



Compilations on Discourse & Social Action



**Compilations
on Discourse &
Social Action**

COMPILATIONS ON DISCOURSE & SOCIAL ACTION

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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE

ARTS

IN PROMOTING THE

FAITH

A compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, letters by and on
behalf of Shoghi Effendi, and communications by and on behalf
of the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled 1990

The 1996 Ridván message of the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the World called attention to the importance of the arts, especially the graphic and performing arts and literature, in the proclamation, expansion and consolidation of the Bahá'í Faith. This compilation is intended to enlarge upon this concept. While there are many references to “the arts” in the English translations of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá, the appearance of the term “arts” in many such passages can be misleading because the meaning of the original word often includes a broad range of activities such as industrial pursuits and trades. The extracts in this compilation have been chosen because they focus mainly on the graphic and performing arts and literature.

Extracts from the Writings

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 The Sun of Truth is the Word of God upon which dependeth the education of those who are endowed with the power of understanding and of utterance. It is the true spirit and the heavenly water, through whose aid and gracious providence all things have been and will be quickened. Its appearance in every mirror is conditioned by the colour of that mirror. For instance, when its light is cast upon the mirrors of the hearts of the wise, it bringeth forth wisdom. In like manner when it manifesteth itself in the mirrors of the hearts of craftsmen, it unfoldeth new and unique arts, and when reflected in the hearts of those that apprehend the truth it revealeth wondrous tokens of true knowledge and discloseth the verities of God's utterance.

From a Tablet

- 2 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.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas

- 3 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.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas

- 4 Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instil new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. All the wondrous works ye behold in this world have been manifested through the operation of His supreme and most exalted Will, His wondrous and inflexible Purpose. 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.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 5 The soul that hath remained faithful to the Cause of God, and stood unwaveringly firm in His Path shall, after his ascension, be possessed of such power that all the worlds which the Almighty hath created can benefit through him. Such a soul provideth, at the bidding of the Ideal King and Divine Educator, the pure leaven that leaveneth the world of being, and furnisheth the power through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 6 Every word of thy poetry is indeed like unto a mirror in which the evidences of the devotion and love thou cherishest for God and His chosen ones are reflected. Well is it with thee who hast quaffed the choice wine of utterance and partaken of the soft flowing stream of true knowledge. Happy is he who hath drunk his fill and attained unto Him and woe betide the heedless. Its perusal hath truly proved highly impressive, for it was indicative of both the light of reunion and the fire of separation.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 7 O musician of God! ... The songsters of fellowship that abide in the gardens of holiness must pour forth such a triumphant burst of songs in this age that the birds in the fields may wing their flight in a transport of delight; and in this divine festival, this heavenly banquet, they should play the lute and the harp, and the viol and the lyre in such wise that the people of east and west may be filled with exceeding joy and gladness, and be carried away with exultation and happiness. Now it behoveth thee to raise the melody of that heavenly lyre and to perform music on that celestial lute, thus causing Barbudⁱ to return to life and Rudakiⁱⁱ to be solaced and Farabiⁱⁱⁱ to become restless and Ibn-i-Sina^{iv} to be guided to the Sinai of God. Upon thee be salutation and praise.

From a Tablet

- 8 I earnestly hope that thou wilt memorize all the Persian poems revealed by the Blessed Beauty and wilt sing them in a voice of incomparable sweetness at Bahá'í meetings and gatherings. The day is not far distant when these poems will be set to Western music and the sweet accents of these songs will reach the Abha Kingdom with exceeding joy and gladness.

From a Tablet

- 9 The art of music must be brought to the highest stage of development, for this is one of the most wonderful arts and in this glorious age of the Lord of Unity it is highly essential to gain its mastery. However, one must endeavour to attain the degree of artistic perfection and not be like those who leave matters unfinished.

From a Tablet

- 10 O nightingale of the rose-garden of God! Singing melodies will bring animation and happiness to the world of humanity, the hearers will be

i Peerless Persian musician: A singer, player and inventor of many ancient musical instruments who lived at the court of Khosrow-Parviz of the Sasani dynasty about 600 A.D.

ii "Father of Persian poetry" (d. A.D. 940).

iii Renowned Muslim scholar; author of a treatise on music (ca. A.D. 870-950).

iv Physician/scientist/philosopher known in the west as Avicenna, one of whose major works devotes a section to music theory (ca. A.D. 980-1027).

delighted and joyful and their deeper emotions stirred. But this gladness, this sense of emotion is transitory and will be forgotten within a short time. However, praise be to God, thou hast blended thy tunes with the melodies of the Kingdom, wilt impart solace to the world of the spirit and wilt everlastingly stimulate spiritual feelings. This will last forever and endure the revolution of ages and centuries.

From a Tablet

- 11 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-Adhkar 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.

From a Tablet

- 12 I rejoice to hear that thou takest pains with thine art, for in this wonderful new age, art is worship. The more thou strivest to perfect it, the closer wilt thou come to God. What bestowal could be greater than this, that one's art should be even as the act of worshipping the Lord? That is to say, when thy fingers grasp the paintbrush, it is as if thou wert at prayer in the Temple.

From a Tablet

- 13 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.

From a Tablet

- 14 O bird that singeth sweetly of the Abha 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, O thou Shahnaz,ⁱ 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.

Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá

- 15 Wherefore, O loved ones of God! Make ye a mighty effort till you yourselves betoken this advancement and all these confirmations, and become focal centres of God's blessings, day-springs of the light of His unity, promoters of the gifts and graces of civilized life. Be ye in that land vanguards of the perfections of humankind; carry forward the various branches of knowledge, be active and progressive in the field of inventions and the arts. Endeavour to rectify the conduct of men, and seek to excel the whole world in moral character. While the children are yet in their infancy feed them from the breast of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence, rear them in the embrace of bounty. Give them the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art.

Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá

- 16 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.

Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá

- 17 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. When His love is there, every bitterness turneth sweet, and every bounty rendereth a wholesome pleasure. For example, a melody, sweet to the ear, bringeth the very spirit

i Shahnaz, the name given to the recipient of this Tablet, is also the name of a musical mode.

of life to a heart in love with God, yet staineth with lust a soul engrossed in sensual desires.

Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá

- 18 O thou bird of pleasing tones! Thy little book of poems, which were very sweet, was read. It was a source of joy, for it was a spiritual anthem and a melody of the love of God. Continue as long as thou canst this melody in the gatherings of the beloved; thus may the minds find rest and joy and become in tune with the love of God. When eloquence of expression, beauty of sense and sweetness of composition unite with new melodies the effect is ever great, especially if it be the anthem of the verses of oneness and the songs of praise to the Lord of Glory. Endeavour your utmost to compose beautiful poems to be chanted with heavenly music; thus may their beauty affect the minds and impress the hearts of those who listen.

Tablets of Abdul-Bahá Abbas, vol. I, p. 59

- 19 O thou honourable one! 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!

Tablets of Abdul-Bahá Abbas, vol. III, p. 512

- 20 The first condition of perception in the world of nature is the perception of the rational soul. In this perception and in this power all men are sharers, whether they be neglectful or vigilant, believers or deniers.

This human rational soul is God's creation; it encompasses and excels other creatures; as it is more noble and distinguished, it encompasses things. The power of the rational soul can discover the realities of things, comprehend the peculiarities of beings, and penetrate the mysteries of existence. All sciences, knowledge, arts, wonders, institutions, discoveries and enterprises come from the exercised intelligence of the rational soul.

Some Answered Questions

From the Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 21 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.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 22 An actor mentioned the drama, and its influence. "The drama is of the utmost importance," said 'Abdu'l-Bahá. "It has been a great educational power in the past; it will be so again." He described how as a young boy he witnessed the Mystery Play of Ali's Betrayal and Passion, and how it affected him so deeply that he wept and could not sleep for many nights.

Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 93

- 23 'Abdu'l-Bahá said ... "All Art is a gift of the Holy Spirit. When this light shines through the mind of a musician, it manifests itself in beautiful harmonies. Again, shining through the mind of a poet, it is seen in fine poetry and poetic prose. When the Light of the Sun of Truth inspires the mind of a painter, he produces marvellous pictures. These gifts are fulfilling their highest purpose, when showing forth the praise of God."

Lady Blomfield, The Chosen Highway, p. 167

- 24 It is natural for the heart and spirit to take pleasure and enjoyment in all things that show forth symmetry, harmony, and perfection. For instance: a beautiful house, a well designed garden, a symmetrical line, a graceful motion, a well written book, pleasing garments—in fact, all things that have

in themselves grace or beauty are pleasing to the heart and spirit—therefore, it is most certain that a true voice causes deep pleasure.

*'Abdu'l-Bahá's words to Mrs. Mary L. Lucas, quoted in
A Brief Account of My Visit to Acca, pp. 11-14*

From the writings of Shoghi Effendi

- 25 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 requires total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks, from opium, and from similar habit-forming drugs. It condemns the prostitution of art and of literature,ⁱ the practices of nudism and of companionate marriage, infidelity in marital relationships, and all manner of promiscuity, of easy familiarity, and of sexual vices. It can tolerate no compromise with the theories, the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age. Nay rather it seeks to demonstrate, through the dynamic force of its example, the pernicious character of such theories, the falsity of such standards, the hollowness of such claims, the perversity of such habits, and the sacrilegious character of such excesses.

The Advent of Divine Justice

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 26 Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated October 27th 1931, together with the accompanying music of "The Lonely Stranger" sent through ... 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.

i The Universal House of Justice, in a letter dated 15 March 1972 written on its behalf, has elucidated this phrase of the Guardian in this manner: "As to your question about the prostitution of arts and literature' we understand by this, using art and literature for debased ends."

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.

11 December 1931

- 27 He wishes to start a new section in “The Bahá’í World” devoted wholly to poems written by Bahá’ís. Though it may be a humble beginning it is a start for great future achievements. Shoghi Effendi wishes thereby to encourage those who are talented to give expression to the wonderful spirit that animates them. We need poets and writers for the Cause and this is undoubtedly one good way to urge them on. Some of the poems are written by very youthful persons yet they ring so true and give expression to such thoughts that one should halt and admire. In Persia the Cause has given birth to poets that even non-Bahá’ís consider as great. We hope before long we will have similar persons arise in the West.

2 January 1932

- 28 It is certain that with the spread of the spirit of Bahá’u’lláh a new era will dawn in art and literature. Whereas before the form was perfect but the spirit was lacking, now there will be a glorious spirit embodied in a form immeasurably improved by the quickened genius of the world.

3 April 1932

- 29 Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated May 18th 1932. He is very glad to know that you have liked “The Dawn-Breakers”, for his greatest reward is to see that this work, which has cost him much labour and anxiety, is helping the friends to understand better and more fully the spirit that animates the Movement and the exemplary life of the heroic souls that ushered it into the world.

The Guardian sincerely hopes that by reading this book the friends will be stirred to greater activity and a higher measure of sacrifice, that they will obtain a deeper realization of this Cause whose spread and ultimate victory is entrusted to their care. As some who have read the book have remarked, no one can become familiar with those lives and not be inspired to follow in their way.

It is surely true that the spirit of those heroic souls will stir many artists to produce their best. It is such lives that in the past inspired poets and moved the brush of the painters.

20 June 1932

- 30 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.

10 October 1932

- 31 The Guardian values the hymns that you are so beautifully composing. They certainly contain the realities of the Faith, and will indeed help you to give the Message to the young ones. It is the music which assists us to affect the human spirit; it is an important means which helps us to communicate with the soul. The Guardian hopes that through this assistance you will give the Message to the people, and will attract their hearts.

15 November 1932

- 32 What Bahá'u'lláh meant primarily with “sciences that begin and end in words” are those theological treatises and commentaries that encumber the human mind rather than help it to attain the truth. The students would devote their life to their study but still attain no where. Bahá'u'lláh surely never meant to include story-writing under such a category; and shorthand and typewriting are both most useful talents, very necessary in our present social and economic life.

What you could do, and should do, is to use your stories to become a source of inspiration and guidance for those who read them. With such a means at your disposal you can spread the spirit and teachings of the Cause; you can show the evils that exist in society, as well as the way they can be remedied. If you possess a real talent in writing you should con-

sider it as given by God and exert your efforts to use it for the betterment of society.

30 November 1932

- 33 Your poem dedicated to Nabil deeply touched me.... I would also welcome any other poems from your gifted pen on any phase or episode recounted in Nabil's immortal narrative. You are rendering the Cause unique and notable services. Be happy and persevere in your high endeavours.

6 August 1933, appended to a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 34 In regard to the main question you have raised in connection with the singing of hymns at Bahá'í meetings: He wishes me to assure you that he sees no objection to it whatsoever. The element of music is, no doubt, an important feature of all Bahá'í gatherings. The Master Himself has emphasized its importance. But the friends should in this, as well as in all other things, not pass beyond the limits of moderation, and should take great care to maintain the strict spiritual character of all their gatherings. Music should lead to spirituality, and provided it creates such an atmosphere there can be no objection against it.

A distinction of vital importance should, however, be clearly established between the singing of hymns composed by the believers and the chanting of the Holy Utterances.

17 March 1935

- 35 As to your question concerning the advisability of dramatizing Bahá'í historic episodes: the Guardian would certainly approve, and even encourage that the friends should engage in such literary pursuits which, no doubt, can be of immense teaching value. What he wishes the believers to avoid is to dramatize the personages of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá, that is to say to treat them as dramatic figures, as characters appearing on the stage. This, as already pointed out, he feels would be quite disrespectful. The mere fact that they appear on the scene constitutes an act of discourtesy which can in no way be reconciled with their highly exalted station. Their message, or actual words, should be preferably reported and conveyed by their disciples appearing on the stage.

25 July 1936

- 36 The Guardian was also pleased to know of your deep interest in music, and of your desire to serve the Faith along this line. 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.

4 November 1937

- 37 ...you raise the question of what will be the source of inspiration to Bahá'í musicians and composers: the music of the past or the Word? We cannot possibly foresee, standing as we do on the threshold of Bahá'í culture, what forms and characteristics the arts of the future, inspired by this Mighty New Revelation, will have. All we can be sure of is that they will be wonderful; as every Faith has given rise to a culture which flowered in different forms, so too our beloved Faith may be expected to do the same thing. It is premature to try and grasp what they will be at present.

23 December 1942

- 38 Music, as one of the arts, is a natural cultural development, and the Guardian does not feel that there should be any cultivation of "Bahá'í Music" any more than we are trying to develop a Bahá'í school of painting or writing. The believers are free to paint, write and compose as their talents guide them. If music is written, incorporating the sacred writings, the friends are free to make use of it, but it should never be considered a requirement at Bahá'í meetings to have such music. The further away the friends keep from any set forms, the better, for they must realize that the Cause is absolutely universal, and what might seem a beautiful addition to their mode of celebrating a Feast, etc., would perhaps fall on the ears of people of another country as unpleasant sounds—and vice versa. As long as they have music for its own sake it is all right, but they should not consider it Bahá'í music.

20 July 1946

- 39 ...he wishes to call your Assembly's attention to a very important matter, and that is the Greatest Name. To the western eye, untrained in the art—the most highly developed art of the East—of calligraphy, nearly every Greatest Name, if it embodies the salient points, is the Greatest Name. But to an Oriental it may appear a monstrosity ... The exact proportions are what

must be maintained. The Greatest Name must not be stretched out—or up—to fill an oblong space or a circle.

22 December 1948

- 40 It was a Canadian, of French extraction, who through his vision and skill, was instrumental in conceiving the design, and delineating the features, of the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of the west, marking the first attempt, however rudimentary, to express the beauty which Bahá'í art will, in its plenitude, unfold to the eyes of the world.

1 March 1951, appended to a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 41 We believe that, in the future, when the Bahá'í spirit has permeated the world and profoundly changed society, music will be affected by it; but there is no such thing as Bahá'í music. All it says in the teachings about music is that it can influence the heart and soul of man very deeply, and have an extremely uplifting effect.

3 February 1952

- 42 As regards the matters you raised in your letter: In the teachings there is nothing against dancing, but the friends should remember that the standard of Bahá'u'lláh is modesty and chastity. The atmosphere of modern dance halls, where so much smoking and drinking and promiscuity goes on, is very bad, but decent dances are not harmful in themselves. There is certainly no harm in classical dancing or learning dancing in school. There is also no harm in taking part in dramas. Likewise in cinema acting. The harmful thing, nowadays, is not the art itself but the unfortunate corruption which often surrounds these arts. As Bahá'ís we need avoid none of the arts, but acts and the atmosphere that sometimes go with these professions we should avoid.

30 June 1952

From letters by and on behalf of the Universal House of Justiceⁱ

- 43 Publicity itself should be well-conceived, dignified and reverent. A flamboyant approach which may succeed in drawing much initial attention to the Cause may ultimately prove to have produced a revulsion which would require great effort to overcome. The standard of dignity and reverence set by the beloved Guardian should always be upheld, particularly in musical and dramatic items; and photographs of the Master should not be used indiscriminately. This does not mean that activities of the youth, for example, should be stultified; one can be exuberant without being irreverent or undermining the dignity of the Cause.

2 July 1967

- 44 ...we feel that it will be helpful to you to know that songs whose words are the primary Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh or 'Abdu'l-Bahá are all quite fitting for the devotional portion of the Feast. Indeed, the Persian chants are such songs, out of a different tradition; they are a way of giving music to the holy Word, and each person who chants does it in a way which mirrors his feeling and expression of the Words he is uttering. As for songs whose words are poetic and the composition of persons other than the Figures of the Faith, these may be desirable but in their proper place...

Inasmuch as the spirit of our gatherings is so much affected by the tone and quality of our worship, of our feeling and appreciation of the Word of God for this day, we would hope that you would encourage the most beautiful possible expression of the human spirits in your communities, through music among other modes of feeling.

22 February 1971

- 45 Your understanding that the portrayal of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh in works of art is forbidden is correct. The Guardian made it clear that this prohibition refers to all the Manifestations of God; photographs, or reproductions of portraits, of the Master may be used in books, but no attempt should be made to portray Him in dramatic or other works where He would be one of the "dramatis personae". However, there can be no objection to symbolic

i Written by the Universal House of Justice unless otherwise referenced

representation of such Holy Figures, provided it does not become a ritual and that the symbol used is not irreverent.

3 December 1972

- 46 While it is quite true that individual artists such as Mark Tobey and others have undoubtedly been inspired and influenced by their love for the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, it is far too early in the Bahá'í Dispensation to talk about the influence of the Faith on the arts in general. Indeed the beloved Guardian himself has pointed out that there is, as yet, no such thing as Bahá'í art although there is no doubt from statements in the writings that a wonderful efflorescence of new and beautiful arts may be anticipated in the future.

17 January 1973

- 47 The beloved Guardian made it clear that the flowering of the arts which is the result of a divine revelation comes only after a number of centuries. The Bahá'í Faith offers the world the complete rebuilding of human society—a rebuilding of such far-reaching effect that it has been looked forward to in all the revelations of the past and has been called the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. The new architecture to which this revelation will give birth will blossom many generations hence. We are now merely at the beginning of this great process.

The present time is a period of turmoil and change. Architecture, like all arts and sciences, is undergoing very rapid development; one has only to consider the changes that have taken place in the course of the last few decades to have some idea of what is likely to happen during the years immediately ahead. Some modern buildings have, no doubt, qualities of greatness and will endure, but very much of what is being constructed now may be outgrown and may appear ugly but a few generations hence. Modern architecture, in other words, may be considered a new development in its primitive stage.

18 July 1974

- 48 The House of Justice feels that at this time in the development of the Faith its primary responsibility is the preparation and prosecution of teaching plans designed to achieve the objectives set forth in Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets of the Divine Plan and that theories in arts and sciences should be developed under the auspices of those who are well-versed and expert in those fields.

25 January 1977, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

49 The prohibition on representing the Manifestation of God in paintings and drawings or in dramatic presentations applies to all the Manifestations of God. There are, of course, great and wonderful works of art of past Dispensations, many of which portrayed the Manifestations of God in a spirit of reverence and love. In this Dispensation however the greater maturity of mankind and the greater awareness of the relationship between the Supreme Manifestation and His servants enable us to realize the impossibility of representing, in any human form, whether pictorially, in sculpture or in dramatic representation, the Person of God's Manifestation. In stating the Bahá'í prohibition, the beloved Guardian pointed out this impossibility.
9 March 1977, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

50 The same destructive forces are also deranging the political, economic, scientific, literary, and moral equilibrium of the world and are destroying the fairest fruits of the present civilization ... Even music, art, and literature, which are to represent and inspire the noblest sentiments and highest aspirations and should be a source of comfort and tranquillity for troubled souls, have strayed from the straight path and are now the mirrors of the soiled hearts of this confused, unprincipled, and disordered age.
10 February 1980

51 Generally speaking, works of fiction which the writers hope will help to promote knowledge of the Cause of God will fulfil this purpose better if they are set against the background of particular events or developing processes in the Cause of God, and not used to portray the actual historical events themselves and the figures taking part in them. The reality of the actual events and the actual personages is so much more convincing than any fictional account. In this connection the Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf:ⁱ

He would not recommend fiction as a means of teaching; the condition of the world is too acute to permit of delay in giving them the direct teachings associated with the name of Bahá'u'lláh. But any suitable approach to the Faith, which appeals to this or that group, is certainly worthy of effort, as we wish to bring the Cause to all men, in all walks of life, of all mentalities.

23 September 1980, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

i 23 March 1945, to an individual.

- 52 Your letter ... concerning art has been received, and the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to commend you on your plan to use your artistic talents to express the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. It warmly encourages you in this pursuit...

In response to your request for guidance on the best ways to approach artists in teaching the Faith, it can be said that in addition to those methods which attract people generally, artists will be responsive to art. When the sublime teachings of the Faith are reflected in artistic work, the hearts of people, including artists, will be touched. A quotation from the Sacred Writings or description of the art piece as it relates to the Writings may provide the viewer with an understanding of the source of this spiritual attraction and lead him to further study of the Faith.

21 July 1982, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 53 With the evolution of the Bahá'í society, which is composed of people of many cultural origins and diverse tastes, each with his conception of what is aesthetically acceptable and pleasing, those Bahá'ís who are gifted in music, drama and the visual arts are free to exercise their talents in ways which will serve the Faith of God. They should not feel disturbed at the lack of appreciation by sundry believers. Rather, in knowledge of the cogent writings of the Faith on music and artistic expression... they should continue their artistic endeavours in prayerful recognition that the arts are powerful instruments to serve the Cause, arts which in time will have their Bahá'í fruition.

9 August 1983, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 54 Your letter ... requesting guidance in the matter of visual representation of the personages connected with the Heroic Age of the Faith has been received. The Universal House of Justice wishes you to know that there is nothing in the instructions of the Guardian, nor of the House of Justice, .. to prohibit artists ... to make drawings of Letters of the Living in surroundings, or participating in events, which are historically accurate. Obviously, in addition to accuracy, it is important to uphold the dignity of the personages being portrayed.

5 October 1983, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 55 Architecture at this time, in common with all aspects of our civilization, is going through a period of rapid development, with tastes changing from

decade to decade. No one can be certain whether a building which is built now in a current style will still appear beautiful in the eyes of the people fifty years hence. For the World Administrative Centre of the Faith, therefore, the beloved Guardian chose the classical Greek style of architecture. This is a mature style, very beautiful, which has persisted for some 2,000 years. It would not be correct, however, to deduce from this that the classical Greek styles are particularly Bahá'í architecture.

3 September 1984, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 56 Rejecting the low sights of mediocrity, let them scale the ascending heights of excellence in all they aspire to do. May they resolve to elevate the very atmosphere in which they move, whether it be in the school rooms or halls of higher learning, in their work, their recreation, their Bahá'í activity or social service.

Indeed, let them welcome with confidence the challenges awaiting them. Imbued with this excellence and a corresponding humility, with tenacity and a loving servitude, today's youth must move towards the front ranks of the professions, trades, arts and crafts which are necessary to the further progress of humankind—this to ensure that the spirit of the Cause will cast its illumination on all these important areas of human endeavour.

Moreover, while aiming at mastering the unifying concepts and swiftly advancing technologies of this era of communications, they can, indeed they must, also guarantee the transmittal to the future of those skills which will preserve the marvellous, indispensable achievements of the past. The transformation which is to occur in the functioning of society will certainly depend to a great extent on the effectiveness of the preparations the youth make for the world they will inherit.

8 May 1985

- 57 The House of Justice wishes to encourage you in the writing of your book but reminds you that the Guardian clearly stated that at this early stage of the Dispensation there is no such thing as Bahá'í art, music, architecture or culture. These will doubtless emerge in the future as a natural outgrowth of a Bahá'í civilization. The Guardian's own predilections in such matters should never be regarded as laying the foundations for such developments. As clearly indicated by his rejection of the design submitted to him for the Temple in Kampala ... he did not feel that the general modern

trend of architecture current at his time was suitable for a Bahá'í House of Worship, but this in no sense implies that he instituted a pattern of his own. His choice of the classical style for the structures on Mount Carmel was, according to Amatu'l-Bahá Ruhiyyih Khanum, on the grounds that it was beautiful and befitted the area, and that it had withstood the test of time. You should, therefore, take care not to indicate or make it possible to infer that the Guardian laid down the early beginnings of Bahá'í art forms. He made beautiful gardens and buildings utilizing what was available and, as in the case of the superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb, engaged experts who could produce befitting designs under his guidance.

23 June 1985, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 58 With reference to music and fine arts, you are, of course, free to include them as curricular subjects in Bahá'í schools. Many of your fellow National Assemblies, keenly aware of the Bahá'í Writings concerning music and the arts, incorporate such instruction and materials as they find possible at this stage of Bahá'í community development. Much work by devoted and talented teachers needs to be done to stimulate, collect and publish the useful music now emerging in the Bahá'í world, and to utilize it systematically in the schools...

In accordance with our Teachings, music and the arts are to be encouraged, and they add immeasurably to the vitality and spirit of the community. Your Assembly's thoughts and efforts are valued, and you are remembered in the prayers of the House of Justice.

20 August 1985, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 59 Regarding the use of symbolism in art, the following extracts from letters written to two individuals by the House of Justice may provide the answer you seek:

We see no objection to the use of natural phenomena as symbols to illustrate the significance of the three Central Figures, Bahá'í Laws, and Bahá'í Administration; and we also appreciate the suitability of using visual symbols to express abstract concepts.

29 July 1971

Your understanding that the portrayal of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh in works of art is forbidden is correct. The Guardian made it clear that

this prohibition refers to all the Manifestations of God; photo-graphs, or reproductions of portraits, of the Master may be used in books, but no attempt should be made to portray Him in dramatic or other works where He would be one of the “*dramatis personae*”. However, there can be no objection to symbolic representation of such Holy Figures, provided it does not become a ritual and that the symbol used is not irreverent.

3 December 1972

You sometimes provide detailed written descriptions of the symbols you use in your paintings; as a practice this could introduce an aspect which could be unduly interpretive of Bahá’í concepts, ultimately detracting from rather than enhancing your artistic efforts. Symbolism is the stuff of art, but artists rarely interpret the symbols they use, leaving it to observers of their works to draw their own conclusions, sometimes with no more than hints from the titles given such works.

The titling of a piece of art is the artist’s prerogative; the only objection would be to the use of an irreverent title for a piece intended to represent a Bahá’í subject.

As to your question about an artist’s executing a “painting which is a contemporary illumination of a passage of the Holy Writings”, the House of Justice feels artists should not be inhibited by Bahá’í institutions from creating a variety of calligraphic renderings of the Holy Writings or of the Greatest Name. However, such efforts should be in good taste and not assume forms that lend themselves to ridicule. Regarding the commonly used symbol of the Greatest Name, the House of Justice advises that great care be given to the accurate representation of the Persian calligraphy, since any deviation from an accepted representation can be distressing to Iranian believers.

23 February 1987, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 60 The policy formulated by the House of Justice to discourage the reproduction of photographs of paintings of the Master for distribution does not imply any judgement of the quality of a painting. There is a wide variation in the quality of the artistry with which paintings of the Master are carried out. The House of Justice does not wish to show preference for one painting over another; it chooses rather to adopt this general policy as a means of ensuring that appropriate respect is accorded to representations

of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and that there is no distribution of photographic reproductions of those paintings which are of poor quality.

An important distinction is made between publication of photographs of paintings in books and magazines, which is not prohibited as it is subject to some degree of judgement by the publisher, and their publication as separate items, which is discouraged by the House of Justice.

More generally, the House of Justice feels that one of the great challenges facing Bahá'ís everywhere is that of restoring to the peoples of the world an awareness of spiritual reality. Our view of the world is markedly different from that of the mass of mankind, in that we perceive creation to encompass spiritual as well as physical entities, and we regard the purpose of the world in which we now find ourselves to be a vehicle for our spiritual progress.

This view has important implications for the behaviour of Bahá'ís and gives rise to practices which are quite contrary to prevailing conduct of the wider society. One of the distinctive virtues given emphasis in the Bahá'í Writings is respect for that which is sacred. Such behaviour has no meaning for those whose perspective on the world is entirely materialistic, while many followers of the established religions have debased it into a set of rituals devoid of true spiritual feeling.

In some instances, the Bahá'í Writings contain precise guidance on how the reverence for sacred objects or places should be expressed, e.g., restrictions on the use of the Greatest Name on objects or on indiscriminate use of the record of the voice of the Master. In other instances, the believers are called upon to strive to obtain a deeper understanding of the concept of sacredness in the Bahá'í teachings, from which they can determine their own forms of conduct by which reverence and respect are to be expressed.

The importance of such behaviour derives from the principle expressed in the Bahá'í Writings, that the outward has an influence on the inward. Referring to "the people of God" Bahá'u'lláh states:

Their outward conduct is but a reflection of their inward life, and their inward life a mirror of their outward conduct.

It is within this framework that the Universal House of Justice wishes you to view the concerns which have been expressed over the past several years. Bahá'ís endowed with artistic talent are in a unique position to use

their abilities, when treating Bahá'í themes, in such a way as to disclose to mankind evidence of the spiritual renewal the Bahá'í Faith has brought to humanity through its revitalization of the concept of reverence.

Questions of artistic freedom are not germane to the issues raised here. Bahá'í artists are free to apply their talents to whatever subject is of interest to them. However, it is hoped that they will exercise a leadership role in restoring to a materialistic society an appreciation of reverence as a vital element in the achievement of true liberty and abiding happiness.

24 September 1987, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 61 The House of Justice is pleased to learn of the success you are achieving in your profession. It advises you to view this professional activity within the context of service to the Faith and the promotion of the proclamation and teaching work. Your musical achievements will enable you to reach a wide range of people and ultimately to proclaim the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to them through the expression of its values in your music. You can also make valuable friendships for the Faith among the influential people you will meet as your business continues to develop. These considerations might well guide you in the decision now before you concerning the area in which you should reside. Bahá'í artists who achieve eminence and renown in their chosen field, and who remain dedicated to the promotion of the Faith, can be of unique assistance to the Cause at the present time when public curiosity about the Bahá'í teachings is gradually being aroused.

30 June 1988, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 62 It is permissible to use selections from the Holy Writings as lyrics to be accompanied by musical compositions and to repeat verses or words. The following quotations provide further clarification concerning these matters.

Therefore ... set to music the verses and the divine words so that they may be sung with soul-stirring melody in the Assemblies and gatherings, and that the hearts of the listeners may become tumultuous and rise towards the Kingdom of Abha in supplication and prayer.ⁱ

No doubt prayers and parts of the Tablets, "Hidden Words", etc., will be suitable, but he does not feel it would be advisable to abridge

i `Abdu'l-Bahá, "Bahá'í World Faith", p. 378. A newer authorized translation of this passage is found in *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Bahá*

any given part, in other words to leave out parts of a paragraph or a meditation and foreshorten it in this manner.ⁱⁱ

In response to a question from a believer concerning minor alterations of words for the sake of correct accent or the addition of a word for the sake of perfect meter, the beloved Guardian stated the following:

Slight alterations in the text of the prayers are permissible, and I would advise you to give a musical form to the revealed word itself which I feel will be exceedingly effective. I will pray that the Beloved may inspire you to accomplish this great service to His Cause.ⁱⁱⁱ

Regarding the question of setting verses from the Bahá'í Writings to the melodies of existing pieces of music, assuming that there is no copyright or legal restriction involved, one should bear in mind that such music may carry with it associations of the original piece, either in lyrics or in mood, and may not meet the requirement to treat the Sacred Texts with dignity and reverence.

6 December 1989, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 63 There is no objection to the interpretation of a prayer in the form of movement or dance if the spirit is properly reverential, but preferably this should not be accompanied by reading the words.

4 January 1990, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 64 The House of Justice is pleased to learn of your teaching activities and your continued devotion to the Cause of God in spite of difficulties you have experienced as a musician. With regard to your questions: the Bahá'í Teachings obviously do not condone the mistreatment of musicians or other artists, nor are artists expected to sacrifice their free will to the whims, or even the strongly held opinions, of other Bahá'ís. As for the tensions and difficulties arising between your teaching the Faith through music and your parallel need to be self-supporting, it is suggested that you yourself will need to set your own limits in this regard. We find, for example, the following

ii From a letter dated 3 July 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer

iii In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 8 April 1931 written on his behalf to an individual believer

guidance in a letter dated 26 February 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer:

The advice that Shoghi Effendi gave you regarding the division of your time between serving the Cause and attending to your other duties was also given to many other friends both by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master. It is a compromise between the two verses of the "Aqdas", one making it incumbent upon every Bahá'í to serve the promotion of the Faith and the other that every soul should be occupied in some form of occupation that will benefit society. In one of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh says that the highest form of detachment in this day is to be occupied with some profession and be self-supporting. A good Bahá'í, therefore, is the one who so arranges his life as to devote time both to his material needs and also to the service of the Cause.

15 February 1990, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 65 Your sincere desire to use theatre as a means of spreading the tenets of the Faith among the people is commendable and it is the hope of the House of Justice that your devoted efforts in this field may bring satisfaction to yourselves and benefits to the community; however, as you yourself have stated, you are conscious of the difficulties and potential pitfalls of Bahá'í theatrical endeavours at this time and in the atmosphere of intolerance prevailing in your country, which make it essential not to produce plays which may arouse public antipathy or the indignation of religious fundamentalists.

9 April 1990, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 66 ...traditional dances associated with the expression of a culture are permissible in Bahá'í Centres. However, it should be borne in mind that such traditional dances generally have an underlying theme or a story being represented. Care must be exercised to ensure that the themes of such dances are in harmony with the high ethical standards of the Cause and are not portrayals that would arouse base instincts and unworthy passions...

As for choreographed dances whose purpose is to reinforce and proclaim Bahá'í principles, if they can be performed in a manner which portrays the nobility of such principles and invokes appropriate attitudes of respect or reverence, there is no objection to dances which are meant to interpret passages from the Writings; however, it is preferable that the motions of a dance not be accompanied by the reading of the words.

The principle which must guide the friends in their consideration of these questions is the observance of “moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations”.

20 June 1991, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 67 There is no objection, of course, to the use of the phrase “Bahá’í artist” but at this point in time in the Bahá’í Dispensation we should not use the term “Bahá’í art”, “Bahá’í music”, or “Bahá’í architecture”.

12 March 1992, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 68 The medium of a novel offers a great deal of latitude for an author to elaborate ideas and areas of thought hitherto unexplored. You should be careful, however, not to ... give interpretations that may not be correct if the Faith and its Teachings are to be explicit in the novel. If, on the other hand, there is no clear connection to the Faith in the novel, you would be free to use your imagination in exploring any ideas which have as their source the principles of the Faith.

15 February 1994, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 69 In all their efforts to achieve the aim of the Four Year Plan, the friends are also asked to give greater attention to the use of the arts, not only for proclamation, but also for the work in expansion and consolidation. The graphic and performing arts and literature have played, and can play, a major role in extending the influence of the Cause. At the level of folk art, this possibility can be pursued in every part of the world, whether it be in villages, towns or cities. Shoghi Effendi held high hopes for the arts as a means for attracting attention to the Teachings. A letter written on his behalf to an individual thus conveys the Guardian’s view: “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.”

Riḍván 153 (1996)

- 70 In much of the region, insufficient attention has been given to the education of children. Far more extensive programmes should be initiated in those countries where the need exists, to ensure that Bahá’í children are nurtured, encouraged to acquire trained minds, illumined with a sound knowledge

of the Divine Teachings, well-equipped to participate in the work of the Cause at all levels and to contribute to the arts, crafts and sciences necessary for the advancement of civilization. Such programmes, when open to all children, Bahá'í or not, offer a potent means of extending the beneficial influences of Bahá'u'lláh's Message to the wider society.

Riḍván 153 (1996)

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

IN THE AGE OF MATURITY

A compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, letters by and
on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, and communications by and on
behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

The Vision Unfolding

An “ever-advancing civilization”

- 1 All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth.

Bahá'u'lláh, Gleanings from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. CIX

- 2 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, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, The ninth Ishráq

- 3 ...the religions of God are the true source of the spiritual and material perfections of man, and the fountainhead for all mankind of enlightenment and beneficial knowledge.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization

The Coming of Age of the Entire Human Race

- 4 For every era hath a spirit; the spirit of this illumined era lieth in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. For these lay the foundation of the oneness of the world of humanity and promulgate universal brotherhood. They are founded upon the unity of science and religion and upon investigation of truth. They uphold the principle that religion must be the cause of amity, union and harmony among men. They establish the equality of both sexes and propound economic principles which are for the happiness of individuals.

They diffuse universal education, that every soul may as much as possible have a share of knowledge. They abrogate and nullify religious, racial, political, patriotic and economic prejudices and the like. Those teachings that are scattered throughout the Epistles and Tablets are the cause of the illumination and the life of the world of humanity.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 71

- 5 In this day ... means of communication have multiplied, and the five continents of the earth have virtually merged into one. And for everyone it is now easy to travel to any land, to associate and exchange views with its peoples, and to become familiar, through publications, with the conditions, the religious beliefs and the thoughts of all men. In like manner all the members of the human family, whether peoples or governments, cities or villages, have become increasingly interdependent. 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 cornerstone 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.¹

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. sec. 15

- 6 “The Tabernacle of Unity,” Bahá’u’lláh proclaims in His message to all mankind, “has been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers ... Of one tree are all ye the fruit and of one bough the leaves ... The world is but one country and mankind its citizens ... Let not a man glory in that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind.”

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 goodwill among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious co-operation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. It constitutes a challenge, at once bold and universal, to outworn shibboleths of national creeds—creeds that have had their day and which must, in the ordinary course of events as shaped and controlled by Providence, give way to a new gospel, fundamentally different from, and infinitely superior to, what the world has already conceived. 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.

28 November 1931, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 7 The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the COMING OF AGE OF THE ENTIRE HUMAN RACE. It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet. The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture—all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of the Bahá'í Era—should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop.

That mystic, all-pervasive, yet undefinable change, which we associate with the stage of maturity inevitable in the life of the individual and the development of the fruit, must, if we would correctly apprehend the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh, have its counterpart in the evolution of the organization of human society. A similar stage must sooner or later be attained in the collective life of mankind, producing an even more striking phenomenon in world relations, and endowing the whole human race with such potentialities of well-being as shall provide, throughout the succeeding ages, the chief incentive required for the eventual fulfilment of its high destiny. Such a stage of maturity in the process of human government must, for all time, if we would faithfully recognize the tremendous claim advanced by Bahá'u'lláh, remain identified with the Revelation of which He was the Bearer.

11 March 1936, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 8 ...the World Civilization which will follow upon the Most Great Peace will unfold and evolve and gradually perfect itself during following

Dispensations; in other words, a World Civilization and a World Culture, which will reach its ascendancy in the distant future and is something that will require many thousands of years to mature.

23 April 1954, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Religion and Cultural Change

Religion—“the very basis and root-principle of culture and civilization”ⁱ

- 9 Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth. All the wondrous works ye behold in this world have been manifested through the operation of His supreme and most exalted Will, His wondrous and inflexible Purpose. 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.

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

- 10 Religion is the light of the world, and the progress, achievement, and happiness of man result from obedience to the laws set down in the holy Books. Briefly, it is demonstrable that in this life, both outwardly and inwardly the mightiest of structures, the most solidly established, the most enduring, standing guard over the world, assuring both the spiritual and the material perfections of mankind, and protecting the happiness and the civilization of society—is religion...

By the Lord God, and there is no God but He, even the minutest details of civilized life derive from the grace of the Prophets of God. What thing of value to mankind has ever come into being which was not first set forth either directly or by implication in the Holy Scriptures? ...

i 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*.

...the Divine religions enjoin upon and encourage all the faithful to adopt such principles as will conduce to continuous improvements, and to acquire from other peoples sciences and arts.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilisation

- 11 ...as every Faith has given rise to a culture which flowered in different forms, so too our beloved Faith may be expected to do the same thing. It is premature to try and grasp what they will be at present.

23 December 1942, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 12 When the masses of mankind are awakened and enter the Faith of God, a new process is set in motion and the growth of a new civilization begins. Witness the emergence of Christianity and of Islam. These masses are the rank and file, steeped in traditions of their own, but receptive to the new Word of God, by which, when they truly respond to it, they become so influenced as to transform those who come in contact with them.

13 July 1964, Universal House of Justice

- 13 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 Bahá'í approach to resolution of the manifold problems affecting human society rests upon the assertion by Bahá'u'lláh that these ills are but various symptoms and side effects of the basic disease, which the Divine Physician has diagnosed to be disunity. Bahá'u'lláh has made it abundantly clear that the first step essential for the health and harmony of the whole of mankind is its unification. He says, "The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established" (The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, p. 203). By contrast, the approach of most people is the exact opposite: their concentration is on attempts to remedy the multitude of ills besetting mankind, with the expectation that the resolution of these problems will lead ultimately to unity.

15 June 1987, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 14 It is, of course, true that new movements of thought, especially in the field of religion, tend to obliterate old ones, or to transform their nature in the eyes of the people. One has only to consider how the religions of Greece and Rome, and those of the Keltic and Germanic peoples, although still remembered by the European peoples in the form of legend and literary tradition, have been replaced by Christianity.

The House of Justice feels that in discussion with ... you should not challenge this point, nor should you enter into criticisms of the often ruthless manner in which the followers of new religions have suppressed the old ways. It is suggested that, instead, you present the Bahá'í concepts, as expressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, namely that the fountainhead of all religions is to be found in God through the Teachings of His Prophets, and that all peoples have drunk at this ocean of divine Revelation; that sterile traditions and blind imitations accumulating over the centuries, exacerbated by the barriers of geography, have caused hatred and conflict where there should have been love and collaboration. These distortions have also given rise to the cruel and debased customs which are to be found in some religions. It is the Bahá'í belief that each human soul has the duty to God and the inborn capacity to seek out truth for himself. Those who do this sincerely will ultimately find themselves united, for there is only one God and Source of Truth. The Bahá'í attitude to earlier religions, therefore, is not that they are false or "heathen", but that, at root, they are all true and that these fundamental truths still persist within them. Bahá'ís encourage Indians in South America, for example, to see and reverence the profound spiritual truths which are to be found in both their pre-Christian religions and in the Catholicism which, in later centuries, has to varying degrees supplanted or overlaid their archaic faiths. Through the Bahá'í teachings, the inner conflict which many still feel between their ancient religions and Christianity is resolved and, at the same time, they are enabled to understand their spiritual unity with the peoples of other continents, such as Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims with whom they will undoubtedly come into contact with increasing frequency.

An example of the Bahá'í attitude is to be found in the operation of such radio stations as Radio Bahá'í Ecuador, which has a policy of encouraging Indian arts and music and fostering in the Indians pride in their heritage.

22 March 1988, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

A “new way of life for humanity”ⁱ

- 15 The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh has assimilated, by virtue of its creative, its regulative and ennobling energies, the varied races, nationalities, creeds and classes that have sought its shadow, and have pledged unswerving fealty to its cause. It has changed the hearts of its adherents, burned away their prejudices, stilled their passions, exalted their conceptions, ennobled their motives, co-ordinated their efforts, and transformed their outlook. While preserving their patriotism and safeguarding their lesser loyalties, it has made them lovers of mankind, and the determined upholders of its best and truest interests. While maintaining intact their belief in the Divine origin of their respective religions, it has enabled them to visualize the underlying purpose of these religions, to discover their merits, to recognize their sequence, their interdependence, their wholeness and unity, and to acknowledge the bond that vitally links them to itself. This universal, this transcending love which the followers of the Bahá'í Faith feel for their fellow-men, of whatever race, creed, class or nation, is neither mysterious nor can it be said to have been artificially stimulated. It is both spontaneous and genuine. They whose hearts are warmed by the energizing influence of God's creative love cherish His creatures for His sake, and recognize in every human face a sign of His reflected glory.

11 March 1936, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 16 To believe in the Mouthpiece of God in His Day confers very great blessings, not only on individuals, but on races, and he hopes that you who are now numbered amongst the followers of Bahá'u'lláh will give His Message to many more of your tribe, and in this way hasten for your people a bright and happy future.

21 December 1947, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 17 ...when a person becomes a Bahá'í, he gives up the past only in the sense that he is a part of this new and living Faith of God, and must seek to pattern himself, in act and thought, along the lines laid down by Bahá'u'lláh. The fact that he is by origin a Jew or a Christian, a black man or a white

i 20 November 1955, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi.

man, is not important any more, but, as you say, lends colour and charm to the Bahá'í Community in that it demonstrates unity in diversity.

12 March 1949, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 18 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. Now that the hour has arrived when the Bahá'í Faith is gaining prominence, and is being reviewed by so many peoples, it is necessary that the adherents of the Faith should live up to the high ideals of the Faith in every way. 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 men, while universal service is of God.

20 November 1955, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 19 It is not enough to proclaim the Bahá'í message, essential as that is. It is not enough to expand the rolls of Bahá'í membership, vital as that is. Souls must be transformed, communities thereby consolidated, new models of life thus attained. Transformation is the essential purpose of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, but it lies in the will and effort of the individual to achieve it in obedience to the Covenant. Necessary to the progress of this life-fulfilling transformation is knowledge of the will and purpose of God through regular reading and study of the Holy Word.

Ridván 1989, Universal House of Justice

Inevitability of Change

- 20 ...change is a necessary quality and an essential attribute of this world, and of time and place.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in a letter from the Universal House of Justice, 27 May 1966

- 21 Know that nothing that exists remains in a state of repose—that is, all things are in motion. They are either growing or declining, either coming from non-existence into existence or passing from existence into non-existence.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions, no. 63

- 22 God has given us eyes, that we may look about us at the world, and lay hold of whatsoever will further civilization and the arts of living. He has given us ears, that we may hear and profit by the wisdom of scholars and philosophers and arise to promote and practice it. Senses and faculties have been bestowed upon us, to be devoted to the service of the general good; so that we, distinguished above all other forms of life for perceptiveness and reason, should labor at all times and along all lines, whether the occasion be great or small, ordinary or extraordinary, until all mankind are safely gathered into the impregnable stronghold of knowledge. We should continually be establishing new bases for human happiness and creating and promoting new instrumentalities toward this end...

The superiority of the present in relation to the past consists in this, that the present can take over and adopt as a model many things which have been tried and tested and the great benefits of which have been demonstrated in the past, and that it can make its own new discoveries and by these augment its valuable inheritance.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 23 O ye respected souls! From the continual imitation of ancient and worn-out ways, the world had grown dark as darksome night. The fundamentals of the divine Teachings had passed from memory; their pith and heart had been totally forgotten, and the people were holding on to husks. The nations had, like tattered garments long outworn, fallen into a pitiful condition.

Out of this pitch blackness there dawned the morning splendour of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. He hath dressed the world with a garment new and fair, and that new garment is the principles which have come down from God.

Now the new age is here and creation is reborn. Humanity hath taken on new life. The autumn hath gone by, and the reviving spring is here. All things are now made new. Arts and industries have been reborn, there are new discoveries in science, and there are new inventions; even the details of human affairs, such as dress and personal effects—even weapons—all these have likewise been renewed. The laws and procedures of every government have been revised. Renewal is the order of the day.

And all this newness hath its source in the fresh outpourings of wondrous grace and favor from the Lord of the Kingdom, which have renewed the world. The people, therefore, must be set completely free from their old patterns of thought, that all their attention may be focused upon these

new principles, for these are the light of this time and the very spirit of this age.

Unless these Teachings are effectively spread among the people, until the old ways, the old concepts, are gone and forgotten, this world of being will find no peace, nor will it reflect the perfections of the Heavenly Kingdom. Strive ye with all your hearts to make the heedless conscious, to waken those who sleep, to bring knowledge to the ignorant, to make the blind to see, the deaf to hear, and restore the dead to life.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 205

- 24 The Bahá'ís should not always be the last to take up new and obviously excellent methods, but rather the first, as this agrees with the dynamic net of the Faith which is not only progressive, but holds within itself the seed of an entirely new culture and civilization.

5 May 1946, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Nature and Processes of Cultural Evolution

- 25 Let there be no misgivings as to the animating purpose of the worldwide Law of Bahá'u'lláh. Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, it seeks to broaden its basis, to remould 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 call of Bahá'u'lláh is primarily directed against all forms of provincialism, all insularities and prejudices. If long-cherished ideals and time-honoured institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious

formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer administer to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution? For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the preservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine.

28 November 1931, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 26 The Revelation, of which Bahá'u'lláh is the source and centre, abrogates none of the religions that have preceded it, nor does it attempt, in the slightest degree, to distort their features or to belittle their value. It disclaims any intention of dwarfing any of the Prophets of the past, or of whittling down the eternal verity of their teachings. It can, in no wise, conflict with the spirit that animates their claims, nor does it seek to undermine the basis of any man's allegiance to their cause. Its declared, its primary, purpose is to enable every adherent of these Faiths to obtain a fuller understanding of the religion with which he stands identified, and to acquire a clearer apprehension of its purpose. It is neither eclectic in the presentation of its truths, nor arrogant in the affirmation of its claims. Its teachings revolve around the fundamental principle that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is progressive, not final. Unequivocally and without the least reservation it proclaims all established religions to be divine in origin, identical in their aims, complementary in their functions, continuous in their purpose, indispensable in their value to mankind.

21 March 1932, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 27 As regards the questions of tribal practice, the Guardian wishes you to be extremely forbearing and patient in weaning the Bahá'ís away from their old customs. This can only be done by taking each case individually as it comes up, using the greatest wisdom and kindness, and not trying rigorously to impose all Bahá'í laws in every detail at this time.

8 August 1957, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 28 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. Iranians, even after their conversion to Islam, 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 Iranian 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.

In deciding whether or not to participate in such traditional activities, the Bahá'ís must guard against two extremes. The one is to disassociate themselves needlessly from harmless cultural observances and thus alienate themselves from their non-Bahá'í families and friends; the other is to continue the practice of abrogated observances of previous dispensations and thus undermine the independence of the Bahá'í Faith and create undesirable distinctions between themselves and their fellow-Bahá'ís. In this connection there is a difference between what Bahá'ís do among themselves and what they do in companionship with their non-Bahá'í friends and relations. For example, in a letter written on behalf of the Guardian there appears the following guidance:

As regards the celebration of the Christian Holidays by the believers: it is surely preferable and even highly advisable that the friends should in their relation to each other discontinue observing such holidays as Christmas and New Year, and to have their festal gatherings of this nature instead during the intercalary days and Naw-Rúz.

Further, there is no objection for Bahá'ís to attend religious marriage ceremonies of their friends and relatives or take part in festivities usually connected with these events, provided that in doing so they do not contravene Bahá'í Law. For example, if consuming alcoholic beverages is a part of such activities, the Bahá'ís, of course, would be obliged to refrain from partaking of such drinks.

There are some exclusive religious ceremonies in which Bahá'ís should not participate, in order to safeguard the independence of the Faith. In this regard, the beloved Guardian has given the following advice to an individual believer: "In these days the friends should, as much as possible, demonstrate through their deeds the independence of the Holy Faith of God, and its freedom from the customs, rituals and practices of a discredited and abrogated past."

In observing this principle, the House of Justice advises the Bahá'ís to maintain a balance between their adherence to the Cause and obedience to its laws on the one hand, and their role in society on the other. When an individual becomes a Bahá'í he acquires, as you are aware, a wider loyalty to the Manifestations of God. Having found this new way of life, he should be careful not to isolate himself from his family and his people, and he should show respect for his former religion. The Bahá'ís should, of course, avoid performing any acts which could be considered as implying their membership in another religion or which are contrary to Bahá'í principles. There is a clear distinction between participating in festive and cultural events, as opposed to performing religious ceremonies and rituals.

It should also be remembered that the weaning away of the Bahá'ís from customs and traditions, which have been established among communities for centuries, takes time and is a gradual process. Therefore, while the National Assembly should avoid rigidity in these matters, it should also not compromise when the interests of the Faith and its integrity and independence are at stake.

26 May 1982, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 29 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...

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.

25 July 1988, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 30 ...what Bahá'u'lláh has done for us all is to provide a standard by which to determine what is pleasing in God's sight, thereby freeing us to maintain those elements of diversity which are unique to our different cultures. The adoption of this divine standard enables each people to be confident in the permissibility of what it can retain from its past.

23 June 1995, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 31 Since change is inevitable if progress is to be made by any African society, a primary challenge to Bahá'ís is to preserve and improve those wholesome aspects of tribal and family custom that are in accord with the Bahá'í Teachings and to dispense with those that are not. Such a challenge must be embraced with the understanding that the Book of God is the standard by which to weigh all forms of behaviour. While unwavering action is necessary, wisdom and tact and patience must, of course, be exercised. Let it be understood, too, that Africans are not alone in the struggle to change certain age-old practices. People everywhere have customs which must be abandoned so as to clear the path along which their societies must evolve towards that glorious, new civilization which is to be the fruit of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation. Indeed, in no society on earth can there be found practices which adequately mirror the standards of His Cause. His own truth-bearing Words clarify the matter: "The summons and the message which We gave were never intended to reach or to benefit one land or one people only. Mankind in its entirety must firmly adhere to whatsoever hath been revealed and vouchsafed unto it. Then and only then will it attain unto true liberty. The whole earth is illuminated with the resplendent glory of God's Revelation."

Ridván 1996, Universal House of Justice

Appreciation of Cultural Diversity

“Consider the flowers of a garden” —The Principle of Unity in Diversityⁱ

- 32 All countries, in the estimation of the one true God, are but one country, and all cities and villages are on an equal footing. Neither holds distinction over another.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Tablets of the Divine Plan

- 33 A critic may object, saying that peoples, races, tribes and communities of the world are of different and varied customs, habits, tastes, character, inclinations and ideas, that opinions and thoughts are contrary to one another, and how, therefore, is it possible for real unity to be revealed and perfect accord among human souls to exist?

In answer we say that differences are of two kinds. One is the cause of annihilation and is like the antipathy existing among warring nations and conflicting tribes who seek each other’s destruction, uprooting one another’s families, depriving one another of rest and comfort and unleashing carnage. The other kind which is a token of diversity is the essence of perfection and the cause of the appearance of the bestowals of the Most Glorious Lord.

Consider the flowers of a garden: though differing in kind, color, form and shape, yet, inasmuch as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increaseth their charm, and addeth unto their beauty. Thus when that unifying force, the penetrating influence of the Word of God, taketh effect, the difference of customs, manners, habits, ideas, opinions and dispositions embellisheth the world of humanity. This diversity, this difference is like the naturally created dissimilarity and variety of the

i *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, sec. 225.*

limbs and organs of the human body, for each one contributeth to the beauty, efficiency and perfection of the whole. When these different limbs and organs come under the influence of man's sovereign soul, and the soul's power pervadeth the limbs and members, veins and arteries of the body, then difference reinforceth harmony, diversity strengtheneth love, and multiplicity is the greatest factor for coordination.

How unpleasing to the eye if all the flowers and plants, the leaves and blossoms, the fruits, the branches and the trees of that garden were all of the same shape and color! Diversity of hues, form and shape, enricheth and adometh the garden, and heighteneth the effect thereof. In like manner, when divers shades of thought, temperament and character, are brought together under the power and influence of one central agency, the beauty and glory of human perfection will be revealed and made manifest. Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men. Verily, it is the penetrating power in all things, the mover of souls and the binder and regulator in the world of humanity.

Praise be to God, today the splendor of the Word of God hath illumined every horizon, and from all sects, races, tribes, nations, and communities souls have come together in the light of the Word, assembled, united and agreed in perfect harmony. Oh! What a great number of meetings are held adorned with souls from various races and diverse sects! Anyone attending these will be struck with amazement, and might suppose that these souls are all of one land, one nationality, one community, one thought, one belief and one opinion: whereas, in fact, one is an American, the other an African, one cometh from Asia and another from Europe, one is a native of India, another is from Turkestan, one is an Arab, another a Tajik, another a Persian and yet another a Greek. Notwithstanding such diversity they associate in perfect harmony and unity, love and freedom; they have one voice, one thought and one purpose. Verily, this is from the penetrative power of the Word of God!

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, section 225

- 34 The Cause does not wish to suppress national characteristics. It abhors too much uniformity, and stands for the principle of unity in diversity, which principle we believe can alone provide a solution for the unification of mankind.

25 June 1935, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 35 Such a Faith knows no division of class or of party. It subordinates, without hesitation or equivocation, every particularistic interest, be it personal, regional, or national, to the paramount interests of humanity, firmly convinced that in a world of interdependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no abiding benefit can be conferred upon the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are ignored or neglected...

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...

National rivalries, hatred, 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.

11 March 1936, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 36 With the coming of Bahá'u'lláh and the emphasis that His Revelation gives to the oneness of mankind, it is inevitable that peoples in all parts of the world who once seemed dormant or who have suffered discrimination would rise to assert their place in society. As with so many fundamental social issues, those concerning "indigenous rights" and "self-determination" find, for Bahá'ís, their proper expression and resolution within the context of the principle of the oneness of mankind. However, as is often the case, such issues are expressed in political forms which are unacceptable to Bahá'ís, who conscientiously avoid partisanship, subversion, and the corrupt attitudes and involvements associated with politics. At the present time, it is recognized that important issues of society fall within the province of government and perforce engage political processes currently in practice. Increasingly, as the Faith emerges from obscurity the Bahá'í community will find itself compelled to assist in finding solutions to the

social problems afflicting humanity; it will have to be wise in its actions to avoid the pitfalls of politics.

Generally, the wisest course for individual Bahá'ís and the Bahá'í community in controversial situations is to remain uninvolved, although not uninterested. It is the responsibility of the Bahá'í, in their contact with the native people, to explain that the Bahá'í approach, with its emphasis upon the achievement of unity as a basis for an enduring resolution to the problems of mankind, far from being indifferent to the real needs of disadvantaged peoples, represents a fundamental solution derived from the diagnosis by the All-Knowing Physician of the manifold ills of human society.

27 June 1993, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 37 The fundamental principle of the oneness of mankind, and the aim of the Faith to promote unity in diversity, underlie the Bahá'í approach to indigenous peoples. Their rights are inseparable from human rights for all, and the Bahá'í Faith upholds the right of indigenous peoples to develop and take pride in their own identity, culture and language. Great importance is attached to teaching the Faith to the indigenous populations in a country, more especially since they have so often been neglected or downtrodden by other segments of society; in many instances their suffering has made them particularly receptive to the Message of Bahá'u'lláh...

A unique feature of the Bahá'í Administrative Order is the manner in which it enables all the diverse elements of the Bahá'í community, drawn from a variety of ethnic, racial, cultural and educational backgrounds, to work together in a mutually supportive and spiritually beneficial manner. This is in direct contrast to the declining social order external to the Bahá'í community, in which each segment seeks to pursue a separate path in its social and political organization and activities.

25 July 1995, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 38 ...the oneness of mankind will not be based on forced assimilation, but upon protection of cultural diversity. At the same time, however, we should beware of inadvertently settling upon a limited model, such as the one sometimes associated in contemporary discourse on multiculturalism. A distinctively Bahá'í culture will welcome an infinite diversity in regard to secondary characteristics, but also firmly uphold unity in regard to fundamental principles; thereby achieving a vigorous complementarity.

For example, in *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1982), page 260-1, we find the following intriguing statement:

What a blessing that will be—when all shall come together, even as once separate torrents, rivers and streams, running brooks and single drops, when collected together in one place will form a mighty sea. And to such a degree will the inherent unity of all prevail, that the traditions, rules, customs and distinctions in the fanciful life of these populations will be effaced and vanish away like isolated drops, once the great sea of oneness doth leap and surge and roll.

The point is not to minimize differences, nor to make of unity and diversity a false dichotomy, but ever to keep in mind that the Bahá’í standard is very high and grounded in divine love.

13 February 1996, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

An “equal standard of human rights”ⁱ

- 39 ...Bahá’u’lláh taught that an equal standard of human rights must be recognized and adopted. In the estimation of God all men are equal; there is no distinction or preferment for any soul in the dominion of His justice and equity.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, sec. 63

- 40 As to your question concerning the rights of the minority of non-Bahá’í citizens in a Bahá’í state, it is clear from the writings of our Faith that under a Bahá’í system the rights of minorities of any type must always be respected and upheld. Just as Bahá’ís today show obedience and loyalty to the government but refuse to bow to the majority if they are asked to deny their faith, so in the future, when the majority is represented by the Faith the Bahá’ís will not force the minority to become followers of Bahá’u’lláh but they will expect the minority to be similarly obedient and loyal. As you indicate the ways of the world are basically and usually at variance with this standard...

The ultimate safeguard in the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh to ensure that this principle and all its other fundamental tenets are not violated is the Universal House of Justice, which, as its Constitution clearly stipulates, is

i ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, no. 63.

charged with the responsibility of maintaining the integrity of the teachings and of safeguarding their inviolability.

9 March 1977, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 41 We appreciate the careful thought you have given to the subject of indigenous populations. The Bahá'í International Community should maintain its involvement with this issue, continuing the emphasis on the need for unity in diversity—a unity which implies mutual tolerance among the various populations, a recognition by dominant populations of the freedom of indigenous peoples to exercise their rights in all legitimate varieties of ways, and the corollary recognition of indigenous peoples themselves that such freedom carries with it the responsibility of recognizing the rights of all others to the same expressions. The implications for indigenous peoples also include: realization of the virtues of cross-cultural influences; appreciation of the values of other cultures as accruing to the wealth of human experience and the freedom of all to share in such values without necessarily giving up their respective identities; avoidance of parochial attitudes which degenerate into ethnic and cultural prejudices; and, above all, appreciation of the necessity to maintain a global perspective within which the particulars of indigenous expression can find an enduring context.

19 July 1985, Universal House of Justice

- 42 Concerning indigenous rights, it stands to reason that indigenous people are entitled to all the human rights accorded other peoples. For example, they should be guaranteed the full rights of citizenship, and all acts of discrimination against them, which may have developed over the years, should be eliminated. At the same time, it would be unseemly for the demands for their rights to make, on the basis of their indigeness, a special claim to exclusive rights and privileges which exceed the necessity to redress injustices. The Bahá'í attitude on such questions should be guided by Bahá'u'lláh's teaching that "The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens." Thus it should be borne in mind that while upholding indigenous rights may well deserve the support of the Bahá'ís, often the viewpoints of those claiming such rights are so circumscribed and narrow that Bahá'ís find it difficult to wholeheartedly subscribe to them.

14 January 1988, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice.

- 43 Indigenous people have a highly significant role to play in the development of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, as is indicated in the oft-quoted words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá concerning the American continent to the effect that "should these Indians be educated and properly guided, there can be no doubt that through the Divine teachings they will become so enlightened that the whole earth will be illumined". In this period of social evolution, however, minorities, including indigenous peoples, continue to suffer from oppressive and disheartening treatment in many parts of the world. On the subject of amelioration of the condition of oppressed and unjustly treated minorities, in a letter written on its behalf, the House of Justice has stated the following.

The Universal House of Justice is deeply concerned at the plight of so many of the aboriginal peoples in various parts of the world who have been denied fundamental human rights by uninterested and selfish majorities. Humanity is plagued with many inequities and injustices in every part of the world. Bahá'u'lláh speaks of these and points out time and again that the solution to these problems lies in the recognition of God and His Manifestation for this Day. While there is no objection to any member of a minority group asserting his legal claim to property or rights through the courts or administrative agencies which may be open to him, it is contrary to Bahá'í principles to take political action in asserting those rights.

The principles stated in the Writings are clear, but usually it is when these principles are applied that questions arise, and in cases in which there is any doubt about the correct course of action, the believers should consult their National Assembly.

27 June 1993, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Enrichment of Community Life

- 44 ...the Guardian was very pleased to learn of the progress made by the Indian National Spiritual Assembly in its efforts to consolidate, widen and maintain the scope of its national activities. The difficulties in your way are tremendous. The differences of language and of social and intellectual background do, undoubtedly, render the work somewhat difficult to carry out and may temporarily check the efficient and smooth working of the national administrative machinery of the Faith. They, nevertheless, impart to the deliberations of the National Assembly a universality which they would

be otherwise lacking, and give to its members a breadth of view which it is their duty to cultivate and foster. It is not uniformity which we should seek in the formation of any national or local Assembly. For the bedrock of the Bahá'í administrative order is the principle of unity in diversity, which has been so strongly and so repeatedly emphasized in the writings of the Cause. Differences which are not fundamental and contrary to the basic teachings of the Cause should be maintained, while the underlying unity of the administrative order should be at any cost preserved and ensured. Unity, both of purpose and of means, is, indeed, indispensable to the safe and speedy working of every Assembly, whether local or national.

2 January 1934, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 45 Now that more of the Latin believers are active and beginning to assume responsibilities, the work will go forward on a more permanent foundation, as pioneers from a foreign land can never take the place of native believers who must always constitute the bedrock of any future development of the Faith in their country.

30 January 1948, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 46 Every effort should be made to teach the native Swedish people, so they may ultimately take their part in the community of races and people, who make the world order of Bahá'u'lláh.

4 January 1954, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 47 He was likewise very happy to know that there are now new Assemblies formed in the Malayan Federation, and he hopes that the Cause will make rapid progress in that part of the world. There are so many races and so many nationalities, and the future is infinitely bright when we think of what these souls are going to contribute to the international Bahá'í life as they become strong supporters of our glorious Faith.

7 May 1954, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 48 In connection with the teaching work throughout the Pacific area ... [the] Bahá'ís ... must bear in mind that the primary object of their living there is to teach the native population the Faith...

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.

16 June 1954, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 49 At the same time there is a challenge of great urgency facing the world-wide Bahá'í community. When launching the Ten Year Crusade, Shoghi Effendi urged the believers to “carry the torch of the Faith to regions so remote, so backward, so inhospitable that neither the light of Christianity or Islam has, after the revolution of centuries, as yet penetrated.” A number of such regions still exist in places like New Guinea, the heart of Africa and the Amazon Basin in South America. As the influence of civilization spreads, the age-old ways of life of the inhabitants of these regions will inevitably perish, and they will rapidly be infected with the materialistic ideas of a decadent civilization. It is our pressing duty to carry the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to such people while they are still pure-hearted and receptive, and through it to prepare them for the changed world which will come upon them...

In addition to the tribes in these remote regions of the world, there are tribes and minorities who still live in their traditional ways in the midst of other cultures. All too often such peoples are despised and ignored by the nations among whom they dwell, but we should seek them out, teach them the Cause of God, and enrich through their membership the Bahá'í communities of the lands in which they live. So important is this goal that each National Spiritual Assembly should study the requirements for teaching each of the different tribes and groups within its area, appoint a committee for this purpose— even a special committee for each tribe or minority where this is feasible and desirable—and launch a series of well-conceived, far-reaching campaigns to bring about the enrollment of these peoples within the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, and the establishment among them of the Bahá'í Administrative Order.

25 May 1975, Universal House of Justice

Cultural Diversity in the Bahá'í Community

Associating with People of Diverse Beliefs and Customs

- 50 The most important teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is to leave behind racial, religious, national and patriotic prejudices. Until these prejudices are entirely removed mankind will not find rest. Nay, rather, discord and bloodshed will increase day by day, and the foundation of the prosperity of the world of man will be destroyed.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 51 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. The consciousness of any division or cleavage in its ranks is alien to its very purpose, principles, and ideals. Once its members have fully recognized the claim of its Author, and, by identifying themselves with its Administrative Order, accepted unreservedly the principles and laws embodied in its teachings, every differentiation of class, creed, or color must automatically be obliterated, and never be allowed, under any pretext, and however great the pressure of events or of public opinion, to reassert itself. If any discrimination is at all to be tolerated, it should be a discrimination not against, but rather in favor of the minority, be it racial or otherwise. 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 fulfil 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

- 52 Association with all people of divers beliefs, customs, and outlook is enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh, but we must guard against interference in political affairs, nor must we give the impression that we are a sect of any existing religion. We must be tolerant, kind, broad-minded, and unprejudiced in our dealings with all sorts and conditions of men, but it is our duty also to assert and prove the independence of our precious and sacred Faith, and to explain its liberal, universal principles.

12 December 1932, Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter written on his behalf

- 53 The friends should first start by applying the principle of the oneness of races within their own community, and thus set before the world outside a noble and inspiring example. Every trace of racial prejudice should be banished by the friends in their community life, and also in their private life, so much so that they should come to gradually forget the very existence of the racial problem as such. Such an attitude is bound to strongly impress

every outsider and draw his attention to the Cause, and convince him of the sublimity and practicability of its Teachings.

11 November 1936, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 54 It is a great mistake to believe that because people are illiterate or live primitive lives, they are lacking in either intelligence or sensibility. On the contrary, they may well look on us, with the evils of our civilization, with its moral corruption, its ruinous wars, its hypocrisy and conceit, as people who merit watching with both suspicion and contempt. We should meet them as equals, well-wishers, people who admire and respect their ancient descent, and who feel that they will be interested, as we are, in a living religion and not in the dead forms of present-day churches.

21 September 1951, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 55 If the Japanese friends will realize that the American believers have failures and weaknesses which often reflect those of their nation, they will feel encouraged to not only be patient and understanding in regard to them, but also to contribute more of the fine points of their own national characteristics to the community work as a whole. If they think that, because the Cause is perfect the American Bahá'ís are perfect, they are bound to be disappointed. In our great Bahá'í family we see both the strong points and the weak points in national character come out in the believers of different countries. The strong points of the American friends are their devotion and their initiative, their courage and determination and zeal, but there are many characteristics they need, just like every people!

The whole aim of teaching work is to create a body of native believers who will carry on the work in their own land. Therefore, the sooner the meetings can be conducted in Japanese, the better; certainly on the Spiritual Assembly there should be adequate translation into Japanese, in fact it would be better if it could be the other way round, but perhaps this is not feasible at present, and would cause confusion and inharmony.

19 August 1952, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 56 I need not tell you that the work in Africa, and more particularly in Uganda, is very dear to his heart ... He feels that this country and its peoples, in the very heart of Africa, are a most precious trust. Their receptivity to the Teachings, their great desire to serve their new Faith, the number of them who have arisen to go out as pioneers, mark them as a people apart in the

Bahá'í world, at least for the time being. May many others in neighbouring countries prove as worthy, and follow their example.

In dealing with people who are still backward in relation to our civilized standards, and in many cases guided by a tribal system which has strong orders of its own, he feels that you should be both tactful and forbearing.

17 June 1954, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 57 In spite of the fact that Mr ... has been expelled from the Gilbert and Ellice Islands, the remarkable progress of the Faith there has been a source of great satisfaction. It shows that a spiritual receptivity, a purity of heart and uprightness of character exist potentially amongst many of the peoples of the Pacific Isles to an extent equal to that of the tribesmen of Africa. It is indeed an encouraging and awe-inspiring sight to witness the spread of our beloved Faith amongst those whom civilized nations misguidedly term "savages", "primitive peoples" and "uncivilized nations".

11 July 1956, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 58 The second issue which causes difficulties for the African friends in these days is the matter of tribalism...

The Bahá'í attitude in such a situation is clearly set forth in the Writings. As Bahá'ís we are attached to our tribes and clans, just as we are to our families and, on a larger scale, to our nations, but we do not allow this attachment to conflict with our wider loyalty to humanity...

In these days when tribal tensions are increasing in Africa the friends should be vigilant lest any trace of prejudice or hatred, God forbid, may enter their midst. On the contrary, they should endeavour to bring into the Faith an ever larger representation of the various tribes in each country, and through complete lack of prejudice as well as through the love that Bahá'ís have for each other and for their non-Bahá'í neighbours, demonstrate to their countrymen what the Word of God can do. They will thus provide, for the scrutiny of the leaders and rulers of their countries, a shining example of a unified community, working together in full concord and harmony, demonstrating a hope that is attainable, and a pattern worthy to be emulated.

To discriminate against any tribes 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 administra-

tion 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 or public opinion should bring pressure to bear upon them.

8 February 1970, Universal House of Justice

- 59 The entry into the Spanish Bahá'í community of Gypsies, with their distinctive traditions and attitudes, is a welcome evidence of the power of the Faith to unite human beings of diverse backgrounds and cultures. It also provides the Spanish Bahá'í community with the challenge of working out ways of gradually and patiently deepening the new believers' understanding of and obedience to the teachings and laws of the Faith.

In this process the older believers must be careful to distinguish between those matters which are principles of the Faith, and those which may merely be traditional Spanish or Persian attitudes. As you are undoubtedly aware, pioneers have sometimes caused unnecessary complications by insisting that the new believers in a country adopt practices which turn out to have nothing to do with the Faith but are merely norms of behaviour from the pioneers' own homeland. In uniting the peoples of the world in the Bahá'í community, we must establish uniformity in essentials, but must permit diversity in secondary matters.

1 November 1979, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 60 We should have no class prejudice in the Faith, but we should not be blind to the differences and sensitivities of people who come from different classes of society. There are social differences in Europe, and the Bahá'ís should be aware of them and make every effort to bridge them. The Bahá'í community should aim at becoming a cross-section of the national community.

12 October 1983, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 61 ...many Bahá'í communities around the world today function in the context of societies which are struggling with problems arising from ethnic differences. Conflicts often involve cultural and linguistic issues and may be further complicated by the presence of religious differences, and by opportunistic political movements which use them for their own benefit. It is not uncommon for the relevant issues to find expression through violence. The essential challenge facing Bahá'ís in such situations is to avoid becoming embroiled in pointless debates. Inspired by the spirit of

Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings, we are called on to make the Bahá'í community a haven of harmony and love, in contrast to the distress, contention and strife of the surrounding society.

Like their fellow-believers in many lands, the Bahá'í community in ... is challenged by such a situation. In seeking to respond, the Bahá'í administration and the more experienced friends must exercise great patience and wisdom in guiding believers, some of whose passions may be raised by the various issues. Essentially, the problems produced by cultural and linguistic differences are impulses which can serve to facilitate the growth of individuals and the maturation of the institutions if we learn to take advantage of them.

13 April 1994, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 62 The difficulties which you describe are undoubtedly among those facing many members of inter-racial families ... The House of Justice feels that these are matters which need to be worked out through the study and implementation of Bahá'í principles, through personal wisdom and initiative, and by taking advantage of the benefits of consultation among those concerned. Of very great importance is development of the consciousness that one is, above all, a human being and a Bahá'í, and that differences of race are of far less significance. It is hoped that the efforts of the believers, in conjunction with those of the Bahá'í institutions, to resolve such difficulties will attract divine confirmations and yield lasting results.

13 October 1996, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Responsibilities of Bahá'í Administrative Institutions

Preserving Flexibility

- 63 Shoghi Effendi believes that, although the friends may have different methods of teaching the Cause, yet they should not let such diversity lead to a consciousness of division among them. To safeguard the unity of the Faith is the sacred obligation of every loyal Bahá'í. We should, therefore, avoid creating any misunderstandings which might develop into actual division. We stand for unity through diversity and we hold in contempt every attempt at uniformity or at complete separateness.

