



Compilations on Bahá'í Administration



**Compilations
on Bahá'í
Administration**

COMPILATIONS ON BAHÁ'Í ADMINISTRATION

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THE SANCITY AND NATURE OF

BAHÁ'Í ELECTIONS

A compilation of extracts from 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 December 1989

Fostering a Spiritual Attitude towards Elections

From letters by Shoghi Effendi

- 1 On the election day, the friends must whole-heartedly participate in the elections, in unity and amity, turning their hearts to God, detached from all things but Him, seeking His guidance and supplicating His aid and bounty.
27 February 1923
- 2 Again I earnestly appeal to every one of you, and renew my only request with all the ardour of my conviction, to make before and during the coming Convention yet another effort, this time more spontaneous and selfless than before, and endeavour to approach your task—the election of your delegates as well as your national and local representatives—with that purity of spirit that can alone obtain our Beloved’s most cherished desire...
23 February 1924, Bahá’í Administration

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 3 In discharging this sacred function no influence whatever, no pressure from any quarter, even though it be from the National Assembly, should under any circumstances affect their views or restrict their freedom. The delegates must be wholly independent of any administrative agency, must approach their task with absolute detachment and must concentrate their attention on the most important and pressing issues.
12 August 1933, The National Spiritual Assembly
- 4 Such a rectitude of conduct must manifest itself, with ever-increasing potency, in every verdict which the elected representatives of the Bahá’í community, in whatever capacity they may find themselves, may be called

upon to pronounce ... It must be exemplified in the conduct of all Bahá'í electors, when exercising their sacred rights and functions...

25 December 1938, The Advent of Divine Justice

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 5 The conditions of limited manpower, of difficulties in travelling and of illiteracy among the local people are found in varying degrees in other countries of the world, and we have always and everywhere urged the National Spiritual Assemblies concerned to guide and teach the friends in proper Bahá'í administrative procedures, not only during the weeks immediately preceding local elections but indeed throughout the year, so that the friends would await the advent of Riḍván with anticipation and determine to observe and uphold correct principles of Bahá'í administration.

24 September 1973

- 6 The aim should always be so to educate the friends during the year that they consider their participation in Bahá'í elections not only as a right they exercise, but as a spiritual obligation which, when discharged in the proper Bahá'í spirit, contributes to the health and growth of the Bahá'í community.

18 June 1980

Qualifications of Those to be Elected

From letters by Shoghi Effendi

- 7 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.

27 December 1923, appended to a letter, Dawn of a New Day

- 8 Let us recall His explicit and often repeated assurances that every Assembly elected in that rarefied atmosphere of selflessness and detachment is in truth appointed of God, that its verdict is truly inspired, that one and all should submit to its decision unreservedly and with cheerfulness.

23 February 1924, Bahá'í Administration

- 9 It would be impossible at this stage to ... overestimate the unique significance of the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly ... Supreme is their position, grave their responsibilities, manifold and arduous their duties. How great the privilege, how delicate the task of the assembled delegates whose function it is to elect such national representatives as would by their record of service ennoble and enrich the annals of the Cause! ... it is incumbent upon the chosen delegates to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, the names of only those who can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience...

3 June 1925, Bahá'í Administration

- 10 ...the elector ... is called upon to vote for none but those whom prayer and reflection have inspired him to uphold...

27 May 1927, Bahá'í Administration

- 11 ...I do not feel it to be in keeping with the spirit of the Cause to impose any limitation upon the freedom of the believers to choose those of any race, nationality or temperament who *best combine* the essential qualifications for membership of administrative institutions. They should disregard personalities and concentrate their attention on the qualities and requirements of office, without prejudice, passion or partiality. The Assembly should be representative of the choicest and most varied and capable elements in every Bahá'í community...

11 August 1933, appended to a letter, Bahá'í Institutions

- 12 If any discrimination is at all to be tolerated, it should be a discrimination not against, but rather in favour of the minority, be it racial or otherwise ... every organised 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...

25 December 1938, The Advent of Divine Justice

- 13 The electors ... must prayerfully and devotedly and after meditation and reflection elect faithful, sincere, experienced, capable and competent souls who are worthy of membership...

1 July 1943

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 14 ...concerning the qualifications of the members of the Spiritual Assembly: there is a distinction of fundamental importance which should be always

remembered in this connection, and this is between the Spiritual Assembly as an institution, and the persons who compose it. These are by no means supposed to be perfect, nor can they be considered as being *inherently* superior to the rest of their fellow-believers. It is precisely because they are subject to the same human limitations that characterize the other members of the community that they have to be elected every year. The existence of elections is a sufficient indication that Assembly members, though forming part of an institution that is divine and perfect, are nevertheless themselves imperfect. But this does not necessarily imply that their judgement is defective...

15 November 1935, The Local Spiritual Assembly

- 15 A believer has the right to vote for himself during the election time, if he conscientiously feels the urge to do so. This does not necessarily imply that he is ambitious or selfish, for he might conscientiously believe that his qualifications entitle him to membership in a Bahá'í administrative body, and he might be right. The essential, however, is that he should be sincere in his belief, and should act according to the dictates of his conscience. Moreover, membership in an Assembly or committee is a form of service, and should not be looked upon as a mark of inherent superiority, or a means for self-praise.

27 March 1938, Dawn of a New Day

- 16 There is no objection in principle to an Assembly being re-elected, whether in toto or in part, provided the members are considered to be well qualified for that post. It is individual merit that counts. Novelty or the mere act of renewal of elections are purely secondary considerations. Changes in Assembly membership would be welcome so far as they do not prejudice the quality of such membership. Once Assembly elections are over, the results should be conscientiously and unquestionably accepted by the entire body of the believers, not necessarily because they represent the voice of truth or the will of Bahá'u'lláh, but for the supreme purpose of maintaining unity and harmony in the Community...

