstrations, individual Bahá'ís in every country are, in principle, free to participate in efforts and activities, for instance in peaceful rallies, that aim to further laudable objectives such as the advancement of women, the promotion of social justice, the protection of the environment, the elimination of all forms of discrimination, and the safeguarding of human rights. However, should such activities begin to deviate from their original purpose and assume a partisan character or degenerate into violence, they must of course be avoided.

Over the past three decades the community of the Greatest Name has suffered grievously in the Cradle of the Faith. During the same period, the noble people of Iran, having gained a deeper understanding of many social issues, underwent a profound evolution in their thinking. Fair-minded Iranians today can no longer ignore the absurdity of the accusations made against the Bahá'ís, whom they regard as loyal compatriots, entitled to the same rights accorded to every other citizen. Indeed, few, if any at all, see the label "Bahá'í", so often attached to those who hold progressive views, as a stigma. The actions of young Bahá'ís, animated by their love for their homeland and its people, and brimming with vitality and enthusiasm, have contributed significantly to this change in attitude. The House of Justice conveys to them its warmest expressions of admiration and praise...

The Universal House of Justice to a believer in Iran, 22 January 2010.

In deciding whether it would be appropriate for Bahá'ís to participate in particular public activities, a crucial distinction should be drawn between those events that have a partisan political character and those that do not. A further distinction can be drawn between those activities that are fully in keeping with the teachings and that can be supported explicitly by Bahá'í institutions and those where the situation is less clear, in which Bahá'í institutions should not participate but in which individuals can be given some latitude to make a personal decision to take part, without in any way implying that they are representing the Faith directly by their choice. If a believer harbors any doubt as to the appropriateness of involvement with a particular event or approach, guidance should be sought from the National Spiritual Assembly, which is in the best position to evaluate the specific circumstances and is responsible for making the final determination on such questions.

Beyond this clarification of basic principles, there are other important considerations. Too often political goals, even when pursued in the name of justice, are a chimera, for the fundamental partisanship in contemporary political life means policies are often implemented without building consensus and consequently seeds of discontent and continuing political struggle are sown. Conflict and contention ultimately yield more conflict and contention. Eliminating social problems, rather than merely ameliorating them to an extent, requires unity of thought as well as

action, an open heart as well as an open hand—conditions which Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is intended to bring about.

The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 27 April 2017.

14.17 The Bahá'í Attitude to Military Service

It is true that Bahá'ís are not pacifists since we uphold the use of force in the service of justice and upholding law. But we do not believe that war is ever necessary and its abolition is one of the essential purposes and brightest promises of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. His specific command to the kings of the earth is: "Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice." (Tablet to Queen Victoria, *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 13) The beloved Guardian has explained that the unity of mankind implies the establishment of a world commonwealth, a world federal system, "... liberated from the curse of war and its miseries in which Force is made the servant of Justice ..." whose world executive "backed by an international Force, ... will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth." This is obviously not war but the maintenance of law and order on a world scale. Warfare is the ultimate tragedy of disunity among nations where no international authority exists powerful enough to restrain them from pursuing their own limited interests. Bahá'ís therefore ask to serve their countries in non-combatant ways during such fighting; they will doubtless serve in such an international Force as Bahá'u'lláh envisions, whenever it comes into being.

The Universal House of Justice, 11 September 1984, in Peace,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. II, No. 1636, p. 199.

It is still his firm conviction that the believers, while expressing their readiness to unreservedly obey any directions that the authorities may issue concerning national service in time of war, should also, and while there is yet no outbreak of hostilities, appeal to the government for exemption from active military service in a combatant capacity, stressing the fact that in doing so they are not prompted by any selfish considerations but by the sole and supreme motive of upholding the Teachings of their Faith, which make it a moral obligation for them to desist from any act that would involve them in direct warfare with their fellow-humans of any other race or nation.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 4 June 1939, *Unfolding Destiny*.

CHAPTER 15

CONTRIBUTING TO AN EVER-ADVANCING CIVILIZATION

Many Fields of Endeavour

15.1 Everyone's Contribution is Important 428
15.2 Education, Research and Innovation are Needed 428
15.3 The Development of Arts and Crafts 429
15.4 The Special Contribution of Music 430
15.5 The Advancement of Science and Technology 431
15.6 Love and Service 432

Participating in the Discourses of Society

15.7 The Example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá 433
15.8 The Accumulating Bahá'í Experience 433
15.9 Discussions Based on Both Science and Religion 435
15.10 Avoiding Unproductive Discourses Related to the Forces of Disintegration 437
15.11 Prioritising Discourses Building Unity and Peace 439
15.12 Participating in Social Media while Avoiding Partisan Politics 442
15.13 The Role of Bahá'í Scholarship 443
15.14 The Association for Bahá'í Studies 446
15.15 The Process of Bahá'í Review 448
15.16 The Internet 449

We Are All Contributing to the Future World Civilization

15.17 A New Day has Already Dawned 452
15.18 Outline for a World Commonwealth in which All Nations, Races, Creeds and Classes are Closely and Permanently United 452
15.19 The Preservation of Cultural Diversity 454

Many Fields of Endeavour

15.1 Everyone's Contribution is Important

All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CIX.

This Day a door is open wider than both heaven and earth. The eye of the mercy of Him Who is the Desire of the worlds is turned towards all men. An act, however infinitesimal, is, when viewed in the mirror of the knowledge of God, mightier than a mountain. Every drop proffered in His path is as the sea in that mirror...

Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

Every nation and every group—indeed, every individual—will, to a greater or lesser degree, contribute to the emergence of the world civilization towards which humanity is irresistibly moving.

The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'í of Iran, 2 March 2013.

15.2 Education, Research and Innovation are Needed

Make every effort to acquire the advanced knowledge of the day, and strain every nerve to carry forward the divine civilization. Establish schools that are well organized, and promote the fundamentals of instruction in the various branches of knowledge through teachers who are pure and sanctified, distinguished for their high standards of conduct and general excellence, and strong in faith; scholars and educators with a thorough knowledge of sciences and arts.

Included must be promotion of the arts, the discovery of new wonders, the expansion of trade, and the development of industry. The methods of civilization and the beautification of the country must also be encouraged ...

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Arts and Crafts, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 22, p. 6.

Among the greatest of all great services is the education of children, and promotion of the various sciences, crafts and arts. Praised be God, ye are now exerting strenuous efforts toward this end. The more ye persevere in this most important task, the more will ye witness the confirmations of God, to such a degree that ye yourselves will be astonished.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Education, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 619, p. 276.

O ye recipients of the favours of God! In this new and wondrous Age, the unshakeable foundation is the teaching of sciences and arts. According to explicit Holy Texts, every child must be taught crafts and arts, to the degree that is needful. Wherefore, in every city and village, schools must be established and every child in that city or village is to engage in study to the necessary degree.

It followeth that whatever soul shall offer his aid to bring this about will assuredly be accepted at the heavenly Threshold, and extolled by the Company on high.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 109.

15.3 The Development of Arts and Crafts

The purpose of learning should be the promotion of the welfare of the people, and this can be achieved through crafts. It hath been revealed and is now repeated that the true worth of artists and craftsmen should be appreciated, for they advance the affairs of mankind. Just as the foundations of religion are made firm through the Law of God, the means of livelihood depend upon those who are engaged in arts and crafts. True learning is that which is conducive to the well-being of the world, not to pride and self-conceit, or to tyranny, violence and pillage.

Bahá'u'lláh, in Arts and Crafts, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 10, p. 3.

Through the mere revelation of the word "Fashioner," issuing forth from His lips and proclaiming His attribute to mankind, such power is released as can generate, through successive ages, all the manifold arts which the hands of man can produce. This, verily, is a certain truth. No sooner is this resplendent word uttered, than its animating energies, stirring within all created things, give birth to the means and instruments whereby such arts can be produced and perfected. All the wondrous achievements ye now witness are the direct consequences of the Revelation of this Name. In the days to come, ye will, verily, behold things of which ye have never heard before. Thus hath it been decreed in the Tablets of God, and none can comprehend it except them whose sight is sharp.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, LXXIV.

He sincerely hopes that as the Cause grows and talented persons come under its banner, they will begin to produce in art the divine spirit that animates their soul. Every religion has brought with it some form of art—let us see what wonders this Cause is going to bring along. Such a glorious spirit should also give vent to a glorious art. The Temple with all its beauty is only the first ray of an early dawn; even more wondrous things are to be achieved in the future.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Arts and Crafts, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 25, p. 7.

Shoghi Effendi was very much interested to learn of the success of the "Pageant of the Nations" you produced. He sincerely hopes that all those who attended it were inspired by the same spirit that animated you while arranging it.

It is through such presentations that we can arouse the interest of the greatest number of people in the spirit of the Cause. The day will come when the Cause will spread like wildfire when its spirit and teachings will be presented on the stage or in art and literature as a whole. Art can better awaken such noble sentiments than cold rationalizing, especially among the mass of the people.

We have to wait only a few years to see how the spirit breathed by Bahá'u'lláh will find expression in the work of the artists. What you and some other Bahá'ís are attempting are only faint rays that precede the effulgent light of a glorious morn. We cannot yet value the part the Cause is destined to play in the life of society. We have to give it time. The material this spirit has to mould is too crude and unworthy,

but it will at last give way and the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh will reveal itself in its full splendour.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Arts and Crafts,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 26, pp. 7–8.