3 June 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 64 The Guardian's emphasis on the question of uniformity between national constitutions is prompted by his desire to maintain in all national Bahá'í affairs a degree of uniformity which he feels is essential to the effective functioning of national administrative bodies throughout the Bahá'í world. In matters which are not specified in the text of national constitutions, and as such are secondary in character, every National Spiritual Assembly is free to act according to its wish and with due consideration to local exigencies and demands. In this way, the principle of unity in diversity will be strictly preserved and effectively applied.

5 January 1935, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 65 The believers are free to paint, write and compose as their talents guide them. If music is written, incorporating the sacred writings, the friends are free to make use of it, but it should never be considered a requirement at Bahá'í meetings to have such music. The further away the friends keep from any set forms, the better, for they must realize that the Cause is absolutely universal, and what might seem a beautiful addition to their mode of celebrating a Feast, etc., would perhaps fall on the ears of people of another country as unpleasant sounds—and vice versa.

20 July 1946, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 66 He does not feel, however, that the regular meetings should all open and close with songs. You see our Faith is for the whole world, for all people, not just for Christians, and this is a Christian custom to sing religious songs at a spiritual gathering. The friends should, however, do all they can to make the meetings interesting and hold the attention of people.

31 May 1949, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 67 ...he feels that the friends should be very careful not to place hindrances in the way of those who wish to accept the Faith. If we make the requirements too rigorous, we will cool off the initial enthusiasm, rebuff the hearts and cease to expand rapidly. The essential thing is that the candidate for enrolment should believe in his heart in the truth of Bahá'u'lláh. Whether he is literate or illiterate, informed of all the Teachings or not, is beside the point entirely. When the spark of faith exists the essential Message is there, and gradually everything else can be added unto it. The process of educating people of different customs and backgrounds must be done with the greatest patience and understanding, and rules and regulations not

imposed upon them, except where a rock-bottom essential is in question. He feels sure that your Assembly is capable of carrying on its work in this spirit, and of fanning the hearts to flame through the fire of the love of God, rather than putting out the first sparks with bucketsful of administrative information and regulations.

9 July 1957, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 68 We have reviewed your letter ... about the application of Bahá'í marriage laws to persons who had married according to the native custom, which we assume was prior to their enrollment in the Faith.

Persons who are married according to native custom prior to their enrollment as Bahá'ís are fully married in the eyes of the Faith, and there is no point in their going through a Bahá'í ceremony.

6 April 1971, Universal House of Justice

- 69 You have asked for suggestions regarding the preparation of the handbook on Bahá'í Holy Days which you are planning to publish. It is important that notwithstanding whatever details you set forth therein, it be made clear that the contents do not constitute procedures that must be rigidly adhered to,

Dignity and reverence befitting the occasion should obviously characterize observances of Bahá'í Holy Days by the friends, but this does not mean that cultural traditions which do not contravene Bahá'í principles may not, and cannot, find expression in the local observances and meetings of the friends.

1 August 1983, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 70 With reference to the question concerning the clapping of hands in songs where the Greatest Name is used, the House of Justice does not want to draw hard and fast rules. Clearly such matters are secondary and subject to cultural considerations, customs, and the social conventions prevailing in a given society. In some cultures, for example, clapping, as part of religious expression, is considered offensive; in other cultures, clapping is a means of keeping the rhythm of a hymn, especially in the absence of a musical instrument and is integral to religious experience; among other peoples, clapping may constitute a demonstration of religious fervour. Further, within any given country there may well be regional cultural differences.

Therefore, it is left to the National Spiritual Assembly to weigh each case with care and sensitivity in light of the prevailing cultural milieu and, if necessary, provide guidance to the friends.

1 October 1986, Universal House of Justice

Fostering Diversity

- 71 No more laudable and meritorious service can be rendered the Cause of God, at the present hour, than a successful effort to enhance the diversity of the members of the American Bahá'í community by swelling the ranks of the Faith through the enrollment of the members of these races.ⁱ A blending of these highly differentiated elements of the human race, harmoniously interwoven into the fabric of an all-embracing Bahá'í fraternity, and assimilated through the dynamic processes of a divinely appointed Administrative Order, and contributing each its share to the enrichment and glory of Bahá'í community life, is surely an achievement the contemplation of which must warm and thrill every Bahá'í heart.

Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice

- 72 It has been a great source of joy to the Guardian to see the marked increase of native Bahá'ís throughout that area ... However devoted the pioneers may be to these distant countries of their adoption, their relation to them cannot but be a transient one, especially in view of the disturbed state of the world and gloomy clouds that hang over its political horizons. They may suddenly be forced to go home; therefore, the native Bahá'ís, in particular, must seize this opportunity and arise to, themselves, in their own countries, pioneer to new cities and towns, new islands and as yet unopened territories, so that they may, with the help of their Bahá'í brethren from overseas, lay a firm and enduring foundation, and commence the great task of building up the Administrative Order, which is itself the foundation of the future World Order.

15 July 1957, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 73 In response to your letter ... requesting guidance about the propriety of burning incense at Bahá'í Feasts and meetings, the Universal House of Justice has asked us to convey the following.

i "the Negro, the Indian, the Eskimo, and Jewish races".

The reasons which prompted you to ask about the above matter undoubtedly stemmed from your desire to safeguard the interests of the Faith and to keep it free from the rituals of past religions, points which Bahá'í institutions should bear in mind when discharging their duties and responsibilities. At the same time they should uphold the principle of unity in diversity, which often demonstrates itself through the cultural heritage of peoples. Your National Assembly may be aware that although incense is burned in religious ceremonies and temples, it is also a custom in some countries which is carried out at non-religious gatherings. For example, in India people of both Hindu and Muslim backgrounds burn incense in their homes and at social gatherings. In some cases the reason behind their using it is to freshen the air. It is therefore not objectionable in principle for the friends to burn incense if they wish when hosting Bahá'í meetings. However, this should not be done in such a way as to give the impression that it is a regular practice which is required at all Bahá'í meetings.

28 June 1983, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 74 At the present time, the challenge to every Bahá'í community is to avoid suppression of those culturally-diverse elements which are not contrary to the teachings, while establishing and maintaining such a high degree of unity that others are attracted to the Cause of God.

25 July 1988, on behalf of the Universal House

- 75 The Bahá'í Faith subscribes to the principle of unity in diversity; the Bahá'í administrative structure provides a model of people of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds who unite together under a National Spiritual Assembly to form a dynamic social unit in which there is provision for the expression of cultural diversity.

27 June 1993, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 76 You have asked about the appropriateness of ceremonies from other cultures being presented at Bahá'í national events and local gatherings ...

You mention that the popularity of the "Pipe Ceremony" is part of the revival of native cultural values. While seeking out the spiritual roots of their own tradition, it is natural for Alaskan natives to view sympathetically symbols of the spiritual roots that once sustained the indigenous peoples of North America. Such a desire for the rediscovery of one's cul-

ture is one in which Bahá'ís rejoice. In this context, it would be acceptable occasionally to hold such cultural ceremonies at Bahá'í national events and local gatherings, so long as their features are not contrary to Bahá'í Teachings and they do not become customary. Moreover, these ceremonies should not be carried out during the formal part of a Bahá'í event, such as during the consultation at a National Convention, or in connection with the reading of prayers and passages from the Writings during a feast or Holy Day programme. Rather, such ceremonies may be included as an adjunct to the programme, and participation in them should be on a voluntary basis.

Regarding your question as to whether the audience should be informed that the cultural ceremonies are not part of the Bahá'í Faith, perhaps it would be possible to have this information presented in a positive manner, such as by explaining Bahá'u'lláh's teaching on unity in diversity, or the respect held by Bahá'ís for diversity of cultural expression.

16 November 1994, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 77 The House of Justice sympathizes with your great desire to find ways of making the Bahá'í Teachings attractive to the Chinese people. Concerning the need, as you say, to reformulate the Teachings in order to make them more readily comprehensible to peoples of different cultural backgrounds, Shoghi Effendi himself wrote:

Nor should any of the pioneers, at this early stage in the upbuilding of Bahá'í national communities, overlook the fundamental prerequisite for any successful teaching enterprise, which is to adapt the presentation of the fundamental principles of their Faith to the cultural and religious backgrounds, the ideologies, and the temperament of the divers races and nations whom they are called upon to enlighten and attract. The susceptibilities of these races and nations ... differing widely in their customs and standards of living, should at all times be carefully considered, and under no circumstances neglected.

5 June 1947, Shoghi Effendi

- 78 However, this desire must be balanced against the requirements of the Covenant which it is our sacred duty as Bahá'ís to uphold...

While you have a laudable aim in preparing materials on the Faith that will serve as a bridge of understanding for Chinese people who encounter the Bahá'í Teachings, you undoubtedly realize that these Teachings can-

not be made to conform to the beliefs and understanding of any portion of humanity.

Indeed, for every people certain beliefs are as veils that prevent the penetration of the light of truth brought by a new Manifestation. Just as the followers of, say, Christianity and Islam must shed the veils imposed by their traditional beliefs, so too must the Chinese who are deeply attracted to Confucius be led to see that their aspirations are realized in the coming of Bahá'u'lláh, Whose life-giving Message is the divine elixir necessary for every people to achieve its promised destiny.

4 June 1995, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 79 As you may know, in many parts of the world there are certain tribal and traditional dances which are performed in glorification of God, and it is perfectly acceptable for a prayer to be interpreted in the form of movement or dance. However, to avoid that such expressions of prayer become gradually ritualized, or that certain gestures and movement become habitual accompaniments to prayers, it is preferable that they not accompany the reciting of words of the prayers. Through the revealed prayers, we seek communion with God, hence they must be offered with the utmost reverence and dignity. Each individual Bahá'í should be free to pray as he wishes, for there is no set form for prayer except for those few which have special instructions for observance upon their recitation.

24 March 1997, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Guiding and Encouraging Social Evolution

- 80 He fully appreciates the fact that the believers are still somewhat attached to the different cults from which they have come; this is a problem which always faces the Faith in a new region; it existed a long time in America, and seems part of the growth of the Cause. He feels your Assembly can afford to be patient with the friends, while at the same time educating them into a deeper understanding of the Cause. As their awareness of the true significance of Bahá'u'lláh grows, they will become weaned from the old ideas and give full allegiance to His teachings.

30 June 1952, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 81 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.

On the other hand, once accorded membership in the Community of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, it must be brought home to them that they are expected to live up to His Teachings, and to show forth the signs of a noble character in conformity with His Laws. This can often, be done gradually, after the new believer is enrolled.

25 June 1953, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 82 ...we noted your decision to place a notice in your Bahá'í newsletter requesting clothing for the new believers, who are described as "primitive".

It is not clear from the information contained in your Minutes whether your decision to obtain clothing for the new believers is for humanitarian reasons or whether it is your wish to clothe the believers whose tribal custom does not require clothing. If your reasons are humanitarian, certainly the plight of people in great need arouses concern and sympathy in all of us. You should bear in mind, however, that to begin such a program might well endanger the future of the Cause among those people and would affect the motives of other members of the tribe when again offered the bounty of becoming followers of Bahá'u'lláh. Assemblies, either Local or National, must always hold as their first consideration that we, with our limited resources, have the obligation to establish the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, and that while millions of people can support projects such as this one, only Bahá'ís may contribute to the work of the Cause.

If it is the tribal custom of those believers to remain unclothed, you should avoid taking steps to obtain clothing for them or to request them to wear clothing at this stage in their deepening. The changing of such a custom should be a natural and gradual process, and not an imposed one. We should avoid the mistakes which have been made in the past by missionaries.

8 February 1972, Universal House of Justice

- 83 Concerning your question whether Bahá'ís can participate in the rites of other religions, it is clear from letters written on behalf of the Guardian that while Bahá'ís are encouraged to associate with the followers of other religions, they should not in any way identify themselves with the doctrines and usages of other religions. There may be a few cases, however, when withdrawal of the new believer from membership in a religious organization and his non-observance of its ceremonies and customs may take place gradually, with the permission or upon the advice of your National

Assembly, which must consider such situations carefully and render its decision in each case separately.

10 July 1978, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 84 The cardinal purpose of the Bahá'í Faith is to establish the oneness of the human race. As we do this, we bring into the Bahá'í community people of many varied backgrounds and temperaments, and only gradually can true unity be forged out of such divergent elements while preserving the desirable diversities which are not inconsistent with the divine Teachings. This is most apparent in tribal societies, which have very strong traditions. The Spiritual Assemblies in such countries have the task, while teaching the Faith, of giving the people pride and self-confidence in their native traditions, of preserving those which are colourful enrichments of social and personal life, while weaning the new believers gradually away from those traditions which are harmful and in conflict with the teachings and spirit of the Cause of God. A similar process is necessary in Europe.

It is in establishing the unity of mankind that the administration of the Faith plays such a vital part ... 'Abdu'l-Bahá ... wrote in the strongest terms about the fundamental importance of the Administrative Order. In a Tablet to an individual believer, for example, the translation of which is published as section 69 of *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, He states:

Thou hast written concerning organization. The divine teachings and the admonitions and exhortations of Bahá'u'lláh are manifestly evident. These constitute the organization of the Kingdom and their enforcement is obligatory. The least deviation from them is absolute error.

There are also all the statements made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament, with which you must be familiar. By obeying the Spiritual Assemblies and adhering to their guidance, the Bahá'ís maintain the unity of the Faith, promote God's Covenant, and ensure that the Cause does not fly into a myriad conflicting sects and schools as has happened with the earlier religions, no matter how spiritual they have been.

12 October 1983, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 85 With regard to the questions you submitted as a result of your contacts with the village women, the House of Justice has directed us to convey its advice.

During this period of transition from practices current in the present social orders of tribal society to the standards advocated and upheld in

the Bahá'í community, it is important for Bahá'ís to exercise patience, and endeavour to show respect to the tribal laws that apply in each case, provided they do not contradict basic Bahá'í principles and regulations involving such acts as denial of one's faith or contracting polygamous marriages. It should also be borne in mind that in cases calling for personal guidance, the friends should feel free to turn to their Local Spiritual Assemblies which, being on the spot and normally familiar with tribal and customary practices as well as with the Bahá'í teachings which apply, will be able to proffer advice, suggest solutions to personal difficulties and, indeed, in some cases, be themselves instrumental in resolving the problems.

12 January 1986, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 86 When a Spiritual Assembly is faced with questions of possible conflict between tribal practices and Bahá'í law, it should distinguish between aspects of tribal community life which are related to fundamental laws (such as monogamy) and matters of lesser importance, from which the friends can and should extricate themselves gradually. Furthermore, the House of Justice has offered the advice that the institutions of the Faith should be careful not to press the friends to arbitrarily discard those local traditions which are harmless and often colourful characteristics of particular peoples and tribes. Were a new Bahá'í suddenly to cease following the customs of his people, it is possible that they might misunderstand the true nature of the Bahá'í Faith, and the Bahá'ís could be regarded as having turned against the traditions of the land. However, Bahá'ís should exercise vigilance, with the aid of the institutions of the Faith, to avoid inadvertent involvement in events which appear at first sight to be purely cultural and traditional in nature, but which are, in fact, held as a cover for politically oriented gatherings. The weaning away of the Bahá'ís from customs and traditions which have been established among communities for centuries takes time and is a gradual process. While an Assembly should avoid rigidity in these matters, it should also not compromise when the interests of the Faith and its integrity and independence are at stake...

When the Bahá'í community in a village is a significant proportion of the population, it has a wide range of opportunities to be an example and an encouragement of means of improving the quality of life in the village. Among the initiatives which it might take are measures to foster child education, adult literacy and the training of women to better dis-

charge their responsibilities as mothers and to play an enlarged role in the administrative and social life of the village; encouragement of the people of the village to join together in devotions, perhaps in the early morning, irrespective of their varieties of religious belief; support of efforts to improve the hygiene and the health of the village, including attention to the provision of pure water, the preservation of cleanliness in the village environment, and education in the harmful effects of narcotic and intoxicating substances. No doubt other possibilities will present themselves to the village Bahá'í community and its Local Spiritual Assembly.

25 July 1988, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 87 The matters raised in your letter are concerned with the differing cultures in ... and their expression in the Bahá'í community. The aim of the Bahá'í Faith is to maintain cultural diversity while promoting the unity of all peoples. This diversity will enrich human life in a peaceful world society. Within the Bahá'í community the cultural traditions of the people who comprise it should be observed, as long as those traditions are not contrary to the Bahá'í teachings. It should also be recognized that many cultural practices will eventually disappear or be merged with related ones from other societies as the social evolution of mankind continues.

The application of these principles requires great wisdom and the exercise of careful judgement on the part of the Spiritual Assemblies. When there is a conflict between a traditional cultural practice and the Bahá'í teachings, the Assembly concerned must decide whether the issue involved is of fundamental importance, in which case the traditional practice cannot be continued by the Bahá'ís, or whether it is of lesser importance, such that the believers can be left to gradually extricate themselves from it over a period of time. An Assembly must also carefully seek out and follow a path which offers encouragement and support to each culture with which it comes in contact, while taking care not to slight the rights and preferences of the believers whose cultural group constitutes the majority in the community.

You are urged to consult fully and frankly with the Spiritual Assemblies concerning the issues raised in your letter. Also, you may well find it useful to seek advice from the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members on these matters. Should you find yourself in disagreement with a decision of the National Spiritual Assembly on a specific issue which you feel to be of fundamental importance, you are free to appeal to the National Assembly

for reconsideration of the matter or for its submission to the Universal House of Justice; in the latter case, the Assembly will transmit your appeal together with its own comments. By following these approaches, the unity of the Bahá'í community is preserved as it devises appropriate means of responding to the new challenges associated with the expansion of the scope of its endeavours.

7 May 1989, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 88 With regard to the ritual use of peyote within the Native American Church, it is understood that this practice is countenanced by civil law. However, this should not alter the clear understanding that, according to Bahá'í law, the use of peyote and similar hallucinogenic agents is prohibited to Bahá'ís except when prescribed for medical treatment by competent physicians. Notwithstanding the prohibition observed by Bahá'ís in this respect, the friends are advised to adopt attitudes of tolerance and forbearance with regard to the beliefs and practices of others and to exercise patience with new believers in the Cause. Any Bahá'í who is found to be involved in the use of peyote should be told by his Assembly that in the Faith spiritual stimulation comes from turning one's heart to Bahá'u'lláh and not through any physical means. The Assembly should therefore encourage him, patiently but persistently, to give up the use of peyote; otherwise it is not possible for him to maintain membership in the Bahá'í community.

7 August 1989, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 89 Regarding the use of traditional curative herbs, any herb known to have medicinal effects can surely be used by the friends, and those administering such medicaments should be left entirely free to carry out their profession. However, it must be borne in mind that this is different from traditional fetishist practices which involve communication with departed spirits.

23 December 1991, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 90 ...the House of Justice does not wish to go beyond its statement in 1985 that, "While we feel that under present circumstances the drinking of kava should not be summarily banned, the believers should be gradually weaned away from its use." Any action to be taken on the use of kava is left to the decision of National Spiritual Assemblies.

Since you are a member of the National Assembly of ... you are certainly free to raise the matter with it from time to time, as you deem wise.

However, in dealing with such matters it is often well to emphasize the role Bahá'í communities are to play in bringing about the changes essential for the transformation of society.

20 April 1993, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 91 The House of Justice has given careful consideration to the question of the genital mutilation of girls, otherwise known as “female circumcision”. No reference in the Bahá'í Writings to this subject has come to light; however, the House of Justice regards the practice of female circumcision as contrary to the spirit of the Bahá'í Teachings.

The House of Justice has noted a growing concern on the part of medical authorities in Africa and other places over the various methods and dire consequences of the operations involved in such genital mutilation...

Because this damaging custom is entrenched in tradition and is reported to be widespread in Africa, the Bahá'í institutions have the duty of weaning the friends from it through an ongoing programme of education based on spiritual principles and sound scientific information.

29 March 1995, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 92 In many of the nations of your area, women have traditionally been restricted to a secondary role in the life of society. We call upon the Bahá'í women of these countries, assured of the support and encouragement of all elements of the Bahá'í community, to demonstrate the transforming power of this Revelation by their courage and initiative in the teaching work and their full participation in the administrative activities of the Faith.

Ridván 1996, Universal House of Justice

CONSERVATION OF THE

EARTH'S RESOURCES

A compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, letters by and
on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, and communications by and on
behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
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Foundation Principles

The approach of the world-wide Bahá'í community to the conservation and protection of the earth's resources is based on a number of fundamental principles derived from the Bahá'í Writings. These include:

Nature as a Reflection of the Divine

Nature is held in high regard. Bahá'u'lláh states that the contemplation of nature creates an awareness of the “signs”¹ and “tokens”² of God and constitutes proof of His existence. Thus:

...whatever I behold I readily discover that it maketh Thee known unto me, and it remindeth me of Thy signs, and of Thy tokens, and of Thy testimonies. By Thy glory! Every time I lift up mine eyes unto Thy heaven, I call to mind Thy highness and Thy loftiness, and Thine incomparable glory and greatness; and every time I turn my gaze to Thine earth, I am made to recognize the evidences of Thy power and the tokens of Thy bounty. And when I behold the sea, I find that it speaketh to me of Thy majesty, and of the potency of Thy might, and of Thy sovereignty and Thy grandeur. And at whatever time I contemplate the mountains, I am led to discover the ensigns of Thy victory and the standards of Thine omnipotence.³

Nature reflects the “names and attributes of God”.⁴ It is the expression of “God’s Will ... in ... the contingent world”.⁵ Bahá'u'lláh writes:

Say: Nature in its essence is the embodiment of My Name, the Maker, 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.⁶

The Earth is One Country

Bahá'u'lláh expounds a world view which acknowledges that the “earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens”⁷ and He calls for the promotion of “the best interests of the peoples and kindreds of the earth”.⁸

‘Abdu’l-Bahá draws attention to the increasing interdependence of the world and the fact that “self- sufficiency”⁹ is no longer possible. He envisages that the trend towards a united world will increase and will manifest itself in the form of “unity of thought in world undertakings”¹⁰ and in other important realms of existence. One critical area for unified action is that of preserving the resources of the planet.

Man’s Station and Responsibility

‘Abdu’l-Bahá indicates that man, “by reason of the ideal and heavenly force latent and manifest in him”,¹¹ occupies a station that is “higher and nobler”¹² than nature, that “man is ruler over nature’s sphere and province”.¹³

It is evident, therefore, that man is ruler over nature’s sphere and province. Nature is inert; man is progressive. Nature has no consciousness; man is endowed with it. Nature is without volition and acts perforce, whereas man possesses a mighty will. Nature is incapable of discovering mysteries or realities, whereas man is especially fitted to do so. Nature is not in touch with the realm of God; man is attuned to its evidences. Nature is uninformed of God; man is conscious of Him. Man acquires divine virtues; nature is denied them. Man can voluntarily discontinue vices; nature has no power to modify the influence of its instincts. Altogether it is evident that man is more noble and superior, that in him there is an ideal power surpassing nature. He has consciousness, volition, memory, intelligent power, divine attributes and virtues of which nature is completely deprived and bereft; therefore, man is higher and nobler by reason of the ideal and heavenly force latent and manifest in him.¹⁴

Man, possessed of an inner faculty which plants and animals do not have, a power which enables him to discover the secrets of nature and gain mastery over the environment, has a special responsibility to use his God-given powers for positive ends. The Universal House of Justice indicates that “the proper exercise of this responsibility is the key to whether his inventive genius produces beneficial results, or creates havoc in the material world”.¹⁵

Development and Happiness — Interaction of Spiritual and Material

‘Abdu’l-Bahá stresses that the development of the physical world and the happiness of mankind are dependent on both the “call of civilization, of the progress of the material world”¹⁶ and the “soul-stirring call of God, Whose spiritual teachings are safeguards of the everlasting glory, the eternal happiness and illumination of the world of humanity”.¹⁷ He states:

However, until material achievements, physical accomplishments and human virtues are reinforced by spiritual perfections, luminous qualities and characteristics of mercy, no fruit or result shall issue therefrom, nor will the happiness of the world of humanity, which is the ultimate aim, be attained. For although, on the one hand, material achievements and the development of the physical world produce prosperity, which exquisitely manifests its intended aims, on the other hand dangers, severe calamities and violent afflictions are imminent.

Consequently, when thou lookest at the orderly pattern of kingdoms, cities and villages, with the attractiveness of their adornments, the freshness of their natural resources, the refinement of their appliances, the ease of their means of travel, the extent of knowledge available about the world of nature, the great inventions, the colossal enterprises, the noble discoveries and scientific researches, thou wouldst conclude that civilization conduceth to the happiness and the progress of the human world. Yet shouldst thou turn thine eye to the discovery of destructive and infernal machines, to the development of forces of demolition and the invention of fiery implements, which uproot the tree of life, it would become evident and manifest unto thee that civilization is conjoined with barbarism. Progress and barbarism go hand in hand,

unless material civilization be confirmed by Divine Guidance, by the revelations of the All-Merciful and by godly virtues, and be reinforced by spiritual conduct, by the ideals of the Kingdom and by the outpourings of the Realm of Might...

Therefore, this civilization and material progress should be combined with the Most Great Guidance so that this nether world may become the scene of the appearance of the bestowals of the Kingdom, and physical achievements may be conjoined with the effulgences of the Merciful. This in order that the beauty and perfection of the world of man may be unveiled and be manifested before all in the utmost grace and splendour. Thus everlasting glory and happiness shall be revealed.¹⁸

Bahá'u'lláh describes the fate of those whose lives demonstrate a heedlessness of spiritual values and a failure to act in conformity with such values. He comments:

...ye walk on My earth complacent and self-satisfied, heedless that My earth is weary of you and everything within it shunneth you...¹⁹

Shoghi Effendi asserts that man's negligence contributes to the decline of the "present-day Order"²⁰ and impacts on the environment in a practical way:

The violent derangement of the world's equilibrium; the trembling that will seize the limbs of mankind; the radical transformation of human society; the rolling up of the present-day Order; the fundamental changes affecting the structure of government ... the development of infernal engines of war; the burning of cities; the contamination of the atmosphere of the earth—these stand out as the signs and portents that must either herald or accompany the retributive calamity which, as decreed by Him Who is the Judge and Redeemer of mankind, must, sooner or later, afflict a society which, for the most part, and for over a century, has turned a deaf ear to the Voice of God's Messenger in this day—a calamity which must purge the human race of the dross of its age-long corruptions, and weld its component parts into a firmly knit world-embracing Fellowship—a Fellowship destined, in the fullness of time, to be incorporated in the framework, and to be galvanized by the spiritualizing influences, of a mysteriously expanding, divinely

appointed Order, and to flower, in the course of future Dispensations, into a Civilization, the like of which mankind has, at no stage in its evolution, witnessed.²¹

Relationship Between Man And Nature

The relationship between man and nature is very complex. An appreciation of the dimensions of this subject requires consideration of some of the characteristics of nature described in the Bahá'í Writings and an awareness of certain values and attitudes that guide individual behaviour and the establishment of priorities.

Characteristics of Nature

A Unified System

'Abdu'l-Bahá indicates that the "temple of the world"²² has been "fashioned after the image and likeness of the human body".²³ He explains that:

By this is meant that even as the human body in this world, which is outwardly composed of different limbs and organs, is in reality a closely integrated, coherent entity, similarly the structure of the physical world is like unto a single being whose limbs and members are inseparably linked together.

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.

Consider for instance how one group of created things constituteth the vegetable kingdom, and another the animal kingdom. Each of these

two maketh use of certain elements in the air on which its own life dependeth, while each increaseth the quantity of such elements as are essential for the life of the other. In other words, the growth and development of the vegetable world is impossible without the existence of the animal kingdom, and the maintenance of animal life is inconceivable without the co-operation of the vegetable kingdom. Of like kind are the relationships that exist among all created things. Hence it was stated that co-operation and reciprocity are essential properties which are inherent in the unified system of the world of existence, and without which the entire creation would be reduced to nothingness.²⁴

In another passage 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the interconnectedness of "every part of the universe"²⁵ and the importance of maintaining balance in the system:

Reflect upon the inner realities of the universe, the secret wisdoms involved, the enigmas, the inter-relationships, the rules that govern all. For every part of the universe is connected with every other part by ties that are very powerful and admit of no imbalance, nor any slackening whatever...²⁶

Subject to Law and Organization

'Abdu'l-Bahá states that "The phenomenal world is entirely subject to the rule and control of natural law."²⁷ He contrasts nature's "sound organization"²⁸ and its lack of "awareness"²⁹ and "will"³⁰ with man's ability to "[command] mastery over nature itself"³¹ through discovery of "the nature of things":³²

This nature is subject to a sound organization, to inviolable laws, to a perfect order, and to a consummate design, from which it never departs. To such an extent is this true that were you to gaze with the eye of insight and discernment, you would observe that all things—from the smallest invisible atom to the largest globes in the world of existence, such as the sun or the other great stars and luminous bodies—are most perfectly organized, be it with regard to their order, their composition, their outward form, or their motion, and that all are subject to one universal law from which they never depart.

When you consider nature itself, however, you see that it has neither awareness nor will. For instance, the nature of fire is to burn; it burns without consciousness or will. The nature of water is to flow; it flows without consciousness or will. The nature of the sun is to shed light; it shines without consciousness or will. The nature of vapour is to rise; it rises without consciousness or will. It is therefore evident that the natural movements of all created things are compelled, and that nothing moves of its own will save animals and, in particular, man.

Man is able to resist and oppose nature inasmuch as he discovers the natures of things and, by virtue of this discovery, has mastery over nature itself. Indeed, all the crafts that man has devised proceed from this discovery. For example, he has invented the telegraph, which connects the East and the West. It is therefore evident that man rules over nature.

Now, can such organization, order, and laws as you observe in existence be attributed merely to the effect of nature, notwithstanding that nature itself has neither consciousness nor understanding? It is therefore evident that this nature, which has neither consciousness nor understanding, is in the grasp of the omnipotent Lord, Who is the Ruler of the world of nature and Who causes it to manifest whatsoever He desires.³³

Change and Motion

Change is a law governing the whole of physical creation. It is seen in the passage of the seasons. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes:

The earth is in motion and growth; the mountains, hills and prairies are green and pleasant; the bounty is overflowing; the mercy universal; the rain is descending from the cloud of mercy; the brilliant Sun is shining; the full moon is ornamenting the horizon of ether; the great ocean-tide is flooding every little stream; the gifts are successive; the favours consecutive; and the refreshing breeze is blowing, wafting the fragrant perfume of the blossoms. Boundless treasure is in the hand of the King of Kings! Lift the hem of thy garment in order to receive it.³⁴

Soon the whole world, as in springtime, will change its garb. The turning and falling of the autumn leaves is past; the bleakness of the winter

time is over. The new year hath appeared and the spiritual springtime is at hand. The black earth is becoming a verdant garden; the deserts and mountains are teeming with red flowers; from the borders of the wilderness the tall grasses are standing like advance guards before the cypress and jessamine trees; while the birds are singing among the rose branches like the angels in the highest heavens, announcing the glad-tidings of the approach of that spiritual spring, and the sweet music of their voices is causing the real essence of all things to move and quiver.³⁵

‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that “absolute repose does not exist in nature”,³⁶ that “movement is essential to existence”.³⁷ In relation to existence He describes the processes of “composition and decomposition”:³⁸

...consider the phenomenon of composition and decomposition, of existence and non-existence. Every created thing in the contingent world is made up of many and varied atoms, and its existence is dependent on the composition of these. In other words, through the divine creative power a conjunction of simple elements taketh place so that from this composition a distinct organism is produced. The existence of all things is based upon this principle. But when the order is deranged, decomposition is produced and disintegration setteth in, then that thing ceaseth to exist. That is, the annihilation of all things is caused by decomposition and disintegration. Therefore attraction and composition between the various elements is the means of life, and discord, decomposition and division produce death. Thus the cohesive and attractive forces in all things lead to the appearance of fruitful results and effects, while estrangement and alienation of things lead to disturbance and annihilation. Through affinity and attraction all living things like plants, animals and men come into existence, while division and discord bring about decomposition and destruction.³⁹

He also explains that, in the physical world, the course of evolution is in the direction of increasing levels of complexity:

In the physical creation, evolution is from one degree of perfection to another. The mineral passes with its mineral perfections to the vegetable; the vegetable, with its perfections, passes to the animal world, and so on to that of humanity..⁴⁰

Diversity

'Abdu'l-Bahá describes diversity as "the essence of perfection and the cause of the appearance of the bestowals"⁴¹ of God, and He states:

Consider the flowers of a garden: though differing in kind, colour, form and shape, yet, inasmuch as they are refreshed by the waters of one spring, revived by the breath of one wind, invigorated by the rays of one sun, this diversity increaseth their charm, and addeth unto their beauty. Thus when that unifying force, the penetrating influence of the Word of God, taketh effect, the difference of customs, manners, habits, ideas, opinions and dispositions embellisheth the world of humanity. This diversity, this difference is like the naturally created dissimilarity and variety of the limbs and organs of the human body, for each one contributeth to the beauty, efficiency and perfection of the whole...

How unpleasing to the eye if all the flowers and plants, the leaves and blossoms, the fruits, the branches and the trees of that garden were all of the same shape and colour! Diversity of hues, form and shape, enricheth and adorneth the garden, and heighteneth the effect thereof...⁴²

The extent of the diversity of the "world of created beings"⁴³ is underlined in the following passage:

...the forms and organisms of phenomenal being and existence in each of the kingdoms of the universe are myriad and numberless. The vegetable plane or kingdom, for instance, has its infinite variety of types and material structures of plant life—each distinct and different within itself, no two exactly alike in composition and detail—for there are no repetitions in nature, and the augmentative virtue cannot be confined to any given image or shape. Each leaf has its own particular identity—so to speak, its own individuality as a leaf...⁴⁴

Serves the Human World

'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the "causes and conditions"⁴⁵ of the "perfection"⁴⁶ of the mineral, vegetable and animal worlds, and He distinguishes this from their "real felicity"⁴⁷ which conduces to the honour of the various kingdoms.

The honour and exaltation of every existing thing are contingent upon certain causes and conditions...

The height of exaltation and perfection of the vegetable world consists in this, that a tree should stand tall beside a stream of fresh water, that a gentle breeze should blow and the sun bestow its warmth upon it, that a gardener should tend it, and that day by day it should grow and yield fruit. But its real felicity consists in progressing into the animal and human worlds and in replacing that which has been consumed in the bodies of animals and men.

The exaltation of the animal world is to possess perfect members, organs, and powers, and to have all its needs supplied. This is the height of its glory, honour, and exaltation. So the supreme felicity of an animal resides in a green and verdant meadow, in a flowing stream of the sweetest water, and in a forest brimming with life. If these things are provided, no greater felicity can be imagined for the animal. For example, were a bird to build its nest in a green and verdant forest, in a pleasant height, upon a mighty tree, and atop a lofty branch, and were it to have at its disposal all the seed and water that it requires, then this would constitute its perfect felicity.

But true felicity for the animal consists in passing from the animal world into the human realm, like the microscopic beings that, through the air and the water, enter into the body of man, are assimilated, and replace that which has been consumed in his body. This is the greatest honour and felicity for the animal world, and no greater honour can be conceived for it.⁴⁸

Imperfection of Nature

Two views of nature are contrasted - one which holds that the “world of nature is complete”,⁴⁹ and one that declares that it is “incomplete”⁵⁰ because “it has need of intelligence and education”.⁵¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that the “mineral, the vegetable, the animal, and the human realms, each and all, are in need of an educator”:⁵²

The materialists hold to the opinion that the world of nature is complete. The divine philosophers declare that the world of nature is incomplete. There is a wide difference between the two. The materialists call attention to the perfection of nature, the sun, moon and stars, the trees in their adornment, the whole earth and the sea - even unimportant phenomena revealing the most perfect symmetry. The divine philosophers deny this seeming perfection and completeness in nature’s kingdom, even though admitting the beauty of its scenes and aspects and acknowledging the irresistible cosmic forces which control the colossal suns and planets. They hold that while nature seems perfect, it is, nevertheless, imperfect because it has need of intelligence and education. In proof of this they say that man, though he be a very god in the realm of material creation, is himself in need of an educator. Man undeveloped by education is savage, animalistic, brutal. Laws and regulations, schools, colleges and universities have for their purpose the training of man and his uplift from the dark borderland of the animal kingdom...⁵³

When we consider existence, we see that the mineral, vegetable, animal and human worlds are all in need of an educator.

If the land is deprived of a cultivator, it becomes a thicket of thriving weeds, but if a farmer is found to cultivate it, the resulting harvest provides sustenance for living things. It is therefore evident that the land is in need of the farmer’s cultivation. Consider the trees: If they remain uncultivated, they bear no fruit, and without fruit they are of no use. But when committed to a gardener’s care, the barren tree becomes fruitful, and, through cultivation, crossing, and grafting, the tree with bitter fruit yields sweet fruit...

Consider likewise the animals: If an animal is trained, it becomes domesticated, whereas man, if he is left without education, becomes like an animal. Indeed, if man is abandoned to the rule of nature, he sinks even lower than the animal, whereas if he is educated he becomes even as an angel...⁵⁴

Attitudes and Values

The Bahá'í Writings articulate certain spiritual values and attitudes that guide the relationship of man toward nature. These include:

Appreciation

An awareness of the fact that the earth is the “source”⁵⁵ of man’s “prosperity”⁵⁶ is tempered by the realization that “the honour and exaltation of man cannot reside solely in material delights and earthly benefits”.⁵⁷ Thus:

Every man of discernment, while walking upon the earth, feeleth indeed abashed, inasmuch as he is fully aware that the thing which is the source of his prosperity, his wealth, his might, his exaltation, his advancement and power is, as ordained by God, the very earth which is trodden beneath the feet of all men. There can be no doubt that whoever is cognizant of this truth, is cleansed and sanctified from all pride, arrogance, and vainglory...⁵⁸

What is it of which ye can rightly boast? Is it on your food and your drink that ye pride yourselves, on the riches ye lay up in your treasuries, on the diversity and the cost of the ornaments with which ye deck yourselves? If true glory were to consist in the possession of such perishable things, then the earth on which ye walk must needs vaunt itself over you, because it supplieth you, and bestoweth upon you, these very things, by the decree of the Almighty. In its bowels are contained, according to what God hath ordained, all that ye possess. From it, as a sign of His mercy, ye derive your riches. Behold then your state, the thing in which ye glory! Would that ye could perceive it!⁵⁹

Then it is clear that the honour and exaltation of man cannot reside solely in material delights and earthly benefits. This material felicity is wholly secondary, while the exaltation of man resides primarily in such virtues and attainments as are the adornments of the human reality. These consist in divine blessings, heavenly bounties, heartfelt emotions, the love and knowledge of God, the education of the people, the perceptions of the mind, and the discoveries of science. They consist in justice and equity, truthfulness and benevolence, inner courage and innate humanity, safeguarding the rights of others and preserving the sanctity of covenants and agreements. They consist in rectitude of conduct under all circumstances, love of truth under all conditions, self-abnegation for the good of all people, kindness and compassion for all nations, obedience to the teachings of God, service to the heavenly Kingdom, guidance for all mankind, and education for all races and nations. This is the felicity of the human world! This is the exaltation of man in the contingent realm! This is eternal life and heavenly honour!⁶⁰

Moderation

The Bahá'í Writings encourage detachment from “this world and the vanities thereof”,⁶¹ since “attachment”⁶² distracts the individual from awareness of God. This does not, however, constitute a form of asceticism or imply a rejection of life's pleasures. Bahá'u'lláh explains:

Should a man 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. Eat ye, O people, of the good things which God hath allowed you, and deprive not yourselves from His wondrous bounties. Render thanks and praise unto Him, and be of them that are truly thankful.⁶³

The standard is one of moderation:

In all matters moderation is desirable. If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil...⁶⁴

Kindness to Animals

Bahá'u'lláh calls for man to “show kindness to animals”⁶⁵ and He warns against “excessive hunting”.⁶⁶ In relation to the former, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes:

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. And indeed ye do worse to harm an animal, for man hath a language, he can lodge a complaint, he can cry out and moan; if injured he can have recourse to the authorities and these will protect him from his aggressor. But the hapless beast is mute, able neither to express its hurt nor take its case to the authorities. If a man inflict a thousand ills upon a beast, it can neither ward him off with speech nor hale him into court. Therefore is it essential that ye show forth the utmost consideration to the animal, and that ye be even kinder to him than to your fellow man.

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.

Most human beings are sinners, but the beasts are innocent. Surely those without sin should receive the most kindness and love—all except animals which are harmful ...But to blessed animals the utmost kindness must be shown, the more the better. Tenderness and loving-kindness are basic principles of God's heavenly Kingdom. Ye should most carefully bear this matter in mind.⁶⁷

The Bahá'í Writings also assert that the consumption of meat is not a prerequisite to health:

Regarding the eating of animal flesh and abstinence therefrom, “he [man] 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” 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.⁶⁸

Development of Nature

In the Bahá'í view, physical creation is dynamic and evolving from “one degree of perfection to another”.⁶⁹ It is, however, “incomplete”,⁷⁰ since it lacks “intelligence and education”.⁷¹ It stands in need of development by man in order to create not only a higher degree of order and beauty, which are standards upheld in the Bahá'í teachings, but also to increase its fertility and productivity. In relation to the creation of order and beauty in the realm of nature ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes:

Nature is the material world. When we look upon it, we see that it is dark and imperfect. For instance, if we allow a piece of land to remain in its natural condition, we will find it covered with thorns and thistles; useless weeds and wild vegetation will flourish upon it, and it will become like a jungle. The trees will be fruitless, lacking beauty and symmetry...⁷²

And if, as thou passest by fields and plantations, thou observest that the plants, flowers and sweet-smelling herbs are growing luxuriantly together, forming a pattern of unity, this is an evidence of the fact that that plantation and garden is flourishing under the care of a skilful gardener. But when thou seest it in a state of disorder and irregularity thou inferrest that it hath lacked the training of an efficient farmer and thus hath produced weeds and tares.⁷³

‘Abdu’l-Bahá also mentions the contribution of cultivation as a means of increasing the fertility of the earth and its productivity. He states:

If we should relegate this plot of ground to its natural state, allow it to return to its original condition, it would become a field of thorns and useless weeds, but by cultivation it will become fertile soil, yielding a harvest. Deprived of cultivation, the mountain slopes would be jungles and forests without fruitful trees. The gardens bring forth fruits and flowers in proportion to the care and tillage bestowed upon them by the gardener...⁷⁴

A grain of wheat, when cultivated by the farmer, will yield a whole harvest, and a seed, through the gardener's care, will grow into a great tree....⁷⁵

While the world of nature stands in need of development, man's approach to such development must be tempered by moderation, a commitment to protecting the "heritage [of] future generations",⁷⁶ and an awareness of the sanctity of nature that pervades the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith. For example, Bahá'u'lláh states:

Blessed is the spot, and the house, and the place, and the city, and the heart, and the mountain, and the refuge, and the cave, and the valley, and the land, and the sea, and the island, and the meadow where mention of God hath been made, and His praise glorified.⁷⁷

Importance of Agriculture

Bahá'u'lláh states that "Special regard must be paid to agriculture."⁷⁸ He characterizes it as an activity which is "conducive to the advancement of mankind and to the reconstruction of the world".⁷⁹ 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts that

The fundamental basis of the community is agriculture ... tillage of the soil...⁸⁰

He describes agriculture as "a noble science"⁸¹ whose practice is an "act of worship",⁸² and He encourages both women and men to engage in "agricultural sciences".⁸³ He indicates that should an individual "become proficient in this field, he will become a means of providing for the comfort of untold numbers of people".⁸⁴

In relation to the economic and social development of the nations, the Universal House of Justice underlines the importance of “agriculture and the preservation of the ecological balance of the world”.⁸⁵

Use of Science

Science is described as “the governor of nature and its mysteries, the one agency by which man explores the institutions of material creation”.⁸⁶

...man through the exercise of his scientific, intellectual power ... can modify, change and control nature according to his own wishes and uses. Science, so to speak, is the breaker of the laws of nature.

Consider, for example, that man according to natural law should dwell upon the surface of the earth. By overcoming this law and restriction, however, he sails in ships over the ocean, mounts to the zenith in air-planes and sinks to the depths of the sea in submarines. This is against the fiat of nature and a violation of her sovereignty and dominion. Nature’s laws and methods, the hidden secrets and mysteries of the universe, human inventions and discoveries, all our scientific acquisitions should naturally remain concealed and unknown, but man through his intellectual acumen searches them out of the plane of the invisible, draws them into the plane of the visible, exposes and explains them. For instance, one of the mysteries of nature is electricity. According to nature this force, this energy, should remain latent and hidden, but man scientifically breaks through the very laws of nature, arrests it and even imprisons it for his use.

In brief, man through the possession of this ideal endowment of scientific investigation is the most noble product of creation, the governor of nature...⁸⁷

‘Abdu’l-Bahá links scientific endeavour with the implementation of a noble goal. He states:

This endowment is the most praiseworthy power of man, for through its employment and exercise the betterment of the human race is

accomplished, the development of the virtues of mankind is made possible and the spirit and mysteries of God become manifest...⁸⁸

And He enumerates the general principle that

...any agency whatever, though it be the instrument of mankind's greatest good, is capable of misuse. Its proper use or abuse depends on the varying degrees of enlightenment, capacity, faith, honesty, devotion and highmindedness of the leaders of public opinion.⁸⁹

Protection of the Environment

A number of issues pertinent to the protection of the environment are addressed in the Writings of the Bahá'í Faith. Several of these are set out below.

Preservation of Resources

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".⁹⁰ He affirms that the work of such groups as the Men of the Trees and the World Forestry Charter is "essentially humanitarian",⁹¹ and he applauds their "noble objective"⁹² of reclaiming the "desert areas [of] Africa".⁹³

It is interesting to note that among the "powers and duties"⁹⁴ of the Universal House of Justice are "the advancement and betterment of the world"⁹⁵ and "the development of countries".⁹⁶

Control of Natural Resources

The Bahá'í Writings envisage that the protection, exploration, and exploitation of the earth's "unimaginably vast resources"⁹⁷ must, inevitably, in the long term, come under the jurisdiction of a "world federal system".⁹⁸ Such a system, based on recognition of the "unity of the human race",⁹⁹ will not only exercise "unchallengeable authority"¹⁰⁰ over the earth's resources, but it will also ensure economic and social justice. Shoghi Effendi writes:

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" 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 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.

A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation - such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving.¹⁰¹

Approaches to Protecting the Environment

The conservation and protection of the environment must be addressed on the individual and societal levels. Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, states:

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 practise 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.¹⁰²

And, with regard to the solution of the world's problems, he indicates that:

We need a change of heart, a reframing of all our conceptions and a new orientation of our activities. The inward life of man as well as his outward environment have to be reshaped if human salvation is to be secured.¹⁰³

On a governmental level, the Universal House of Justice calls for "global cooperation of the family of nations in devising and adopting measures designed to preserve the ecological balance this earth was given by its Creator".¹⁰⁴ The House of Justice asserts:

Until such time as the nations of the world understand and follow the admonitions of Bahá'u'lláh to whole-heartedly work together in looking after the best interests of all humankind, and unite in the search for

ways and means to meet the many environmental problems besetting our planet, the House of Justice feels that little progress will be made towards their solution...¹⁰⁵

The Universal House of Justice sets out the role of the individual Bahá'í and of Bahá'í communities in relation to saving "the wildlife and natural condition of the world"¹⁰⁶ as follows:

...the best way in which you can help to save the wildlife and natural condition of the world is to exert every effort to bring the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to the attention of your fellow-men and to win their allegiance to His Cause.

As the hearts of men are changed, and they begin to work in unity in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, they can begin to implement many practical improvements to the condition of the world. This is already beginning in the efforts at social and economic development in those areas where large Bahá'í communities have been founded. Of course, you can also assist those with whom you come into contact who have an interest in improving the environment, but the fundamental solution is the one that Bahá'u'lláh has brought.¹⁰⁷

In addition to addressing the issue on a fundamental spiritual level, collaboration with individuals and groups interested in improving the environment is encouraged. The Bahá'í communities are called upon to make the conservation of the environment an integral part of their ongoing activities by

...assisting in endeavors to conserve the environment in ways which blend with the rhythm of life of our community...¹⁰⁸

Prospect for the Future

'Abdu'l-Bahá sketches the following picture of the future state of life on earth:

The Lord of all mankind hath fashioned this human realm to be a Garden of Eden, an earthly paradise. If, as it must, it findeth the way to harmony and peace, to love and mutual trust, it will become a true abode of bliss, a place of manifold blessings and unending delights. Therein shall be revealed the excellence of humankind, therein shall the rays of the Sun of Truth shine forth on every hand.¹⁰⁹

Endnotes

- 1 Bahá'u'lláh, *Prayers and Meditations*, sec. CLXXVI.
- 2 *ibid.*
- 3 *ibid.*
- 4 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, sec. XC.
- 5 Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, no. 9.
- 6 *ibid.*
- 7 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, sec. CXVII.
- 8 *ibid.*
- 9 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, sec. 15.
- 10 *ibid.*
- 11 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, sec. 63.
- 12 *ibid.*
- 13 *ibid.*
- 14 *ibid.*
- 15 Universal House of Justice, 19 May 1971.
- 16 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, sec. 225.
- 17 *ibid.*
- 18 *ibid.*
- 19 Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, Persian no. 20.
- 20 Shoghi Effendi, April 1957, *Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957*.
- 21 *ibid.*
- 22 'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet.
- 23 *ibid.*
- 24 *ibid.*
- 25 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, sec. 137.
- 26 *ibid.*
- 27 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*.
- 28 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, no. 1.
- 29 *ibid.*
- 30 *ibid.*
- 31 *idib.*
- 32 *ibid.*
- 33 *idib.*
- 34 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Bahá Abbas*, vol. III, p. 641.
- 35 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Tablets of Abdul-Bahá Abbas*, vol. II, pp. 318-19.
- 36 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, no.28.
- 37 *ibid.*
- 38 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, sec. 225.
- 39 *ibid.*

- 40 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, no.20.
- 41 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, sec. 225.
- 42 ibid.
- 43 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, no.14.
- 44 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, no. 96.
- 45 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, no. 15.
- 46 ibid.
- 47 ibid.
- 48 ibid.
- 49 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, no. 106.
- 50 idib.
- 51 ibid.
- 52 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, no. 3.
- 53 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, no. 106.
- 54 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, no. 3.
- 55 Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*.
- 56 ibid.
- 57 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, no. 15.
- 58 Bahá'u'lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*.
- 59 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, sec. CXVIII.
- 60 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Some Answered Questions*, no. 15.
- 61 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, sec. CXVIII.
- 62 ibid.
- 63 ibid.
- 64 Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, Words of Paradise, ninth leaf.
- 65 Bahá'u'lláh, *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, sec. CXXV.
- 66 Universal House of Justice, *Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, note 84.
- 67 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, sec. 225.
- 68 'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet.
- 69 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Paris Talks*, no.20.
- 70 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, no. 106.
- 71 ibid.
- 72 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, no. 101.
- 73 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, sec. 225.
- 74 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, no. 110.
- 75 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, sec. 104.
- 76 Shoghi Effendi, 23 May 1951, to the New Earth Luncheon, London.
- 77 Bahá'u'lláh, in *Bahá'í Prayers*.
- 78 Bahá'u'lláh, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, no. 7.
- 79 ibid.
- 80 'Abdu'l-Bahá, quoted in *Star of the West*, vol. 4, no. 6 (24 June 1913), p. 103.

- 81 'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet.
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- 83 ibid.
- 84 'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet.
- 85 On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 31 March 1985.
- 86 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, no. 12.
- 87 ibid.
- 88 ibid.
- 89 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*.
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- 91 Shoghi Effendi, 21 May 1956, to the World Forestry Charter Luncheon, London.
- 92 ibid.
- 93 Shoghi Effendi, 22 May 1957, to the World Forestry Charter Luncheon, London.
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- 99 ibid.
- 100 ibid.
- 101 ibid.
- 102 On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 17 February 1933.
- 103 On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, 27 May 1932.
- 104 On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 18 October 1981.
- 105 ibid.
- 106 On behalf of the Universal House of Justice, 14 June 1984.
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ECONOMICS AGRICULTURE

AND RELATED SUBJECTS

A compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, letters by and
on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, and communications on behalf of
the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

Extracts from the Writings

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 Whilst in the Prison of 'Akká, We revealed in the Crimson Book that which is conducive to the advancement of mankind and to the reconstruction of the world. The utterances set forth therein by the Pen of the Lord of creation include the following which constitute the fundamental principles for the administration of the affairs of men:

First: It is incumbent upon the ministers of the House of Justice to promote the Lesser Peace so that the people of the earth may be relieved from the burden of exorbitant expenditures. This matter is imperative and absolutely essential, inasmuch as hostilities and conflict lie at the root of affliction and calamity.

Second: Languages must be reduced to one common language to be taught in all the schools of the world.

Third: It behoveth man to adhere tenaciously unto that which will promote fellowship, kindness and unity.

Fourth: Everyone, whether man or woman, should hand over to a trusted person a portion of what he or she earneth through trade, agriculture or other occupation, for the training and education of children, to be spent for this purpose with the knowledge of the Trustees of the House of Justice.

Fifth: Special regard must be paid to agriculture. Although it hath been mentioned in the fifth place, unquestionably it precedeth the others.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, no. 7

- 2 Thou hadst made reference in thy letter to agriculture. On this matter He hath laid down the following universal rule: that it is incumbent upon

everyone, even should he be resident in a particular land for no more than a single day, to become engaged in some craft or trade, or agriculture, and that the very pursuit of such a calling is, in the eyes of the one true God, identical with worship. This rule was exemplified by the Bahá'í community at the time when they were facing exile from 'Iraq, for, while they were making arrangements for their journey, they occupied themselves in cultivating the land; and when they set out, instructions were given for the fruits of their labours to be distributed amongst the friends.

From a Tablet

From the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 3 O God! Grant Thy favour, and bestow Thy blessing. Vouchsafe Thy grace, and give a portion of Thy bounty. Enable these men to witness during this year the fulfilment of their hopes. Send down Thy heavenly rain, and provide Thy plenteousness and abundance. Thou art the Powerful, the Mighty.

From a Tablet

- 4 Thy letter was received. Praise be to God it imparted the good news of thy health and safety and indicated that thou art ready to enter an agricultural school. This is highly suitable. Strive as much as possible to become proficient in the science of agriculture, for in accordance with the divine teachings the acquisition of sciences and the perfection of arts are considered acts of worship. If a man engageth with all his power in the acquisition of a science or in the perfection of an art, it is as if he has been worshipping God in churches and temples. Thus as thou enterest a school of agriculture and strivest in the acquisition of that science thou art day and night engaged in acts of worship—acts that are accepted at the threshold of the Almighty. What bounty greater than this that science should be considered as an act of worship and art as service to the Kingdom of God.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 126

- 5 Commerce, agriculture and industry should not, in truth, be a bar to service of the one true God. Indeed, such occupations are most potent instruments and clear proofs for the manifestation of the evidences of one's piety, of one's trustworthiness and of the virtues of the All-Merciful Lord.

From a Tablet

- 6 ...all the members of the human family, whether peoples or governments, cities or villages, have become increasingly interdependent. 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.

Cited in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 7 ...Bahá'u'lláh set forth principles of guidance and teaching for economic readjustment. Regulations were revealed by Him which ensure the welfare of the commonwealth. As the rich man enjoys his life surrounded by ease and luxuries, so the poor man must, likewise, have a home and be provided with sustenance and comforts commensurate with his needs. This readjustment of the social economy is of the greatest importance inasmuch as it ensures the stability of the world of humanity; and until it is effected, happiness and prosperity are impossible.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, no. 63

- 8 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 laborer 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...

Difference of capacity in human individuals is fundamental. It is impossible for all to be alike, all to be equal, all to be wise. Bahá'u'lláh has revealed principles and laws which will accomplish the adjustment of varying human capacities. He has said that whatsoever is possible of accomplishment in human government will be effected through these principles. When the laws He has instituted are carried out, there will be no millionaires possible in the community and likewise no extremely poor. This will be effected and regulated by adjusting the different degrees of human capacity. The fundamental basis of the community is agriculture, tillage of the soil. All must be producers. Each person in the community whose need is equal to his individual producing capacity shall be exempt from taxation. But if his income is greater than his needs, he must pay a

tax until an adjustment is effected. That is to say, a man's capacity for production and his needs will be equalized and reconciled through taxation. If his production exceeds, he will pay a tax; if his necessities exceed his production, he shall receive an amount sufficient to equalize or adjust. Therefore, taxation will be proportionate to capacity and production, and there will be no poor in the community.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, no. 77

- 9 The question of economics must commence with the farmer and then be extended to the other classes inasmuch as the number of farmers is far greater than all other classes. Therefore, it is fitting to begin with the farmer in matters related to economics for the farmer is the first active agent in human society. In brief, from among the wise men in every village a board should be set up and the affairs of that village should be under the control of that board. Likewise a general storehouse should be founded with the appointment of a secretary. At the time of the harvest, under the direction of that board, a certain percentage of the entire harvest should be appropriated for the storehouse.

The storehouse has seven revenues: Tithes, taxes on animals, property without an heir, all lost objects found whose owners cannot be traced, one third of all treasure-trove, one third of the produce of all mines, and voluntary contributions.

This storehouse also has seven expenditures:

- General running expenses of the storehouse, such as the salary of the secretary and the administration of public health.
- Tithes to the government.
- Taxes on animals to the government.
- Costs of running an orphanage.
- Costs of running a home for the incapacitated.
- Costs of running a school.
- Payment of subsidies to provide needed support of the poor.

The first revenue is the tithe. It should be collected as follows: If, for instance, the income of a person is five hundred dollars and his necessary expenses are the same, no tithes will be collected from him. If another's expenses are five hundred dollars while his income is one thousand dollars,

one tenth will be taken from him, for he hath more than his needs; if he giveth one tenth of the surplus, his livelihood will not be adversely affected. If another's expenses are one thousand dollars, and his income is five thousand dollars, as he hath four thousand dollars surplus he will be required to give one and a half tenths. If another person hath necessary expenses of one thousand dollars, but his income is ten thousand dollars, from him two tenths will be required for his surplus represents a large sum. But if the necessary expenses of another person are four or five thousand dollars, and his income one hundred thousand, one fourth will be required from him. On the other hand, should a person's income be two hundred, but his needs absolutely essential for his livelihood be five hundred dollars, and provided he hath not been remiss in his work or his farm hath not been blessed with a harvest, such a one must receive help from the general storehouse so that he may not remain in need and may live in comfort.

A certain amount must be put aside from the general storehouse for the orphans of the village and a certain sum for the incapacitated. A certain amount must be provided from this storehouse for those who are needy and incapable of earning a livelihood, and a certain amount for the village's system of education. And, a certain amount must be set aside for the administration of public health. If anything is left in the storehouse, that must be transferred to the general treasury of the nation for national expenditures.

4 October 1912, from a Tablet

- 10 As to the economic question, it hath been stated briefly and the basis of it hath been set forth, while its details are to be fixed by the Universal House of Justice. The board of the house of finance (storehouse) will direct in every village the revenues of the house, such as tithes, tax on animals, etc. In every village a storehouse and an officer in charge are to be provided, while the notables of the village gather and form a board and to this board and officer the direction of the affairs of the village are entrusted. They take charge of all questions pertaining to the village, and the revenues of the storehouse such as tithes, tax on animals and other revenues are gathered in it and are given out for necessary expenditures.

As to the doubling of tithes in accordance with the size of revenues and of crops: it is not possible to double as a fixed proportion the amount of tithes to be paid when the revenues are doubled. For instance, a man whose revenues amount to 1,000 dollars and whose expenses are 500

dollars, should pay one tenth of his revenues, i.e. 100 dollars. When his revenues reach 2,000 dollars and his expenses remain 500 dollars, he cannot pay two tenths of his revenues, i.e. 400 dollars, for it would be difficult. At most he can pay 1.5 tenths, which is 300 dollars. If his revenues rise to 4,000 dollars, he can give 1.75 tenths of his revenues, i.e. 700 dollars, and if his revenues are 8,000 dollars, he can pay two tenths, i.e. 1,600 dollars, and if they still rise to 16,000 dollars, he can pay one fourth (2.5 tenths), i.e. 4,000 dollars. If they still rise to 32,000 dollars and the tithes to be taken from him were to be fixed at a definite ratio (i.e. doubled every time), they would constitute a huge amount which he would not be able to pay, as the preparation of the harvest entails many expenditures. Therefore, for a revenue of 16,000 dollars, one fourth is taken from him (2.5 tenths). In short the division and the fixing of everyone's share are to be arranged in accordance with the time and place by the House of Justice.

What hath been stated is only an example and this doth not mean that it should be enforced exactly in this manner. The principle is that as a man's wealth increaseth, his financial obligations should proportionately increase, so that vast riches may not be accumulated in one place. In this manner justice may be exercised between the rich and the poor. Thus there will not be, on one hand, a man owning a thousand million and, on the other, a poor man in need of his necessary subsistence. As to the revenues of the storehouse, the House of Justice must strive by every means possible to increase that amount, i.e. by every just means. Likewise with the expenditures; if anything is deemed necessary for the village such as the providing of hygienic measures, the House of Justice must also make all the necessary provisions. In short, if it is done in this manner in the village, the orphans, the disabled and the poor will secure the means of subsistence; education will be fostered, and the adoption of hygienic measures will become universal.

These are only the preliminary principles; the House of Justice will arrange and widen them in accordance with time and place.

25 July 1919, from a Tablet

- 11 His Holiness Bahá'u'lláh has given instructions regarding every one of the questions confronting humanity. He has given teachings and instructions with regard to every one of the problems with which man struggles. Among them are (the teachings) concerning the question of economics that all the members of the body politic may enjoy through the working out of this

solution the greatest happiness, welfare and comfort without any harm or injury attacking the general order of things. Thereby no difference or dissension will occur. No sedition or contention will take place. The solution is this:

First and foremost is the principle that to all the members of the body politic shall be given the greatest achievements of the world of humanity, Each one shall have the utmost welfare and well-being. To solve this problem we must begin with the farmer; there will we lay a foundation for system and order because the peasant class and the agricultural class exceed other classes in the importance of their service. In every village there must be established a general storehouse which will have a number of revenues.

The first revenue will be that of the tenths or tithes.

The second revenue (will be derived) from the animals.

The third revenue, from the minerals, that is to say, every mine prospected or discovered, a third thereof will go to this vast storehouse.

The fourth is this: whosoever dies without leaving any heirs all his heritage will go to the general storehouse.

Fifth, if any treasures shall be found on the land they should be devoted to this storehouse.

All these revenues will be assembled in this storehouse.

As to the first, the tenths or tithes: we will consider a farmer, one of the peasants. We will look into his income. We will find out, for instance, what is his annual revenue and also what are his expenditures. Now, if his income be equal to his expenditures, from such a farmer nothing whatever will be taken. That is, he will not be subjected to taxation of any sort, needing as he does all his income. Another farmer may have expenses running up to one thousand dollars we will say. and his income is two thousand dollars. From such an one a tenth will be required, because he has a surplus. But if his income be ten thousand dollars and his expenses one thousand dollars or his income twenty thousand dollars, he will have to pay as taxes, one-fourth. If his income be one hundred thousand dollars

and his expenses five thousand, one-third will he have to pay because he has still a surplus, since his expenses are five thousand and his income one hundred thousand. If he pays, say, thirty-five thousand dollars, in addition to the expenditure of five thousand he still has sixty thousand left. But if his expenses be ten thousand and his income two hundred thousand then he must give an even half because ninety thousand will be in that case the sum remaining. Such a scale as this will determine allotment of taxes. All the income from such revenues will go to this general storehouse.

Then there must be considered such emergencies as follows: a certain farmer whose expenses run up to ten thousand dollars and whose income is only five thousand, he will receive necessary expenses from this storehouse. Five thousand dollars will be allotted to him so he will not be in need.

Then the orphans will be looked after, all of whose expenses will be taken care of. The cripples in the village—all their expenses will be looked after. The poor in the village—their necessary expenses will be defrayed. And other members who for valid reasons are incapacitated -- the blind, the old, the deaf -- their comfort must be looked after. In the village no one will remain in need or in want. All will live in the utmost comfort and welfare. Yet no schism will assail the general order of the body politic.

Hence the expenses or expenditures of the general storehouse are now made clear and its activities made manifest. The income of this general storehouse has been shown. Certain trustees will be elected by the people in a given village to look after these transactions. The farmers will be taken care of and if after all these expenses are defrayed any surplus is found in the storehouse it must be transferred to the national treasury.

This system is all thus ordered so that in the village the very poor will be comfortable, the orphans will live happily and well; in a word, no one will be left destitute. All the individual members of the body politic will thus live comfortably and well.

For larger cities, naturally, there will be a system on a larger scale. Were I to go into that solution the details thereof would be very lengthy.

The result of this (system) will be that each individual member of the body politic will live most comfortably and happily under obligation to no one. Nevertheless, there will be preservation of degrees because in the world of humanity there must needs be degrees. The body politic may well be likened to an army. In this army there must be a general, there must

be a sergeant, there must be a marshal, there must be the infantry; but all must enjoy the greatest comfort and welfare.

The Promulhation of World Peace, no. 102

- 12 By the sacred verse: "Begging is forbidden, and it is also prohibited to dispense alms to a beggar", is meant that mendicancy is forbidden and that giving charity to people who take up begging as their profession is also prohibited. The object is to wipe out mendicancy altogether. However, if a person is disabled, stricken by dire poverty or becomes helpless, then it is incumbent upon the rich or the trustees to provide him with a monthly allowance for his subsistence. When the House of Justice comes into being it will set up homes for the incapacitated. Thus no one will be obliged to beg, even as the supplementary part of the blessed verse denotes: "It is enjoined upon everyone to earn his livelihood"; then He says: "As to those who are disabled, it devolveth upon the trustees and the rich to make adequate provision for them." By "trustees" is meant the representatives of the people, that is to say the members of the House of Justice.

Lights of Guidance, p. 120

- 13 Since thy dear child is taking his examinations, my fervent wish at the divine Threshold is that, by the grace and favour of God, he may meet with success, and that in the future he may go on to study agriculture and master its various branches, practical and theoretical. Agriculture is a noble science and, should thy son become proficient in this field, he will become a means of providing for the comfort of untold numbers of people.

From a Tablet

- 14 Wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual's own efforts and the grace of God, on commerce, agriculture, art and industry and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes. Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude. Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor.

If, on the other hand, it is expended for the promotion of knowledge, the founding of elementary and other schools, the encouragement of art and industry, the training of orphans and the poor—in brief, if it is dedicated to the welfare of society—its possessor will stand out before God and man as the most excellent of all who live on earth and will be accounted as one of the people of paradise.

The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 15 ...a plan whereby all the individual members of society may enjoy the utmost comfort and welfare. The degrees of society must be preserved. The farmer will continue to till the soil, the artist pursue his art, the banker to finance the nations. An army has need of its general, captain, and private soldiers. The degrees varying with the pursuits are essential. But in this Bahá'í plan there is no class hatred. Each is to be protected and each individual member of the body politic is to live in the greatest comfort and happiness. Work is to be provided for all and there will be no needy ones seen in the streets.

Star of the West, vol. 22, no. 1 (April 1931), p. 3

From the writings and cables of Shoghi Effendi

- 16 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.

A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation—such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving.

11 March 1936, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 17 [Bahá'u'lláh] urges that special regard be paid to the interests of agriculture...
God Passes By

- 18 DESIRE TO EXPRESS TO HIS MAJESTY THE KING OR HIS MAJESTY'S REPRESENTATIVE AS WELL AS TO ASSEMBLED GUESTS MY HOPE WORK OF MEN OF TREES SO IMPORTANT FOR PROTECTION PHYSICAL WORLD AND HERITAGE FUTURE GENERATIONS MAY BE RICHLY BLESSED AND AT SAME TIME CONSTITUTE YET ANOTHER FORCE WORKING FOR PEACE AND BROTHERHOOD IN THIS SORELY TRIED DIVIDED WORLD.

23 May 1951, to New Earth Luncheon, London

- 19 DESIRE EXPRESS ADMIRATION YOUR ESSENTIALLY HUMANITARIAN WORK NOBLE OBJECTIVE RECLAIM DESERTS SPIRIT CO-OPERATION FOSTERED BY YOUR UNDERTAKINGS WISH YOU EVERY SUCCESS.

21 May 1956, to World Forestry Charter Luncheon, London

- 20 DELIGHTED STEADY PROGRESS ACHIEVED MEN OF THE TREES WORLD OVER ESPECIALLY HOPES PLANS RECLAMATION DESERT AREAS AFRICA.

22 May 1957, to World Forestry Charter Luncheon, London

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 21 He was much interested in your ideas over the solution of the economic problem in the West—a question that must have meant a good deal of thought to many enlightened people—and he is delighted to see in your thoughts much that runs along the same general lines as the principles laid out by the Movement. Of course conditions in the East differ; where the countries are rarely industrial and mostly agricultural, we should have to apply different laws from the West, and that is why the principles of the Movement strike at the root which is common to them both. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has developed in various of His talks, which you will find in different compilations, the principles upon which the Bahá’í economic system would be based. A system that prevents, among others, the gradual control of wealth in the hands of a few and the resulting state of both extremes, wealth and poverty.

28 October 1927

- 22 You had asked about poverty and wealth, and the toil of the poor and the comfort of the rich, and you had expressed your amazement and wonder at this situation.

Dear friend, the scope of this subject and discussion thereof are extensive. Why should one only mention the poor and the rich or poverty and wealth? There are many other similar and analogous things in the world of creation. For instance, why are all the birds of the world not possessed of a melodious voice? Why have crows and ravens? Or, why are not all the people of the world beautiful and pleasing? Why have the ugly and the unsightly? Or, why are not all the beasts of the field graceful deer? Why have wolves and the bloodthirsty leopards? Or, in the arena of war, why have soldiers? Let all be commanders and officers! And, lastly, why have the poor? All should be rich!

It is evident that the subject of the suffering poor and the pampered rich has been, and will continue to be, discussed by the world’s scholars and philosophers, but so far they have not found a solution to this difficult problem. Whatever you witness in this world, such as evidences of mighty upheavals and omens of future events, all revolve around this pivot, that is, the groaning and the agitation of the poor on the one hand, and the excessive wealth and affluence of the rich on the other. This conflict and

clash of interests will remain unchanged until such time as the laws and commandments revealed by the Pen of the Most High in this regard are executed and enforced, and the solution of the economic problems based on spiritual principles becomes possible. Then will there be peace between the rich and the poor, or between the forces of capital and labour. Then will the poor gain their legitimate right of having their necessary and essential needs satisfied, and the rich will be able to spend their wealth as they please, free of fear for their lives and property.

The intent is not, however, to say that all the poor will become rich and they will become equal. Such a concept is like saying that all the ignorant and the illiterate will become the sages of the age and the learned of the learned. Rather, when education becomes compulsory and universal, ignorance and illiteracy will decrease and there will remain no one deprived of education. But, as the basis for distinction is in the person's capacity and ability, and differences are related to the degree of his intelligence and mental powers, therefore, all the people will not be equal in their knowledge, learning and understanding. The intent is to say that the world of creation calls for distinctions in people's stations, and degrees in the differences existing among them, so that the affairs of the world may become organized and ordered. Diversity in all created things, whether in kind, in physical appearance, or in station, is the means for their protection, their permanence, unity and harmony. Each part complements the other.

Concerning the point that the poor are always in hardship and trouble and in need of everything, this we can acknowledge. However, it is doubtful whether the rich have peace of mind and true comfort, they should be quietly asked about this, and their response is dependent upon their conscience.

This should not be understood to mean that poverty is cherished and riches and wealth are blameworthy. All are called upon, nay, rather, commanded and required by the Pen of the Most High, to engage in a trade or profession.

22 May 1928

- 23 He has also received the article you wrote for "The Bahá'í World" on the economic teachings of the Cause.ⁱ As you say, the writings are not so rich

i See *The World Economy of Bahá'u'lláh*, by Horace Holley, and *The Supreme Affliction: A Study in Bahá'í Economics and Socialization*, by Alfred E. Lunt, in *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 4

on this subject, and many of the issues at present baffling the minds of the world are not even mentioned. The primary consideration is the spirit that has to permeate our economic life and this will gradually crystallize itself into definite institutions and principles that would help to bring about the ideal condition foretold by Bahá'u'lláh ... It is very necessary that the teachings of the Cause along these lines be presented to the public in a complete and clear form.

20 December 1931

- 24 As to your fourth question, Shoghi Effendi believes that it is preferable not to confuse the methods explained by the Master with present systems. They may have many resemblances but also many points of difference. Moreover these general statements we have in the teachings have to be explained and applied by the House of Justice before we can really appreciate their significance.

21 October 1932

- 25 With regard to your wish for reorganizing your business along Bahá'í lines, Shoghi Effendi deeply appreciates the spirit that has prompted you to make such a suggestion. But he feels, nevertheless, that the time has not yet come for any believer to bring about such a fundamental change in the economic structure of our society, however restricted may be the field for such an experiment. The economic teachings of the Cause, though well known in their main outline, have not yet been sufficiently elaborated and systematized to allow anyone to make an exact and thorough application of them, even on a restricted scale.

22 May 1935

- 26 He wishes me first to express his appreciation of your efforts for a deeper understanding of the principles and teachings of the Cause, particularly those that concern the social and economic aspects of the Faith, which should be studied with increasing interest by all the believers, and especially by the young ones, upon whom lies the chief responsibility of teaching the Message to the world outside...

...There are practically no technical teachings on economics in the Cause, such as banking, the price system, and others. The Cause is not an economic system, nor should its Founders be considered as having

(1930-32), pp. 351-67, 435-60.

been technical economists. The contribution of the Faith to this subject is essentially indirect, as it consists in the application of spiritual principles to our present-day economic system. Bahá'u'lláh has given us a few basic principles which should guide future Bahá'í economists in establishing such institutions as will adjust the economic relationships of the world.

...The Master has definitely stated that wages should be unequal, simply because men are unequal in their ability, and hence should receive wages that would correspond to their varying capacities and resources. This view seems to contradict the opinion of some modern economists. But the friends should have full confidence in the words of the Master, and should give preference to His statements over those voiced by our so-called modern thinkers...

...Whatever the progress of the machinery may be, man will have always to toil in order to earn his living. Effort is an inseparable part of man's life. It may take different forms with the changing conditions of the world, but it will be always present as a necessary element in our earthly existence. Life is after all a struggle. Progress is attained through struggle, and without such a struggle life ceases to have a meaning; it becomes even extinct. The progress of machinery has not made effort unnecessary. It has given it a new form, a new outlet.

...By the statement "the economic solution is divine in nature" is meant that religion alone can, in the last resort, bring in man's nature such a fundamental change as to enable him to adjust the economic relationships of society. It is only in this way that man can control the economic forces that threaten to disrupt the foundations of his existence, and thus assert his mastery over the forces of nature.

...As already referred to ... social inequality is the inevitable outcome of the natural inequality of men. Human beings are different in ability and should, therefore, be different in their social and economic standing. Extremes of wealth and poverty should, however, be totally abolished. Those whose brains have contributed to the creation and improvement of the means of production must be fairly rewarded, though these means may be owned and controlled by others.

26 December 1935

- 27 As regards your suggestion to write a book on Bahá'í economics: the Guardian has no objection to your writing such a work, but he feels that the task is a tremendously difficult one, specially in view of the fact that there

are almost no definite teachings on technical economics as it is known and taught today. The Bahá'í Writings give us only a few principles which can guide future Bahá'í economists in their efforts to bring about the necessary readjustments in the economic and industrial system.