10 July 1939, Directives of the Guardian

- 17 In regard to your question about qualifications of delegates and Assembly members: the qualifications which he outlined are really applicable to anyone we elect to a Bahá'í office, whatever its nature. But these are only

an indication, they do not mean people who don't fulfil them cannot be elected to office. We must aim as high as we can. He does not feel the friends should attach so much importance to limitations—such as people perhaps not being able to attend Assembly or Convention meetings, because if they do, then the fundamental concept of everyone being willing to do Bahá'í service on administrative bodies will be weakened, and the friends may be tempted to vote for those who because of independent means or circumstances in their lives are freer to come and go but less qualified to serve.

24 October 1947, Unfolding Destiny

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

18 Also relevant to this question is the statement made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in one of His Tablets to the effect that a voter should make his choice from among those whose good name has been widely diffused.

Inevitably, in any form of election, worthy individuals fail to be elected simply because they are not widely known. This is true in the system that uses nominations and electioneering as it will be in the Bahá'í system. However, this is not the point. Election to an Assembly, from a Bahá'í point of view, is not a right that people are entitled to, or an honour to which they should aspire; it is a duty and responsibility to which they may be called. The purpose is that those who are elected to an Assembly should be the most worthy for this service; this does not and cannot mean that all those who are worthy will be elected.

It is expected that in the future ... there will be very large numbers of individuals who have the qualities which make them fit for service on Spiritual Assemblies. Of these only a few can be elected at any one time. It is also expected that, through training and experience in the process and spirit of Bahá'í elections, the members of the electorate will have raised their consciousness of their responsibility to vote for only those who satisfy the requirements that the Guardian has outlined. They will, therefore, see it as their continuing duty to familiarize themselves with the character and abilities of those who are active in the community so that, when the time for an election comes, they will already have some idea of the people from among whom they must make their choice.

16 November 1988

The Non-Political Character of Elections

From letters by Shoghi Effendi

- 19 Beware, beware lest the foul odour of the parties and peoples of foreign lands in the West, and their pernicious methods, such as intrigues, party politics and propaganda—practices which are abhorrent even in name—should ever reach the Bahá'í community, exert any influence whatsoever upon the friends, and thus bring all spirituality to naught...

30 January 1923

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 20 One's vote should be kept confidential. It is not permissible to make any reference whatsoever to individual names. The friends must avoid the evil methods and detestable practices of the politicians. They must turn completely to God, and with a purity of motive, a freedom of spirit and a sanctity of heart, participate in the elections...

16 January 1932

- 21 Let them exercise the utmost vigilance so that the elections are carried out freely, universally and by secret ballot. Any form of intrigue, deception, collusion and compulsion must be stopped and is forbidden.

8 March 1932

- 22 The strength and progress of the Bahá'í community depend upon the election of pure, faithful and active souls ... Canvassing is abhorred...

9 April 1932

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 23 As you know very well, the method of Bahá'í elections is at complete variance with the methods and practices of elections in political systems. The beloved Guardian has pointed out to us that should we follow the method of the politicians in our Bahá'í elections, misunderstandings and differences will arise, chaos and confusion will ensue, mischief will abound and the confirmations of God will be cut off from that Bahá'í community. In view of these grave warnings, the utmost care must always be exercised so that the purity and spiritual character of Bahá'í elections are maintained and preserved.

When one sees some inexperienced or immature Bahá'ís indulge in electioneering, either openly or secretly, far from being tempted to imitate them, one should resolutely arise and through proper administrative channels and procedures assist in eradicating such tendencies and cleansing the Bahá'í community from such evil influences.

6 December 1971

- 24 ...the Bahá'ís, particularly prominent Bahá'ís, should avoid doing anything which might create a wrong impression and give rise to accusations by uninformed Bahá'ís of electioneering.

15 April 1986

The Absence of Nominations

From letters by Shoghi Effendi

- 25 I feel that reference to personalities before the election would give rise to misunderstanding and differences. What the friends should do is to get thoroughly acquainted with one another, to exchange views, to mix freely and discuss among themselves the requirements and qualifications for such a membership without reference or application, however indirect, to particular individuals. We should refrain from influencing the opinion of others...

14 May 1927, Bahá'í News Letter, no. 18, June 1927, p. 9

- 26 ...the practice of nomination, so detrimental to the atmosphere of a silent and prayerful election, is viewed with mistrust inasmuch as it gives the right to the majority of a body that, in itself, under the present circumstances, often constitutes a minority of all the elected delegates, to deny that God-given right of every elector to vote only in favour of those whom he is conscientiously convinced are the most worthy candidates...

27 May 1927, Bahá'í Administration

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 27 As to the practice of nomination in Bahá'í elections, this the Guardian firmly believes to be in fundamental disaccord with the spirit which should animate and direct all elections held by the Bahá'ís, be they of a local or national character and importance. It is, indeed, the absence of such a practice that constitutes the distinguishing feature and the marked superiority of the Bahá'í electoral methods over those commonly associated with political parties and factions. The practice of nomination, being thus contrary to the spirit of Bahá'í Administration, should be totally discarded by all the friends. For otherwise the freedom of the Bahá'í elector in choosing the

members of any Bahá'í Assembly will be seriously endangered, leaving the way open for the domination of personalities. Not only that, but the mere act of nomination leads eventually to the formation of parties—a thing which is totally alien to the spirit of the Cause.

In addition to these serious dangers, the practice of nomination has the great disadvantage of killing in the believer the spirit of initiative, and of self-development. Bahá'í electoral procedures and methods have, indeed, for one of their essential purposes the development in every believer of the spirit of responsibility. By emphasizing the necessity of maintaining his full freedom in the elections, they make it incumbent upon him to become an active and well-informed member of the Bahá'í community in which he lives. To be able to make a wise choice at the election time, it is necessary for him to be in close and continued contact with all of his fellow-believers, to keep in touch with all local activities, be they teaching, administrative or otherwise, and to fully and whole-heartedly participate in the affairs of the local as well as national committees and Assemblies in his country. It is only in this way that a believer can develop a true social consciousness, and acquire a true sense of responsibility in matters affecting the interests of the Cause. Bahá'í community life thus makes it a duty for every loyal and faithful believer to become an intelligent, well-informed and responsible elector, and also gives him the opportunity of raising himself to such a station. And since the practice of nomination hinders the development of such qualities in the believer, and in addition leads to corruption and partisanship, it has to be entirely discarded in all Bahá'í elections.