Although now is only the very beginning of Bahá'í art, yet the friends who feel they are gifted in such matters should endeavour to develop and cultivate their gifts and through their works to reflect, however inadequately, the Divine Spirit which Bahá'u'lláh has breathed into the world.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in Arts and Crafts,
The Compilation of Compilations, Vol. I, No. 27, p. 8.

15.4 The Special Contribution of Music

We have made it lawful for you to listen to music and singing. Take heed, however, lest listening thereto should cause you to overstep the bounds of propriety and dignity. Let your joy be the joy born of My Most Great Name, a Name that bringeth rapture to the heart, and filleth with ecstasy the minds of all who have drawn nigh unto God. We, verily, have made music as a ladder for your souls, a means whereby they may be lifted up unto the realm on high; make it not, therefore, as wings to self and passion. Truly, We are loath to see you numbered with the foolish.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas* (The Most Holy Book), para. 51.

O bird that singeth sweetly of the Abhá Beauty! In this new and wondrous dispensation the veils of superstition have been torn asunder and the prejudices of eastern peoples stand condemned. Among certain nations of the East, music was considered reprehensible, but in this new age the Manifest Light hath, in His holy Tablets, specifically proclaimed that music, sung or played, is spiritual food for soul and heart.

The musician's art is among those arts worthy of the highest praise, and it moveth the hearts of all who grieve. Wherefore, ... play and sing out the holy words of God with wondrous tones in the gatherings of the friends, that the listener may be freed from chains of care and sorrow, and his soul may leap for joy and humble itself in prayer to the realm of Glory.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 74.

Thank thou God that thou art instructed in music and melody, singing with pleasant voice the glorification and praise of the Eternal, the Living. I pray to God that thou mayest employ this talent in prayer and supplication, in order that the souls may become quickened, the hearts may become attracted and all may become inflamed with the fire of the love of God!

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Music, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1413, p. 74.

O servant of Bahá! Music is regarded as a praiseworthy science at the Threshold of the Almighty, so that thou mayest chant verses at large gatherings and congregations in a most wondrous melody and raise such hymns of praise at the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to enrapture the Concourse on High. By virtue of this, consider how much the art of music is admired and praised. Try, if thou canst, to use spiritual melodies, songs and

tunes, and to bring the earthly music into harmony with the celestial melody. Then thou wilt notice what a great influence music hath and what heavenly joy and life it conferreth. Strike up such a melody and tune as to cause the nightingales of divine mysteries to be filled with joy and ecstasy.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Music, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1419, p. 76.

What a wonderful meeting this is! These are the children of the Kingdom. The song we have just listened to was very beautiful in melody and words. The art of music is divine and effective. It is the food of the soul and spirit. Through the power and charm of music the spirit of man is uplifted. It has wonderful sway and effect in the hearts of children, for their hearts are pure, and melodies have great influence in them. The latent talents with which the hearts of these children are endowed will find expression through the medium of music. Therefore, you must exert yourselves to make them proficient; teach them to sing with excellence and effect. It is incumbent upon each child to know something of music, for without knowledge of this art the melodies of instrument and voice cannot be rightly enjoyed. Likewise, it is necessary that the schools teach it in order that the souls and hearts of the pupils may become vivified and exhilarated and their lives be brightened with enjoyment.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 24 April 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

Whatever is in the heart of man, melody moves and awakens. If a heart full of good feelings and a pure voice are joined together, a great effect is produced. For instance: if there be love in the heart, through melody, it will increase until its intensity can scarcely be borne; but if bad thoughts are in the heart, such as hatred, it will increase and multiply. For instance: the music used in war awakens the desire for bloodshed. The meaning is that melody causes whatever feeling is in the heart to increase.

Some feelings occur accidentally and some have a foundation. For example: some people are naturally kind, but they may be accidentally upset by a wave of anger. But if they hear music, the true nature will reassert itself. Music really awakens the real, natural nature, the individual essence.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, in Music, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. II, No. 1422, p. 79.

15.5 The Advancement of Science and Technology

The third Tajallí is concerning arts, crafts and sciences. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words. Great indeed is the claim of scientists and craftsmen on the peoples of the world. Unto this beareth witness the Mother Book on the day of His return.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tajallíyát (Effulgences), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

One of the names of God is the Fashioner. He loveth craftsmanship. Therefore any of His servants who manifesteth this attribute is acceptable in the sight of this Wronged One. Craftsmanship is a book among the books of divine sciences, and a treasure among the treasures of His heavenly wisdom.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, Arts and Crafts, No. 2, p.1.

All blessings are divine in origin, but none can be compared with this power of intellectual investigation and research, which is an eternal gift producing fruits of unending delight. Man is ever partaking of these fruits. All other blessings are temporary; this is an everlasting possession. Even sovereignty has its limitations and overthrow; this is a kingship and dominion which none may usurp or destroy. Briefly, it is an eternal blessing and divine bestowal, the supreme gift of God to man. Therefore, you should put forward your most earnest efforts toward the acquisition of science and arts. The greater your attainment, the higher your standard in the divine purpose. The man of science is perceiving and endowed with vision, whereas he who is ignorant and neglectful of this development is blind. The investigating mind is attentive, alive; the callous and indifferent mind is deaf and dead. A scientific man is a true index and representative of humanity, for through processes of inductive reasoning and research he is informed of all that appertains to humanity, its status, conditions and happenings. He studies the human body politic, understands social problems and weaves the web and texture of civilization. In fact, science may be likened to a mirror wherein the infinite forms and images of existing things are revealed and reflected. It is the very foundation of all individual and national development. Without this basis of investigation, development is impossible. Therefore, seek with diligent endeavour the knowledge and attainment of all that lies within the power of this wonderful bestowal.

Public Talk of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 23 April 1912, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.

15.6 Love and Service

It is enjoined upon every one of you to engage in some form of occupation, such as crafts, trades and the like. We have graciously exalted your engagement in such work to the rank of worship unto God, the True One. Ponder ye in your hearts the grace and the blessings of God and render thanks unto Him at eventide and at dawn. Waste not your time in idleness and sloth. Occupy yourselves with that which profiteth yourselves and others. Thus hath it been decreed in this Tablet from whose horizon the daystar of wisdom and utterance shineth resplendent.

Bahá'u'lláh, Bishárát (Glad-Tidings), *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*.

He Who is the Eternal Truth hath, from the Day Spring of Glory, directed His eyes towards the people of Bahá, and is addressing them these words: "Address yourselves to the promotion of the well-being and tranquillity of the children of men. Bend your minds and wills to the education of the peoples and kindreds of the earth, that haply the dissensions that divide it may, through the power of the Most Great Name, be blotted out from its face, and all mankind become the upholders of one Order, and the inhabitants of one City. Illumine and hallow your hearts; let them not be profaned by the thorns of hate or the thistles of malice. Ye dwell in one world, and have been created through the operation of one Will. Blessed is he who mingleth with all men in a spirit of utmost kindliness and love."

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLVI.

Participating in the Discourses of Society

15.7 The Example of ʻAbdu'l-Bahá

Yet, discernible too is its counterpart, the constructive process that the Guardian associated with "the nascent Faith of Bahá'u'lláh" and described as "the harbinger of the New World Order that Faith must erelong establish." Its indirect effects can be seen in the outpouring of feeling, especially from the young, that springs from a longing to contribute to societal development. It is a bounty accorded to the followers of the Ancient Beauty that this longing, which wells up inexorably from the human spirit in every land, is able to find such eloquent expression in the work the Bahá'í community is carrying out to build capacity for effective action amongst the diverse populations of the planet. Can any privilege compare with this?

For insight into this work let every believer look to ʻAbdu'l-Bahá, the centenary of Whose "epoch-making journeys" to Egypt and the West is being marked at this time. Tirelessly, He expounded the teachings in every social space: in homes and mission halls, churches and synagogues, parks and public squares, railway carriages and ocean liners, clubs and societies, schools and universities. Uncompromising in defence of the truth, yet infinitely gentle in manner, He brought the universal divine principles to bear on the exigencies of the age. To all without distinction—officials, scientists, workers, children, parents, exiles, activists, clerics, sceptics—He imparted love, wisdom, comfort, whatever the particular need. While elevating their souls, He challenged their assumptions, reoriented their perspectives, expanded their consciousness, and focused their energies. He demonstrated by word and deed such compassion and generosity that hearts were utterly transformed. No one was turned away. Our great hope is that frequent recollection, during this centennial period, of the Master's matchless record will inspire and fortify His sincere admirers. Set His example before your eyes and fix your gaze upon it; let it be your instinctive guide in your pursuit of the aim of the Plan.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2011.

15.8 The Accumulating Bahá'í Experience

At this crucial point in the unfoldment of the Plan, when so many clusters are nearing such a stage, it seems appropriate that the friends everywhere would reflect on the nature of the contributions which their growing, vibrant communities will make to the material and spiritual progress of society. In this respect, it will prove fruitful to think in terms of two interconnected, mutually reinforcing areas of

activity: involvement in social action and participation in the prevalent discourses of society.