30 June 1936

- 28 Regarding your questions concerning the Bahá'í attitude on various economic problems, such as the problem of ownership, control and distribution of capital, and of other means of production, the problem of trusts and monopolies, and such economic experiments as social co-operatives: the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá do not provide specific and detailed solutions to all such economic questions, which mostly pertain to the domain of technical economics, and as such do not concern directly the Cause. True, there are certain guiding principles in Bahá'í Sacred Writings on the subject of economics, but these do by no means cover the whole field of theoretical and applied economics, and are mostly intended to guide future Bahá'í economic writers and technicians to evolve an economic system which would function in full conformity with the spirit, and the exact provisions of the Cause on this and similar subjects. The International House of Justice will have, in consultation with economic experts to assist in the formulation and evolution of the Bahá'í economic system of the future. One thing, however, is certain: that the Cause neither accepts the theories of the Capitalistic economics in full, nor can it agree with the Marxists and Communists in their repudiation of the principle of private ownership and of this vital sacred right of the individual.

10 June 1939

- 29 He has noted with keen interest the plan you have conceived for the intensification of agricultural production with the view of meeting any possible food shortage in these times of war. While he is fully aware of the need for putting forth such a plan, and deeply appreciative as he feels of the noble motives that have prompted you to approach this problem, he nevertheless thinks that the time is not yet ripe for the believers, as a body, to undertake social and economic experiments of such character and scope. Neither the material resources at their disposal, nor their numerical strength are sufficient to give them any reasonable hope of embarking successfully upon a project of this kind.

6 November 1940

- 30 Now is not the time for the friends to seek to establish a Bahá'í village; they have definite tasks confronting them of the utmost importance and urgency, and on these they should concentrate their attention. Nor does the Guardian feel it is necessary for the friends to buy land at this time. In the future, when they have accomplished the goals set out for them by the beloved Master Himself, they will be able to develop more community projects, but now such enterprises would merely dissipate their strength, which should all be directed into the teaching work.

26 March 1943

- 31 The income tax, according to the Bahá'í teachings, mounts at quite a steep rate so that great sums of money would be very heavily taxed. But the individual is free to make his will as he pleases. What he has laboured for he has the right to dispose of. The greater the sum inherited, the higher the tax will be.

11 February 1944

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 32 The ideologies now current in the world are extremely complex. Just as it is difficult to identify any longer a coherent system of teachings which could be called Christianity and embrace all those who call themselves Christians, so there are many kinds of Communist, often stridently at variance with one another. Even more so are there many kinds of "Capitalist" in the sense of those who advocate Capitalism as the most desirable form of economic system. "The Promise of World Peace" was no place for an analysis of the virtues and shortcomings of these various theories, it could but allude to some of the most glaring deficiencies produced by extreme variants, and encourage all who advocate them to overlook their differences in a search for the real solution of the problems afflicting mankind.

One could postulate two extremes of economic theory: those who believe that the best solution is to remove all governmental control and intervention from the operation of the economic system, and those who believe that the functioning of the economic system should be closely supervised and adjusted by the State so that society is not at the mercy of the system but has it under its control. As has become abundantly clear, neither extreme is workable, and proponents of both have gradu-

ally come to adopt more moderate stances, although there tends to be an oscillation of viewpoints in response to changing conditions. It was to the proponents of one of these extremes and to the current highly unsatisfactory economic situation in the world that the House of Justice was alluding when it referred to those ideologies which have tended “to callously abandon starving millions to the operations of a market system that all too clearly is aggravating the plight of the majority of mankind, while enabling small sections to live in a condition of affluence scarcely dreamed of by our forebears.”

13 November 1985

- 33 Your comments concerning poverty emphasize the extent to which society must change its attitudes before a solution to that social problem can be found. It is not simply a matter of economics; the solution deeply involves the adoption of spiritual principles at the grassroots as well as among governments. It imposes upon the Bahá'ís a clear duty to teach the Faith with unabating vigour.

27 April 1988

- 34 The House of Justice sympathizes with your urgent desire to see the application of the Bahá'í idea of a spiritual solution to economic problems ... The solution to these problems lies not so much in the formulation of workable theories; it is related to the overall spiritual transformation which is to take place through the gradual influence of the Bahá'í teachings on the lives of people throughout the world—a transformation which will itself be the matrix for the solution so anxiously sought. In the meantime, governments, through hard experience, will, no doubt, take steps which are in harmony with the progressive spirit of the times.

6 July 1989

HEALTH, HEALING & NUTRITION

A compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, letters on behalf
of Shoghi Effendi, and communications by and on behalf of
the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled 1991; revised translations inserted 2022

Extracts from the Writings

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 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, par. 113

- 2 We have permitted you to read such sciences as are profitable unto you, not such as end in idle disputation; better is this for you, if ye be of them that comprehend.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 77

- 3 Whatever competent physicians or surgeons prescribe for a patient should be accepted and complied with, provided that they are adorned with the ornament of justice. If they were to be endued with divine understanding, that would certainly be preferable and more desirable.

Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet

- 4 Well is it with the physician who cureth ailments in My hallowed and dearly-cherished Name.

Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet

- 5 In all circumstances they should conduct themselves with moderation; if the meal be only one course this is more pleasing in the sight of God; however, according to their means, they should seek to have this single dish be of good quality.

Bahá'u'lláh, "Kitáb-i-Badí"

- 6 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. Consider the light of the lamp. Though an external object may interfere with its radiance, the light itself continueth to shine with undiminished power. In like manner, every malady afflicting the body of man is an impediment that preventeth the soul from manifesting its inherent might and power. When it leaveth the body, however, it will evince such ascendancy, and reveal such influence as no force on earth can equal. Every pure, every refined and sanctified soul will be endowed with tremendous power, and shall rejoice with exceeding gladness.

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

7 O Befriended Stranger!

The candle of thine heart is lighted by the hand of My power, quench it not with the contrary winds of self and passion. The healer of all thine ills is remembrance of Me, forget it not. Make My love thy treasure and cherish it even as thy very sight and life.

The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, Persian no. 32

8 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.

Cited in J. E. Esslemont, Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era

9 Verily the most necessary thing is contentment under all circumstances; by this one is preserved from morbid conditions and from lassitude. Yield not to grief and sorrow: they cause the greatest misery. Jealousy consumeth the body and anger doth burn the liver: avoid these two as you would a lion.

Cited in J. E. Esslemont, Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era

From the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 10 Thou shouldst endeavour to study the science of medicine. It is extremely useful and serveth as the greatest instrument for the dissemination of the Cause. It is absolutely imperative that thou acquire this bounty. Strive day and night that thou mayest become highly qualified in this science. And when thou wishest to dispense treatment set thy heart toward the Abhá Kingdom, entreating divine confirmations.

From a Tablet

- 11 Thou shouldst continue thy profession and at the same time try to serve the Kingdom of God.

From a Tablet

- 12 Thou hast written about thy poor sight. According to the explicit divine text the sick must refer to the doctor. This decree is decisive and everyone is bound to observe it. While thou art there thou shouldst consult the most skilled and the most famed eye specialist.

From a Tablet

- 13 One must obey the command of God and submit to medical opinion. Thou hast undertaken this journey to comply with His command and not for the sake of healing, since healing is in the hand of God, not in the hand of doctors.

From a Tablet

- 14 That the Most Great Name exerciseth influence over both physical and spiritual matters is sure and certain.

From a Tablet

- 15 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...

From a Tablet

- 16 When thou wishest to treat nervous pains turn thy whole being to the realm on high with thine heart detached from aught else besides Him and thy soul enraptured by the love of God. Then seek confirmation of the Holy Spirit from the Abhá Kingdom, while touching the affected part with utmost love, tenderness and attraction to God. When all these things are combined, be assured that healing will take place.

From a Tablet

- 17 Regarding the eating of animal flesh and abstinence therefrom, know thou of a certainty that, in the beginning of creation, God determined the food of every living being, and to eat contrary to that determination is not approved. For instance, beasts of prey, such as the wolf, lion and leopard, are endowed with ferocious, tearing instruments, such as hooked talons and claws. From this it is evident that the food of such beasts is meat. If they were to attempt to graze, their teeth would not cut the grass, neither could they chew the cud, for they do not have molars. Likewise, God hath given to the four-footed grazing animals such teeth as reap the grass like a sickle, and from this we understand that the food of these species of animal is vegetable. They cannot chase and hunt down other animals. The falcon hath a hooked beak and sharp talons; the hooked beak preventeth him from grazing, therefore his food also is meat.

But now 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.

From a Tablet

- 18 Thou hast written regarding the four canine teeth in man, saying that these teeth, two in the upper jaw and two in the lower, are for the purpose of

eating meat. Know thou that these four teeth are not created for meat-eating, although one can eat meat with them. All the teeth of man are made for eating fruit, cereals and vegetables. These four teeth, however, are designed for breaking hard shells, such as those of almonds. But eating meat is not forbidden or unlawful, nay, the point is this, that it is possible for man to live without eating meat and still be strong. Meat is nourishing and containeth the elements of herbs, seeds and fruits; therefore sometimes it is essential for the sick and for the rehabilitation of health. There is no objection in the Law of God to the eating of meat if it is required. So if thy constitution is rather weak and thou findest meat useful, thou mayest eat it.

From a Tablet

- 19 Thy letter was received. I hope that thou mayest be protected and assisted under the providence of the True One, be occupied always in mentioning the Lord and display effort to complete thy profession. Thou must endeavour greatly so that thou mayest become unique in thy profession and famous in those parts, because attaining perfection in one's profession in this merciful period is considered to be worship of God. And whilst thou art occupied with thy profession, thou canst remember the True One.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec.128

- 20 O ye, God's loved ones! Experience hath shown how greatly the renouncing of smoking, of intoxicating drink, and of opium, conduceth to health and vigour, to the expansion and keenness of the mind and to bodily strength. There is today a peopleⁱ who strictly avoid tobacco, intoxicating liquor and opium. This people is far and away superior to the others, for strength and physical courage, for health, beauty and comeliness. A single one of their men can stand up to ten men of another tribe. This hath proved true of the entire people: that is, member for member, each individual of this community is in every respect superior to the individuals of other communities.

Make ye then a mighty effort, that the purity and sanctity which, above all else, are cherished by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, shall distinguish the people of Bahá; that in every kind of excellence the people of God shall surpass all other human beings; that both outwardly and inwardly they shall prove superior to the rest; that for purity, immaculacy, refinement, and the preservation of health, they shall be leaders in the vanguard of those

i Possibly 'Abdu'l-Bahá was referring to the Sikhs; the description appears to apply to them.

who know. And that by their freedom from enslavement, their knowledge, their self-control, they shall be first among the pure, the free and the wise.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 129

- 21 O thou distinguished physician! ... Praise be to God that thou hast two powers: one to undertake physical healing and the other spiritual healing. Matters related to man's spirit have a great effect on his bodily condition. For instance, thou shouldst impart gladness to thy patient, give him comfort and joy, and bring him to ecstasy and exultation. How often hath it occurred that this hath caused early recovery. Therefore, treat thou the sick with both powers. Spiritual feelings have a surprising effect on healing nervous ailments.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 130

- 22 Although ill health is one of the unavoidable conditions of man, truly it is hard to bear. The bounty of good health is the greatest of all gifts.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 132

- 23 When giving medical treatment turn to the Blessed Beauty, then follow the dictates of thy heart. Remedy the sick by means of heavenly joy and spiritual exultation, cure the sorely afflicted by imparting to them blissful glad tidings and heal the wounded through His resplendent bestowals. When at the bedside of a patient, cheer and gladden his heart and enrapture his spirit through celestial power. Indeed, such a heavenly breath quickeneth every mouldering bone and reviveth the spirit of every sick and ailing one.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 131

- 24 There are two ways of healing sickness, material means and spiritual means. The first is by the treatment of physicians; the second consisteth in prayers offered by the spiritual ones to God and in turning to Him. Both means should be used and practised.

Illnesses which occur by reason of physical causes should be treated by doctors with medical remedies; those which are due to spiritual causes disappear through spiritual means. Thus an illness caused by affliction, fear, nervous impressions, will be healed more effectively by spiritual rather than by physical treatment. Hence, both kinds of treatment should be followed; they are not contradictory. Therefore thou shouldst also accept physical remedies inasmuch as these too have come from the mercy and

favour of God, Who hath revealed and made manifest medical science so that His servants may profit from this kind of treatment also. Thou shouldst give equal attention to spiritual treatments, for they produce marvellous effects.

Now, if thou wishest to know the true remedy which will heal man from all sickness and will give him the health of the divine kingdom, know that it is the precepts and teachings of God. Focus thine attention upon them.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 133

- 25 O thou who art attracted to the fragrant breathings of God! I have read thy letter addressed to Mrs. Lua Getsinger. Thou hast indeed examined with great care the reasons for the incursion of disease into the human body. It is certainly the case that sins are a potent cause of physical ailments. If humankind were free from the defilements of sin and waywardness, and lived according to a natural, inborn equilibrium, without following wherever their passions led, it is undeniable that diseases would no longer take the ascendant, nor diversify with such intensity.

But man hath perversely continued to serve his lustful appetites, and he would not content himself with simple foods. Rather, he prepared for himself food that was compounded of many ingredients, of substances differing one from the other. With this, and with the perpetrating of vile and ignoble acts, his attention was engrossed, and he abandoned the temperance and moderation of a natural way of life. The result was the engendering of diseases both violent and diverse.

For the animal, as to its body, is made up of the same constituent elements as man. Since, however, the animal contenteth itself with simple foods and striveth not to indulge its importunate urges to any great degree, and committeth no sins, its ailments relative to man's are few. We see clearly, therefore, how powerful are sin and contumacy as pathogenic factors. And once engendered these diseases become compounded, multiply, and are transmitted to others. Such are the spiritual, inner causes of sickness.

The outer, physical causal factor in disease, however, is a disturbance in the balance, the proportionate equilibrium of all those elements of which the human body is composed. To illustrate: the body of man is a compound of many constituent substances, each component being present in a prescribed amount, contributing to the essential equilibrium

of the whole. So long as these constituents remain in their due proportion, according to the natural balance of the whole—that is, no component suffereth a change in its natural proportionate degree and balance, no component being either augmented or decreased—there will be no physical cause for the incursion of disease.

For example, the starch component must be present to a given amount, and the sugar to a given amount. So long as each remaineth in its natural proportion to the whole, there will be no cause for the onset of disease. When, however, these constituents vary as to their natural and due amounts—that is, when they are augmented or diminished—it is certain that this will provide for the inroads of disease.

This question requireth the most careful investigation. The Báb hath said that the people of Bahá must develop the science of medicine to such a high degree that they will heal illnesses by means of foods. The basic reason for this is that if, in some component substance of the human body, an imbalance should occur, altering its correct, relative proportion to the whole, this fact will inevitably result in the onset of disease. If, for example, the starch component should be unduly augmented, or the sugar component decreased, an illness will take control. It is the function of a skilled physician to determine which constituent of his patient's body hath suffered diminution, which hath been augmented. Once he hath discovered this, he must prescribe a food containing the diminished element in considerable amounts, to re-establish the body's essential equilibrium. The patient, once his constitution is again in balance, will be rid of his disease.

The proof of this is that while other animals have never studied medical science, nor carried on researches into diseases or medicines, treatments or cures—even so, when one of them falleth a prey to sickness, nature leadeth it, in fields or desert places, to the very plant which, once eaten, will rid the animal of its disease. The explanation is that if, as an example, the sugar component in the animal's body hath decreased, according to a natural law the animal hankereth after a herb that is rich in sugar. Then, by a natural urge, which is the appetite, among a thousand different varieties of plants across the field, the animal will discover and consume that herb which containeth a sugar component in large amounts. Thus the essential balance of the substances composing its body is re-established, and the animal is rid of its disease.

This question requireth the most careful investigation. When highly-skilled physicians shall fully examine this matter, thoroughly and perseveringly, it will be clearly seen that the incursion of disease is due to a disturbance in the relative amounts of the body's component substances, and that treatment consisteth in adjusting these relative amounts, and that this can be apprehended and made possible by means of foods.

It is certain that in this wonderful new age the development of medical science will lead to the doctors' healing their patients with foods. For the sense of sight, the sense of hearing, of taste, of smell, of touch—all these are discriminative faculties, their purpose being to separate the beneficial from whatever causeth harm. Now, is it possible that man's sense of smell, the sense that differentiates odours, should find some odour repugnant, and that odour be beneficial to the human body? Absurd! Impossible! In the same way, could the human body, through the faculty of sight—the differentiator among things visible—benefit from gazing upon a revolting mass of excrement? Never! Again, if the sense of taste, likewise a faculty that selecteth and rejecteth, be offended by something, that thing is certainly not beneficial; and if, at the outset, it may yield some advantage, in the long run its harmfulness will be established.

And likewise, when the constitution is in a state of equilibrium, there is no doubt that whatever is relished will be beneficial to health. Observe how an animal will graze in a field where there are a hundred thousand kinds of herbs and grasses, and how, with its sense of smell, it snuffeth up the odours of the plants, and tasteth them with its sense of taste; then it consumeth whatever herb is pleasurable to these senses, and benefitteth therefrom. Were it not for this power of selectivity, the animals would all be dead in a single day; for there are a great many poisonous plants, and animals know nothing of the pharmacopoeia. And yet, observe what a reliable set of scales they have, by means of which to differentiate the good from the injurious. Whatever constituent of their body hath decreased, they can rehabilitate by seeking out and consuming some plant that hath an abundant store of that diminished element; and thus the equilibrium of their bodily components is re-established, and they are rid of their disease.

At whatever time highly-skilled physicians shall have developed the healing of illnesses by means of foods, and shall make provision for simple foods, and shall prohibit humankind from living as slaves to their lustful appetites, it is certain that the incidence of chronic and diversified illnesses will abate, and the general health of all mankind will be much improved.

This is destined to come about. In the same way, in the character, the conduct and the manners of men, universal modifications will be made.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 134

- 26 According to the explicit decree of Bahá'u'lláh one must not turn aside from the advice of a competent doctor. It is imperative to consult one even if the patient himself be a well-known and eminent physician. In short, the point is that you should maintain your health by consulting a highly-skilled physician.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 135

- 27 It is incumbent upon everyone to seek medical treatment and to follow the doctor's instructions, for this is in compliance with the divine ordinance, but, in reality, He Who giveth healing is God.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 136

- 28 O handmaid of God! The prayers which were revealed to ask for healing apply both to physical and spiritual healing. Recite them, then, to heal both the soul and the body. If healing is right for the patient, it will certainly be granted; but for some ailing persons, healing would only be the cause of other ills, and therefore wisdom doth not permit an affirmative answer to the prayer.

O handmaid of God! The power of the Holy Spirit healeth both physical and spiritual ailments.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 139

- 29 ...every branch of learning, conjoined with the love of God, is approved and worthy of praise; but bereft of His love, learning is barren—indeed, it bringeth on madness. Every kind of knowledge, every science, is as a tree: if the fruit of it be the love of God, then is it a blessed tree, but if not, that tree is but dried-up wood, and shall only feed the fire.

O thou loyal servant of God and thou spiritual healer of man! Whensoever thou dost attend a patient, turn thy face toward the Lord of the heavenly Kingdom, ask the Holy Spirit to come to thine aid, then heal thou the sickness.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 154

- 30 ...should a physician console a patient and say, “Thank God, you are doing better and there is hope for your recovery”, although these words may be contrary to the truth, yet sometimes they will ease the patient’s mind and become the means of curing the illness. And this is not blameworthy.

Some Answered Questions, no. 57

- 31 If the health and well-being of the body be expended in the path of the Kingdom, this is very acceptable and praiseworthy; and if it be expended to the benefit of the human world in general—even though it be to their material benefit—and be a means of doing good, that is also acceptable. But if the health and welfare of man be spent in sensual desires, in a life on the animal plane, and in devilish pursuits—then disease were better than such health; nay, death itself were preferable to such a life. If thou art desirous of health, wish thou health for serving the Kingdom. I hope that thou mayest attain perfect insight, inflexible resolution, complete health, and spiritual and physical strength in order that thou mayest drink from the fountain of eternal life and be assisted by the spirit of divine confirmation.

Cited in J. E. Esslemont, Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era

- 32 I ever pray on her behalf and beg from God His divine remedy and healing. As in this Dispensation consultation with expert doctors is highly advisable and acting in accordance with their prescriptions obligatory, it is well for her to undergo an operation if deemed necessary by such doctors.

Cited in Star of the West, vol. 12, no. 7 (July 1921), p. 134

- 33 It is therefore evident that the spirit is different from the body, that the bird is different from the cage, and that the power and influence of the spirit is more pronounced without the intermediary of the body. Now, if the instrument becomes idle, its wielder continues to exist. For example, if the pen is abandoned or broken, the writer remains alive and well; if a house is destroyed, its owner lives on. This is one of the rational arguments proving the immortality of the soul.

Another proof is this: Man’s body may become weak or robust, sick or healthy, tired or rested; it may suffer the loss of a hand or leg; it may decline in material powers; it may become blind, deaf, dumb, or paralysed—in short, it may become gravely impaired. And yet, despite this, the spirit maintains its original condition and spiritual perceptions, suffering no impairment or disruption. But when the body is afflicted with a major

illness or calamity, it is deprived of the grace of the spirit, like a mirror that is broken or covered with dust, and that can no longer reflect the light of the sun or manifest its bounty.

We have already explained that the spirit of man is not contained within the body, for it is freed and sanctified from ingress and egress, which are among the properties of material bodies. Rather, the connection of the spirit with the body is like that of the sun with the mirror. Briefly, the human spirit is always in one condition. It neither falls ill with the illness of the body nor is made healthy by the latter's health; it does not become weak or incapacitated, wretched or downtrodden, diminished or lessened—that is, it suffers no harm or ill effect on account of the infirmities of the body, even if the body were to waste away, or if the hands, feet, and tongue were to be cut off, or if the powers of sight and hearing were to be disrupted. It is therefore evident and established that the spirit is different from the body and that its immortality is not conditioned upon the latter's, but that the spirit rules supreme in the world of the body, and that its power and influence are as plain and visible as the bounty of the sun in a mirror. But when the mirror is covered with dust or broken, it will be deprived of the rays of the sun.

Some Answered Questions, no. 61

34 **Question:** Some heal the sick by spiritual means—that is, without medicine. How is this?

Answer: A detailed explanation of this matter was provided earlier. If you have not fully grasped it, we will repeat it so that you may. Know that there are four kinds of treatment and healing without medicine. Two are due to material causes and two to spiritual ones.

As to the two material kinds, one is due to the fact that in reality both health and sickness are contagious. The contagiousness of disease is rapid and violent, whereas that of health is exceedingly slow and weak. If two bodies are brought into contact with each other, it is certain that microbial particles will be transmitted from one to the other. In the same way that disease is rapidly and violently transmitted from one body to another, the strong health of a healthy person may also alleviate a very slight condition in a sick person. Our meaning is that the contagiousness of disease is rapid and violent, while that of health is very slow and of limited effect, and it is only in minor ills that this modest effect can be felt. In such cases, the

strength of the healthy body overcomes the slight weakness of the sick body and brings about its health. This is one kind of healing.

Another kind of healing is through the force of bodily magnetism, where the magnetic force of one body affects another body and brings about the cure. This force, too, has only a slight effect. Thus someone may lay his hand upon the head or stomach of a patient and perchance the latter will benefit from this. Why? Because the effect of the magnetism, and the impression made upon the psyche of the patient, may dispel the disease. But this effect is also very slight and weak.

The two other kinds are spiritual; that is, the means of healing is a spiritual power. One is when a healthy person focuses his whole attention upon a sick person, and the latter in turn fully expects to be healed through the spiritual power of the former and is wholly convinced thereof, to such an extent that a strong connection is created between their hearts. Should the healthy individual then bend every effort to heal the sick one, and should the latter have full faith that health will be attained, an excitement may be produced in his nerves from these soul-to-soul influences and bring about the cure. So, for example, when a sick person is suddenly given the good news that his most ardent wish and desire has been realized, a nervous excitement may result that will entirely dispel the ailment. In the same way, when a terrifying event suddenly comes to pass, such an excitement may be produced in the nerves of a healthy person that he immediately falls ill. The cause of the illness is not a material thing, for that person has not ingested or come into contact with anything: The nervous excitement alone has brought about the illness. Likewise, the sudden realization of a most cherished desire may impart such joy as to excite the nerves and restore health.

In brief, a complete and perfect connection between the spiritual physician and the patient—that is, one where the physician concentrates his entire attention on the patient and where the patient likewise concentrates all his attention on the spiritual physician and anticipates healing—causes a nervous excitement whereby health is regained. But this is effective only to a point and not in all cases. For instance, should someone contract a grave illness or be physically injured, these means will neither dispel the illness nor soothe and heal the injury—that is, these means have no sway over grave illnesses unless assisted by the constitution of the patient, for a strong constitution will often ward off an illness. This is the third kind of healing.

But the fourth kind is when healing is brought about through the power of the Holy Spirit. This depends neither upon physical contact, nor upon sight, nor even upon presence: It is not dependent upon any condition. Whether the disease be mild or severe, whether there be contact between the bodies or not, whether a connection be established between patient and physician or not, whether the patient be present or not, this healing takes place through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Some Answered Questions, no. 72

- 35 We mentioned, in connection with the question of spiritual medicine and healing, how illnesses can be cured through spiritual powers.

Now we will speak of material healing. The science of medicine is still in its infancy and has not yet reached maturity. But when it reaches that stage, treatments will be administered with things that are not repulsive to the senses of taste and smell, that is, through foods, fruits, and plants that have an agreeable taste and a pleasant smell. For the cause of the intrusion of illness into the human body is either a physical agent or a nervous excitement and stimulation.

As to physical agents, which are the primary cause of illness, their effect is due to the following: The human body is composed of numerous elements according to a particular state of equilibrium. So long as this equilibrium is maintained, man is preserved from sickness, but should this fundamental balance, which is the central requirement of a sound constitution, be upset, the constitution will be disrupted and illnesses will supervene.

For instance, if there is a deficiency in one of the component parts of the body and a surfeit of another, the state of equilibrium is disturbed and illness occurs. So, for example, equilibrium may require one component to be a thousand grams and another to be five grams. Should the former fall to seven hundred grams and the latter increase in such wise that the state of equilibrium is disturbed, then illness will supervene; and should equilibrium be restored through medicines and treatments, the illness will be overcome. Thus if the sugar component becomes excessive, the health is impaired; and when the physician forbids sweet and starchy foods, the sugar component diminishes, equilibrium is restored, and the illness is banished.

Now, the equilibration of these bodily components can be accomplished by one of two means, either through medicines or with foods,

and when the constitution has recovered its equilibrium, the illness is banished. Since all the constituent elements of the human body are also found in plants, if one of these components were to become deficient, and if one were to partake of foods that are rich in that component, then equilibrium would be restored and the cure realized. So long as the aim is the equilibration of the component parts of the body, this can be equally effected through medicines or various foods.

The majority of the illnesses that afflict man also afflict animals, but the animal does not treat them through medicines. The animal's physician in the mountains and the wilderness is its powers of taste and smell. The sick animal smells the plants that grow in the wilderness, eats those that its smell and taste find to be sweet and fragrant, and is cured. The reason is this: When, for example, the sugar component in its body becomes deficient, it craves sweet things and thus eats of sweet-tasting plants, for nature so urges and guides it. Thus, as the animal eats things that are pleasing to its smell and taste, the sugar component increases and it regains its health.

It is therefore evident that it is possible to cure illnesses by means of fruits and other foods. But as the science of medicine has not yet been perfected, this fact has not been fully understood. When this science reaches perfection, treatments will be administered with fragrant fruits and plants as well as with other foods, and with hot and cold waters of various temperatures.

This is only a brief explanation. God willing, and the occasion permitting, we will provide a more detailed explanation another time.

Some Answered Questions, no. 73

- 36 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. In the East it is the custom to call upon the patient often and meet him individually. 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.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, no. 72

- 37 All true healing comes from God! There are two causes for sickness, one is material, the other spiritual. If the sickness is of the body, a material remedy is needed, if of the soul, a spiritual remedy.

If the heavenly benediction be upon us while we are being healed then only can we be made whole, for medicine is but the outward and visible means through which we obtain the heavenly healing. Unless the spirit be healed, the cure of the body is worth nothing. All is in the hands of God, and without Him there can be no health in us!

There have been many men who have died at last of the very disease of which they have made a special study. Aristotle, for instance, who made a special study of the digestion, died of a gastronomic malady. Aviseu was a specialist of the heart, but he died of heart disease. God is the great compassionate Physician who alone has the power to give true healing.

Paris Talks, no. 3

- 38 When an illness is slight a small remedy will suffice to heal it, but when the slight illness becomes a terrible disease, then a very strong remedy must be used by the Divine Healer...

Paris Talks, no. 5

- 39 This is worship: to serve mankind and to minister to the needs of the people. Service is prayer. A physician ministering to the sick, gently, tenderly, free from prejudice and believing in the solidarity of the human race, he is giving praise.

Paris Talks, no. 55

- 40 The healing that is by the power of the Holy Spirit needs no special concentration or contact. It is through the wish or desire and the prayer of the holy person. The one who is sick may be in the East and the healer in the West, and they may not have been acquainted with each other, but as soon as that holy person turns his heart to God and begins to pray, the sick one is healed. This is a gift belonging to the Holy Manifestations and those who are in the highest station.

Cited in J. E. Esslemont, Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era

- 41 "What will be the food of the future?" "Fruit and grains. The time will come when meat will no longer be eaten. Medical science is only in its infancy, yet it has shown that our natural diet is that which grows out of the ground. The people will gradually develop up to the condition of this natural food."

Cited in Julia M. Grundy, Ten Days in the Light of 'Akka, pp. 8-9

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

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

9 July 1931

- 43 'Abdu'l-Bahá does often state that the medical science will much improve. With the appearance of every Revelation a new insight is created in man and this in turn expresses itself in the growth of science. This has happened in past dispensations and we find its earliest fruits in our present day. What we see however is only the beginning. With the spiritual awakening of man this force will develop and marvelous results will become manifest.

14 January 1932

- 44 Bahá'u'lláh tells us that in case of disease we should pray but at the same time refer to competent physicians, and abide by their considered decision. Shoghi Effendi wishes you therefore to find whether your son has really become ill, and if he is, then follow the directions of the doctor. Being versed in the medical sciences they can treat better than even a loving mother can. You can render your assistance by praying for him and at the same time helping the physicians to treat him.

9 April 1933

- 45 In the "Book of Aqdas" Bahá'u'lláh urges us that when we obtain any physical ailment we should refer to the doctor and abide by his decision. Physical and spiritual forces have both to be used to secure the speedy recovery of the patients; no partial treatment is sufficient...

1 June 1933

- 46 Healing through purely spiritual forces is undoubtedly as inadequate as that which materialist physicians and thinkers vainly seek to obtain by resorting entirely to mechanical devices and methods. The best result can be obtained by combining the two processes: spiritual and physical.

12 March 1934

- 47 With regard to your question concerning spiritual healing: Such a healing constitutes, indeed, one of the most effective methods of relieving a person from either his mental or physical pains and sufferings. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has in His “Paris Talks” emphasized its importance by stating that it should be used as an essential means for effecting a complete physical cure. Spiritual healing, however, is not and cannot be a substitute for material healing, but it is a most valuable adjunct to it. Both are, indeed, essential and complementary.

16 February 1935

- 48 With reference to your question concerning spiritual healing: Its importance, as you surely know, has been greatly emphasized by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who considered it, indeed, as an essential part of physical processes of healing. Physical healing cannot be complete and lasting unless it is reinforced by spiritual healing. And this last one can be best obtained through obedience to the laws and commandments of God as revealed to us through His Manifestations. Individual believers, however, can also help by imparting healing to others. But the success of their efforts depends entirely on their strict adherence to the Teachings, and also on the manner in which they impart them to others. According to Bahá’u’lláh man cannot obtain full guidance directly from God. He must rather seek it through His Prophets. Provided this principle is clearly understood and explained, the Guardian sees no harm that the friends should try to effect spiritual healing in others. Any such cure effected, however, should be done in the name of Bahá’u’lláh and in accordance with His teachings. For God, and God alone, is the Supreme and Almighty Physician, and all else are but instruments in His hands.

23 May 1935

- 49 As to your question concerning the meaning of physical suffering and its relation to mental and spiritual healing: Physical pain is a necessary accompaniment of all human existence, and as such is unavoidable. As long as there will be life on earth, there will be also suffering, in various forms and degrees. But suffering, although an inescapable reality, can nevertheless be utilized as a means for the attainment of happiness. This is the interpretation given to it by all the Prophets and saints, who, in the midst of severe tests and trials, felt happy and joyous and experienced what is best and holiest in life. Suffering is both a reminder and a guide. It

stimulates us to better adapt ourselves to our environmental conditions, and thus leads the way to self-improvement. In every suffering one can find a meaning and a wisdom. But it is not always easy to find the secret of that wisdom. It is sometimes only when all our suffering has passed that we become aware of its usefulness. What man considers to be evil turns often to be a cause of infinite blessings. And this is due to his desire to know more than he can. God's wisdom is, indeed, inscrutable to us all, and it is no use pushing too far trying to discover that which shall always remain a mystery to our mind.

29 May 1935

- 50 Regarding your questions concerning the condition of the soul during illness: The passages in the "Gleanings" make it quite clear that physical ailments, no matter how severe, cannot bring any change in the inherent condition of the soul. As Bahá'u'lláh says: "The spirit is permanent and steadfast in its station".ⁱ The veil or hindrance that interposes between soul and body during physical disease is sickness itself. Sickness reveals a lack of balance in the human organism, an absence of equilibrium in the forces essential for the normal functioning of the human body.

8 March 1936

- 51 As to your question regarding the possibility of an artificial production of life by means of an incubator: this is essentially a matter that concerns science, and as such should be investigated and studied by scientists.

31 December 1937

- 52 As to the possibility of conception without the presence of a male sperm in the future: this is a question which lies entirely within the province of science, and which future scientists will have to investigate.

27 February 1938

- 53 The Teachings bear no reference to the question of telepathy. It is a matter that concerns psychology.

28 February 1938

i The words quoted here are from a translation appearing in *Bahá'í Scriptures* p. 228. The passage as translated by Shoghi Effendi appears in *Gleanings*, section LXXX, as follows: "...the soul itself remaineth unaffected by any bodily ailments."

- 54 The eating of pork is not forbidden in the Bahá'í Teachings.

27 March 1938

- 55 These investigations you have so painstakingly pursued in the field of medical science, and on a subject which is still puzzling the minds of all the leading scientists in the world, cannot but be of a captivating interest and of a great value to all medical research workers.

It is significant that you as a believer should have undertaken a work of this nature, as we all know that the powers released by the Manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh in this day are destined in the course of time to reveal themselves through the instrumentality of His followers, and in every conceivable field of human endeavour.

That you should increasingly prove, through your continued researches in the domain of medicine, to be one of those instruments is the fervent hope of our beloved Guardian...

29 November 1938

- 56 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 determined and continued effort...

6 February 1939

- 57 The Bahá'í Teachings do not only encourage marital life, considering it the natural and normal way of existence for every sane, healthy and socially-conscious and responsible person, but raise marriage to the status of a divine institution, its chief and sacred purpose being the perpetuation of the human race—which is the very flower of the entire creation—and its elevation to the true station destined for it by God.

That there should be, however, certain individuals who by reason of some serious deficiency, physical or mental, would be incapacitated to contract marriage and enjoy the blessings of an enduring and successful marital life is only too evident, but these constitute only a very small section of humanity, and are therefore merely an exception, and their condition cannot possibly invalidate what an all-wise and loving Providence has decreed to be the normal way to a fruitful and constructive social existence.

The exact conditions and circumstances under which such incapacitated individuals should be advised or even prevented perhaps from entering

into any sort of marital existence have not been specified in the Bahá'í Writings, but will have to be defined later on by the Universal House of Justice. In the mean time, those believers who consider themselves as falling into the above category would do well, before taking any final decision themselves, to consult medical experts, who are both conscientious and competent, and to abide by their recommendation.

15 April 1939

- 58 Also with regard to the practice of circumcision; the Teachings bear no reference to this matter, and it is therefore not enjoined upon the believers.

14 December 1940

- 59 Regarding your question about vaccination: these are technical matters which have not been specifically mentioned in the teachings, and consequently the Guardian cannot make any statement about them. No doubt medical science will progress tremendously as time goes by, and the treatment of disease become more perfect.

22 January 1944

- 60 As to your question about healing: although there is no objection to your helping others to regain their health, he does not feel you should associate the name Bahá'í with your work, as it gives a wrong impression; we have no "Bahá'í healers" as Christian Science and various other sects have. You are a Bahá'í and a healer, and that is quite different.

13 December 1945

- 61 The Tablet to a Physician was addressed to a man who was a student of the old type of healing prevalent in the East and familiar with the terminology used in those days, and He addresses him in terms used by the medical men of those days. These terms are quite different from those used by modern medicine, and one would have to have a deep knowledge of this former school of medicine to understand the questions Bahá'u'lláh was elucidating.

The Guardian never goes into technical matters, as this is not his work. Bahá'u'lláh has recommended that people seek the help and advice of experts and doctors; He does not say which school they should belong to.

Likewise there is nothing in the teachings about whether people should eat their food cooked or raw; exercise or not exercise; resort to specific therapies or not; nor is it forbidden to eat meat.

Bahá'u'lláh says teaching is the greatest of all services, but He does not mean one should give up medicine to teach.

18 December 1945

- 62 The greatest form of healing which the Bahá'ís can practice is to heal the spiritually sick souls of men by giving this greatest of all Messages to them. We can also try to help them, both physically and spiritually, through prayer.

25 March 1946

- 63 There is nothing in the teachings which would forbid a Bahá'í to bequeath his eyes to another person or for a Hospital; on the contrary it seems a noble thing to do.

6 September 1946

- 64 He feels you should certainly think of your future and earning your living, and if chiropractic is the work you wish to go in for, you should continue your education; when you are finished it would be highly meritorious to enter the pioneer field, as for many years to come Bahá'í teachers will be needed in distant lands.

31 March 1947

- 65 ...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...

23 November 1947

- 66 Very little is as yet known about the mind and its workings. But one thing is certain: Bahá'ís can and do receive a very remarkable help and protection in this world, one which often surprises their doctors very much!

9 April 1948

- 67 The Guardian knows nothing about your kind of healing, nor would he care to go into the question in detail, as he has no time for such matters. But he can lay down for your guidance certain broad principles: there is no such thing as Bahá'í healers or a Bahá'í type of healing. In His Most Holy

Book (the Aqdas) Bahá'u'lláh says to consult the best physicians, in other words doctors who have studied a scientific system of medicine; He never gave us to believe He Himself would heal us through 'healers', but rather through prayer and the assistance of medicine and approved treatments.

Now, as long as your healing is in no opposition to these principles, as long as you do not try and take the place of a regular doctor in trying to heal others, but only give them your kind of help through constructive suggestion—or whatever it may be—and do not associate this help with being a channel of the direct grace of Bahá'u'lláh, the Guardian sees no harm in your continuing your assistance to others. But you must conscientiously decide whether in view of the above you are really justified in continuing. He will pray for your guidance and happiness.

8 June 1948

- 68 He does not feel that you should try to do anything special about the capacity you feel to help people when they are ill. This does not mean you should not use it, when the occasion arises, such as it did recently. But he means you should not become a "healer" such as the Christian Scientists have, and we Bahá'ís do not have.

25 December 1949

- 69 We have no reason to believe that the healing of the Holy Spirit cannot be attracted by ordinary human beings. But this is rare, a mystery, and a gift of God.

26 March 1950

- 70 There is nothing in our teachings about Freud and his method. Psychiatric treatment in general is no doubt an important contribution to medicine, but we must believe it is still a growing rather than a perfected science. As Bahá'u'lláh has urged us to avail ourselves of the help of good physicians Bahá'ís are certainly not only free to turn to psychiatry for assistance but should, when advisable, do so. This does not mean psychiatrists are always wise or always right, it means we are free to avail ourselves of the best medicine has to offer us.

15 June 1950

- 71 ...as we are a religion and not qualified to pass on scientific matters we cannot sponsor different treatments. We are certainly free to pass on what we have found beneficial to others.

30 September 1950

- 72 The Guardian sees no reason why you should not continue to help sick people. As he wrote some of the believers regarding this matter previously, as long as you do not say you are healing them as a Bahá'í, or because you are a Bahá'í (because we have no "healers" in the Cause as such) there can be certainly no objection to your doing it. On the contrary, to be able to help another soul who is in suffering is a great bounty from God.

5 October 1950

- 73 There is nothing in the Teachings about chiropractic as a method of healing. People are free to turn to it if they please and find help through it.

10 February 1951

- 74 Regarding your question: there are very few people who can get along without eight hours sleep. If you are not one of those, you should protect your health by sleeping enough. The Guardian himself finds that it impairs his working capacity if he does not try and get a minimum of seven or eight hours.

15 September 1951

- 75 There is nothing in the teachings about Socialized Medicine. All these details are for the House of Justice to decide.

18 February 1951

- 76 Every day medical science is progressing, and it is quite possible that some new form of treatment or some new doctor may be able to get you on your feet. He will certainly pray that this may be so.

24 February 1952

- 77 So you see he cannot possibly pronounce on the merits of Dianetics. The believers are free to investigate new things, and use them if they prove of real value and no harm.

30 August 1952

- 78 He was sorry to hear you have been ill, and urges you to cooperate fully with your doctors in order to regain your health as soon as possible and be free to serve the Cause.

19 July 1953

- 79 The beloved Guardian says that the question of circumcision has nothing to do with the Bahá'í Teachings; and the believers are free to do as they please in the matter.

27 March 1954

- 80 He is pleased to see that you are feeling better, and will certainly pray for your full recovery. Before having any serious operation, you should consult more than one qualified physician.

8 April 1954

- 81 Regarding various matters raised in your letters: There is nothing in the Teachings to prevent a Bahá'í from willing his body for medical research after death. However, it should be made clear that the remains must be buried eventually and not cremated, as this is according to Bahá'í law.

26 June 1956

- 82 There is nothing in the Teachings against leaving our bodies to medical science. The only thing we should stipulate is that we do not wish to be cremated, as it is against our Bahá'í Laws.

As many people make arrangements to leave their bodies to medical science for investigation, he suggests that you inquire, either through some lawyer friend or through some hospital, how you could do this, and then make the necessary provision in your will, stipulating that you wish your body be of service to mankind in death, and that, being a Bahá'í, you request that your remains not be cremated and not be taken more than an hour's journey from the place you die.

The spirit has no more connection with the body after it departs, but, as the body was once the temple of the spirit, we Bahá'ís are taught that it must be treated with respect.

22 March 1957

From letters by or on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 83 One of the friends of Persia wrote to Shoghi Effendi and asked this question: "Is it true that 'Abdu'l-Bahá has said that biochemical homeopathy, which is a form of food medicine, is in conformity with the Bahá'í medical concept?" The beloved Guardian's reply to this question in a letter dated 25th November, 1944 was as follows: "This statement is true, and the truth thereof will be revealed in the future."

The Universal House of Justice has also asked us to inform you that it does not wish the above statement to be circulated in isolation from the many and varied other texts in the Writings on medicine. However, you may share it with any of your friends who are interested.

12 November 1975

- 84 No specific school of nutrition or medicine has been associated with the Bahá'í teachings. What we have are certain guidelines, indications and principles which will be carefully studied by experts and will, in the years ahead, undoubtedly prove to be invaluable sources of guidance and inspiration in the development of these medical sciences. Moreover, in this connection the Guardian's secretary has stated on his behalf that "It is premature to try and elaborate on the few general references to health and medicine made in our Holy Scriptures." The believers must guard against seizing upon any particular text which may appeal to them and which they may only partially or even incorrectly understand...

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh has stated: "Whenever ye fall ill, refer to competent physicians. Verily, We have not abolished recourse to material means, rather have We affirmed it through this Pen which God hath made the Dawning Place of His luminous and resplendent Cause." The secretaries of the Guardian have conveyed his guidance on this point in many letters to individual believers in passages such as these: "...refer to competent physicians, and abide by their considered decisions"; "...invariably consult and follow the treatment of competent and conscientious physicians..." and "...consult the best physicians ... doctors who have studied a scientific system of medicine." Thus the obligation to consult physicians and to distinguish between doctors who are well trained in medical sciences and those who are not is clear, but the Faith should not be associated with any particular school of medical theory or practice. It is

left to each believer to decide for himself which doctors he should consult, bearing in mind the principles enunciated above.

In matters of diet, as in medicine, the Universal House of Justice feels that the believers should be aware that a huge body of scientific knowledge has been accumulated as a guide to our habits and practices. Here too, as in all other things, the believers should be conscious of the two principles of moderation and courtesy in the way they express their opinions and in deciding whether they should refuse food offered to them or request special foods.

There are, of course, instances where a believer would be fully justified in abstaining from or eating only certain foods for some medical reason, but this is a different matter and would be understood by any reasonable person.

24 January 1977

- 85 In matters of health, particularly regarding diet and nutrition, the House of Justice advises the friends to seek the help and advice of experts and doctors. This is what Bahá'u'lláh has recommended and He does not indicate which school of thought or practice they should belong to. However, as you particularly ask about references in the Old Testament as they relate to meat and fish, the House of Justice has asked us to quote for you the following excerpt taken from a letter written on behalf of the beloved Guardian by his secretary to an individual believer:

“...there is nothing in the teachings about whether people should eat their food cooked or raw; exercise or not exercise; resort to specific therapies or not; nor is it forbidden to eat meat.”

19 June 1977

- 86 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 19th January 1978 enquiring the Bahá'í point of view on the vivisection of animals. The beloved Guardian was asked a similar question to which his secretary replied on his behalf, on 29 November 1955: “As there is no definite and conclusive statement on Vivisection in the Bahá'í Teachings, this is a matter which the International House of Justice will have to pass upon in the future.”

The House of Justice does not wish to legislate upon this matter at the present time. It is left to the consciences of the individual friends, who

should make their decisions in light of the teachings concerning animals and their treatment.

In this connection the House of Justice instructs us to say that in a Tablet in which He stresses the need for kindness to animals, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that it would be permissible to perform an operation on a living animal for the purposes of research even if the animal were killed thereby, but that the animal must be well anaesthetized and that the utmost care must be exercised that it does not suffer.

9 March 1978

- 87 In matters of diet, as in medicine, the Universal House of Justice feels that the believers should be aware that a huge body of scientific knowledge has been accumulated as a guide to our habits and practices. But it must be clearly understood that no specific school of nutrition or medicine has been associated with the Bahá’í teachings. What we have are certain guidelines, indications and principles which will be carefully studied by experts and will, in the years ahead, undoubtedly prove to be invaluable sources of guidance and inspiration in the development of these medical sciences. Moreover, in this connection the Guardian’s secretary has stated on his behalf that “It is premature to try and elaborate on the few general references to health and medicine made in our Holy Scriptures.” The believers must guard against seizing upon any particular text which may appeal to them and which they may only partially or even in correctly understand.

11 July 1978

REPRODUCTION

AND OTHER BIOLOGICAL SUBJECTS

A compilation of extracts from the letters on behalf
of Shoghi Effendi, and communications on behalf of
the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled 2000

Extracts

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 24 August 2000 and has asked us to respond as follows.

The House of Justice has not found anything specific in the Bahá'í writings concerning the ethics of genetic engineering on human tissue, including foetal tissue, and on possible means of biologically creating replacement limbs and organs for human beings. It regards it as premature to give consideration to these matters and to their spiritual consequences. For the present, believers confronted with such issues are free to come to their own conclusions, based on their knowledge of the pertinent Bahá'í teachings.

Enclosed for your information is a brief compilation of passages from the Bahá'í writings on reproduction and other biological issues, which may be of interest to you in your consideration of these subjects.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 1 With regard to the soul of man: According to the Bahá'í Teachings the human soul starts with the formation of the human embryo, and continues to develop and pass through endless stages of existence after its separation from the body. Its progress is thus infinite.

As to your question regarding the possibility of an artificial production of life by means of an incubator: this is essentially a matter that concerns science, and as such should be investigated and studied by scientists.

31 December 1937

- 2 The Teachings do not tell us of any miraculous birth besides that of Jesus. As to the possibility of conception without the presence of a male sperm in the future: this is a question which lies entirely within the province of science, and which future scientists will have to investigate.

27 February 1938

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 3 Your second question concerning the possible synthesis of an elementary 'life' form such as a simple virus relates to the statement made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá on "The Origin of Man" from Bahá'í World Faith, p. 298 (originally Some Answered Questions, p. 211):

For example, if a man of his own mind and intelligence collects some elements and combines them, a living being will not be brought into existence, since the system is unnatural. This is the answer to the implied question that, since beings are made by the composition and the combination of elements, why is it not possible for us to gather elements and mingle them together, and so create a living being. This is a false supposition, for the origin of this composition is from God; it is God Who makes the combination, and as it is done according to the natural system, from each composition one being is produced, and an existence is realized. A composition made by man produces nothing because man cannot create.

To understand the implications of this statement it is necessary to know what the Master meant by "a living being" and what limitations He intended by the phrases "of his own mind and intelligence" and "since the system is unnatural." As the science of biology develops and men acquire ever deeper insights into the nature of living things, these implications will no doubt become clearer.

22 June 1977

- 4 This answer was written in response to a question concerning child-birth—specifically, whether conception and gestation will, in the future, take place in an incubator, rather than through natural means or artificial insemination.

Concerning your first question, the House of Justice understands that the genetic engineering of fertilized human eggs is far from becoming a reality in the foreseeable future, therefore it does not feel it is propitious or necessary for it to legislate on this matter, or to take up a position about it.

8 March 1983

- 5 Concerning your question about the teachings of the Faith in connection with donating or receiving human organs, in a letter dated 6 September 1946 written on behalf of the beloved Guardian, it was stated that there was nothing in the Teachings which would forbid a Bahá'í to bequeath his eyes to another person or for a hospital, adding that it seemed a noble thing to do.

The House of Justice feels that this statement applies equally to living bodies.

Concerning organs received from a dead person, in a letter dated 26 June 1956, also written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi pointed out:

“...there is nothing in the Teachings to prevent a Bahá'í from willing his body for medical research after death. However, it should be made clear that the remains must be buried eventually and not cremated, as this is according to Bahá'í law.”

1 October 1984

- 6 With respect to the question of multiple ovulation and pregnancies induced through the use of certain chemical agents, the House of Justice knows of nothing in the Writings on this matter. Since the process described is essentially only an accentuation of a normal process, i.e., inducing ovulation where formerly there was some physiological obstacle to successful release of ova, the possibility of multiple pregnancies may be viewed as the chance that is taken in achieving an otherwise successful outcome to a therapeutic intervention...

On the question of removing life support in medical cases where physiological intervention prolongs life in disabling and otherwise fatal illnesses our Teachings indicate that God, the Giver of life, can alone dispose of it as He deems best, and nothing has been found in the Sacred Text on these matters specifically. Until such time as the Universal House of Justice considers legislation on euthanasia, decisions in the matters

to which you refer must be left to the consciences of those responsible, within the limits prescribed by the law of the land.

Bahá'ís are permitted to specify in their wills that their bodies or organs of their bodies may be donated to the proper uses of science or the replacement of organs or organ parts.

30 August 1988

- 7 ...has raised a number of questions in her search for a deeper understanding of the implications to which the House of Justice has referred. The proposed procedure [surrogacy] leads to a mechanistic use of the human body, incompatible with the dignity assigned to the individual in the Bahá'í teachings. Apart from legal questions to which such a procedure could give rise, it should be remembered that, since human beings are endowed with a spiritual nature, an accurate assessment of the implications of the physical actions in which an individual engages must include consideration of the spiritual, emotional and psychological effects of these actions; this interrelationship is evident on examining the emphasis placed in the Bahá'í teachings on modesty, chastity and fidelity. The use of a surrogate for the gestation of an embryo would raise a number of issues pertaining to the future impact on the child itself, as well as the emotional ties between the surrogate and the child, and also between the donor of the ovum and the child.

22 November 1989

- 8 The beloved Guardian states in a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer, that "...there is no objection to having a baby by means of artificial insemination as long as your husband is the father of it". In view of this, it would not be permissible under Bahá'í law for a Bahá'í couple seeking to have a child to utilize a sperm bank.

As to the permissibility of terminating a pregnancy following the discovery through amniocentesis of a severely handicapped foetus, this is a matter left to the judgement of capable professionals in the field, and the consciences of the parents. As you are aware, the Bahá'í Writings prohibit the practice of abortion solely for the purpose of terminating unwanted pregnancies; however, circumstances may occur in which an abortion would be justifiable. The Texts of the Faith do not specify what these circumstances are, and the House of Justice does not wish to legislate on this matter presently. Therefore, a Bahá'í couple faced with making

this decision should be guided by this principle, the best medical advice possible, and their individual consciences.

21 May 1992

- 9 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of ... on your recent activities with the National Council of Women, now concerned with the Human Fertilization and Embryology Bill presently before the House of Commons. We are asked to convey its advice.

You have specifically requested information defining the Bahá'í position on the important matter of experimentation with human embryos. It is not practicable for the House of Justice to consider this delicate issue at this time, hence you are asked not to express opinions in matters of women's activities which might be ascribed to the Faith which you so worthily serve.

11 April 1990

- 10 With reference to your fax of 26 March 1996 inquiring about the question of in-vitro fertilization, we have been asked by the Universal House of Justice to reply as follows.

The beloved Guardian, in a letter written on his behalf to an individual believer, states, "...there is no objection to having a baby by means of artificial insemination as long as your husband is the father of it." While artificial insemination is a very different process from in-vitro fertilization, the principle enunciated by the Guardian is the same, namely, that to be acceptable to Bahá'ís, the egg cell of the wife should be fertilized by the sperm of the husband in the procedure.

5 April 1996

- 11 The Universal House of Justice has considered the question of whether Bahá'ís are required to take extraordinary measures to facilitate the natural process of conception. For the present, it is left to the Bahá'í couple to decide whether or not they wish to use in vitro fertilization as a means of having children. The use of such procedures is clearly a matter of choice, and not a requirement. In this regard, there is value in obtaining the best medical advice available.

6 May 1996

- 12 ...the Bahá'í Writings affirm that the human soul comes into being at the time of conception. However, they do not clearly define the exact biological moment and nature of the event described as conception and this may, indeed, be a question that is insoluble by human thought or investigation, since it relates to mysteries of the spiritual world and the nature of the soul itself.

6 February 1997

- 13 Nothing specific has been found in the Bahá'í writings on genetic engineering. This is therefore a matter on which the House of Justice may have to legislate but the time has not yet come for that. The subject is quite complex, and an informed opinion can be offered only when the scientific understanding is much further advanced than at present and the social implications are clearer. With the emergence of adequate understanding, it will also be opportune to deal with the ethical issues involved. In the meantime, Bahá'ís faced with questions about genetic engineering are free to come to their own conclusions based on their knowledge of the Bahá'í teachings on nature and the purpose of life. However, they should be careful not to make dogmatic statements or offer their own understanding as the teaching of the Faith.

20 April 1997

- 14 Reports appearing in the press and in scientific literature indicate that the study of the cloning of animals is at an early stage. Many fundamental questions about the biological and genetic features of this process, and its physiological implications, remain unresolved, and will only become clear with the passage of time.

Nothing specific has been found in the Bahá'í Writings on the subject of human cloning. The House of Justice regards it as premature for it to give consideration to this matter and its spiritual consequences. For the present, the believers faced with questions about cloning are free to come to their own conclusions based on their knowledge of the Bahá'í teachings on the nature and purpose of life. However, they should be careful not to make dogmatic statements or to offer their own understanding as a teaching of the Faith.

19 May 1998

PEACE

A compilation of extracts from the Writings and Utterances of Bahá'u'lláh, the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, letters by and on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, and communications by and on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled Semptember 1990

Extracts from the Writings

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 This is the Day in which God's most excellent favours have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace hath been infused into all created things. It is incumbent upon all the peoples of the world to reconcile their differences, and, with perfect unity and peace, abide beneath the shadow of the Tree of His care and loving-kindness. It behoveth them to cleave to whatsoever will, in this Day, be conducive to the exaltation of their stations, and to the promotion of their best interests...

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 2 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.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 3 O ye that dwell on earth! The distinguishing feature that marketh the preeminent character of this Supreme Revelation consisteth in that We have ... laid down the essential prerequisites of concord, of understanding, of complete and enduring unity. Well is it with them that keep My statutes.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 4 The Great Being, wishing to reveal the prerequisites of the peace and tranquillity of the world and the advancement of its peoples, hath written: 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. 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. This will ensure the peace and composure of every people, government and nation. We fain would hope that the kings and rulers of the earth, the mirrors of the gracious and almighty name of God, may attain unto this station, and shield mankind from the onslaught of tyranny.... 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. 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.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 5 O ye rulers of the earth! Wherefore have ye clouded the radiance of the Sun, and caused it to cease from shining? Hearken unto the counsel given you by the Pen of the Most High, that haply both ye and the poor may attain unto tranquillity and peace. We beseech God to assist the kings of the earth to establish peace on earth. He, verily, doth what He willeth.

O kings of the earth! We see you increasing every year your expenditures, and laying the burden thereof on your subjects. This, verily, is wholly and grossly unjust. Fear the sighs and tears of this Wronged One, and lay not excessive burdens on your peoples. Do not rob them to rear palaces for yourselves; nay rather choose for them that which ye choose for yourselves. Thus We unfold to your eyes that which profiteth you, if ye but perceive. Your people are your treasures. Beware lest your rule violate the commandments of God, and ye deliver your wards to the hands of the robber. By them ye rule, by their means ye subsist, by their aid ye conquer. Yet, how disdainfull ye look upon them! How strange, how very strange!

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.

O 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. Beware lest ye disregard the counsel of the All-Knowing, the Faithful.

Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend. Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 6 The well-being of mankind, its peace and security, are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established. This unity can never be achieved so long as the counsels which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed are suffered to pass unheeded.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 7 We pray God—exalted be His glory—and cherish the hope that He may graciously assist the manifestations of affluence and power and the day-springs of sovereignty and glory, the kings of the earth—may God aid them through His strengthening grace—to establish the Lesser Peace. This, indeed, is the greatest means for ensuring the tranquillity of the nations. It is incumbent upon the Sovereigns of the world—may God assist them—unitedly to hold fast unto this Peace, which is the chief instrument for the protection of all mankind. It is Our hope that they will arise to achieve what will be conducive to the well-being of man. It is their duty to convene an all-inclusive assembly, which either they themselves or their ministers will attend, and to enforce whatever measures are required to establish unity and concord amongst men. They must put away the weapons of war, and turn to the instruments of universal reconstruction. Should one king rise up against another, all the other kings must arise to deter him. Arms and armaments will, then, be no more needed beyond that which is necessary to ensure the internal security of their respective countries. If they attain unto this all-surpassing blessing, the people of each nation will pursue, with tranquillity and contentment, their own occupations, and the groanings and lamentations of most men would be silenced. We

beseech God to aid them to do His will and pleasure. He, verily, is the Lord of the throne on high and of earth below, and the Lord of this world and of the world to come. It would be preferable and more fitting that the highly-honoured kings themselves should attend such an assembly, and proclaim their edicts. Any king who will arise and carry out this task, he, verily will, in the sight of God, become the cynosure of all kings. Happy is he, and great is his blessedness!

Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

- 8 The sixth Glad-Tidings is the establishment of the Lesser Peace, details of which have formerly been revealed from Our Most Exalted Pen. Great is the blessedness of him who upholdeth it and observeth whatsoever hath been ordained by God, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 9 ...In all matters moderation is desirable. If a thing is carried to excess, it will prove a source of evil. Consider the civilization of the West, how it hath agitated and alarmed the peoples of the world. An infernal engine hath been devised, and hath proved so cruel a weapon of destruction that its like none hath ever witnessed or heard. The purging of such deeply-rooted and overwhelming corruptions cannot be effected unless the peoples of the world unite in pursuit of one common aim and embrace one universal faith. Incline your ears unto the Call of this Wronged One and adhere firmly to the Lesser Peace.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 10 First: It is incumbent upon the ministers of the House of Justice to promote the Lesser Peace so that the people of the earth may be relieved from the burden of exorbitant expenditures. This matter is imperative and absolutely essential, inasmuch as hostilities and conflict lie at the root of affliction and calamity.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 11 In the abundance of Our grace and loving-kindness We have revealed specially for the rulers and ministers of the world that which is conducive to safety and protection, tranquillity and peace; haply the children of men may rest secure from the evils of oppression. He, verily, is the Protector, the Helper, the Giver of victory. It is incumbent upon the men of God's House

of Justice to fix their gaze by day and by night upon that which hath shone forth from the Pen of Glory for the training of peoples, the upbuilding of nations, the protection of man and the safeguarding of his honour.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 12 ...They that are possessed of wealth and invested with authority and power must show the profoundest regard for religion. In truth, religion is a radiant light and an impregnable stronghold for the protection and welfare of the peoples of the world, for the fear of God impelleth man to hold fast to that which is good, and shun all evil. Should the lamp of religion be obscured, chaos and confusion will ensue, and the lights of fairness and justice, of tranquillity and peace cease to shine. Unto this will bear witness every man of true understanding.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 13 We have enjoined upon all mankind to establish the Most Great Peace—the surest of all means for the protection of humanity. The sovereigns of the world should, with one accord, hold fast thereunto, for this is the supreme instrument that can ensure the security and welfare of all peoples and nations. They, verily, are the manifestations of the power of God and the daysprings of His authority. We beseech the Almighty that He may graciously assist them in that which is conducive to the well-being of their subjects. A full explanation regarding this matter hath been previously set forth by the Pen of Glory; well is it with them that act accordingly.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 14 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. It behoveth the chiefs and rulers of the world, and in particular the Trustees of God's House of Justice, to endeavour to the utmost of their power to safeguard its position, promote its interests and exalt its station in

the eyes of the world. In like manner it is incumbent upon them to enquire into the conditions of their subjects and to acquaint themselves with the affairs and activities of the divers communities in their dominions. We call upon the manifestations of the power of God—the sovereigns and rulers on earth—to bestir themselves and do all in their power that haply they may banish discord from this world and illumine it with the light of concord.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 15 Our hope is that the world's religious leaders and the rulers thereof will unitedly arise for the reformation of this age and the rehabilitation of its fortunes. Let them, after meditating on its needs, take counsel together and, through anxious and full deliberation, administer to a diseased and sorely-afflicted world the remedy it requireth.

The Great Being saith: The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 16 *Take ye counsel together, and let your concern be only for that which profiteth mankind and bettereth the condition thereof ... Regard the world as the human body which, though created whole and perfect, has been afflicted, through divers causes, with grave ills and maladies. Not for one day did it rest, nay its sicknesses waxed more severe, as it fell under the treatment of unskilled physicians who have spurred on the steed of their worldly desires and have erred grievously. And if at one time, through the care of an able physician, a member of that body was healed, the rest remained afflicted as before. Thus informeth you the All-Knowing, the All-Wise ... 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. This verily is the truth, and all else naught but error...*

Consider these days in which the Ancient Beauty, He Who is the Most Great Name, hath been sent down to regenerate and unify mankind. Behold how with drawn swords they rose against Him, and committed that which caused the Faithful Spirit to tremble. And whenever We said unto them: 'Lo,

the World Reformer is come,' they made reply: 'He, in truth, is one of the stirrers of mischief'...

Cited in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

From the Utterances of Bahá'u'lláh

- 17 ...Praise be to God that thou hast attained! ... Thou hast come to see a prisoner and an exile ... We desire but the good of the world and happiness of the nations; yet they deem us a stirrer up of strife and sedition worthy of bondage and banishment ... 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—what harm is there in this? ... Yet so it shall be; these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the “Most Great Peace” shall come ... Do not you in Europe need this also? Is not this that which Christ foretold? ... Yet do we see your kings and rulers lavishing their treasures more freely on means for the destruction of the human race than on that which would conduce to the happiness of mankind ... These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family ... Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind...

Cited in J. E. Esslemont, Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 18 Know thou that all the powers combined have not the power to establish universal peace, nor to withstand the overmastering dominion, at every time and season, of these endless wars. Ere long, however, shall the power of heaven, the dominion of the Holy Spirit, hoist on the high summits the banners of love and peace, and there above the castles of majesty and might shall those banners wave in the rushing winds that blow out of the tender mercy of God.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 19 Rest thou assured that in this era of the spirit, the Kingdom of Peace will raise up its tabernacle on the summits of the world, and the commandments

of the Prince of Peace will so dominate the arteries and nerves of every people as to draw into His sheltering shade all the nations on earth. From springs of love and truth and unity will the true Shepherd give His sheep to drink.

O handmaid of God, 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.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 20 So long as these prejudices [religious, racial, national, political] survive, there will be continuous and fearsome wars.

To remedy this condition there must be universal peace. To bring this about, a Supreme Tribunal must be established, representative of all governments and peoples; questions both national and international must be referred thereto, and all must carry out the decrees of this Tribunal. Should any government or people disobey, let the whole world arise against that government or people.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 21 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.

Therefore Bahá'u'lláh, fifty years ago, expounded this question of universal peace at a time when He was confined in the fortress of 'Akká and was wronged and imprisoned...

Among His teachings was the declaration of universal peace ... the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh were not limited to the establishment of universal peace. They embraced many teachings which supplemented and supported that of universal peace...

In fine, such teachings are numerous. These manifold principles, which constitute the greatest basis for the felicity of mankind and are of the bounties of the Merciful, must be added to the matter of universal peace and combined with it, so that results may accrue. Otherwise the realization of universal peace by itself in the world of mankind is difficult. As the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are combined with universal peace, they are like a table provided with every kind of fresh and delicious food. Every

soul can find, at that table of infinite bounty, that which he desires. If the question is restricted to universal peace alone, the remarkable results which are expected and desired will not be attained. The scope of universal peace must be such that all the communities and religions may find their highest wish realized in it. The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are such that all the communities of the world, whether religious, political or ethical, ancient or modern, find in them the expression of their highest wish...

For example, the question of universal peace, about which Bahá'u'lláh says that the Supreme Tribunal must be established: although the League of Nations has been brought into existence, yet it is incapable of establishing universal peace. But the Supreme Tribunal which Bahá'u'lláh has described will fulfil this sacred task with the utmost might and power. And His plan is this: that the national assemblies of each country and nation—that is to say parliaments—should elect two or three persons who are the choicest of that nation, and are well informed concerning international laws and the relations between governments and aware of the essential needs of the world of humanity in this day. The number of these representatives should be in proportion to the number of inhabitants of that country. The election of these souls who are chosen by the national assembly, that is, the parliament, must be confirmed by the upper house, the congress and the cabinet and also by the president or monarch so these persons may be the elected ones of all the nation and the government. The Supreme Tribunal will be composed of these people, and all mankind will thus have a share therein, for every one of these delegates is fully representative of his nation.ⁱ When the Supreme Tribunal gives a ruling on any international question, either unanimously or by majority rule, there will no longer be any pretext for the plaintiff or ground of objection for the defendant. In case any of the governments or nations, in the execution of the irrefutable decision of the Supreme Tribunal, be negligent or dilatory, the rest of the nations will rise up against it, because all the governments and nations of the world are the supporters of this Supreme Tribunal. Consider what a firm foundation this is! But by a limited and restricted League the purpose will not be realized as it ought and should. This is the truth about the situation, which has been stated...

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

i The translation of this sentence has been revised since the publication of "Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá".

22 True civilization will unfurl its banner in the midmost heart of the world whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-minded sovereigns—the shining exemplars of devotion and determination—shall, for the good and happiness of all mankind, arise, with firm resolve and clear vision, to establish the Cause of Universal Peace. 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.

Observe that if such a happy situation be forthcoming, no government would need continually to pile up the weapons of war, nor feel itself obliged to produce ever new military weapons with which to conquer the human race. A small force for the purposes of internal security, the correction of criminal and disorderly elements and the prevention of local disturbances, would be required—no more. In this way the entire population would, first of all, be relieved of the crushing burden of expenditure currently imposed for military purposes, and secondly, great numbers of people would cease to devote their time to the continual devising of new weapons of destruction—those testimonials of greed and bloodthirstiness, so inconsistent with the gift of life—and would instead bend their efforts to

the production of whatever will foster human existence and peace and well-being, and would become the cause of universal development and prosperity. Then every nation on earth will reign in honour, and every people will be cradled in tranquillity and content.

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 unrivaled 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 day-star 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.

It is clear from what has already been said that man's glory and greatness do not consist in his being avid for blood and sharp of claw, in tearing down cities and spreading havoc, in butchering armed forces and civilians. What would mean a bright future for him would be his reputation for justice, his kindness to the entire population whether high or low, his building up countries and cities, villages and districts, his making life easy, peaceful and happy for his fellow beings, his laying down fundamental principles for progress, his raising the standards and increasing the wealth of the entire population.

No power on earth can prevail against the armies of justice, and every citadel must fall before them; for men willingly go down under the triumphant strokes of this decisive blade, and desolate places bloom and flourish under the trappings of this host. There are two mighty banners which, when they cast their shadow across the crown of any king, will cause the influence of his government quickly and easily to penetrate the whole earth, even as if it were the light of the sun: the first of these two

banners is wisdom; the second is justice. Against these two most potent forces, the iron hills cannot prevail, and Alexander's wall will break before them. It is clear that life in this fast-fading world is as fleeting and inconstant as the morning wind, and this being so, how fortunate are the great who leave a good name behind them, and the memory of a lifetime spent in the pathway of the good pleasure of God...

A conquest can be a praiseworthy thing, and there are times when war becomes the powerful basis of peace, and ruin the very means of reconstruction. If, for example, a high-minded sovereign marshals his troops to block the onset of the insurgent and the aggressor, or again, if he takes the field and distinguishes himself in a struggle to unify a divided state and people, if, in brief, he is waging war for a righteous purpose, then this seeming wrath is mercy itself, and this apparent tyranny the very substance of justice and this warfare the cornerstone of peace. Today, the task befitting great rulers is to establish universal peace, for in this lies the freedom of all peoples.

The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 23 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. In this day, however, means of communication have multiplied, and the five continents of the earth have virtually merged into one.... In like manner all the members of the human family, whether peoples or governments, cities or villages, have become increasingly interdependent. 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—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.

Cited in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 24 ...every great Cause in this world of existence findeth visible expression through three means: first, intention; second, confirmation; third, action. Today on this earth there are many souls who are promoters of peace and reconciliation and are longing for the realization of the oneness and unity of the world of humanity; but this intention needeth a dynamic power, so that it may become manifest in the world of being. In this day the divine instructions and lordly exhortations promulgate this most great aim, and the confirmations of the Kingdom also support and aid the realization of this intention. Therefore, although the combined forces and thoughts of the nations of the world cannot by themselves achieve this exalted purpose, the power of the Word of God penetrateth all things and the assistance of the divine Kingdom is continuous. Ere long it will become evident and clear that the ensign of the Most Great Peace is the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and the tent of union and harmony among nations is the Tabernacle of the divine Kingdom, for therein the intention, the power and the action, all three, are brought together. The realization of everything in the world of being dependeth upon these three elements.

From a Tablet

- 25 As far as possible, rest thou not for a moment, travel to the North and South of the country and summon all men to the oneness of the world of humanity and to universal peace, saying: O people! Bahá'u'lláh laid the foundation of universal peace fifty years ago. He even addressed Epistles to the kings wherein He declared that war could destroy the foundation of the world of humanity, that peace is conducive to everlasting life and that dire peril awaited mankind. Also three years before the outbreak of the world war 'Abdu'l-Bahá travelled to America and most of Europe, where he raised His voice before all gatherings, societies and churches, appealing: O ye assemblage of men! The continent of Europe hath virtually become an arsenal filled with explosives. There are vast stores of destructive material hidden underground, liable to burst forth at a single spark, causing the whole earth to quake. O ye men of understanding! Bestir yourselves that perchance this accumulation of volatile material may not explode. But the appeal went unheeded and consequently this murderous war broke out.

The bulk of humanity now realiseth what a great calamity war is and how war turneth man into a ferocious animal, causing prosperous cities and villages to be reduced to ruins and the foundations of the human edifice to crumble. Now, since all men have been awakened and their ears are attentive, it is time for the promulgation of universal peace—a peace based on righteousness and justice—that mankind may not be exposed to further dangers in the future. Now is the dawn of universal peace, and the first streaks of its light are beginning to appear. We earnestly hope that its effulgent orb may shine forth and flood the East and the West with its radiance. The establishment of universal peace is not possible save through the power of the Word of God...

From a Tablet

- 26 Chaos and confusion are daily increasing in the world. They will attain such intensity as to render the frame of mankind unable to bear them. Then will men be awakened and become aware that religion is the impregnable stronghold and the manifest light of the world, and its laws, exhortations and teachings the source of life on earth.

From a Tablet

From the Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 27 Today the world of humanity is in need of international unity and conciliation. To establish these great fundamental principles a propelling power is needed. It is self-evident that the unity of the human world and the Most Great Peace cannot be accomplished through material means. They cannot be established through political power, for the political interests of nations are various and the policies of peoples are divergent and conflicting. They cannot be founded through racial or patriotic power, for these are human powers, selfish and weak. The very nature of racial differences and patriotic prejudices prevents the realization of this unity and agreement. Therefore, it is evidenced that the promotion of the oneness of the kingdom of humanity, which is the essence of the teachings of all the Manifestations of God, is impossible except through the divine power and breaths of the Holy Spirit. Other powers are too weak and are incapable of accomplishing this.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 28 We will pray that the ensign of international peace may be uplifted and that the oneness of the world of humanity may be realized and accomplished. All this is made possible and practicable through your efforts. May this American democracy be the first nation to establish the foundation of international agreement. May it be the first nation to proclaim the universality of mankind. May it be the first to upraise the standard of the Most Great Peace, and through this nation of democracy may these philanthropic intentions and institutions be spread broadcast throughout the world. Truly, this is a great and revered nation. Here liberty has reached its highest degree. The intentions of its people are most praiseworthy. They are, indeed, worthy of being the first to build the Tabernacle of the Most Great Peace and proclaim the oneness of mankind. I will supplicate God for assistance and confirmation in your behalf.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 29 Today the greatest need of the world of humanity is discontinuance of the existing misunderstandings among nations. This can be accomplished through the unity of language. Unless the unity of languages is realized, the Most Great Peace and the oneness of the human world cannot be effectively organized and established because the function of language is to portray the mysteries and secrets of human hearts. The heart is like a box, and

language is the key. Only by using the key can we open the box and observe the gems it contains. Therefore, the question of an auxiliary international tongue has the utmost importance ... It is my hope that it may be perfected through the bounties of God and that intelligent men may be selected from the various countries of the world to organize an international congress whose chief aim will be the promotion of this universal medium of speech.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 30 ...because I find the American nation so capable of achievement and this government the fairest of western governments, its institutions superior to others, my wish and hope is that the banner of international reconciliation may first be raised on this continent and the standard of the Most Great Peace be unfurled here. May the American people and their government unite in their efforts in order that this light may dawn from this point and spread to all regions, for this is one of the greatest bestowals of God. In order that America may avail herself of this opportunity, I beg that you strive and pray with heart and soul, devoting all your energies to this end: that the banner of international peace may be upraised here and that this democracy may be the cause of the cessation of warfare in all other countries.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 31 In past ages humanity has been defective and inefficient because it has been incomplete. War and its ravages have blighted the world; the education of woman will be a mighty step toward its abolition and ending, for she will use her whole influence against war. Woman rears the child and educates the youth to maturity. She will refuse to give her sons for sacrifice upon the field of battle. In truth, she will be the greatest factor in establishing universal peace and international arbitration. Assuredly, woman will abolish warfare among mankind...