4 February 1935, The Light of Divine Guidance

- 28 The elections, especially when annual, give the community a good opportunity to remedy any defect or imperfection from which the Assembly may suffer as a result of the actions of its members. Thus a safe method has been established whereby the quality of membership in Bahá'í Assemblies can be continually raised and improved. But, as already stated, the institution of the Spiritual Assembly should under no circumstances be identified with, or be estimated merely through, the personal qualifications of the members that compose it.

15 November 1935, The Local Spiritual Assembly

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 29 The fundamental difference between the system of candidature and the Bahá'í system is that, in the former, individuals, or those who nominate them, decide that they should be placed in positions of authority and put themselves forward to be voted into it. In the Bahá'í system it is the mass of the electorate which makes the decision. If an individual ostentatiously places himself in the public eye with the seeming purpose of getting people to vote for him, the members of the electorate regard this as self-conceit and are affronted by it; they learn to distinguish between someone who is well known as an unintentional result of active public service and someone who makes an exhibition of himself merely to attract votes.

16 November 1988

Participation in Elections

From letters by Shoghi Effendi

- 30 These local Spiritual Assemblies will have to be elected directly by the friends, and every declared believer of 21ⁱ years and above, far from standing aloof and assuming an indifferent or independent attitude, should regard it his sacred duty to take part, conscientiously and diligently, in the election, the consolidation, and the efficient working of his own local Assembly.

12 March 1923, Bahá'í Administration

- 31 It would also appear to me unobjectionable to enable and even to require in the last resort such delegates as cannot possibly undertake the journey to the seat of the Bahá'í Convention to send their votes ... It should however be made clear to every elected delegate—who should be continually reminded—that it is a sacred responsibility and admittedly preferable to attend if possible in person the sessions of the Convention, to take an active part in all its proceedings, and to acquaint his fellow-workers on his return with the accomplishments, the decisions, and the aspirations of the assembled representatives of the American believers.

24 October 1925, Bahá'í Administration

- 32 I feel I must reaffirm the vital importance and necessity of the right of voting—a sacred responsibility of which no adult recognized believer should be deprived ... This distinguishing right which the believer possesses however does not carry with it nor does it imply an obligation to cast his vote, if he feels that the circumstances under which he lives do not justify or allow him to exercise that right intelligently and with understanding. This is a matter which should be left to the individual to decide for himself according to his own conscience and discretion...

28 April 1935, appended to a letter, Messages to America

i Editor: the Ridván 2021 message from the Universal House of Justice states “while the age at which a believer becomes eligible to serve on a Spiritual Assembly shall remain twenty-one, the age at which a believer may vote in Bahá'í elections shall be lowered to eighteen.”

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

In the matter of attendance of delegates at Conventions, the desirability of the friends themselves being self-supporting should be pointed out by the National Assembly. If a delegate cannot pay his own expenses in attending the Convention, the Local Assembly or the believers in the electoral unit from which the delegate comes should be encouraged by the National Assembly to defray such expenses, so that only when funds are unavailable from those sources, the National Assembly is approached to consider offering financial assistance...

9 February 1967, Lights of Guidance

- 33 There is no minimum of ballots required for an election to be considered valid, either in the case of a Local Spiritual Assembly or of delegates to the National Convention. Nevertheless, it is desirable that every eligible voter take part, and your Assembly should encourage all believers to do so...

10 July 1980, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 34 In general, if a delegate to the National Convention is unable to pay his own travel expenses, the believers from the electoral unit from which the delegate comes should be encouraged by the National Spiritual Assembly to defray such expenses. If funds are unavailable from this source, the National Spiritual Assembly may be approached to consider offering financial assistance. The National Assembly is not under obligation to do so. It may choose to pay only a portion of the travel expenses of a delegate, such as the return portion of the transportation cost...

The Counsellors should not hesitate to draw the attention of the National Spiritual Assembly to the need to foster good attendance of delegates at the National Convention, and to offer advice on the merits of provision of financial assistance to delegates. In addition, the Counsellors should emphasize to the community, through the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, the value of believers in each unit area providing financial help to the delegate they have elected to participate in the deliberations of the National Convention. The vital responsibility of

ii Editor: Written by the Universal House of Justice unless otherwise referenced.

each delegate to cast his ballot by mail, if he is unable to attend in person, should also be emphasized.

14 November 1988

The Role of the National Spiritual Assembly

From letters by Shoghi Effendi

- 35 The seating of delegates to the Convention, i.e., the right to decide upon the validity of the credentials of the delegates at a given Convention is vested in the outgoing National Assembly, and the right to decide who has the voting privilege is also ultimately placed in the hands of the National Spiritual Assembly...

29 January 1925, Bahá'í Administration

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 36 He considers that the National Spiritual Assembly has every right to examine the ballots if there is some doubt as to the election having been properly conducted. By “preservation” of the ballots is meant that they are preserved in the national files.

14 March 1947, Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, 1923-1957

BAHÁ'Í FUNDS & CONTRIBUTIONS

A compilation of extracts from letters by and
on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
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Importance of Giving

From letters by Shoghi Effendiⁱ

- 1 We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has and is continually being refilled from an invisible source. To be continually giving out for the good of our fellows undeterred by fear of poverty and reliant on the unfailing bounty of the Source of all wealth and all good—this is the secret of right living.