Over the decades, the Bahá'í community has gained much experience in these two areas of endeavour. There are, of course, a great many Bahá'ís who are engaged as individuals in social action and public discourse through their occupations. A number of non-governmental organizations, inspired by the teachings of the Faith and operating at the regional and national levels, are working in the field of social and economic development for the betterment of their people. Agencies of National Spiritual Assemblies are contributing through various avenues to the promotion of ideas conducive to public welfare. At the international level, agencies such as the United Nations Office of the Bahá'í International Community are performing a similar function. To the extent necessary and desirable, the friends working at the grassroots of the community will draw on this experience and capacity as they strive to address the concerns of the society around them.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2010.

A phenomenon that has gathered force as the century draws to its end is that the people of the world have arisen to express their aspirations through what has come to be known as the "organizations of civil society." It must be a source of great satisfaction to Bahá'ís everywhere that the Bahá'í International Community as an NGO representing a cross-section of humankind has won such trust as a unifying agent in major discussions shaping the future of humankind. Our principal representative at the United Nations was appointed to co-chair a committee of non-governmental organizations—a position that is giving the Bahá'í International Community a leading role in the organization of the Millennium Forum. This gathering, called by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and scheduled to be held in May, will give organizations of civil society an opportunity to formulate views and recommendations on global issues which will be taken up at the subsequent Millennium Summit in September of this year to be attended by heads of state and government.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2000, *Messages1986-2001*, para. 331.19, p. 723.

During the past year, as this pattern of growth became more firmly rooted in the operation of the Plan, other important developments were taking place. In the arena of external affairs, agencies of the Bahá'í International Community engaged in activities too numerous and varied to describe here, but of a collective effect too impressive to let pass without some mention. The highlight of such activities was the message we addressed last April to the world's religious leaders. This has given a fresh impulse to the approach being taken by the Bahá'í community to call the attention of the most influential elements of society to issues of critical importance to ensuring the peace of the world. Through the coordinating efforts of the Bahá'í International Community's Office of Public Information and the prompt efficiency of National Spiritual Assemblies, the message was distributed in a short time to the topmost ranks and other echelons of religious communities across the globe. The purpose of the initiative is to bring to the attention of all concerned the urgent need for religious leadership to address the problem of religious prejudice, which

is becoming a steadily more serious danger to human well-being. The immediate reactions from many recipients indicate that the message is being seriously *regarded and is even in* some places lending new perspective to interfaith activities.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2003.

... the processes of successive Plans have refined the community's ability to participate in prevalent discourses in every space where they occur—from personal conversations to international forums. At the grassroots, involvement in this kind of endeavour builds naturally, through the same organic approach that characterizes the steady increase of the friends' engagement in social action, and no special attempt to stimulate it is necessary. At the national level, however, it is more often becoming the focus of attention for these same dedicated agencies already functioning in dozens of national communities, and it is proceeding according to the familiar and fruitful pattern of action, reflection, consultation, and study. To enhance such efforts, to facilitate learning in this domain, and to ensure that steps taken are coherent with the other endeavours of the Bahá'í community, we have recently established at the Bahá'í World Centre the Office of Public Discourse. We will call on it to assist National Spiritual Assemblies in this field by gradually promoting and coordinating activities and systematizing experience.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2013.

15.9 Discussions Based on Both Science and Religion

On the matter of climate change and other vital issues with profound implications for the common good, Bahá'ís have to avoid being drawn into the all too common tendencies evident in contemporary discourse to delineate sharp dichotomies, become ensnared in contests for power, and engage in intractable debate that obstructs the search for viable solutions to the world's problems. Humanity would be best and most effectively served by setting aside partisan disputation, pursuing united action that is informed by the best available scientific evidence and grounded in spiritual principles, and thoughtfully revising action in the light of experience. The incessant focus on generating and magnifying points of difference rather than building upon points of agreement leads to exaggeration that fuels anger and confusion, thereby diminishing the will and capacity to act on matters of vital concern.

One of the most pressing problems of humanity in the current century is how a growing, rapidly developing, and not yet united global population can, in a just manner, live in harmony with the planet and its finite resources. Certain biological realities present themselves when an organism negatively affects or exceeds the capacity of its ecosystem. The limited availability and inequitable distribution of resources profoundly impact social relations within and between nations in many ways, even to the point of precipitating upheaval and war. And particular arrangements of human affairs can have devastating consequences for the environment. The question of the impact of climate change, and to what extent it is man-made and its effects can be ameliorated, is today a major aspect of this larger problem. The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh directly and indirectly touches on a range of such concerns in a manner that speaks to a harmony between society and the

natural world. It is essential, therefore, that Bahá'ís contribute to thought and action regarding such matters.

Among the Bahá'í teachings are those concerning the importance of science. "Great indeed is the claim of scientists … on the peoples of the world," Bahá'u'lláh observed. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote that the "sciences of today are bridges to reality" and repeatedly emphasized that "religion must be in conformity with science and reason." Significantly, on an occasion when a scientific question was asked of Shoghi Effendi, he responded in a letter written on his behalf that "we are a religion and not qualified to pass on scientific matters." And in reply to scientific issues raised on a number of occasions, he consistently advised Bahá'ís that such matters would need to be investigated by scientists…

… More than a century ago, 'Abdu'l-Bahá referred to "unity of thought in world undertakings, the consummation of which will erelong be witnessed." The recently adopted international agreement on climate change, irrespective of any shortcomings and limitations it may have, offers another noteworthy demonstration of that development anticipated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The agreement represents a starting point for constructive thought and action that can be refined or revised on the basis of experience and new findings over time.

While as a fundamental principle Bahá'ís do not engage in partisan political affairs, this should not be interpreted in a manner that prevents the friends from full and active participation in the search for solutions to the pressing problems facing humanity. Given that the question of climate change gives rise to social, economic, and environmental concerns across the world, interested Bahá'ís and Bahá'í institutions and agencies have naturally addressed it, whether at local, regional, national, or international levels. However, this does not mean that conclusions about scientific findings on climate change associated with such initiatives should be construed or presented as matters of religious conviction or obligation. Different Bahá'ís will, given their range of backgrounds, understand ideas about science and climate change in different ways and feel impelled to act differently, and there is no obligation for them to have uniformity of thought in such matters. Whenever Bahá'ís do participate in activities associated with this topic in the wider society, they can help to contribute to a constructive process by elevating the discourse above partisan concerns and self-interest to strive to achieve unity of thought and action.

Also relevant to such participation is greater appreciation and application of Bahá'u'lláh's insights on moderation. "It behoveth a prudent man of wisdom to speak with utmost leniency and forbearance so that the sweetness of his words may induce everyone to attain that which befitteth man's station…" A moderate perspective is a practical and principled standpoint from which one can recognize and adopt valid and insightful ideas whatever their source, without prejudice. "Whoso cleaveth to justice, can, under no circumstances, transgress the limits of moderation," Bahá'u'lláh states. "He discerneth the truth in all things, through the guidance of Him Who is the All-Seeing."

The House of Justice trusts that, in pursuing the many facets of their work of community building, social action, and involvement in the discourses of society, individuals, communities, and institutions will continually grow in their capacity

to make a distinctive and effective contribution to addressing the multitudinous problems afflicting society and the planet, including those associated with climate change.

The Universal House of Justice, 29 November 2017.

15.10 Avoiding Unproductive Discourses Related to the Forces of Disintegration[1]

You express concern about the challenge Bahá'ís encounter in understanding and upholding the Teachings in the face of powerful social forces influencing public attitudes towards homosexuality. In this connection, you observe that some Bahá'ís are susceptible to the argument that the Faith must change to keep up with what are perceived to be progressive social values, while some others, despite their firm adherence to the Teachings, are unable to resolve the incongruity between the Bahá'í perspective and attitudes prevailing in the wider society. Your thoughtful analysis of the issues you raise is warmly appreciated.

The contemporary discussion surrounding homosexuality, which began in the West and is increasingly promoted in other parts of the world, generally takes the form of a false dichotomy, which compels one to choose between a position that is either affirming or rejecting. It is understandable that Bahá'ís would be sensitive to acts of prejudice or oppression in any form and to the needs of those who suffer as a result. But to align with either side in the public debate is to accept the premises on which it is based. Moreover, this debate occurs within the context of a rising tide of materialism and consequent reorientation of society, over more than a century, which has among its outcomes a destructive emphasis on sexuality. Various philosophies and theories have eroded precepts of right and wrong that govern personal behavior. For some, relativism reigns and individuals are to determine their own moral preferences; others dismiss the very conception of personal morality, maintaining that any standard that restrains what is considered a natural impulse is harmful to the individual and ultimately to society. Self-indulgence, in the guise of expressing one's true nature, becomes the norm, even the touchstone of healthy living. Consequently, sexuality has become a preoccupation, pervading commerce, media, the arts, and popular culture, influencing disciplines such as medicine, psychology, and education and reducing the human being to an object. It is no longer merely a part of life, but becomes the defining element of a person's identity. At its most extreme, the doctrine aggressively propagated in some societies is that it is abnormal for adolescents to restrain their sexual impulses, unreasonable for young adults to marry without first having had sexual relations, and impossible for a married couple to remain monogamous. The unbounded expression of sexuality in almost any form is thought to be natural and is accepted as a matter of course, the only limitation being to cause no harm to others, while any notion to the contrary is deemed narrow-minded or retrogressive. The question of same-sex marriage arises not simply as an appeal for fairness within a framework of existing values but as another step, presumed to be inevitable, in clearing away the vestiges of what is regarded to be a repressive traditional morality.