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 32 All of us know that international peace is good, that it is conducive to human welfare and the glory of man, but volition and action are necessary before it can be established. Action is essential. Inasmuch as this century is a century of light, capacity for action is assured to mankind. Necessarily the divine principles will be spread among men until the time of action arrives. Surely this has been so, and truly the time and conditions are ripe for action now...

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 33 This has come to pass. The powers of earth cannot withstand the privileges and bestowals which God has ordained for this great and glorious century. It is a need and exigency of the time ... Let this century be the sun of previous centuries, the effulgences of which shall last forever, so that in times to come they shall glorify the twentieth century, saying the twentieth century was the century of lights, the twentieth century was the century of life, the twentieth century was the century of international peace, the twentieth century was the century of divine bestowals, and the twentieth century has left traces which shall last forever.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 34 The most momentous question of this day is international peace and arbitration, and universal peace is impossible without universal suffrage. Children are educated by the women. The mother bears the troubles and anxieties of rearing the child, undergoes the ordeal of its birth and training. Therefore, it is most difficult for mothers to send to the battlefield those upon whom they have lavished such love and care. Consider a son reared and trained twenty years by a devoted mother. What sleepless nights and restless, anxious days she has spent! Having brought him through dangers and difficulties to the age of maturity, how agonizing then to sacrifice him upon the battlefield! Therefore, the mothers will not sanction war nor be satisfied with it. So it will come to pass that when women participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world, when they enter confidently and capably the great arena of laws and politics, war will cease; for woman will be the obstacle and hindrance to it. This is true and without doubt.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 35 Now the glorious and brilliant twentieth century has dawned, and the divine bounty is radiating universally...

Truly, this can be called the miracle of centuries, for it is replete with manifestations of the miraculous. The time has come when all mankind shall be united, when all races shall be loyal to one fatherland, all religions become one religion, and racial and religious bias pass away. It is a day in which the oneness of humankind shall uplift its standard and international peace, like the true morning, flood the world with its light...

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 36 He promulgated the adoption of the same course of education for man and woman. Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes. 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. Mothers will not give their sons as sacrifices upon the battlefield after twenty years of anxiety and loving devotion in rearing them from infancy, no matter what cause they are called upon to defend. There is no doubt that when women obtain equality of rights, war will entirely cease among mankind.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 37 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.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 38 I find these two great American nations [the United States and Canada] highly capable and advanced ... it is my hope that these revered nations may become prominent factors in the establishment of international peace and the oneness of the world of humanity...

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 39 The world of humanity is possessed of two wings: the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength, the bird will not fly. Until womankind reaches the same degree as man, until she enjoys the same arena of activity, extraordinary attainment for humanity will not be realized; humanity cannot wing its way to heights of real attainment. When the two wings or parts become equivalent in strength, enjoying the same prerogatives, the flight of man will be exceedingly lofty and extraordinary. Therefore, woman must receive the same education as man and

all inequality be adjusted. Thus, imbued with the same virtues as man, rising through all the degrees of human attainment, women will become the peers of men, and until this equality is established, true progress and attainment for the human race will not be facilitated.

The evident reasons underlying this are as follows: Woman by nature is opposed to war; she is an advocate of peace. Children are reared and brought up by the mothers who give them the first principles of education and labour assiduously in their behalf. Consider, for instance, a mother who has tenderly reared a son for twenty years to the age of maturity. Surely she will not consent to having that son torn asunder and killed in the field of battle. Therefore, as woman advances toward the degree of man in power and privilege, with the right of vote and control in human government, most assuredly war will cease; for woman is naturally the most devoted and staunch advocate of international peace.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 40 A Supreme Tribunal shall be elected by the peoples and governments of every nation, where members from each country and government shall assemble in unity. All disputes shall be brought before this Court, its mission being to prevent war.

Paris Talks

- 41 A Supreme Tribunal shall be established by the peoples and Governments of every nation, composed of members elected from each country and Government. The members of this Great Council shall assemble in unity. All disputes of an international character shall be submitted to this Court, its work being to arrange by arbitration everything which otherwise would be a cause of war. The mission of this Tribunal would be to prevent war.

Paris Talks

- 42 As to the question of disarmament, all nations must disarm at the same time. It will not do at all, and it is not proposed, that some nations shall lay down their arms while others, their neighbours, remain armed. The peace of the world must be brought about by international agreement. All nations must agree to disarm simultaneously...

No nation can follow a peace policy while its neighbour remains war-like. There is no justice in that. Nobody would dream of suggesting that the peace of the world could be brought about by any such line of action.

It is to be brought about by a general and comprehensive international agreement, and in no other way...

Simultaneous action, he went on, is necessary in any scheme of disarmament. All the governments of the world must transform their battleships and warcraft into merchant vessels. But no one nation can by itself start in upon such a policy and it would be folly should one power attempt to do so ... it would simply invite destruction...

Are there any signs that the permanent peace of the world will be established in anything like a reasonable period? 'Abdu'l-Bahá was asked.

It will be established in this century, he answered. It will be universal in the twentieth century. All nations will be forced into it...

Economic pressure will tell?

Yes: the nations will be forced to come to peace and to agree to the abolition of war. The awful burdens of taxation for war purposes will get beyond human endurance...

No, said 'Abdu'l-Bahá in conclusion, I repeat, no nation can disarm under these circumstances. Disarmament is surely coming, but it must come, and it will come, by the universal consent of the civilized nations of the earth. By international agreement they will lay down their arms and the great era of peace will be ushered in.

In this and no other way can peace be established upon the earth.

Quoted in 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Canada, pp. 34-35

- 43 Once the Parliament of Man is established and its constituent parts organized, the governments of the world having entered into a covenant of eternal friendship will have no need of keeping large standing armies and navies. A few battalions to preserve internal order, and an International Police to keep the highways of the seas clear, are all that will be necessary. Then these huge sums will be diverted to other more useful channels, pauperism will disappear, knowledge will increase, the victories of Peace will be sung by poets and bards, knowledge will improve the conditions and mankind will be rocked in the cradle of felicity and bliss. Then, whether a government is constitutional or republican, hereditary monarchy or democratic, the rulers will devote their time to the prosperity of their nations, the legislation of just and sane laws and the fostering of closer and more amicable relations with their neighbours—thus will the world of humanity become a mirror reflecting the virtues and attributes of the Kingdom of God.

By a general agreement all the governments of the world must disarm simultaneously.... It will not do if one lays down the arms and the other refuses to do so. The nations of the world must concur with each other concerning this supremely important subject, thus they may abandon together the deadly weapons of human slaughter. As long as one nation increases her military and naval budget, another nation will be forced into this crazed competition through her natural and supposed interests...

Now the question of disarmament must be put into practice by all the nations and not only by one or two. Consequently the advocates of Peace must strive day and night, so that the individuals of every country may become peace-loving, public opinion may gain a strong and permanent footing, and day by day the army of International Peace be increased, complete disarmament be realized and the Flag of Universal Conciliation be waving on the summit of the mountains of the earth...

The ideals of Peace must be nurtured and spread among the inhabitants of the world; they must be instructed in the school of Peace and the evils of war. First: The financiers and bankers must desist from lending money to any government contemplating to wage an unjust war upon an innocent nation. Second: The presidents and managers of the railroads and steamship companies must refrain from transporting war ammunition, infernal engines, guns, cannons and powder from one country into another. Third: The soldiers must petition, through their representatives, the Ministers of War, the politicians, the Congressmen and the generals to put forth in a clear, intelligible language the reasons and the causes which have brought them to the brink of such a national calamity. The soldiers must *demand* this as one of the prerogatives. "Demonstrate to us", they must say, "that this is a just war, and we will then enter into the battlefield otherwise we will not take one step.... Come forth from your hiding-places, enter into the battlefield if you like to attack each other and tear each other to pieces if you desire to air your so-called contentions. The discord and feud are between you; why do you make us, innocent people, a party to it? If fighting and bloodshed are good things, then lead us into the fray by your presence!"

In short, every means that produces war must be checked and the causes that prevent the occurrence of war be advanced;—so that physical conflict may become an impossibility. On the other hand, every country must be properly delimited, its exact frontiers marked, its national integrity secured, its permanent independence protected, and its vital interests

honoured by the family of nations. These services ought to be rendered by an impartial, international Commission. In this manner all causes of friction and differences will be removed. And in case there should arise some disputes between them, they could arbitrate before the Parliament of Man, the representatives of which should be chosen from among the wisest and most judicious men of all the nations of the world.

Star of the West, vol. 5, no. 8 (August 1914), pp. 115-117

- 44 Every century holds the solution of one predominating problem. Although there may be many problems, yet one of the innumerable problems will loom large and become the most important of all ... in this luminous century the greatest bestowal of the world of humanity is Universal Peace, which must be founded, so that the realm of creation may obtain composure, the East and the West, which include in their arms the five continents of the globe, may embrace each other, mankind may rest beneath the tent of oneness of the world of humanity, and the flag of universal peace may wave over all the regions...

Today the true duty of a powerful king is to establish a universal peace; for verily it signifies the freedom of all the people of the world. Some persons who are ignorant of the world of true humanity and its high ambitions for the general good, reckon such a glorious condition of life to be very difficult, nay rather impossible to compass. But it is not so, far from it.

Star of the West, vol. 7, no. 14 (November 1916), p. 136

- 45 O ye individuals of humanity, find ye means for the stoppage of this wholesale murder and bloodshed. Now is the appointed time! Now is the opportune time! Arise ye, show ye an effort, put ye forward an extraordinary force, and unfurl ye the Flag of Universal Peace and dam the irresistible fury of this raging torrent which is wreaking havoc and ruin everywhere.

Star of the West, vol. 18, no. 11 (February 1928), p. 345

- 46 By what process, continued the questioner, will this peace on earth be established? Will it come at once after a universal declaration of the Truth?

No, it will come about gradually, said 'Abdu'l-Bahá. A plant that grows too quickly lasts but a short time. You are my family, and he looked about with a smile, my new children! if a family lives in unison, great results are obtained. Widen the circle; when a city lives in intimate accord greater

results will follow, and a continent that is fully united will likewise unite all other continents. Then will be the time of the greatest results, for all the inhabitants of the earth belong to one native land.

'Abdu'l-Bahá in London, p. 106

From the writings of Shoghi Effendi

- 47 Dearly-beloved friends! Humanity, whether viewed in the light of man's individual conduct or in the existing relationships between organized communities and nations, has, alas, strayed too far and suffered too great a decline to be redeemed through the unaided efforts of the best among its recognized rulers and statesmen—however disinterested their motives, however concerted their action, however unsparing in their zeal and devotion to its cause. 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 vigour. Nor would any general scheme of mere organized international co-operation, 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 vigour of organized peoples and nations. What else, might we not confidently affirm, but the unreserved acceptance of the Divine Programme enunciated, with such simplicity and force as far back as sixty years ago, 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. It is towards this goal—the goal of a new World Order, Divine in

origin, all-embracing in scope, equitable in principle, challenging in its features—that a harrassed humanity must strive.

To claim to have grasped all the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's prodigious scheme for world-wide human solidarity, or to have fathomed its import, would be presumptuous on the part of even the declared supporters of His Faith. To attempt to visualize it in all its possibilities, to estimate its future benefits, to picture its glory, would be premature at even so advanced a stage in the evolution of mankind.

All we can reasonably venture to attempt is to strive to obtain a glimpse of the first streaks of the promised Dawn that must, in the fullness of time, chase away the gloom that has encircled humanity. All we can do is to point out, in their broadest outline, to what appear to us to be the guiding principles underlying the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, as amplified and enunciated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of His Covenant with all mankind and the appointed Interpreter and Expounder of His Word.

That the unrest and suffering afflicting the mass of mankind are in no small measure the direct consequences of the World War and are attributable to the unwisdom and short-sightedness of the Framers of the Peace Treaties only a biased mind can refuse to admit...

It would be idle however to contend that the war, with all the losses it involved, the passions it aroused and the grievances it left behind, has solely been responsible for the unprecedented confusion into which almost every section of the civilized world is plunged at present. Is it not a fact—and this is the central idea I desire to emphasize—that the fundamental cause of this world unrest is attributable, not so much to the consequences of what must sooner or later come to be regarded as a transitory dislocation in the affairs of a continually changing world, but rather to the failure of those into whose hands the immediate destinies of peoples and nations have been committed, to adjust their systems of economic and political institutions to the imperative needs of a fast evolving age? Are not these intermittent crises that convulse present-day society due primarily to the lamentable inability of the world's recognized leaders to read aright the signs of the times, to rid themselves once for all of their preconceived ideas and fettering creeds, and to reshape the machinery of their respective governments according to those standards that are implicit in Bahá'u'lláh's supreme declaration of the Oneness of Mankind—the chief and distinguishing feature of the Faith He proclaimed? ...

How pathetic indeed are the efforts of those leaders of human institutions who, in utter disregard of the spirit of the age, are striving to adjust national processes, suited to the ancient days of self-contained nations to an age which must either achieve the unity of the world, as adumbrated by Bahá'u'lláh, or perish. At so critical an hour in the history of civilization it behoves the leaders of all the nations of the world, great and small, whether in the East or in the West, whether victors or vanquished, to give heed to the clarion call of Bahá'u'lláh and, thoroughly imbued with a sense of world solidarity, the sine qua non of loyalty to His Cause, arise manfully to carry out in its entirety the one remedial scheme He, the Divine Physician, has prescribed for an ailing humanity. Let them discard, once for all, every preconceived idea, every national prejudice, and give heed to the sublime counsel of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the authorized Expounder of His teachings. You can best serve your country, was 'Abdu'l-Bahá's rejoinder to a high official in the service of the federal government of the United States of America, who had questioned Him as to the best manner in which he could promote the interests of his government and people, if you strive, in your capacity as a citizen of the world, to assist in the eventual application of the principle of federalism underlying the government of your own country to the relationships now existing between the peoples and nations of the world...

Some form of a world super-state must needs be evolved, in whose favour 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 judgement 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 Labour definitely recognized; in which the clamour of religious fanaticism and strife will have been for ever 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 judgement 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...

Let there be no misgivings as to the animating purpose of the world-wide Law of Bahá'u'lláh. Far from aiming at the subversion of the existing foundations of society, it seeks to broaden its basis, to remould 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 such as 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself has explained...

Its [the principle of the Oneness of Mankind] implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. It constitutes a challenge, at once bold and universal, to outworn shibboleths of national creeds—creeds that have had their day and which must, in the ordinary course of events as shaped and controlled by Providence, give way to a new gospel, fundamentally different from, and infinitely superior to, what the world has already conceived. 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.

To take but one instance. How confident were the assertions made in the days preceding the unification of the states of the North American continent regarding the insuperable barriers that stood in the way of their ultimate federation! Was it not widely and emphatically declared that the conflicting interests, the mutual distrust, the differences of government and habit that divided the states were such as no force, whether spiritual or temporal, could ever hope to harmonize or control? And yet how different were the conditions prevailing a hundred and fifty years ago from those that characterize present-day society! It would indeed be no exaggeration to say that the absence of those facilities which modern scientific progress has placed at the service of humanity in our time made of the problem of welding the American states into a single federation, similar though they were in certain traditions, a task infinitely more complex than that which confronts a divided humanity in its efforts to achieve the unification of all mankind.

Who knows that for so exalted a conception to take shape a suffering more intense than any it has yet experienced will have to be inflicted upon humanity? Could anything less than the fire of a civil war with all its violence and vicissitudes—a war that nearly rent the great American Republic—have welded the states, not only into a Union of independent units, but into a Nation, in spite of all the ethnic differences that characterized its component parts? That so fundamental a revolution, involving such far-reaching changes in the structure of society, can be achieved through the ordinary processes of diplomacy and education seems highly improbable. We have but to turn our gaze to humanity's blood-stained history to realize that nothing short of intense mental as well as physical agony has been able to precipitate those epoch-making changes that constitute the greatest landmarks in the history of human civilization.

Great and far-reaching as have been those changes in the past, they cannot but appear, when viewed in their proper perspective, except as subsidiary adjustments preluding that transformation of unparalleled majesty and scope which humanity is in this age bound to undergo. That the forces of a world catastrophe can alone precipitate such a new phase of human thought is, alas, becoming increasingly apparent. That nothing short of the fire of a severe ordeal, unparalleled in its intensity, can fuse and weld the discordant entities, that constitute the elements of present-day civilization, into the integral components of the world Commonwealth of the future is a truth which future events will increasingly demonstrate.

The prophetic voice of Bahá'u'lláh warning, in the concluding passages of the "Hidden Words", "the peoples of the world" that "an unforeseen calamity is following them and that grievous retribution awaiteth them" throws indeed a lurid light upon the immediate fortunes of sorrowing humanity. Nothing but a fiery ordeal, out of which humanity will emerge, chastened and prepared, can succeed in implanting that sense of responsibility which the leaders of a new-born age must arise to shoulder.

I would again direct your attention to those ominous words of Bahá'u'lláh which I have already quoted: "And when the appointed hour is come, there shall suddenly appear that which shall cause the limbs of mankind to quake."

Has not 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself asserted in unequivocal language that "another war, fiercer than the last, will assuredly break out"?

Upon the consummation of this colossal, this unspeakably glorious enterprise—an enterprise that baffled the resources of Roman statesmanship and which Napoleon's desperate efforts failed to achieve—will depend the ultimate realization of that millenium of which poets of all ages have sung and seers have long dreamed. Upon it will depend the fulfilment of the prophecies uttered by the Prophets of old when swords shall be beaten into ploughshares and the lion and the lamb lie down together. It alone can usher in the Kingdom of the Heavenly Father as anticipated by the Faith of Jesus Christ. It alone can lay the foundation for the New World Order visualized by Bahá'u'lláh—a World Order that shall reflect, however dimly, upon this earthly plane, the ineffable splendours of the Abhá Kingdom.

One word more in conclusion. The proclamation of the Oneness of Mankind—the head corner-stone of Bahá'u'lláh's all-embracing dominion—can under no circumstances be compared with such expressions

of pious hope as have been uttered in the past. His is not merely a call which He raised, alone and unaided, in the face of the relentless and combined opposition of two of the most powerful Oriental potentates of His day—while Himself an exile and prisoner in their hands. It implies at once a warning and a promise—a warning that in it lies the sole means for the salvation of a greatly suffering world, a promise that its realization is at hand.

Uttered at a time when its possibility had not yet been seriously envisaged in any part of the world, it has, by virtue of that celestial potency which the Spirit of Bahá'u'lláh has breathed into it, come at last to be regarded, by an increasing number of thoughtful men, not only as an approaching possibility, but as the necessary outcome of the forces now operating in the world.

Surely the world, contracted and transformed into a single highly complex organism by the marvellous progress achieved in the realm of physical science, by the world-wide expansion of commerce and industry, and struggling, under the pressure of world economic forces, amidst the pitfalls of a materialistic civilization, stands in dire need of a restatement of the Truth underlying all the Revelation, of the past in a language suited to its essential requirements. And what voice other than that of Bahá'u'lláh—the Mouthpiece of God for this age—is capable of effecting a transformation of society as radical as that which He has already accomplished in the hearts of those men and women, so diversified and seemingly irreconcilable, who constitute the body of His declared followers throughout the world?

That such a mighty conception is fast budding out in the minds of men, that voices are being raised in its support, that its salient features must fast crystallize in the consciousness of those who are in authority, few indeed can doubt. That its modest beginnings have already taken shape in the world-wide Administration with which the adherents of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh stand associated only those whose hearts are tainted by prejudice can fail to perceive.

28 November 1931, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 48 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.... Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend. Should any one among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice.*”

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...

The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signalizing through its advent the *coming of age of the entire human race*. It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man’s collective life on this planet. The emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, the founding of a world civilization and culture—all of which must synchronize with the initial stages in the unfoldment of the Golden Age of the Bahá’í Era—should, by their very nature, be regarded, as far as this planetary life is concerned, as the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop...

The whole of mankind is groaning, is dying to be led to unity, and to terminate its age-long martyrdom. And yet it stubbornly refuses to embrace the light and acknowledge the sovereign authority of the one

Power that can extricate it from its entanglements, and avert the woeful calamity that threatens to engulf it.

Ominous indeed is the voice of Bahá'u'lláh that rings through these prophetic words: *"O ye peoples of the world! Know, verily, that an unforeseen calamity followeth you, and grievous retribution awaiteth you. Think not that which ye have committed hath been effaced in My sight."* And again: *"We have a fixed time for you, O peoples. If ye fail, at the appointed hour, to turn towards God, He, verily, will lay violent hold on you, and will cause grievous afflictions to assail you from every direction. How severe, indeed, is the chastisement with which your Lord will then chastise you!"*

Must humanity, tormented as she now is, be afflicted with still severer tribulations ere their purifying influence can prepare her to enter the heavenly Kingdom destined to be established upon earth? Must the inauguration of so vast, so unique, so illumined an era in human history be ushered in by so great a catastrophe in human affairs as to recall, nay surpass, the appalling collapse of Roman civilization in the first centuries of the Christian Era? Must a series of profound convulsions stir and rock the human race ere Bahá'u'lláh can be enthroned in the hearts and consciences of the masses, ere His undisputed ascendancy is universally recognized, and the noble edifice of His World Order is reared and established?

The long ages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax, and must gradually be superseded by the calmness, the wisdom, and the maturity that characterize the stage of manhood. Then will the human race reach that stature of ripeness which will enable it to acquire all the powers and capacities upon which its ultimate development must depend...

Unification of the whole of mankind is the hall mark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life...

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.

A world federal system, ruling the whole earth and exercising unchallengeable authority over its unimaginably vast resources, blending and embodying the ideals of both the East and the West, liberated from the curse of war and its miseries, and bent on the exploitation of all the available sources of energy on the surface of the planet, a system in which Force is made the servant of Justice, whose life is sustained by its universal recognition of one God and by its allegiance to one common Revelation—such is the goal towards which humanity, impelled by the unifying forces of life, is moving.

11 March 1936, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 49 The world-shaking ordeal which Bahá'u'lláh, as quoted in the foregoing pages, has so graphically prophesied, may find it [the American nation] swept, to an unprecedented degree, into its vortex. Out of it it will probably emerge, unlike its reactions to the last world conflict, consciously determined to seize its opportunity, to bring the full weight of its influence to bear upon the gigantic problems that such an ordeal must leave in its wake, and to exorcise forever, in conjunction with its sister nations of both the East and the West, the greatest curse which, from time immemorial, has afflicted and degraded the human race.

Then, and only then, will the American nation, moulded and purified in the crucible of a common war, inured to its rigours, and disciplined by its lessons, be in a position to raise its voice in the councils of the nations, itself lay the corner-stone of a universal and enduring peace, proclaim the

solidarity, the unity, and maturity of mankind, and assist in the establishment of the promised reign of righteousness on earth. Then, and only then, will the American nation, while the community of the American believers within its heart is consummating its divinely appointed mission, be able to fulfill the unspeakably glorious destiny ordained for it by the Almighty, and immortally enshrined in the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Then, and only then, will the American nation accomplish “*that which will adorn the pages of history*,” “*become the envy of the world and be blest in both the East and the West*.”

25 December 1938, *The Advent of Divine Justice*

- 50 The world is, in truth, moving on towards its destiny. The interdependence of the peoples and nations of the earth, whatever the leaders of the divisive forces of the world may say or do, is already an accomplished fact. Its unity in the economic sphere is now understood and recognized. The welfare of the part means the welfare of the whole, and the distress of the part brings distress to the whole. The Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh has, in His own words, “*lent a fresh impulse and set a new direction*” to this vast process now operating in the world. The fires lit by this great ordeal are the consequences of men’s failure to recognize it. They are, moreover, hastening its consummation. Adversity, prolonged, world wide, afflictive, allied to chaos and universal destruction, must needs convulse the nations, stir the conscience of the world, disillusion the masses, precipitate a radical change in the very conception of society, and coalesce ultimately the disjointed, the bleeding limbs of mankind into one body, single, organically united, and indivisible...

To the general character, the implications and features of this world commonwealth, destined to emerge, sooner or later, out of the carnage, agony, and havoc of this great world convulsion, I have already referred in my previous communications. Suffice it to say that this consummation will, by its very nature, be a gradual process, and must, as Bahá’u’lláh has Himself anticipated, lead at first to the establishment of that Lesser Peace which the nations of the earth, as yet unconscious of His Revelation and yet unwittingly enforcing the general principles which He has enunciated, will themselves establish. This momentous and historic step, involving the reconstruction of mankind, as the result of the universal recognition of its oneness and wholeness, will bring in its wake the spiritualization of the masses, consequent to the recognition of the character, and the

acknowledgement of the claims, of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh—the essential condition to that ultimate fusion of all races, creeds, classes, and nations which must signalize the emergence of His New World Order.

Then will the coming of age of the entire human race be proclaimed and celebrated by all the peoples and nations of the earth. Then will the banner of the Most Great Peace be hoisted. Then will the world wide sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh—the Establisher of the Kingdom of the Father foretold by the Son, and anticipated by the Prophets of God before Him and after Him—be recognized, acclaimed, and firmly established. Then will a world civilization be born, flourish, and perpetuate itself, a civilization with a fullness of life such as the world has never seen nor can as yet conceive. Then will the Everlasting Covenant be fulfilled in its completeness. Then will the promise enshrined in all the Books of God be redeemed, and all the prophecies uttered by the Prophets of old come to pass, and the vision of seers and poets be realized. Then will the planet, galvanized through the universal belief of its dwellers in one God, and their allegiance to one common Revelation, mirror, within the limitations imposed upon it, the effulgent glories of the sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh, shining in the plenitude of its splendour in the Abhá Paradise, and be made the footstool of His Throne on high, and acclaimed as the earthly heaven, capable of fulfilling that ineffable destiny fixed for it, from time immemorial, by the love and wisdom of its Creator.

28 March 1941, The Promised Day Is Come

- 51 The principle of collective security He [Bahá'u'lláh] unreservedly urges; recommends the reduction in national armaments; and proclaims as necessary and inevitable the convening of a world gathering at which the kings and rulers of the world will deliberate for the establishment of peace among the nations.

God Passes By

- 52 During this Formative Age of the Faith, and in the course of the 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...

...we cannot fail to perceive the workings of two simultaneous processes, generated as far back as the concluding years of the Heroic Age of our Faith, each clearly defined, each distinctly separate, yet closely related and destined to culminate, in the fullness of time, in a single glorious consummation.

One of these processes is associated with the mission of the American Bahá'í community, the other with the destiny of the American nation. The one serves directly the interests of the Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh...

The other process dates back to the outbreak of the First World War that threw the Great Republic of the West into the vortex of the first stage of a world upheaval. It received its initial impetus through the formulation of President Wilson's Fourteen Points, closely associating for the first time that Republic with the fortunes of the Old World. It suffered its first set-back through the dissociation of that Republic from the newly-born League of Nations which that President had laboured to create. It acquired added momentum through the outbreak of the Second World War, inflicting unprecedented suffering on that Republic, and involving it still further in the affairs of all the continents of the globe. It was further reinforced through the declaration embodied in the Atlantic Charter, as voiced by one of its chief progenitors, Franklin D. Roosevelt. It assumed a definite outline through the birth of the United Nations at the San Francisco Conference. It acquired added significance through the choice of the City of the Covenant itself as the seat of the newly-born organization, through the declaration recently made by the American President related to his country's commitments in Greece and Turkey, as well as through the submission to the General Assembly of the United Nations of the thorny and challenging problem of the Holy Land, the spiritual as well as the administrative centre of the World Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. It must, however long and tortuous the way, lead, through a series of victories and reverses, to the political unification of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, to the emergence of a world government, and the establishment of the Lesser Peace, as foretold by Bahá'u'lláh and foreshadowed by the Prophet Isaiah.

It must, in the end, culminate in the unfurling of the banner of the Most Great Peace, in the Golden Age of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh.

5 June 1947, Citadel of Faith

- 53 The raising of this Edifice will in turn herald the construction, in the course of successive epochs of the Formative Age of the Faith, of several other structures, which will serve as the administrative seats of such divinely appointed institutions as the Guardianship, the Hands of the Cause, and the Universal House of Justice. These Edifices will, in the shape of a far-flung arc, and following a harmonizing style of architecture, surround the resting-places of the Greatest Holy Leaf, ranking as foremost among the members of her sex in the Bahá'í Dispensation, of her Brother, offered up as a ransom by Bahá'u'lláh for the quickening of the world and its unification, and of their Mother, proclaimed by Him to be His chosen "consort in all the worlds of God". The ultimate completion of this stupendous undertaking will mark the culmination of the development of a world-wide divinely-appointed Administrative Order whose beginnings may be traced as far back as the concluding years of the Heroic Age of the Faith.

This vast and irresistible process, unexampled in the spiritual history of mankind, and which will synchronize with two no less significant developments—the establishment of the Lesser Peace and the evolution of Bahá'í national and local institutions—the one outside and the other within the Bahá'í world—will attain its final consummation, in the Golden Age of the Faith, through the raising of the standard of the Most Great Peace, and the emergence, in the plenitude of its power and glory, of the focal Centre of the agencies constituting the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The final establishment of this seat of the future Bahá'í World Commonwealth will signalize at once the proclamation of the sovereignty of the Founder of our Faith and the advent of the Kingdom of the Father repeatedly lauded and promised by Jesus Christ.

This World Order will, in turn, in the course of successive Dispensations of the Bahá'í Cycle, yield its fairest fruit through the birth and flowering of a civilization, divinely inspired, unique in its features, world-embracing in its scope, and fundamentally spiritual in its character—a civilization destined as it unfolds to derive its initial impulse from the spirit animating the very institutions which, in their embryonic state, are now stirring in the womb of the present Formative Age of the Faith.

27 November 1954, Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950-1957, pp. 74-75

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 54 The world is in great turmoil, and what is most pathetic is that it has learned to keep away from God, Who alone can save it and alleviate its sufferings. It is our duty, we who have been trusted with the task of applying the divine remedy given by Bahá'u'lláh, to concentrate our attention upon the consummation of this task, and not rest until the peace foretold by the Prophets of God is permanently established...

9 December 1931

- 55 Shoghi Effendi wrote his last general letter to the western friends because he felt that the public should be made to understand the attitude the Bahá'í Faith maintains towards the prevailing economic and political problems. We should let the world know what the real aim of Bahá'u'lláh was. Up to the present Unity of Mankind was only of an academic importance. Now it is becoming more and more a subject for international statesmen to think of. It is coming to the field of practical politics. It is therefore a wonderful chance for us to come to the front and expound the teaching which is the goal and aim of the social precepts of Bahá'u'lláh. Shoghi Effendi hopes that the friends will re-echo this call to an organic unity of mankind until it forms part of the conscious faith of every living man in the world. Great judgement should be however practised lest we be misunderstood and our Faith be classed among radical movements.

28 January 1932

- 56 Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated January 26th 1932 which accompanied a printed copy of his last general letter. He thanks you both for this as well as for the one hundred copies you are shipping to him. He is deeply gratified to learn that the friends find it interesting and worthwhile enough as to make its subject-matter the topic of their teaching campaign. He sincerely hopes that this will also awaken some of the friends to the importance of this teaching of the Cause and stimulate them to make a thorough and deep study of it. For it undoubtedly forms the goal of the social precepts of the Faith. There is no reason why the Bahá'ís should not take the lead in advocating such a federation of the world, towards which the world is driven by forces it cannot control...

16 February 1932

- 57 The different nations of the world will never attain peace except after recognizing the significance of the teachings and whole-heartedly upholding them for through those precepts all international problems will be solved and every man will secure the spiritual environment in which his soul can evolve and produce its highest fruits.

15 January 1933

- 58 The Guardian has also read with deep interest all the enclosed papers. He is firmly convinced that through perseverance and concerted action the cause of Peace will eventually triumph over all the dark forces which threaten the welfare and progress of the world today. But such purely human attempts are undoubtedly ineffective unless inspired and guided by the power of faith. Without the assistance of God, as given through the message of Bahá'u'lláh, peace can never be safely and adequately established. To disregard the Bahá'í solution for world peace is to build on foundations of sand. To accept and apply it is to make peace not a mere dream, or an ideal, but a living reality. This is the point which the Guardian wishes you to develop, to emphasize again and again, and to support by convincing arguments. The Bahá'í peace programme is, indeed, not only *one* way of attaining that goal. It is not even relatively the best. It is, in the last resort, the *sole* effective instrument for the establishment of the reign of peace in this world. This attitude does not involve any total repudiation of other solutions offered by various philanthropists. It merely shows their inadequacy compared to the Divine Plan for the unification of the world. We cannot escape the truth that nothing mundane can in the last resort be enduring, unless supported and sustained through the power of God.

25 September 1933

- 59 Whatever our shortcomings may be, and however formidable the forces of darkness which besiege us today, the unification of mankind as outlined and ensured by the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh will in the fullness of time be firmly and permanently established. This is Bahá'u'lláh's promise, and no power on earth can in the long run prevent or even retard its adequate realization. The friends should, therefore, not lose hope, but fully conscious of their power and their rôle they should persevere in their mighty efforts for the extension and the consolidation of Bahá'u'lláh's universal dominion on earth.

6 November 1933

- 60 As regards the International Executive referred to by the Guardian in his “Goal of a New World Order”, it should be noted that this statement refers by no means to the Bahá’í Commonwealth of the future, but simply to that world government which will herald the advent and lead to the final establishment of the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh. The formation of this International Executive, which corresponds to the executive head or board in present-day national governments, is but a step leading to the Bahá’í world government of the future, and hence should not be identified with either the institution of the Guardianship or that of the International House of Justice.

17 March 1934

- 61 In connection with your teaching work: what the Guardian wishes you to particularly emphasize in all your talks is the supreme necessity for all individuals and nations in this day to adopt in its entirety the social programme given by Bahá’u’lláh for the reconstruction of the religious, economic and political life of mankind. He wishes you to explain and analyze the elements that help in raising this Divine World Order in the light of the present-day events and conditions in the world. Special stress, he feels, should be laid on the impending necessity of establishing a supranational and sovereign world state, as the one described by Bahá’u’lláh. With the world becoming increasingly subject to tumults and convulsions never experienced before, the realization of such a necessity is entering into the consciousness of not only the wise and learned, but of the common people as well. The believers should, therefore, seize this opportunity and make a supreme effort to present, in a convincing and eloquent language, those social and humanitarian teachings of the Faith which we believe to constitute the sole panacea for the innumerable ills afflicting our present-day world.

15 November 1935

- 62 With reference to your question concerning ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s reference to “unity in the political realm”: this unity should be clearly distinguished from the “unity of nations”. The first is a unity which politically independent and sovereign *states* achieve among themselves; while the second is one which is brought about between *nations*, the difference between a state and a nation being that the former, as you know, is a political entity without necessarily being homogeneous in race, whereas the second implies national as well as political homogeneity.

26 July 1936

- 63 As regards your teaching work: the Guardian has already advised you to stress in your talks the idea of a world superstate, and the concept of the Oneness of Mankind underlying it. In addition, he wishes you also to emphasize the fact that humanity, taken as a whole, has entered the most critical and momentous stage of its evolution, the stage of maturity. This idea of the coming of age of mankind constitutes the central core of the Bahá'í Teachings, and is the most distinguishing feature of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. A proper understanding of this concept gives the key to an adequate appreciation of the tremendous claim made by the Author of the Faith, both with regard to His own station, and to the incomparable greatness of His Dispensation.

12 October 1936

- 64 With reference to the question you have asked concerning the time and means through which the Lesser and Most Great Peace, referred to by Bahá'u'lláh, will be established, following the coming World War: Your view that the Lesser Peace will come about through the political efforts of the states and nations of the world, and independently of any direct Bahá'í plan or effort, and the Most Great Peace be established through the instrumentality of the believers, and by the direct operation of the laws and principles revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and the functioning of the Universal House of Justice as the supreme organ of the Bahá'í superstate—your view on this subject is quite correct and in full accord with the pronouncements of the Guardian as embodied in “The Unfoldment of World Civilization”.

14 March 1939

- 65 Though it is premature to try and endeavour to foresee on what basis various nations would be represented on any international council, or in any international form of government, it is clear that from the Bahá'í standpoint it could only be carried out on a basis of true justice; and justice does not imply one race having a preponderating vote over some other race's representatives, and thus being in a position to dominate them.

12 April 1942

- 66 What 'Abdu'l-Bahá meant about the women arising for peace is that this a matter which vitally affects women, and when they form a conscious and overwhelming mass of public opinion against war there can be no war. The Bahá'í women are already organized through being members of the Faith

and the Administrative Order. No further organization is needed. But they should, through teaching and through the active moral support they give to every movement directed towards peace, seek to exert a strong influence on other women's minds in regard to this essential matter.

24 March 1945

- 67 The Seven Lights of Unity will not necessarily appear in the order given. A product of the second may well be universal culture.

19 November 1945

- 68 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. Now that the hour has arrived when the Bahá'í Faith is gaining prominence, and is being reviewed by so many peoples, it is necessary that the adherents of the Faith should live up to the high ideals of the Faith in every way. 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 men, while universal service is of God.

The Guardian is now anxious that all the friends achieve a universal consciousness and universal way of life.

20 November 1955

- 69 World government will come, but we do not know the date.

15 August 1957

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 70 When Bahá'u'lláh proclaimed His Message to the world in the nineteenth century He made it abundantly clear that the first step essential for the peace and progress of mankind was its unification. As He says, "The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established." ("The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh", p. 203) To this day, however, you will find most people take the opposite point of view: they look upon unity as an ultimate, almost unattainable goal and concentrate first on remedying all the other ills of mankind. If they did but

know it, these other ills are but various symptoms and side effects of the basic disease—disunity.

Bahá'u'lláh has, furthermore, stated that the revivification of mankind and the curing of all its ills can be achieved only through the instrumentality of His Faith...

We are told by Shoghi Effendi that two great processes are at work in the world: the great Plan of God, tumultuous in its progress, working through mankind as a whole, tearing down barriers to world unity and forging humankind into a unified body in the fires of suffering and experience. This process will produce, in God's due time, the Lesser Peace, the political unification of the world. Mankind at that time can be likened to a body that is unified but without life. The second process, the task of breathing life into this unified body—of creating true unity and spirituality culminating in the Most Great Peace—is that of the Bahá'ís, who are labouring consciously, with detailed instructions and continuing Divine guidance, to erect the fabric of the Kingdom of God on earth, into which they call their fellow men, thus conferring upon them eternal life.

8 December 1967

71 It is true that 'Abdu'l-Bahá made statements linking the establishment of the unity of nations to the twentieth century. For example: "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." And, in The "Promised Day Is Come", following a similar statement quoted from "Some Answered Questions", Shoghi Effendi makes this comment: "This is the stage which the world is now approaching, the stage of world unity, which, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá assures us, will, in this century, be securely established."

There is also this statement from a letter written in 1946 to an individual believer on behalf of the beloved Guardian by his secretary:

All we know is that the Lesser and the Most Great Peace *will* come—their *exact* dates we do not know. The same is true as regards the possibility of a future war; we cannot state dogmatically it will or will not take place—all we know is that mankind must suffer and be punished sufficiently to make it turn to God.

29 July 1974

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

72 ...the Bahá'í Faith aims to eliminate all war, including nuclear. The fundamental purpose of our Faith is unity and the establishment of peace. This goal, which is the longing of people throughout an increasingly insecure world, can only be achieved through the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Since it is only the Bahá'ís who can give these Teachings to mankind, the friends must weigh carefully how they will spend their time and energy and guard against associating with activities which unduly distract them from their primary responsibility of sharing the Message of Bahá'u'lláh.

4 July 1982

73 At the present time, the subject of nuclear disarmament has become very much a political issue, with demonstrations taking place not only in the United States but also in England and some western European countries. To single out nuclear disarmament falls short of the Bahá'í position and would involve the Faith in the current disputes between nations. It is very clear that Bahá'ís believe disarmament, not only of nuclear weapons but of biological, chemical and all other forms, is essential...

12 January 1983

74 Concerning the transition from the present system of national sovereignty to a system of world government, the House of Justice fully agrees with your view that the Bahá'ís must now do all in their power to promote this transition. This requires several related activities, all of which are goals of the present Seven Year Plan. One is the establishment as rapidly as possible of firmly grounded efficiently functioning Local Spiritual Assemblies in every part of the world, so that seekers everywhere will have a point of reference to which they can turn for guidance and for the Teachings of the Faith. A second is the deepening of the believers, of all ages, in their understanding of and obedience to the Teachings. A third is the proclamation of the Faith to all strata of society, and in particular to those in authority and to leaders of thought so that those who hold the direction of peoples in their hands will learn accurately about the nature and tenets of the Faith and will grow to respect it and implement its principles. A fourth is the promotion of Bahá'í scholarship, so that an increasing number of believers will be able to analyse the problems of mankind in every field and to show how the

Teachings solve them. A fifth is the development of relations between the Bahá'í International Community and the United Nations both directly with the highest UN institutions and at a grass-roots level in areas of rural development, education, etc.

As you are no doubt aware, the Guardian indicated that the development of mankind from its present chaotic condition to the stage of the Bahá'í World Commonwealth would be a long and gradual one. The coming into existence of a World Authority and the initiation of the Lesser Peace, is one major transformation in this process, and will be followed by other stages of the development of the Faith as outlined by Shoghi Effendi in his writings. Undoubtedly, as these developments are taking place, the counsel the institutions of the Faith can give to governments, the pattern of world administration offered by the Bahá'í community and the great humanitarian projects which will be launched under the aegis of the Universal House of Justice, will exercise a great influence on the course of progress.

19 January 1983

- 75 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.

11 September 1984

76 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.

31 January 1985

REINCARNATION
AND THE NATURE AND
PROGRESS
OF THE
SOUL

A compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and letters
on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
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Extracts

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 Thou hast asked Me concerning the nature of the soul. 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. It is the first among all created things to declare the excellence of its Creator, the first to recognize His glory, to cleave to His truth, and to bow down in adoration before Him. If it be faithful to God, it will reflect His light, and will, eventually, return unto Him. If it fail, however, in its allegiance to its Creator, it will become a victim to self and passion, and will, in the end, sink in their depths.

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

- 2 Thou hast, moreover, asked Me concerning the state of the soul after its separation from the body. Know thou, of a truth, that if the soul of man hath walked in the ways of God, it will, assuredly, return and be gathered to the glory of the Beloved. By the righteousness of God! It shall attain a station such as no pen can depict, or tongue describe. The soul that hath remained faithful to the Cause of God, and stood unwaveringly firm in His Path shall, after his ascension, be possessed of such power that all the worlds which the Almighty hath created can benefit through him. Such a soul provideth, at the bidding of the Ideal King and Divine Educator, the pure leaven that leaveneth the world of being, and furnisheth the power through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest. Consider how meal needeth leaven to be leavened with. Those souls that are the symbols of detachment are the leaven of the world. Meditate on this, and be of the thankful.

In several of Our Tablets We have referred to this theme, and have set forth the various stages in the development of the soul. Verily I say, the human soul is exalted above all egress and regress. It is still, and yet it soareth; it moveth, and yet it is still. It is, in itself, a testimony that beareth witness to the existence of a world that is contingent, as well as to the

reality of a world that hath neither beginning nor end. Behold how the dream thou hast dreamed is, after the lapse of many years, re-enacted before thine eyes. Consider how strange is the mystery of the world that appeareth to thee in thy dream. Ponder in thine heart upon the unsearchable wisdom of God, and meditate on its manifold revelations...

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

- 3 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.

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

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 4 Thou didst write of reincarnation. A belief in reincarnation goeth far back into the ancient history of almost all peoples, and was held even by the philosophers of Greece, the Roman sages, the ancient Egyptians, and the great Assyrians. Nevertheless such superstitions and sayings are but absurdities in the sight of God.

The major argument of the reincarnationists was this, that according to the justice of God, each must receive his due: whenever a man is afflicted with some calamity, for example, this is because of some wrong he hath committed. But take a child that is still in its mother's womb, the embryo but newly formed, and that child is blind, deaf, lame, defective—what sin hath such a child committed, to deserve its afflictions? They answer that, although to outward seeming the child, still in the womb, is guilty of no sin—nevertheless he perpetrated some wrong when in his previous form, and thus he came to deserve his punishment.

These individuals, however, have overlooked the following point. If creation went forward according to only one rule, how could the all-encompassing Power make Itself felt? How could the Almighty be the One Who “doeth as He pleaseth and ordaineth as He willeth”?ⁱ

i Qur'án 3:35; 2:254.

Briefly, a return is indeed referred to in the Holy Scriptures, but by this is meant the return of the qualities, conditions, effects, perfections, and inner realities of the lights which recur in every dispensation. The reference is not to specific, individual souls and identities.

It may be said, for instance, that this lamplight is last night's come back again, or that last year's rose hath returned to the garden this year. Here the reference is not to the individual reality, the fixed identity, the specialized being of that other rose, rather doth it mean that the qualities, the distinctive characteristics of that other light, that other flower, are present now, in these. Those perfections, that is, those graces and gifts of a former springtime are back again this year. We say, for example, that this fruit is the same as last year's; but we are thinking only of the delicacy, bloom and freshness, and the sweet taste of it; for it is obvious that that impregnable centre of reality, that specific identity, can never return.

What peace, what ease and comfort did the Holy Ones of God ever discover during Their sojourn in this nether world, that They should continually seek to come back and live this life again? Doth not a single turn at this anguish, these afflictions, these calamities, these body blows, these dire straits, suffice, that They should wish for repeated visits to the life of this world? This cup was not so sweet that one would care to drink of it a second time.

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.

When thou lookest about thee with a perceptive eye, thou wilt note that on this dusty earth all humankind are suffering. Here no man is at rest as a reward for what he hath performed in former lives; nor is there anyone so blissful as seemingly to pluck the fruit of bygone anguish. And if a human life, with its spiritual being, were limited to this earthly span, then what would be the harvest of creation? Indeed, what would be the effects and the outcomes of Divinity Itself? Were such a notion true, then all created things, all contingent realities, and this whole world of being—all would be meaningless. God forbid that one should hold to such a fiction and gross error.

For just as the effects and the fruitage of the uterine life are not to be found in that dark and narrow place, and only when the child is transferred to this wide earth do the benefits and uses of growth and development in that previous world become revealed—so likewise reward and punishment, heaven and hell, requital and retribution for actions done in this present life, will stand revealed in that other world beyond. And just as, if human life in the womb were limited to that uterine world, existence there would be nonsensical, irrelevant—so too if the life of this world, the deeds here done and their fruitage, did not come forth in the world beyond, the whole process would be irrational and foolish.

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.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 156

- 5 Thou hast asked concerning reincarnation: Reincarnation as understood by the people, is untrue; but in the Gospel, “return” is referred to, and that is the return of qualities² and not the return of entities. This matter is explained in detail in the Book of Ighan, which is translated and published. Study that Book...

Thou hast asked concerning the spirits of men: They are not at all annihilated—they are immortal.³ The spirits of heavenly souls will find eternal life, that is, they will attain the highest and most great stations of perfection; but the spirits of the heedless souls, although they are eternal, yet they are in a world of imperfection, concealment and ignorance. This is a concise answer. Contemplate and meditate upon it, in order that thou mayest comprehend the reality of the mysteries in detail. For instance: No matter how much the mineral has an existence and life, yet in comparison to man, it is entirely non-existent and deprived of life. For where man is translated from life to death, his comparative station will be that of a mineral existence.

Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas, vol. III, pp. 549–550

- 6 With the soul it is different. The soul is not a combination of elements, it is not composed of many atoms, it is one indivisible substance and therefore eternal. It is entirely out of the order of the physical creation; it is immortal!

Paris Talks, no. 29

- 7 Thus it is evident that movement is essential to all existence. All material things progress to a certain point, then begin to decline. This is the law which governs the whole physical creation. Now let us consider the soul. We have seen that movement is essential to existence; nothing that has life is without motion. All creation, whether of the mineral, vegetable or animal kingdom, is compelled to obey the law of motion; it must either ascend or descend. But with the human soul, there is no decline. Its only movement is towards perfection; growth and progress alone constitute the motion of the soul.

Divine perfection is infinite, therefore the progress of the soul is also infinite. From the very birth of a human being the soul progresses, the intellect grows and knowledge increases. When the body dies the soul lives on. All the differing degrees of created physical beings are limited, but the soul is limitless!

Paris Talks, no. 29

- 8 The rational soul—the human spirit—did not descend into this body or subsist through it to begin with, that it should require some substance to depend upon after the constituent parts of the body have decomposed. On the contrary, the rational soul is the substance upon which the body depends. The rational soul is endowed from the beginning with individuality; it does not acquire it through the intermediary of the body. At most, what can be said is that the individuality and identity of the rational soul may be strengthened in this world, and that the soul may either progress and attain to the degrees of perfection or remain in the lowest abyss of ignorance and be veiled from and deprived of beholding the signs of God.

Some Answered Questions

- 9 “Progress” is the expression of spirit in the world of matter. The intelligence of man, his reasoning powers, his knowledge, his scientific achievements, all these being manifestations of the spirit, partake of the inevitable law of spiritual progress and are, therefore, of necessity, immortal.

My hope for you is that you will progress in the world of spirit, as well as in the world of matter; that your intelligence will develop, your knowledge will augment, and your understanding be widened.

Paris Talks, no. 29

- 10 As to the soul of man after death, it remains in the degree of purity to which it has evolved during life in the physical body, and after it is freed from the body it remains plunged in the ocean of God's Mercy.

From the moment the soul leaves the body and arrives in the Heavenly World, its evolution is spiritual, and that evolution is: The approaching unto God.

Paris Talks, no. 20

- 11 In another place He [Christ] said, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." The meaning of this is that if man is a captive of nature, he is like unto an animal because he is only a body physically born—that is, he belongs to the world of matter and remains subject to the law and control of nature. But if he is baptized with the Holy Spirit, if he is freed from the bondage of nature, released from animalistic tendencies and advanced in the human realm, he is fitted to enter into the divine Kingdom. The world of the Kingdom is the realm of divine bestowals and the bounties of God. It is attainment of the highest virtues of humanity; it is nearness to God; it is capacity to receive the bounties of the ancient Lord. When man advances to this station, he attains the second birth. Before his first or physical birth man was in the world of the matrix. He had no knowledge of this world; his eyes could not see; his ears could not hear. When he was born from the world of the matrix, he beheld another world. The sun was shining with its splendors, the moon radiant in the heavens, the stars twinkling in the expansive firmament, the seas surging, trees verdant and green, all kinds of creatures enjoying life here, infinite bounties prepared for him. In the world of the matrix none of these things existed. In that world he had no knowledge of this vast range of existence; nay, rather, he would have denied the reality of this world. But after his birth he began to open his eyes and behold the wonders of this illimitable universe. Similarly, as long as man is in the matrix of the human world, as long as he is the captive of nature, he is out of touch and without knowledge of the universe of the Kingdom. If he attains rebirth while in the world of nature, he will become informed of the divine world.

He will observe that another and a higher world exists. Wonderful bounties descend; eternal life awaits; everlasting glory surrounds him. All the signs of reality and greatness are there. He will see the lights of God. All these experiences will be his when he is born out of the world of nature into the divine world. Therefore, for the perfect man there are two kinds of birth: the first, physical birth, is from the matrix of the mother; the second, or spiritual birth, is from the world of nature. In both he is without knowledge of the new world of existence he is entering. Therefore, rebirth means his release from the captivity of nature, freedom from attachment to this mortal and material life. This is the second, or spiritual, birth of which Jesus Christ spoke in the Gospels.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, no. 99

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 12 As to your question concerning reincarnation: The Bahá'í view of the life after death can in no way be reconciled with certain Indian and Sufi doctrines which teach that the human soul can pass from one body to another. This doctrine, known as metempsychosis, is not only too materialistic in its view, but is purely imaginary and fatalistic. Bahá'u'lláh teaches that after its separation from the body, the human soul begins to lead a new life, of which we can have no definite knowledge, in the same way as the child in the embryo cannot visualize the type of life it is destined to lead in this world.

10 August 1934

- 13 The Bahá'í view of "reincarnation" is essentially different from the Hindu conception. The Bahá'ís believe in the return of the attributes and qualities, but maintain that the essence or the reality of things cannot be made to return. Every being keeps its own individuality, but some of his qualities can be transmitted. The doctrine of metempsychosis upheld by the Hindus is fallacious.

27 March 1938

- 14 Evolution in the life of the individual starts with the formation of the human embryo and passes through various stages, and even continues after death in another form. The human spirit is capable of infinite development.

Man's identity or rather his individuality is never lost. His reality as a person remains intact throughout the various stages of his development. He does not pre-exist in any form before coming into this world...

The passage on page 156 of "Gleanings" regarding the evolution of the soul after death clearly proves that the soul after its separation from the body keeps its individuality and its consciousness both in relation to other souls and to the human beings in this world.

26 November 1939

- 15 No Revelation from God has ever taught reincarnation; this is a man-made conception. The soul of man comes into being at conception; we do not believe it goes on to another planet.

1 April 1946

- 16 Regarding your question about reincarnation: we Bahá'ís do not believe that one individual soul keeps returning to this earthly life in different bodies. This is a very ancient belief, and based on a great truth—namely that the soul does go on developing and unfolding and returning towards its Creator. But the concept of its returning to this physical world is erroneous, and an outgrowth of man-made doctrines which have grown up about the fundamental concept of the progress of the soul. It would be like putting the child over and over again back into the world of the womb. It is unnecessary; but from state to state spiritually, after death, the soul does go on and go higher, so to speak.

26 December 1948

- 17 We know from His Teachings that reincarnation does not exist. We come on to this planet once only. Our life here is like the baby in the womb of its mother, which develops in that state what is necessary for its entire life after it is born. The same is true of us. Spiritually we must develop here what we will require for the life after death. In that future life, God, through His mercy, can help us to evolve characteristics which we neglected to develop while we were on this earthly plane. It is not necessary for us to come back and be born into another body in order to advance spiritually and grow closer to God.

This is the Bahá'í Teaching, and this is what the followers of Bahá'u'lláh must accept, regardless of what experiences other people may feel they have. You yourself must surely know that modern psychology has taught

that the capacity of the human mind for believing what it imagines is almost infinite. Because people think they have a certain type of experience, think they remember something of a previous life, does not mean they actually had the experience, or existed previously. The power of their mind would be quite sufficient to make them believe firmly such a thing had happened.

We must use the Writings of the Prophets as our measurement. If Bahá'u'lláh had attached the slightest importance to occult experiences, to the seeing of auras, to the hearing of mystic voices; if He had believed that reincarnation was a fact, He, Himself, would have mentioned all of these things in His Teachings. The fact that He passed over them in silence shows that to Him, they had either no importance or no reality, and were consequently not worthy to take up His time as the Divine Educator of the human race.

We must turn our faces away from these things, and toward the actual practice of His Teachings in our everyday life through our Bahá'í Administration, and in our contact with other people and the examples we give.

22 April 1954

SCHOLARSHIP

A compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, letters by and
on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, and communications by and on
behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled February 1995

The Station of Scholarship

Importance of Knowledge and Learning

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 Knowledge is one of the wondrous gifts of God. It is incumbent upon everyone to acquire it. Such arts and material means as are now manifest have been achieved by virtue of His knowledge and wisdom which have been revealed in Epistles and Tablets through His Most Exalted Pen—a Pen out of whose treasury pearls of wisdom and utterance and the arts and crafts of the world are brought to light.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 2 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.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

From the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 3 Make every effort to acquire the advanced knowledge of the day, and strain every nerve to carry forward the divine civilization...

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 encour-

aged; and also to be inculcated is absolute obedience to the Government and total avoidance of any trace of sedition.

From a Tablet, translated from the Persian

- 4 ...I most urgently request the friends of God to make every effort, as much as lieth within their competence, along these lines. The harder they strive to widen the scope of their knowledge, the better and more gratifying will be the result. Let the loved ones of God, whether young or old, whether male or female, each according to his capabilities, bestir themselves and spare no efforts to acquire the various current branches of knowledge, both spiritual and secular, and of the arts.

From a Tablet, translated from the Arabic

- 5 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.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 6 ...Bahá'u'lláh considered education as one of the most fundamental factors of a true civilization. This education, however, in order to be adequate and fruitful, should be comprehensive in nature and should take into consideration not only the physical and the intellectual side of man but also his spiritual and ethical aspects.

9 July 1931 to an individual believer

Characteristics of the “Truly Learned”

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 7 Happy are ye, O ye the learned ones in Bahá. By the Lord! Ye are the billows of the Most Mighty Ocean, the stars of the firmament of Glory, the standards of triumph waving betwixt earth and heaven. Ye are the manifestations of steadfastness amidst men and the daysprings of Divine Utterance to all that dwell on earth.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 173

- 8 The Great Being saith: The man of consummate learning and the sage endowed with penetrating wisdom are the two eyes to the body of mankind. God willing, the earth shall never be deprived of these two greatest gifts.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 9 Know thou that he is truly learned who hath acknowledged My Revelation, and drunk from the Ocean of My knowledge, and soared in the atmosphere of My love, and cast away all else besides Me, and taken firm hold on that which hath been sent down from the Kingdom of My wondrous utterance. He, verily, is even as an eye unto mankind, and as the spirit of life unto the body of all creation. Glorified be the All-Merciful Who hath enlightened him, and caused him to arise and serve His great and mighty Cause. Verily, such a man is blessed by the Concourse on high, and by them who dwell

within the Tabernacle of Grandeur, who have quaffed My sealed Wine in My name, the Omnipotent, the All-Powerful.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 10 Consider, how can he that faileth in the day of God's Revelation to attain unto the grace of the "Divine Presence" and to recognize His Manifestation, be justly called learned, though he may have spent aeons in the pursuit of knowledge, and acquired all the limited and material learning of men? It is surely evident that he can in no wise be regarded as possessed of true knowledge. Whereas, the most unlettered of all men, if he be honoured with this supreme distinction, he verily is accounted as one of those divinely-learned men whose knowledge is of God; for such a man hath attained the acme of knowledge, and hath reached the furthermost summit of learning.

The Kitáb-i-Íqán

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 11 ...there are those famed and accomplished men of learning, possessed of praiseworthy qualities and vast erudition, who lay hold on the strong handle of the fear of God and keep to the ways of salvation. In the mirror of their minds the forms of transcendent realities are reflected, and the lamp of their inner vision derives its light from the sun of universal knowledge. They are busy by night and by day with meticulous research into such sciences as are profitable to mankind, and they devote themselves to the training of students of capacity. It is certain that to their discerning taste, the proffered treasures of kings would not compare with a single drop of the waters of knowledge, and mountains of gold and silver could not outweigh the successful solution of a difficult problem. To them, the delights that lie outside their work are only toys for children, and the cumbersome load of unnecessary possessions is only good for the ignorant and base. Content, like the birds, they give thanks for a handful of seeds, and the song of their wisdom dazzles the minds of the world's most wise...

...the happiness and greatness, the rank and station, the pleasure and peace, of an individual have never consisted in his personal wealth, but rather in his excellent character, his high resolve, the breadth of his learning, and his ability to solve difficult problems...

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. For an unlit candle, however great in diameter and tall, is no better than a barren palm tree or a pile of dead wood...

An authoritative Tradition states: "As for him who is one of the learned:ⁱ he must guard himself, defend his faith, oppose his passions and obey the commandments of his Lord. It is then the duty of the people to pattern themselves after him."

The Secret of Divine Civilization

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 12 In connection with the question as to whether Bahá'ís should be familiar with the different sciences and branches of study, Shoghi Effendi wishes me to inform you that both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have given a very high position to men of culture and knowledge and Bahá'u'lláh says in one of His Tablets that respect shown to such people is incumbent upon all Bahá'ís. Furthermore there is no doubt that familiarity with different branches of study widens one's point of view and we can then understand and realize the significance of the Bahá'í Movement and its principles much more.

14 December 1924

- 13 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.

21 October 1943

i 'Ulamá', from the Arabic *'alima*, to know, may be translated as learned men, scientists, religious authorities.

Scope of “Bahá’í Scholarship”

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 14 At this early stage in the development of the Faith, it would not be useful to propound a highly restrictive definition of the term “Bahá’í scholarship”. In a letter written on behalf of the House of Justice to an Association for Bahá’í Studies recently, it is stated that:

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.

Thus, there should be room within the scope of Bahá'í scholarship to accommodate not only those who are interested in theological issues and in the historical origins of the Faith, but also those who are interested in relating the Bahá'í Teachings to their field of academic or professional interest, as well as those believers who may lack formal academic qualifications but who have, through their perceptive study of the Teachings, acquired insights which are of interest to others...

The House of Justice wishes to avoid use of the terms “Bahá'í scholarship” and “Bahá'í scholars” in an exclusive sense, which would effectively establish a demarcation between those admitted into this category and those denied entrance to it. It is clear that such terms are relative, and that what is a worthy scholarly endeavour by a Bahá'í, when compared to the activities of those with whom he is in contact, may well be regarded as of vastly lesser significance when measured against the accomplishments of the outstanding scholars which the Faith has produced. The House of Justice seeks the creation of a Bahá'í community in which the members encourage each other, where there is respect for accomplishment, and a common realization that every one is, in his or her own way, seeking to acquire a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and to contribute to the advancement of the Faith.

19 October 1993

Appreciation of Scholarship

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 15 Respect ye the divines and learned amongst you, they whose conduct accords with their professions, who transgress not the bounds which God hath fixed, whose judgments are in conformity with His behests as revealed in His Book. Know ye that they are the lamps of guidance unto them that are in the heavens and on the earth. They who disregard and neglect the divines and learned that live amongst them—these have truly changed the favour with which God hath favoured them.

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

- 16 O people of God! Righteous men of learning who dedicate themselves to the guidance of others and are freed and well guarded from the promptings of a base and covetous nature are, in the sight of Him Who is the Desire of the world, stars of the heaven of true knowledge. It is essential to treat them with deference. They are indeed fountains of soft-flowing water, stars that shine resplendent, fruits of the blessed Tree, exponents of celestial power, and oceans of heavenly wisdom. Happy is he that followeth them. Verily such a soul is numbered in the Book of God, the Lord of the mighty Throne, among those with whom it shall be well.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 17 Beware, O My loved ones, lest ye despise the merits of My learned servants whom God hath graciously chosen to be the exponents of His Name “the Fashioner” amidst mankind. Exert your utmost endeavour that ye may develop such crafts and undertakings that everyone, whether young or old, may benefit therefrom. We are quit of those ignorant ones who fondly imagine that Wisdom is to give vent to one’s idle imaginings and to repudiate God, the Lord of all men; even as We hear some of the heedless voicing such assertions today.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

From the Writings and Utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- 18 ...the religion of God is the promoter of truth, the establisher of science and learning, the supporter of knowledge, the civilizer of the human race, the discoverer of the secrets of existence, and the enlightener of the horizons of the world. How then could it oppose knowledge? God forbid! On the contrary, in the sight of God knowledge is the greatest human virtue and the noblest human perfection. To oppose knowledge is pure ignorance, and he who abhors knowledge and learning is not a human being but a mindless animal. For knowledge is light, life, felicity, perfection, and beauty, and causes the soul to draw nigh to the divine threshold. It is the honour and glory of the human realm and the greatest of God’s bounties. Knowledge is identical to guidance, and ignorance is the essence of error.

Some Answered Questions

- 19 There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakeable 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.

To promote knowledge is thus an inescapable duty imposed on every one of the friends of God. It is incumbent upon that Spiritual Assembly, that assemblage of God, to exert every effort to educate the children, so that from infancy they will be trained in Bahá'í conduct and the ways of God, and will, even as young plants, thrive and flourish in the soft-flowing waters that are the counsels and admonitions of the Blessed Beauty.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

From letters by Shoghi Effendi

- 20 The responsibilities of the members of the Spiritual Assemblies that are engaged in teaching the Cause of God in Eastern lands have been clearly laid down in the holy Texts...

They further impress upon them the virtue of trustworthiness and godliness, of purity of motive, kindness of heart, and detachment from the fetters of this material world ... They urge them to make detailed inquiry into the various branches of contemporary learning—arts and sciences alike—and to concentrate their attention on serving the general interests of the people; to deepen themselves by attentive study of the sacred Texts, and to apply the divine guidance they contain to the circumstances, needs and conditions of society today; to refrain from entering into the tangled affairs of political parties and 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.

They finally exhort them to be sincerely obedient, in both thought and word, to the laws duly enacted by the government of the realm, and to distance themselves from the methods, concepts and ill-grounded arguments of extreme traditionalists and modernists alike; to accord honour, veneration and respect to—and endorse the efforts of—exponents of the arts and sciences, and to esteem and revere those who are possessed of extensive knowledge and scholarly erudition; to uphold the right of freedom of conscience; and to abstain from criticizing and disparaging the manners, customs and beliefs of other individuals, peoples and nations.

30 January 1926

Functions of Bahá'í Scholarship

Promotion of Human Welfare

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 21 The Great Being saith: The learned of the day must direct the people to acquire those branches of knowledge which are of use, that both the learned themselves and the generality of mankind may derive benefits therefrom. Such academic pursuits as begin and end in words alone have never been and will never be of any worth. The majority of Persia's learned doctors devote all their lives to the study of a philosophy the ultimate yield of which is nothing but words.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 22 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.

From a Tablet

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 23 The primary, the most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward. The principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples is ignorance. Today the mass of the people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs, how much less do they grasp the core of the important problems and complex needs of the time.

It is therefore urgent that beneficial articles and books be written, clearly and definitely establishing what the present-day requirements of

the people are, and what will conduce to the happiness and advancement of society. These should be published and spread throughout the nation, so that at least the leaders among the people should become, to some degree, awakened, and arise to exert themselves along those lines which will lead to their abiding honour. The publication of high thoughts is the dynamic power in the arteries of life; it is the very soul of the world. Thoughts are boundless sea, and the effects and varying conditions of existence are as the separate forms and individual limits of the waves; not until the sea boils up will the waves rise and scatter their pearls of knowledge on the shore of life...

Public opinion must be directed toward whatever is worthy of this day, and this is impossible except through the use of adequate arguments and the adducing of clear, comprehensive and conclusive proofs. For the helpless masses know nothing of the world, and while there is no doubt that they seek and long for their own happiness, yet ignorance like a heavy veil shuts them away from it...

It is, furthermore, a vital necessity to establish schools ... If necessary, education should even be made compulsory. Until the nerves and arteries of the nation stir into life, every measure that is attempted will prove vain; for the people are as the human body, and determination and the will to struggle are as the soul, and a soulless body does not move.

The Secret of Divine Civilization

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 24 The news of the co-operation of the Bahá'í young men and women in Montreal, their establishment of a group for study and discussion, the sane and sober expression of their methods as expressed in the programme you had enclosed, and their thoughtful and enthusiastic outlook upon the future, all these have helped to create the liveliest hopes and the deepest satisfaction in the heart of our Guardian. It is indeed with no little pleasure that he welcomes the active co-operation of his young friends in Montreal, and he sincerely trusts that with an adequate study of the proper teachings and their spiritual significance coupled with a sufficient knowledge of the problems and perplexities that the world is beset with, you will be able to render great services to the Cause and therefore to humanity.

20 March 1929

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 25 The further emergence of the Faith from obscurity is reflected in distinctive ways. In learned circles, in reference works and in the media, the Faith is increasingly being referred to as a “principal” or “major” world religion ... The exposure of influential segments of the public to Bahá’í ideas in such areas as peace, the environment, status of women, education and literacy, has induced a response which increasingly calls upon the Bahá’ís to participate with others in a range of projects associated with governments or with non-governmental organizations.

Moreover, such exposure is creating in the public mind the realization that the Faith has answers to current problems and thus the expectation that the Bahá’í community should take a more active part in public affairs...

...Bahá’í projects of social and economic development have greatly multiplied and brought much credit to the community in the examples of the power of group initiative and voluntary consultative action that have been set in numerous places.... Some projects have been so distinguished in their achievements as to be given public notice through the citations and awards of governments and international non-governmental agencies.

Riḍván 1992

Defence of the Faith

From the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh

- 26 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. For whosoever standeth firm and steadfast in this holy, this glorious, and exalted Revelation, such power shall be given him as to enable him to face and withstand all that is in heaven and on earth. Of this God is Himself a witness.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, sec. CLIV

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 27 The second of these spiritual standards which apply to the possessor of knowledge is that he should be the defender of his faith. It is obvious that these holy words do not refer exclusively to searching out the implications of the Law, observing the forms of worship, avoiding greater and lesser sins, practicing the religious ordinances, and by all these methods, protecting the Faith. They mean rather that the whole population should be protected in every way; that every effort should be exerted to adopt a combination of all possible measures to raise up the Word of God, increase the number of believers, promote the Faith of God and exalt it and make it victorious over other religions.

The Secret of Divine Civilization

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 28 Shoghi Effendi was delighted to hear of your conversation with Sir ... How much he hopes to have such scholars obtain a true understanding of the spirit and teaching of the Cause and arise to dissipate that veil of misconceptions that is prejudicing the mind of the scholars in the western world. The Cause is in great need for such competent and spiritually minded men who after a thorough study of the Movement would share with the world the fruit of their labours.

11 March 1929 to an individual believer

- 29 There is an answer in the teachings for everything; unfortunately the majority of the Bahá'ís, however intensely devoted and sincere they may be, lack for the most part the necessary scholarship and wisdom to reply to and refute the claims and attacks of people with some education and standing.

25 September 1942 to an individual believer

Expansion and Consolidation of the Bahá'í Community

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 30 Pure souls, such as Mírzá Abu'l-Faḍl, upon him be the Glory of God, spend their nights and days in demonstrating the truth of the Revelation, by adducing conclusive and brilliant proofs and expanding the verities of the Faith, by lifting the veils, promoting the religion of God and spreading His fragrances.

From a Tablet

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 31 We had heard through various channels the wonderful way your children had grown to speak about the Cause in public. Shoghi Effendi's hope is that they will, the three of them, become able and devoted speakers on the Cause and subjects akin to it. To do this properly they will need a firm foundation of scientific and literary training which fortunately they are obtaining. It is just as important for the Bahá'í young boys and girls to become properly educated in colleges of high standing as it is to be spiritually developed. The mental as well as the spiritual side of the youth has to be developed before he can serve the Cause efficiently.

28 November 1926

- 32 The university training which you are receiving at present will be of immense help to you in your efforts to present the Message in intellectual circles. In these days when people are so sceptical about religion and look with so much contempt towards religious organizations and movements, there seems to be more need than ever for our young Bahá'ís to be well equipped intellectually, so that they may be in a position to present the Message in a befitting way, and in a manner that would convince every unbiased observer of the effectiveness and power of the Teachings.

5 May 1934

- 33 Young men and women in the Faith must be deep and thoughtful scholars of its teachings, so that they can teach in a way that will convince people that all the problems facing them have a remedy. They must grasp the Administration, so that they can wisely and efficiently administer the ever-growing affairs of the Cause; and they must exemplify the Bahá'í way of living. All this is not easy—but the Guardian is always encouraged to see the spirit animating such young believers as yourself. He has high hopes of what your generation will accomplish.

12 May 1944

- 34 If the Bahá'ís want to be really effective in teaching the Cause they need to be much better informed and able to discuss intelligently, intellectually, the present condition of the world and its problems. We need Bahá'í scholars, not only people far, far more deeply aware of what our teachings really are, but also well-read and well-educated people, capable of correlating our teachings to the current thoughts of the leaders of society.

We Bahá'ís should, in other words, arm our minds with knowledge in order to better demonstrate to, especially, the educated classes, the truths enshrined in our Faith.

5 July 1949

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 35 The Universal House of Justice ... regards Bahá'í scholarship as of great potential importance for the development and consolidation of the Bahá'í community as it emerges from obscurity...

3 January 1979 to participants in an academic seminar

Contribution to Scholarly Development

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 36 He was very happy to hear from you, and to see with what keen appreciation and interest you are studying the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. One could truly say that the longer one studies them, the more one finds in them. They are the very essence from which thinkers and scientists and humanitarians of the future will derive inspiration and guidance for their work.

10 December 1942

- 37 Regarding the advice you requested from him concerning what studies you should specialize in with a view to teaching in the future: He would suggest either History, Economics or Sociology, as these are not only fields in which Bahá'ís take a great interest but also cover subjects which our teachings cast an entirely new light upon. Your knowledge would be of use to the Cause in teaching it in the future, and you could also perhaps introduce the Bahá'í ideas into your lectures as an educator.

13 March 1944

From letters by or on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 38 You are already a qualified practitioner in your field, and no doubt you give advice on the basis of what you have learned from study and experience—a whole fabric of concepts about the human mind, its growth, development and proper functioning, which you have learned and evolved without reference to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Now, as a Bahá'í, you know that what Bahá'u'lláh teaches about the purpose of human life, the nature of the human being and the proper conduct of human lives, is divinely revealed and therefore true. However, it will inevitably take time for you not only to study the Bahá'í teachings so that you clearly understand them, but also to work out how they modify your professional concepts. This is, of course, not an unusual predicament for a scientist. How often in the course of research is a factor discovered which requires a revolution in thinking over a wide field of human endeavour. You must be guided in each case by your own professional knowledge and judgement as illuminated by your growing

knowledge of the Bahá'í teachings; undoubtedly you will find that your own understanding of the human problems dealt with in your work will change and develop and you will see new and improved ways of helping the people who come to you. Psychology is still a very young and inexact science, and as the years go by Bahá'í psychologists, who know from the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh the true pattern of human life, will be able to make great strides in the development of this science, and will help profoundly in the alleviation of human suffering.

6 February 1973, Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1968–1973, pp. 111–112

- 39 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...

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.

21 August 1977, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 40 Indeed, let them [the Bahá'í youth] welcome with confidence the challenges awaiting them. Imbued with this excellence and a corresponding humility, with tenacity and a loving servitude, today's youth must move towards the front ranks of the professions, trades, arts and crafts which are necessary to the further progress of humankind—this to ensure that the spirit of the Cause will cast its illumination on all these important areas of human endeavour. Moreover, while aiming at mastering the unifying concepts and swiftly advancing technologies of this era of communications, they can, indeed they must, also guarantee the transmittal to the future of those skills which will preserve the marvelous, indispensable achievements of the past. The transformation which is to occur in the functioning of society will certainly depend to a great extent on the effectiveness of the preparations the youth make for the world they will inherit.

8 May 1985, Universal House of Justice

41 The House of Justice recognizes that the questions you raise, concerning the offer of newly enrolled professionals to share their views with the Bahá'í community, are of vital and timely importance, especially as the Faith emerges from obscurity and increasing numbers of professionals from all walks of life are attracted to its Teachings. The process of integrating these experts into Bahá'í communities as well-grounded believers and tapping their potential as promoters and supporters of the Cause will require patient and loving guidance by Bahá'í institutions. A great challenge will be to avoid undue disruption of this process of integration by abandoning such persons to the insensitive attitudes still present in communities not yet broadly diverse or accustomed to dealing with all ranks of society.

Scholars and professionals are well accustomed to encountering new facts in the course of their research which require them to adjust previous thinking on various aspects of their discipline. In the case of their deepening in the Teachings of the Faith it naturally takes time for them to study and absorb so many new concepts. They must be assisted to acquire, as quickly as possible, profound knowledge of the Teachings. Gradually this knowledge will shed new light on their previous views. At the same time, Bahá'í communities will need to develop greater tolerance toward ideas that may not coincide with their current understanding, and remain open to new insights...