Bahá'í News Letter, no. 13, September 1926, p. 1

- 2 And as the progress and extension of spiritual activities is dependent and conditioned upon material means, it is of absolute necessity that immediately after the establishment of local as well as national Spiritual Assemblies, a *Bahá'í Fund* be established, to be placed under the exclusive control of the Spiritual Assembly. All donations and contributions should be offered to the Treasurer of the Assembly, for the express purpose of promoting the interests of the Cause, throughout that locality or country. It is the sacred obligation of every conscientious and faithful servant of Bahá'u'lláh, who desires to see His Cause advance, to contribute freely and generously for the increase of that Fund. The members of the Spiritual Assembly will at their own discretion expend it to promote the Teaching Campaign, to help the needy, to establish educational Bahá'í institutions, to extend in every way possible their sphere of service. I cherish the hope that all the friends, realizing the necessity of this measure, will bestir themselves and contribute, however modestly at first, towards the speedy establishment and the increase of that Fund.

12 March 1923, Bahá'í Administration

- 3 That you may reinforce this Teaching Campaign—so vitally needed in these days—and conduct, properly and efficiently, the rest of your mani-

ⁱ Editor: In the original compilation the following extracts are listed within letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi.

fold activities, spiritual as well as humanitarian, it is urgently necessary to establish that *Central Fund*, which, if generously supported and upheld by individual friends and Local Assemblies, will soon enable you to execute your plans with promptness and vigour.

6 May 1923, Bahá'í Administration

- 4 With regard to the Bahá'í Fund, recently established amongst the friends, I trust that the matter now stands clear to every one throughout the country. As I have previously intimated, although individual friends and Local Assemblies are absolutely free to specify the object and purpose of their donations to the National Spiritual Assembly, yet, in my opinion, I regard it of the utmost vital importance that individuals, as well as Local Assemblies, throughout the land should, in view of the paramount importance of National Teaching and as an evidence of their absolute confidence in their national representatives, endeavour, however small at first, to contribute freely towards the upkeep and the increase of the National Bahá'í Fund, so that the members of the National Assembly may at their full discretion expend it for whatever they deem urgent and necessary.

26 November 1923, Bahá'í Administration

- 5 It is for the National Assembly ... to exercise its judgement as to what extent the resources at their disposal enable them to aid financially the individual undertakings of the friends. Should the response of the friends and Assemblies to the appeals made on behalf of the National Fund be prompt, sustained, and generous, the National Assembly will, I am certain, justify its sympathy, good-will and genuine co-operation with every individual Bahá'í enterprise. I would, however, at this early stage of our work, strongly urge, nay entreat, the friends not to dissipate their efforts, but to seek, after frank, mature, and continuous deliberation, to arrive at a common conclusion as to the most urgent requirements and needs of the hour, and having unified their views to strive to uphold and enforce them with promptitude, whole-heartedness, and understanding.

16 January 1925, Bahá'í Administration

- 6 That the work of the National Spiritual Assemblies may be efficiently conducted, it is incumbent upon their members to seek if feasible the establishment of an adequate and permanent centre for their activities which would be widely and officially advertised and be recognized as the

headquarters of their Secretariat. To it all communications from individual friends and Local Assemblies within its province, from the Holy Land and from foreign countries should be directly addressed. It would be its first duty to keep in close and constant touch, without exception, discrimination or favour, with the various localities and isolated believers in its jurisdiction, and diligently and promptly distribute to them as well as to the friends abroad any matter of common concern and general interest.

That this cherished aim may materialize and the standard of efficiency be maintained, the institution of the National Fund is of paramount importance. I would unceasingly urge the individual believers as well as the Local Assemblies throughout India and Burma to arise with heart and soul and generously and regularly contribute toward the upkeep and the extension of a Fund upon which will greatly depend the success of their endeavours.

I am personally instructing the ... Assembly, whose past services, moral as well as financial, to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh in India and elsewhere are graven upon my heart, to concentrate their energies upon, and uphold with their resources the twin institutions of the National Spiritual Assembly and the National Fund. I trust that these may soon be enabled to shoulder the burden that is now weighing upon the self-sacrificing friends of...

25 March 1925

- 7 In connection with the institution of the National Fund and the budgetary system set forth in the minutes of the National Spiritual Assembly, I feel urged to remind you of the necessity of ever bearing in mind the cardinal principle that all contributions to the Fund are to be purely and strictly voluntary in character. It should be made clear and evident to every one that any form of compulsion, however slight and indirect, strikes at the very root of the principle underlying the formation of the Fund ever since its inception. While appeals of a general character, carefully-worded and moving and dignified in tone are welcome under all circumstances, it should be left entirely to the discretion of every conscientious believer to decide upon the nature, the amount, and purpose of his or her contribution for the propagation of the Cause.

10 January 1926, Bahá'í Administration

- 8 The National Fund must be firmly established, generously supported and universally and continuously upheld, for it is the prerequisite of future progress and achievement. The "News Letter" should be extended, widely distributed and utilized as a means to supply information, co-ordinate activities and secure the support of all the believers to the institutions of the Cause. I strongly urge you to ensure the success of these two primary and essential organs of our work.

25 May 1926, appended to a letter

- 9 In times of disappointment, stress and anxiety, which we must inevitably encounter, we should remember the sufferings of our departed Master. Your work, your energy, your vigilance and care, your loving-kindness are assets that I greatly value and prize. Keep on, persevere, redouble in your efforts, repeat and rewrite the admonitions and instructions of our Beloved in your communications with individuals and Assemblies until they sink in their hearts and minds. This was truly our Beloved's way and method and none better can we ever pursue. Your present pioneer work will surely be remembered and extolled by future generations. My prayers will always be offered for you. In matters of contribution we should not use any compulsion whatsoever and ascertain clearly the desire of the donor. We should appeal to but not coerce the friends.

9 July 1926, appended to a letter

- 10 I have urged them to support consistently and whole-heartedly the very essential and vital institutions of the National Fund and the National Assembly. It must be made clear to them all that continuous support to these twin institutions is the corner-stone of all future achievements, the mainspring from which all future blessings will flow.