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1 *See also 14.15-14.16*

The perspective presented in the Bahá'í writings departs sharply from the pattern of thought achieving ascendancy in many societies. Bahá'u'lláh states that the knowledge of God is revealed through His Manifestation, Who has an innate awareness of the human condition and the social order, and Whose purpose is to set forth such precepts as will effect a profound transformation in both the inner life and external conditions of humankind. "No man, however acute his perception," He affirms, "can ever hope to reach the heights which the wisdom and understanding of the Divine Physician have attained." 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that the human being has two natures, the spiritual or higher nature and the material or lower nature, and that the purpose of life is to gain mastery over the limitations and promptings of one's material nature and to cultivate spiritual qualities and virtues - the attributes of the soul which constitute one's true and abiding identity. Worldly desire is not the essence of a human being, but a veil that obscures it. Adherence to the Teachings of the Divine Educator refines the character and develops the potentialities with which each person is endowed; it liberates the individual and society from lower inclinations that give rise to the ills that afflict humanity.

'Abdu'l-Bahá highlights the distinction between the two worldviews outlined above by contrasting "the political freedom of Europeans, which leaves the individual free to do whatsoever he desires as long as his action does not harm his neighbor" with the freedom "born of obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Almighty." "In the religion of God, there is no freedom of action outside the law of God," 'Abdu'l-Bahá concludes. "Man may not transgress this law, even though no harm is inflicted on one's neighbor. This is because the purpose of Divine law is the education of all — others as well as oneself — and, in the sight of God, the harm done to one individual or to his neighbor is the same and is reprehensible in both cases." Thus, for Bahá'ís, just as the development of a strong and healthy body requires adherence to sound physical practices and disciplines, so too, the refinement of character requires effort to act within the framework of moral principles delineated by the Manifestation of God.

While Bahá'ís hold specific beliefs about human identity, sexuality, personal morality, and individual and social transformation, they also believe that individuals must be free to investigate truth and should not be coerced. They are, therefore, enjoined to be tolerant of those whose views differ from their own, not to judge others according to their own standards, and not to attempt to impose these standards on society. To regard a person who has a homosexual orientation with prejudice or disdain is entirely against the spirit of the Faith. And where occasion demands, it would be appropriate to speak out or act against unjust or oppressive measures directed towards homosexuals.

The House of Justice feels it would be ill-advised to engage in discussions intended to convince those who do not accept the station of Bahá'u'lláh that their views are erroneous; such an effort would ultimately prove fruitless. Shoghi Effendi counseled the friends "to have neither concern for, nor involvement in, the controversies of politicians, the wranglings of theologians or any of the ailing social theories current amongst men." The response of the Bahá'í community to the challenges facing humanity lies not in combating specific issues one by one but rather in making efforts

to uplift the vision of their compatriots and to work with them for the betterment of the world. In their involvement in society at all levels, the friends should distinguish between those discourses associated with forces of disintegration, such as those which overemphasize sexuality, where involvement would be unproductive, and those associated with forces of integration, whose aim is unity and the collaborative resolution of social ills, to which they can constructively contribute. They should be mindful that the divisive issues of the day, diametrically opposed to the Teachings but often presented in the guise of truth or progress, exert themselves upon the Bahá'í community and can at times result in those "severe mental tests" that the writings state would "inevitably sweep over His loved ones of the West — tests that would purge, purify and prepare them for their noble mission in life."

The Universal House of Justice, 9 May 2014, to an individual believer.

15.11 Prioritising Discourses Building Unity and Peace[2]

For many decades following the second great war of the twentieth century, humanity moved, with fits and starts, toward the promise of a united world. The failure to complete the project of the unification of nations, however, left gaps in relations in which supranational problems could fester and threaten the security and well-being of peoples and states, leading to a recrudescence of prejudice, of divers expressions of factionalism, and of virulent nationalism that are the very negation of Bahá'u'lláh's message of peace and oneness.

One of the current features of the process of the disintegration of the old world order manifest in the United States is the increasing polarization and fragmentation that has come to characterize so much of political and social life. There has been a hardening of viewpoints, increased incivility, an unwillingness to compromise or even entertain differing perspectives, and a tendency to automatically take sides and fight. Science and religion, two great lights that should guide human progress, are often compromised or swept aside. Matters of moral principle and questions of justice are reduced to intractable liberal or conservative viewpoints, and the country is increasingly divided along divergent lines. In this context, the friends have to hold steadfastly to the Bahá'í teachings and consultative methods and not allow their pursuit of noble aims and high aspirations to draw them into one side or the other of fruitless debates and contentious processes…

In a recent letter written on its behalf, the House of Justice explained to your National Assembly that the scope of the Five Year Plan offers ample opportunities for believers to address the social concerns of their communities and society as a whole. The Plan's activities for sustained growth and community building lie at the heart of a broad scheme for social transformation. The friends are called to three simultaneous, overlapping, and coherent areas of action: community-building efforts in clusters; projects and activities for social action; and involvement in the discourses of society, whether in neighborhoods or in personal or professional associations. An assessment of the efforts of Bahá'ís across the United States will reveal that there is already an army of believers working in all strata of society to

[2] *See also 14.13*

promote the Bahá'í teachings and combat the spiritual and social ills afflicting their country. As the learning process that has proven to be so effective in the expansion and consolidation work worldwide is increasingly employed in all endeavors, the capacity of individuals, communities, and institutions to apply Bahá'u'lláh's healing remedy to achieve profound and lasting change will become ever more pronounced, assisting the nation along the path of its destiny.

The Universal House of Justice, 27 April 2017.

Another area to which the Bahá'í community has been giving a progressively greater share of attention is participation in discourses which have a significant bearing on the well-being of humanity. Its efforts in this regard have been directed towards engaging in conversations in a widening range of spaces at the international and national levels, working shoulder to shoulder with like-minded organizations and individuals, seeking, where possible, to stimulate consultative processes and draw out underlying principles around which agreement and mutual understanding can be built. A number of these discourses, such as those on the role of religion in society, religious coexistence, and freedom of religion or belief, directly address the imperative of overcoming the challenge of religious prejudice.

In this light, the Bahá'í community has particularly been a vigorous promoter of interfaith activities since the time of their inception, working alongside others to increase understanding and cooperation among religions. The achievements of the interfaith movement were highlighted in a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the world's religious leaders in April 2002. The letter also emphasized that the efforts of the movement to date, however constructive, were not sufficient to effectively address the growing challenge posed by religious prejudice and fanaticism; more was required. "With every day that passes," the letter stated "danger grows that the rising fires of religious prejudice will ignite a worldwide conflagration the consequences of which are unthinkable", and the House of Justice urged earnest consideration of the challenge this poses for religious leadership.

Fundamentally, a great share of the Bahá'í community's efforts has been directed at addressing the root cause of religious prejudice—ignorance. "The perpetuation of ignorance", the House of Justice has stated, "is a most grievous form of oppression; it reinforces the many walls of prejudice that stand as barriers to the realization of the oneness of humankind.... Access to knowledge is the right of every human being, and participation in its generation, application and diffusion a responsibility that all must shoulder in the great enterprise of building a prosperous world civilization—each individual according to his or her talents and abilities." This orientation has particularly manifested itself in the Bahá'í community's focus on education, which has been a central concern since the inception of the Faith; in its efforts to foster in individuals a growing consciousness and capacity to recognize prejudice and to counter it; in its practice of using consultative processes in all its affairs; and in its commitment to and upholding of the dual knowledge systems of science and religion as being necessary for the advancement of civilization. Moreover, the development of the life of the mind and independent investigation of reality, which are highly prized in the Bahá'í writings, serve to equip individuals to distinguish truth from falsehood, which is so essential if prejudices, superstitious beliefs, and outworn

traditions that impede unity are to be eliminated. 'Abdu'l-Bahá offers the assurance in this respect that "once every soul inquireth into truth, society will be freed from the darkness of continually repeating the past."

The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 27 December 2017.

As the work of community building intensifies, the friends are using the new capacities they have developed to improve conditions in the society around them, their enthusiasm kindled by their study of the divine teachings. Short-term projects have soared in number, formal programmes have expanded their reach, and there are now more Bahá'í-inspired development organizations engaged in education, health, agriculture, and other areas. From the resulting transformation visible in the individual and collective lives of peoples may be discerned the unmistakable stirrings of the society-building power of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. No wonder, then, that it is from such instances of social action—whether simple or complex, of fixed duration or long sustained—that the Offices of the Bahá'í International Community are increasingly taking inspiration in their efforts to participate in the prevalent discourses of society. This is another important field of endeavour for the Faith that has advanced well. At the national level, contributions to discourses that are meaningful to that society—the equality of men and women, migration and integration, the role of youth in social transformation, and religious coexistence, among others—are being made with growing confidence, proficiency, and insight. And wherever they live, work, or study, believers of all ages and backgrounds are making valued contributions to particular discourses, bringing to the attention of those around them a principled perspective shaped by Bahá'u'lláh's vast Revelation.

The Faith's standing in various spaces in which discourses unfold has been much enhanced by its official presence on the World Wide Web, a presence which has expanded considerably through the launch of numerous national Bahá'í websites and the further development of the family of sites associated with Bahai.org.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2018.