Newly enrolled professionals and other experts provide a great resource for the development of Bahá'í scholarship. It is hoped that, as they attain a deeper grasp of the Teachings and their significance, they will be able to assist Bahá'í communities in correlating the beliefs of the Faith with the current thoughts and problems of the world. In some instances Bahá'ís of a particular profession have come together in special conferences or organized themselves into an association for this purpose. This also allows them to support one another as Bahá'ís and to take advantage of their professional status to promote the interests of the Faith. Current examples of professional associations of this type are the Bahá'í Justice Society and the Bahá'í Medical Association, both in the United States. Special encouragement should therefore be given to believers of unusual capacity to consecrate their abilities to the service of the Cause through the unique contribution they can make to this rapidly developing field of Bahá'í endeavour.

18 April 1989, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

General Principles and Guidelines

Spiritual Foundation

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 42 Therefore, hath it been said: “Knowledge is a light which God casteth into the heart of whomsoever He willeth.” It is this kind of knowledge which is and hath ever been praiseworthy, and not the limited knowledge that hath sprung forth from veiled and obscured minds. This limited knowledge they even stealthily borrow one from the other, and vainly pride themselves therein!

The Kitáb-i-Íqán

- 43 We have decreed, O people, that the highest and last end of all learning be the recognition of Him Who is the Object of all knowledge; and yet, behold how ye have allowed your learning to shut you out, as by a veil, from Him Who is the Dayspring of this Light, through Whom every hidden thing hath been revealed.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 102

From the Writings and Utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- 44 Although to acquire the sciences and arts is the greatest glory of mankind, this is so only on condition that man’s river floweth into the mighty Sea, and draweth from God’s ancient source His inspiration. When this cometh to pass, then every teacher is as a shoreless ocean, every pupil a prodigal fountain of knowledge. If, then, the pursuit of knowledge leadeth to the beauty of Him Who is the object of all knowledge, how excellent that goal;

but if not, a mere drop will perhaps shut a man off from flooding grace, for with learning cometh arrogance and pride, and it bringeth on error and indifference to God.

The sciences of today are bridges to reality; if then they lead not to reality, naught remains but fruitless illusion. By the one true God! If learning be not a means of access to Him, the Most Manifest, it is nothing but evident loss.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 72

- 45 And every branch of learning, conjoined with the love of God, is approved and worthy of praise; but bereft of His love, learning is barren—indeed, it bringeth on madness. Every kind of knowledge, every science, is as a tree: if the fruit of it be the love of God, then is it a blessed tree, but if not, that tree is but dried-up wood, and shall only feed the fire.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 154

- 46 Scientific knowledge is the highest attainment upon the human plane, for science is the discoverer of realities. It is of two kinds: material and spiritual. Material science is the investigation of natural phenomena; divine science is the discovery and realization of spiritual verities. The world of humanity must acquire both. A bird has two wings; it cannot fly with one. Material and spiritual science are the two wings of human uplift and attainment. Both are necessary—one the natural, the other supernatural; one material, the other divine. By the divine we mean the discovery of the mysteries of God, the comprehension of spiritual realities, the wisdom of God, inner significances of the heavenly religions and foundation of the law.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 47 Between the truth which comes from God through His Prophets, and the glimmerings, often misunderstood and misinterpreted, of truth which come from the philosophers and thinkers, there is an immense difference. We must never, under any circumstances, confuse the two.

Bahá'u'lláh has said that learning can be the veil between the soul of man and the eternal truth; in other words, between man and the knowledge of God. We have seen that many people who become very advanced

in the study of modern physical sciences are led to deny God, and to deny His Prophets. That does not mean that God and the Prophets have not existed and do not exist. It only means that knowledge has become a veil between their hearts and the light of God.

22 April 1954

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 48 Just as there is a fundamental difference between divine Revelation itself and the understanding that believers have of it, so also there is a basic distinction between scientific fact and reasoning on the one hand and the conclusions or theories of scientists on the other. There is, and can be, no conflict between true religion and true science: true religion is revealed by God, while it is through true science that the mind of man “discovers the realities of things and becomes cognizant of their peculiarities and effects, and of the qualities and properties of beings” and “comprehendeth the abstract by the aid of the concrete”. However, whenever a statement is made through the lens of human understanding it is thereby limited, for human understanding is limited; and where there is limitation there is the possibility of error; and where there is error, conflicts can arise. For example, at the present time many people are convinced that it is unscientific to believe in God, but, as human enlightenment progresses, the scientists and philosophers of the future will not be, in the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “deniers of the Prophets, ignorant of spiritual susceptibilities, deprived of the heavenly bounties and without belief in the supernatural”.

26 December 1975

- 49 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 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.

7 October 1980

- 50 The House of Justice suggests that the issues raised in your letter might best be considered in light of the statements in the Bahá'í Writings which disclose the relationship between the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and the knowledge which is acquired as a result of scholarly endeavours. Bahá'u'lláh asserts that:

Unveiled and unconcealed, this Wronged One hath, at all times, proclaimed before the face of all the peoples of the world that which will serve as the key for unlocking the doors of sciences, of arts, of knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and wealth...

It is evident that the Bahá'í Writings illuminate all areas of human endeavour and all academic disciplines. Those who have been privileged to recognize the station of Bahá'u'lláh have the bounty of access to a Revelation which casts light upon all aspects of thought and inquiry, and are enjoined to use the understanding which they obtain from their immersion in the Holy Writings to advance the interests of the Faith.

Those believers with the capacity and opportunity to do so have repeatedly been encouraged in their pursuit of academic studies by which they are not only equipped to render much needed services to the Faith, but are also provided with the means to acquire a profound insight into the meaning and the implications of the Bahá'í Teachings. They discover also that the perceptions gained from a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh clarify the subjects of their academic inquiry.

It is useful to review a number of statements written by Shoghi Effendi on this subject. To a believer who had completed advanced academic studies in a subject related to the Teachings the Guardian stated, in a letter written on his behalf:

It is hoped that all the Bahá'í students will follow the noble example you have set before them and will, henceforth, be led to investigate and analyse the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth.

When he was informed of the enrolment of a scientist in the Faith, the response set out in the letter written on his behalf was:

We need very much the sound, sane, element of thinking which a scientifically trained mind has to offer. When such intellectual powers are linked to deep faith a tremendous teaching potential is created...

His secretary wrote, on another occasion, that:

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply.

In the simultaneous endeavour to pursue their studies and to delve deeply into the Bahá'í Teachings, believers are enjoined to maintain a keen awareness that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the standard of truth against which all other views and conclusions are to be measured. They are urged to be modest about their accomplishments, and to bear in mind always the statement of Bahá'u'lláh that:

The heart must needs therefore be cleansed from the idle sayings of men, and sanctified from every earthly affection, so that it may discover the hidden meaning of divine inspiration, and become the treasury of the mysteries of divine knowledge.

19 October 1993

“Useful” Sciences

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 51 It is permissible to study sciences and arts, but such sciences as are useful and would redound to the progress and advancement of the people. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Ordainer, the All-Wise.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

From the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- 52 The individual should, prior to engaging in the study of any subject, ask himself what its uses are and what fruit and result will derive from it. If it is a useful branch of knowledge, that is, if society will gain important benefits from it, then he should certainly pursue it with all his heart. If not, if it consists in empty, profitless debates and in a vain concatenation of imaginings that lead to no result except acrimony, why devote one’s life to such useless hairsplittings and disputes.

The Secret of Divine Civilization

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 53 The choice you have made for your course of study is surely most interesting and will be of inestimable service in your work for the Cause. Even though every branch of study will have some interest for a Bahá’í who is looking how the spirit of the Cause and of the new age is awakening the minds, yet a study of the condition of society will better show us the needs of the world, hence the part that the Teachings can play in satisfying them.

5 January 1930

- 54 Philosophy, as you will study it and later teach it, is certainly not one of the sciences that begins and ends in words. Fruitless excursions into metaphysical hair-splittings is meant, not a sound branch of learning like philosophy...

As regards your own studies: he would advise you not to devote too much of your time to the abstract side of philosophy, but rather to approach it from a more historical angle. As to correlating philosophy with the Bahá'í teachings: this is a tremendous work which scholars in the future can undertake. We must remember that not only are all the teachings not yet translated into English, but they are not even all collected yet. Many important Tablets may still come to light which are at present owned privately.

15 February 1947

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

55 In response to your letter of ... in which you seek guidance on the question of chosen professions vis-à-vis the statement of Bahá'u'lláh concerning sciences which begin in words and end in mere words and the pursuit of study in pure mathematics and the classics, the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to share with you an excerpt from a letter to an individual believer written in 1947 on behalf of the beloved Guardian: "Philosophy, as you will study it and later teach it, is certainly not one of the sciences that begins and ends in words. Fruitless excursions into metaphysical hair-splittings is meant, not a sound branch of learning like philosophy."

In these words the Guardian has enunciated the general principle. Turning to the specific instance of the science of pure mathematics, the reference in the Eleventh Glad Tidings ("Bahá'í World Faith", p. 195) regarding "such sciences as are profitable, which lead and conduce to the elevation of man-kind",ⁱ must be placed in the context of the meaning of "sciences" as employed by the Manifestation. Bahá'u'lláh's comment about sciences which begin and end in mere words does not apply to the systematic study of natural phenomena in order to discover the laws of order in the physical universe, an order which mathematics seeks to explore. Pure mathematics frequently has application in practical matters, such as, for example, group theory or the study of fundamental particles.

As for classical studies, we are to share with you the following excerpt from a letter dated 30 November 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual who had asked a question about the skills of story writing

i Cf. "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh", p. 26.

and whether such occupation would be classed as those sciences that “begin and end in words”.

What Bahá'u'lláh meant primarily with “sciences that begin and end in words” are those theological treatises and commentaries that encumber the human mind rather than help it to attain the truth. The students would devote their life to their study but still attain no where. Bahá'u'lláh surely never meant to include story-writing under such a category; and shorthand and typewriting are both most useful talents, very necessary in our present social and economic life.

What you could do, and should do, is to use your stories to become a source of inspiration and guidance for those who read them. With such a means at your disposal you can spread the spirit and teachings of the Cause; you can show the evils that exist in society, as well as the way they can be remedied. If you possess a real talent in writing you should consider it as given by God and exert your efforts to use it for the betterment of society.

The House of Justice hopes that you will be able to satisfy your friends on these matters and encourage them to prepare for their Bahá'í service and be able to contribute to the welfare of humanity.

24 May 1988

Attitudes of the Scholar

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 56 Amongst the people is he whose learning hath made him proud, and who hath been debarred thereby from recognizing My Name, the Self-Subsisting; who, when he heareth the tread of sandals following behind him, waxeth greater in his own esteem than Nimrod. Say: O rejected one! Where now is his abode? By God, it is the nethermost fire. Say: O concourse of divines! Hear ye not the shrill voice of My Most Exalted Pen? See ye not this Sun that shineth in refulgent splendour above the All-Glorious Horizon? For how long will ye worship the idols of your evil passions? Forsake your vain imaginings, and turn yourselves unto God, your Everlasting Lord.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 41

- 57 Show forbearance and benevolence and love to one another. Should any one among you be incapable of grasping a certain truth, or be striving to comprehend it, show forth, when conversing with him, a spirit of extreme kindliness and good-will. Help him to see and recognize the truth, without esteeming yourself to be, in the least, superior to him, or to be possessed of greater endowments.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. V

- 58 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.

Dispute not with any one concerning the things of this world and its affairs, for God hath abandoned them to such as have set their affection upon them.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. CXXVIII

- 59 Warn, O Salmán, the beloved of the one true God, not to view with too critical an eye the sayings and writings of men. Let them rather approach such sayings and writings in a spirit of open-mindedness and loving sympathy. Those men, however, who, in this Day, have been led to assail, in their inflammatory writings, the tenets of the Cause of God, are to be treated differently. It is incumbent upon all men, each according to his ability, to refute the arguments of those that have attacked the Faith of God. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the All-Powerful, the Almighty.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. CLIV

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 60 Good behaviour and high moral character must come first, for unless the character be trained, acquiring knowledge will only prove injurious. Knowledge is praiseworthy when it is coupled with ethical conduct and virtuous character; otherwise it is a deadly poison, a frightful danger. A physician of evil character, and who betrayeth his trust, can bring on death, and become the source of numerous infirmities and diseases.

From a Tablet

From letters by or on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 61 ...the believers must recognize the importance of intellectual honesty and humility. In past dispensations many errors arose because the believers in God's Revelation were over-anxious to encompass the Divine Message within the framework of their limited understanding, to define doctrines where definition was beyond their power, to explain mysteries which only the wisdom and experience of a later age would make comprehensible, to argue that something was true because it appeared desirable and necessary. Such compromises with essential truth, such intellectual pride, we must scrupulously avoid.

27 May 1966, Wellspring of Guidance, pp. 87-88

- 62 When studying at school or university Bahá'í youth will often find themselves in the unusual and slightly embarrassing position of having a more profound insight into a subject than their instructors. The Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh throw light on so many aspects of human life and knowledge that a Bahá'í must learn, earlier than most, to weigh the information that is given to him rather than to accept it blindly. A Bahá'í has the advantage of the divine Revelation for this Age, which shines like a searchlight on so many problems that baffle modern thinkers; he must therefore develop the ability to learn everything from those around him, showing proper humility before his teachers, but always relating what he hears to the Bahá'í teachings, for they will enable him to sort out the gold from the dross of human error.

10 June 1966, Wellspring of Guidance, pp. 95-96

- 63 The House of Justice agrees that it is most important for the believers, and especially those who hold positions of responsibility in the Administrative Order, to react calmly and with tolerant and enquiring minds to views which differ from their own, remembering that all Bahá'ís are but students of the Faith, ever striving to understand the Teachings more clearly and to apply them more faithfully, and none can claim to have a perfect understanding of this Revelation. At the same time all believers, and scholars in particular, should remember the many warnings in the Writings against the fomenting of discord among the friends. It is the duty of the institutions of the Faith to guard the community against such dangers.... [I]t cannot

be denied that some of the statements that have been made recently in the name of Bahá'í scholarship by certain individuals have betrayed an intemperance, and a lack of appreciation of many of the fundamental teachings of the Faith, that would understandably arouse alarm in the breasts of the most tolerant of believers.

18 July 1979, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 64 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 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.

23 March 1983, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Methodological Issues

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 65 Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men. In this most perfect Balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it.
The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 99

- 66 When the eyes of the people of the East were captivated by the arts and wonders of the West, they roved distraught in the wilderness of material causes, oblivious of the One Who is the Causer of Causes, and the Sustainer thereof, while such men as were the source and the wellspring of Wisdom never denied the moving Impulse behind these causes, nor the Creator or the Origin thereof. Thy Lord knoweth, yet most of the people know not.
Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

From the Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 67 There are only four accepted criteria of comprehension, that is, four criteria whereby the realities of things are understood.

The first criterion is that of the senses; that is, all that the eye, the ear, the taste, the smell, and the touch perceive is called "sensible". At present all the European philosophers hold this to be the most perfect criterion. They claim that the greatest of all criteria is that of the senses, and they regard it as sacrosanct. And yet the criterion of the senses is defective, as it can err. For example, the greatest of the senses is the power of vision. The vision, however, sees a mirage as water and reckons images reflected in mirrors as real and existing; it sees large bodies as small, perceives a whirling point as a circle, imagines the earth to be stationary and the sun to be in motion, and is subject to many other errors of a similar nature. One cannot therefore rely implicitly upon it.

The second criterion is that of the intellect, which was the principal criterion of comprehension for those pillars of wisdom, the ancient philosophers. They deduced things through the power of the mind and relied on rational arguments: All their arguments are based upon reason. But despite this, they diverged greatly in their opinions. They would even change their own views: For twenty years they would deduce the existence of something through rational arguments, and then afterwards they would disprove the same, again through rational arguments. Even Plato at first proved through rational arguments the immobility of the earth and the movement of the sun, and then subsequently established, again through rational arguments, the centrality of the sun and the movement of the earth. Then the Ptolemaic theory became widespread, and Plato's theory was entirely forgotten until a modern astronomer revived it. Thus have the mathematicians disagreed among themselves, even though they all relied on rational arguments.

Likewise, at one time they would establish a thing by rational arguments and disprove it at another, again by rational arguments. So a philosopher would firmly uphold a view for a time and adduce a range of proofs and arguments to support it, and afterwards he would change his mind and contradict his former position by rational arguments.

It is therefore evident that the criterion of reason is imperfect, as proven by the disagreements existing between the ancient philosophers as well as by their want of consistency and their propensity to change their own views. For if the criterion of intellect were perfect, all should have been united in their thoughts and agreed in their opinions.

The third criterion is that of tradition, that is, the text of the Sacred Scriptures, when it is said, "God said thus in the Torah", or "God said thus in the Gospel." This criterion is not perfect either, because the traditions must be understood by the mind. As the mind itself is liable to error, how can it be said that it will attain to perfect truth and not err in comprehending and inferring the meaning of the traditions? For it is subject to error and cannot lead to certitude. This is the criterion of the leaders of religion. What they comprehend from the text of the Book, however, is that which their minds can understand and not necessarily the truth of the matter; for the mind is like a balance, and the meanings contained in the texts are like the objects to be weighed. If the balance is untrue, how can the weight be ascertained?

Know, therefore, that what the people possess and believe to be true is liable to error. For if in proving or disproving a thing a proof drawn from the evidence of the senses is advanced, this criterion is clearly imperfect; if a rational proof is adduced, the same holds true; and likewise if a traditional proof is given. Thus it is clear that man does not possess any criterion of knowledge that can be relied upon.

But the grace of the Holy Spirit is the true criterion regarding which there is no doubt or uncertainty. That grace consists in the confirmations of the Holy Spirit which are vouchsafed to man and through which certitude is attained.

Some Answered Questions

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 68 The concern was expressed that many of the friends, holding that there is only one “correct” view of the history and teachings of the Faith, react critically to unfamiliar views. This has already been covered in statements made by the Universal House of Justice itself, for example that on pages 88–89 of “Wellspring of Guidance”. As you point out in your letter, divine Revelation is infallible and proceeds from an all-encompassing knowledge of the Truth, but when individual Bahá’ís attempt to apply Sacred Texts to any specific problem or situation they do so using their own minds which are of limited understanding. Thus, just as people can differ from one another in their use of reason in making deductions from available evidence, so they can also differ in their understanding and application of a passage of divine Revelation. The Bahá’í principle of the harmony between science and religion requires, as you say, that a Bahá’í scholar must use his intelligence to arrive at a solution of a specific problem if there is an apparent conflict between a Sacred Text and other evidence; and also he must accept the fact that some problems may defy his comprehension....

By conveying the comments of the Research Department on the ... Seminarⁱ the House of Justice did not intend to imply that there was only one valid methodology for Bahá’í historians to follow. It merely wished to alert Bahá’í scholars to the dangers that are inherent in the paths that some

i “The Challenge and Promise of Bahá’í Scholarship”, prepared by the Research Department. As published in “The Bahá’í World” (Haifa: Bahá’í World Centre, 1981), vol. XVII, pp. 195–196, this statement was inadvertently attributed to the Universal House of Justice.

of them are following at the present time. Historical research is largely a matter of evaluating evidence and deducing probabilities. Historical evidence, moreover, is always fragmentary, and may also be accidentally erroneous or even intentionally fabricated. The House of Justice realizes that you are fully aware of this, but it stresses the point because it does not see how a Bahá'í historian can in all honesty claim to be a faithful believer on the one hand and, on the other, challenge in his writings the veracity and honour of the Central Figures of the Faith or of its Guardian.

The fact that the Faith, as the Guardian states, "enjoins upon its followers the primary duty of an unfettered search after truth", should reassure any aspiring Bahá'í historian that there can be no question of any requirement to distort history in the so-called "interests" of the Faith. On the contrary, the combination of profound faith and freedom of thought is one of the great strengths of the Bahá'í religion. It does, however, place a great responsibility upon Bahá'í historians to put forward their views and conclusions with moderation and due humility. In this connection one of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh states:

Thou hast written that one of the friends hath composed a treatise. This was mentioned in the Holy Presence, and this is what was revealed in response: Great care should be exercised that whatever is written in these days doth not cause dissension, and invite the objection of the people. Whatever the friends of the one true God say in these days is listened to by the people of the world. It hath been revealed in the Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat: "The unbelievers have inclined their ears towards Us in order to hear that which might enable them to cavil against God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting." Whatever is written should not transgress the bounds of tact and wisdom, and in the words used there should lie hid the property of milk, so that the children of the world may be nurtured therewith, and attain maturity. We have said in the past that one word hath the influence of spring and causeth hearts to become fresh and verdant, while another is like unto blight which causeth the blossoms and flowers to wither. God grant that authors among the friends will write in such a way as would be acceptable to fair-minded souls, and not lead to cavilling by the people.

18 July 1979

- 69 The House of Justice had hoped that the publication of the statementⁱⁱ would stimulate discussion among Bahá'í scholars and encourage them to examine

ii Ibid.

more profoundly all aspects of their work, and the effect it has upon both Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í audiences. The aim was not to instruct scholars to abandon any specific methodology but to warn them of the dangers of taking for granted the a priori assumptions of modern non-Bahá'í scholars and of allowing their thinking and their understanding of the Faith to be limited by criteria which they themselves, as Bahá'ís, would know to be in error. It was also the hope of the House of Justice that Bahá'í scholars would realize the significance of the manner in which they express themselves, and that they would guard against use of the proud and scornful language with which some had been publicly referring to their fellow believers who, nevertheless, were devotedly trying to serve the Faith of God.

8 October 1980

- 70 From your letter the House of Justice understands that you desire to find ways of conveying spiritual truths in logical ways and demonstrating their validity through scientific proofs. There can be no objection to such an attitude. 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself used such a method. The danger Bahá'í scholars must avoid is the distortion of religious truth, almost forcibly at times, to make it conform to understandings and perceptions current in the scientific world. True Bahá'í scholars should guard against this. In a letter to a National Spiritual Assembly dated 21 July 1968, the House of Justice wrote:

While it may often be the part of wisdom to approach individuals or an audience from a standpoint of current knowledge, it should never be overlooked that the Revelation of the Manifestation of God is the standard for all knowledge, and scientific statements and theories, no matter how close they may come to the eternal principles proclaimed by God's Messenger, are in their very nature ephemeral and limited. Likewise, attempting to make the Bahá'í Faith relevant to modern society is to incur the grave risk of compromising the fundamental verities of our Faith in an effort to make it conform to current theories and practices.

7 June 1983

- 71 The principal concern of the House of Justice is over a methodological bias and discordant tone which seem to inform the work of certain of the authors. The impression given is that, in attempting to achieve what they understand to be academic objectivity, they have inadvertently cast the Faith into a mould which is essentially foreign to its nature, taking

no account of the spiritual forces which Bahá'ís see as its foundation. Presumably the justification offered for this approach would be that most scholars of comparative religion are essentially concerned with discernable phenomena, observable events and practical affairs and are used to treating their subject from a western, if not a Christian, viewpoint. This approach, although understandable, is quite impossible for a Bahá'í, for it ignores the fact that our world-view includes the spiritual dimension as an indispensable component for consistency and coherence, and it does not beseem a Bahá'í to write ... about his Faith as if he looked upon it from the norm of humanism or materialism.

In other words, we are presented in such articles with the spectacle of Bahá'ís trying to write as if they were non-Bahá'ís. This leads to these authors' drawing conclusions and making implications which are in conflict with Bahá'í teachings and with the reality of the Faith. A good Bahá'í author, when writing for such a publication, should be fully capable of adopting a calmly neutral and expository tone, without falling into the trap of distorting the picture by adopting what is, in essence, a materialistic and localized stance.

4 October 1994

The Covenant

From letters by or on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 72 Concerning the course of study you may follow: The Cause is such that we can serve it no matter what our profession may be. The only necessity is that we be spiritually minded and not be guided by purely material considerations. We should also not let our studies detain us from deepening our knowledge of the literature of the Cause.

9 November 1931, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 73 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 preconceived 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.

25 December 1938, Shoghi Effendi, The Advent of Divine Justice

- 74 The Guardian feels that a sound knowledge of history, including religious history, and also of social and economic subjects, is of great help in teaching the Cause to intelligent people; as to what subjects within the Faith you should concentrate on he feels that the young Bahá’ís should gain a mastery of such books as the “Gleanings”, “The Dawn-Breakers”, “God Passes By”, the “Íqán”, “Some Answered Questions” and the more important Tablets. All aspects of the Faith should be deeply studied—and ... they need to know more about the Administration.

4 May 1946, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 75 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!

3 July 1949, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 76 He was very pleased to hear you do a lot of lecturing for the Cause; this is a very important field of service and one you should devote as much time to as possible. The public must hear of the Faith, and new ways and means must be devised to bring it to their attention. He also urges you to study the teachings themselves more deeply. Bahá’í scholarship is needed really

more than worldly scholarship, for one is spiritual, the other more or less transient. There is a real lack in the Cause of people who know the teachings *thoroughly*, especially their deeper truths, and who can consequently teach the souls properly and lay a permanent foundation, one that tests and trials will not shake down.

27 August 1951, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 77 In the field of Bahá'í scholarship we feel that it is most important not to stifle the development of Bahá'í scholars by an attitude of censorship or undue criticism. We believe that both the International Teaching Centre and the Boards of Counsellors can render valuable services in this area by encouraging budding scholars and by promoting within the Bahá'í community an atmosphere of tolerance for the views of others. At the same time the fundamental core of the believers' faith should be strengthened by an increasing awareness of the cardinal truth and vital importance of the Covenant, and an ever-growing love for Bahá'u'lláh.

10 February 1981

- 78 There can be no doubt that the progress of the Cause from this time onward will be characterized by an ever-increasing relationship to the agencies, activities, institutions and leading individuals of the non-Bahá'í world. We shall acquire greater stature at the United Nations, become better known in the deliberations of governments, a familiar figure to the media, a subject of interest to academics, and inevitably the envy of failing establishments. Our preparation for and response to this situation must be a continual deepening of our faith, an unwavering adherence to its principles of abstention from partisan politics and freedom from prejudices, and above all an increasing understanding of its fundamental verities and relevance to the modern world.

Riḍván 1984

PERSPECTIVES ON
SCIENCE &
RELIGION

A compilation of extracts from the Writings and
Utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, letters on behalf of Shoghi
Effendi, and communications by and on behalf of
the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled September 2013

Extracts from the Writings

From the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 1 And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is that religion must be in conformity with science and reason, so that it may influence the hearts of men. The foundation must be solid and must not consist of imitations.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 227

- 2 The third teaching or principle of Bahá'u'lláh is that religion and science are in complete agreement. Every religion which is not in accordance with established science is superstition. Religion must be reasonable. If it does not square with reason, it is superstition and without foundation. It is like a mirage, which deceives man by leading him to think it is a body of water. God has endowed man with reason that he may perceive what is true. If we insist that such and such a subject is not to be reasoned out and tested according to the established logical modes of the intellect, what is the use of the reason which God has given man? The eye is the organ of sense by which we view the world of outer phenomena; hearing is the faculty for distinguishing sounds; taste senses the properties of objects, such as bitter, sweet; smell detects and differentiates odors; touch reveals attributes of matter and perfects our communication with the outer world; yet after all, the circle and range of perception by the five senses is exceedingly limited. But the intellectual faculty of man is unlimited in its sphere of action. The eye views details perhaps a mile, but the intellect can perceive the far East and West. The ear may hear tone modulations at one thousand feet, but the mind of man can detect the harmonies of the heavenly spheres as they swing in their courses. Mind makes geological discoveries in subterranean depths and determines the processes of creation in the earth's lowest strata. The sciences and arts, all inventions, crafts, trades and their products have come forth from the intellect of man. It is evident that within the human organism the intellect occupies the supreme station. Therefore, if religious belief, principle or creed is not in accordance with the intellect and the power of reason, it is surely superstition.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, no. 26

- 3 The third principle or teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the oneness of religion and science. Any religious belief which is not conformable with scientific proof and investigation is superstition, for true science is reason and reality, and religion is essentially reality and pure reason; therefore, the two must correspond. Religious teaching which is at variance with science and reason is human invention and imagination unworthy of acceptance, for the antithesis and opposite of knowledge is superstition born of the ignorance of man. If we say religion is opposed to science, we lack knowledge of either true science or true religion, for both are founded upon the premises and conclusions of reason, and both must bear its test.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, no. 44

- 4 Another cause of dissension and disagreement is the fact that religion has been pronounced at variance with science. Between scientists and the followers of religion there has always been controversy and strife for the reason that the latter have proclaimed religion superior in authority to science and considered scientific announcement opposed to the teachings of religion. Bahá'u'lláh declared that religion is in complete harmony with science and reason. If religious belief and doctrine is at variance with reason, it proceeds from the limited mind of man and not from God; therefore, it is unworthy of belief and not deserving of attention; the heart finds no rest in it, and real faith is impossible. How can man believe that which he knows to be opposed to reason? Is this possible? Can the heart accept that which reason denies? Reason is the first faculty of man, and the religion of God is in harmony with it. Bahá'u'lláh has removed this form of dissension and discord from among mankind and reconciled science with religion by revealing the pure teachings of the divine reality. This accomplishment is specialized to Him in this Day.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, no. 82

- 5 Science is the first emanation from God toward man. All created beings embody the potentiality of material perfection, but the power of intellectual investigation and scientific acquisition is a higher virtue specialized to man alone. Other beings and organisms are deprived of this potentiality and attainment. God has created or deposited this love of reality in man. The development and progress of a nation is according to the measure and degree of that nation's scientific attainments. Through this means its greatness is continually increased, and day by day the welfare and prosperity of its people are assured.

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 endeavor the knowledge and attainment of all that lies within the power of this wonderful bestowal.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, no. 20

- 6 It was in such a land and amidst such barbarous tribes that an illiterate Man brought forth a Book in which the attributes and perfections of God, the prophethood of His Messengers, the precepts of His religion, and certain fields of knowledge and questions of human learning have been expounded in a most perfect and eloquent manner.

For example, as you know, before the observations of the renowned astronomer of later times,⁵ that is, from the first centuries down to the fifteenth century of the Christian era, all the mathematicians of the world were unanimous in upholding the centrality of the earth and the movement of the sun. This modern astronomer was the source of the new theory that postulated the movement of the earth and the fixity of the sun. Until his time, all the mathematicians and philosophers of the world held to the Ptolemaic system, and whosoever uttered a word against it was considered

ignorant. It is true that Pythagoras, and Plato during the latter part of his life, conceived that the sun's annual movement around the zodiac did not proceed from the sun itself but from the earth's movement around it, but this theory was entirely forgotten and the Ptolemaic theory was universally accepted by all mathematicians. But in the Qur'án a number of verses were revealed which contradicted the Ptolemaic system. One of them, "The sun moves in a fixed place of its own",⁶ alludes to the fixity of the sun and its movement around an axis. Likewise, in another verse, "And each swims in its own heaven",⁷ the movement of the sun, the moon, the earth, and the other celestial bodies is specified. When the Qur'án was spread abroad, all the mathematicians scoffed and attributed this view to ignorance. Even the Muslim divines, finding these verses contrary to the Ptolemaic system, were obliged to interpret them figuratively, for the latter was accepted as incontrovertible fact and yet was explicitly contradicted by the Qur'án.

It was not before the fifteenth century of the Christian era, nearly nine hundred years after Muḥammad, that new observations were made by a famous mathematician,⁸ that the telescope was invented, that important discoveries were made, that the rotation of the earth and the fixity of the sun were proven, and that the latter's movement about an axis was likewise discovered. Then it became evident that the explicit text of the Qur'án was in full agreement with reality and that the Ptolemaic system was sheer imagination.

Some Answered Questions, sec. 7

- 7 ...the signs and conditions that have been indicated have inner meanings and are not to be taken literally. For otherwise it is said, among other things, that the stars will fall upon the earth. Yet the stars are endless and innumerable, and modern mathematicians have established and proven that the mass of the sun is approximately one and a half million times greater than that of the earth, and that each one of the fixed stars is a thousand times larger than the sun. If these stars were to fall upon the surface of the earth, how could there be room for them? It would be as though a thousand million mountains as mighty as the Himalayas were to fall upon a grain of mustard seed. Such a thing is, by reason and by science (and indeed as a matter of simple common sense), utterly impossible. And yet even more astonishing is that Christ said: Perchance I shall come when you are

sleeping, for the coming of the Son of man is like the coming of a thief.⁸⁹ Perhaps the thief will be in the house and the owner will be unaware.

It is therefore clear and evident that these signs have inner meanings and should not be taken literally. These meanings have been fully explained in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*: Refer to it.

Some Answered Questions, sec. 26

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 8 It is very easy indeed for him to understand how you, with your training, are often tested and irritated by your contact with some of the believers. But then you must remember that your advantages of a reasonable mind and a scientific education have not been given to all, and you cannot expect acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to endow people with these things automatically! But think of the kind of human beings, if brought up in the society He envisages, and taught in homes, schools and universities which were the mirror and product of His teachings, which would be produced! There you would really have a new race of men.

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply. 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. Very few people, as you as a psychologist know, have attained perfect equilibrium in their minds or their lives—their acts—the same is certainly true of the Bahá'ís, for anyone who believes in our teachings can become a Bahá'í and they represent all elements of the population.

5 July 1947

- 9 Considering that a century ago nobody knew the nature of matter, and couldn't split any kind of an atom, it should not surprise the scientist that 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that copper can be transmuted into gold.

There may come a time, for all we know, when the mass of many atoms can be changed by scientists. We have no way of proving, or disproving, at present the statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Just because we cannot demonstrate a contention in the Bahá'í Teachings does not mean the contention is not true.

The same holds true of the statement of Bahá'u'lláh in the *Íqán*, regarding transmutation of copper into gold after seventy years, under certain conditions.

We as Bahá'ís must assume that, as He had access to all knowledge, He was referring to a definite physical condition which theoretically might exist. Because we don't know what this condition is in scientific terms does not refute Bahá'u'lláh's statement at all.

The principle of faith is to accept anything the Manifestation of God says, once you have accepted Him as being the Manifestation. That is really the crux of the whole matter. It is a question of confidence.

14 March 1955

- 10 The Tablet to a Physician was addressed to a man who was a student of the old type of healing prevalent in the East and familiar with the terminology used in those days, and He addresses him in terms used by the medical men of those days. These terms are quite different from those used by modern medicine, and one would have to have a deep knowledge of this former school of medicine to understand the questions Bahá'u'lláh was elucidating.

18 December 1945

From letters by or on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 11 The Guardian was meticulous about the authenticity of historical fact. One of the friends in Yazd wrote to him stating that the account given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in one of His Tablets about events related to the martyrdom of some of the believers in that place was in conflict with known facts about these events. Shoghi Effendi replied saying that the friends should investigate the facts carefully and unhesitatingly register them in their historical records,

since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself had prefaced His recording of the events in His Tablet with a statement that it was based on news received from Yazd.
25 July 1974, Universal House of Justice

- 12 We have been asked to say that there is nothing in the Bahá’í Writings to support the conclusion that the Revelation of a Manifestation of God is confined to an exposition of “values” or that the infallibility of the Prophets does not extend to and include the area of historical and scientific “fact”. On the contrary, in “Some Answered Questions”, p. 23, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá points out that when the Qur’án was revealed, it contained verses explaining the movement of the stars and planets in the universe. Because these statements disagreed with the established theories of the time, the verses were ridiculed by all the mathematicians who “attributed the theory to ignorance”. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá goes on to say that it was not until 900 years later, when the telescope was invented, that the validity of Muḥammad’s statements on this subject was proven.

Another clear reference to the scope of divine Revelation appears in “Some Answered Questions”, p. 218, where ‘Abdu’l-Bahá compares the “universal divine mind” of the Manifestation with the limited intellect of man. He states:

The intellectual power of the world of nature is a power of investigation, and by its researches it discovers the realities of beings and the properties of existences; but the heavenly intellectual power which is beyond nature, embraces things and is cognizant of things, knows them, understands them, is aware of mysteries, realities and divine significations, and is the discoverer of the concealed verities of the Kingdom. This divine intellectual power is the special attribute of the Holy Manifestations...

7 August 1978, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 13 With reference to your question about the “ether”, the various definitions of this word as given in the Oxford English Dictionary all refer to a physical reality, for instance, “an element”, “a substance”, “a medium”, all of which imply a physical and objective reality and, as you say, this was the concept posited by nineteenth century scientists to explain the propagation of light waves. It would have been understood in this sense by the audiences whom ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was addressing. However, in chapter XVI of “Some Answered Questions”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá devotes a whole chapter to explaining the difference between things which are “perceptible to the senses” which

He calls “objective or sensible”, and realities of the “intellect” which have “no outward form and no place”, and are “not perceptible to the senses”. He gives examples of both “kinds” of “human knowledge”. The first kind is obvious and does not need elaboration. To illustrate the second kind the examples He gives are: love, grief, happiness, the power of the intellect, the human spirit and “ethereal matter”. (In the original Persian the word “ethereal” is the same as “etheric”.) He states clearly that “Even ethereal matter, the forces of which are said in physics to be heat, light, electricity and magnetism, is an intellectual reality, and is not sensible.” In other words, the “ether” is a concept arrived at intellectually to explain certain phenomena. In due course, when scientists failed to confirm the physical existence of the “ether” by delicate experiments, they constructed other intellectual concepts to explain the same phenomena.

In considering the whole field of divinely conferred “infallibility” one must be careful to avoid the literal understanding and petty-mindedness that has so often characterised discussions of this matter in the Christian world. The Manifestation of God (and, to a lesser degree, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi) has to convey tremendous concepts covering the whole field of human life and activity to people whose present knowledge and degree of understanding are far below His. He must use the limited medium of human language against the limited and often erroneous background of His audience’s traditional knowledge and current understanding to raise them to a wholly new level of awareness and behaviour. It is a human tendency, against which the Manifestation warns us, to measure His statements against the inaccurate standard of the acquired knowledge of mankind. We tend to take them and place them within one or other of the existing categories of human philosophy or science while, in reality, they transcend these and will, if properly understood, open new and vast horizons to our understanding.

Some sayings of the Manifestation are clear and obvious. Among these are laws of behaviour. Others are elucidations which lead men from their present level of understanding to a new one. Others are pregnant allusions, the significance of which only becomes apparent as the knowledge and understanding of the reader grow. And all are integral parts of one great Revelation intended to raise mankind to a new level of its evolution.

It may well be that we shall find some statement is couched in terms familiar to the audience to which it was first addressed, but is strange now to us. For example, in answer to a question about Bahá’u’lláh’s reference to

the “fourth heaven” in the “Kitáb-i-Íqán”, the Guardian’s secretary wrote on his behalf:

As to the ascent of Christ to the fourth heaven, as revealed in the glorious “Book of Íqán”, he [the Guardian] stated that the “fourth heaven” is a term used and a belief held by the early astronomers. The followers of the Shí‘ih sect likewise held this belief. As the “Kitáb-i-Íqán” was revealed for the guidance of that sect, this term was used in conformity with the concepts of its followers.

In studying such statements, however, we must have the humility to appreciate the limitations of our own knowledge and outlook, and strive always to understand the purpose of Bahá’u’lláh in making them, trying to look upon Him with His own eyes, as it were.

3 June 1982, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 14 With regard to the harmony of science and religion, the Writings of the Central Figures and the commentaries of the Guardian make abundantly clear that the task of humanity, including the Bahá’í community that serves as the “leaven” within it, is to create a global civilization which embodies both the spiritual and material dimensions of existence. The nature and scope of such a civilization are still beyond anything the present generation can conceive. The prosecution of this vast enterprise will depend on a progressive interaction between the truths and principles of religion and the discoveries and insights of scientific inquiry. This entails living with ambiguities as a natural and inescapable feature of the process of exploring reality. It also requires us not to limit science to any particular school of thought or methodological approach postulated in the course of its development. The challenge facing Bahá’í thinkers is to provide responsible leadership in this endeavour, since it is they who have both the priceless insights of the Revelation and the advantages conferred by scientific investigation.

19 May 1995, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 15 ...the principle of harmony between religion and science, while it enables us, with the help of reason, to see through the falsity of superstitions, does not imply that truth is limited to what can be explained by current scientific concepts. Not only do all religions have their miracles and mysteries,

but religion itself, and certain fundamental religious concepts, such as the nature of the Manifestations of God, are far from being explicable by present-day scientific theories.

16 February 1996, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 16 In academia, at the present time, the common ground of understanding in relation to all aspects of human behaviour is generally materialistic, and rules out of consideration many factors such as the reality and fundamental importance of divine revelation in the life and development of humankind. Within the Bahá'í community, by definition, the common ground of understanding is the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and it is within this context that Bahá'ís pursue scholarship and freedom of discussion. How, therefore, is a Bahá'í academic to relate the two variant common grounds of understanding: the materialistic one which constrains his professional activity and the Bahá'í one which is the basis of his whole life?

The path followed by some members of other religions, is to divide their thinking into two watertight compartments: their religion and their science. A Bahá'í, however, firmly believes in the harmony between religion and science, and should resist all temptation to dichotomize his thinking. There are some areas of study, such as chemistry or mathematics, in which the problem scarcely arises. But in anything to do with human life, behaviour and history, it must affect that whole area of analysis, interpretation and explanation referred to above.

A Bahá'í academic should, of course, pursue fearlessly the truth of any matter before him, but in the elucidation of the facts that he discovers, how can he propound explanations which are in flat contradiction to the fundamental teachings of Bahá'u'lláh? Either he is hypocritically presenting an explanation which he knows to be untrue, merely for the sake of following a particular academic authority, or, if he believes the academic explanation in contradiction to the Bahá'í teachings, he should logically conclude that the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are in error; in which case he should courageously face up to the implications of such a conclusion, and think it through.

This dilemma lies before every Bahá'í academic, irrespective of the existence of Bahá'í review. It is the impression of the Universal House of Justice that most Bahá'í academics have been able to solve the problem with little difficulty, by a profound acceptance of the principle of the

harmony of science and religion, and by the use of wisdom and understanding in the couching of their conclusions.

24 March 1997, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 17 Scholarly training and professional experience will have sensitized you to the implications for the study of religion of certain assumptions about human nature and the processes of civilization that a purely materialistic interpretation of reality has imposed on scholarly activity of every kind, at least in the Western world. A related paradigm for the study of religion has gradually consolidated itself in the prevailing academic culture during the course of the present century. It insists that all spiritual and moral phenomena must be understood through the application of a scholarly apparatus devised to explore existence in a way that ignores the issues of God's continuous relationship with His creation and His intervention in human life and history. Yet, from a Bahá'í point of view, it is precisely this intervention that is the central theme of the Teachings of the Founders of the revealed religions ostensibly being studied.

As a result of this insistence, opinions that should have remained matters of learned speculation have tended to assume the character of dogma. Equally regrettable is an intolerant attitude toward other perceptions of reality, which too often characterizes the expression of these opinions. In the context of historical circumstance, this development is understandable. The rigid intolerance exhibited in the past by much of organized religion, together with the domination of scholarship long exercised by theological elites, could not but arouse strong negative reactions. From a Bahá'í point of view, however, bigotry is retrograde and unacceptable in whatever form it chooses to present itself.

20 July 1997, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

A compilation of extracts from the letters by and on behalf
of Shoghi Effendi, and communications by and on behalf of
the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled 2000

Extracts from the Writings

From letters by or on behalf of Shoghi Effendiⁱ

- 1 Among the sacred obligations devolving upon the Spiritual Assemblies is the promotion of learning, the establishing of schools and creation of the necessary academic equipment and facilities for every boy and girl.

Every child, without exception, must from his earliest years make a thorough study of the art of reading and writing, and according to his own tastes and inclinations and the degree of his capacity and powers, devote extreme diligence to the acquisition of learning beneficial arts and skills, various languages, speech, and contemporary technology.

8 June 1925

- 2 We had heard through various channels the wonderful way your children had grown to speak about the Cause in public. Shoghi Effendi's hope is that they will, the three of them, become able and devoted speakers on the Cause and subjects akin to it. To do this properly they will need a firm foundation of scientific and literary training which fortunately they are obtaining. It is just as important for the Bahá'í young boys and girls to become properly educated in colleges of high standing as it is to be spiritually developed. The mental as well as the spiritual side of the youth has to be developed before he can serve the Cause efficiently.

28 November 1926, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 3 In philanthropic enterprises and acts of charity, in promotion of the general welfare and furtherance of the public good including that of every group without any exceptions whatever, let the beloved of God attract the favourable attention of all, and lead all the rest.

Let them, freely and without charge, open the doors of their schools and their higher institutions for the study of sciences and the liberal arts, to non-Bahá'í children and youth who are poor and in need.

i Editor: Written by Shoghi Effendi unless otherwise cited.

...and next is the propagation of learning and the promulgation of Bahá'í rules of conduct, practices and laws. At this time, when the nation has awakened out of its sleep of negligence, and the Government has begun to consider the promotion and expansion of its educational establishment, let the Bahá'í representatives in that country arise in such a manner that as a result of their high endeavours in every hamlet, village and town, of every province and district, preliminary measures will be taken for the setting up of institutions for the study of sciences, the liberal arts and religion. Let Bahá'í children without any exceptions learn the fundamentals of reading and writing and familiarize themselves with the rules of conduct, the customs, practices and laws as set forth in the Book of God; and let them, in the new branches of knowledge, in the arts and technology of the day, in pure and praiseworthy characteristics -- Bahá'í conduct, the Bahá'í way of life—become so distinguished above the rest that all other communities, whether Islamic, Zoroastrian, Christian, Judaic or materialist, will of their own volition and most gladly enter their children in such advanced Bahá'í institutions of learning and entrust them to the care of Bahá'í instructors.

January 1929

- 4 As to your entrance to Reed College as an undergraduate ... No one could think more than the Master did of the great need for capacity, knowledge and a broad scientific outlook in the service of the Cause, but as against the hard and dry intellectuals, he wished such knowledge to be coupled with an intense love for the welfare of humanity.

20 September 1929, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 5 The Revelation proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, His followers believe, is divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, broad in its outlook, scientific in its method, humanitarian in its principles and dynamic in the influence it exerts on the hearts and minds of men. The mission of the Founder of their Faith, they conceive it to be, to proclaim that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, that the Founders of all past religions, though differing in the non-essential aspects of their teachings, "abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech and proclaim the same Faith". His Cause, they have already demonstrated, stands identified with, and revolves round, the principle of the organic unity of mankind as

representing the consummation of the whole process of human evolution. This final stage in this stupendous evolution, they assert, is not only necessary but inevitable, that it is gradually approaching, and that nothing short of the celestial potency with which a divinely-ordained Message can claim to be endowed can succeed in establishing it.

The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the unity of God and of His Prophets, upholds the principle of an unfettered search after truth, condemns all forms of superstition and prejudice, teaches that the fundamental purpose of religion is to promote concord and harmony, that it must go hand-in-hand with science, and that it constitutes the sole and ultimate basis of a peaceful, an ordered and progressive society. It inculcates the principle of equal opportunity, rights and privileges for both sexes, advocates compulsory education, abolishes extremes of poverty and wealth, exalts work performed in the spirit of service to the rank of worship, recommends the adoption of an auxiliary international language, and provides the necessary agencies for the establishment and safeguarding of a permanent and universal peace.

June 1933, to the High Commissioner for Palestine

- 6 It is hoped that all the Bahá'í students will ... be led to investigate and analyse the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth.

6 August 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 7 Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply. 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.

5 July 1947, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 8 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.

14 July 1947, to the United Nations Special Commission on Palestine

- 9 He thanks you for the book you are sending him. He sees no reason why you should not tell the Bahá'ís that cancer seems to be successfully treated by this method sometimes. But as we are a religion and not qualified to pass on scientific matters we cannot sponsor different treatments. We are certainly free to pass on what we have found beneficial to others.

30 September 1950, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

From letters by and on behalf of the Universal House of Justiceⁱ

- 10 We have no doubt that the Bahá'í world community will accomplish all these tasks and go forward to new achievements. The powers released by Bahá'u'lláh match the needs of the times. We may therefore be utterly confident that the new throb of energy now vibrating throughout the Cause will empower it to meet the oncoming challenges of assisting, as maturity and resources allow, the development of the social and economic life of peoples, of collaborating with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world, of influencing the exploitation and constructive uses of modern technology, and in all these ways enhancing the prestige and progress of the Faith and uplifting the conditions of the generality of mankind.

Ridván 1983

- 11 Among the favourable signs are the steadily growing strength of the steps towards world order taken initially near the beginning of this century in the creation of the League of Nations, succeeded by the more broadly based United Nations Organization; the achievement since the Second World War of independence by the majority of all the nations on earth, indicating the completion of the process of nation building, and the involvement of these fledgling nations with older ones in matters of mutual concern; the consequent vast increase in co-operation among hitherto isolated and antagonistic peoples and groups in international undertakings in the scientific, educational, legal, economic and cultural fields; the rise in recent decades of an unprecedented number of international humanitarian organizations; the spread of women's and youth movements calling for an end to war; and the spontaneous spawning of widening networks of ordinary people seeking understanding through personal communication.

The scientific and technological advances occurring in this unusually blessed century portend a great surge forward in the social evolution of the planet, and indicate the means by which the practical problems of humanity may be solved. They provide, indeed, the very means for the administration of the complex life of a united world. Yet barriers persist. Doubts, misconceptions, prejudices, suspicions and narrow self-interest beset nations and peoples in their relations one to another...

i Editor: Written by the Universal House of Justice unless otherwise cited.

If, therefore, humanity has come to a point of paralyzing conflict it must look to itself, to its own negligence, to the siren voices to which it has listened, for the source of the misunderstandings and confusion perpetrated in the name of religion. 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 increasing attention being focused on some of the most deep-rooted problems of the planet is yet another hopeful sign. Despite the obvious shortcomings of the United Nations, the more than two score declarations and conventions adopted by that organization, even where governments have not been enthusiastic in their commitment, have given ordinary people a sense of a new lease on life. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and the similar measures concerned with eliminating all forms of discrimination based on race, sex or religious belief; upholding the rights of the child; protecting all persons against being subjected to torture; eradicating hunger and malnutrition; using scientific and technological progress in the interest of peace and the benefit of mankind—all such measures, if courageously enforced and expanded, will advance the day when the spectre of war will have lost its power to dominate international relations. There is no need to stress the significance of the issues addressed by these declarations and conventions. However, a few such issues, because of their immediate relevance to establishing world peace, deserve additional comment...

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 neighbourhood 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.

October 1985

- 12 Bahá'u'lláh found the world in a “strange sleep”. But what a disturbance His coming has unloosed! The peoples of the earth had been separated, many parts of the human race socially and spiritually isolated. But the world of humanity today bears little resemblance to that which Bahá'u'lláh left a century ago. Unbeknownst to the great majority, His influence permeates all living beings. Indeed, no domain of life remains unaffected. In the burgeoning energy, the magnified perspectives, the heightened global consciousness; in the social and political turbulence, the fall of kingdoms, the emancipation of nations, the intermixture of cultures, the clamour for development; in the agitation over the extremes of wealth and poverty, the acute concern over the abuse of the environment, the leap of consciousness regarding the rights of women; in the growing tendency towards ecumenism, the increasing call for a new world order; in the astounding advances in the realms of science, technology, literature and the arts—in all this tumult, with its paradoxical manifestations of chaos and order, integration and disintegration, are the signs of His power as World Reformer, the proof of His claim as Divine Physician, the truth of His Word as the All-Knowing Counsellor.

Bahá'u'lláh wrote voluminously about the purpose of this mysterious force and its transformative effects, but the essence can be drawn from these few perspicuous words: “Through the movement of Our Pen of Glory We have, at the bidding of the Omnipotent Ordainer, breathed a new life into every human frame, and instilled into every word a fresh potency. All created things proclaim the evidences of this worldwide regeneration.” And again: “A new life is, in this age, stirring within all the peoples of the earth; and yet none hath discovered its cause or perceived its motive.” And yet again: “He Who is the Unconditioned is come, in the clouds of light, that He may quicken all created things with the breezes of His Name, the Most Merciful, and unify the world, and gather all men around this Table which hath been sent down from heaven.”

May 1992, tribute to Bahá'u'lláh on the occasion of the Centenary Commemoration at Bahji of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh

- 13 We have toiled to build a community at a period when the world has witnessed startling changes which have profoundly altered the character of society and plunged it into an unprecedented state of worry and confusion. Indeed, the world in its current condition has lost its bearings through the operation of forces it neither understands nor can control. It is a period in which great dynasties and empires have collapsed in rapid succession, in which powerful ideologies have captured the hearts of millions only to expire in infamy, in which two world wars wreaked havoc on civilized life as it was known at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the wake of such horrendous disruptions, there have been unexampled advances in the realms of science, technology and social organization; a veritable explosion of knowledge; and an even more remarkable burgeoning in the awakening and rise of masses of humanity which were previously presumed to be dormant. These masses are claiming their rightful places within the community of nations which has greatly expanded. With the simultaneous development of communications at the speed of light and transportation at the speed of sound, the world has contracted into a mere neighbourhood in which people are instantly aware of each other's affairs and have immediate access to each other. And yet, even with such miraculous advances, with the emergence of international organizations, and with valiant attempts and brilliant successes at international cooperation, nations are at woeful odds with one another, people are convulsed by economic upheavals, races feel more alienated than before and are filled with mistrust, humiliation and fear.

26 November 1992

- 14 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. Likewise, those involved should avoid belittling the views of one another...

Most important of all, as with any exploration by Bahá'ís of the beliefs and practices of their Faith, electronic discussion will serve the interests of the Cause and its members only as it is conducted within the framework of the Bahá'í Teachings and the truths they enshrine...

With regard to the harmony of science and religion, the Writings of the Central Figures and the commentaries of the Guardian make abundantly clear that the task of humanity, including the Bahá'í community that serves as the "leaven" within it, is to create a global civilization which embodies both the spiritual and material dimensions of existence. The nature and scope of such a civilization are still beyond anything the present generation can conceive. The prosecution of this vast enterprise will depend on a progressive interaction between the truths and principles of religion and the discoveries and insights of scientific inquiry. This entails living with ambiguities as a natural and inescapable feature of the process of exploring reality. It also requires us not to limit science to any particular school of thought or methodological approach postulated in the course of its development. The challenge facing Bahá'í thinkers is to provide responsible leadership in this endeavour, since it is they who have both the priceless insights of the Revelation and the advantages conferred by scientific investigation.

19 May 1995, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

SOCIAL ACTION

A compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, letters by and
on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, and communications by and on
behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled August 2020

Underlying Concepts and Principles

The Concept of Social and Economic Development Enshrined in the Teachings

- 1 Promote ye the development of the cities of God and His countries, and glorify Him therein in the joyous accents of His well-favored ones. In truth, the hearts of men are edified through the power of the tongue, even as houses and cities are built up by the hand and other means. We have assigned to every end a means for its accomplishment; avail yourselves thereof, and place your trust and confidence in God, the Omniscient, the All-Wise.
Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas
- 2 ...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
- 3 ...that which hath streamed forth from the Most Exalted Pen is conducive to the glory, the advancement and education of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Indeed it is the sovereign remedy for every disease, could they but comprehend and perceive it.
Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh
- 4 O people of God! Give ear unto that which, if heeded, will ensure the freedom, well-being, tranquillity, exaltation and advancement of all men.
Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh
- 5 Unveiled and unconcealed, this Wronged One hath, at all times, proclaimed before the face of all the peoples of the world that which will serve as the

key for unlocking the doors of sciences, of arts, of knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and wealth.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 6 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, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 7 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.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 8 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.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 9 This servant appealeth to every diligent and enterprising soul to exert his utmost endeavour 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.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 10 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, The Tabernacle of Unity

11 It behoveth the loved ones of God to occupy themselves under all circumstances with that which is conducive to the edification of human souls, the advancement of the world of being, and the exaltation of the Word of God, the realization of which dependeth upon the deliberations of the trustees of the House of Justice. Well is it with them that strive to render service to the world of humanity. The influence of these souls will lead the world from hardship to comfort, from poverty to wealth, and from abasement to glory.
Bahá'u'lláh, From a Tablet

12 Once in session, it behoveth them to converse, on behalf of God's servants, upon the affairs and interests of all ... In like manner, they should consider such matters as the refinement of manners, the preservation of human dignity, the development of cities, and the polity which God hath made a bulwark for His lands and a fortress for His people.
Bahá'u'lláh, From a Tablet

13 God has given us eyes, that we may look about us at the world, and lay hold of whatsoever will further civilization and the arts of living. He has given us ears, that we may hear and profit by the wisdom of scholars and philosophers and arise to promote and practice it. Senses and faculties have been bestowed upon us, to be devoted to the service of the general good; so that we, distinguished above all other forms of life for perceptiveness and reason, should labor at all times and along all lines, whether the occasion be great or small, ordinary or extraordinary, until all mankind are safely gathered into the impregnable stronghold of knowledge. 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.
'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 14 Exert every effort in the fields of development and of civilization, in the acquisition of knowledge, the increase of trade, the improvement of agriculture and the promotion of modern discoveries.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 15 Guide and counsel at all times the friends of God, one and all, to be occupied day and night with that which is conducive to Iran's abiding glory, and to exert the utmost effort and the greatest endeavour in order to refine character and manners, labour assiduously, aim for lofty goals, promote love and affection, and foster the progress and development of industry, agriculture and trade.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 16 The friends must engage in the work of developing Persia, that is, they must exert great efforts in the promotion of agriculture, industry, trade, education, arts, and sciences.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 17 And now, in gratitude for the assistance, confirmation, protection, and loving-kindness vouchsafed by the All-Glorious Lord, the beloved of God must with great wisdom strive to strengthen the pillars of the Cause of God, to establish and promote the religion of God, to diffuse the fragrances of God, and to exalt the Word of God. They must exert every effort for the advancement of the souls in all stages of existence. They must educate the children and teach them useful arts, reach ever higher degrees of civilization, multiply national crafts and industry, promote trade, improve agriculture, provide learning for all, educate women and honour them, and show consideration for the handmaidens of God. They must strive with heart and soul to create love and unity among the friends, to serve the government, and to be true to the royal throne, the well-wishers of everyone, and obedient to the valiant sovereign.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 18 The matter of Teaching, its direction, its ways and means, its extension, its consolidation, essential as they are to the interests of the Cause, constitute by no means the only issue which should receive the full attention of these Assemblies. A careful study of Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets will

reveal that other duties, no less vital to the interests of the Cause, devolve upon the elected representatives of the friends in every locality...

They must do their utmost to extend at all times the helping hand to the poor, the sick, the disabled, the orphan, the widow, irrespective of color, caste and creed.

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...

They must undertake the arrangement of the regular meetings of the friends, the feasts and the anniversaries, as well as the special gatherings designed to serve and promote the social, intellectual and spiritual interests of their fellowmen.

12 March 1923, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 19 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-Adhikár*, the spiritual centre of every Bahá'í community round which must flourish dependencies dedicated to the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific advancement of mankind. Thus, we can readily appreciate that although it has hitherto been impracticable for Bahá'í institutions generally to emphasize development activities, the concept of social and economic development is enshrined in the sacred Teachings of our Faith. The beloved Master, through His illuminating words and deeds, set the example for the application of this concept to the reconstruction of society. Witness, for instance, what social and economic progress the Iranian believers attained under His loving guidance and, subsequently, with the unfailing encouragement of the Guardian of the Cause.

20 October 1983, Universal House of Justice

- 20 'Abdu'l-Bahá has extolled "two calls" to "success and prosperity" that can be heard from the "heights of the happiness of mankind". One is the call of "civilization", of "progress of the material world". It comprises the "laws", "regulations", "arts and sciences" through which humanity develops. The other is the "soul-stirring call of God", on which depends the eternal happiness of humanity. "This second call", the Master has explained, "is founded upon the instructions and exhortations of the Lord and the admonitions and altruistic emotions belonging to the realm of morality which, like unto a brilliant light, brighten and illumine the lamp of the realities of mankind. Its penetrative power is the Word of God." As you continue to labour in your clusters, you will be drawn further and further into the life of the society around you and will be challenged to extend the process of systematic learning in which you are engaged to encompass a growing range of human endeavours. In the approaches you take, the methods you adopt, and the instruments you employ, you will need to achieve the same degree of coherence that characterizes the pattern of growth presently under way.
- Ridván 2008, Universal House of Justice*

- 21 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." 'Abdu'l-Bahá urges the friends to "become distinguished in all the virtues of the human world—for faithfulness and sincerity, for justice and fidelity, for firmness and steadfastness, for philanthropic deeds and service to the human world, for love toward every human being, for unity and accord with all people, for removing prejudices and promoting international peace." Further, in a letter written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi explains that "much as the friends must guard against in any way 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”. In another letter written on his behalf in 1948, when racial inequality was enshrined in the laws of many states in the United States, he indicates that there is “no objection at all to the students taking part in something so obviously akin to the spirit of our teachings as a campus demonstration against race prejudice.” Bahá’ís must, therefore, be tireless in addressing, through word and deed, a range of social issues.

23 December 2008, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Collective Maturity and an Ever-Advancing Civilization

- 22 All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization.
Bahá’u’lláh, Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh

- 23 All men have been called into being for the betterment of the world. It behoveth every soul to arise and serve his brethren for the sake of God.
Bahá’u’lláh, The Tabernacle of Unity

- 24 And the honor and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world’s multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight.
‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 25 O namesake of the Chaste One!ⁱ The sea of bounty hath surged so high as to flood the shores of existence with the waters of infinite grace. The world of being hath therefore been set in wondrous motion and hath been revived and blessed. Minds have soared to new heights, understanding hath increased, movement hath become rapid, and progress hath become powerfully evident in all aspects of life. Thus, great discoveries have been made, mighty enterprises have been established, wonderful inventions have appeared, and the mysteries of the universe have stepped forth from the

i i.e., Yahyá, the Arabic name of John the Baptist, who was titled “the Chaste”. See Qur’án 3:39.

invisible plane into the realm of the visible. Wherefore must the friends, one and all, exhibit a signal effort to create a new invention, discover a new science, engage in a great enterprise, or manifest a power or a bestowal in the human world. I beseech God that thou mayest be assisted and confirmed under all conditions. The Glory of Glories rest upon thee.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 26 All created things have their degree, or stage, of maturity. The period of maturity in the life of a tree is the time of its fruit bearing. The maturity of a plant is the time of its blossoming and flower. The animal attains a stage of full growth and completeness, and in the human kingdom man reaches his maturity when the lights of intelligence have their greatest power and development...

Similarly, there are periods and stages in the life of the aggregate world of humanity, which at one time was passing through its degree of childhood, at another its time of youth but now has entered its long presaged period of maturity, the evidences of which are everywhere visible and apparent. Therefore, the requirements and conditions of former periods have changed and merged into exigencies which distinctly characterize the present age of the world of mankind. That which was applicable to human needs during the early history of the race could neither meet nor satisfy the demands of this day and period of newness and consummation. Humanity has emerged from its former degrees of limitation and preliminary training. Man must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moralities, new capacities. New bounties, bestowals and perfections are awaiting and already descending upon him. The gifts and graces of the period of youth, although timely and sufficient during the adolescence of the world of mankind, are now incapable of meeting the requirements of its maturity.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 27 "The heights," Bahá'u'lláh Himself testifies, "which, through the most gracious favor of God, mortal man can attain in this Day are as yet unrevealed to his sight. The world of being hath never had, nor doth it yet possess, the capacity for such a revelation. The day, however, is approaching when the potentialities of so great a favor will, by virtue of His behest, be manifested unto men."

For the revelation of so great a favor a period of intense turmoil and wide-spread suffering would seem to be indispensable. Resplendent as has been the Age that has witnessed the inception of the Mission with which Bahá'u'lláh has been entrusted, the interval which must elapse ere that Age yields its choicest fruit must, it is becoming increasingly apparent, be overshadowed by such moral and social gloom as can alone prepare an unrepentant humanity for the prize she is destined to inherit.

Into such a period we are now steadily and irresistibly moving. Amidst the shadows which are increasingly gathering about us we can faintly discern the glimmerings of Bahá'u'lláh's unearthly sovereignty appearing fitfully on the horizon of history. To us, the "generation of the half-light," living at a time which may be designated as the period of the incubation of the World Commonwealth envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh, has been assigned a task whose high privilege we can never sufficiently appreciate, and the arduousness of which we can as yet but dimly recognize. We may well believe, we who are called upon to experience the operation of the dark forces destined to unloose a flood of agonizing afflictions, that the darkest hour that must precede the dawn of the Golden Age of our Faith has not yet struck. Deep as is the gloom that already encircles the world, the afflictive ordeals which that world is to suffer are still in preparation, nor can their blackness be as yet imagined. We stand on the threshold of an age whose convulsions proclaim alike the death-pangs of the old order and the birth-pangs of the new. Through the generating influence of the Faith announced by Bahá'u'lláh this New World Order may be said to have been conceived. We can, at the present moment, experience its stirrings in the womb of a travailing age—an age waiting for the appointed hour at which it can cast its burden and yield its fairest fruit.

11 March 1936, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 28 As we view the world around us, we are compelled to observe the manifold evidences of that universal fermentation which, in every continent of the globe and in every department of human life, be it religious, social, economic or political, is purging and reshaping humanity in anticipation of the Day when the wholeness of the human race will have been recognized and its unity established. A twofold process, however, can be distinguished, each tending, in its own way and with an accelerated momentum, to bring to a climax the forces that are transforming the face of our planet. The first is essentially an integrating process, while the second is fundamentally

disruptive. The former, as it steadily evolves, unfolds a System which may well serve as a pattern for that world polity towards which a strangely-disordered world is continually advancing; while the latter, as its disintegrating influence deepens, tends to tear down, with increasing violence, the antiquated barriers that seek to block humanity's progress towards its destined goal. The constructive process stands associated with the nascent Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and is the harbinger of the New World Order that Faith must ere long establish. The destructive forces that characterize the other should be identified with a civilization that has refused to answer to the expectation of a new age, and is consequently falling into chaos and decline.

11 March 1936, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 29 The long ages of infancy and childhood, through which the human race had to pass, have receded into the background. Humanity is now experiencing the commotions invariably associated with the most turbulent stage of its evolution, the stage of adolescence, when the impetuosity of youth and its vehemence reach their climax, and must gradually be superseded by the calmness, the wisdom, and the maturity that characterize the stage of manhood. Then will the human race reach that stature of ripeness which will enable it to acquire all the powers and capacities upon which its ultimate development must depend.

11 March 1936, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 30 Of the principles enshrined in these Tablets the most vital of them all is the principle of the oneness and wholeness of the human race, which may well be regarded as the hall-mark of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and the pivot of His teachings.... "We, verily," He declares, "have come to unite and weld together all that dwell on earth." "So potent is the light of unity," He further states, "that it can illuminate the whole earth." ... Unity, He states, is the goal that "excelleth every goal" and an aspiration which is "the monarch of all aspirations." "The world," He proclaims, "is but one country, and mankind its citizens." He further affirms that the unification of mankind, the last stage in the evolution of humanity towards maturity is inevitable, that "soon will the present day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead," that "the whole earth is now in a state of pregnancy," that "the day is approaching when it will have yielded its noblest fruits, when from it will have sprung forth the loftiest trees, the most enchanting blossoms, the most heavenly blessings." He deplores the defectiveness of the prevailing

order, exposes the inadequacy of patriotism as a directing and controlling force in human society, and regards the “love of mankind” and service to its interests as the worthiest and most laudable objects of human endeavor.

Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By

- 31 Inseparable from the Bahá'í perspective on politics is a particular conception of history, its course and direction. Humanity, it is the firm conviction of every follower of Bahá'u'lláh, is approaching today the crowning stage in a millennia-long process which has brought it from its collective infancy to the threshold of maturity—a stage that will witness the unification of the human race. Not unlike the individual who passes through the unsettled yet promising period of adolescence, during which latent powers and capacities come to light, humankind as a whole is in the midst of an unprecedented transition. Behind so much of the turbulence and commotion of contemporary life are the fits and starts of a humanity struggling to come of age. Widely accepted practices and conventions, cherished attitudes and habits, are one by one being rendered obsolete, as the imperatives of maturity begin to assert themselves.

Bahá'ís are encouraged to see in the revolutionary changes taking place in every sphere of life the interaction of two fundamental processes. One is destructive in nature, while the other is integrative; both serve to carry humanity, each in its own way, along the path leading towards its full maturity. The operation of the former is everywhere apparent—in the vicissitudes that have afflicted time-honoured institutions, in the impotence of leaders at all levels to mend the fractures appearing in the structure of society, in the dismantling of social norms that have long held in check unseemly passions, and in the despondency and indifference exhibited not only by individuals but also by entire societies that have lost any vital sense of purpose. Though devastating in their effects, the forces of disintegration tend to sweep away barriers that block humanity's progress, opening space for the process of integration to draw diverse groups together and disclosing new opportunities for cooperation and collaboration. Bahá'ís, of course, strive to align themselves, individually and collectively, with forces associated with the process of integration, which, they are confident, will continue to gain in strength, no matter how bleak the immediate horizons. Human affairs will be utterly reorganized, and an era of universal peace inaugurated...

...Animating the Bahá'í effort to discover the nature of a new set of relationships among these three protagonists [the individual, the institutions, and the community] is a vision of a future society that derives inspiration from the analogy drawn by Bahá'u'lláh, in a Tablet penned nearly a century and a half ago, which compares the world to the human body. Cooperation is the principle that governs the functioning of that system. Just as the appearance of the rational soul in this realm of existence is made possible through the complex association of countless cells, whose organization in tissues and organs allows for the realization of distinctive capacities, so can civilization be seen as the outcome of a set of interactions among closely integrated, diverse components which have transcended the narrow purpose of tending to their own existence. And just as the viability of every cell and every organ is contingent upon the health of the body as a whole, so should the prosperity of every individual, every family, every people be sought in the well-being of the entire human race.

2 March 2013, Universal House of Justice

Oneness and Justice

- 32 ...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...

...Shut your eyes to estrangement, then fix your gaze upon unity. Cleave tenaciously unto that which will lead to the well-being and tranquillity of all mankind. This span of earth is but one homeland and one habitation. It behoveth you to abandon vainglory which causeth alienation and to set your hearts on whatever will ensure harmony.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 33 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. If the rulers and kings of the earth, the symbols of the power of God, exalted be His glory, arise and resolve to dedicate themselves to whatever will promote the highest interests of the whole of humanity, the reign of justice will assuredly

be established amongst the children of men, and the effulgence of its light will envelop the whole earth...

...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 ... There can be no doubt whatever that if the daystar 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, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 34 We entreat God to deliver the light of equity and the sun of justice from the thick clouds of waywardness, and cause them to shine forth upon men. No light can compare with the light of justice. The establishment of order in the world and the tranquillity of the nations depend upon it.

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

- 35 The second attribute of perfection is justice and impartiality. This means to have no regard for one's own personal benefits and selfish advantages, and to carry out the laws of God without the slightest concern for anything else. It means to see one's self as only one of the servants of God, the All-Possessing, and except for aspiring to spiritual distinction, never attempting to be singled out from the others. It means to consider the welfare of the community as one's own. It means, in brief, to regard humanity as a single individual, and one's own self as a member of that corporeal form, and to know of a certainty that if pain or injury afflicts any member of that body, it must inevitably result in suffering for all the rest.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 36 O ye beloved of God! Know ye, verily, that the happiness of mankind lieth in the unity and the harmony of the human race, and that spiritual and material developments are conditioned upon love and amity among all men.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 37 O well-wisher of the world of humanity! Praised be God that thine intention was good, that thou didst acquire knowledge and learning, and that thy wish is to engage in service to the peoples of the world. I beseech God that thou mayest succeed in this purpose and mayest manifest that which lieth concealed within thy heart. In the world of creation, good

intentions are of two kinds. One kind is particular and aimed at specific people; this is limited and its scope is extremely narrow. The other kind is directed towards all created things; it is all-pervading and extensive in range. Whatsoever is undertaken for the sake of the universal good is of God. Therefore, undertakings that relate somewhat to the general good may be accomplished among civilized nations, but the only thing that is directed wholly towards the general good is the Word of God and Divine wisdom. This is the power which can effect a fundamental change and transformation in the world of being. This force is creative; it is generative and revitalizing and bringeth forth a new creation. Exert thine utmost endeavour, therefore, in pursuing that which will be the cause of progress of the world of humanity and will lead to perpetual exaltation and eternal life. Upon thee be greetings and praise.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 38 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 message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. It constitutes a challenge, at once bold and universal, to outworn shibboleths of national creeds—creeds that have had their day and which must, in the ordinary course of events as shaped and controlled by Providence, give way to a new gospel, fundamentally different from, and infinitely superior to, what the world has already conceived. 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.

28 November 1931, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 39 Their Faith they conceive to be essentially non-political, supra-national in character, rigidly non-partisan, and entirely dissociated from nationalistic ambitions, pursuits, and purposes. Such a Faith knows no division of class or of party. It subordinates, without hesitation or equivocation, every particularistic interest, be it personal, regional, or national, to the paramount interests of humanity, firmly convinced that in a world of inter-dependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no abiding benefit can be conferred upon the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are ignored or neglected.

11 March 1936, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 40 Unification of the whole of mankind is the hallmark of the stage which human society is now approaching. Unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation have been successively attempted and fully established. World unity is the goal towards which a harassed humanity is striving. Nation-building has come to an end. The anarchy inherent in state sovereignty is moving towards a climax. A world, growing to maturity, must abandon this fetish, recognize the oneness and wholeness of human relationships, and establish once for all the machinery that can best incarnate this fundamental principle of its life.

11 March 1936, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 41 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 neighbourhood 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.

October 1985, Universal House of Justice

- 42 ...not only are humanity's talents and capacities shared by all its members, but its problems and afflictions likewise ultimately affect all. Whether in sickness or health, the human family constitutes a single species, and the condition of any part of it cannot be intelligently considered in isolation from this systemic oneness. As the present state of the world illustrates all

too clearly, attempts by the leadership of society to proceed otherwise is merely to exacerbate the problems.

27 November 2001, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 43 Penetrating, indeed, is Shoghi Effendi's depiction of the process of disintegration accelerating in the world. Equally striking is the accuracy with which he analysed 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.

Riḍván 2006, Universal House of Justice

- 44 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.

23 December 2008, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 45 As you know from your study of the Bahá'í writings, the principle that is to infuse all facets of organized life on the planet is the oneness of humankind, the hallmark of the age of maturity. That humanity constitutes a single

people is a truth that, once viewed with scepticism, claims widespread acceptance today. The rejection of deeply ingrained prejudices and a growing sense of world citizenship are among the signs of this heightened awareness. Yet, however promising the rise in collective consciousness may be, it should be seen as only the first step of a process that will take decades—nay, centuries—to unfold. For the principle of the oneness of humankind, as proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh, asks not merely for cooperation among people and nations. It calls for a complete reconceptualization of the relationships that sustain society. The deepening environmental crisis, driven by a system that condones the pillage of natural resources to satisfy an insatiable thirst for more, suggests how entirely inadequate is the present conception of humanity's relationship with nature; the deterioration of the home environment, with the accompanying rise in the systematic exploitation of women and children worldwide, makes clear how pervasive are the misbegotten notions that define relations within the family unit; the persistence of despotism, on the one hand, and the increasing disregard for authority, on the other, reveal how unsatisfactory to a maturing humanity is the current relationship between the individual and the institutions of society; the concentration of material wealth in the hands of a minority of the world's population gives an indication of how fundamentally ill-conceived are relationships among the many sectors of what is now an emerging global community. The principle of the oneness of humankind implies, then, an organic change in the very structure of society.

2 March 2013, Universal House of Justice

- 46 ...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”. With what insight and eloquence did he expound upon the far-reaching implications of this cardinal principle! Plainly he saw, amidst the turbulence of world affairs, how the reality that humanity is one people must be the starting point for a new order. The vast array of relations among nations—and within them—all need to be re-envisioned in this light.