7 September 1926, appended to a letter, Dawn of a New Day

- 11 ...we should, I feel, regard it as an axiom and guiding principle of Bahá'í administration that in the conduct of every specific Bahá'í activity, as different from undertakings of a humanitarian, philanthropic, or charitable character, which may in future be conducted under Bahá'í auspices, only those who have already identified themselves with the Faith and are regarded as its avowed and unreserved supporters should be invited to join and collaborate. For apart from the consideration of embarrassing complications which the association of non-believers in the financing

of institutions of a strictly Bahá'í character may conceivably engender in the administration of the Bahá'í community of the future, it should be remembered that these specific Bahá'í institutions, which should be viewed in the light of Bahá'u'lláh's gifts bestowed upon the world, can best function and most powerfully exert their influence in the world only if reared and maintained solely by the support of those who are fully conscious of, and are unreservedly submissive to, the claims inherent in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. In cases, however, when a friend or sympathizer of the Faith eagerly insists on a monetary contribution for the promotion of the Faith, such gifts should be accepted and duly acknowledged by the elected representatives of the believers with the express understanding that they would be utilized by them only to reinforce that section of the Bahá'í Fund exclusively devoted to philanthropic or charitable purposes. For as the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh extends in scope and in influence, and the resources of Bahá'í communities correspondingly multiply, it will become increasingly desirable to differentiate between such departments of the Bahá'í treasury as minister to the needs of the world at large, and those that are specifically designed to promote the direct interests of the Faith itself. From this apparent divorce between Bahá'í and humanitarian activities it must not however be inferred that the animating purpose of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh stands at variance with the aims and objects of the humanitarian and philanthropic institutions of the day. Nay, it should be realized by every judicious promoter of the Faith that at such an early stage in the evolution and crystallization of the Cause such discriminating and precautionary measures are inevitable and even necessary if the nascent institutions of the Faith are to emerge triumphant and unimpaired from the present welter of confused and often conflicting interests with which they are surrounded. This note of warning may not be thought inappropriate at a time when, inflamed by a consuming passion to witness the early completion of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhikár*, we may not only be apt to acquiesce in the desire of those who as yet uninitiated into the Cause are willing to lend financial assistance to its institutions, but may even feel inclined to solicit from them such aid as it is in their power to render. Ours surely is the paramount duty so to acquit ourselves in the discharge of our most sacred task that in the days to come neither the tongue of the slanderer nor the pen of the malevolent may dare to insinuate that so beauteous, so significant an Edifice has been reared by anything short of the unanimous, the exclusive, and the self-sacrificing strivings of the

small yet determined body of the convinced supporters of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. How delicate our task, how pressing the responsibility that weighs upon us, who are called upon on one hand to preserve inviolate the integrity and the identity of the regenerating Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and to vindicate on the other its broad, its humanitarian, its all-embracing principles!

True, we cannot fail to realize at the present stage of our work the extremely limited number of contributors qualified to lend financial support to such a vast, such an elaborate and costly enterprise. We are fully aware of the many issues and varied Bahá'í activities that are unavoidably held in abeyance pending the successful conclusion of the Plan of Unified Action. We are only too conscious of the pressing need of some sort of befitting and concrete embodiment of the spirit animating the Cause that would stand in the heart of the American Continent both as a witness and as a rallying centre to the manifold activities of a fast growing Faith. But spurred by these reflections may we not bestir ourselves and resolve as we have never resolved before to hasten by every means in our power the consummation of this all-absorbing yet so meritorious a task? I beseech you, dear friends, not to allow considerations of number, or the consciousness of the limitation of our resources, or even the experience of inevitable set-backs which every mighty undertaking is bound to encounter, to blur your vision, to dim your hopes, or to paralyse your efforts in the prosecution of your divinely appointed task. Neither, do I entreat you, to suffer the least deviation into the paths of expediency and compromise to obstruct those channels of vivifying grace that can alone provide the inspiration and strength vital not only to the successful conduct of its material construction, but to the fulfilment of its high destiny.

25 October 1929, Bahá'í Administration

- 12 As the activities of the American Bahá'í community expand, and its world-wide prestige correspondingly increases, the institution of the national Fund, the bedrock on which all other institutions must necessarily rest and be established, acquires added importance, and should be increasingly supported by the entire body of the believers, both in their individual capacities, and through their collective efforts, whether organized as groups or as Local Assemblies. The supply of funds, in support of the national Treasury, constitutes, at the present time, the life-blood of these nascent institutions which you are labouring to erect. Its importance

cannot surely be overestimated. Untold blessings shall no doubt crown every effort directed to that end. I am eagerly and prayerfully awaiting the news of an unprecedented expansion in so vital an organ of the Administrative Order of our Faith.

29 July 1935, appended to a letter, Bahá'í News, no. 95, October 1935, p. 1

- 13 Each and every believer, undaunted by the uncertainties, the perils and the financial stringency afflicting the nation, must arise and ensure, to the full measure of his or her capacity, that continuous and abundant flow of funds into the national Treasury, on which the successful prosecution of the Plan must chiefly depend.

30 January 1938, appended to a letter, Messages to America

- 14 Conscious of the state of the National Fund, and realizing the urgency of the task facing its administrators, I have felt the urge to devote the offering of the American believers to the International Fund to the work which is now vitally facing and challenging the friends in the teaching field. Much as I appreciated the spirit prompting you and your fellow-members to make this monthly contribution to the Cause at its World Centre, I felt that it was my duty to consecrate this offering, while the Seven Year Plan is still operating, to that vital aspect of teaching upon which its success must ultimately depend. May the friends, in view of the vastness of the field that stretches before them, and the potentialities of their labours within it, and of the glowing promise of future blessings which such a labour must yield, rise to still greater heights of self-sacrifice and evince nobler manifestations of solidarity in the face of the critical situation that so insistently demands their support.

26 October 1941, appended to a letter, Bahá'í News, no. 149, December 1941, p. 2

- 15 The institution of the National Fund, so vital and essential for the uninterrupted progress of these activities must, in particular, be assured of the whole-hearted, the ever-increasing and universal support of the mass of believers, for whose welfare, and in whose name, these beneficent activities have been initiated and have been conducted. All, no matter how modest their resources, must participate.