The friends are also developing their capacity for engaging those around them, regardless of creed, culture, class, or ethnicity, in conversations about how to bring about spiritual and material well-being through systematic application of the divine teachings. One gratifying result of this growing capacity is the community's increased ability to make meaningful contributions to various important discourses prevalent in society; in certain countries, leaders and thinkers striving to address the challenges confronting their societies increasingly show appreciation for the perspectives offered by Bahá'ís. These contributions articulate insights derived from Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, draw on the experience being generated by the believers around the world, and aim to elevate the discussion above the acrimony and contention that so often prevent discourses of society from progressing. Further, the ideas and lines of reasoning advanced by Bahá'ís are reinforced by their practice of consultation. Sensitized as they are to the importance of harmony and the fruitlessness of conflict, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh seek to cultivate those conditions that are most conducive to the emergence of unity in any setting. We are

heartened to see the believers expanding their efforts to participate in the discourses of society—especially those friends who, in their professional capacity, are able to contribute to discourses directly related to peace.

The Universal House of Justice, 18 January 2019.

15.12 Participating in Social Media while Avoiding Partisan Politics

One conspicuous symptom of society's deepening malaise is the steady descent of public discourse into greater rancour and enmity, reflecting entrenched partisan points of view. A prevalent feature of such contemporary discourse is how political disagreements rapidly degenerate into invective and ridicule. However, what particularly differentiates the present age from those that preceded it is how so much of this discourse occurs in full view of the world. Social media and related communication tools tend to give the greatest exposure to all that is controversial, and the very same tools allow individuals, in an instant, to disseminate more widely whatever catches their attention and to register their support or opposition to various sentiments, whether explicitly or tacitly. The unparalleled ease with which a person can join in such public debate and the nature of the technology make momentary lapses of judgement and incautious actions more likely and their residue more enduring.

This holds particular implications for Bahá'ís, who know well that the principles of their Faith require them to refrain from involvement in political controversies and conflicts of all kinds. "Speak thou no word of politics" was the counsel of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to one believer, adding, "Except to speak well of them, make thou no mention of the earth's kings, and the worldly governments thereof." Shoghi Effendi warned against allowing our vision of the Cause to be clouded "by the stain and dust of worldly happenings, which, no matter how glittering and far-reaching in their immediate effects, are but the fleeting shadows of an imperfect world". While the importance of keeping at a distance from all politically divisive issues is well known to the friends, their engagement with pressing social issues, motivated by a commendable and sincere wish to be of service to those around them, can present them with difficult situations. An unexpected development can turn an uncontroversial issue into one that divides people along partisan lines, and some of the same unhealthy modes of expression that are common to the political sphere can transfer into other areas of discourse. Especially in the uninhibited realm of social media, wrongs—both real and imagined—are quickly magnified, and a variety of feelings are easily stirred: righteous indignation perhaps, or a desire to promote one's point of view, or an eagerness to be seen as the source of new information. Much that is taken to be harmless, or even well-intentioned, is, on closer examination, serving to deepen social divides, fuel differences between opposing groups, and perpetuate disagreements, driving away possibilities for consensus and the search for solutions. If one person's contribution seems provocative or objectionable, reacting to it may have the effect of unwittingly strengthening and increasing the exposure of the original sentiment, and exacerbating matters. The followers of the Blessed Beauty must be conscious and conscientious users of any technology they decide to utilize and must apply

insight and spiritual discipline. They should look to the lofty standards of the Cause to guide them at all times in the way they express themselves. Bahá'u'lláh states:

Every word is endowed with a spirit, therefore the speaker or expounder should carefully deliver his words at the appropriate time and place, for the impression which each word maketh is clearly evident and perceptible. The Great Being saith: One word may be likened unto fire, another unto light, and the influence which both exert is manifest in the world.

It will be apparent that the precepts the friends observe in the course of their general interactions with those around them must also characterize, sometimes even more scrupulously, their communication carried out via social media. These precepts include the prohibition on backbiting, the counsel to see the world with their own eyes and not through the eyes of others, the need to uphold the oneness of humanity and avoid a mind-set of "us" and "them", and the principles of consultation and the necessary decorum associated with it.

The friends will occasionally come across instances when their fellow believers have made comments or circulated the comments of others in ways that seem unwise, or imprudent, when judged against the standards set out in the Bahá'í Writings. It would be wrong, when encountering postings of this kind, to conclude that such behaviour must therefore be unobjectionable, condoned, or even encouraged. Not infrequently, Bahá'í institutions have had to counsel individuals about their actions online, although wherever possible they do so with discretion, out of respect for the dignity of the persons in question.

One example among many areas in which the considerations set out above are relevant is the discussion on social media of matters pertaining to Iran. As will be readily appreciated, this is an area of particular sensitivity, and therefore the friends need to be especially on their guard. Rash statements made online could endanger the believers in that land or unwittingly provide the enemies of the Cause with the means to misrepresent the Bahá'ís. Observing strict caution in this respect is essential for the protection of the sorely tried community in Iran.

The Universal House of Justice, 1 December 2019.

15.13 The Role of Bahá'í Scholarship

The spiritually learned are lamps of guidance among the nations, and stars of good fortune shining from the horizons of humankind. ...

For every thing, however, God has created a sign and symbol, and established standards and tests by which it may be known. The spiritually learned must be characterized by both inward and outward perfections; they must possess a good character, an enlightened nature, a pure intent, as well as intellectual power, brilliance and discernment, intuition, discretion and foresight, temperance, reverence, and a heartfelt fear of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*.

The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp

of the Teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Importance of Deepening, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 495, p. 226.

It seems what we need now is a more profound and co-ordinated Bahá'í scholarship in order to attract such men as you are contacting. The world has—at least the thinking world—caught up by now with all the great and universal principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh over 70 years ago, and so of course it does not sound "new" to them. But we know that the deeper teachings, the capacity of His projected World Order to re-create society, are new and dynamic. It is these we must learn to present intelligently and enticingly to such men!

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, in The Importance of Deepening, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 510, p. 230.

As the Bahá'í community grows it will acquire experts in numerous fields—both by Bahá'ís becoming experts and by experts becoming Bahá'ís. As these experts bring their knowledge and skill to the service of the community and, even more, as they transform their various disciplines by bringing to bear upon them the light of the Divine Teachings, problem after problem now disrupting society will be answered. In such developments they should strive to make the utmost use of non-Bahá'í resources and should collaborate fully with non-Bahá'ís who are working in the same fields. Such collaboration will, in the long run, be of far more benefit than any attempt now to treat such scientific endeavours as specifically Bahá'í projects operating under Bahá'í institutions and financed by investment of Bahá'í funds.

Paralleling this process, Bahá'í institutional life will also be developing, and as it does so the Assemblies will draw increasingly upon scientific and expert knowledge—whether of Bahá'ís or of non-Bahá'ís—to assist in solving the problems of their communities.

In time great Bahá'í institutions of learning, great international and national projects for the betterment of human life will be inaugurated and flourish.

The Universal House of Justice, 21 August 1977, *Messages 1963–1986*, paras. 195.6–195.8, pp. 369–370.

The House of Justice feels that Bahá'í scholars must beware of the temptations of intellectual pride. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has warned the friends in the West that they would be subjected to intellectual tests, and the Guardian reminded them of this warning. There are many aspects of western thinking which have been exalted to a status of unassailable principle in the general mind, that time may well show to have been erroneous or, at least, only partially true. Any Bahá'í who rises to eminence in academic circles will be exposed to the powerful influence of such thinking. One of the problems of modern times is the degree to which the different disciplines have become specialized and isolated from one another. Thinkers are now faced with a challenge to achieve a synthesis, or at least a coherent correlation, of the vast amount of knowledge that has been acquired during the past century. The Bahá'ís must be aware of this factor and of the moderation and all-embracing nature of this

Revelation. In a letter written on 5 July 1947 to an individual believer the Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf:

> "One might liken Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to a sphere; there are points poles apart, and in between the thoughts and doctrines that unite them. We believe in balance in all things; we believe in moderation in all things—we must not be too emotional, nor cut and dried and lacking in feeling, we must not be so liberal as to cease to preserve the character and unity of our Bahá'í system, nor fanatical and dogmatic."

In the application of the social laws of the Faith, most of the difficulties can be seen to arise not only from outright disobedience, but also from the actions of those who, while careful to observe the letter of the law, try to go as far as it will permit them away from the spirit which lies at its heart. A similar tendency can be noted among some Bahá'í scholars.

The great advances in knowledge and understanding in the vital field of Bahá'í scholarship will be made by those who, while well versed in their subjects and adhering to the principles of research, are also thoroughly imbued with love for the Faith and the determination to grow in the comprehension of its teachings.

The Universal House of Justice, 23 March 1983,
in *Bahá'í Scholarship: A Compilation and Essays*, pp. 17–18.

... individual interpretation is considered the fruit of man's rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, provided that no disputes or arguments arise among the friends and the individual himself understands and makes it clear that his views are merely his own. Individual interpretations continually change as one grows in comprehension of the teachings. ... although individual insights can be enlightening and helpful, they can also be misleading. The friends must therefore learn to listen to the views of others without being overawed or allowing their faith to be shaken, and to express their own views without pressing them on their fellow Bahá'ís.

The Universal House of Justice, 27 May 1966, *Messages 1963–1986*, para. 35.13, p. 88.