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. Seemingly countless permutations of “us” and “them” define group identities ever more narrowly and in contrast to one another. Over time, this splintering into divergent interest groups has weakened the cohesion of society itself. Rival conceptions about the primacy of a particular people are peddled to the exclusion of the truth that humanity is on a common journey in which all are protagonists. Consider how radically different such a fragmented conception of human identity is from the one that follows from a recognition of the oneness of humanity. In this perspective, the diversity that characterizes the human family, far from contradicting its oneness, endows it with richness. Unity, in its Bahá’í expression, contains the essential concept of diversity, distinguishing it from uniformity. 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 fulfilment.

18 January 2019, Universal House of Justice

The Role of Knowledge

- 47 Knowledge is one of the wondrous gifts of God. It is incumbent upon everyone to acquire it. Such arts and material means as are now manifest have been achieved by virtue of His knowledge and wisdom which have been revealed in Epistles and Tablets through His Most Exalted Pen—a Pen out of whose treasury pearls of wisdom and utterance and the arts and crafts of the world are brought to light.

Bahá’u’lláh, Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh

- 48 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 ... 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.

Bahá’u’lláh, Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh

- 49 The Great Being saith: The learned of the day must direct the people to acquire those branches of knowledge which are of use, that both the learned themselves and the generality of mankind may derive benefits therefrom. Such academic pursuits as begin and end in words alone have never been and will never be of any worth.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 50 In this day the choicest fruit of the tree of knowledge is that which serveth the welfare of humanity and safeguardeth its interests.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Tabernacle of Unity

- 51 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, from a Tablet

- 52 ...every branch of learning, conjoined with the love of God, is approved and worthy of praise; but bereft of His love, learning is barren—indeed, it bringeth on madness. Every kind of knowledge, every science, is as a tree: if the fruit of it be the love of God, then is it a blessed tree, but if not, that tree is but dried-up wood, and shall only feed the fire.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 53 Make every effort to acquire the advanced knowledge of the day, and strain every nerve to carry forward the divine civilization.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 54 Good behaviour and high moral character must come first, for unless the character be trained, acquiring knowledge will only prove injurious. Knowledge is praiseworthy when it is coupled with ethical conduct and virtuous character; otherwise it is a deadly poison, a frightful danger. A physician of evil character, and who betrayeth his trust, can bring on death, and become the source of numerous infirmities and diseases.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 55 The harder they strive to widen the scope of their knowledge, the better and more gratifying will be the result. Let the loved ones of God, whether young or old, whether male or female, each according to his capabilities, bestir themselves and spare no efforts to acquire the various current branches of knowledge, both spiritual and secular, and of the arts. Whensoever they gather in their meetings let their conversation be confined to learned subjects and to information on the knowledge of the day.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 56 It is clear that learning is the greatest bestowal of God; that knowledge and the acquirement thereof is a blessing from Heaven. Thus is it incumbent upon the friends of God to exert such an effort and strive with such eagerness to promote divine knowledge, culture and the sciences, that ere long those who are schoolchildren today will become the most erudite of all the fraternity of the wise. This is a service rendered unto God Himself, and it is one of His inescapable commandments.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 57 ...the religion of God is the promoter of truth, the establisher of science and learning, the supporter of knowledge, the civilizer of the human race, the discoverer of the secrets of existence, and the enlightener of the horizons of the world. How then could it oppose knowledge? God forbid! On the contrary, in the sight of God knowledge is the greatest human virtue and the noblest human perfection. To oppose knowledge is pure ignorance, and he who abhors knowledge and learning is not a human being but a mindless animal. For knowledge is light, life, felicity, perfection, and beauty, and causes the soul to draw nigh to the divine threshold. It is the honour and glory of the human realm and the greatest of God's bounties. Knowledge is identical to guidance, and ignorance is the essence of error.

Happy are those who spend their days in the pursuit of knowledge, in the discovery of the secrets of the universe, and in the meticulous investigation of truth!

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions

- 58 All the sciences, branches of learning, arts, inventions, institutions, undertakings, and discoveries have resulted from the comprehension of the rational soul. These were once impenetrable secrets, hidden mysteries, and unknown realities, and the rational soul gradually discovered them and

brought them out of the invisible plane into the realm of the visible. This is the greatest power of comprehension in the world of nature, and the uttermost limit of its flight is to comprehend the realities, signs, and properties of contingent things.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions

- 59 Science is the first emanation from God toward man. All created beings embody the potentiality of material perfection, but the power of intellectual investigation and scientific acquisition is a higher virtue specialized to man alone. Other beings and organisms are deprived of this potentiality and attainment. God has created or deposited this love of reality in man. The development and progress of a nation is according to the measure and degree of that nation's scientific attainments. Through this means its greatness is continually increased, and day by day the welfare and prosperity of its people are assured.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 60 All the heavenly Books, divine Prophets, sages and philosophers agree that warfare is destructive to human development, and peace constructive. They agree that war and strife strike at the foundations of humanity. Therefore, a power is needed to prevent war and to proclaim and establish the oneness of humanity.

But knowledge of the need of this power is not sufficient. Realizing that wealth is desirable is not becoming wealthy. The admission that scientific attainment is praiseworthy does not confer scientific knowledge. Acknowledgment of the excellence of honor does not make a man honorable. Knowledge of human conditions and the needed remedy for them is not the cause of their betterment. To admit that health is good does not constitute health. A skilled physician is needed to remedy existing human conditions. As a physician is required to have complete knowledge of pathology, diagnosis, therapeutics and treatment, so this World Physician must be wise, skillful and capable before health will result. His mere knowledge is not health; it must be applied and the remedy carried out.

The attainment of any object is conditioned upon knowledge, volition and action. Unless these three conditions are forthcoming, there is no execution or accomplishment.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 61 Acceptance of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh carries with it the commitment to strive for individual spiritual maturity and to participate in collective efforts to build a thriving society and contribute to the common weal. Science and religion are the two inseparable, reciprocal systems of knowledge impelling the advancement of civilization. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "The progress of the world of humanity dependeth upon knowledge, and its decline is due to ignorance. When the human race gaineth in knowledge it becometh heavenly, and when it acquireth learning it taketh on lordly attributes." To seek to acquire knowledge and learning and to study useful sciences and crafts are among the fundamental beliefs of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh. Therefore, the long-term solution you have chosen as a means of counteracting the difficulties imposed upon you in the path of higher education is to engage in constructive collaboration with other proponents of peace and reconciliation to build a progressive and orderly society committed to the promotion of knowledge and social justice.

17 June 2011, Universal House of Justice

- 62 One of the critical aspects of a conceptual framework that will require careful attention in the years ahead is the generation and application of knowledge ... At the heart of most disciplines of human knowledge is a degree of consensus about methodology—an understanding of methods and how to use them appropriately to systematically investigate reality to achieve reliable results and sound conclusions. 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.

24 July 2013, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 63 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.”

27 December 2017, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

The Nature of Bahá'í Social and Economic Development

Coherence between the Material and Spiritual Dimensions of Existence

- 64 ...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.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Íqán

- 65 Religion is verily the chief instrument for the establishment of order in the world and of tranquillity amongst its peoples ... The greater the decline of religion, the more grievous the waywardness of the ungodly. This cannot but lead in the end to chaos and confusion.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 66 ...religion must be in conformity with science and reason, so that it may influence the hearts of men. The foundation must be solid and must not consist of imitations.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, First Tablet to The Hague

- 67 ...although material civilization is one of the means for the progress of the world of mankind, yet until it becomes combined with Divine civilization, the desired result, which is the felicity of mankind, will not be attained.... Material civilization is like a lamp-glass. Divine civilization is the lamp itself and the glass without the light is dark. Material civilization is like the body. No matter how infinitely graceful, elegant and beautiful it may be, it is dead. Divine civilization is like the spirit, and the body gets its life from the spirit, otherwise it becomes a corpse. It has thus been made evident that the world of mankind is in need of the breaths of the Holy Spirit. Without

the spirit the world of mankind is lifeless, and without this light the world of mankind is in utter darkness.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, First Tablet to The Hague

- 68 ...until material achievements, physical accomplishments and human virtues are reinforced by spiritual perfections, luminous qualities and characteristics of mercy, no fruit or result shall issue therefrom, nor will the happiness of the world of humanity, which is the ultimate aim, be attained. For although, on the one hand, material achievements and the development of the physical world produce prosperity, which exquisitely manifests its intended aims, on the other hand dangers, severe calamities and violent afflictions are imminent.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 69 We hope that the beloved of God and the handmaids of the Merciful will, in accordance with the heavenly Teachings, serve the oneness of the world of humanity, regard religion as the basis of love and fellowship amongst the people, strive to harmonize religion and science, become a treasury of riches for the poor and a shelter and asylum for the fugitive, bring joy and radiance to the destitute, and aid the needy through the strengthening grace of the All-Merciful.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 70 Material civilization is like unto the lamp, while spiritual civilization is the light in that lamp. If the material and spiritual civilization become united, then we will have the light and the lamp together, and the outcome will be perfect. For material civilization is like unto a beautiful body, and spiritual civilization is like unto the spirit of life. If that wondrous spirit of life enters this beautiful body, the body will become a channel for the distribution and development of the perfections of humanity.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 71 For man two wings are necessary. One wing is physical power and material civilization; the other is spiritual power and divine civilization. With one wing only, flight is impossible. Two wings are essential. Therefore, no matter how much material civilization advances, it cannot attain to perfection except through the uplift of spiritual civilization.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 72 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.... Therefore, the material and the divine, or merciful, civilizations must progress together until the highest aspirations and desires of humanity shall become realized.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 73 Scientific knowledge is the highest attainment upon the human plane, for science is the discoverer of realities. It is of two kinds: material and spiritual. Material science is the investigation of natural phenomena; divine science is the discovery and realization of spiritual verities. The world of humanity must acquire both. A bird has two wings; it cannot fly with one. Material and spiritual science are the two wings of human uplift and attainment. Both are necessary—one the natural, the other supernatural; one material, the other divine.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 74 God has endowed man with intelligence and reason whereby he is required to determine the verity of questions and propositions. If religious beliefs

and opinions are found contrary to the standards of science, they are mere superstitions and imaginations; for the antithesis of knowledge is ignorance, and the child of ignorance is superstition. Unquestionably there must be agreement between true religion and science. If a question be found contrary to reason, faith and belief in it are impossible, and there is no outcome but wavering and vacillation.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 75 No matter how much the world of humanity advances in material civilization, it is nevertheless in need of the spiritual development mentioned in the Gospel. The virtues of the material world are limited, whereas divine virtues are unlimited. Inasmuch as material virtues are limited, man's need of the perfections of the divine world is unlimited.

Throughout human history we find that although the very apex of human virtues has been reached at various times, yet they were limited, whereas divine attainments have ever been unbounded and infinite. The limited is ever in need of the unlimited. The material must be correlated with the spiritual. The material may be likened to the body, but divine virtues are the breathings of the Holy Spirit itself. The body without spirit is not capable of real accomplishment. Although it may be in the utmost condition of beauty and excellence, it is, nevertheless, in need of the spirit. The chimney of the lamp, no matter how polished and perfect it be, is in need of the light. Without the light, the lamp or candle is not illuminating. Without the spirit, the body is not productive.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 76 This last world war together with the treaty of peace and its consequences have taught humanity that unless national, religious and political prejudices be abolished, unless universal brotherhood be established, unless spiritual civilization be given an equal footing with material civilization and thereby change the standard of individual, national and international morality, the world is doomed to failure and society to utter destruction.

Circa 1924, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 77 The present social and economic problems that are facing the British people are surely occupying their whole attention, but they should also operate as a reminder and draw them closer to spiritual matters. The people have to be made conscious of the fact that without a complete change in our

outlook and a total reform of the guiding principles of our life, such as the Cause advocates, our social and economic problems cannot be solved nor our conditions ameliorated.

7 November 1931, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 78 It is not merely material well-being that people need. What they desperately need is to know how to live their lives—they need to know who they are, to what purpose they exist, and how they should act towards one another; and, once they know the answers to these questions they need to be helped to gradually apply these answers to everyday behaviour. It is to the solution of this basic problem of mankind that the greater part of all our energy and resources should be directed...

19 November 1974, Universal House of Justice

- 79 With regard to the harmony of science and religion, the Writings of the Central Figures and the commentaries of the Guardian make abundantly clear that the task of humanity, including the Bahá'í community that serves as the "leaven" within it, is to create a global civilization which embodies both the spiritual and material dimensions of existence. The nature and scope of such a civilization are still beyond anything the present generation can conceive. The prosecution of this vast enterprise will depend on a progressive interaction between the truths and principles of religion and the discoveries and insights of scientific inquiry. This entails living with ambiguities as a natural and inescapable feature of the process of exploring reality. It also requires us not to limit science to any particular school of thought or methodological approach postulated in the course of its development. The challenge facing Bahá'í thinkers is to provide responsible leadership in this endeavour, since it is they who have both the priceless insights of the Revelation and the advantages conferred by scientific investigation.

19 May 1995, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 80 ...religion and science are the two indispensable knowledge systems through which the potentialities of consciousness develop. Far from being in conflict with one another, these fundamental modes of the mind's exploration of reality are mutually dependent and have been most productive in those rare but happy periods of history when their complementary nature has been recognized and they have been able to work together. The insights and skills

generated by scientific advance will have always to look to the guidance of spiritual and moral commitment to ensure their appropriate application; religious convictions, no matter how cherished they may be, must submit, willingly and gratefully, to impartial testing by scientific methods.

April 2002, Universal House of Justice

- 81 ...science and religion are two complementary systems of knowledge and practice by which human beings come to understand the world around them and through which civilization advances ... religion without science soon degenerates into superstition and fanaticism, while science without religion becomes the tool of crude materialism ... true prosperity, the fruit of a dynamic coherence between the material and spiritual requirements of life, will recede further and further out of reach as long as consumerism continues to act as opium to the human soul...

2 March 2013, Universal House of Justice

- 82 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.

18 December 2014, Universal House of Justice

Capacity Building, Participation, and Organic Growth

- 83 We must now highly resolve to arise and lay hold of all those instrumentalities that promote the peace and well-being and happiness, the knowledge, culture and industry, the dignity, value and station, of the entire human

race. Thus, through the restoring waters of pure intention and unselfish effort, the earth of human potentialities will blossom with its own latent excellence and flower into praiseworthy qualities, and bear and flourish until it comes to rival that rose garden of knowledge which belonged to our forefathers.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 84 The world of politics is like the world of man; he is seed at first, and then passes by degrees to the condition of embryo and foetus, acquiring a bone structure, being clothed with flesh, taking on his own special form, until at last he reaches the plane where he can befittingly fulfill the words: "the most excellent of Makers." Just as this is a requirement of creation and is based on the universal Wisdom, the political world in the same way cannot instantaneously evolve from the nadir of defectiveness to the zenith of rightness and perfection. Rather, qualified individuals must strive by day and by night, using all those means which will conduce to progress, until the government and the people develop along every line from day to day and even from moment to moment.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 85 In all the prophetic Dispensations, philanthropic affairs were confined to their respective peoples only—with the exception of small matters, such as charity, which it was permissible to extend to others. But in this wonderful Dispensation, philanthropic undertakings are for all humanity, without any exception, because this is the manifestation of the mercifulness of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a talk

- 86 It is even as the seed: The tree exists within it but is hidden and concealed; when the seed grows and develops, the tree appears in its fullness. In like manner, the growth and development of all beings proceeds by gradual degrees. This is the universal and divinely ordained law and the natural order. The seed does not suddenly become the tree; the embryo does not at once become the man; the mineral substance does not in a moment become the stone: No, all these grow and develop gradually until they attain the limit of perfection.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions

- 87 In a living organism the full measure of its development is not known or realized at the time of its inception or birth. Development and progression imply gradual stages or degrees. For example, spiritual advancement may be likened to the light of the early dawn. Although this dawn light is dim and pale, a wise man who views the march of the sunrise at its very beginning can foretell the ascendancy of the sun in its full glory and effulgence. He knows for a certainty that it is the beginning of its manifestation and that later it will assume great power and potency. Again, for example, if he takes a seed and observes that it is sprouting, he will know assuredly that it will ultimately become a tree.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 88 The realities of things have been revealed in this radiant century, and that which is true must come to the surface. Among these realities is the principle of the equality of man and woman—equal rights and prerogatives in all things appertaining to humanity ... Woman must especially devote her energies and abilities toward the industrial and agricultural sciences, seeking to assist mankind in that which is most needful. By this means she will demonstrate capability and ensure recognition of equality in the social and economic equation.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 89 Another essential requirement is the expediting of the tasks of transcribing, collecting and despatching the Sacred Writings to the Holy Land, and recording the general history of the Cause of God. The Western believers in the far-flung reaches of the free world, who have set about prosecuting important plans, are anxious and expectant that these two tasks be speedily completed and the necessary preparations for their forthcoming projects be made without delay, thus enabling them to give concrete expression to their hopes and plans for the future, and to impart a great momentum to the spread of the Holy Cause.

The same applies to the participation of the friends in charitable, scientific, and literary associations. The friends must, with wisdom and moderation, after careful consultation, and according to their capacity and means, assist any association that sincerely aims to contribute to the common weal and to the best interests of the world of humanity. They should participate to the extent possible, but must refrain from the least

involvement in politics, whether in their deeds, hearts, or words, and must shun and avoid any association with malevolent and contending parties.

September 1926, Shoghi Effendi

- 90 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.

17 February 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 91 “Regard the world as the human body,” wrote Bahá’u’lláh to Queen Victoria ... 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 in serving it or receiving from it. This is true of the body of mankind in which God has “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...

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 animated and 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.

September 1964, Universal House of Justice

- 92 As you can see, all these developments relate directly to the teaching work inasmuch as the Bahá’í communities must reach a certain size before they can begin to implement many of them. How, for example, can a Bahá’í community demonstrate effectively the abolition of prejudices which divide the inhabitants of a country until it has a cross-section of those

inhabitants within its ranks? A seed is the vital origin of a tree and of a tremendous importance for that reason, but it cannot produce fruit until it has grown into a tree and flowered and fruited. So a Bahá'í community of nine believers is a vital step, since it can bring into being for that locality the divine institution of the Local Spiritual Assembly, but it is still only a seed, and needs to grow in size and in the diversity of its members before it can produce really convincing fruit for its fellow-citizens.

3 January 1982, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 93 There are two principles which the House of Justice feels are fundamental to the generality of such projects of social and economic development, although, of course, there will be exceptions. The first is that they should be built on a substructure of existing, sufficiently strong local Bahá'í communities. The second is that the long-term conduct of the project should aim at self-sufficiency and not be dependent upon continuing financial support from outside.

The first principle implies that the projects of social and economic development now to be undertaken are a natural stage of the growth of the Bahá'í community and are needed by the community itself, although they will, of course, benefit a much wider segment of society...

The second principle must take into account that any project started by the Cause should be designed to grow soundly and steadily, and not to collapse from attrition. In other words, external assistance and funds, Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í, may be used for capital acquisitions, to make surveys, to initiate activities, to bring in expertise, but the aim should be for each project to be able to continue and to develop on the strength of local Bahá'í labour, funds and enthusiasm even if all external aid should be cut off.

8 May 1984, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 94 The second fundamental principleⁱ which enables us to understand the pattern towards which Bahá'u'lláh wishes human society to evolve is the principle of organic growth which requires that detailed developments, and the understanding of detailed developments, become available only with

i The first principle referred to in this letter is "the principle that the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian are thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and intimately linked with the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh Himself." See *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1986–2001, the Fourth Epoch of the Formative Age* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 2009), pars. 201.9–201.11.

the passage of time and with the help of the guidance given by that Central Authority in the Cause to whom all must turn. In this regard one can use the simile of a tree. If a farmer plants a tree, he cannot state at that moment what its exact height will be, the number of its branches or the exact time of its blossoming. He can, however, give a general impression of its size and pattern of growth and can state with confidence which fruit it will bear. The same is true of the evolution of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.
27 April 1995, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 95 These projects include schools, literacy programmes, moral education classes, academic training, health plans, special programmes for the advancement of women and minority groups, agricultural programmes, and special programmes for the conservation of the environment, etc. Experience has shown that if help is provided from abroad without the cooperation and involvement of the local inhabitants, the locals do not consider the project as something that belongs to them and feel no responsibility toward it, but if they initiate the process of identifying their needs and take part in the decision-making and execution processes they will feel responsible for the preservation and continued operation of the project.
30 July 1996, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 96 The worldwide Bahá'í community, as an organic whole, transcends divisions prevalent in society today, such as "North" and "South", "developed" and "underdeveloped". Social and economic development efforts are undertaken by Bahá'ís, irrespective of the degree of material prosperity achieved by their nations, as they strive to apply the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to the gradual process of building a new civilization. Every follower of Bahá'u'lláh is a member of this worldwide community and can rightfully offer to contribute to a specific endeavor in any country. As the friends gain experience in social and economic development, and as they advance in their studies of various branches of learning or in their professional fields, individuals arise in every continent who have expertise in some aspect of development work and who wish to offer their services to projects at home or abroad. If their energies are not channelled effectively, and they are not given a realistic picture of Bahá'í development efforts, these friends will later become frustrated when they realize that the capacity of Bahá'í projects overseas to utilize their talents and services is limited.

For this reason, it is important that conferences, seminars and promotional materials not reinforce an image of “development projects” as understood by society at large. Bahá’í efforts in this field generally take the form of grassroots initiatives carried out by small groups of believers in the towns and villages where they reside. As these initiatives are nurtured, some grow into more substantial programs with permanent administrative structures. Yet very few can be compared with the kind of complex projects promoted and funded by government agencies and large nongovernmental organizations.

The effective use of the talents of individuals with particular expertise also demands vigilance in ensuring that the initiative of some, usually those with access to more resources, does not end up suffocating the initiatives of others. The Administrative Order is structured in a way that fosters initiative and safeguards the right of people to be meaningfully involved in the development of their own communities. Accordingly the activities of the friends in each country fall under the guidance of the institutions of the Faith in that country...

In general, the determining factor in matching offers of service and assistance to projects should be the capacity of the projects to receive help and not the amount of resources available. It is quite possible that the talents of the friends, especially those in ... exceed the capacity of the development projects elsewhere to receive assistance at this stage in the growth of the Faith. In this connection, the two-pronged approach you are pursuing seems most appropriate. While striving to help increase the capacity of projects worldwide, you are at the same time encouraging individual believers from more materially prosperous countries to become involved in Bahá’í projects at home. You should also continue encouraging them to participate in worthy endeavors outside the Faith in order to influence their professional fields and infuse them with the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh. They should be assured that this is, in and of itself, a tremendous service to the Cause and not feel that they are serving the Faith only if they dedicate themselves directly to Bahá’í projects.

11 March 1997, Universal House of Justice

- 97 Humanity’s crying need will not be met by a struggle among competing ambitions or by protest against one or another of the countless wrongs afflicting a desperate age. It calls, rather, for a fundamental change of consciousness, for a wholehearted embrace of Bahá’u’lláh’s teaching that

the time has come when each human being on earth must learn to accept responsibility for the welfare of the entire human family.

24 May 2001, Universal House of Justice

- 98 As you know, the attention of the Bahá'í world has been, and will continue to be for at least the next fifteen years, focused on advancing the process of entry by troops. It is expected that, as this process gathers momentum at the local level, one of the natural consequences will be the emergence of a vibrant Bahá'í community life characterized by a desire to apply the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to the needs of society. Effective social action will result, then, as capacity at the grassroots of the community increases and collective consciousness is raised.

6 September 2006, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 99 A greater involvement in the life of society, individually and collectively, will be an inevitable outcome as the process of growth gathers momentum in advanced clusters. In Bahá'í communities with limited resources too much involvement in such efforts at an early stage may dissipate their energies and detract from the coherence of activities necessary for growth. Yet, in areas where the Faith has sufficiently consolidated itself, it is natural to expect that Bahá'ís would engage in social action, initially by finding ways to apply the Teachings to the problems afflicting their families, neighbors and the communities in which they live.

11 September 2008, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 100 In its Riḍván 2008 message, the House of Justice observed that, as the work of expansion and consolidation progresses, Bahá'ís will be drawn further and further into the life of the society around them. The nature of this encounter will necessarily be organic, gradual, and guided by the learning process in which the believers everywhere are already engaged. Moreover, it is hoped that the Bahá'í community's increasing involvement with society will occur naturally in every cluster around the world.

16 June 2009, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 101 ...every human being and every group of individuals, irrespective of whether they are counted among His followers, can take inspiration from His teachings, benefiting from whatever gems of wisdom and knowledge will aid them in addressing the challenges they face. Indeed, the civilization

that beckons humanity will not be attained through the efforts of the Bahá'í community alone. Numerous groups and organizations, animated by the spirit of world solidarity that is an indirect manifestation of Bahá'u'lláh's conception of the principle of the oneness of humankind, will contribute to the civilization destined to emerge out of the welter and chaos of present-day society.

Riḍván 2010, Universal House of Justice

- 102 As noted in the Riḍván message, 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, the message explains, must be commensurate with the human resources available in a village or neighbourhood to carry it forward. This implies that efforts best begin on a modest scale and grow organically as capacity within the population develops—essentially capacity to apply with increasing effectiveness elements of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, together with the contents and methods of science, to social reality. In this light, the House of Justice has made clear in many of its recent messages that, at the present stage in the development of the Faith, building capacity to address the material needs of a local community should not be considered in isolation from a process already set in motion to address its spiritual needs. This process, of course, gathers momentum as devotional meetings, children's classes, junior youth groups and study circles are established in a region. It is directed by the institutions and agencies of the Faith and depends heavily on the exercise of initiative by a growing number of individuals in the region concerned for the well-being of their communities. It is such individuals—men and women, young and old—who, thus empowered, begin to make and implement decisions about their spiritual and material progress, increasing still further their collective capacity as they do so. Depending on the circumstances in the region, the endeavours of a non-profit development organization, operating in keeping with the principles of the Faith, may well help to facilitate this now more complex process of empowerment unfolding in the region. Such an organization, which itself emerges organically and grows in strength over time, functions under the moral guidance of the institutions in the country. Those most intimately involved with the organization by necessity submit themselves to the discipline needed to ensure that their efforts constantly serve to contribute to the empowerment of a population, requiring them to work close to the grassroots, alongside the people themselves; to share in their struggles; and to recognize that economic benefits will be few.

18 July 2010, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 103 A small community, whose members are united by their shared beliefs, characterized by their high ideals, proficient in managing their affairs and tending to their needs, and perhaps engaged in several humanitarian projects—a community such as this, prospering but at a comfortable distance from the reality experienced by the masses of humanity, can never hope to serve as a pattern for restructuring the whole of society. That the worldwide Bahá'í community has managed to avert the dangers of complacency is a source of abiding joy to us. Indeed, the community has well in hand its expansion and consolidation. Yet, to administer the affairs of teeming numbers in villages and cities around the globe—to raise aloft the standard of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order for all to see—is still a distant goal.

Therein, then, lies the challenge that must be faced by those in the forefront of the learning process which will continue to advance over the course of the next Plan. Wherever an intensive programme of growth is established, let the friends spare no effort to increase the level of participation. Let them strain every nerve to ensure that the system which they have so laboriously erected does not close in on itself but progressively expands to embrace more and more people ... And let them not forget the lessons of the past which left no doubt that a relatively small band of active supporters of the Cause, no matter how resourceful, no matter how consecrated, cannot attend to the needs of communities comprising hundreds, much less thousands, of men, women and children.

28 December 2010, Universal House of Justice

- 104 The pattern of spiritual and social life taking shape in clusters that involves study circles, children's classes, junior youth groups, devotional meetings, home visits, teaching efforts, and reflection meetings, as well as Holy Day observances, Nineteen Day Feasts, and other gatherings, provides abundant opportunities for engagement, experience, consultation, and learning that will lead to change in personal and collective understanding and action. Issues of prejudice of race, class, and color will inevitably arise as the friends reach out to diverse populations, especially in the closely knit context of neighborhoods. There, every activity can take a form most suited to the culture and interests of the population, so that new believers can be quickened and confirmed in a nurturing and familiar environment, until they are able to offer their share to the resolution of the challenges faced by a growing Bahá'í community. For this is not a process that some carry out on behalf of others who are passive recipients—the mere extension of a congregation

and invitation to paternalism—but one in which an ever-increasing number of souls recognize and take responsibility for the transformation of humanity set in motion by Bahá'u'lláh. In an environment of love and trust born of common belief, practice, and mission, individuals of different races will have the intimate connection of heart and mind upon which mutual understanding and change depend. As a result of their training and deepening, a growing number of believers will draw insights from the Writings to sensitively and effectively address issues of racial prejudice that arise within their personal lives and families, among community members, and in social settings and the workplace. As programs of growth advance and the scope and intensity of activities grow, the friends will be drawn into participation in conversations and, in time, initiatives for social action at the grassroots where issues pertaining to freedom from prejudice naturally emerge, whether directly or indirectly.

10 April 2011, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 105 You will no doubt be familiar with the guidance provided by the Universal House of Justice in its Ridván 2010 message concerning “certain fundamental concepts” that pertain to instances of social action pursued by Bahá'ís, which would include social and economic development projects. Among these are the principles that “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” and that “social change is not a project that one group of people carries out for the benefit of another.” Indeed, such endeavours are best initiated from within the communities they are intended to benefit, and great care must be exercised so as to ensure that the resources available from outside the community do not define the nature of the projects undertaken. In places around the world where the process of growth is advancing well, the enhanced capabilities fostered within individuals by the training institute process are naturally giving rise to sustainable programmes of social action at the grassroots, as it is the members of a given community who are in the best position to understand their social reality, assess their needs, and trace their own path of progress. For this reason, Bahá'ís are discouraged from designing and implementing development projects in countries other than their own.

22 October 2012, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

106 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.

2 March 2013, Universal House of Justice

107 At the heart of such an approach lies the question of capacity building. It has been observed in cluster after cluster that the capacity to carry out efforts in the area of social action is gradually raised as growing numbers of individuals are involved in the institute process and are assisted to dedicate their energies to the spiritual and material transformation of the regions in which they live. Generally speaking, Bahá'í social and economic development efforts begin at the grassroots, start small, and grow organically, commensurate with the local human and financial resources available to them. In this connection, as noted in the Ridván message of 2010, social change should not be conceived of as a project that one group of people carries out for the benefit of another, nor should it be reduced to the mere delivery of goods or services. In light of these considerations, Bahá'ís are discouraged from implementing projects in countries where they do not reside. Further, for a number of reasons, considerable caution needs to be exercised in cases where external funds are made available to a particular endeavor. Experience has shown, for example, that the right of the local community to trace its own path of progress can be compromised when those providing resources from outside of the community assume responsibility for the management and direction of an initiative or exert undue influence on the nature of projects undertaken. Moreover, organizations which are solely reliant on external support often struggle to sustain their activities in the event that outside sources of funding are withdrawn. In order to avoid such challenges, the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre helps to coordinate the flow of resources to Bahá'í-inspired development projects, taking into account both the conditions in the region and the maturity of particular initiatives.

19 April 2013, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

108 ...development, from a Bahá'í perspective, is viewed as a process, the main protagonists of which are the people themselves. Emphasis is placed on building the capacity of communities to make and implement decisions about their spiritual and material progress. This necessitates a process whereby small-scale endeavors emerge organically from a pattern of community life which is created as the friends in a given cluster gain experience in applying the framework for action associated with the Five Year Plan. As the believers engage in the processes of expansion and consolidation, they acquire through their efforts a sharper understanding of the challenges faced by the populations they serve and gradually learn to apply the Teachings of the Faith to the pressing needs of their communities. Experience throughout the Bahá'í world has demonstrated that it is generally unproductive to introduce external agencies, technologies, or funding sources at an early stage—that is, before capacity to initiate and sustain projects is built at the grassroots.

30 December 2014, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

109 In its early stages, the systematic effort to reach out to a population and foster its participation in the process of capacity building accelerates markedly when members of that population are themselves in the vanguard of such an effort. These individuals will have special insight into those forces and structures in their societies that can, in various ways, reinforce the endeavours under way.

29 December 2015, Universal House of Justice

110 ...Bahá'ís are engaged in cities and villages across the globe in establishing a pattern of life in which increasing numbers, irrespective of background, are invited to take part. This pattern, expressive of the dynamic coherence between the material and spiritual dimensions of life, includes classes for the spiritual education of children in which they also develop a deep appreciation for the fundamental unity of the various world religions; groups that assist young people to navigate a crucial stage of their lives and to withstand the corrosive forces that especially target them; circles of study wherein participants reflect on the spiritual nature of existence and build capacity for service to the community and society; gatherings for collective worship that strengthen the devotional character of the community; and, in time, a growing range of endeavours for social and economic development. This pattern of community life is giving rise to vibrant and purposeful

new communities wherein relationships are founded on the oneness of mankind, universal participation, justice, and freedom from prejudice. All are welcome. The process which is unfolding seeks to foster collaboration and build capacity within every human group—with no regard to class or religious background, with no concern for ethnicity or race, and irrespective of gender or social status—to arise and contribute to the advancement of civilization.

27 December 2017, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

The Emergence of Social Action

- 111 He has noted with keen interest the plan you have conceived for the intensification of agricultural production with the view of meeting any possible food shortage in these times of war. While he is fully aware of the need for putting forth such a plan, and deeply appreciative as he feels of the noble motives that have prompted you to approach this problem, he nevertheless thinks that the time is not yet ripe for the believers, as a body, to undertake social and economic experiments of such character and scope. Neither the material resources at their disposal, nor their numerical strength are sufficient to give them any reasonable hope of embarking successfully upon a project of this kind.

6 November 1940, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 112 Now is not the time for the friends to seek to establish a Bahá'í village; they have definite tasks confronting them of the utmost importance and urgency, and on these they should concentrate their attention. Nor does the Guardian feel it is necessary for the friends to buy land at this time. In the future, when they have accomplished the goals set out for them by the beloved Master Himself, they will be able to develop more community projects, but now such enterprises would merely dissipate their strength, which should all be directed into the teaching work.

26 March 1943, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 113 The believers must not take their eyes off their own immediate tasks of patiently consolidating their administrative institutions, building up new Assemblies ... and labouring to perfect the Bahá'í pattern of life, for these are things that no other group of people in the world can do or will do,

and they alone are able to provide the spiritual foundation and example on which the larger world schemes must ultimately rest. At the same time every effort should be made to broadcast the Teachings at this time, and correlate them to the plight of humanity and the plans for its future.

29 March 1945, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 114 A wider horizon is opening before us, illuminated by a growing and universal manifestation of the inherent potentialities of the Cause for ordering human affairs. In this light can be discerned not only our immediate tasks but, more dimly, new pursuits and undertakings upon which we must shortly become engaged...

...The powers released by Bahá'u'lláh match the needs of the times. We may therefore be utterly confident that the new throb of energy now vibrating throughout the Cause will empower it to meet the oncoming challenges of assisting, as maturity and resources allow, the development of the social and economic life of peoples, of collaborating with the forces leading towards the establishment of order in the world, of influencing the exploitation and constructive uses of modern technology, and in all these ways enhancing the prestige and progress of the Faith and uplifting the conditions of the generality of mankind.

Riḍván 1983, Universal House of Justice

- 115 The message of the House of Justice dated 20 October 1983 has clearly set out the concepts, defined the objectives and outlined the guiding principles for the selection and implementation of Bahá'í development projects, programmes or activities. The vast majority of Bahá'í projects will be primarily generated at the grass roots, and, initially as required, will receive help from Bahá'í sources, in terms of finances and manpower. The projects will, as you have already surmised, be non-profit making, concerned mainly with activities closely related to education, health and hygiene, agriculture and simple community development activities. It is hoped that all these types of projects will reflect the strength of the spiritual principles enshrined in the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

It is important that our undertakings be modest in their scope at the present time. Then, as we gain in confidence and experience and as our resources increase, our work will encompass expanded objectives, and the friends will explore new areas of social and economic activity.

22 December 1983, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 116 The relationship between teaching and social and economic development needs to be considered both in terms of certain fundamental principles and in the context of the processes which characterize the growth of the Bahá'í community. You are well aware of the relevant principles, which include the following: Bahá'ís should give the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh liberally and unconditionally to humanity so that people may apply them to pressing social issues and uplift themselves materially and spiritually; in their dealings with society at large, the friends should be upright and avoid any trace of deception; social and economic development projects should not be used as an inducement to conversion; and funds from non-Bahá'ís should not be utilized for strictly Bahá'í purposes. None of these diminishes the importance of the sacred obligation to teach the Cause. Teaching should remain the dominating passion of the life of every individual believer, and growth a major concern of the Bahá'í community.

As the Bahá'í community has moved from one stage to the next, the range of activities that it has been able to undertake has increased. Its growth has been organic in nature and has implied gradual differentiation in functions. When the Bahá'í community was small in size, all of its interactions with society at large easily fitted together under the designation of direct and indirect teaching. But, over time, new dimensions of work appeared—involvement in civil society, highly organized diplomatic work, social action, and so on—each with its own aims, methods and resources. In a certain sense, it is possible to refer to all of these activities as teaching, since their ultimate purpose is the diffusion of the divine fragrances, the offering of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation to humankind, and service to society. But, in practice, it seems more fruitful to treat them as distinct but complementary lines of action. For example, simply designating certain social and economic development endeavors indirect teaching may cause confusion in at least two ways: On the one hand, it may give the impression that development activities should have as their primary and immediate objective the recruitment of new believers, which is, of course,

not the case. On the other, it may suggest to some friends that they are fulfilling their obligation to teach merely by participating in social action.

Social and economic development is an important area of activity in and of itself. Its justification should not be sought in its ability to produce enrollments; it complements teaching and also contributes to it. Naturally, when endeavors in the development field are successful, they increase the public's interest in the Faith and create new teaching opportunities for the Bahá'í community, opportunities which the friends should seize upon through their expansion and consolidation activities.

27 April 1998, Universal House of Justice

- 117 One of the basic principles governing Bahá'í social and economic development is that the friends should give the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh liberally and unconditionally to humanity so that people everywhere can apply them to pressing social issues and improve their individual and collective lives, both in material and spiritual dimensions. Access to the Word of God should not be conditioned upon acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God for today. Moreover, it would not be inappropriate to refrain from explicitly mentioning the Source of inspiration underlying an educational programme developed on the basis of His Teachings, when circumstances demand it. In this light, there are a range of options that the friends can consider when creating educational materials which draw on the teachings and principles of the Faith.

11 June 2006, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 118 It is to be expected that a desire to undertake social action will accompany the collective change which begins to occur in a village or neighbourhood as acts of communal worship and home visits are woven together with activities for the spiritual education of its population to create a rich pattern of community life. Social action can, of course, range from the most informal efforts of limited duration to social and economic development programmes of a high level of complexity and sophistication promoted by Bahá'í-inspired non-governmental organizations—all concerned with the application of the teachings to some need identified in such fields as health, education, agriculture and the environment.

4 January 2009, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

119 In our Ridván 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. A rich tapestry of community life begins to emerge in every cluster as acts of communal worship, interspersed with discussions undertaken in the intimate setting of the home, are woven together with activities that provide spiritual education to all members of the population—adults, youth and children. Social consciousness is heightened naturally as, for example, lively conversations proliferate among parents regarding the aspirations of their children and service projects spring up at the initiative of junior youth. 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...

...Further involvement in the life of society should not be sought prematurely. It will proceed naturally as the friends in every cluster persevere in applying the provisions of the Plan through a process of action, reflection, consultation and study, and learn as a result. Involvement in the life of society will flourish as the capacity of the community to promote its own growth and to maintain its vitality is gradually raised. It will achieve coherence with efforts to expand and consolidate the community to the extent that it draws on elements of the conceptual framework which governs the current series of global Plans. And it will contribute to the movement of populations towards Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a prosperous and peaceful world civilization to the degree that it employs these elements creatively in new areas of learning.

Riḍván 2010, Universal House of Justice

120 While expansion and consolidation have steadily progressed over the past year, other important areas of activity have also moved forward, often in close parallel. As a prime example, the advances at the level of culture being witnessed in some villages and neighbourhoods are due in no small part to what is being learned from Bahá'í involvement in social action. Our Office of Social and Economic Development recently prepared a document which distils thirty years of experience that has accumulated in this field since that Office was established at the Bahá'í World Centre. Among the observations it makes is that efforts to engage in social action are lent vital impetus by the training institute. This is not simply through the rise in human resources it fosters. The spiritual insights, qualities, and abilities that are cultivated by the institute process have proven to be as crucial for participation in social action as they are for contributing to the process of growth. Further, it is explained how the Bahá'í community's distinct spheres of endeavour are governed by a common, evolving, conceptual framework composed of mutually reinforcing elements, albeit these assume varied expressions in different domains of action. The document we have described was lately shared with National Spiritual Assemblies, and we invite them, in consultation with the Counsellors, to consider how the concepts it explores can help to enhance existing efforts of social action pursued under their auspices and raise consciousness of this significant dimension of Bahá'í endeavour.ⁱ This should not be interpreted as a general call for widespread activity in this area—the emergence of social action happens naturally, as a growing community gathers strength—but it is timely that the friends reflect more deeply on the implications of their exertions for the transformation of society. The surge in learning that is occurring in this field places increased demands upon the Office of Social and Economic Development, and steps are being taken to ensure that its functioning evolves commensurately.

Ridván 2013, Universal House of Justice

121 In recent years it has become evident that in communities where there has been a strong emphasis on the capacity-building features of the Five Year Plan, the ability of the friends to engage in social action has increased substantially. Accordingly, you would do well to encourage the friends to persevere in their efforts to strengthen the training institute and the

i "Social Action: A paper prepared by the Office of Social and Economic Development at the Bahá'í World Centre, 26 November 2012," published in *Framework for Action: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice and Supplementary Material*, 2006–2016, pp. 327–350. It is also available on the Bahá'í Reference Library.

activities of the Plan, for therein lies the key to multiplying your human resources and creating a vibrant, united, and loving community. As they progress along this path, they will become increasingly capable of contributing in tangible ways to the practical resolution of the problems that confront populations at the grassroots in cities and towns, neighbourhoods and villages.

1 October 2015, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 122 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. Some initiatives become sustained and gradually grow. In various places the founding of a community school at the grassroots has arisen from a heightened concern for the proper education of children and awareness of its importance, flowing naturally from the study of institute materials. On occasion, the efforts of the friends can be greatly reinforced through the work of an established Bahá'í-inspired organization functioning in the vicinity. 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.

29 December 2015, Universal House of Justice

- 123 Generally speaking, Bahá'í development projects begin at the grassroots and are, in the early stages, sustained by locally available human and financial resources. If such projects are introduced prematurely in a cluster, they risk distracting and dissipating the energies of the friends who should be attending primarily to advancing the process of expansion and consolidation.

In this regard, experience has shown that community schools, like other efforts of social action, have proven more sustainable when they emerge in localities with a strong institute process, as a natural extension of the community-building activities under way. In these localities, conditions for starting a school are fostered as growing numbers of people participate in the study of the main sequence of institute courses, which serves to equip more and more individuals with the qualities, attitudes, and skills required to contribute to processes of spiritual and material transformation. Further, when efforts to multiply and strengthen children's classes and junior youth groups foster a community's sense of ownership for the education of younger generations, they lead to an increase in collective capacity to implement even more complex endeavours.

9 April 2017, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 124 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.

Riḍván 2018, Universal House of Justice

- 125 During the ministries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, the first community of sufficient size that could begin to systematically apply Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to unite material and spiritual progress was that of the believers in the Cradle of the Faith. The steady flow of guidance from the Holy Land enabled the Bahá'ís of Iran to make tremendous strides in but one or two generations and to contribute a distinctive share to the progress of their nation. A network of schools that provided moral and academic education, including for girls, flourished. Illiteracy was virtually eliminated in the Bahá'í community. Philanthropic enterprises were created.

Prejudices among ethnic and religious groups, aflame in the wider society, were extinguished within the community's loving embrace. Villages became distinguished for their cleanliness, order, and progress. And believers from that land were instrumental in raising in another land the first *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* with its dependencies designed to "afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant." Over time, such efforts were augmented by scattered initiatives of other Bahá'í communities in various parts of the world. However, as Shoghi Effendi remarked to one community, the number of believers was as yet too small to effect a notable change in the wider society, and for more than the first half century of the Formative Age the believers were encouraged to concentrate their energies on the propagation of the Faith, since this was work that only Bahá'ís could do—indeed their primary spiritual obligation—and it would prepare them for the time when they could address the problems of humanity more directly.

Thirty-five years ago, circumstances within and outside the community combined to create new possibilities for greater involvement in the life of society. The Faith had developed to the stage at which the processes of social and economic development needed to be incorporated into its regular pursuits, and in October 1983 we called upon the Bahá'ís of the world to enter this new field of endeavor. The Office of Social and Economic Development was established at the Bahá'í World Centre to assist us in promoting and coordinating the activities of the friends worldwide. Bahá'í activities for social and economic development, at whatever level of complexity, were at that time counted in the hundreds. Today they number in the tens of thousands, including hundreds of sustained projects such as schools and scores of development organizations. The broad range of current activities spans efforts from villages and neighborhoods to regions and nations, addressing an array of challenges, including education from preschool to university, literacy, health, the environment, support for refugees, advancement of women, empowerment of junior youth, elimination of racial prejudice, agriculture, local economies, and village development. The society-building power of Bahá'u'lláh's Cause has begun to be more systematically expressed in the collective life of the friends as a result of the acceleration of the process of expansion and consolidation, especially in advanced clusters. Beyond this, of course, countless believers, through their professional and voluntary efforts, contribute their energies and insights to projects and organizations established for the common good.

Once again, then, we find that forces inside and outside the Faith have made possible a new stage in the work of social and economic development in the Bahá'í world. Therefore, 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.

9 November 2018, Universal House of Justice

Community Development and the Movement of Populations

- 126 O people of the world! Build ye houses of worship throughout the lands in the name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions. Make them as perfect as is possible in the world of being, and adorn them with that which befitteth them, not with images and effigies. Then, with radiance and joy, celebrate therein the praise of your Lord, the Most Compassionate. Verily, by His remembrance the eye is cheered and the heart is filled with light.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas

- 127 ...all the members of the human family, whether peoples or governments, cities or villages, have become increasingly interdependent. 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.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 128 Although to outward seeming the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is a material structure, yet it hath a spiritual effect. It forgeth bonds of unity from heart to heart; it is a collective center for men's souls. Every city in which, during the days of the Manifestation, a temple was raised up, hath created security and constancy and peace, for such buildings were given over to the perpetual

glorification of God, and only in the remembrance of God can the heart find rest. Gracious God! The edifice of the House of Worship hath a powerful influence on every phase of life. Experience hath, in the east, clearly shown this to be a fact. Even if, in some small village, a house was designated as the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, it produced a marked effect; how much greater would be the impact of one especially raised up.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 129 The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is one of the most vital institutions in the world, and it hath many subsidiary branches. Although it is a House of Worship, it is also connected with a hospital, a drug dispensary, a traveler's hospice, a school for orphans, and a university for advanced studies. Every Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is connected with these five things. My hope is that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár will now be established in America, and that gradually the hospital, the school, the university, the dispensary and the hospice, all functioning according to the most efficient and orderly procedures, will follow. Make these matters known to the beloved of the Lord, so that they will understand how very great is the importance of this "Dawning-Point of the Remembrance of God." The Temple is not only a place for worship; rather, in every respect is it complete and whole.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 130 The foundation of life and existence is cooperation and mutual aid, whereas the cause of annihilation and deterioration is the cessation of aid and assistance. The higher the realm of existence, the stronger and more vital this weighty matter of cooperation and assistance doth become. In the realm of humanity, therefore, cooperation and mutual aid are in a greater degree of completeness and perfection than that which prevaleth in the other realms of existence—so much so, that the life of humanity dependeth entirely upon this principle. Among the friends of God, in particular, this strong foundation must be fortified in such wise that each soul may help the other in all matters, whether pertaining to spiritual realities and inner truths or to the material and physical aspects of life. Such is especially the case with regard to the founding of public institutions that benefit all people, and, in particular, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, which constituteth the greatest of divine foundations.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 131 The responsibilities of the members of the Spiritual Assemblies that are engaged in teaching the Cause of God in Eastern lands have been clearly laid down in the holy Texts.

These bid them to work towards the improvement of morals and the spread of learning; to strive to eradicate ignorance and unenlightenment, eliminate prejudice, and reinforce the foundation of true faith in people's hearts and minds; to seek to develop self-reliance and avoidance of blind imitation; to aim to enhance the efficient management of their affairs, and observe purity and refinement in all circumstances; to show their commitment to truthfulness and honesty, and their ability to conduct themselves with frankness, courage and resolution.

They similarly enjoin them to lend their support to agricultural and industrial development, to consolidate the foundations of mutual assistance and co-operation, to promote the emancipation and advancement of women and support the compulsory education of both sexes, to encourage application of the principles of consultation among all classes, and to adhere in all dealings to a standard of scrupulous integrity.

30 January 1926, Shoghi Effendi

- 132 There are, at the present time, many villages in India, the Philippines, Africa, Latin America, etc., where the Bahá'ís form a majority or even the entire population of the village. One of the goals of the Five Year Plan, as you will recall, is to develop the characteristics of Bahá'í community life, and it is, above all, to such villages that the goal is directed. The Local Spiritual Assemblies of such villages must gradually widen the scope of their activities, not only to develop every aspect of the spiritual life of the believers within their jurisdiction, but also, through Bahá'í consultation, and through such Bahá'í principles as harmony between science and religion, the importance of education, and work as a form of worship, to promote the standards of agriculture and other skills in the life of the people. For this they will need the assistance of Bahá'í experts from other lands. This is a major undertaking, and is being started gradually wherever and whenever possible.

27 July 1976, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 133 When the Bahá'í community in a village is a significant proportion of the population, it has a wide range of opportunities to be an example and an encouragement of means of improving the quality of life in the village. Among

the initiatives which it might take are measures to foster child education, adult literacy and the training of women to better discharge their responsibilities as mothers and to play an enlarged role in the administrative and social life of the village; encouragement of the people of the village to join together in devotions, perhaps in the early morning, irrespective of their varieties of religious belief; support of efforts to improve the hygiene and the health of the village, including attention to the provision of pure water, the preservation of cleanliness in the village environment, and education in the harmful effects of narcotic and intoxicating substances. No doubt other possibilities will present themselves to the village Bahá'í community and its Local Spiritual Assembly.

25 July 1988, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 134 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.

Riḍván 1996, Universal House of Justice

135 As you are aware, often in a rural cluster made up of villages and perhaps one or two towns, while the pattern of action associated with an intensive programme of growth is being established, the efforts of the friends are confined to a few localities. Once in place, however, the pattern can be extended quickly to village after village, as explained in our Riḍván message this year. 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.

Our Ridván message described a few of the characteristics of social action at the grassroots, and the conditions it must meet. Efforts in a village will generally begin on a small scale, perhaps with the emergence of groups of friends, each concerned with a specific social or economic need it has identified and each pursuing a simple set of appropriate actions. Consultation at the Nineteen Day Feast creates a space for the growing social consciousness of the community to find constructive expression. Whatever the nature of activities undertaken, the Local Assembly must be attentive to potential pitfalls and help the friends, if necessary, to steer past them—the allurements of overly ambitious projects that would consume energies and ultimately prove untenable, the temptation of financial grants that would necessitate a departure from Bahá'í principle, the promises of technologies deceptively packaged that would strip the village of its cultural heritage and lead to fragmentation and dissonance. Eventually the strength of the institute process in the village, and the enhanced capabilities it has fostered in individuals, may enable the friends to take advantage of methods and programmes of proven effectiveness, which have been developed by one or another Bahá'í-inspired organization and which have been introduced into the cluster at the suggestion of, and with support from, our Office of Social and Economic Development. Moreover, the Assembly must learn to interact with social and political structures in the locality, gradually raising consciousness of the presence of the Faith and the influence it is exerting on the progress of the village.

What is outlined in the foregoing paragraphs represents only a few of the attributes which Local Spiritual Assemblies in the many villages of the world will gradually develop in serving the needs of communities that embrace larger and larger numbers. As they increasingly manifest their latent capacities and powers, their members will come to be seen by the inhabitants of each village as “the trusted ones of the Merciful among men”. Thus will these Assemblies become “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.”

28 December 2010, Universal House of Justice

- 136 From this landscape of thriving activity, one prospect deserves particular mention. In the message addressed to you three years ago, we expressed the hope that, in clusters with an intensive programme of growth in operation, the friends would endeavour to learn more about the ways of community building by developing centres of intense activity in neighbourhoods and villages. Our hopes have been exceeded, for even in clusters where the programme of growth has not yet achieved intensity, efforts by a few to initiate core activities among the residents of small areas have demonstrated their efficacy time and again. In essence, this approach centres on the response to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on the part of populations who are ready for the spiritual transformation His Revelation fosters. Through participation in the educational process promoted by the training institute, they are motivated to reject the torpor and indifference inculcated by the forces of society and pursue, instead, patterns of action which prove life altering. Where this approach has advanced for some years in a neighbourhood or village and the friends have sustained their focus, remarkable results are becoming gradually but unmistakably evident. Youth are empowered to take responsibility for the development of those around them younger than themselves. Older generations welcome the contribution of the youth to meaningful discussions about the affairs of the whole community. For young and old alike, the discipline cultivated through the community's educational process builds capacity for consultation, and new spaces emerge for purposeful conversation. Yet change is not confined merely to the Bahá'ís and those who are involved in the core activities called for by the Plan, who might reasonably be expected to adopt new ways of thinking over time. The very spirit of the place is affected. A devotional attitude takes shape within a broad sweep of the population. Expressions of the equality of men and women become more pronounced. The education of children, both boys and girls, commands greater attention. The character of relationships within families—moulded by assumptions centuries old—alters perceptibly. A sense of duty towards one's immediate community and physical environment becomes prevalent. Even the scourge of prejudice, which casts its baleful shadow on every society, begins to yield to the compelling force

of unity. In short, the community-building work in which the friends are engaged influences aspects of culture.

Riḍván 2013, Universal House of Justice

- 137 A House of Worship is, of course, an integral part of the process of community building, and its construction represents an important milestone in the development of a community. It is the hope of the House of Justice that the friends in ... will, through the zeal and determination with which they pursue the essential activities of the Five Year Plan, hasten the day when it will be timely for a *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* to be built in your country.
12 December 2013, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 138 Underlying the process even from the start is, of course, a collective movement towards the vision of material and spiritual prosperity set forth by Him Who is the Lifegiver of the World. But when such large numbers are involved, the movement of an entire population becomes discernible.

This movement is especially in evidence in those clusters where a local *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* is to be established. One such, by way of example, is in Vanuatu. The friends who reside on the island of Tanna have made a supreme effort to raise consciousness of the planned House of Worship, and have already engaged no less than a third of the island's 30,000 inhabitants in an expanding conversation about its significance in a variety of ways. The ability to sustain an elevated conversation among so many people has been refined through years of experience sharing the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and extending the reach of a vibrant training institute. Junior youth groups on the island are particularly thriving, urged on by the support of village chiefs who see how the participants are spiritually empowered. Encouraged by the unity and dedication that exist among them, these young people have not only dispelled the languor of passivity in themselves but have, through various practical projects, found means to work for the betterment of their community, and as a result, those of all ages, not least their own parents, have been galvanized into constructive action. Among the believers and the wider society, the bounty of being able to turn to a Local Spiritual Assembly for guidance and for the resolution of difficult situations is being recognized, and in turn, the decisions of the Spiritual Assemblies are increasingly characterized by wisdom and sensitivity. There is much here to indicate that, when the elements of the Plan's framework for action are combined into a coherent whole, the

impact on a population can be profound. And it is against the background of ongoing expansion and consolidation—the thirtieth cycle of the intensive programme of growth has recently concluded—that the friends are actively exploring, with the rest of the island’s inhabitants, what it means for a Mashriqu’l-Adhkár, a “collective centre for men’s souls”, to be raised up in their midst. With the active support of traditional leaders, Tanna islanders have offered no less than a hundred design ideas for the Temple, demonstrating the extent to which the House of Worship has captured imaginations, and opening up enthralling prospects for the influence it is set to exert on the lives lived beneath its shade.

Ridván 2014, Universal House of Justice

- 139 ...a House of Worship is to be the spiritual centre of a community and, together with its dependencies that will be created, contributes to a flourishing pattern of collective life. Currently, the first Houses of Worship of each continent serve as the national Temples of the countries in which they are located, and they also serve the communities in their vicinity, playing a significant role in local activities. As the process of growth unfolds, Temples will increasingly be raised at the national and local levels, and much will be learned about their nature and how they contribute to the community-building process. The many aspects of the functioning of this institution will then gradually be manifest. As Shoghi Effendi wrote, “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.”

26 January 2015, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 140 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.

29 December 2015, Universal House of Justice

- 141 ...as the work in thousands of villages and neighbourhoods gathers momentum, a vibrant community life is taking root in each. The number of clusters where the system for extending this pattern of activity to more and more locations is becoming well established—enabling, thereby, the friends to pass the third milestone along a continuum of development—has grown markedly. And it is here, at the frontiers of the Bahá'í world's learning, particularly in the movement of populations towards the vision of Bahá'u'lláh, where not only are large numbers coming into the widening embrace of Bahá'í activities but the friends are now learning how sizeable groups come to identify themselves with the community of the Most Great Name. We are seeing the Faith's educational efforts take on a more formal character in such places, as children move seamlessly through the grades year after year and one level of the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme reliably succeeds another. In these places, the training institute is learning to ensure that sufficient human resources are being raised up to provide for the spiritual and moral edification of children and junior youth in ever-increasing numbers. Participation in these foundational activities is becoming so embedded in the culture of the population that it is viewed as an indispensable aspect of the life of a community. A new vitality emerges within a people taking charge of their own development, and they build
- Riḍván 2018, Universal House of Justice*

Methods and Approaches

Learning and Systematic Action

- 142 The purpose of learning should be the promotion of the welfare of the people.... 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, from a Tablet

- 143 ...the happiness and greatness, the rank and station, the pleasure and peace, of an individual have never consisted in his personal wealth, but rather in his excellent character, his high resolve, the breadth of his learning, and his ability to solve difficult problems.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 144 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.

To promote knowledge is thus an inescapable duty imposed on every one of the friends of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 145 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 ... 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 endeavor the knowledge and attainment of all that lies within the power of this wonderful bestowal.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 146 The present condition of the world—its economic instability, social dissensions, political dissatisfaction and international distrust—should awaken the youth from their slumber and make them enquire what the future is going to bring. It is surely they who will suffer most if some calamity sweep over the world. They should therefore open their eyes to the existing conditions, study the evil forces that are at play and then with a concerted effort arise and bring about the necessary reforms—reforms that shall contain within their scope the spiritual as well as social and political phases of human life.

13 March 1932, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 147 Systematization ensures consistency of lines of action based on well-conceived plans. In a general sense, it implies an orderliness of approach in all that pertains to Bahá’í service, whether in teaching or administration, in individual or collective endeavour. While allowing for individual initiative and spontaneity, it suggests the need to be clear-headed, methodical, efficient, constant, balanced and harmonious. Systematization is a necessary mode of functioning animated by the urgency to act.

Riḍván 1998, Universal House of Justice

- 148 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.

Universal House of Justice, The Institution of the Counsellors

149 One of your primary concerns will be to strengthen appreciation for systematic action, already heightened by the successes it has brought. To arrive at a unified vision of growth based on a realistic assessment of possibilities and resources, to develop strategies that lend structure to it, to devise and implement plans of action commensurate with capacity, to make necessary adjustments while maintaining continuity, to build on accomplishments—these are some of the requisites of systematization that every community must learn and internalize.

27 December 2005, Universal House of Justice

150 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.

Not only does this advance in culture influence relations among individuals, but its effects can also be felt in the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith. 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...

Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is vast. It calls for profound change not only at the level of the individual but also in the structure of society. "Is not the object of every Revelation", He Himself proclaims, "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?" The work advancing in every corner of the globe today represents the latest stage of the ongoing Bahá'í endeavour to create the nucleus of the glorious civilization enshrined in His teachings, the building of which is an enterprise of infinite complexity and scale, one that will demand centuries of exertion by humanity to bring to fruition. There are no shortcuts, no formulas. Only as effort is made to draw on insights from His Revelation, to tap into the accumulating knowledge of the human race, to apply His teachings intelligently to the life of humanity, and to consult on the questions that arise will the necessary learning occur and capacity be developed.

Riḍván 2010, Universal House of Justice

- 151 Numerous, of course, are the questions that the process of learning, now under way in all regions of the world, must address: how to bring people of different backgrounds together in an environment which, devoid of the constant threat of conflict and distinguished by its devotional character, encourages them to put aside the divisive ways of a partisan mindset, fosters higher degrees of unity of thought and action, and elicits wholehearted participation; how to administer the affairs of a community in which there is no ruling class with priestly functions that can lay claim to distinction or privilege; how to enable contingents of men and women to break free from the confines of passivity and the chains of oppression in order to engage in activities conducive to their spiritual, social and intellectual development; how to help youth navigate through a crucial stage of their lives and become empowered to direct their energies towards the advancement of civilization; how to create dynamics within the family unit that lead to material and spiritual prosperity without instilling in the rising generations feelings of estrangement towards an illusory "other" or nurturing any instinct to exploit those relegated to this category; how to make it possible

for decision making to benefit from a diversity of perspectives through a consultative process which, understood as the collective investigation of reality, promotes detachment from personal views, gives due importance to valid empirical information, does not raise mere opinion to the status of fact or define truth as the compromise between opposing interest groups. To explore questions such as these and the many others certain to arise, the Bahá'í community has adopted a mode of operation characterized by action, reflection, consultation and study—study which involves not only constant reference to the writings of the Faith but also the scientific analysis of patterns unfolding. Indeed, how to maintain such a mode of learning in action, how to ensure that growing numbers participate in the generation and application of relevant knowledge, and how to devise structures for the systemization of an expanding worldwide experience and for the equitable distribution of the lessons learned—these are, themselves, the object of regular examination.

The overall direction of the process of learning that the Bahá'í community is pursuing is guided by a series of global plans, the provisions of which are established by the Universal House of Justice. Capacity building is the watchword of these plans: they aim at enabling the protagonists of collective effort to strengthen the spiritual foundations of villages and neighbourhoods, to address certain of their social and economic needs, and to contribute to the discourses prevalent in society, all while maintaining the necessary coherence in methods and approaches.

2 March 2013, Universal House of Justice

- 152 Central to the effort to advance the work of expansion and consolidation, social action, and the involvement in the discourses of society is the notion of an evolving conceptual framework, a matrix that organizes thought and gives shape to activities and which becomes more elaborate as experience accumulates. It would be fruitful if the elements of this framework ... can be consciously and progressively clarified ... Perhaps the most important of these is learning in action; the friends participate in an ongoing process of action, reflection, study, and consultation in order to address obstacles and share successes, re-examine and revise strategies and methods, and systematize and improve efforts over time.

24 July 2013, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 153 The Bahá'í approach to the questions you have raised is one which will be worked out over time through patient and persistent effort and by the process of learning in which the Bahá'í community is engaged. This process will be augmented by research and discussion and by attempts to correlate the teachings with modern thought, including the identification of similarities and distinctions between the teachings and contemporary social constructs. Involvement in the discourses of society by believers in various social spaces will sharpen the insights gained. Ongoing study of the teachings and systematic endeavour to translate Bahá'í principles into action by engaging in the processes of community building, education of children and youth, and social action will assist in refining our grasp of Bahá'u'lláh's intention for humanity in all areas of life. In the years ahead, the ability of the Bahá'í community to contribute to thought-shaping social change will increase, and answers to questions that appear to be unsolvable today will become apparent through a process of organic change, rather than as a result of imposing particular perspectives.

21 January 2014, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 154 In many ways, the communities that have progressed furthest are tracing an inviting path for others to follow. Yet whatever the level of activity in a cluster, it is the capacity for learning among the local friends, within a common framework, that fosters progress along the path of development. Everyone has a share in this enterprise; the contribution of each serves to enrich the whole. The most dynamic clusters are those in which, irrespective of the resources the community possesses or the number of activities being undertaken, the friends appreciate that their task is to identify what is required for progress to occur—the nascent capacity that must be nurtured, the new skill that must be acquired, the initiators of a fledgling effort who must be accompanied, the space for reflection that must be cultivated, the collective endeavour that must be coordinated—and then find creative ways in which the necessary time and resources can be made available to achieve it. The very fact that each set of circumstances presents its own challenges is enabling every community not simply to benefit from what is being learned in the rest of the Bahá'í world but also to add to that body of knowledge. Awareness of this reality frees one from the fruitless search for a rigid formula for action while still allowing the insights gleaned in diverse settings to inform the process of growth as it takes a particular shape in one's own surroundings. This entire approach is completely at odds with

narrow conceptions of “success” and “failure” that breed freneticism or paralyse volition. Detachment is needed. When effort is expended wholly for the sake of God then all that occurs belongs to Him and every victory won in His Name is an occasion to celebrate His praise.

Riḍván 2014, Universal House of Justice

- 155 ...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.

29 December 2015, Universal House of Justice

Consultation and Collaboration

- 156 O people of God! Give ear unto that which, if heeded, will ensure the freedom, well-being, tranquillity, exaltation and advancement of all men. Certain laws and principles are necessary and indispensable for Persia. However, it is fitting that these measures should be adopted in conformity with the considered views of His Majesty—may God aid him through His grace—and of the learned divines and of the high-ranking rulers. Subject to their approval a place should be fixed where they would meet. There they should hold fast to the cord of consultation and adopt and enforce that which is conducive to the security, prosperity, wealth and tranquillity of the people. For were any measure other than this to be adopted, it could not but result in chaos and commotion.

Bahá’u’lláh, Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh

- 157 The Great Being saith: The heaven of divine wisdom is illumined with the two luminaries of consultation and compassion. Take ye counsel together in all matters, inasmuch as consultation is the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding.

Bahá’u’lláh, Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh

- 158 If ye travel the countries of the globe ye shall observe on one side the remains of ruin and destruction, while on the other ye shall see the signs of civilization and development. Such desolation and ruin are the result of

war, strife and quarreling, while all development and progress are fruits of the lights of virtue, cooperation and concord.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 159 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.... 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.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Bahá'í Administration

- 160 Man must consult on all matters, whether major or minor, so that he may become cognizant of what is good. Consultation giveth him insight into things and enableth him to delve into questions which are unknown. The light of truth shineth from the faces of those who engage in consultation.... The members who are consulting, however, should behave in the utmost love, harmony and sincerity towards each other. The principle of consultation is one of the most fundamental elements of the divine edifice. Even in their ordinary affairs the individual members of society should consult.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 161 Some of the creatures of existence can live solitary and alone. A tree, for instance, may live without the assistance and cooperation of other trees. Some animals are isolated and lead a separate existence away from their kind. But this is impossible for man. In his life and being cooperation and association are essential. Through association and meeting we find happiness and development, individual and collective.

For instance, when there is intercourse and cooperation between two villages, the advancement of each will be assured. Likewise, if intercommunication is established between two cities, both will benefit and progress. And if a reciprocal basis of agreement be reached between two countries, their individual and mutual interests will find great development ... It is evident, then, that the outcomes from this basis of agreement and accord are numberless and unlimited.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 162 The supreme need of humanity is cooperation and reciprocity. The stronger the ties of fellowship and solidarity amongst men, the greater will be the power of constructiveness and accomplishment in all the planes of human activity. Without cooperation and reciprocal attitude the individual member of human society remains self-centered, uninspired by altruistic purposes, limited and solitary in development like the animal and plant organisms of the lower kingdoms.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 163 The Ancient Beauty, exalted be His Most Great Name, states: “The canopy of world order is upraised upon the two pillars of consultation and compassion,” and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in one of His Tablets asserts: “The purpose of consultation is to show that the views of several individuals are assuredly preferable to one man, even as the power of a number of men is of course greater than the power of one man. Thus consultation is acceptable in the presence of the Almighty, and hath been enjoined upon the believers, so that they may confer upon ordinary and personal matters, as well as on affairs which are general in nature and universal. For instance, when a man hath a project to accomplish, should he consult with some of his brethren, that which is agreeable will of course be investigated and unveiled to his eyes, and the truth will be disclosed. Likewise on a higher level, should the people of a village consult one another about their affairs, the right solution will certainly be revealed. In like manner, the members of each profession, such as in industry, should consult, and those in commerce should similarly consult on business affairs. In short, consultation is desirable and acceptable in all things and on all issues.”

15 February 1922, Shoghi Effendi

- 164 The principle of consultation, which constitutes one of the basic laws of the Administration, should be applied to all Bahá’í activities which affect the collective interests of the Faith, for it is through co-operation and continual exchange of thoughts and views that the Cause can best safeguard and foster its interests. Individual initiative, personal ability and resourcefulness, though indispensable, are, unless supported and enriched by the collective experiences and wisdom of the group, utterly incapable of achieving such a tremendous task.

30 August 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 165 There is nothing that can better ensure the success of your efforts than this close and continued consultation, and he would therefore advise you to adopt this method in all your future activities.

30 May 1937, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 166 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.

2 March 2013, Universal House of Justice

- 167 In their reflections on how to contribute to the betterment of the world, Bahá'ís will undoubtedly recognize that demonstrations are not the only, or even the most effective, means available to them. Rather, they can learn and grow in capacity over time to help their fellow citizens to frame concerns in a way that rises above fissures, to share views in a manner that transcends divisive approaches, and to create and participate in spaces to work together in the quest to enact solutions to the problems that bedevil their nation. As

Bahá'u'lláh stated: “Say: no man can attain his true station except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation.” In this light, justice is indeed essential to resist the vain imaginings and idle fancies of social and political machinations, to see reality with one’s own eyes, and to identify the requirements for an equitable social order. But then unity is essential—forged through consultative processes, including action and reflection—to achieve the power required for positive social change.

27 April 2017, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 168 Concepts and principles associated with Bahá’í consultation inform how the friends should interact among themselves and how they participate in social discourses and social action. Consultation provides a means by which common understanding can be reached and a collective course of action defined. It involves a free, respectful, dignified, and fair-minded effort on the part of a group of people to exchange views, seek truth, and attempt to reach consensus. An initial difference of opinion is the starting point for examining an issue in order to reach greater understanding and consensus; it should not become a cause of rancor, aversion, or estrangement. By acting in unity, a conclusion about a particular course of action may be tested and revised as necessary through a process of learning. Otherwise, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains, “stubbornness and persistence in one’s views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden.”

29 November 2017, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Utilizing Material Means

- 169 Hold ye fast unto the cord of material means, placing your whole trust in God, the Provider of all means.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 170 In this day it is incumbent upon everyone to serve the Cause of God, while He Who is the Eternal Truth—exalted be His glory—hath made the fulfilment of every undertaking on earth dependent on material means.

Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet

- 171 Wealth 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. Above all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude. Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor. If, on the other hand, it is expended for the promotion of knowledge, the founding of elementary and other schools, the encouragement of art and industry, the training of orphans and the poor—in brief, if it is dedicated to the welfare of society—its possessor will stand out before God and man as the most excellent of all who live on earth and will be accounted as one of the people of paradise.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 172 Thou hast asked about material means and prayer. Prayer is like the spirit and material means are like the human hand. The spirit operateth through the instrumentality of the hand. Although the one true God is the All-Provider, it is the earth which is the means to supply sustenance. "The heaven hath sustenance for you"ⁱ but when sustenance is decreed it becometh available, whatever the means may be. When man refuseth to use material means, he is like a thirsty one who seeketh to quench his thirst through means other than water or other liquids. The Almighty Lord is the provider of water, and its maker, and hath decreed that it be used to quench man's thirst, but its use is dependent upon His Will. If it should not be in conformity with His Will, man is afflicted with a thirst which the oceans cannot quench.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 173 O servant of God! To 'Abdu'l-Bahá, homelessness is home and the gloomy prison his nest. He seeketh a lofty mansion, but in the world of God; he desireth the Frequented Fane, but in the heavenly realm. An earthly edifice, even if raised as high as the heavens, will ultimately become a ruin, nay,

i Qur'án 51:22.

a darkened tomb. Erecting edifices, palaces, mansions, and stately homes is acceptable and praiseworthy in the religion of God, but one should not become attached to them or set one's affections upon them. The intention should be the advancement of the world and the establishment of human civilization. A man of true knowledge and understanding will build public structures, that is, places that belong to all—a house of worship, a school to teach children of all ages, a hostel for travellers, a hospital—for every public building is a divine edifice, eternal and everlasting. Upon thee be greetings and praise.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 174 Charity, however, does not necessarily imply a project that would fall within the scope of development work; at its simplest, it suggests only the transfer of resources, whether financial or of another kind, from those who have plenty to those who have insufficient. The motive that prompts such a benevolent act is, of course, laudable—Bahá'u'lláh Himself declares that “charity is pleasing and praiseworthy in the sight of God and is regarded as a prince among goodly deeds.” Nevertheless, the manner in which it is carried out must be carefully considered. It is important, for instance, to avoid any hint of paternalism, and the giver should be conscious of the values implicit in any system of redistribution that he or she establishes.

22 October 2012, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 175 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 ... 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.

29 December 2015, Universal House of Justice

- 176 The vision of Bahá'u'lláh challenges many of the assumptions that are allowed to shape contemporary discourse—for instance, that self-interest, far from needing to be restrained, drives prosperity, and that progress depends upon its expression through relentless competition. To view the worth of an individual chiefly in terms of how much one can accumulate and how many goods one can consume relative to others is wholly alien to Bahá'í thought.

But neither are the teachings in sympathy with sweeping dismissals of wealth as inherently distasteful or immoral, and asceticism is prohibited. Wealth must serve humanity. Its use must accord with spiritual principles; systems must be created in their light. And, in Bahá'u'lláh's memorable words, "No light can compare with the light of justice. The establishment of order in the world and the tranquillity of the nations depend upon it."

1 March 2017, Universal House of Justice

Selected Themes Pertaining to Social and Economic Development

Education

- 177 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, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 178 We prescribe unto all men that which will lead to the exaltation of the Word of God amongst His servants, and likewise, to the advancement of the world of being and the uplift of souls. To this end, the greatest means is education of the child. To this must each and all hold fast. We have verily laid this charge upon you in manifold Tablets as well as in My Most Holy Book. Well is it with him who deferreth thereto.

Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet

- 179 Close investigation will show that the primary cause of oppression and injustice, of unrighteousness, irregularity and disorder, is the people's lack of religious faith and the fact that they are uneducated. When, for example, the people are genuinely religious and are literate and well-schooled, and a difficulty presents itself, they can apply to the local authorities; if they do not meet with justice and secure their rights and if they see that the conduct of the local government is incompatible with the divine good pleasure and the

king's justice, they can then take their case to higher courts and describe the deviation of the local administration from the spiritual law. Those courts can then send for the local records of the case and in this way justice will be done. At present, however, because of their inadequate schooling, most of the population lack even the vocabulary to explain what they want.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 180 The primary, the most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward. The principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples is ignorance. Today the mass of the people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs, how much less do they grasp the core of the important problems and complex needs of the time.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 181 Observe carefully how education and the arts of civilization bring honor, prosperity, independence and freedom to a government and its people.

It is, furthermore, a vital necessity to establish schools throughout Persia, even in the smallest country towns and villages, and to encourage the people in every possible way to have their children learn to read and write. If necessary, education should even be made compulsory. Until the nerves and arteries of the nation stir into life, every measure that is attempted will prove vain; for the people are as the human body, and determination and the will to struggle are as the soul, and a soulless body does not move. This dynamic power is present to a superlative degree in the very nature of the Persian people, and the spread of education will release it.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 182 And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is the promotion of education. Every child must be instructed in sciences as much as is necessary. If the parents are able to provide the expenses of this education, it is well, otherwise the community must provide the means for the teaching of that child.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, First Tablet to The Hague

- 183 The education and training of children is among the most meritorious acts of humankind and draweth down the grace and favor 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.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 184 It followeth that the children's school must be a place of utmost discipline and order, that instruction must be thorough, and provision must be made for the rectification and refinement of character; so that, in his earliest years, within the very essence of the child, the divine foundation will be laid and the structure of holiness raised up.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 185 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, from a Tablet

- 186 One of the friends hath sent us a letter regarding the school at 'Ishqábád, to the effect that, praised be God, the friends there are now working hard to get the school in order, and have appointed teachers well qualified for their task, and that from this time forward the greatest care will be devoted to the supervision and management of the school...