8 August 1957, appended to a letter

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 16 As to material sacrifices towards the welfare of the Cause, he wishes you to understand that the general interests of the Cause take precedence over the interests of the particular individuals. For instance contributions to the welfare of individuals are secondary to contributions towards the National and Local Funds and that of the Temple.

This is a general instruction. Of course helping the individuals in case one is able to help, is also desirable and merits appreciation.

24 November 1925

- 17 As Bahá'ís we should follow the prophet's method. We know that the Cause will ultimately conquer and its ranks be fully united. We know that the Master's promises will ultimately be realized, therefore why be discouraged by trivial oppositions we see on our way. We should rather add to our zeal and persist in our prayers and endeavours. Shoghi Effendi has taken the available measures, and, by letter as well as cable, has urged the ... friends to give a moral and material support to the National fund. It always takes time for a people to change from one administration to another. Up to the present they have been accustomed to think of the Local Assemblies as next only to the Centre of the Cause, and it will take some time and training before they can admit another superior. The same problem existed in America and for some time the work of the National body seemed to be paralysed but through personal contact and Shoghi Effendi's incessant reminding that problem has been solved and now we see the National Assembly considered as the only body to undertake matters that are beyond the purely local jurisdiction of the Local Assemblies.

7 September 1926, Dawn of a New Day

- 18 You asked concerning some plans whereby funds could be gathered for the Temple. Shoghi Effendi believes that the best and noblest method is to have free donations that are made spontaneously and with the sense of making some sacrifice in furthering the Cause. It is with sacrifice that this Temple is to be built. This is the truly worthy method. This principle therefore excludes any method whereby the help of non-Bahá'ís is included. A Bahá'í Temple should be built by the Bahá'ís alone; it is not an ordinary humanitarian activity in which the help of any person could

be solicited. Anyhow Shoghi Effendi has fully explained these matters to the National Spiritual Assembly and you could easily refer to them as to further light on the subject.

14 April 1932, Bahá'í News, no. 64, July 1932, p. 4

- 19 Even though Shoghi Effendi would urge every believer to sacrifice as much as possible for the sake of contributing towards the fund of the National Assembly, yet he would discourage the friends to incur debts for that purpose. We are asked to give what we have, not what we do not possess, especially if such an act causes suffering to others. In such matters we should use judgement and wisdom and take into our confidence other devoted Bahá'ís.

4 May 1932

- 20 Shoghi Effendi wishes me to acknowledge the receipt of your letter dated May 8th 1932 telling him of some incidents that transpired during the Convention this year, especially when funds were collected for the Temple. He was very glad to learn of the wonderful spirit that prevailed in those gatherings; for it is only through such a spirit of devotion and sacrifice that the Cause can prosper and its message embrace the whole world.

It was also wonderful to see the interest shown by the public in the general gatherings that formed part of the Convention programme. Shoghi Effendi hopes that as the Temple is gradually completed this interest will increase and they will try to share in the spirit that motivates the friends and, accepting the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, arise to serve it, and dedicate their life to its spread.

Such gatherings for collection of funds are permissible if it is done with a true spirit of sacrifice, not when the audience is especially aroused to a frenzy and mob psychology is used to induce them to pay. Shoghi Effendi has repeatedly stated that no pressure should be used upon the friends, and psychological pressure falls under that category. But there is much difference between such gatherings, often used by religious bodies, and a true quiet, prayerful atmosphere when a person is of his own accord aroused to make some sacrifice. The distinction is very delicate, but it is for the chairman to use his power to see that one desirable form is not corrupted into the other. All the activities of the Cause should be carried through in a dignified manner. Shoghi Effendi is sure that the funds gathered at the last Convention were not due to the play of mob

psychology but to the prayerful attitude of the friends and their desire to make further sacrifice.

28 May 1932, Bahá'í News, no. 67, October 1932, p. 5

- 21 Your donations to the Temple as well as the remarkable manner in which you are assisting the believers in their efforts to widen the scope of their publicity work are real and abiding contributions you have made to the Faith. And although at present you are unable to contribute financially as much as you did in former years you should not feel discouraged, much less disappointed. For the best way in which you can effectively support the Temple cause is not through material means but by the moral help which is your primary obligation to extend to those who are in charge of the building of that sacred and unique Edifice. It is devotion, sincerity and genuine enthusiasm which in the long run can ensure the completion of our beloved Temple. Material considerations, though essential, are not the most vital by any means. Had it been otherwise the Temple would have never reached the stage of progress which it has already so well attained. For the resources of the community are limited, and have been severely affected during the last two years by an unprecedented and world-wide economic crisis. But despite all these material obstacles the Temple has made a steady progress and this alone is sufficient to convince every unbiased observer of the divine potency animating the Faith—a potency before which all material difficulties must inevitably wane.

30 December 1933

- 22 He wishes you particularly to impress the believers with the necessity of maintaining the flow of their contributions to the Temple, and also to stress the importance of the institution of the national Bahá'í Fund, which, in these early days of the administrative development of the Faith, is the indispensable medium for the growth and expansion of the Movement. Contributions to this fund constitute, in addition, a practical and effective way whereby every believer can test the measure and character of his faith, and prove in deeds the intensity of his devotion and attachment to the Cause.

25 September 1934, Bahá'í News, no. 88, November 1934, pp. 1–2

- 23 ...the Guardian would advise your Assembly to continue impressing upon the believers the necessity of their contributing regularly to the national

fund, irrespective of whether there is an emergency to be met or not. Nothing short of a continuous flow of contributions to that fund can, indeed, ensure the financial stability upon which so much of the progress of the institutions of the Faith must now inevitably depend.

29 July 1935, Bahá'í News, no. 95, October 1935, p. 1

- 24 With regard to your question concerning contributions to the Temple fund: the friends should certainly be encouraged and even urged to support financially this, as well as other national institutions of the Cause. But they should, under no circumstances, be required to do so.