The combination of absolute loyalty to the Manifestation of God and His Teachings, with the searching and intelligent study of the Teachings and history of the Faith which those Teachings themselves enjoin, is a particular strength of this Dispensation. In past Dispensations the believers have tended to divide into two mutually antagonistic groups: those who held blindly to the letter of the Revelation, and those who questioned and doubted everything. Like all extremes, both [of] these can lead into error. The beloved Guardian has written that "The Bahá'í Faith ... enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth ...." Bahá'ís are called upon to follow the Faith with intelligence and understanding. Inevitably believers will commit errors as they strive to rise to this degree of maturity, and this calls for forbearance and humility on the part of all concerned, so that such matters do not cause disunity or discord among the friends.

The Universal House of Justice, 7 October 1980,
in *Bahá'í Scholarship: A Compilation and Essays*, p. 34.

From the passage of the Guardian's writings dealing with the attributes to which a Bahá'í scholar should aspire, it is evident that Bahá'í scholarship is an endeavour accessible to all members of the Bahá'í community, without exception. All believers can aspire to the attributes described by the Guardian, and can strive to relate the Bahá'í teachings to the thinking and concerns of the non-Bahá'í population around them. You can perform a valuable service in bringing this potential role to the attention of all the believers—including those who may lack formal education, and those who dwell in remote areas, villages and islands—and to discourage any thought that Bahá'í scholarship is an activity open only to those who are highly educated or who are pursuing an academic career.

International Teaching Centre, *Bahá'í Scholarship: A Compilation and Essays*, pp. 31–32.

Both the Auxiliary Board member for Protection and the Auxiliary Board member for Propagation take it upon themselves to ensure that proper attention is devoted to the various components of the community... They nurture the habits of scholarship among the friends and the spirit of tolerance that it needs in order to flourish. They keep before everyone's eyes the imperative of the spiritual education of children and do everything in their power to help establish and maintain regular classes for the children. And, with complete confidence in the capacity of youth for heroic service to the Cause, they assist them in realizing their full potential as vital agents for the expansion of the Faith and the transformation of society.

The Universal House of Justice, *The Institution of the Counsellors*, 2001, p. 22.

15.14 The Association for Bahá'í Studies

The House of Justice advises you not to attempt to define too narrowly the form that Bahá'í scholarship should take, or the approach that scholars should adopt. Rather should you strive to develop within your Association respect for a wide range of approaches and endeavours. No doubt there will be some Bahá'ís who will wish to work in isolation, while others will desire consultation and collaboration with those having similar interests. Your aim should be to promote an atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance within which will be included scholars whose principal interest is in theological issues as well as those scholars whose interests lie in relating the insights provided by the Bahá'í teachings to contemporary thought in the arts and sciences.

A similar diversity should characterize the endeavours pursued by Bahá'í scholars, accommodating their interests and skills as well as the needs of the Faith. The course of world events, the development of new trends of thought and the extension of the teaching work all tend to highlight attractive and beneficial areas to which Bahá'í scholars might well direct their attention. Likewise, the expansion of the activities of the Bahá'í International Community in its relationship with United Nations agencies and other international bodies creates attractive opportunities for scholars to make a direct and highly valued contribution to the enhancement of the prestige of the Faith and to its proclamation within an influential and receptive stratum of society. As the Bahá'í community continues to emerge inexorably from

obscurity, it will be confronted by enemies, from both within and without, whose aim will be to malign and misrepresent its principles, so that its admirers might be disillusioned and the faith of its adherents might be shaken; Bahá'í scholars have a vital role to play in the defence of the Faith through their contribution to anticipatory measures and their response to defamatory accusations levelled against the Faith.

The Universal House of Justice, 23 January 1991,
in *Bahá'í Scholarship: A Compilation and Essays*, pp. 23–24.

Since its establishment in North America in 1975, the Association for Bahá'í Studies has made a valued contribution to the development of the Bahá'í community, and gradually, a network of chapters or related structures devoted to promoting scholarly activity emerged in different parts of the world…

The House of Justice has observed that Bahá'ís will increasingly become involved in the discourses of society within clusters where the process of growth rises in intensity and at the national level, on topics selected by the National Assembly. At the same time, it noted that there are "a great many Bahá'ís who are engaged as individuals in social action and public discourse through their occupations". Every believer has the opportunity to examine the forces operating in society and introduce relevant aspects of the teachings within the discourses prevalent in whatever social space he or she is present. It is, perhaps, as a means to enhance the abilities of the friends to explore such opportunities in relation to their scholarly interests that the endeavours of the Association for Bahá'í Studies can be conceived. Through the specialized settings it creates, the Association can promote learning among a wide range of believers across a wide range of disciplines…

Bahá'ís who are involved in various disciplines—economics, education, history, social science, philosophy, and many others—are obviously conversant and fully engaged with the methods employed in their fields. It is they who have the responsibility to earnestly strive to reflect on the implications that the truths found in the Revelation may hold for their work. The principle of the harmony of science and religion, faithfully upheld, will ensure that religious belief does not succumb to superstition and that scientific findings are not appropriated by materialism. The friends who seek to excel in scholarly activity will, of course, strive to live up to the high expectations set forth by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Whatever the extent of their achievements, they are an integral part of the community; they are not exempt from obligations placed upon any believer and, at the same time, deserve the community's understanding, forbearance, support, and respect.

As unity of thought around essential concepts emerges, the Association may find it useful to explore fresh approaches with some simple steps that can grow in complexity. Gradually, those aspects of the conceptual framework pertaining to intellectual inquiry in diverse fields will become clearer and grow richer. For example, a number of small seminars could be held to assist

individuals from certain professions or academic disciplines to examine some aspect of the discourse of their field. Specific topics could be selected, and a group of participants with experience could share articles, prepare papers, and consult on contemporary perspectives and related Bahá'í concepts. Special interest groups, such as philosophy or religious studies, could have gatherings to intensify their efforts. Periodic communications or follow-up meetings could be arranged to increase the effectiveness of the participation of these groups of individuals in aspects of the discourse in their chosen fields. Focus could also be directed toward those areas in the academic literature pertaining to the Faith that are ignored or dealt with in a misleading or problematic manner. In addition, existing activities, such as the hosting of a large conference, may be reimagined. Of course, continued exertions must be directed toward preparing and disseminating articles, periodicals, and books...

The House of Justice looks to rising generations of Bahá'ís to wholeheartedly address a wide range of intellectual challenges, overcome all pitfalls and obstacles, and render service for the betterment of the world. In the decades ahead, then, a host of believers will enter diverse social spaces and fields of human endeavour. To this arena, pregnant with possibilities, the Association for Bahá'í Studies can offer an important contribution.

The Universal House of Justice, 24 July 2013.

15.15 The Process of Bahá'í Review

The House of Justice suggests that you consider the following steps through which the scholars of the Faith can overcome the problems which some of them perceive as presented by review of their publications.

- Let them accept unreservedly that 'Abdu'l-Bahá was right in instituting the temporary system of review, and that the decisions of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice to not yet eliminate the system are in accordance with the Divine will.
- Let them recognize the fundamental difference between errors propagated by Bahá'ís from those issuing from non-Bahá'í sources. The review system is not an attempt to prevent errors or attacks on the Faith from being published; it is an attempt to prevent Bahá'ís from promulgating them in their published writings.
- Let them strive to understand the wisdom of this policy and its true nature, and to present it in its proper light to their fellow-academics ...
- Let Bahá'í scholars look upon their fellow Bahá'ís with trust and affection, not with disdain as to their qualifications and suspicion as to their motives. Let them regard them as devoted Bahá'ís striving to perform a service which the policies of the Faith require of them. And let them not hesitate to discuss openly with such reviewers the points which they raise. If it appears that a National Spiritual Assembly does not permit such open discussion, let them appeal to the Universal House of Justice for clarification of the situation. It is well understood by the Universal House of Justice that in some cases the process of review works inefficiently and with problems. These deficiencies

could be overcome if the scholars themselves would collaborate with the process and openly raise questions about its functioning, rather than fostering an atmosphere of antagonism and mutual distrust.

- If the question of review is raised by non-Bahá'í academics, let the Bahá'í academics say that in this early stage in the development of the Faith this is a species of peer review which they welcome, since it is primarily among their fellow-Bahá'ís that they would find at this time those who would have sufficiently wide and deep understanding of the Faith and its Teachings to raise issues of importance which they would want to consider before publication. Of course, to be able to say this with sincerity, the scholars must have been able to accept the other steps mentioned above.

The Universal House of Justice, 23 January 1991,
Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith, pp. 7–8.

15.16 The Internet

The Faith's standing in various spaces in which discourses unfold has been much enhanced by its official presence on the World Wide Web, a presence which has expanded considerably through the launch of numerous national Bahá'í websites and the further development of the family of sites associated with Bahai.org. This has immense value for both the propagation and protection of the Cause… Plans are already far advanced for introducing to the *Bahá'í Reference Library* site a feature that will allow previously untranslated and unpublished passages or Tablets from the Holy Writings to be released online over time. As well as this, new volumes of Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings rendered into English are set to appear in the coming years.

The Universal House of Justice, Riḍván 2018.