One of the most important of undertakings is the education of children, for success and prosperity depend upon service to and worship of God, the Holy, the All-Glorified.

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, from a Tablet

- 187 This school is one of the vital and essential institutions which indeed support and bulwark the edifice of humankind. God willing, it will develop and be perfected along every line. Once this school hath, in every respect, been perfected, once it hath been made to flourish and to surpass all other schools, then, each following the other, more and more schools must be established.

Our meaning is that the friends must direct their attention toward the education and training of all the children of Persia, so that all of them, having, in the school of true learning, achieved the power of understanding and come to know the inner realities of the universe, will go on to uncover the signs and mysteries of God, and will find themselves illumined by the lights of the knowledge of the Lord, and by His love. This truly is the very best way to educate all peoples.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 188 Exert every effort to acquire the various branches of knowledge and true understanding. Strain every nerve to achieve both material and spiritual accomplishments.

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, from a Tablet

- 189 Your letter was eloquent, its contents original and sensitively expressed, and it betokened your great and praiseworthy efforts to educate the children, both girls and boys. This is among the most important of all human endeavours. Every possible means of education must be made available to Bahá'í children, tender plants of the divine garden, for in this consisteth the illumination of humankind.

Praised be God, the friends in 'Ishqábád have laid a solid foundation, an unassailable base. It was in the City of Love that the first Bahá'í House of Worship was erected; and today in this city the means for the education

of children are also being developed, inasmuch as even during the war years this duty was not neglected, and indeed deficiencies were made up for. Now must ye widen the scope of your endeavours and draw up plans to establish schools for higher education, so that the City of Love will become the Bahá'í focal centre for science and the arts. Thanks to the bountiful assistance of the Blessed Beauty, means for this will be provided.

Devote ye particular attention to the school for girls, for the greatness of this wondrous Age will be manifested as a result of progress in the world of women. This is why ye observe that in every land the world of women is on the march, and this is due to the impact of the Most Great Manifestation, and the power of the teachings of God.

Instruction in the schools must begin with instruction in religion. Following religious training, and the binding of the child's heart to the love of God, proceed with his education in the other branches of knowledge.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

190 Make ye every effort to improve the Tarbíyat School and to develop order and discipline in this institution. Utilize every means to make this School a garden of the All-Merciful, from which the lights of learning will cast their beams, and wherein the children, whether Bahá'í or other, will be educated to such a degree as to become God's gifts to man, and the pride of the human race. Let them make the greatest progress in the shortest span of time, let them open wide their eyes and uncover the inner realities of all things, become proficient in every art and skill, and learn to comprehend the secrets of all things even as they are—this faculty being one of the clearly evident effects of servitude to the Holy Threshold.

It is certain that ye will make every effort to bring this about, will also draw up plans for the opening of a number of schools. These schools for academic studies must at the same time be training centres in behaviour and conduct, and they must favour character and conduct above the sciences and arts. Good behaviour and high moral character must come first, for unless the character be trained, acquiring knowledge will only prove injurious. Knowledge is praiseworthy when it is coupled with ethical conduct and virtuous character; otherwise it is a deadly poison, a frightful danger. A physician of evil character, and who betrayeth his trust, can bring on death, and become the source of numerous infirmities and diseases.

Devote ye the utmost attention to this matter, for the basic, the foundation-principle of a school is first and foremost moral training, character and the rectification of conduct.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 191 The subjects to be taught in children's schools are many, and for lack of time We can touch on only a few: First and most important is training in behaviour and good character; the rectification of qualities; arousing the desire to become accomplished and acquire perfections, and to cleave unto the religion of God and stand firm in His Laws: to accord total obedience to every just government, to show forth loyalty and trustworthiness to the ruler of the time, to be well wishers of mankind, to be kind to all.

And further, as well as in the ideals of character, instruction in such arts and sciences as are of benefit, and in foreign tongues. Also, the repeating of prayers for the well-being of ruler and ruled; and the avoidance of materialistic works that are current among those who see only natural causation, and tales of love, and books that arouse the passions.

To sum up, let all the lessons be entirely devoted to the acquisition of human perfections.

Here, then, in brief are directions for the curriculum of these schools.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 192 Your letter hath come and hath occasioned the utmost joy, with its news that, praised be God, in Hamadán a welfare and relief association hath been established. I trust that this will become a source of general prosperity and assistance, and that means will be provided to set the hearts of the poor and weak at rest, and to educate the orphans and other children.

The question of training the children and looking after the orphans is extremely important, but most important of all is the education of girl children, for these girls will one day be mothers, and the mother is the first teacher of the child. In whatever way she reareth the child, so will the child become, and the results of that first training will remain with the individual throughout his entire life, and it would be most difficult to alter them. And how can a mother, herself ignorant and untrained, educate her child? It is therefore clear that the education of girls is of far greater consequence than that of boys. This fact is extremely important, and the matter must be seen to with the greatest energy and dedication.

God sayeth in the Qur'án that they shall not be equals, those who have knowledge and those who have it not. Ignorance is thus utterly to be blamed, whether in male or female; indeed, in the female its harm is greater. I hope, therefore, that the friends will make strenuous efforts to educate their children, sons and daughters alike. This is verily the truth, and outside the truth there is manifestly naught save perdition.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 193 In this new and wondrous Cause, the advancement of all branches of knowledge is a fixed and vital principle, and the friends, one and all, are obligated to make every effort toward this end, so that the Cause of the Manifest Light may be spread abroad, and that every child, according to his need, will receive his share of the sciences and arts—until not even a single peasant's child will be found who is completely devoid of schooling.

It is essential that the fundamentals of knowledge be taught; essential that all should be able to read and write. Wherefore is this new institution most worthy of praise, and its programme to be encouraged. The hope is that other villages will take you for a model, and that in every village where there is a certain number of believers, a school will be founded where the children can study reading, writing, and basic knowledge.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 194 Bahá'u'lláh has announced that inasmuch as ignorance and lack of education are barriers of separation among mankind, all must receive training and instruction. Through this provision the lack of mutual understanding will be remedied and the unity of mankind furthered and advanced. Universal education is a universal law.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 195 Among the sacred obligations devolving upon the Spiritual Assemblies is the promotion of learning, the establishing of schools and creation of the necessary academic equipment and facilities for every boy and girl.

Every child, without exception, must from his earliest years make a thorough study of the art of reading and writing, and according to his own tastes and inclinations and the degree of his capacity and powers, devote extreme diligence to the acquisition of learning beneficial arts and skills, various languages, speech, and contemporary technology.

To assist the children of the poor in the attainment of these accomplishments, and particularly in learning the basic subjects, is incumbent upon the members of the Spiritual Assemblies, and is accounted as one of the obligations laid upon the conscience of the trustees of God in every land.

“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.”

8 June 1925, Shoghi Effendi

- 196 You had asked about poverty and wealth, and the toil of the poor and the comfort of the rich, and you had expressed your amazement and wonder at this situation...

The intent is not, however, to say that all the poor will become rich and they will become equal. Such a concept is like saying that all the ignorant and the illiterate will become the sages of the age and the learned of the learned. Rather, when education becomes compulsory and universal, ignorance and illiteracy will decrease and there will remain no one deprived of education. But, as the basis for distinction is in the person's capacity and ability, and differences are related to the degree of his intelligence and mental powers, therefore, all the people will not be equal in their knowledge, learning and understanding. The intent is to say that the world of creation calls for distinctions in people's stations, and degrees in the differences existing among them, so that the affairs of the world may become organized and ordered. Diversity in all created things, whether in kind, in physical appearance, or in station, is the means for their protection, their permanence, unity and harmony. Each part complements the other.

22 May 1928, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 197 ...Bahá'u'lláh considered education as one of the most fundamental factors of a true civilization. This education, however, in order to be adequate and fruitful, should be comprehensive in nature and should take into consideration not only the physical and the intellectual side of man but also his spiritual and ethical aspects.

9 July 1931, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 198 You have asked him for detailed information concerning the Bahá'í educational programme. There is as yet no such thing as a Bahá'í curriculum, and there are no Bahá'í publications exclusively devoted to this subject, since the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá do not present a definite and detailed educational system, but simply offer certain basic principles and set forth a number of teaching ideals that should guide future Bahá'í educationalists in their efforts to formulate an adequate teaching curriculum which would be in full harmony with the spirit of the Bahá'í Teachings, and would thus meet the requirements and needs of the modern age.

These basic principles are available in the sacred writings of the Cause, and should be carefully studied, and gradually incorporated in various college and university programmes. But the task of formulating a system of education which would be officially recognized by the Cause, and enforced as such throughout the Bahá'í world, is one which [the] present-day generation of believers cannot obviously undertake, and which has to be gradually accomplished by Bahá'í scholars and educationalists of the future.

7 June 1939, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 199 Education is a vast field, and educational theories abound. Surely many have considerable merit, but it should be remembered that none is free of assumptions about the nature of the human being and society. An educational process should, for example, create in a child awareness of his or her potentialities, but the glorification of self has to be scrupulously avoided. So often in the name of building confidence the ego is bolstered. Similarly, play has its place in the education of the young. Children and junior youth, however, have proven time and again their capacity to engage in discussions on abstract subjects, undertaken at a level appropriate to their age, and derive great joy from the serious pursuit of understanding. An educational process that dilutes content in a mesmerizing sea of entertainment does them no service.

12 December 2011, Universal House of Justice

Agriculture

200 Whilst in the Prison of 'Akká, We revealed in the Crimson Book that which is conducive to the advancement of mankind and to the reconstruction of the world. The utterances set forth therein by the Pen of the Lord of creation include the following which constitute the fundamental principles for the administration of the affairs of men:

First: It is incumbent upon the ministers of the House of Justice to promote the Lesser Peace so that the people of the earth may be relieved from the burden of exorbitant expenditures. This matter is imperative and absolutely essential, inasmuch as hostilities and conflict lie at the root of affliction and calamity.

Second: Languages must be reduced to one common language to be taught in all the schools of the world.

Third: It behoveth man to adhere tenaciously unto that which will promote fellowship, kindliness and unity.

Fourth: Everyone, whether man or woman, should hand over to a trusted person a portion of what he or she earneth through trade, agriculture or other occupation, for the training and education of children, to be spent for this purpose with the knowledge of the Trustees of the House of Justice.

Fifth: Special regard must be paid to agriculture. Although it hath been mentioned in the fifth place, unquestionably it precedeth the others.

Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

201 Thou hadst made reference in thy letter to agriculture. On this matter He hath laid down the following universal rule that it is incumbent upon everyone, even should he be resident in a particular land for no more than a single day, to become engaged in some craft or trade, or agriculture, and that the very pursuit of such a calling is, in the eyes of the one true God, identical with worship. This rule was exemplified by the Bahá'í community at the time when they were facing exile from 'Iráq, for, while they

were making arrangements for their journey, they occupied themselves in cultivating the land; and when they set out, instructions were given for the fruits of their labours to be distributed amongst the friends.

Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet

- 202 And if, as you pass by fields and plantations, where the plants, flowers and sweet-smelling herbs are growing luxuriantly together, forming a pattern of unity, this is an evidence of the fact that that plantation and garden is flourishing under the care of a skilful gardener. But when you see it in a state of disorder and irregularity you infer that it has lacked the training of an efficient farmer and thus has produced weeds and tares.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, First Tablet to The Hague

- 203 Strive as much as possible to become proficient in the science of agriculture, for in accordance with the divine teachings the acquisition of sciences and the perfection of arts are considered acts of worship. If a man engageth with all his power in the acquisition of a science or in the perfection of an art, it is as if he has been worshipping God in churches and temples. Thus as thou enterest a school of agriculture and strivest in the acquisition of that science thou art day and night engaged in acts of worship—acts that are accepted at the threshold of the Almighty. What bounty greater than this, that science should be considered as an act of worship and art as service to the Kingdom of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 204 Since thy dear child is taking his examinations, my fervent wish at the divine Threshold is that, by the grace and favour of God, he may meet with success, and that in the future he may go on to study agriculture and master its various branches, practical and theoretical. Agriculture is a noble science and, should thy son become proficient in this field, he will become a means of providing for the comfort of untold numbers of people.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 205 Commerce, agriculture and industry should not, in truth, be a bar to service of the one true God. Indeed, such occupations are most potent instruments and clear proofs for the manifestation of the evidences of one's piety, of one's trustworthiness and of the virtues of the All-Merciful Lord.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 206 The crisis that exists in the world is not confined to the farmers. Its effects have reached every means of livelihood. The farmers are in a sense better off because they at least have food to eat. But on the whole the crisis is serving a great purpose. It is broadening the outlook of man, teaching him to think internationally, forcing him to take into consideration the welfare of his neighbours if he wishes to improve his own condition.

2 March 1932, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Economics

- 207 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

- 208 Should these sublime teachings be diffused, mankind shall be freed from all perils, from all chronic ills and sicknesses. In like manner are the Bahá'í economic principles the embodiment of the highest aspirations of all wage-earning classes and of economists of various schools.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Tablet to Dr. Forel

- 209 To state the matter briefly, the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh advocate voluntary sharing, and this is a greater thing than the equalization of wealth. For equalization must be imposed from without, while sharing is a matter of free choice.

Man reacheth perfection through good deeds, voluntarily performed, not through good deeds the doing of which was forced upon him. And sharing is a personally chosen righteous act: that is, the rich should extend assistance to the poor, they should expend their substance for the poor, but of their own free will, and not because the poor have gained this end by force. For the harvest of force is turmoil and the ruin of the social order. On the other hand voluntary sharing, the freely-chosen expending

of one's substance, leadeth to society's comfort and peace. It lighteth up the world; it bestoweth honor upon humankind.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 210 O my spiritual friends! Among the greatest means of achieving modern advancements, the prosperity of nations, and the civilization of the peoples is the establishment of companies for commerce, industry, and other sources of wealth, inasmuch as a company is a symbol of oneness, unity, and harmony in the Cause of God. It is most difficult for humankind to succeed in anything singly, but when an assemblage is formed and a company established, the members will be enabled jointly to accomplish great tasks. Consider, for instance, an army. If each soldier were to enter into combat singly, he would be fighting with the force of one man, but when a troop is formed, each member of that troop resisteth with a thousand-fold power, for the power of a thousand individuals is converged upon one point. It is the same in other matters. However, every business company should be established on divine principles. Its foundations should be trustworthiness, piety, and truthfulness, in order to protect the rights of the people and to become, as day followeth day, a magnet of fidelity, so that the confirmations of the All-Glorious may be unveiled. Moreover, a legitimate company must needs exert all within its power to safeguard the rights of the people in all matters, whether great or small, and to administer the affairs of the company with the utmost perfection, uprightness, and care. If it be so conducted, that company, beyond a shadow of a doubt, will become the embodiment of blessings, and that assemblage will attract the confirmations of the Lord of all bounties and, safe under the protection of the Greatest Name, will remain shielded from every misfortune. Upon you be greetings and praise.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 211 The question of economics must commence with the farmer and then be extended to the other classes inasmuch as the number of farmers is far greater than all other classes. Therefore, it is fitting to begin with the farmer in matters related to economics for the farmer is the first active agent in human society. In brief, from among the wise men in every village a board should be set up and the affairs of that village should be under the control of that board. Likewise a general storehouse should be founded with the appointment of a secretary. At the time of the harvest, under the direction of

that board, a certain percentage of the entire harvest should be appropriated for the storehouse.

The storehouse has seven revenues: Tithes, taxes on animals, property without an heir, all lost objects found whose owners cannot be traced, one third of all treasure-trove, one third of the produce of all mines, and voluntary contributions.

This storehouse also has seven expenditures:

1. General running expenses of the storehouse, such as the salary of the secretary and the administration of public health.
2. Tithes to the government.
3. Taxes on animals to the government.
4. Costs of running an orphanage.
5. Costs of running a home for the incapacitated.
6. Costs of running a school.
7. Payment of subsidies to provide needed support of the poor.

The first revenue is the tithe. It should be collected as follows: If, for instance, the income of a person is five hundred dollars and his necessary expenses are the same, no tithes will be collected from him. If another's expenses are five hundred dollars while his income is one thousand dollars, one tenth will be taken from him, for he hath more than his needs; if he giveth one tenth of the surplus, his livelihood will not be adversely affected. If another's expenses are one thousand dollars, and his income is five thousand dollars, as he hath four thousand dollars surplus he will be required to give one and a half tenths. If another person hath necessary expenses of one thousand dollars, but his income is ten thousand dollars, from him two tenths will be required for his surplus represents a large sum. But if the necessary expenses of another person are four or five thousand dollars, and his income one hundred thousand, one fourth will be required from him. On the other hand, should a person's income be two hundred, but his needs absolutely essential for his livelihood be five hundred dollars, and provided he hath not been remiss in his work or his farm hath not been blessed with a harvest, such a one must receive help from the general storehouse so that he may not remain in need and may live in comfort.

A certain amount must be put aside from the general storehouse for the orphans of the village and a certain sum for the incapacitated. A certain amount must be provided from this storehouse for those who are

needy and incapable of earning a livelihood, and a certain amount for the village's system of education. And, a certain amount must be set aside for the administration of public health. If anything is left in the storehouse, that must be transferred to the general treasury of the nation for national expenditures.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 212 One must therefore enact such laws and regulations as will moderate the excessive fortunes of the few and meet the basic needs of the myriad millions of the poor, that a degree of moderation may be achieved.

However, absolute equality is just as untenable, for complete equality in wealth, power, commerce, agriculture, and industry would result in chaos and disorder, disrupt livelihoods, provoke universal discontent, and undermine the orderly conduct of the affairs of the community. For unjustified equality is also fraught with peril. It is preferable, then, that some measure of moderation be achieved, and by moderation is meant the enactment of such laws and regulations as would prevent the unwarranted concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and satisfy the essential needs of the many. For instance, the factory owners reap a fortune every day, but the wage the poor workers are paid cannot even meet their daily needs: This is most unfair, and assuredly no just man can accept it. Therefore, laws and regulations should be enacted which would grant the workers both a daily wage and a share in a fourth or fifth of the profits of the factory in accordance with its means, or which would have the workers equitably share in some other way in the profits with the owners. For the capital and the management come from the latter and the toil and labour from the former. The workers could either be granted a wage that adequately meets their daily needs, as well as a right to a share in the revenues of the factory when they are injured, incapacitated, or unable to work, or else a wage could be set that allows the workers to both satisfy their daily needs and save a little for times of weakness and incapacity.

If matters were so arranged, neither would the factory owners amass each day a fortune which is absolutely of no use to them—for should one's fortune increase beyond measure, one would come under a most heavy burden, become subject to exceeding hardships and troubles, and find the administration of such an excessive fortune to be most difficult and to exhaust one's natural powers—nor would the workers endure such toil and hardship as to become incapacitated and to fall victim, at the end of their lives, to the direst need.

It is therefore clearly established that the appropriation of excessive wealth by a few individuals, notwithstanding the needs of the masses, is unfair and unjust, and that, conversely, absolute equality would also disrupt the existence, welfare, comfort, peace, and orderly life of the human race. Such being the case, the best course is therefore to seek moderation, which is for the wealthy to recognize the advantages of moderation in the acquisition of profits and to show regard for the welfare of the poor and the needy, that is, to fix a daily wage for the workers and also to allot them a share of the total profits of the factory.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Some Answered Questions

- 213 Among the results of the manifestation of spiritual forces will be that the human world will adapt itself to a new social form, the justice of God will become manifest throughout human affairs, and human equality will be universally established. The poor will receive a great bestowal, and the rich attain eternal happiness. For although at the present time the rich enjoy the greatest luxury and comfort, they are nevertheless deprived of eternal happiness; for eternal happiness is contingent upon giving, and the poor are everywhere in the state of abject need. Through the manifestation of God's great equity the poor of the world will be rewarded and assisted fully, and there will be a readjustment in the economic conditions of mankind so that in the future there will not be the abnormally rich nor the abject poor. The rich will enjoy the privilege of this new economic condition as well as the poor, for owing to certain provisions and restrictions they will not be able to accumulate so much as to be burdened by its management, while the poor will be relieved from the stress of want and misery. The rich will enjoy his palace, and the poor will have his comfortable cottage.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 214 ...Bahá'u'lláh set forth principles of guidance and teaching for economic readjustment. Regulations were revealed by Him which ensure the welfare of the commonwealth. As the rich man enjoys his life surrounded by ease and luxuries, so the poor man must, likewise, have a home and be provided with sustenance and comforts commensurate with his needs. This readjustment of the social economy is of the greatest importance inasmuch as it ensures the stability of the world of humanity; and until it is effected, happiness and prosperity are impossible.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

215 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 laborer 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...

Difference of capacity in human individuals is fundamental. It is impossible for all to be alike, all to be equal, all to be wise. Bahá'u'lláh has revealed principles and laws which will accomplish the adjustment of varying human capacities. He has said that whatsoever is possible of accomplishment in human government will be effected through these principles. When the laws He has instituted are carried out, there will be no millionaires possible in the community and likewise no extremely poor. This will be effected and regulated by adjusting the different degrees of human capacity. The fundamental basis of the community is agriculture, tillage of the soil. All must be producers. Each person in the community whose need is equal to his individual producing capacity shall be exempt from taxation. But if his income is greater than his needs, he must pay a tax until an adjustment is effected. That is to say, a man's capacity for production and his needs will be equalized and reconciled through taxation. If his production exceeds, he will pay a tax; if his necessities exceed his production, he shall receive an amount sufficient to equalize or adjust. Therefore, taxation will be proportionate to capacity and production, and there will be no poor in the community.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

216 The fundamentals of the whole economic condition are divine in nature and are associated with the world of the heart and spirit. This is fully explained in the Bahá'í teaching, and without knowledge of its principles no improvement in the economic state can be realized. The Bahá'ís will bring about this improvement and betterment but not through sedition and appeal to physical force—not through warfare, but welfare. Hearts must be so cemented together, love must become so dominant that the rich shall most willingly extend assistance to the poor and take steps to establish these economic adjustments permanently. If it is accomplished in this way, it will be most praiseworthy because then it will be for the sake of

God and in the pathway of His service. For example, it will be as if the rich inhabitants of a city should say, “It is neither just nor lawful that we should possess great wealth while there is abject poverty in this community,” and then willingly give their wealth to the poor, retaining only as much as will enable them to live comfortably.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 217 He has also received the article you wrote for “The Bahá’í World” on the economic teachings of the Cause.ⁱ As you say, the writings are not so rich on this subject, and many of the issues at present baffling the minds of the world are not even mentioned. The primary consideration is the spirit that has to permeate our economic life and this will gradually crystallize itself into definite institutions and principles that would help to bring about the ideal condition foretold by Bahá’u’lláh.

20 December 1931, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 218 With regard to your wish for reorganizing your business along Bahá’í lines, Shoghi Effendi deeply appreciates the spirit that has prompted you to make such a suggestion. But he feels, nevertheless, that the time has not yet come for any believer to bring about such a fundamental change in the economic structure of our society, however restricted may be the field for such an experiment. The economic teachings of the Cause, though well known in their main outline, have not yet been sufficiently elaborated and systematized to allow anyone to make an exact and thorough application of them, even on a restricted scale.

22 May 1935, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 219 There are practically no technical teachings on economics in the Cause, such as banking, the price system, and others. The Cause is not an economic system, nor should its Founders be considered as having been technical economists. The contribution of the Faith to this subject is essentially indirect, as it consists in the application of spiritual principles to our present-day economic system. Bahá’u’lláh has given us a few basic principles which should guide future Bahá’í economists in establishing such institutions as will adjust the economic relationships of the world.

i “The World Economy of Bahá’u’lláh” by Horace Holley, in *The Bahá’í World*, vol. 4, 1930–1932 (New York: Bahá’í Publishing Committee, 1933), pp. 351–367.

...The Master has definitely stated that wages should be unequal, simply because men are unequal in their ability, and hence should receive wages that would correspond to their varying capacities and resources. This view seems to contradict the opinion of some modern economists. But the friends should have full confidence in the words of the Master, and should give preference to His statements over those voiced by our so-called modern thinkers...

...Whatever the progress of the machinery may be, man will have always to toil in order to earn his living. Effort is an inseparable part of man's life. It may take different forms with the changing conditions of the world, but it will be always present as a necessary element in our earthly existence. Life is after all a struggle. Progress is attained through struggle, and without such a struggle life ceases to have a meaning; it becomes even extinct. The progress of machinery has not made effort unnecessary. It has given it a new form, a new outlet.

...By the statement "the economic solution is divine in nature" is meant that religion alone can, in the last resort, bring in man's nature such a fundamental change as to enable him to adjust the economic relationships of society. It is only in this way that man can control the economic forces that threaten to disrupt the foundations of his existence, and thus assert his mastery over the forces of nature.

...As already referred to ... social inequality is the inevitable outcome of the natural inequality of men. Human beings are different in ability and should, therefore, be different in their social and economic standing. Extremes of wealth and poverty should, however, be totally abolished. Those whose brains have contributed to the creation and improvement of the means of production must be fairly rewarded, though these means may be owned and controlled by others.

26 December 1935, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 220 With regard to your question concerning the Bahá'í attitude towards labour problems: these cannot assuredly be solved, 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us, through the sheer force of physical violence. Non-co-operation too, even though not accompanied by acts of violence, is ineffective. The conflict between labour and capital can best be solved through the peaceful and constructive methods of co-operation and of consultation.

30 June 1937, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 221 Regarding your questions concerning the Bahá'í attitude on various economic problems, such as the problem of ownership, control and distribution of capital, and of other means of production, the problem of trusts and monopolies, and such economic experiments as social co-operatives: the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá do not provide specific and detailed solutions to all such economic questions, which mostly pertain to the domain of technical economics, and as such do not concern directly the Cause. True, there are certain guiding principles in Bahá'í Sacred Writings on the subject of economics, but these do by no means cover the whole field of theoretical and applied economics, and are mostly intended to guide future Bahá'í economic writers and technicians to evolve an economic system which would function in full conformity with the spirit, and the exact provisions of the Cause on this and similar subjects. The International House of Justice will have, in consultation with economic experts, to assist in the formulation and evolution of the Bahá'í economic system of the future. One thing, however, is certain: that the Cause neither accepts the theories of the Capitalistic economics in full, nor can it agree with the Marxists and Communists in their repudiation of the principle of private ownership and of this vital sacred right of the individual.

10 June 1939, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 222 The ideologies now current in the world are extremely complex. Just as it is difficult to identify any longer a coherent system of teachings which could be called Christianity and embrace all those who call themselves Christians, so there are many kinds of Communist, often stridently at variance with one another. Even more so are there many kinds of "Capitalist" in the sense of those who advocate Capitalism as the most desirable form of economic system. "The Promise of World Peace" was no place for an analysis of the virtues and shortcomings of these various theories, it could but allude to some of the most glaring deficiencies produced by extreme variants, and encourage all who advocate them to overlook their differences in a search for the real solution of the problems afflicting mankind.

One could postulate two extremes of economic theory: those who believe that the best solution is to remove all governmental control and intervention from the operation of the economic system, and those who believe that the functioning of the economic system should be closely supervised and adjusted by the State so that society is not at the mercy of the system but has it under its control. As has become abundantly

clear, neither extreme is workable, and proponents of both have gradually come to adopt more moderate stances, although there tends to be an oscillation of viewpoints in response to changing conditions. It was to the proponents of one of these extremes and to the current highly unsatisfactory economic situation in the world that the House of Justice was alluding when it referred to those ideologies which have tended “to callously abandon starving millions to the operations of a market system that all too clearly is aggravating the plight of the majority of mankind, while enabling small sections to live in a condition of affluence scarcely dreamed of by our forebears.”

13 November 1985, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 223 An obvious example arises in discussions of the process of globalization, to which your letter alludes. The immense advantages, that this long-awaited stage in the evolution of human society brings with it, demand of government and civil society comparable efforts to ensure a fair distribution of its benefits to the whole of humankind. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sets the issue squarely before us:

Consider an individual who has amassed treasures by colonizing a country for his profit: he has obtained an incomparable fortune and has secured profits and incomes which flow like a river, while a hundred thousand unfortunate people, weak and powerless, are in need of a mouthful of bread. There is neither equality nor benevolence. So you see that general peace and joy are destroyed, and the welfare of humanity is negated to such an extent as to make fruitless the lives of many. For fortune, honours, commerce, industry are in the hands of some industrialists, while other people are submitted to quite a series of difficulties and to limitless troubles: they have neither advantages, nor profits, nor comforts, nor peace.

The challenges posed by this issue, which today affects the whole planet, are on a scale unprecedented in human history. Addressing them will require unity of understanding about what is at stake, an understanding that can be achieved only by searching analysis, open public discussion and an unrelenting commitment to putting into effect agreed upon systems of control.

27 November 2001, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

224 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter ... requesting clarification on what constitutes an appropriate economic philosophy for our time...

In your ... letter you quote a passage from *Century of Light*, which refers to the current reigning system of thought on the planet as morally and intellectually bankrupt. The passage suggests to you that capitalism is regarded by the Bahá'í community as a useless economic philosophy for future world development. You find this stance surprising not only because it is in direct opposition to conclusions reached by thinkers today who consider capitalism the only viable system for global economic development, but also because it seems to contradict certain statements made by Shoghi Effendi. Capitalism has evolved into a system which you would argue is largely, if not entirely, consistent with Shoghi Effendi's statements. You wonder how Bahá'ís working in the field of economics are to move forward, when they hold such widely differing views on the subject, from those like you who see the Guardian's remarks as support for capitalism to others who believe it should be replaced.

There are two aspects to the questions you raise. One concerns the statement about the moral bankruptcy of today's dominant world system, and the other is related to the validity of economic theories that embrace capitalism. As to the first, the passage you quote from *Century of Light* is intended as a general statement on the condition of the world, its political and economic structures, and the injustices that are tearing away the fabric of present-day society. One can rightly denounce as unjust the current global situation, in which a relatively few live in opulence while the vast majority of their fellow human beings are condemned to a life of utter material poverty. Surely this situation cannot be separated from the basic inadequacies of the dominant system of thought and the structures and processes to which it has given rise.

The second aspect of your questions concerns the specifics of economic theory. That, as you mention, Bahá'í thinkers adhere to a wide range of views on capitalism and its various forms should not be a cause for alarm. On the contrary, the House of Justice finds the situation quite healthy and does not wish to elaborate further on the subject at this time. You are correct when you make the statement in your ... letter that the solutions to humanity's problems are to be found in the application of scientific knowledge and the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh to social reality. It is to be expected, then, that the Teachings would be brought to bear on the choic-

es humanity has to make about how to produce, distribute, multiply, apply and use material means. As is natural in the advancement of any science, insights into a proper economic theory will only be gained as people with divergent views explore different directions. Criticism of current economic practices should not be misconstrued as simply a denunciation of capitalism, nor should it be taken as an endorsement of socialism. As you would readily agree, the premise of private ownership can give rise to new and better ways than current modes of organizing the economic activity of the human race.

31 July 2002, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 225 Social justice will be attained only when every member of society enjoys a relative degree of material prosperity and gives due regard to the acquisition of spiritual qualities. The solution, then, to prevailing economic difficulties is to be sought as much in the application of spiritual principles as in the implementation of scientific methods and approaches. The family unit offers an ideal setting within which can be shaped those moral attributes that contribute to an appropriate view of material wealth and its utilization.

Referring to the exigencies of the material world, Bahá'u'lláh has affirmed that to every end has been assigned a means for its accomplishment. A natural conclusion to be drawn from reflection on this fundamental principle is that vigilance must be exercised in distinguishing “means” from “ends”; otherwise, what is intended as a mere instrument could easily become the very goal of an individual’s life. The acquisition of wealth is a case in point; it is acceptable and praiseworthy to the extent that it serves as a means for achieving higher ends—for meeting one’s basic necessities, for fostering the progress of one’s family, for promoting the welfare of society, and for contributing to the establishment of a world civilization. But to make the accumulation of wealth the central purpose of one’s life is unworthy of any human being.

An idea closely related to the above, and well in accord with the spirit of the Bahá’í teachings, is that the end does not serve to justify the means. However constructive and noble the goal, however significant to one’s life or to the welfare of one’s family, it must not be attained through improper means. Regrettably, a number of today’s leaders—political, social, and religious—as well as some of the directors of financial markets, executives of multinational corporations, chiefs of commerce and industry, and ordinary people who succumb to social pressure and ignore the call of their

conscience, act against this principle; they justify any means in order to achieve their goals.

The legitimacy of wealth depends, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has indicated, on how it is acquired and on how it is expended. In this connection, He has stated that “wealth is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual’s own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, crafts and industry”, if the measures adopted by the individual in generating wealth serve to “enrich the generality of the people”, and if the wealth thus obtained is expended for “philanthropic purposes” and “the promotion of knowledge”, for the establishment of schools and industry and the advancement of education, and in general for the welfare of society...

Many would readily acknowledge that the acquisition of wealth should be governed by the requirements of justice, which, as a principle, can be expressed to varying degrees, on different levels. An employer and employee, for example, are bound by the laws and conventions that regulate their work, and each is expected to carry out his or her responsibilities with honesty and integrity. At another level, however, if the deeper implications of justice are to be realized, the other two preconditions to the legitimate acquisition of wealth mentioned above must be taken into account, and prevailing norms reassessed in their light. Here, the relationship between minimum wage and the cost of living merits careful evaluation—this, especially in light of the contribution workers make to a company’s success and their entitlement, as noted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, to a fair share of the profits. The wide margin, often unjustifiable, between the production costs of certain goods and the price at which they are sold likewise requires attention, as does the question of the generation of wealth through measures that “enrich the generality of the people”. What such reflection and inquiry will no doubt make abundantly clear is that certain approaches to obtaining wealth—so many of which involve the exploitation of others, the monopolization and manipulation of markets, and the production of goods that promote violence and immorality—are unworthy and unacceptable.

2 April 2010, Universal House of Justice

- 226 The welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. Humanity’s collective life suffers when any one group thinks of its own well-being in isolation from that of its neighbours or pursues economic gain without regard for how the natural environment,

which provides sustenance for all, is affected. A stubborn obstruction, then, stands in the way of meaningful social progress: time and again, avarice and self-interest prevail at the expense of the common good. Unconscionable quantities of wealth are being amassed, and the instability this creates is made worse by how income and opportunity are spread so unevenly both between nations and within nations. But it need not be so. However much such conditions are the outcome of history, they do not have to define the future, and even if current approaches to economic life satisfied humanity's stage of adolescence, they are certainly inadequate for its dawning age of maturity. There is no justification for continuing to perpetuate structures, rules, and systems that manifestly fail to serve the interests of all peoples. The teachings of the Faith leave no room for doubt: there is an inherent moral dimension to the generation, distribution, and utilization of wealth and resources.

1 March 2017, *Universal House of Justice*

Health

- 227 Let them also study whatever will nurture the health of the body and its physical soundness, and how to guard their children from disease.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 228 Make ye then a mighty effort, that the purity and sanctity which, above all else, are cherished by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, shall distinguish the people of Bahá; that in every kind of excellence the people of God shall surpass all other human beings; that both outwardly and inwardly they shall prove superior to the rest; that for purity, immaculacy, refinement, and the preservation of health, they shall be leaders in the vanguard of those who know. And that by their freedom from enslavement, their knowledge, their self-control, they shall be first among the pure, the free and the wise.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 229 O handmaiden of the Most High! Thy letter was received. Thou hast written that thou seekest to establish a new hospital and art arranging and planning it together with five other Bahá'í doctors. Should such a matter be accomplished, it would be most beneficial.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 230 If the health and well-being of the body be expended in the path of the Kingdom, this is very acceptable and praiseworthy; and if it be expended to the benefit of the human world in general—even though it be to their material (or bodily) benefit—and be a means of doing good, that is also acceptable. But if the health and welfare of man be spent in sensual desires, in a life on the animal plane, and in devilish pursuits—then disease were better than such health; nay, death itself were preferable to such a life. If thou art desirous of health, wish thou health for serving the Kingdom. I hope that thou mayest attain perfect insight, inflexible resolution, complete health, and spiritual and physical strength in order that thou mayest drink from the fountain of eternal life and be assisted by the spirit of divine confirmation. *‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era*
- 231 Healing through purely spiritual forces is undoubtedly as inadequate as that which materialist physicians and thinkers vainly seek to obtain by resorting entirely to mechanical devices and methods. The best result can be obtained by combining the two processes: spiritual and physical. *12 March 1934, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi*
- 232 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. *11 March 1936, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*
- 233 You may be pleased to learn that information on AIDS is incorporated in many Bahá’í health education projects in Africa and throughout the world, emphasizing the importance of chastity, marital fidelity, the sacredness of marriage and the crucial importance of the family as the fundamental unit of society. Education about AIDS and human sexuality is likely to be most effective if it is conducted within the context of training focussed on the broader, spiritual and moral aspects of life, which would lead to the strengthening of families and communities. *15 November 2000, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice*

Arts, Media, and Technology

- 234 It is permissible to study sciences and arts, but such sciences as are useful and would redound to the progress and advancement of the people. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the Ordainer, the All-Wise.
Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh
- 235 At the outset of every endeavour, it is incumbent to look to the end of it. Of all the arts and sciences, set the children to studying those which will result in advantage to man, will ensure his progress and elevate his rank.
Bahá'u'lláh, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh
- 236 Erelong shall We bring into being through thee exponents of new and wondrous sciences, of potent and effective crafts, and shall make manifest through them that which the heart of none of Our servants hath yet conceived.
Bahá'u'lláh, The Summons of the Lord of Hosts
- 237 “Arts, crafts and sciences uplift the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation.”
Bahá'u'lláh, Epistle to the Son of the Wolf
- 238 Blessed is he who in the days of God will engage in handicrafts. This is a bounty from God, for in this Most Great Dispensation it is acceptable in the sight of God for man to occupy himself in a trade which relieveth him of depending upon charity. The craft of every craftsman is regarded as worship.
Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet
- 239 Whatever is written should not transgress the bounds of tact and wisdom, and in the words used there should lie hid the property of milk, so that the children of the world may be nurtured therewith, and attain maturity. We have said in the past that one word hath the influence of spring and causeth hearts to become fresh and verdant, while another is like unto blight which causeth the blossoms and flowers to wither. God grant that authors among

the friends will write in such a way as would be acceptable to fair-minded souls, and not lead to cavilling by the people.

Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet

- 240 Would the extension of education, the development of useful arts and sciences, the promotion of industry and technology, be harmful things? For such endeavor lifts the individual within the mass and raises him out of the depths of ignorance to the highest reaches of knowledge and human excellence.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 241 It is therefore urgent that beneficial articles and books be written, clearly and definitely establishing what the present-day requirements of the people are, and what will conduce to the happiness and advancement of society. These should be published and spread throughout the nation, so that at least the leaders among the people should become, to some degree, awakened, and arise to exert themselves along those lines which will lead to their abiding honor. The publication of high thoughts is the dynamic power in the arteries of life; it is the very soul of the world. Thoughts are a boundless sea, and the effects and varying conditions of existence are as the separate forms and individual limits of the waves; not until the sea boils up will the waves rise and scatter their pearls of knowledge on the shore of life.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 242 Observe for instance that in other countries they persevered over a long period until finally they discovered the power of steam and by means of it were enabled easily to perform the heavy tasks which were once beyond human strength. How many centuries it would take if we were to abandon the use of this power and instead strain every nerve to invent a substitute. It is therefore preferable to keep on with the use of steam and at the same time continuously to examine into the possibility of there being a far greater force available. One should regard the other technological advances, sciences, arts and political formulae of proven usefulness in the same light—i.e., those procedures which, down the ages, have time and again been put to the test and whose many uses and advantages have demonstrably resulted in the glory and greatness of the state, and the well-being and progress of the people. Should all these be abandoned, for no valid reason, and other methods of reform be attempted, by the time such reforms might eventuate,

and their advantages might be put to proof, many years would go by, and many lives. Meanwhile, "we are still at the first bend in the road."

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 243 In this new and wondrous Age, the unshakable 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.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 244 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.

10 October 1932, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 245 With regard to the ... magazine ... he suggests that more emphasis be laid on the number and quality of articles, and that the latter be written not only on specific Bahá'í subjects, but should cover a wide range of material, whether social, religious or humanitarian. The science section is, no doubt, very important and has a special appeal to the young and the newcomers.

30 May 1935, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 246 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 ... 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.

11 March 1936, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 247 Imbued with this excellence and a corresponding humility, with tenacity and a loving servitude, today's youth must move towards the front ranks of the professions, trades, arts and crafts which are necessary to the further

progress of humankind—this to ensure that the spirit of the Cause will cast its illumination on all these important areas of human endeavour. Moreover, while aiming at mastering the unifying concepts and swiftly advancing technologies of this era of communications, they can, indeed they must also guarantee the transmittal to the future of those skills which will preserve the marvelous, indispensable achievements of the past.

8 May 1985, Universal House of Justice

- 248 The scientific and technological advances occurring in this unusually blessed century portend a great surge forward in the social evolution of the planet, and indicate the means by which the practical problems of humanity may be solved. They provide, indeed, the very means for the administration of the complex life of a united world. Yet barriers persist. Doubts, misconceptions, prejudices, suspicions and narrow self-interest beset nations and peoples in their relations one to another.

October 1985, Universal House of Justice

- 249 It is useful to bear in mind that the Internet is a reflection of the world around us, and we find in its infinitude of pages the same competing forces of integration and disintegration that characterize the tumult in which humanity is caught up.

9 April 2008, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 250 The capacity of the institutions and agencies of the Faith to build unity of thought in their communities, to maintain focus among the friends, to channel their energies in service to the Cause, and to promote systematic action depends, to an extent, on the degree to which the systems and instruments they employ are responsive to reality, that is, to the needs and demands of the local communities they serve and the society in which they operate.

In this connection, we are instructed to provide a word of warning: The use of technology will, of course, be imperative to the development of effective systems and instruments ... yet it cannot be allowed to define needs and dictate action.

30 March 2011, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 251 There is no doubt that modern technologies can be valuable instruments in the great enterprise of building a prosperous world civilization. Surely,

however, as an individual committed to rural development, you are aware of the potentially destructive forces unleashed by a naïve implementation of technology in the name of modernity and globalization. For example, the introduction of the agricultural practice of monoculture in rural areas, intended to increase efficiency and yield for small landowners, has in some instances actually cost them their land; even if there is, ultimately, merit in moving toward modern agricultural practices, one cannot be blind to the tremendous cost in human suffering that may occur, and which might be mitigated by a change in approach. The statement in the letter was a reference to these negative tendencies, and not a general condemnation of technological development and progress, which are upheld by the teachings of the Faith...

Bahá'ís involved in projects for social and economic development recognize that there are both benefits and pitfalls involved with the use of technology. The key question is, therefore, not whether to use technology, but how to use it. Approaches to development centred on the donation of goods and services, so characteristic of well-intentioned traditional religious charity and the programs of the welfare state, are known to have debilitating effects. The initial allure of the promised technologies often proves ephemeral. It is to this phenomenon that the phrase "technologies deceptively packaged" refers. It is hoped that the friends in the development field will weigh the technical issues and social forces involved and bring to bear a profound understanding of both science and religion, so that they may contribute to a sound approach that avoids the extremes of blind faith in materialism and a romantic attachment to tradition.

30 December 2014, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 252 As you know, technological advancement is integral to the emergence of a global civilization. Indeed, the Internet is a manifestation of a development anticipated by the Guardian when, in describing the characteristics of a unified humanity, he foresaw that 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." Yet, learning to utilize the Internet in a manner conducive to material and spiritual progress is an immense challenge.

...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...

...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. There is also the danger of exerting an unintended influence on the process of learning unfolding at the grassroots, where individuals, communities, and institutions are acting as protagonists of their own growth and development. 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:

Propelled by forces generated both within and outside the Bahá'í community, the peoples of the earth can be seen to be moving from divergent directions, closer and closer to one another, towards what will be a world civilization so stupendous in character that it would be futile for us to attempt to imagine it today. As this centripetal movement of populations accelerates across the globe, some elements in every culture, not in accord with the teachings of the Faith, will gradually fall away, while others will be reinforced. By the same token, 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.

9 October 2015, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

253 One of the most significant developments that mark the unfoldment of the Divine Plan at this time has been the advancements at the level of culture that the Bahá'í community has experienced and to which the House of Justice has in several of its messages referred. These advancements deserve profound reflection. Every devoted believer will surely wish to guard and further foster them. Accordingly, the friends must pay heed to their manner of communication which can do so much to impact the community's culture. They must aim to raise consciousness without awakening the insistent self, to disseminate insight without cultivating a sense of celebrity, to address issues profoundly but not court controversy, to remain clear in expression but not descend to crassness prevalent in common discourse, and to avoid deliberately or unintentionally setting the agenda for the community or, in seeking the approval of society, recasting the community's endeavors in terms that can undermine those very endeavors.

4 April 2018, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

THE REDISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

A compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, letters by and
on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, and communications by and on
behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled 2000; revised translations inserted 2022

The Redistribution of Wealth

With regard to the request for information about the Bahá'í perspective on the redistribution of wealth, it is useful to preface the discussion by considering a number of statements excerpted from letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi concerning the contribution of the Faith to economics:

There are practically no technical teachings on economics in the Cause, such as banking, the price system, and others. The Cause is not an economic system, nor should its Founders be considered as having been technical economists. The contribution of the Faith to this subject is essentially indirect, as it consists in the application of spiritual principles to our present-day economic system. Bahá'u'lláh has given us a few basic principles which should guide future Bahá'í economists in establishing such institutions as will adjust the economic relationships of the world.

26 December 1935

The Bahá'í Writings give us only a few principles which can guide future Bahá'í economists in their efforts to bring about the necessary readjustments in the economic and industrial system.

30 June 1936

Now with regard to your questions concerning Bahá'í economic teachings: the writings of Bahá'u'lláh do not contain any technical teachings on the subject of economics, and on such specific financial questions as gold standardization, monetary standards and exchanges, etc.—what they provide however are certain general principles in the light of which future Bahá'í economists will have to evolve the Bahá'í Economic System of the future. These principles contribute the basis of all future economic schemes, but at present it would certainly be premature to foretell what definite economic system will be evolved and established by the Cause. The Bahá'ís, therefore, cannot claim to possess at present an economic order or system which they can officially associate with the Faith, nor should they now attempt to establish any such economic

scheme, which would obviously be beyond their present-day capacity and resources.

22 April 1939

Regarding your questions concerning the Bahá'í attitude on various economic problems, such as the problem of ownership, control and distribution of capital, and of other means of production, the problem of trusts and monopolies, and such economic experiments as social co-operatives: the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá do not provide specific and detailed solutions to all such economic questions, which mostly pertain to the domain of technical economics, and as such do not concern directly the Cause. True, there are certain guiding principles in Bahá'í Sacred Writings on the subject of economics, but these do by no means cover the whole field of theoretical and applied economics, and are mostly intended to guide future Bahá'í economic writers and technicians to evolve an economic system which would function in full conformity with the spirit, and the exact provisions of the Cause on this and similar subjects. The International House of Justice will have, in consultation with economic experts, to assist in the formulation and evolution of the Bahá'í economic system of the future. One thing, however, is certain: that the Cause neither accepts the theories of the Capitalistic economics in full, nor can it agree with the Marxists and Communists in their repudiation of the principle of private ownership and of this vital sacred right of the individual.

10 June 1939

It is noteworthy that Shoghi Effendi envisages that:

- while the Bahá'í Faith does not at present possess an “economic order or system” its principles constitute “the basis of all future economic schemes”.
- the Universal House of Justice, in consultation with economic experts, will “assist in the formulation and evolution of the Bahá'í economic system of the future”.
- it will be necessary to bring about “readjustments in the economic and industrial system”, and to
- establish “such institutions as will adjust the economic relationships of the world”.

Context

There are a number of fundamental principles and issues that, when taken together, help to provide a framework for considering the subject of the redistribution of wealth. These include the principle of the oneness of mankind, the “coherence” of the material and spiritual aspects of life, and the Bahá’í perspectives on wealth and on the elimination of the extremes of wealth and poverty. The extracts, cited below, provide brief examples of each of the above-mentioned themes:

Oneness of Mankind

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 unequivocally maintains the principle of equal rights, opportunities and privileges for men and women, insists on compulsory education, eliminates extremes of poverty and wealth, ... prohibits slavery, asceticism, mendicancy and monasticism ... emphasizes the necessity of strict obedience to one’s government, exalts any work performed in the spirit of service to the level of worship ... and delineates the outlines of those institutions that must establish and perpetuate the general peace of mankind.

14 July 1947, Shoghi Effendi, addressed to a United Nations Commission

“Dynamic Coherence”

The Bahá’í Teachings remove the artificial barrier between the material and spiritual aspects of life and underline the significance of both to social progress and material well-being. On this theme, the Universal House of Justice in a letter dated 20 October 1983 addressed to the Bahá’ís of the World, wrote:

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. Thus, we can readily appreciate that although it has hitherto been impracticable for Bahá'í institutions generally to emphasize development activities, the concept of social and economic development is enshrined in the sacred Teachings of our Faith...

Now ... the Community of the Greatest Name has grown to the stage at which the processes of this development must be incorporated into its regular pursuits... The steps to be taken must necessarily begin in the Bahá'í Community itself, with the friends endeavouring, through their application of spiritual principles, their rectitude of conduct and the practice of the art of consultation, to uplift themselves and thus become self-sufficient and self-reliant. Moreover, these exertions will conduce to the preservation of human honour, so desired by Bahá'u'lláh. In the process and as a consequence, the friends will undoubtedly extend the benefits of their efforts to society as a whole, until all mankind achieves the progress intended by the Lord of the Age.

Wealth

The value of wealth—used for the benefit of humanity—is recognized in the Bahá'í Writings. For example, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in “The Secret of Divine Civilization”, writes:

Wealth 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. Above

all, if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement, for such a benefactor would supply the needs and insure the comfort and well-being of a great multitude. Wealth is most commendable, provided the entire population is wealthy. If, however, a few have inordinate riches while the rest are impoverished, and no fruit or benefit accrues from that wealth, then it is only a liability to its possessor. If, on the other hand, it is expended for the promotion of knowledge, the founding of elementary and other schools, the encouragement of art and industry, the training of orphans and the poor—in brief, if it is dedicated to the welfare of society—its possessor will stand out before God and man as the most excellent of all who live on earth and will be accounted as one of the people of paradise.

The Secret of Divine Civilization

Elimination of the Extremes of Wealth and Poverty

The Bahá'í Teachings call not only for the alleviation of poverty, but for the elimination of the extremes of poverty and wealth. From the extracts provided below, it will be noted that the rich are called upon to share their wealth voluntarily and that the redistribution of wealth does not imply that all people will receive exactly the same amount. In “The Promulgation of Universal Peace”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is recorded as stating:

...divine justice will become manifest in human conditions and affairs, and all mankind will find comfort and enjoyment in life. It is not meant that all will be equal, for inequality in degree and capacity is a property of nature. Necessarily there will be rich people and also those who will be in want of their livelihood, but in the aggregate community there will be equalization and readjustment of values and interests. In the future there will be no very rich nor extremely poor. There will be an equilibrium of interests, and a condition will be established which will make both rich and poor comfortable and content. This will be an eternal and blessed outcome of the glorious twentieth century which will be realized universally.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, no. 50

And:

The fundamentals of the whole economic condition are divine in nature and are associated with the world of the heart and spirit ... Hearts must be so cemented together, love must become so dominant that the rich shall most willingly extend assistance to the poor and take steps to establish these economic adjustments permanently. If it is accomplished in this way, it will be most praiseworthy because then it will be for the sake of God and in the pathway of His service. For example, it will be as if the rich inhabitants of a city should say, "It is neither just nor lawful that we should possess great wealth while there is abject poverty in this community," and then willingly give their wealth to the poor, retaining only as much as will enable them to live comfortably.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace. no. 84

The following extract from a letter dated 26 December 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer comments further on this theme:

By the statement "the economic solution is divine in nature" is meant that religion alone can, in the last resort, bring in man's nature such a fundamental change as to enable him to adjust the economic relationships of society. It is only in this way that man can control the economic forces that threaten to disrupt the foundations of his existence, and thus assert his mastery over the forces of nature.

...social inequality is the inevitable outcome of the natural inequality of men. Human beings are different in ability and should, therefore, be different in their social and economic standing. Extremes of wealth and poverty should, however, be totally abolished. Those whose brains have contributed to the creation and improvement of the means of production must be fairly rewarded, though these means may be owned and controlled by others.

Some Specific Measures

—for the Redistribution of Wealth—

We attach a compilation of extracts from the Bahá'í Writings and from the letters of Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice entitled “The Redistribution of Wealth—Some Specific Measures”. From a close perusal of this material, a number of possible measures can be noted. For example:

Change in values and attitudes on individual and societal levels.

See extracts: 1, 2, 3, 6, 10, 12, 23, 24, 25

Payment of Huqúqu'lláh: Payment of the Right of God reduces individual wealth. It also increases the donor's prosperity.

See extracts: 4, 5, 14

Funds from this source, available to the Head of the Faith, can be dispersed for humanitarian, charitable and other purposes.

See extract: 7

Legal and governmental actions: There are several pertinent themes; e.g., recognition of the interdependence of the world's economic problems and the need for new governmental structures, the role of government in introducing legislation to guarantee social justice and to ensure the right of the individual to work.

See extracts: 10, 12, 13, 15, 18, 19, 25

Introducing changes to the relationship between capital and labour: Relevant, here, are such issues as the status of capitalism and socialization, profit-sharing, private property, the wage system and consultation between management and labour.

See extracts: 10, 11, 13, 17, 19, 22

Taxation.

See extracts: 9, 14, 16, 21

The storehouse as a basis for the economic organization of the village.

See extract: 9

Philanthropy.

See extract: 8

A “peace dividend”.

See extract: 15

Extracts

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

1 O SON OF MAN!

Bestow My wealth upon My poor, that in heaven thou mayest draw from stores of unfading splendor and treasures of imperishable glory. But by My life! To offer up thy soul is a more glorious thing couldst thou but see with Mine eye.

The Hidden Words, Arabic, no. 57

2 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 adorneth himself with My virtues.

The Hidden Words, Persian, no. 49

3 The beginning of magnanimity is when man expendeth his wealth on himself, on his family and on the poor among his brethren in his Faith.

The essence of wealth is love for Me; whoso loveth Me is the possessor of all things, and he that loveth Me not is indeed of the poor and needy. This is that which the Finger of Glory and Splendour hath revealed.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. 10

- 4 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. Well is it with them that comprehend and recognize this truth and woe betide them that believe not. And this is on condition that the individual should observe the injunctions prescribed in the Book with the utmost radiance, gladness and willing acquiescence. It behoveth you to counsel the friends to do that which is right and praiseworthy. Whoso hearkeneth to this call, it is to his own behoof, and whoso faileth bringeth loss upon himself. Verily our Lord of Mercy is the All-Sufficing, the All-Praised.

Huqúqu'lláh—The Right of God, extract no. 12

- 5 This ordinance [Huqúqu'lláh] is binding upon everyone, and by observing it one will be raised to honour inasmuch as it will serve to purify one's possessions and will impart blessing, and added prosperity. However, the people are as yet ignorant of its significance. They continually endeavour to amass riches by lawful or unlawful means in order to transmit them to their heirs, and this to what advantage, no one can tell. Say: In this day the true Heir is the Word of God, since the underlying purpose of inheritance is the preservation of the name and traces of men. It is indubitably clear that the passing of centuries and ages will obliterate these signs, while every word that hath streamed from the Pen of Glory in honour of a certain individual will last as long as the dominions of earth and heaven will endure.

Huqúqu'lláh—The Right of God, extract no. 9

From the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 6 As preordained by the Fountain-head of Creation, the temple of the world hath been fashioned after the image and likeness of the human body. In fact each mirroreth forth the image of the other, wert thou but to observe with discerning eyes. By this is meant that even as the human body in this world, which is outwardly composed of different limbs and organs, is in reality a closely integrated, coherent entity, similarly the structure of the physical world is like unto a single being whose limbs and members are inseparably linked together.

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...

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 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 interrelationship 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.

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 Huqúqu'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 treasures 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!

Huqúqu'lláh—The Right of God, extract no. 23

- 7 Render thou thanks unto God, for He hath graciously enabled thee to observe the injunction set forth in His Most Holy Book, inasmuch as thou hast arisen to fulfil the obligation of Huqúq, and God hath accepted thy goodly deed.

Know thou, moreover, that those who faithfully serve the All-Merciful will be enriched by Him out of His heavenly treasury, and that the Huqúq offering is but a test applied by Him unto His servants and maidservants. Thus every true and sincere believer will offer Huqúq to be expended for the relief of the poor, the disabled, the needy, and the orphans, and for other vital needs of the Cause of God, even as Christ did establish a Fund for benevolent purposes.

Huqúqu'lláh—The Right of God, extract no. 25

- 8 Man reacheth perfection through good deeds, voluntarily performed, not through good deeds the doing of which was forced upon him. And sharing is a personally chosen righteous act: that is, the rich should extend assistance to the poor, they should expend their substance for the poor, but of their own free will, and not because the poor have gained this end by force. For the harvest of force is turmoil and the ruin of the social order. On the other hand voluntary sharing, the freely-chosen expending of one's substance, leadeth to society's comfort and peace. It lighteth up the world; it bestoweth honour upon humankind.

I have seen the good effects of your own philanthropy in America, in various universities, peace gatherings, and associations for the promotion of learning, as I travelled from city to city. Wherefore do I pray on your behalf that you shall ever be encompassed by the bounties and blessings of heaven, and shall perform many philanthropic deeds in East and West. Thus may you gleam as a lighted taper in the Kingdom of God, may attain honour and everlasting life, and shine out as a bright star on the horizon of eternity.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdul-Bahá, sec. 79

- 9 The question of economics must commence with the farmer and then be extended to the other classes inasmuch as the number of farmers is far greater than all other classes. Therefore, it is fitting to begin with the farmer in matters related to economics for the farmer is the first active agent in human society. In brief, from among the wise men in every village a board should be set up and the affairs of that village should be under the control

of that board. Likewise a general storehouse should be founded with the appointment of a secretary. At the time of the harvest, under the direction of that board, a certain percentage of the entire harvest should be appropriated for the storehouse.

The storehouse has seven revenues: Tithes, taxes on animals, property without an heir, all lost objects found whose owners cannot be traced, one third of all treasure-trove, one third of the produce of all mines, and voluntary contributions.

This storehouse also has seven expenditures:

- General running expenses of the storehouse, such as the salary of the secretary and the administration of public health.
- Tithes to the government.
- Taxes on animals to the government.
- Costs of running an orphanage.
- Costs of running a home for the incapacitated.
- Costs of running a school.
- Payment of subsidies to provide needed support of the poor.

The first revenue is the tithe. It should be collected as follows: If, for instance, the income of a person is five hundred dollars and his necessary expenses are the same, no tithes will be collected from him. If another's expenses are five hundred dollars while his income is one thousand dollars, one tenth will be taken from him, for he hath more than his needs; if he giveth one tenth of the surplus, his livelihood will not be adversely affected. If another's expenses are one thousand dollars, and his income is five thousand dollars, as he hath four thousand dollars surplus he will be required to give one and a half tenths. If another person hath necessary expenses of one thousand dollars, but his income is ten thousand dollars, from him two tenths will be required for his surplus represents a large sum. But if the necessary expenses of another person are four or five thousand dollars, and his in-come one hundred thousand, one fourth will be required from him. On the other hand, should a person's income be two hundred, but his needs absolutely essential for his livelihood be five hundred dollars, and provided he hath not been remiss in his work or his farm hath not been blessed with a harvest, such a one must receive help from the general storehouse so that he may not remain in need and may live in comfort.

A certain amount must be put aside from the general storehouse for the orphans of the village and a certain sum for the incapacitated. A certain amount must be provided from this storehouse for those who are needy and incapable of earning a livelihood, and a certain amount for the village's system of education. And, a certain amount must be set aside for the administration of public health. If anything is left in the storehouse, that must be transferred to the general treasury of the nation for national expenditures.

4 October 1912, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

10 ...the root cause of these difficulties lies in the law of nature that governs present-day civilization, for it results in a handful of people accumulating vast fortunes that far exceed their needs, while the greater number remain naked, destitute, and helpless. This is at once contrary to justice, to humanity, and to fairness; it is the very height of inequity and runs counter to the good-pleasure of the All-Merciful...

...One must therefore enact such laws and regulations as will moderate the excessive fortunes of the few and meet the basic needs of the myriad millions of the poor, that a degree of moderation may be achieved.

However, absolute equality is just as untenable, for complete equality in wealth, power, commerce, agriculture, and industry would result in chaos and disorder, disrupt livelihoods, provoke universal discontent, and undermine the orderly conduct of the affairs of the community. For unjustified equality is also fraught with peril. It is preferable, then, that some measure of moderation be achieved, and by moderation is meant the enactment of such laws and regulations as would prevent the unwarranted concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and satisfy the essential needs of the many. For instance, the factory owners reap a fortune every day, but the wage the poor workers are paid cannot even meet their daily needs: This is most unfair, and assuredly no just man can accept it. Therefore, laws and regulations should be enacted which would grant the workers both a daily wage and a share in a fourth or fifth of the profits of the factory in accordance with its means, or which would have the workers equitably share in some other way in the profits with the owners. For the capital and the management come from the latter and the toil and labour from the former. The workers could either be granted a wage that adequately meets their daily needs, as well as a right to a share in the revenues of the factory when they are injured, incapacitated, or unable

to work, or else a wage could be set that allows the workers to both satisfy their daily needs and save a little for times of weakness and incapacity.

If matters were so arranged, neither would the factory owners amass each day a fortune which is absolutely of no use to them—for should one's fortune increase beyond measure, one would come under a most heavy burden, become subject to exceeding hardships and troubles, and find the administration of such an excessive fortune to be most difficult and to exhaust one's natural powers—nor would the workers endure such toil and hardship as to become incapacitated and to fall victim, at the end of their lives, to the direst need.

Some Answered Questions, sec. 78

- 11 The question of socialization is very important. It will not be solved by strikes for wages. All the governments of the world must be united and organize an assembly the members of which should be elected from the parliaments and the nobles of the nations. These must plan with utmost wisdom and power so that neither the capitalist suffer from enormous losses nor the laborers become needy. In the utmost moderation they should make the law; then announce to the public that the rights of the working people are to be strongly preserved. Also the rights of the capitalists are to be protected. When such a general plan is adopted by the will of both sides, should a strike occur, all the governments of the world collectively should resist it. Otherwise, the labor problem will lead to much destruction, especially in Europe. Terrible things will take place.

For instance, the owners of properties, mines and factories should share their incomes with their employees and give a fairly certain percentage of their products to their workingmen in order that the employees may receive, beside their wages, some of the general income of the factory so that the employee may strive with his soul in the work.

No more trusts will remain in the future. The question of the trusts will be wiped away entirely. Also, every factory that has ten thousand shares will give two thousand shares of these ten thousand to its employees and will write the shares in their names, so that they may have them, and the rest will belong to the capitalists. Then at the end of the month or year whatever they may earn after the expenses and wages are paid, according to the number of shares, should be divided among both...

Foundations of World Unity, sec. 102

- 12 Certainly, some being enormously rich and others lamentably poor, an organization is necessary to control and improve this state of affairs. It is important to limit riches, as it is also of importance to limit poverty. Either extreme is not good. To be seated in the meanⁱ is most desirable. If it be right for a capitalist to possess a large fortune, it is equally just that his workman should have a sufficient means of existence.

A financier with colossal wealth should not exist whilst near him is a poor man in dire necessity. When we see poverty allowed to reach a condition of starvation it is a sure sign that somewhere we shall find tyranny. Men must bestir themselves in this matter, and no longer delay in altering conditions which bring the misery of grinding poverty to a very large number of the people. The rich must give of their abundance, they must soften their hearts and cultivate a compassionate intelligence, taking thought for those sad ones who are suffering from lack of the very necessities of life.

There must be special laws made, dealing with these extremes of riches and of want. The members of the Government should consider the laws of God when they are framing plans for the ruling of the people. The general rights of mankind must be guarded and preserved.

Paris Talks, no. 46

- 13 The fourth principle or teaching of Bahá'u'lláh is the readjustment and equalization of the economic standards of mankind. This deals with the question of human livelihood. It is evident that under present systems and conditions of government the poor are subject to the greatest need and distress while others more fortunate live in luxury and plenty far beyond their actual necessities. This inequality of portion and privilege is one of the deep and vital problems of human society. That there is need of an equalization and apportionment by which all may possess the comforts and privileges of life is evident. The remedy must be legislative readjustment of conditions. The rich too must be merciful to the poor, contributing from willing hearts to their needs without being forced or compelled to do so. The composure of the world will be assured by the establishment of this principle in the religious life of mankind.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, sec. 44

i "Give me neither poverty nor riches"—Prov. xxx., 8.

- 14 Difference of capacity in human individuals is fundamental. It is impossible for all to be alike, all to be equal, all to be wise. Bahá'u'lláh has revealed principles and laws which will accomplish the adjustment of varying human capacities. He has said that whatsoever is possible of accomplishment in human government will be effected through these principles. When the laws He has instituted are carried out, there will be no millionaires possible in the community and likewise no extremely poor. This will be effected and regulated by adjusting the different degrees of human capacity. The fundamental basis of the community is agriculture, tillage of the soil. All must be producers. Each person in the community whose need is equal to his individual producing capacity shall be exempt from taxation. But if his income is greater than his needs, he must pay a tax until an adjustment is effected. That is to say, a man's capacity for production and his needs will be equalized and reconciled through taxation. If his production exceeds, he will pay a tax; if his necessities exceed his production, he shall receive an amount sufficient to equalize or adjust. Therefore, taxation will be proportionate to capacity and production, and there will be no poor in the community.

Bahá'u'lláh, likewise, commanded the rich to give freely to the poor. In the Kitáb-I-Aqdas it is further written by Him that those who have a certain amount of income must give one-fifth of it to God, the Creator of heaven and earth.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, sec. 77

From letters by and on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 15 Some form of a world super-state must needs be evolved, in whose favour 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 judgement 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 Labour definitely recognized...

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 16 Concerning the economic teachings of the Cause ... Even though the Cause has much on the economic life of society, such as progressive income tax, a high death duty and consultation in industry between capital and labour, yet what it has on the international question is far more important and interesting, especially in the light of present world problems.

27 January 1932, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 17 Question V—"Profit-sharing" should be used rather than "income-sharing", as the former is the term used actually in the Bahá'í Writings...

Question VIII—"As already referred to in answer to question II, social inequality is the inevitable outcome of the natural inequality of men. Human beings are different in ability and should, therefore, be different in their social and economic standing. Extremes of wealth and poverty should, however, be totally abolished. Those whose brains have contributed to the creation and improvement of the means of production must be fairly rewarded, though these means may be owned and controlled by others.

26 December 1935, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 18 With reference to Bahá'u'lláh's command concerning the engagement of the believers in some sort of profession: the Teachings are most emphatic on this matter, particularly the statement in the "Aqdas" to this effect which makes it quite clear that idle people who lack the desire to work can have no place in the new World Order. As a corollary of this principle, Bahá'u'lláh further states that mendicity should not only be discouraged but entirely wiped out from the face of society. It is the duty of those who are in charge of the organization of society to give every individual the opportunity of acquiring the necessary talent in some kind of profession, and also the means of utilizing such a talent, both for its own sake and for the sake of earning the means of his livelihood. Every individual, no matter how handicapped and limited he may be, is under the obligation of engaging in some work or profession, for work, especially when performed in the spirit of service, is according to Bahá'u'lláh a form of worship. It has not only

a utilitarian purpose, but has a value in itself, because it draws us nearer to God, and enables us to better grasp His purpose for us in this world. It is obvious, therefore, that the inheritance of wealth cannot make anyone immune from daily work.

22 March 1937, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 19 As regards the objections raised against Bahá'u'lláh's law of Inheritance: 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. It is his duty as a loyal and responsible believer to make such provision in his will as would make it fully conform to the spirit if not actually to the exact provisions of the Aqdas regarding the division and distribution of inheritance...

No country can possibly solve its economic difficulties alone, for economic interdependence is an unescapable economic reality, a fact of economic life which can neither be ignored nor deliberately opposed.

The Teachings do not state what the exact relationship between Labour and Capital will be in the future. Neither do they indicate any directions regarding the payment of wages, or whether the wage system will be retained, modified or altogether abolished. They, however, explicitly uphold the institution of private ownership, but stress also the necessity of introducing certain fundamental changes in its methods and features.

22 April 1939, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 20 Concerning your question whether the heirs to whom the principal residence, furniture and clothing of the deceased are transferred by way of inheritance will be exempt from the payment of Huqúq or not, he said: Since the residence, furniture and the tools of trade have, in accordance with the explicit Text, been granted exemption from the Huqúq, therefore when the transfer of ownership takes place such possessions continue to be exempt.

29 September 1942, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 21 The income tax, according to the Bahá'í teachings, mounts at quite a steep rate so that great sums of money would be very heavily taxed. But the

individual is free to make his will as he pleases. What he has laboured for he has the right to dispose of. The greater the sum inherited, the higher the tax will be.

11 February 1944, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 22 Profit-sharing is recommended as a solution to one form of economic problem.

There is nothing in the teachings against some kind of capitalism; its present form, though, would require adjustments to be made.

19 November 1945, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

From letters by and on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 23 ...the most urgent need of human beings is to recognize the Manifestation of God and thereby to learn how to collaborate constructively. All over the world tremendous efforts are being made to improve the lot of mankind—or of parts of mankind, but most of these efforts are frustrated by conflicts of aims, by corruption of the morals of those involved, by mistrust, or by fear. There is no lack of material resources in the world if they are properly used. The problem is the education of human beings in the ultimate and most important purpose of life and in how to weld differences of opinion and outlook into a united constructive effort. Bahá'ís believe that God has revealed the purpose of life, has shown us how to attain it, has provided the ways in which we can work together and, beyond that, has given mankind the assurance both of continuing divine guidance and of divine assistance. As people learn and follow these teachings their efforts will produce durable results. In the absence of these teachings, a lifetime of effort only too often ends in disillusionment and the collapse of all that has been built...

3 January 1982, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 24 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.

October 1985, Universal House of Justice

- 25 Your comments concerning poverty emphasize the extent to which society must change its attitudes before a solution to that social problem can be found. It is not simply a matter of economics; the solution deeply involves the adoption of spiritual principles at the grassroots as well as among governments. It imposes upon the Bahá'ís a clear duty to teach the Faith with unabating vigour.

27 April 1988, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

WOMEN

A compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, letters by and
on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, and communications by and on
behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled July 1990

The Bahá'í Concept of Equality

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 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.

The Hidden Words, Arabic no. 68

- 2 Exalted, immensely exalted is He Who hath removed differences and established harmony. Glorified, infinitely glorified is He Who hath caused discord to cease, and decreed solidarity and unity. 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 of the same plane. He hath broken the back of vain imaginings with the sword of utterance and hath obliterated the perils of idle fancies through the pervasive power of His might.

From a Tablet

- 3 This Wronged One hath heard thy voice and that which thy inner and outer tongue hath uttered in praise of thy Lord. By the righteousness of God! That which the people possess, and the treasures of the earth, and that which the rulers and kings own, are not equal in this day to the singing of His praise. The Lord of the Kingdom beareth witness unto this at this glorious moment. And having heard thy groaning and lamentation, We are

responding with a Tablet which calleth out betwixt earth and heaven and maketh mention of thee with words that immortalize what hath appeared from thee in His love, in His service, in His remembrance and in His praise. And He hath made that which hath issued forth from thy mouth a trust with Him for thee. He is verily the Most Bounteous, the Most Generous. If thou truly givest ear to that which hath been revealed for thee from My Supreme Pen at this moment, thou shalt soar with the wings of eagerness in the heaven of love for the Lord of the Day of the Covenant, and wilt say during all the days of thy life: Thanks be unto Thee, O Thou the Desire of the world, and praise be unto Thee, O Thou the Beloved of the people of understanding. May all existence be a sacrifice for Thy favour, and all that hath been and will ever be, a ransom for Thy Word, O Thou the Wronged One amongst the people of enmity, O Thou in Whose grasp are the reins of all who are in heaven and on earth...

In this Day the Hand of divine grace hath removed all distinctions. The servants of God and His handmaidens are regarded on the same plane. Blessed is the servant who hath attained unto that which God hath decreed, and likewise the leaf moving in accordance with the breezes of His will. This favour is great and this station lofty. His bounties and bestowals are ever present and manifest. Who is able to offer befitting gratitude for His successive bestowals and continuous favours?

From a Tablet

- 4 By My Life! The names of handmaidens who are devoted to God are written and set down by the Pen of the Most High in the Crimson Book. They excel over men in the sight of God. How numerous are the heroes and knights in the field who are bereft of the True One and have no share in His recognition, but thou hast attained and received thy fill.

From a Tablet

- 5 Verily the Pen of the Most High hath borne witness unto thy recognition of Him, thy love for Him and thy turning towards the Ancient Countenance at a time when the world hath rejected Him, save those whom God, the Most High, hath willed...

Well is it with thee for having adorned thyself with the ornament of the love of God and for having been enabled to make mention of Him and utter His praise. Divine grace, in its entirety, is in the mighty grasp of God, exalted be He. He conferreth it upon whomsoever He willeth. How many

a man considered himself a celebrated divine and a repository of heavenly mysteries, and yet when the slightest test visited him, he arose with such opposition and denial as to cause the Concourse on high to moan and lament. Through the bestowals of the Lord, however, and His infinite favour, thou hast attained unto the hidden secret and the well-guarded treasure. Preserve then, in the name of God, this lofty station and conceal it from the eyes of betrayers. The glory shining from the horizon of My Kingdom be upon thee and upon every handmaiden who hath attained the splendours of My sublime Throne.

From a Tablet

- 6 We beseech God to aid all the leaves to attain the knowledge of the Tree and deprive them not of the ocean of His generosity. In this day no regard is paid to loftiness or lowliness, to poverty or wealth, to nobility and lineage, to weakness or might. Whosoever recognizeth the incomparable Beloved is the possessor of true wealth and occupieth a divine station. Today, in the court of the True One, the queen of the world and her like are not worth a mustard seed, because although she may speak in the name of God, invoke the Lord of creation every day in the temple of her body, and spend large sums of earthly wealth for the development of her nation, she is deprived of recognition of the Sun of His Manifestation and is barred from the True One in Whose remembrance she is engaged.

From a Tablet

- 7 Throughout the centuries and ages many a man hath waited expectant for God's Revelation, and yet when the Light shone forth from the horizon of the world, all but a few turned their faces away from it. Whosoever from amongst the handmaidens hath recognized the Lord of all Names is recorded in the Book as one of those men by the Pen of the Most High. Offer thou praise to the Beloved of the world for having aided thee to recognize the Dayspring of His Signs and the Revealer of the evidences of His Glory. This is a great bounty, a bounteous favour. Preserve it in the name of the True One...