As to the idea of "giving what one can afford": this does by no means put a limit or even exclude the possibility of self-sacrifice. There can be no limit to one's contributions to the national fund. The more one can give the better it is, especially when such offerings necessitate the sacrifice of other wants and desires on the part of the donor. The harder the sacrifice the more meritorious will it be, of course, in the sight of God. For after all it is not so much the quantity of one's offerings that matters, but rather the measure of deprivation that such offerings entail. It is the spirit, not the mere fact of contributing, that we should always take into account when we stress the necessity for a universal and whole-hearted support of the various funds of the Cause.

31 December 1935, Bahá'í News, no. 250, December 1951, p. 1

- 25 Above all he wishes through you to reiterate his wish, already expressed in his recent cable to the National Spiritual Assembly, that the National Fund, which undoubtedly constitutes the bedrock upon which all the activities of the Cause ultimately rest, should receive the continued and whole-hearted support of all the believers. Both the Local Assemblies and the individual believers should realize that unless they contribute regularly and generously to that Fund the progress of the Faith in India and Burma will not only be considerably retarded, but will inevitably come to a standstill. There should be a continual flow of funds to the national treasury of the National Spiritual Assembly, if that body wishes to properly administer the manifold and ever-increasing activities of the Faith. Every Bahá'í, no matter how poor, must realize what a grave responsibility he has to shoulder in this connection, and should have confidence that his spiritual progress as a believer in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh will

largely depend upon the measure in which he proves, in deeds, his readiness to support materially the divine institutions of His Faith.

17 July 1937, Dawn of a New Day

- 26 Regarding the state of the National Fund, which you have reported is suffering from a general slackness in contributions from both individual believers and the Local Assemblies and groups: It is only evident that unless the flow of donations is regularly maintained by means of generous and continual support by all the believers, individually and collectively, the National Fund will never be able to meet the needs and requirements of the Cause, particularly in these days when the national activities of the American believers are assuming such wide and increasing proportions.

3 February 1941, Bahá'í News, no. 143, May 1941, p. 3

- 27 Indeed the splendid spirit that animates the American believers these days is a great source of joy and inspiration of the Guardian, and as the good news comes in of new victories won and new sacrifices made, one can see his spirits rise and a wave of new strength sweep over him—tired and over-burdened as he so often is.

In this connection the letter you so thoughtfully enclosed from that dear Bahá'í who gave the difference in the price of a cheap or expensive coffin to the Fund of the Cause, greatly touched him. Such sacrifices prove the caliber of the friends and insure the very foundations of the Faith.

4 May 1941, Bahá'í News, no. 144, June 1941, pp. 2–3

- 28 Regarding your questions: He does not feel that it is desirable to lay down any conditions for giving to the Bahá'í Fund. This is an entirely personal matter, and each believer must act according to his own judgement and the needs of the Faith. In times of crisis, whether in the affairs of the Cause or in one's own family, people naturally behave differently than under normal circumstances. But decisions in these matters must rest with each individual Bahá'í.

19 October 1947, Unfolding Destiny

- 29 Regarding the question you raised: in the first place every believer is free to follow the dictates of his own conscience as regards the manner in which he should spend his own money. Secondly, we must always bear in mind that there are so few Bahá'ís in the world, relative to the world's population, and so many people in need, that even if all of us gave all we

had, it would not alleviate more than an infinitesimal amount of suffering. This does not mean we must not help the needy, we should; but our contributions to the Faith are the surest way of lifting once and for all time the burden of hunger and misery from mankind, for it is only through the System of Bahá'u'lláh—Divine in origin—that the world can be gotten on its feet and want, fear, hunger, war, etc., be eliminated. Non-Bahá'ís cannot contribute to our work or do it for us; so really our first obligation is to support our own teaching work, as this will lead to the healing of the nations.

8 December 1947, Bahá'í News, no. 210, August 1948, p. 3

- 30 Regarding your question about contributions: it is up to the individual to decide; if he wishes to devote a sum to a specific purpose, he is free to do so; but the friends should recognize the fact that too much labelling of contributions will tie the hands of the Assembly and prevent it from meeting its many obligations in various fields of Bahá'í activity.

23 June 1950, Messages to Canada

- 31 He suggests you give the sum you would spend on a world tour to the Cause in memory of your son. Bahá'u'lláh says that deeds of this nature aid the progress of the soul of the loved, departed one, in the world beyond. Your son died in suffering, in his youth. Perhaps to still have a part in the most constructive work of this world would bring him extra peace and joy.

19 September 1951

- 32 As to your question: the friends can give their contributions to the treasurer, or, if they wish to remain anonymous and give small sums, a receptacle can be provided. The Local Assembly can decide this matter.

29 September 1951

- 33 The Guardian feels sure that the contribution which has been made by your friend who has not been active in the Cause for a short time will be the means of stimulating her to renewed service. There is nothing that brings success in the Faith like service. Service is the magnet which draws the divine confirmations. Thus, when a person is active, they are blessed by the Holy Spirit. When they are inactive, the Holy Spirit cannot find a repository in their being, and thus they are deprived of its healing and quickening rays.

12 July 1952

- 34 There is no objection to the ... Spiritual Assembly keeping a record of the names of contributors, and sums received; but no pressure must ever be brought on the Bahá'ís to contribute, it must be voluntary, and should be considered confidential, unless the friends themselves wish to mention it openly.

26 October 1945

- 35 Now is the time to build the World Centre of the Faith, and the friends are not only free, but encouraged to contribute directly to the International and Shrine of the Báb Funds.

Of course it has never been the Guardian's idea that in contributing to the International Funds, the friends would neglect their responsibilities to the Local and National Funds; but it certainly was not his intent that the friends must contribute first to the Local and then the National Funds, before contributing to the international activities of the Faith, which at this time are of paramount importance.

The general principle of contribution by the friends is unchanged, namely, that everyone is free to contribute to whatever funds they wish, and to the degree their conscience and feeling of sacrifice moves them. At this time, however, we must actively bear in mind the many instructions of the Guardian, that we must now build up the international activities of the Faith, and consequently, the International Funds.