The opportunity which electronic communication technology provides for more speedy and thorough consultation among the friends is highly significant. Without doubt, it represents another manifestation of a development eagerly anticipated by the Guardian when he foresaw the creation of "a mechanism of world intercommunication … embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity".

As you well appreciate, the extent to which such technology advances the work of the Faith depends, of course, on the manner in which it is used. As a medium for Bahá'ís to exchange views, it imposes on participants the same requirements of moderation, candour, and courtesy as would be the case in any other discussion …

The ease and relative impersonality of the electronic medium require in some ways an even higher level of self-discipline than is the case in situations where a spirit of unity is reinforced by the opportunity for direct personal contact and social interaction. In the pursuit of such a spirit of unity, Bahá'ís will, without doubt, wish to assist the consultative processes by sharing and discussing relevant Bahá'í texts. This will itself have the further effect of drawing attention back to the framework of Bahá'í belief.

The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 19 May 1995, extract provided.

The House of Justice notes that you have been disturbed by some of the postings made to the email discussion group of which you have recently been a member. Email discussion groups are a new phenomenon; they can provide immense benefits for communication between people and for the teaching of the Faith, but, as you have seen, they can also give rise to far-reaching problems. The use of email requires an adjustment of perception. In the past, discussions among Bahá'ís would take place orally among groups of friends in private, or at summer schools and other Bahá'í events, or in letters between individuals. Inevitably, many erroneous statements were made; not all comments were as temperate as they should have been; many statements were misunderstood by those who heard them. After all, not all Bahá'ís have a profound knowledge of the teachings, and it is clear that even academic eminence is no guarantee of a correct understanding of the Revelation of God. Before email such extravagances had a limited range and were of an ephemeral nature. Now, the same kind of discussion is spread among a hundred or more people, who often do not know one another, is in a form more durable than speech, and can be disseminated to a vast readership at the touch of a button. A new level of self-discipline, therefore, is needed by those who take part. Such discussions among Bahá'ís call for self-restraint and purity of motive as well as cordiality, frankness and openness ...

Thus, if any participant in an email discussion feels that a view put forward appears to contradict or undermine the provisions of the Covenant, he should be free to say so, explaining candidly and courteously why he feels as he does. The person who made the initial statement will then be able to re-evaluate his opinion and, if he still believes it to be valid, he should be able to explain why it is not contrary to either the letter or the spirit of the Covenant. The participants in such a discussion should avoid disputation and, if they are unable to resolve an issue, they should refer the point to the Universal House of Justice since, in accordance with the *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, "By this body all the difficult problems are to be resolved ..." and it has the authority to decide upon "all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure, and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book." In this way the Covenant can illuminate and temper the discourse and make it fruitful.

The Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, 16 February 1996, extract provided.

The Internet makes it possible for Bahá'í and Bahá'í-inspired content to become accessible to a wide audience. In this connection, the House of Justice has encouraged the strengthening of the official Bahá'í presence on the World Wide Web, and it has been pleased to see the many advances made, especially in recent years, and looks forward to the further unfoldment of this process. Beyond that, many believers around the world, each according to his or her circumstances and in coherence with other endeavours of the community, use the Internet as a medium for promoting Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a new World Order, and it is natural for the friends to explore different ways to do so. However, given that the Internet allows for the instantaneous dissemination of content among growing multitudes, wisdom and self-discipline are required lest the significance or dignity of the Teachings become compromised by an unbecoming, inaccurate, or trivialized presentation.

A related consideration is that the institutions of the Faith are charged with the responsibility for creating and maintaining official sources of information about the Faith, such as national and international websites, regularly assessing the presentation of the Faith on the World Wide Web and providing the necessary guidance to individuals. The friends are generally free to determine what aspects of the Teachings they wish to touch upon in their contributions but in doing so should clearly distinguish their sites from those created by the institutions. This can be accomplished through a variety of means, including the name, description, or design of a site. While in the past the friends have at times been encouraged to refrain from using the word "Bahá'í", or forms of it, in the name of their websites, experience has demonstrated that this may not always be necessary if other aspects of the site unmistakably identify it as an individual initiative. In addition, individuals will no doubt wish to avoid a tone that could be perceived as authoritative or instructional. They will also want to steer away from areas that lie exclusively within the sphere of institutional responsibility, such as offering a comprehensive collection of the writings and of the messages of the House of Justice or an exhaustive calendar of Bahá'í events across many countries. This becomes particularly significant when the visibility of a website increases and it gains prominence. As the institutions guide the friends in adopting the proper posture, the aim is not to unduly restrict their efforts but to avoid confusion and misinformation.

Notwithstanding that a site may, of course, be accessed from any part of the world, a Bahá'í who seeks to establish a personal site should determine what would be an appropriate audience to address and the scope of subjects to be covered. For example, while it may be beneficial to reflect on the nature and form of the core activities, especially in the context of the experience of a cluster or region, certain problems arise in attempting to create a site that aims to speak to Bahá'ís worldwide about the subject. Such an approach could lead to the cultural norms and values of a particular population being promoted to a universal audience—a pattern all too prevalent in the world today... The perspectives offered in the following extract from the message dated 12 December 2011 from the House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies—although in the specific context of artistic endeavours and supplementary educational materials—are especially relevant to aspects of culture mentioned above:

...new elements of culture will evolve over time as people hailing from every human group, inspired by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, give expression to patterns of thought and action engendered by His teachings, in part through artistic and literary works.... We long to see, for instance, the emergence of captivating songs from every part of the world, in every language, that will impress upon the consciousness of the young the profound concepts enshrined in the Bahá'í teachings. Yet such an efflorescence of creative thought will fail to materialize, should the friends fall, however inadvertently, into patterns prevalent in the world that give licence to those with financial resources to impose their cultural perspective on others, inundating them with materials and products aggressively promoted.

The Universal House of Justice, 9 October 2015.

We are All Contributing to the Future World Civilization

15.17 A New Day has Already Dawned

Peerless is this Day, for it is as the eye to past ages and centuries, and as a light unto the darkness of the times.

Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

O CHILDREN OF MEN!

Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other. Ponder at all times in your hearts how ye were created. Since We have created you all from one same substance it is incumbent on you to be even as one soul, to walk with the same feet, eat with the same mouth and dwell in the same land, that from your inmost being, by your deeds and actions, the signs of oneness and the essence of detachment may be made manifest. Such is My counsel to you, O concourse of light! Heed ye this counsel that ye may obtain the fruit of holiness from the tree of wondrous glory.

Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic, no. 68.

O friends! Be not careless of the virtues with which ye have been endowed, neither be neglectful of your high destiny... Ye are the stars of the heaven of understanding, the breeze that stirreth at the break of day, the soft-flowing waters upon which must depend the very life of all men...

Bahá'u'lláh, quoted by Shoghi Effendi, *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

O My Letters! Verily I say, immensely exalted is this Day above the days of the Apostles of old. Nay, immeasurable is the difference! You are the witnesses of the Dawn of the promised Day of God... The newly born babe of that Day excels the wisest and most venerable men of this time, and the lowliest and most unlearned of that period shall surpass in understanding the most erudite and accomplished divines of this age.

Words of the Báb to the Letters of the Living, *The Dawn-Breakers*.

15.18 Outline for a World Commonwealth in which All Nations, Races, Creeds and Classes are Closely and Permanently United

The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh will establish a new way of life for humanity. Those who are Bahá'ís must endeavour to establish this way of life just as rapidly as possible... In this way they can demonstrate that the Bahá'í Faith does create a new way of life, which brings to the individual a complete association

with the Will of God, and thus the establishment of a peaceful and universal society. Divisional attachments are of man, while universal service is of God.

The Guardian is now anxious that all the friends achieve a universal consciousness and a universal way of life.

Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, *Lights of Guidance*, No. 1424, p. 434.

No machinery falling short of the standard inculcated by the Bahá'í Revelation, and at variance with the sublime pattern ordained in His teachings, which the collective efforts of mankind may yet devise can ever hope to achieve anything above or beyond that "*Lesser Peace*" to which the Author of our Faith has Himself alluded in His writings. "*Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace,*" He, admonishing the kings and rulers of the earth, has written, "*hold ye fast unto this the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents.*" Expatiating on this Lesser Peace, He thus addresses in that same Tablet the rulers of the earth: "*Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions...*

The Most Great Peace, on the other hand, as conceived by Bahá'u'lláh—a peace that must inevitably follow as the practical consequence of the spiritualisation of the world and the fusion of all its races, creeds, classes and nations—can rest on no other basis, and can be preserved through no other agency, except the divinely appointed ordinances that are implicit in the World Order that stands associated with His Holy Name.