From a Tablet

From the Writings and Utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- 8 From the beginning of existence until the Promised Day men retained superiority over women in every respect. It is revealed in the Qur’án: “Men have superiority over women.” But in this wondrous Dispensation, the supreme outpouring of the Glorious Lord became the cause of manifest achievements by women. Some handmaidens arose who excelled men in the arena of knowledge. They arose with such love and spirituality that they became the cause of the outpouring of the bounty of the Sovereign Lord upon mankind, and with their sanctity, purity and attributes of the spirit led a great many to the shore of unity. They became a guiding torch to the wanderers in the wastes of bewilderment, and enkindled the despondent in the nether world with the flame of the love of the Lord. This is a bounteous characteristic of this wondrous Age which hath granted strength to the weaker sex and hath bestowed masculine might upon womanhood...

From a Tablet

- 9 O handmaid of God! In this wondrous dispensation in which the Ancient Beauty and the Manifest Light—may my spirit be sacrificed for His loved ones—hath risen from the horizon of age-old hopes, women have assumed the attributes of men in showing forth steadfastness in the Cause of God, and revealing the heroism and might of fearless men. They invaded the arena of mystic knowledge and hoisted aloft the banner on the heights of certitude. Thou, too, must make a mighty effort and show forth supreme courage. Exert thyself and taste of the sweetness of a heavenly draught, for the sweet taste of the love of God will linger on to the end that hath no end.

From a Tablet

- 10 Render thanks to the Lord that among that race thou art the first believer,ⁱ that thou hast engaged in spreading sweet-scented breezes, and hast arisen to guide others. It is my hope that through the bounties and favours of the

i This Tablet was addressed to one Mrs. Pocohontas in Washington. According to Fádíl Mázandarání, the recipient of the Tablet was a black woman. See *Tárikh-i-Zuhúru’l-Ḥaq*, vol. 8, part 2, p. 1209 (Tíhrán: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 132 B.E.). Additional information provided by the Archives of the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States indicates that Mr. Louis Gregory, in a history of the Washington, D.C. Bahá’í community, mentions a black Bahá’í, Mrs. Pocohontas Pope, who is likely the same person. Mrs. Pope learned of the Bahá’í Faith through Alma and Fanny Knobloch and Joseph and Pauline Hannen. There is, at present no other information on Mrs. Pope.

Abhá Beauty thy countenance may be illumined, thy disposition pleasing, and thy fragrance diffused, that thine eyes may be seeing, thine ears attentive, thy tongue eloquent, thy heart filled with supreme glad-tidings, and thy soul refreshed by divine fragrances, so that thou mayest arise among that race and occupy thyself with the edification of the people, and become filled with light. Although the pupil of the eye is black, it is the source of light. Thou shalt likewise be. The disposition should be bright, not the appearance. Therefore, with supreme confidence and certitude, say: "O God! Make me a radiant light, a shining lamp, and a brilliant star, so that I may illumine the hearts with an effulgent ray from Thy Kingdom of Abhá..."

From a Tablet

- 11 The establishment of a women's assemblage for the promotion of knowledge is entirely acceptable, but discussions must be confined to educational matters. It should be done in such a way that differences will, day by day, be entirely wiped out, not that, God forbid, it will end in argumentation between men and women. As in the question of the veil, nothing should be done contrary to wisdom. The individual women should, today, follow a course of action which will be the cause of eternal glory to all womankind, so that all women will be illumined. And that lieth in gathering to learn how to teach, in holding meetings to recite the verses, to offer supplications to the kingdom of the Lord of evident signs, and to institute education for the girls. Ponder the manner in which Jináb-i-Ṭáhirih used to teach. She was free from every concern, and for this reason she was resplendent.

Now the world of women should be a spiritual world, not a political one, so that it will be radiant. The women of other nations are all immersed in political matters. Of what benefit is this, and what fruit doth it yield? To the extent that ye can, ye should busy yourselves with spiritual matters which will be conducive to the exaltation of the Word of God and of the diffusion of His fragrances. Your demeanour should lead to harmony amongst all and to coalescence and the good-pleasure of all...

I am endeavouring, with Bahá'u'lláh's confirmations and assistance, so to improve the world of the handmaidens that all will be astonished. This progress is intended to be in spirituality, in virtues, in human perfections and in divine knowledge. In America, the cradle of women's liberation, women are still debarred from political institutions because they squabble. They are yet to have a member in the House of Representatives. Also Bahá'u'lláh hath proclaimed: "O ye men of the House of Justice."

Ye need to be calm and composed, so that the work will proceed with wisdom, otherwise there will be such chaos that ye will leave everything and run away. "This newly born babe is traversing in one night the path that needeth a hundred years to tread." In brief, ye should now engage in matters of pure spirituality and not contend with men. 'Abdu'l-Bahá will tactfully take appropriate steps. Be assured. In the end thou wilt thyself exclaim, "This was indeed supreme wisdom!" I appeal to you to obliterate this contention between men and women...

No one can on his own achieve anything. 'Abdu'l-Bahá must be well pleased and assist.

From a Tablet

- 12 Know thou, O handmaid, that in the sight of Bahá, women are accounted the same as men, and God hath created all humankind in His own image, and after His own likeness. That is, men and women alike are the revealers of His names and attributes, and from the spiritual viewpoint there is no difference between them. Whosoever draweth nearer to God, that one is the most favoured, whether man or woman. How many a handmaid, ardent and devoted, hath, within the sheltering shade of Bahá, proved superior to the men, and surpassed the famous of the earth.

The House of Justice, however, according to the explicit text of the Law of God, is confined to men;ⁱ this for a wisdom of the Lord God's, which will erelong be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, secs. 38.3–38.4

- 13 And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is the equality of women and men. The world of humanity has two wings—one is women and the other men. Not until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. Should one wing remain weak, flight is impossible. Not until the world of women becomes equal to the world of men in the acquisition of virtues and perfections, can success and prosperity be attained as they ought to be.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 227.18

- 14 Inasmuch as this is the century of light, it is evident that the Sun of Reality, the Word, has revealed itself to all humankind. One of the potentialities hidden in the realm of humanity was the capability or capacity of womanhood.

i From other extracts it is evident that the limitation of membership to men applies only to the Universal House of Justice, and not to the National and Local Houses of Justice.

Through the effulgent rays of divine illumination the capacity of woman has become so awakened and manifest in this age that equality of man and woman is an established fact...

In this day man must investigate reality impartially and without prejudice in order to reach the true knowledge and conclusions. What, then, constitutes the inequality between man and woman? Both are human. In powers and function each is the complement of the other. At most it is this: that woman has been denied the opportunities which man has so long enjoyed, especially the privilege of education...

The truth is that all mankind are the creatures and servants of one God, and in His estimate all are human. *Man* is a generic term applying to all humanity. The biblical statement "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" does not mean that woman was not created. The image and likeness of God apply to her as well. In Persian and Arabic there are two distinct words translated into English as man: one meaning man and woman collectively, the other distinguishing man as male from woman the female. The first word and its pronoun are generic, collective; the other is restricted to the male. This is the same in Hebrew.

To accept and observe a distinction which God has not intended in creation is ignorance and superstition...

It is my hope that the banner of equality may be raised throughout the five continents where as yet it is not fully recognized and established. In this enlightened world of the West woman has advanced an immeasurable degree beyond the women of the Orient. 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. For the world of humanity consists of two parts or members: one is woman; the other is man. Until these two members are equal in strength, the oneness of humanity cannot be established, and the happiness and felicity of mankind will not be a reality. God willing, this is to be so.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 15 Today questions of the utmost importance are facing humanity, questions peculiar to this radiant century...

One of these questions concerns the rights of woman and her equality with man. In past ages it was held that woman and man were not equal—that is to say, woman was considered inferior to man, even from the standpoint of her anatomy and creation. She was considered

especially inferior in intelligence, and the idea prevailed universally that it was not allowable for her to step into the arena of important affairs. In some countries man went so far as to believe and teach that woman belonged to a sphere lower than human. But in this century, which is the century of light and the revelation of mysteries, God is proving to the satisfaction of humanity that all this is ignorance and error; nay, rather, it is well established that mankind and womankind as parts of composite humanity are coequal and that no difference in estimate is allowable, for all are human. The conditions in past centuries were due to woman's lack of opportunity. She was denied the right and privilege of education and left in her undeveloped state. Naturally, she could not and did not advance. In reality, God has created all mankind, and in the estimation of God there is no distinction as to male and female. The one whose heart is pure is acceptable in His sight, be that one man or woman. God does not enquire, "Art thou woman or art thou man?" He judges human actions. If these are acceptable in the threshold of the Glorious One, man and woman will be equally recognized and rewarded.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 16 The world of humanity consists of two parts: male and female. Each is the complement of the other. Therefore, if one is defective, the other will necessarily be incomplete, and perfection cannot be attained. There is a right hand and a left hand in the human body, functionally equal in service and administration. If either proves defective, the defect will naturally extend to the other by involving the completeness of the whole; for accomplishment is not normal unless both are perfect. If we say one hand is deficient, we prove the inability and incapacity of the other; for single-handed there is no full accomplishment. Just as physical accomplishment is complete with two hands, so man and woman, the two parts of the social body, must be perfect. It is not natural that either should remain undeveloped; and until both are perfected, the happiness of the human world will not be realized.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 17 The status of woman in former times was exceedingly deplorable, for it was the belief of the Orient that it was best for woman to be ignorant. It was considered preferable that she should not know reading or writing in order that she might not be informed of events in the world. Woman was considered to be created for rearing children and attending to the duties of the

household. If she pursued educational courses, it was deemed contrary to chastity; hence women were made prisoners of the household. The houses did not even have windows opening upon the outside world. Bahá'u'lláh destroyed these ideas and proclaimed the equality of man and woman. He made woman respected by commanding that all women be educated, that there be no difference in the education of the two sexes and that man and woman share the same rights. In the estimation of God there is no distinction of sex. One whose thought is pure, whose education is superior, whose scientific attainments are greater, whose deeds of philanthropy excel, be that one man or woman, white or coloured, is entitled to full rights and recognition; there is no differentiation whatsoever.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 18 Woman's lack of progress and proficiency has been due to her need of equal education and opportunity. Had she been allowed this equality, there is no doubt she would be the counterpart of man in ability and capacity. The happiness of mankind will be realized when women and men coordinate and advance equally, for each is the complement and helpmeet of the other.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 19 He establishes the equality of man and woman. This is peculiar to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, for all other religions have placed man above woman.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 20 Women have equal rights with men upon earth; in religion and society they are a very important element. As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve the greatness which might be theirs.

Paris Talks

- 21 In the world of humanity ... the female sex is treated as though inferior, and is not allowed equal rights and privileges. This condition is due not to nature, but to education. In the Divine Creation there is no such distinction. Neither sex is superior to the other in the sight of God. Why then should one sex assert the inferiority of the other, withholding just rights and privileges as though God had given His authority for such a course of action? If women received the same educational advantages as those of men, the result would demonstrate the equality of capacity of both for scholarship.

In some respects woman is superior to man. She is more tender-hearted, more receptive, her intuition is more intense.

Paris Talks

- 22 Divine Justice demands that the rights of both sexes should be equally respected since neither is superior to the other in the eyes of Heaven. Dignity before God depends, not on sex, but on purity and luminosity of heart. Human virtues belong equally to all!

Paris Talks

- 23 In the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, women are advancing side by side with men. There is no area or instance where they will lag behind: they have equal rights with men, and will enter, in the future, into all branches of the administration of society. Such will be their elevation that, in every area of endeavour, they will occupy the highest levels in the human world. Rest thou assured. Look not upon their present state. In future, the world of womankind will shine with lustrous brilliance, for such is the will and purpose of Bahá'u'lláh. At the time of elections the right to vote is the inalienable right of women, and the entrance of women into all human departments is an irrefutable and incontrovertible question. No soul can retard or prevent it.

But there are certain matters, the participation in which is not worthy of women. For example, at the time when the community is taking up vigorous defensive measures against the attack of foes, the women are exempt from military engagements. It may so happen that at a given time warlike and savage tribes may furiously attack the body politic with the intention of carrying on a wholesale slaughter of its members; under such a circumstance defense is necessary, but it is the duty of men to organize and execute such defensive measures and not the women—because their hearts are tender and they cannot endure the sight of the horror of carnage, even if it is for the sake of defense. From such and similar undertakings the women are exempt.

As regards the constitution of the House of Justice, Bahá'u'lláh addresses the men. He says: "O ye men of the House of Justice!"

But when its members are to be elected, the right which belongs to women, so far as their voting and their voice is concerned, is indisputable. When the women attain to the ultimate degree of progress, then, according to the exigency of the time and place and their great capacity, they

shall obtain extraordinary privileges. Be ye confident on these accounts. 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'*.

Paris Talks

- 24 The woman of the East has progressed. Formerly in India, Persia and throughout the Orient, she was not considered a human being. Certain Arab tribes counted their women in with the live stock. In their language the noun for woman also meant donkey; that is, the same name applied to both and a man's wealth was accounted by the number of these beasts of burden he possessed. The worst insult one could hurl at a man was to cry out, "Thou woman!"

From the moment Bahá'u'lláh appeared, this changed. He did away with the idea of distinction between the sexes, proclaiming them equal in every capacity.

In former times it was considered wiser that woman should not know how to read or write; she should occupy herself only with drudgery. She was very ignorant. Bahá'u'lláh declares the education of woman to be of more importance than that of man. If the mother be ignorant, even if the father have great knowledge, the child's education will be at fault, for education begins with the milk. A child at the breast is like a tender branch that the gardener can train as he wills.

The East has begun to educate its women. Some there are in Persia who have become liberated through this cause, whose cleverness and eloquence the 'ulamá cannot refute. Many of them are poets. They are absolutely fearless...

I hope for a like degree of progress among the women of Europe—that each may shine like unto a lamp; that they may cry out the proclamation of the kingdom; that they may truly assist the men; nay, that they may be even superior to the men, versed in sciences and yet detached, so that the whole world may bear witness to the fact that men and women have absolutely the same rights. It would be a cause of great joy for me to see such

women. This is useful work; by it woman will enter into the kingdom. Otherwise, there will be no results.

'Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy, pp. 86–88

- 25 The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy. Hence the new age will be an age less masculine and more permeated with the feminine ideals, or, to speak more exactly, will be an age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more evenly balanced.

Cited in Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 26 If presented properly the position of women in the Bahá'í teachings will surely attract much attention, for it is not only legal but also spiritual and educational. Our ideals are so high and at the same time so practicable that all other views will fall short if compared to them.

7 January 1931

- 27 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.

28 July 1936

- 28 As regards the membership of the International House of Justice, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states in a Tablet that it is confined to men, and that the wisdom of it will be revealed as manifest as the sun in the future. In any case the believers should know that, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself has explicitly stated

that sexes are equal except in some cases, the exclusion of women from the International House of Justice should not be surprising. From the fact that there is no equality of functions between the sexes one should not, however, infer that either sex is inherently superior or inferior to the other, or that they are unequal in their rights.

14 December 1940

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 29 It is apparent from the Guardian's writings that where Bahá'u'lláh has expressed a law as between a man and a woman it applies, mutatis mutandis, between a woman and a man unless the context should make this impossible. For example, the text of the "Kitáb-i-Aqdas" forbids a man to marry his father's wife (i.e. his step-mother), and the Guardian has indicated that likewise a woman is forbidden to marry her step-father.

28 April 1974

- 30 Concerning your questions about the equality of men and women, this, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has often explained, is a fundamental principle of Bahá'u'lláh; therefore the Laws of the "Aqdas" should be studied in the light of it. Equality between men and women does not, indeed physiologically it cannot, mean identity of functions. In some things women excel men, for others men are better fitted than women, while in very many things the difference of sex is of no effect at all. The differences of function are most apparent in family life. The capacity for motherhood has many far-reaching implications which are recognized in Bahá'í Law. For example, when it is not possible to educate all one's children, daughters receive preference over sons, as mothers are the first educators of the next generation. Again, for physiological reasons, women are granted certain exemptions from fasting that are not applicable to men.

24 July 1975

- 31 The primary question to be resolved is how the present world, with its entrenched pattern of conflict, can change to a world in which harmony and co-operation will prevail.

World order can be founded only on an unshakable consciousness of the oneness of mankind, a spiritual truth which all the human sciences

confirm. Anthropology, physiology, psychology, recognize only one human species, albeit infinitely varied in the secondary aspects of life. Recognition of this truth requires abandonment of prejudice—prejudice of every kind—race, class, colour, creed, nation, sex, degree of material civilization, everything which enables people to consider themselves superior to others.

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.

October 1985

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 32 To the general premise that women and men have equality in the Faith, this, as often explained by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is a fundamental principle deriving from Bahá’u’lláh and therefore His mention of the “Men of Justice” in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas should be considered in light of that principle.

29 June 1976

- 33 ...‘Abdu’l-Bahá asserts: “In this divine age the bounties of God have encompassed the world of women. Equality of men and women, except in some negligible instances, has been fully and categorically announced. Distinctions have been utterly removed.” That men and women differ from one another in certain characteristics and functions is an inescapable fact of nature; the important thing is that He regards such inequalities as remain between the sexes as being “negligible”.

8 January 1981

- 34 You are quite right in stating that men and women have basic and distinct qualities. The solution provided in the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh is not, as you correctly observe, for men to become women, and for women to become men. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gave us the key to the problem when He taught that the qualities and functions of men and women “complement” each other. He further elucidated this point when He said that the “new age” will be “an

age in which the masculine and feminine elements of civilization will be more properly balanced.”

22 April 1981

- 35 It may be helpful to stress ... that the Bahá'í principle of the equality of men and women is clearly stated in the teachings, and the fact that there is diversity of function between them in certain areas does not negate this principle.

23 August 1984

The Role of Education in the Development of Women

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 36 It is the bounden duty of parents to rear their children to be staunch in faith ... For every praiseworthy deed is born out of the light of religion, and lacking this supreme bestowal the child will not turn away from any evil, nor will he draw nigh unto any good.

Bahá'í Education (compilation)

From the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 37 Praised be God, the women believers have organized meetings where they will learn how to teach the Faith, will spread the sweet savours of the Teachings and make plans for training the children.

...those present should concern themselves with every means of training the girl children; with teaching the various branches of knowledge, good behaviour, a proper way of life, the cultivation of a good character, chastity and constancy, perseverance, strength, determination, firmness of purpose; with household management, the education of children, and whatever especially applieth to the needs of girls—to the end that these girls, reared in the stronghold of all perfections, and with the protection of a goodly character, will, when they themselves become mothers, bring up their children from earliest infancy to have a good character and conduct themselves well.

Let them also study whatever will nurture the health of the body and its physical soundness, and how to guard their children from disease.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, secs. 94.1–94.3

- 38 Work ye for the guidance of the women in that land, teach the young girls and the children, so that the mothers may educate their little ones from

their earliest days, thoroughly train them, rear them to have a goodly character and good morals, guide them to all the virtues of humankind, prevent the development of any behaviour that would be worthy of blame, and foster them in the embrace of Bahá'í education. Thus shall these tender infants be nurtured at the breast of the knowledge of God and His love. Thus shall they grow and flourish, and be taught righteousness and the dignity of humankind, resolution and the will to strive and to endure. Thus shall they learn perseverance in all things, the will to advance, high mindedness and high resolve, chastity and purity of life. Thus shall they be enabled to carry to a successful conclusion whatsoever they undertake.

Let the mothers consider that whatever concerneth the education of children is of the first importance. Let them put forth every effort in this regard, for when the bough is green and tender it will grow in whatever way ye train it. Therefore it is incumbent upon the mothers to rear their little ones even as a gardener tendeth his young plants. Let them strive by day and by night to establish within their children faith and certitude, the fear of God, the love of the Beloved of the worlds, and all good qualities and traits. 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.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 95.2

- 39 ...it is incumbent upon the father and mother to train their children both in good conduct and the study of books; study, that is, to the degree required, so that no child, whether girl or boy, will remain illiterate.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 101

- 40 'Abdu'l-Bahá's supreme joy is in observing that a number of leaves from among the handmaidens of the Blessed Beauty have been educated, that they are the essence of detachment, and are well-informed of the mysteries of the world of being; that they raise such a call in their glorification and praise of the Greatest Name as to cause the inmates of the Fanés of the Kingdom to become attracted and overjoyed, and that they recite prayers in prose and poetry, and melodiously chant the divine verses. I cherish the

hope that thou wilt be one of them, wilt cast forth pearls, wilt be constantly engaged in singing His praise and wilt intone celestial strains in glorification of His attributes...

From a Tablet

- 41 ...Thou hast written about the girls' school. What was previously written still holdeth true. There can be no improvement unless the girls are brought up in schools and centres of learning, unless they are taught the sciences and other branches of knowledge, and unless they acquire the manifold arts, as necessary, and are divinely trained. For the day will come when these girls will become mothers. Mothers are the first educators of children, who establish virtues in the child's inner nature. They encourage the child to acquire perfections and goodly manners, warn him against unbecoming qualities, and encourage him to show forth resolve, firmness, and endurance under hardship, and to advance on the high road to progress. Due regard for the education of girls is, therefore, necessary. This is a very important subject, and it should be administered and organized under the aegis of the Spiritual Assembly...

From a Tablet

- 42 ...it is incumbent upon the girls of this glorious era to be fully versed in the various branches of knowledge, in sciences and the arts and all the wonders of this pre-eminent time, that they may then educate their children and train them from their earliest days in the ways of perfection.

From a Tablet

- 43 Furthermore, the education of woman is more necessary and important than that of man, for woman is the trainer of the child from its infancy. If she be defective and imperfect herself, the child will necessarily be deficient; therefore, imperfection of woman implies a condition of imperfection in all mankind, for it is the mother who rears, nurtures and guides the growth of the child. This is not the function of the father. If the educator be incompetent, the educated will be correspondingly lacking. This is evident and incontrovertible. Could the student be brilliant and accomplished if the teacher is illiterate and ignorant? The mothers are the first educators of mankind; if they be imperfect, alas for the condition and future of the race...

It has been objected by some that woman is not equally capable with man and that she is deficient by creation. This is pure imagination. The

difference in capability between man and woman is due entirely to opportunity and education. Heretofore woman has been denied the right and privilege of equal development. If equal opportunity be granted her, there is no doubt she would be the peer of man. History will evidence this. In past ages noted women have arisen in the affairs of nations and surpassed men in their accomplishments...

The purpose, in brief, is this: that if woman be fully educated and granted her rights, she will attain the capacity for wonderful accomplishments and prove herself the equal of man. She is the coadjutor of man, his complement and helpmeet. Both are human; both are endowed with potentialities of intelligence and embody the virtues of humanity. In all human powers and functions they are partners and coequals. At present in spheres of human activity woman does not manifest her natal prerogatives, owing to lack of education and opportunity. Without doubt education will establish her equality with men.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 44 In proclaiming the oneness of mankind He taught that men and women are equal in the sight of God and that there is no distinction to be made between them. The only difference between them now is due to lack of education and training. If woman is given equal opportunity of education, distinction and estimate of inferiority will disappear...

He promulgated the adoption of the same course of education for man and woman. Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes. 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.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 45 Why should a woman be left mentally undeveloped? Science is praiseworthy—whether investigated by the intellect of man or woman. So, little by little, woman advanced, giving increasing evidence of equal capabilities with man—whether in scientific research, political ability or any other sphere of human activity. The conclusion is evident that woman has been outdistanced through lack of education and intellectual facilities. If given the same educational opportunities or course of study, she would develop the same capacity and abilities.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 46 Bahá'u'lláh has announced that inasmuch as ignorance and lack of education are barriers of separation among mankind, all must receive training and instruction. Through this provision the lack of mutual understanding will be remedied and the unity of mankind furthered and advanced. Universal education is a universal law. It is, therefore, incumbent upon every father to teach and instruct his children according to his possibilities. If he is unable to educate them, the body politic, the representative of the people, must provide the means for their education.

The sex distinction which exists in the human world is due to the lack of education for woman, who has been denied equal opportunity for development and advancement. Equality of the sexes will be established in proportion to the increased opportunities afforded woman in this age, for man and woman are equally the recipients of powers and endowments from God, the Creator. God has not ordained distinction between them in His consummate purpose.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 47 The education of each child is compulsory ... In addition to this widespread education each child must be taught a profession, art, or trade, so that every member of the community will be enabled to earn his own livelihood. Work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship.

'Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy

- 48 Devote ye particular attention to the school for girls, for the greatness of this wondrous Age will be manifested as a result of progress in the world of women. This is why ye observe that in every land the world of women is on the march, and this is due to the impact of the Most Great Manifestation, and the power of the teachings of God.

Bahá'í Education (compilation)

- 49 Our hearts rejoiced at thy letter concerning a school for girls.

Praised be God that there is now a school of this type in Tíhrán where young maidens can, through His bounty, receive an education and with all vigour acquire the accomplishments of humankind. Erelong will women in every field keep pace with the men.

Until now, in Persia, the means for women's advancement were non-existent. But now, God be thanked, ever since the dawning of the Morn of Salvation, they have been going forward day by day. The hope is that they will take the lead in virtues and attainments, in closeness to the

Court of Almighty God, in faith and certitude—and that the women of the East will become the envy of the women of the West.

Bahá'í Education (compilation)

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 50 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 fulfil 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.

October 1985 to the Peoples of the World

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 51 A very important element in the attainment of such equality is Bahá'u'lláh's provision that boys and girls must follow essentially the same curriculum in schools.

28 December 1980

- 52 The House of Justice regards the need to educate and guide women in their primary responsibility as mothers as an excellent opportunity for organizing women's activities. Your efforts should focus on helping them in their function as educators of the rising generation. Women should also be encouraged to attract their husbands and male members of their families to the Faith so that the Bahá'í community will be representative of the society of which it forms a part. Gradually the spirit of unity and fellowship, as set forth in our teachings, will be reflected in the life of Bahá'í families.

29 February 1984

Application of the Principle of Equality to Family Life

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 53 Steadfastness in the Cause is mentioned in the Tablets and set forth by the Pen of the Ancient of Days. Render thanks to the Beloved of the world that thou hast set thy heart on Him and art uttering His praise. Many a man hath in this day been deprived of making mention of the All-Sufficing Lord and of recognizing His truth; and many a woman hath fixed her gaze upon the Horizon of the Most High, and hath adorned herself with the garb of the love of the Desire of the world. This is God's grace which He bestoweth upon whomsoever He pleaseth. By the Day-Star of ancient mysteries! The sweet-scented fragrance of every breath breathed in the love of God is wafted in the court of the presence of the Lord of Revelation. The reward of no good deed is or ever will be lost. Blessed art thou, doubly blessed art thou! Thou art reckoned amongst those handmaidens whose love for their kin hath not prevented them from attaining the shores of the Sea of Grace and Mercy. God willing, thou shalt rest eternally neath the shade of the favours of the All-Merciful and shalt be assured of His bounties. Engage in the praise of the True One and rejoice in His loving-kindness.

The world passeth away, and that which is everlasting is the love of God. God willing, thou shalt circumambulate the True One in every world of His worlds and shalt be free from all else save Him.

From a Tablet

- 54 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.

From a Tablet

From the Writings and Utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- 55 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.

Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, sec. 92

- 56 ...following the precepts of God and the holy Law, suckle your children from their infancy with the milk of a universal education, and rear them so that from their earliest days, within their inmost heart, their very nature, a way of life will be firmly established that will conform to the divine Teachings in all things.

For mothers are the first educators, the first mentors; and truly it is the mothers who determine the happiness, the future greatness, the courteous ways and learning and judgement, the understanding and the faith of their little ones.

Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, sec. 96

- 57 ...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.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 98.2

- 58 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.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 114

- 59 Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. Their concerns are in order, they enjoy comfort and tranquillity, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honour, as day succeedeth day...

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 221.9

- 60 You have asked whether a husband would be able to prevent his wife from embracing the divine light or a wife dissuade her husband from gaining entry into the Kingdom of God. In truth neither of them could prevent the other from entering into the Kingdom, unless the husband hath an excessive attachment to the wife or the wife to the husband. Indeed when either of the two worshippeth the other to the exclusion of God, then each could prevent the other from seeking admittance into His Kingdom.

Family Life (compilation)

- 61 **QUESTION:** What is the attitude of your belief toward the family?

ANSWER: 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.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

62 When such difference of opinion and belief occurs between husband and wife it is very unfortunate for undoubtedly it detracts from that spiritual bond which is the stronghold of the family bond, especially in times of difficulty. The way, however, that it could be remedied is not by acting in such wise as to alienate the other party. One of the objects of the Cause is actually to bring about a closer bond in the homes. In all such cases, therefore, the Master used to advise obedience to the wishes of the other party and prayer. Pray that your husband may gradually see the light and at the same time so act as to draw him nearer rather than prejudice him. Once that harmony is secured then you will be able to serve unhampered.

15 July 1928

63 Shoghi Effendi trusts that as a result of his cable and this letter your wife will be able to devote a little more time to her family, but he also hopes that you will be able to assist her in obtaining the time and opportunity to serve a Cause that is so dear and near to her heart and in which her services are much appreciated.

19 June 1931

64 The Guardian, in his remarks ... about parents' and children's, wives' and husbands' relations in America, meant that there is a tendency in that country for children to be too independent of the wishes of their parents and lacking in the respect due to them. Also wives, in some cases, have a tendency to exert an unjust degree of domination over their husbands, which, of course, is not right, any more than that the husband should unjustly dominate his wife.

22 July 1943

65 It is one of the essential teachings of the Faith that unity should be maintained in the home. Of course this does not mean that any member of the family has a right to influence the faith of any other member; and if

this is realized by all the members, then it seems certain that unity would be feasible.

6 July 1952

- 66 The Guardian fully appreciates your desire to go forth as a pioneer at this time, and to help establish the Faith in the virgin areas, but you should not go against the wishes of your husband, and force him to give up everything in order that you might serve the Faith in this manner. We must bear in mind the wishes and the rights of those who are closely connected in our lives.

If your husband wishes you to remain where you are, certainly there is a vast field for teaching there.

31 July 1953

- 67 Wherever there is a Bahá'í family, those concerned should by all means do all they can to preserve it, because divorce is strongly condemned in the Teachings, whereas harmony, unity and love are held up as the highest ideals in human relationships. This must always apply to the Bahá'ís, whether they are serving in the pioneering field or not.

9 November 1956

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 68 That the first teacher of the child is the mother should not be startling, for the primary orientation of the infant is to its mother. This provision of nature in no way minimizes the role of the father in the Bahá'í family. Again, equality of status does not mean identity of function.

23 June 1974

- 69 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. Bahá'u'lláh came to bring unity to the world, and a fundamental unity is that of the family. Therefore, we must believe that the Faith is intended to strengthen the family, not weaken it. 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.

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.

1 August 1978

- 70 Noting that you and your husband have consulted about your family problems with your Spiritual Assembly but did not receive any advice, and also discussed your situation with a family counsellor without success, the House of Justice feels it most essential for your husband and you to understand that marriage can be a source of well-being, conveying a sense of security and spiritual happiness. However, it is not something that just happens. For marriage to become a haven of contentment it requires the cooperation of the marriage partners themselves, and the assistance of their families.

24 June 1979

- 71 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 parents have the inescapable duty to educate their children—but not vice versa; the children have the duty to obey their parents—the parents do not obey the children; the mother—not the father—bears the children, nurses them in babyhood, and is thus their first educator; hence daughters have a prior right to education over sons and, as the Guardian's secretary has written on his behalf, "The task of bringing up a Bahá'í child, as emphasized time and again in Bahá'í Writings, is the chief responsibility of the mother, whose unique privilege is indeed to create in her home such conditions as would be most conducive to both his material and spiritual welfare and advancement. The training which a child first receives through his mother constitutes the strongest foundation for his future development..." A corollary of this responsibility of the mother is her right to be supported by her husband—a husband has no explicit right to be supported by his wife...

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. In short, the relationship between husband and wife should be as held forth in the prayer revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá which is often read at Bahá’í weddings: “Verily, they are married in obedience to Thy command. Cause them to become the signs of harmony and unity until the end of time.”

These are all relationships within the family, but there is a much wider sphere of relationships between men and women than in the home, and this too we should consider in the context of Bahá’í society, not in that of past or present social norms. For example, although the mother is the first educator of the child, and the most important formative influence in his development, the father also has the responsibility of educating his children, and this responsibility is so weighty that Bahá’u’lláh has stated that a father who fails to exercise it forfeits his rights of fatherhood. Similarly, although the primary responsibility for supporting the family financially is placed upon the husband, this does not by any means imply that the place of woman is confined to the home.

28 December 1980

- 72 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 should be settled in harmony and love, and that there are times when the husband and the 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.

16 May 1982

- 73 You ask about the admonition that everyone must work, and want to know if this means that you, a wife and mother, must work for a livelihood as your husband does. We are requested to enclose for your perusal an excerpt, “The twelfth Glad-Tidings”, from Bahá’u’lláh’s “Tablet of Bishárát”.ⁱ You

i This passage appears in the present compilation under Section IV.

will see that the directive is for the friends to be engaged in an occupation which will be of benefit to mankind. Homemaking is a highly honourable and responsible work of fundamental importance for mankind.

16 June 1982

- 74 With regard to your question whether mothers should work outside the home, it is helpful to consider the matter from the perspective of the concept of a Bahá'í family. This concept is based on the principle that the man has primary responsibility for the financial support of the family, and the woman is the chief and primary educator of the children. This by no means implies that these functions are inflexibly fixed and cannot be changed and adjusted to suit particular family situations, nor does it mean that the place of the woman is confined to the home. Rather, while primary responsibility is assigned, it is anticipated that fathers would play a significant role in the education of the children and women could also be breadwinners. As you rightly indicated, 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged women to "participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world".

In relation to your specific queries, the decision concerning the amount of time a mother may spend in working outside the home depends on circumstances existing within the home, which may vary from time to time. Family consultation will help to provide the answers...

9 August 1984

- 75 The great importance attached to the mother's role derives from the fact that she is the *first* educator of the child. Her attitude, her prayers, even what she eats and her physical condition have a great influence on the child when it is still in the womb. When the child is born, it is she who has been endowed by God with the milk which is the first food designed for it, and it is intended that, if possible, she should be with the baby to train and nurture it in its earliest days and months. This does not mean that the father does not also love, pray for, and care for his baby, but as he has the primary responsibility of providing for the family, his time to be with his child is usually limited, while the mother is usually closely associated with the baby during this intensely formative time when it is growing and developing faster than it ever will again during the whole of its life. As the child grows older and more independent, the relative nature of its relationship with its mother and father modifies and the father can play a greater role.

23 August 1984

Women in the World at Large

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 76 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 day-star of wisdom and utterance shineth resplendent.

The most despised of men in the sight of God are those who sit idly and beg. Hold ye fast unto the cord of material means, placing your whole trust in God, the Provider of all means. When anyone occupieth himself in a craft or trade, such occupation itself is regarded in the estimation of God as an act of worship; and this is naught but a token of His infinite and all-pervasive bounty.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

From the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 77 The handmaidens of God and the bondsmails in His divine Court should reveal such attributes and attitudes amongst the women of the world as would cause them to stand out and achieve renown in the circles of women. That is, they should associate with them with supreme chastity and steadfast decency, with unshakeable faith, articulate speech, an eloquent tongue, irrefutable testimony and high resolve. Beseech God that thou mayest attain unto all these bounties.

From a Tablet

- 78 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.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 79 ...the principle of religion has been revealed by Bahá'u'lláh that woman must be given the privilege of equal education with man and full right to his prerogatives. That is to say, there must be no difference in the education of male and female in order that womankind may develop equal capacity and importance with man in the social and economic equation. Then the world will attain unity and harmony. In past ages humanity has been defective and inefficient because it has been incomplete. War and its ravages have blighted the world; the education of woman will be a mighty step toward its abolition and ending, for she will use her whole influence against war. Woman rears the child and educates the youth to maturity. She will refuse to give her sons for sacrifice upon the field of battle. In truth, she will be the greatest factor in establishing universal peace and international arbitration. Assuredly, woman will abolish warfare among mankind.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 80 Again, it is well established in history that where woman has not participated in human affairs the outcomes have never attained a state of completion and perfection. On the other hand, every influential undertaking of the human world wherein woman has been a participant has attained importance. This is historically true and beyond disproof even in religion. Jesus Christ had twelve disciples and among His followers a woman known as Mary Magdalene. Judas Iscariot had become a traitor and hypocrite, and after the crucifixion the remaining eleven disciples were wavering and undecided. It is certain from the evidence of the Gospels that the one who comforted them and reestablished their faith was Mary Magdalene...

The most momentous question of this day is international peace and arbitration, and universal peace is impossible without universal suffrage.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 81 **QUESTION:** Is it not a fact that universal peace cannot be accomplished until there is political democracy in all the countries of the world?

ANSWER: It is very evident that in the future there shall be no centralization in the countries of the world, be they constitutional in government, republican or democratic in form. The United States may be held up as the example of future government—that is to say, each province will be independent in itself, but there will be federal union protecting the interests of the various independent states. It may not be a republican or a democratic form. To cast aside centralization which promotes despotism is the exigency of the time. This will be productive of international peace. Another fact of equal importance in bringing about international peace is woman's suffrage. That is to say, when perfect equality shall be established between men and women, peace may be realized for the simple reason that womankind in general will never favour warfare. Women will not be willing to allow those whom they have so tenderly cared for to go to the battlefield. When they shall have a vote, they will oppose any cause of warfare. Another factor which will bring about universal peace is the linking together of the Orient and the Occident.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 82 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.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 83 Woman must especially devote her energies and abilities toward the industrial and agricultural sciences, seeking to assist mankind in that which is most needful. By this means she will demonstrate capability and ensure recognition of equality in the social and economic equation.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 84 Therefore, strive to show in the human world that women are most capable and efficient, that their hearts are more tender and susceptible than the hearts of men, that they are more philanthropic and responsive toward the

needy and suffering, that they are inflexibly opposed to war and are lovers of peace. Strive that the ideal of international peace may become realized through the efforts of womankind, for man is more inclined to war than woman, and a real evidence of woman's superiority will be her service and efficiency in the establishment of universal peace.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 85 ...imbued with the same virtues as man, rising through all the degrees of human attainment, women will become the peers of men, and until this equality is established, true progress and attainment for the human race will not be facilitated.

The evident reasons underlying this are as follows: Woman by nature is opposed to war; she is an advocate of peace. Children are reared and brought up by the mothers who give them the first principles of education and labour assiduously in their behalf. Consider, for instance, a mother who has tenderly reared a son for twenty years to the age of maturity. Surely she will not consent to having that son torn asunder and killed in the field of battle. Therefore, as woman advances toward the degree of man in power and privilege, with the right of vote and control in human government, most assuredly war will cease; for woman is naturally the most devoted and staunch advocate of international peace.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 86 According to the spirit of this age, women must advance and fulfil 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.

Cited in Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era

- 87 The woman is indeed of the greater importance to the race. She has the greater burden and the greater work. Look at the vegetable and the animal worlds. The palm which carries the fruit is the tree most prized by the date grower. The Arab knows that for a long journey the mare has the longest wind. For her greater strength and fierceness, the lioness is more feared by the hunter than the lion.

...The woman has greater moral courage than the man; she has also special gifts which enable her to govern in moments of danger and crisis.

'Abdu'l-Bahá in London, pp. 102-103

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 88 Concerning Bahá'í representation at the All-Asian Women's Conference: this is undoubtedly a most commendable thing to do especially as the Cause has so much concerning the position of women in society. Shoghi Effendi hopes that the National Assembly will do its best to win the admiration of all the assembled delegates for the teachings of the Cause along that line. We should always take such opportunities that present themselves. Maybe we would succeed to render some service to society and alleviate its ills.

10 November 1930

- 89 What 'Abdu'l-Bahá meant about the women arising for peace is that this a matter which vitally affects women, and when they form a conscious and overwhelming mass of public opinion against war there can be no war. The Bahá'í women are already organized through being members of the Faith and the Administrative Order. No further organization is needed. But they should, through teaching and through the active moral support they give to every movement directed towards peace, seek to exert a strong influence on other women's minds in regard to this essential matter.

24 March 1945

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 90 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.

October 1985

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

91 ...there is a much wider sphere of relationships between men and women than in the home, and this too we should consider in the context of Bahá'í society, not in that of past or present social norms. For example, although the mother is the first educator of the child, and the most important formative influence in his development, the father also has the responsibility of educating his children, and this responsibility is so weighty that Bahá'u'lláh has stated that a father who fails to exercise it forfeits his rights of fatherhood. Similarly, although the primary responsibility for supporting the family financially is placed upon the husband, this does not by any means imply that the place of woman is confined to the home. On the contrary, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated:

In this Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, the women go neck and neck with the men. In no movement will they be left behind. Their rights with men are equal in degree. They will enter all the administrative branches of politics. They will attain in all such a degree as will be considered the very highest station of the world of humanity and will take part in all affairs...

*Paris Talks*ⁱ

and again:

So it will come to pass that when women participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world, when they enter confidently and capably the great arena of laws and politics, war will cease...

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

In the Tablet of the World, Bahá'u'lláh Himself has envisaged that women as well as men would be breadwinners in stating:

Everyone, whether man or woman, should hand over to a trusted person a portion of what he or she earneth through trade, agriculture or other

i Editor: revised translation.

occupation, for the training and education of children, to be spent for this purpose with the knowledge of the Trustees of the House of Justice.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

28 December 1980

- 92 The duty of women in being the first educators of mankind is clearly set forth in the Writings. It is for every woman, if and when she becomes a mother, to determine how best she can discharge on the one hand her chief responsibility as a mother and on the other, to the extent possible, to participate in other aspects of the activities of the society of which she forms a part.

22 April 1981

Fostering the Development of Women

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 93 In this Day the Blessed Tree of Remembrance speaketh forth in the Kingdom of Utterance saying: Well is it with the servant who hath turned his face towards Him, and embraced His truth, and with the handmaiden who hath hearkened to His Voice and become of the blissful. Verily, she is a champion of the field of true understanding. To this the Tongue of Truth beareth witness from His exalted Station.

O My leaf, blessed art thou for having responded to My call when it was raised in the name of the True One. Thou didst recognize My Revelation when men of renown were immersed in manifest idle fancies. Thou hast verily attained the mercy of thy Lord time and again. Render thanks unto Him and glorify Him with thy Praise. He is, in truth, with His handmaidens and servants who have turned towards Him. The shining glory from the Horizon of My Kingdom be upon thee and upon the one who hath guided thee to My straight path.

From a Tablet

- 94 We beseech the True One to adorn His handmaidens with the ornament of chastity, of trustworthiness, of righteousness and of purity. Verily, He is the All-Bestowing, the All-Generous. We make mention of the handmaidens of God at this time and announce unto them the glad-tidings of the tokens of the mercy and compassion of God and His consideration for them, glorified be He, and We supplicate Him for all His assistance to perform such deeds as are the cause of the exaltation of His Word. He verily speaketh the truth and enjoineth upon His servants and His handmaidens that which will profit them in every world of His worlds. He, verily, is the All-Forgiving, the All-Merciful.

From a Tablet

From the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 95 The effulgence of the rays of the Sun of Truth is abundant and the favours of the Blessed Beauty surround the women believers and the handmaidens who have attained unto certitude. At every moment a bounteous bestowal is revealed. The handmaidens of the Merciful should seize the opportunities afforded in these days. Each one should strive to draw nigh unto the divine Threshold and seek bounties from the Source of existence. She should attain such a state and be confirmed with such a power as to make, with but the utterance of one word, a lowly person to be held in reverence, initiate him who is deprived into the world of the spirit, impart hope to the despondent, endow the portionless one with a share of the great bestowal, and confer knowledge and insight upon the ignorant and the blind, and alertness and vigilance on the indolent and heedless. This is the attribute of the handmaidens of the Merciful. This is the characteristic of the bondsmajds of God's Threshold.

O ye leaves who have attained certitude! In the countries of Europe and America the maidservants of the Merciful have won the prize of excellence and advancement from the arena of men, and in the fields of teaching and spreading the divine fragrances they have shown a brilliant hand. Soon they will soar like the birds of the Concourse on high in the far corners of the world and will guide the people and reveal to them the divine mysteries. Ye, who are the blessed leaves from the East, should burn more brightly, and engage in spreading the sweet savours of the Lord and in reciting the verses of God. Arise, therefore, and exert yourselves to fulfil the exhortations and counsels of the Blessed Beauty, that all hopes may be realized and that the plain of streams and orchards may become the garden of oneness.

Upon ye, men and women, be the glory of glories.

From a Tablet

- 96 In this great Cycle and wondrous Dispensation some women have been raised up who were the emblems of unity and ensigns of oneness, for the revelation of divine bestowals is received by men and women in equal measure. "Verily the most honoured in the sight of God is the most virtuous amongst you"ⁱ is applicable to both men and women, to servants and

i Qur'án 49:13

handmaidens. All are under the shadow of the Word of God and all derive their strength from the bounties of the Lord. Therefore, do not consider thyself to be insignificant by doubting what a handmaiden living behind the veil can do...

With a firm heart, a steadfast step and an eloquent tongue arise to spread the Word of God and say: "O God, although I am sitting concealed behind the screen of chastity and am restricted by the veil and exigencies of modesty, my cherished hope is to raise the banner of service and to become a maidservant at Thy Holy Threshold; to ride on a charger and penetrate the army of the ignorant, defeat the mighty regiments and subvert the foundations of error and violation. Thou art the Helper of the weak, Thou art the Sustainer of the poor, Thou art the Succourer of the handmaidens. Verily, Thou art the Almighty and All-Powerful."

From a Tablet

- 97 Confirmations from the kingdom of God will assuredly be received, enabling some radiant leaves to appear resplendent in the assemblage of this world with clear proofs and convincing reasons, which will adorn the cause of womanhood. They will prove that in this cycle women are equal to men, nay, in certain respects they will excel. Ponder ye: in this wonderful Cause numerous were the men who scaled the heights of knowledge; they had a brilliant utterance, a convincing proof, an eloquent tongue and magnificent speech, but the blessed leaf, Jináb-i-Ṭáhirih, because she was a woman, emerged with immense splendour and dumbfounded all the people. If she were a man, this would not have been so at all. Therefore, ye should know that the greatness of the Cause hath penetrated the nerves and veins of the world in such wise that if one of the leaves is attracted and gains mastery in demonstrating reasons and proofs and in uttering convincing evidences, she will shine resplendently. O radiant leaves, I swear by the Beauty of the Desired One and the Mystery of Existence that if ye work actively in this realm, the outpourings of the Blessed Beauty will reflect as the sun in the mirrors of the hearts. Your progress will astonish all.

The attracted leaves should not, when associating with each other, talk merely about the temperature of the weather, the coldness of the water, the beauty of the flowers and gardens, the freshness of the grass and the flowing water. They should rather restrict their discussions to glorification and praise and the uttering of proofs and reasons, to quoting verses and traditions and putting forth clear testimonies, so that all the homes

of the loved ones will be converted into gathering places for lessons on teaching the Cause.

If ye do so, in a short while the outpourings of the Kingdom will be so manifested that each one of the handmaidens of the Merciful will become a perspicuous book revealing the mysteries of the Lord of Mercy.

Upon you be the glory of glories.

From a Tablet

- 98 In this wondrous Dispensation the favours of the Glorious Lord are vouchsafed unto the handmaidens of the Merciful. Therefore, they should, like unto men, seize the prize and excel in the field, so that it will be proven and made manifest that the penetrative influence of the Word of God in this new Dispensation hath caused women to be equal with men, and that in the arena of tests they will outdo others. Therefore, the true bondswomen of the Blessed Beauty must be revived by the spirit of detachment, and refreshed by the breezes of attraction. With hearts overflowing with the love of God, with souls gladdened by the heavenly glad-tidings, and with extreme humility and lowliness, let them speak out with eloquent speech, and praise and glorify the Great Lord, for they are the manifestations of His bounty and adorned with the crown of splendour.

From a Tablet

- 99 Blessed, blessed are ye for ye have arranged spiritual meetings and engaged in propounding divine proofs and evidences. Ye are intent on vindicating truth in support of the manifest Light of the Cause, through conclusive arguments and proofs based on the sacred scriptures of the past. This is a very noble aim, and this cherished hope a cause of the illumination of all peoples and nations.

From the beginning of existence until the present day, in any of the past cycles and dispensations, no assemblies for women have ever been established and classes for the purpose of spreading the teachings were never held by them. This is one of the characteristics of this glorious Dispensation and this great century. Ye should, most certainly, strive to perfect this assemblage and increase your knowledge of the realities of heavenly mysteries, so that, God willing, in a short time, women will become the same as men; they will take a leading position amongst the learned, will each have a fluent tongue and eloquent speech, and shine like unto lamps of guidance throughout the world. In some respects, women

have astonishing capacities; they hasten in their attraction to God, and are intense in their fiery ardour for Him.

In brief, spend your nights and days in the study of the holy Utterances and in acquiring perfections. Occupy yourselves always in discussing these matters. When ye meet each other, convey the glad-tidings and impart hope to one another because of the confirmations and bounties of the Ancient and Ever-Living Lord. Let each set forth proofs and evidences, and talk about the mysteries of the Kingdom, so that the true and divine Spirit may permeate the body of the contingent world and the secrets of all things, whether of the past or of the future, may become openly manifest and resplendent.

O loved handmaidens of God! Consider not your present merits and capacities, rather fix your gaze on the favours and confirmations of the Blessed Beauty, because His everlasting grace will make of the insignificant plant a blessed tree, will turn the mirage into cool water and wine; will cause the forsaken atom to become the very essence of being, the puny one erudite in the school of knowledge. It enableth a thorny bush to give forth blossoms, and the dark earth to produce fragrant and rich hyacinths. It will transmute the stone into a ruby of great price, and fill the sea shells with brilliant pearls. It will assist a fledgling schoolchild to become a learned teacher and enable a frail embryo to reveal the reality of the verse: "Hallowed be the Lord, the Most Excellent of all creators."ⁱ Verily, my Lord is powerful over things.

From a Tablet

- 100 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...

From a Tablet

- 101 Now is the time to speak forth and to deliver speeches, the time to teach and to give testimony. Loosen thy tongue, expound the truths, and establish

i Qur'án 23:14

the validity of the verse: "The All-Merciful hath taught the Qur'án."ⁱ The Holy Spirit speaketh through the innermost essence of the human tongue, God's Spirit which desireth communion with the human soul unfoldeth the truths, the Faithful Spirit writeth down and the Spirit of the Ancient of Days confirmeth.

I swear by that Peerless Beauty, Who is in the Unseen Kingdom, that when the leaves loose their tongues in praise and glorification of the All-Loving Lord, and in teaching the Cause of the Kind Lord, the concurrence of the Kingdom and the inmates of the Unseen Realms will give ear, and cry out with exclamations of extreme joy and jubilation.

Glory be upon thee and upon every handmaiden who is steadfast in the Covenant.

From a Tablet

- 102 O handmaid of God! ... To the mothers must be given the divine Teachings and effective counsel, and they must be encouraged and made eager to train their children, for the mother is the first educator of the child. It is she who must, at the very beginning, suckle the new-born at the breast of God's Faith and God's Law, that divine love may enter into him even with his mother's milk, and be with him till his final breath.

So long as the mother faileth to train her children, and start them on a proper way of life, the training which they receive later on will not take its full effect. It is incumbent upon the Spiritual Assemblies to provide the mothers with a well-planned programme for the education of children, showing how, from infancy, the child must be watched over and taught. These instructions must be given to every mother to serve her as a guide, so that each will train and nurture her children in accordance with the Teachings.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, secs. 113.1–113.2

- 103 ...we must not make distinctions between individual members of the human family. We must not consider any soul as barren or deprived. Our duty lies in educating souls so that the Sun of the bestowals of God shall become resplendent in them, and this is possible through the power of the oneness of humanity. The more love is expressed among mankind and the stronger the power of unity, the greater will be this reflection and revelation, for the greatest bestowal of God is love. Love is the source of all the bestowals of

i Qur'án 55:2

God. Until love takes possession of the heart, no other divine bounty can be revealed in it.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 104 In brief, the assumption of superiority by man will continue to be depressing to the ambition of woman, as if her attainment to equality was creationally impossible; woman's aspiration toward advancement will be checked by it, and she will gradually become hopeless. On the contrary, we must declare that her capacity is equal, even greater than man's. This will inspire her with hope and ambition, and her susceptibilities for advancement will continually increase. She must not be told and taught that she is weaker and inferior in capacity and qualification. If a pupil is told that his intelligence is less than his fellow pupils, it is a very great drawback and handicap to his progress. He must be encouraged to advance by the statement, "You are most capable, and if you endeavour, you will attain the highest degree."

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 105 The purpose, in brief, is this: that if woman be fully educated and granted her rights, she will attain the capacity for wonderful accomplishments and prove herself the equal of man. She is the coadjutor of man, his complement and helpmeet.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 106 The realities of things have been revealed in this radiant century, and that which is true must come to the surface. Among these realities is the principle of the equality of man and woman—equal rights and prerogatives in all things appertaining to humanity. Bahá'u'lláh declared this reality over fifty years ago. But while this principle of equality is true, it is likewise true that woman must prove her capacity and aptitude, must show forth the evidences of equality. She must become proficient in the arts and sciences and prove by her accomplishments that her abilities and powers have merely been latent. Demonstrations of force, such as are now taking place in England, are neither becoming nor effective in the cause of womanhood and equality. Woman must especially devote her energies and abilities toward the industrial and agricultural sciences, seeking to assist mankind in that which is most needful. By this means she will demonstrate capability and ensure recognition of equality in the social and economic equation. Undoubtedly God will confirm her in her efforts and endeavours,

for in this century of radiance Bahá'u'lláh has proclaimed the reality of the oneness of the world of humanity and announced that all nations, peoples and races are one.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 107 Equality of the sexes will be established in proportion to the increased opportunities afforded woman in this age, for man and woman are equally the recipients of powers and endowments from God, the Creator. God has not ordained distinction between them in His consummate purpose.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 108 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!

Paris Talks

From the writings of Shoghi Effendi

109 Regarding the position of the Bahá'í women in India and Burma, and their future collaboration with the men in the administrative work of the Cause, I feel that the time is now ripe that those women who have already conformed to the prevailing custom in India and Burma by discarding the veil should not only be given the right to vote for the election of their local and national representatives, but should themselves be eligible to the membership of all Bahá'í Assemblies throughout India and Burma, be they local or national.

This definite and most important step, however, should be taken with the greatest care and caution, prudence and thoughtfulness. Due regard must be paid to their actual capacity and present attainments, and only those who are best qualified for membership, be they men or women, and irrespective of social standing, should be elected to the extremely responsible position of a member of the Bahá'í Assembly.

This momentous decision, I trust, will prove to be a great incentive to the women Bahá'ís throughout India and Burma who, I hope, will now bestir themselves and endeavour to the best of their ability to acquire a better and more profound knowledge of the Cause, to take a more active and systematic part in the general affairs of the Movement, and prove themselves in every way enlightened, responsible and efficient co-workers to their fellow-men in their common task for the advancement of the Cause throughout their country.

May they fully realize their high responsibilities in this day, may they do all in their power to justify the high hopes we cherish for their future, and may they prove themselves in every respect worthy of the noble mission which the Bahá'í world is now entrusting to their charge.

27 December 1923

110 Full rights have been accorded to Bahá'í women residing in the cradle of the Faith to participate in the membership of both national and local Bahá'í Spiritual Assemblies, removing thereby the last remaining obstacle to the enjoyment of complete equality of rights in the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Persian Bahá'í Community.

April 1954, Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957

- 111 That the members of this community, of either sex and of every age, of whatever race or background, however limited in experience, capacity and knowledge, may arise as one man, and seize with both hands the God-given opportunities now presented to them through the dispensations of an all-loving, ever-watchful, ever-sustaining Providence, and lend thereby a tremendous impetus to the propelling forces mysteriously guiding the operations of this newly-launched, unspeakably potent, world-encompassing Crusade, is one of the dearest wishes which a loving and longing heart holds for them at this great turning point in the fortunes of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in the American continent.

20 June 1954, Citadel of Faith

From letters and telex by the Universal House of Justice

- 112 Concerning the point you raised in your letter ... that the women's liberation movement in ... is assuming extreme positions which are having some influence on impressionable Bahá'í young women, we feel it would be helpful if your Assembly were to stress the unique position that women occupy by being members of the Bahá'í Faith particularly through participation in the administration of its affairs on both a local and national scale.

9 April 1971

- 113 'Abdu'l-Bahá has pointed out that "Among the miracles which distinguish this sacred dispensation is this, that women have evinced a greater boldness than men when enlisted in the ranks of the Faith." Shoghi Effendi has further stated that this "boldness" must, in the course of time, "be more convincingly demonstrated, and win for the beloved Cause victories more stirring than any it has as yet achieved." Although obviously the entire Bahá'í world is committed to encouraging and stimulating the vital role of women in the Bahá'í community as well as in society at large, the Five Year Plan calls specifically on eighty National Spiritual Assemblies to organize Bahá'í activities for women. In the course of the current year which has been designated "International Women's Year" as a world-wide activity of the United Nations, the Bahá'ís, particularly in these eighty national communities, should initiate and implement programmes which will stimulate and promote the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of Bahá'í community life, so that through their accomplishments

the friends will demonstrate the distinction of the Cause of God in this field of human endeavour.

25 May 1975 to all National Spiritual Assemblies

PARTICULARLY CALL UPON BAHÁ'Í WOMEN, WHOSE CAPACITIES IN MANY LANDS STILL LARGELY UNUSED, AND WHOSE POTENTIAL FOR SERVICE CAUSE SO GREAT, TO ARISE AND DEMONSTRATE IMPORTANCE PART THEY ARE TO PLAY IN ALL FIELDS SERVICE FAITH.

24 March 1977

- 114 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.

Riḍván 1978

- 115 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.

Naw-Rúz 1979

- 116 The equality of men and women is not, at the present time, universally applied. In those areas where traditional inequality still hampers its progress we must take the lead in practising this Bahá'í principle. Bahá'í women and girls must be encouraged to take part in the social, spiritual and administrative activities of their communities.

Riḍván 1984

- 117 Calling upon local and national Bahá'í communities to sponsor a wide range of activities which will engage the attention of people from all walks of life to various topics relevant to peace, such as: the role of women....
23 January 1985

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 118 The House of Justice regards the need to educate and guide women in their primary responsibility as mothers as an excellent opportunity for organizing women's activities. Your efforts should focus on helping them in their function as educators of the rising generation.
29 February 1984
- 119 The principle of the equality between women and men, like the other teachings of the Faith, can be effectively and universally established among the friends when it is pursued in conjunction with all the other aspects of Bahá'í life. Change is an evolutionary process requiring patience with one's self and others, loving education and the passage of time as the believers deepen their knowledge of the principles of the Faith, gradually discard long-held traditional attitudes and progressively conform their lives to the unifying teachings of the Cause.
25 July 1984

THE
WORLD'S
CURRENT STATE OF
DISORDER &
CONFUSION

A compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
the Writings and Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, letters by
and on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, and communications by
the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled September 2020

The World's Current State of Disorder and Confusion

- 1 The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System—the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 181

- 2 O ye lovers of God! The world is even as a human being who is diseased and impotent, whose eyes can see no longer, whose ears have gone deaf, all of whose powers are corroded and used up. Wherefore must the friends of God be competent physicians who, following the holy Teachings, will nurse this patient back to health. Perhaps, God willing, the world will mend, and become permanently whole, and its exhausted faculties will be restored, and its person will take on such vigor, freshness and verdancy that it will shine out with comeliness and grace.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 200

- 3 The call of Bahá'u'lláh is primarily directed against all forms of provincialism, all insularities and prejudices. If long-cherished ideals and time-honored institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution? For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the preservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine.

28 November 193, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 4 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 on life is too crude and materialistic to enable him to elevate himself into the higher realms of the spirit.

8 December 1935, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Directives from the Guardian, p. 86

- 5 Sore-trying and disillusioned, humanity has no doubt lost its orientation, and would seem to have lost as well its faith and hope. It is hovering, unshepherded and visionless, on the brink of disaster. A sense of fatality seems to pervade it. An ever-deepening gloom is settling on its fortunes as it recedes further and further from the outer fringes of the darkest zone of its agitated life and penetrates its very heart.

11 March 1936, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 6 The decline of religious and moral restraints has unleashed a fury of chaos and confusion that already bears the signs of universal anarchy. Engulfed in this maelstrom, the Bahá'í world community, pursuing with indefeasible unity and spiritual force its redemptive mission, inevitably suffers the disruption of economic, social and civil life which afflicts its fellow-men throughout the planet.

Naw-Rúz 1979, Universal House of Justice

- 7 ...the Pen of the Centre of the Covenant has repeatedly prophesied the intolerable calamities which must beset this wayward humanity ere it heeds the life-giving Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

Chaos and confusion are daily increasing in the world. They will attain such intensity as to render the frame of mankind unable to bear them. Then will men be awakened and become aware that religion is the impregnable stronghold and the manifest light of the world, and its laws, exhortations and teachings the source of life on earth.

Every discerning eye clearly sees that the early stages of this chaos have daily manifestations affecting the structure of human society; its destructive forces are uprooting time-honoured institutions which were a haven and refuge for the inhabitants of the earth in bygone days and centuries, and around which revolved all human affairs.

10 February 1980, Universal House of Justice

- 8 Events of the most profound significance are taking place in the world. The river of human history is flowing at a bewildering speed. Age-old institutions are collapsing. Traditional ways are being forgotten, and newly-born ideologies which were fondly expected to take their place, are withering and decaying before the eyes of their disillusioned adherents. Amidst this decay and disruption, assailed from every side by the turmoil of the age, the Order of Bahá'u'lláh, unshakably founded on the Word of God, protected by the shield of the Covenant and assisted by the hosts of the Concourse on High, is rising in every part of the world.

3 November 1980, Universal House of Justice

- 9 Dear friends, as the world passes through its darkest hour before the dawn, the Cause of God, shining ever more brightly, presses forward to that glorious break of day when the Divine Standard will be unfurled and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its melody.

Riḍván 1986, Universal House of Justice

- 10 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.

18 January 2019, Universal House of Justice

- 11 However difficult matters are at present, and however close to the limits of their endurance some sections of societies are brought, humanity will ultimately pass through this ordeal, and it will emerge on the other side with greater insight and with a deeper appreciation of its inherent oneness and interdependence.

Naw-Rúz 177 (2020), Universal House of Justice

- 12 In many countries, despite valiant and determined collective efforts to avert disaster, the situation is already grave, creating tragedies for families and individuals and plunging whole societies into crisis. Waves of suffering and sorrow are breaking over one place after another, and will weaken different nations, at different moments, in different ways.

Riḍván 2020, Universal House of Justice

Disposition of the Bahá'ís

- 13 Let the fear of no one dismay thee. Trust in the Lord, thy God, for He is sufficient unto whosoever trusteth in Him. He, verily, shall protect thee, and in Him shalt thou abide in safety.

Bahá'u'lláh, Gems of Divine Mysteries, par. 83

- 14 The beloved of the Lord must stand fixed as the mountains, firm as impregnable walls. Unmoved must they remain by even the direst adversities, ungrieved by the worst of disasters. Let them cling to the hem of Almighty God, and put their faith in the Beauty of the Most High; let them lean on the unfailing help that cometh from the Ancient Kingdom, and depend on the care and protection of the generous Lord. Let them at all times refresh and restore themselves with the dews of heavenly grace, and with the breaths of the Holy Spirit revive and renew themselves from moment to moment. Let them rise up to serve their Lord, and do all in their power to scatter His breathings of holiness far and wide. Let them be a mighty fortress to defend His Faith, an impregnable citadel for the hosts of the Ancient Beauty. Let them faithfully guard the edifice of the Cause of God from every side; let them become the bright stars of His luminous skies. For the hordes of darkness are assailing this Cause from every direction, and the peoples of the earth are intent on extinguishing this evident Light. And since all the kindreds of the world are mounting their attack, how can our attention be diverted, even for a moment? Assuredly be cognizant of these things, be watchful, and guard the Cause of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 2

- 15 O army of God! When calamity striketh, be ye patient and composed. However afflictive your sufferings may be, stay ye undisturbed, and with perfect confidence in the abounding grace of God, brave ye the tempest of tribulations and fiery ordeals.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 35

- 16 Indulge not your bodies with rest, but work with all your souls, and with all your hearts cry out and beg of God to grant you His succor and grace. Thus may ye make this world the Abhá Paradise, and this globe of earth the parade ground of the realm on high. If only ye exert the effort, it is certain that these splendors will shine out, these clouds of mercy will shed down their rain, these life-giving winds will rise and blow, this sweet-smelling musk will be scattered far and wide.

O ye lovers of God! Do not dwell on what is coming to pass in this holy place, and be ye in no wise alarmed. Whatsoever may happen is for the best, because affliction is but the essence of bounty, and sorrow and toil are mercy unalloyed, and anguish is peace of mind, and to make a

sacrifice is to receive a gift, and whatsoever may come to pass hath issued from God's grace.

See ye, therefore, to your own tasks: guide ye the people and educate them in the ways of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Deliver to mankind this joyous message from the Abhá Realm. Rest not, by day or night; seek ye no moment's peace. Strive ye with all your might to bring to men's ears these happy tidings. In your love for God and your attachment to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, accept ye every tribulation, every sorrow. Endure the aggressor's taunts, put up with the enemy's reproaches. Follow in the footsteps of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and in the pathway of the Abhá Beauty, long at every moment to give up your lives. Shine out like the daystar, be unresting as the sea; even as the clouds of heaven, shed ye life upon field and hill, and like unto April winds, blow freshness through those human trees, and bring them to their blossoming.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 200

- 17 "The sign of a knower and lover is this, that you will find him dry in the sea." That is how he was ... He stayed dry in the depths of the sea, cool and safe in the heart of the fire...

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Memorials of the Faithful

- 18 And now, if you act in accordance with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, you may rest assured that you will be aided and confirmed. You will be rendered victorious in all that you undertake, and all the inhabitants of the earth will be unable to withstand you. You are conquerors, because the power of the Holy Spirit assisteth you. Above and beyond all physical and phenomenal forces, the Holy Spirit itself shall aid you.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Star of the West, vol. 8, no. 8 (1 August 1917), p. 103 - revised translation

- 19 True, the Cause as every other movement has its own obstacles, complications and unforeseen difficulties, but unlike any other human organization it inspires a spirit of Faith and Devotion which can never fail to induce us to make sincere and renewed efforts to face these difficulties and smooth any differences that may and must arise.

I look forward with fervent hope to hear of these renewed efforts on your part and of the strong determination which you will never suffer to slacken, to maintain at any cost the unity, the effectiveness and the dignity of the Cause.

16 December 1922, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 20 In such a process of purgation, when all humanity is in the throes of dire suffering, the Bahá'ís should not hope to remain unaffected. Should we consider the beam that is in our own eye, we would immediately find that these sufferings are also meant for ourselves, who claimed to have attained. Such world crisis is necessary to awaken us to the importance of our duty and the carrying on of our task. Suffering will increase our energy in setting before humanity the road to salvation; it will move us from our repose for we are far from doing our best in teaching the Cause and conveying the Message with which we have been entrusted.

14 October 1931, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 21 That the Cause associated with the name of Bahá'u'lláh feeds itself upon those hidden springs of celestial strength which no force of human personality, whatever its glamour, can replace; that its reliance is solely upon that mystic Source with which no worldly advantage, be it wealth, fame, or learning can compare; that it propagates itself by ways mysterious and utterly at variance with the standards accepted by the generality of mankind, will, if not already apparent, become increasingly manifest as it forges ahead towards fresh conquests in its struggle for the spiritual regeneration of mankind.

21 March 1932, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 22 When such a crisis sweeps over the world no person should hope to remain intact. We belong to an organic unit and when one part of the organism suffers all the rest of the body will feel its consequence. This is in fact the reason why Bahá'u'lláh calls our attention to the unity of mankind. But as Bahá'ís we should not let such hardship weaken our hope in the future.

14 April 1932, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 23 The resistless march of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, viewed in this light, and propelled by the stimulating influences which the unwisdom of its enemies and the force latent within itself both engender, resolves itself into a series of rhythmic pulsations, precipitated, on the one hand, through the explosive outbursts of its foes, and the vibrations of Divine Power, on the other, which speed it, with ever-increasing momentum, along that predestined course traced for it by the Hand of the Almighty.

12 August 1941, Shoghi Effendi, This Decisive Hour

- 24 Ours is the duty to fix our gaze with undeviating attention on the duties and responsibilities confronting us at this present hour, to concentrate our resources, both material and spiritual, on the tasks that lie immediately ahead, to ensure that no time is wasted, that no opportunity is missed, that no obligation is evaded, that no task is half-heartedly performed, that no decision is procrastinated. The task summoning us to a challenge, unprecedented in its gravity and force, is too vast and sacred, the time too short, the hour too perilous, the workers too few, the call too insistent, the resources too inadequate, for us to allow these precious and fleeting hours to slip from our grasp, and to suffer the prizes within our reach to be endangered or forfeited.

15 June 1946, Shoghi Effendi, This Decisive Hour

- 25 The champion builders of Bahá'u'lláh's rising World Order must scale nobler heights of heroism as humanity plunges into greater depths of despair, degradation, dissension and distress. Let them forge ahead into the future serenely confident that the hour of their mightiest exertions and the supreme opportunity for their greatest exploits must coincide with the apocalyptic upheaval marking the lowest ebb in mankind's fast-declining fortunes.

3 November 1948, Shoghi Effendi, Citadel of Faith

- 26 It is becoming evident that the world is not yet through with its labour, the New Age not yet fully born, real Peace not yet right around the corner. We must have no illusions about how much depends on us and our success or failure. All humanity is disturbed and suffering and confused; we cannot expect to not be disturbed and not to suffer—but we don't have to be confused. On the contrary, confidence and assurance, hope and optimism are our prerogative. The successful carrying out of our various Plans is the greatest sign we can give of our faith and inner assurance, and the best way we can help our fellow-men out of their confusion and difficulties.

9 April 1949, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Unfolding Destiny, p. 225

- 27 The Hosts of the Supreme Concourse are in martial array, poised between earth and heaven ready to rush to the assistance of those who arise to teach the Faith. If one seeks the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, one can find them in rich abundance in the teaching field. The world is seeking as never before, and if the friends will arise with new determination, fully

consecrated to the noble task ahead of them, victory after victory will be won for the glorious Faith of God.

2 February 1956, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 28 In such an afflicted time, when mankind is bewildered and the wisest of men are perplexed as to the remedy, the people of Bahá, who have confidence in His unfailing grace and divine guidance, are assured that each of these tormenting trials has a cause, a purpose, and a definite result, and all are essential instruments for the establishment of the immutable Will of God on earth. In other words, on the one hand humanity is struck by the scourge of His chastisement which will inevitably bring together the scattered and vanquished tribes of the earth; and on the other, the weak few whom He has nurtured under the protection of His loving guidance are, in this Formative Age and period of transition, continuing to build amidst these tumultuous waves an impregnable stronghold which will be the sole remaining refuge for those lost multitudes. Therefore, the dear friends of God who have such a broad and clear vision before them are not perturbed by such events, nor are they panic-stricken by such thundering sounds, nor will they face such convulsions with fear and trepidation, nor will they be deterred, even for a moment, from fulfilling their sacred responsibilities.

10 February 1980, Universal House of Justice

- 29 Every institution of this divinely created Order is one more refuge for a distraught populace; every soul illumined by the light of the sacred Message is one more link in the oneness of mankind, one more servant ministering to the needs of an ailing world. Even should the Bahá'í communities, in the years immediately ahead, be cut off from the World Centre or from one another—as some already have been—the Bahá'ís will neither halt nor hesitate; they will continue to pursue their objectives, guided by their Spiritual Assemblies and led by the Counsellors, the members of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants.

3 November 1980, Universal House of Justice

- 30 May you all arise to seize the tasks of this crucial moment. May each inscribe his or her own mark on a brief span of time so charged with potentialities and hope for all humanity. Lest you become distracted or preoccupied with the drastic happenings of this age of transition, bear ever in mind the advice of our infallible guide, Shoghi Effendi: “Not ours, puny mortals

that we are, to attempt, at so critical a stage in the long and checkered history of mankind, to arrive at a precise and satisfactory understanding of the steps which must successively lead a bleeding humanity, wretchedly oblivious of its God, and careless of Bahá'u'lláh, from its calvary to its ultimate resurrection ... Ours rather the duty, however confused the scene, however dismal the present outlook, however circumscribed the resources we dispose of, to labour serenely, confidently, and unremittingly to lend our share of assistance, in whichever way circumstances may enable us, to the operation of the forces which, as marshalled and directed by Bahá'u'lláh, are leading humanity out of the valley of misery and shame to the loftiest summits of power and glory."

Riḍván 153 (1996), Universal House of Justice

- 31 How striking that, amid the cacophony of fixed opinions and opposing interests that grows everywhere more fierce, you are focused on drawing people together to build communities that are havens of unity. Far from disheartening you, let the world's prejudices and hostilities be reminders of how urgently souls all around you need the healing balm that you alone can present to them.

Riḍván 2016, Universal House of Justice

- 32 The obligations that must be met by the company of the faithful are made the more pressing by the confusion, distrust, and cloudiness in the world. Indeed, the friends should use every opportunity to shine a light that can illuminate the way and offer assurance to the anxious, hope to the despairing.

Riḍván 2017, Universal House of Justice

- 33 At a time of another crisis, 'Abdu'l-Bahá offered these words of counsel: "In a day such as this, when the tempests of trials and tribulations have encompassed the world, and fear and trembling have agitated the planet, ye must rise above the horizon of firmness and steadfastness with illumined faces and radiant brows in such wise that, God willing, the gloom of fear and consternation may be entirely obliterated, and the light of assurance may dawn above the manifest horizon and shine resplendently."

Naw-Rúz 177 (2020), Universal House of Justice

- 34 The second reality, one that is daily more apparent, is the resilience and undiminished vitality of the Bahá'í world in the face of a challenge which has no likeness in living memory...

However long and arduous the road that must be travelled, we are supremely confident in your fortitude and your determination to see the journey through. You draw from stores of hope, faith, and magnanimity, putting the needs of others before your own, enabling those who are deprived to be spiritually nourished, those who increasingly thirst for answers to be satisfied, and those who long to work for the betterment of the world to be offered the means. From the devoted followers of the Blessed Perfection, how could we expect less?

Riḍván 2020, Universal House of Justice

- 35 ...The world is caught in the grip of a fast-spreading virus that has claimed many thousands of lives and severely disrupted a large share of humanity's social and economic activity. Yet the Bahá'í community has remained composed and has acted swiftly to meet the immediate demands that confronted it. It has found ways to ensure the continuity of community life, while also striving to play its part in meeting spiritual and material needs in society more widely—a fitting response to an emergency situation...

...Naturally, the activities undertaken must suit the prevailing conditions, but there should be no doubt that this is a time for noble aims, high resolve, and intense endeavour ... It is essential, then, that the steps being taken to learn how to apply the Plan's framework for action to the current circumstances of the world continue in earnest; in all likelihood, the global health crisis will have a direct impact on Bahá'í activities, to a greater or lesser degree, for months or even years, and the task of adapting to the situation cannot be postponed...

When society is in such difficulty and distress, the responsibility of the Bahá'ís to make a constructive contribution to human affairs becomes more pronounced. This is a moment when distinct but interrelated lines of action converge upon a single point, when the call to service rings aloud...

You are of course ever conscious that your responsibilities reach beyond those of administering the affairs of the community and channelling its energies towards the fulfilment of noble goals: you seek to raise awareness of those spiritual forces that are available to every confirmed believer and which must be marshalled at the hour of need. It is these forces which endow the community with resilience, ensure its integrity, and keep it

focused on its divine mission to serve humanity and elevate its vision of the future.

9 May 2020, Universal House of Justice