Shoghi Effendi, The Unfoldment of World Civilization, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

The unity of the human race, as envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, implies the establishment of a world commonwealth in which all nations, races, creeds and classes are closely and permanently united, and in which the autonomy of its state members and the personal freedom and initiative of the individuals that compose them are definitely and completely safeguarded. This commonwealth must, as far as we can visualize it, consist of a world legislature, whose members will, as the trustees of the whole of mankind, ultimately control the entire resources of all the component nations, and will enact such laws as shall be required to regulate the life, satisfy the needs and adjust the relationships of all races and peoples. A world executive, backed by an international Force, will carry out the decisions arrived at, and apply the laws enacted by, this world legislature, and will safeguard the organic unity of the whole commonwealth. A world tribunal will adjudicate and deliver its compulsory and final verdict in all and any disputes that may arise between the various elements constituting this universal system. A mechanism of world inter-communication will be devised, embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity. A world metropolis will act as the nerve centre of a world civilization, the focus towards which the unifying forces of life will converge and from which its energizing influences will radiate. A world language will either be invented or chosen from among the existing languages and will be taught in the schools of all the federated nations as an auxiliary to their mother tongue. A world script, a world literature, a

uniform and universal system of currency, of weights and measures, will simplify and facilitate intercourse and understanding among the nations and races of mankind. In such a world society, science and religion, the two most potent forces in human life, will be reconciled, will co-operate, and will harmoniously develop. The press will, under such a system, while giving full scope to the expression of the diversified views and convictions of mankind, cease to be mischievously manipulated by vested interests, whether private or public, and will be liberated from the influence of contending governments and peoples. The economic resources of the world will be organized, its sources of raw materials will be tapped and fully utilized, its markets will be co-ordinated and developed, and the distribution of its products will be equitably regulated.

National rivalries, hatreds, and intrigues will cease, and racial animosity and prejudice will be replaced by racial amity, understanding and co-operation. The causes of religious strife will be permanently removed, economic barriers and restrictions will be completely abolished, and the inordinate distinction between classes will be obliterated. Destitution on the one hand, and gross accumulation of ownership on the other, will disappear. The enormous energy dissipated and wasted on war, whether economic or political, will be consecrated to such ends as will extend the range of human inventions and technical development, to the increase of the productivity of mankind, to the extermination of disease, to the extension of scientific research, to the raising of the standard of physical health, to the sharpening and refinement of the human brain, to the exploitation of the unused and unsuspected resources of the planet, to the prolongation of human life, and to the furtherance of any other agency that can stimulate the intellectual, the moral, and spiritual life of the entire human race.

Shoghi Effendi, The Unfoldment of World Civilization, *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

...The principle of the oneness of humankind implies, then, an organic change in the very structure of society.

What should be stated plainly here is that Bahá'ís do not believe the transformation thus envisioned will come about exclusively through their own efforts. Nor are they trying to create a movement that would seek to impose on society their vision of the future. Every nation and every group—indeed, every individual—will, to a greater or lesser degree, contribute to the emergence of the world civilization towards which humanity is irresistibly moving. Unity will progressively be achieved, as foreshadowed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in different realms of social existence, for instance, "unity in the political realm", "unity of thought in world undertakings", "unity of races" and the "unity of nations". As these come to be realized, the structures of a politically united world, which respects the full diversity of culture and provides channels for the expression of dignity and honour, will gradually take shape.

The Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'í of Iran, 2 March 2013.

15.19 The Preservation of Cultural Diversity

Bahá'ís should obviously be encouraged to preserve their inherited cultural identities, as long as the activities involved do not contravene the principles of the

Faith. The perpetuation of such cultural characteristics is an expression of unity in diversity. Although most of these festive celebrations have no doubt stemmed from religious rituals in bygone ages, the believers should not be deterred from participating in those in which, over the course of time, the religious meaning has given way to purely culturally oriented practices. For example, Naw-Rúz itself was originally a Zoroastrian religious festival, but gradually its Zoroastrian connotation has almost been forgotten. Iránians, even after their conversion to Islám, have been observing it as a national festival. Now Naw-Rúz has become a Bahá'í Holy Day and is being observed throughout the world, but, in addition to the Bahá'í observance, many Iránian Bahá'ís continue to carry out their past cultural traditions in connection with this Feast. Similarly, there are a number of national customs in every part of the world which have cultural rather than religious connotations...

The Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, 26 May 1982, extract provided.

Your letter raises the issue of cultural diversity within the Bahá'í community. The Faith seeks to maintain cultural diversity while promoting the unity of all peoples. Indeed, such diversity will enrich the tapestry of human life in a peaceful world society. The House of Justice supports the view that in every country the cultural traditions of the people should be observed within the Bahá'í community as long as they are not contrary to the Teachings. The general attitude of the Faith towards the traditional practices of various peoples is expressed in the following statement of Shoghi Effendi's, published in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, US 1982 edition, pages 41–42.

> Let there be no misgivings as to the animating purpose of the world-wide Law of Bahá'u'lláh. ... It does not ignore, nor does it attempt to suppress, the diversity of ethnical origins, of climate, of history, of language and tradition, of thought and habit, that differentiate the peoples and nations of the world. ... Its watchword is unity in diversity such as 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself has explained:
>
> "Consider the flowers of a garden. ... Diversity of hues, form and shape enricheth and adorneth the garden, and heighteneth the effect thereof."

Of course, many cultural elements everywhere inevitably will disappear or be merged with related ones from their societies, yet the totality will achieve that promised diversity within world unity. We can expect much cultural diversity in the long period before the emergence of a world commonwealth of nations in the Golden Age of Bahá'u'lláh's new world order. Much wisdom and tolerance will be required, and much time must elapse until the advent of that great day ....

The Universal House of Justice, 25 July 1988.

AFTERWORD…

16.1 Hopes and Promises

No man that seeketh Us will We ever disappoint, neither shall he that hath set his face towards Us be denied access unto Our court …

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXXVI.

It is Our wish and desire that every one of you may become a source of all goodness unto men, and an example of uprightness to mankind… We love to see you at all times consorting in amity and concord within the paradise of My good-pleasure, and to inhale from your acts the fragrance of friendliness and unity, of loving-kindness and fellowship. Thus counselleth you the All-Knowing, the Faithful. We shall always be with you; if We inhale the perfume of your fellowship, Our heart will assuredly rejoice, for naught else can satisfy Us.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CXLVI.

There is no paradise more wondrous for any soul than to be exposed to God's Manifestation in His Day, to hear His verses and believe in them, to attain His presence, which is naught but the presence of God, to sail upon the sea of the heavenly kingdom of His good-pleasure, and to partake of the choice fruits of the paradise of His divine Oneness.

The Báb, Excerpts from the Persian Bayán, *Selections from the Writings of the Báb*.

Therefore do the lovers of the Abhá Beauty wish for no other recompense but to reach that station where they may gaze upon Him in the Realm of Glory, and they walk no other path save over desert sands of longing for those exalted heights. They seek that ease and solace which will abide forever, and those bestowals that are sanctified beyond the understanding of the worldly mind.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, No. 156.

The permanence and stability achieved by any association, group or nation is a result of—and dependent upon—the soundness and worth of the principles upon which it bases the running of its affairs and the direction of its activities. The guiding principles of the Bahá'ís are: honesty, love, charity and trustworthiness; the setting of the common good above private interest; and the practice of godliness, virtue and moderation. Ultimately, then, their preservation and happiness are assured. Whatever misfortunes they may encounter, wrought by the wiles of the schemer and ill-wisher, shall all pass away like waves, and hardship shall be succeeded by joy. The friends are under the protection of the resistless power and inscrutable providence of God. There is no doubt that every blessed soul who brings his life into harmony with this all-swaying power shall give lustre to his works and win an ample recompense. The actions of those who choose to set themselves against it should

provoke not antipathy on our part, but prayers for their guidance. Such was the way of the Bahá'ís in days gone by, and so must it be, now and for always.

Shoghi Effendi, in Crisis and Victory, *The Compilation of Compilations*, Vol. I, No. 342, p. 174.

For Bahá'ís, the attainment of peace is not simply an aspiration to which they are sympathetic or a goal complementary to their other aims—it has always been a central concern. In a second Tablet 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed to the Central Organization for a Durable Peace in the Hague, He asserted that "our desire for peace is not derived merely from the intellect: It is a matter of religious belief and one of the eternal foundations of the Faith of God."

The Universal House of Justice, 18 January 2019.

There are many noble and admirable causes in the world, and they arise from particular perspectives, each with its own merit. Is the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh merely one amongst them? Or is it universal, embodying the highest ideals of all humanity? After all, a Cause that is to be the wellspring of enduring justice and peace—not for one place or one people, but for all places and all peoples—must be inexhaustible, must possess a heavenly vitality that allows it to transcend all limitations and encompass every dimension of the life of humanity. Ultimately, it must have the power to transform the human heart. Then let us, like the Báb's guest, observe attentively. Does not the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh possess these very qualities?

The Universal House of Justice, October 2019.

16.2 A Prayer for the True Seeker

I know not, O my God, what the Fire is which Thou didst kindle in Thy land. Earth can never cloud its splendor, nor water quench its flame. All the peoples of the world are powerless to resist its force. Great is the blessedness of him that hath drawn nigh unto it, and heard its roaring.

Some, O my God, Thou didst, through Thy strengthening grace, enable to approach it, while others Thou didst keep back by reason of what their hands have wrought in Thy days. Whoso hath hasted towards it and attained unto it hath, in his eagerness to gaze on Thy beauty, yielded his life in Thy path, and ascended unto Thee, wholly detached from aught else except Thyself.

I beseech Thee, O my Lord, by this Fire which blazeth and rageth in the world of creation, to rend asunder the veils that have hindered me from appearing before the throne of Thy majesty, and from standing at the door of Thy gate. Do Thou ordain for me, O my Lord, every good thing Thou didst send down in Thy Book, and suffer me not to be far removed from the shelter of Thy mercy.

Powerful art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee. Thou art, verily, the All-Powerful, the Most Generous.

Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, LIII.

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