25 March 1953

- 36 In your letter of September 28, 1953, you mentioned the sum of ... as being included in the ... allocated from your Assembly's Budget to the World Centre. The principle involved is as follows: The Guardian feels that your Assembly when allocating its annual budget, and having stipulated what sum is for the purposes of the International Centre of the Faith, should immediately pigeon-hole that sum to be at the Guardian's disposal. Any monies received as contributions from the Bahá'ís for the International Centre should not be credited to this account which represents a national joint contribution, and has nothing to do with individual or local contributions forwarded to the World Centre in your care.

20 June 1954

- 37 The contribution which you have made to the International Fund in memory of Mrs ... is greatly appreciated. This will be the means of much

happiness to her, that her name will now be connected with the work at the World Centre.

10 August 1956

- 38 The Guardian feels that now that the new National Assembly has been established, with headquarters in Kampala, the Assembly should establish its own Bank Account. When this is done the moneys you have received for the Kampala Temple should be turned over to them, for deposit in their account. This applies not only to the munificent contribution of Mr ... but also to past contributions which you have received, and any which you may receive in the future.

10 June 1956

- 39 In the November Minutes of the National Assembly Meeting, page 28, the Guardian has noticed that the National Assembly plans to make a contribution of ... dollars to the Australia and New Zealand Assembly for their Temple. He wishes to know whether this is the contribution that Mrs ... has made for that purpose, or whether this is another contribution given from the funds of the National Assembly. If it is Mrs ... contribution, then it should naturally be given under her name.

15 December 1956

The Responsibility of Assemblies in Administering Bahá'í Funds

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 40 The financial questions that confront the Cause are all very pressing and important. They need a judicious administration and wise policy. We should study the needs of the Cause, find which field will give the greatest yield, and then appropriate the necessary funds. And such a task is surely most difficult and responsible.

19 December 1929

- 41 Regarding his special contribution to the Teaching Fund: he feels that this is a matter to be left entirely to the discretion of the National Spiritual Assembly. He believes that the continuous expenditure of a considerable sum to provide for travelling expenses of teachers who are in need constitutes in these days the chief obligation of the national fund. An effort should be made to facilitate, as much as possible, the extension of the teaching work by helping those who are financially unable to reach their destination, and once there to encourage them to settle and earn the means of their livelihood.

14 November 1936, Bahá'í News, no. 105, February 1937, p. 1

- 42 With regard to your question concerning the National Bahá'í Fund: there is nothing in the Declaration of Trust or the By-Laws which prevents the allocation of any funds to any individual who is in dire financial need. But it should be emphasized and clearly understood by the friends that the national interests and requirements of the Cause take absolute precedence over individual and private needs. It is the duty of the National Spiritual Assembly to so dispose of the national Fund as not to allow the national

interests of the Faith to be jeopardized by individual considerations that are obviously transient when compared to the lasting interests of the Cause of God. In rare and exceptional cases, when a believer has absolutely no other means of material sustenance, the National Spiritual Assembly may either contribute towards his expenses from the national Fund, or make a special appeal to the body of the believers to that effect. It is for the family, the civil community and the Local Assembly to administer to such local and private needs of the individual. But in case none of these sources has the means to do so, the National Spiritual Assembly may, if it is convinced of the gravity, urgency and justice of the case, appropriate a part of its fund for that purpose.

17 July 1937

- 43 The Guardian can only outline to you the principle, which is that Bahá'í funds should not be invested in building up a place that has dear associations for a number of the friends, but is not going to really serve a large group of the believers...

The Guardian's point is that National Bodies, when creating national institutions, should use sound judgement, because of the financial investment involved. This is only reasonable.

8 June 1952, Messages to Canada

- 44 He urges your Assembly, in addition to expediting the Temple work as much as reasonably possible, to carefully supervise expenditures and prevent the architect from getting extravagant ideas. It is only through a wise economy, the elimination of non-essentials, concentration on essentials and a careful supervision, that the Guardian himself has been able to build the Shrine and the International Archives at the World Centre, and surround the Holy Places here by what appear in the eyes of the public to be lavish gardens, but are in reality the result of rigorous and economical planning. This will not only ensure that the budget of the Temple is adhered to, but will be a salutary example to the African Bahá'ís, who must not be led to believe that because the Bahá'ís of the world are building for them a Temple in the heart of their homelands, our resources are infinite and that the affairs of the Cause can be supported from abroad. The more they see that economy and intelligent supervision of the work is carried on in connection with their own Temple, the more they will be encouraged to feel some financial responsibility toward their Nation-

al Body. Having very little themselves, it is a delicate matter, and as he already informed your Assembly, under no circumstances should a heavy budget be imposed upon such weak communities, and thus discourage them from the outset, or lead them to believe that like the Missions, our money comes from abroad.

8 August 1957

Who Can Contribute to the Fund?

From letters by Shoghi Effendi

- 45 To offer contributions towards this end [in support of the activities of the Spiritual Assembly] is one of the pressing requirements of the Cause of God, is deemed highly essential, and is of fundamental importance. Next to the payment of the Ḥuqúq, it is the obligation of every Bahá'í.

27 February 1927

- 46 I feel that only such goods as are *owned* by believers, whether made by Bahá'ís or non-Bahá'ís, may be sold in the interests of the Temple or any other Bahá'í institutions, thus maintaining the general principle that non-believers are not, whether directly or indirectly, expected to contribute to the support of institutions that are of a strictly Bahá'í character. As to the manner of the disposal of Bahá'í property for such purposes, and the channel through which the sale may be effected, I feel that no rigid rule should be imposed. Individual Bahá'ís are free to seek the help of private individuals or of Spiritual Assemblies to act as intermediary for such transactions. We should avoid confusion on one hand and maintain efficiency on the other, and lay no unnecessary restrictions that would fetter individual initiative and enterprise.

4 January 1929, appended to a letter, Bahá'í News Letter, no. 31, April 1929, p. 6

i Editor: In the original compilation the following extracts are listed within letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi.

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 47 In regard to Miss ... contribution to the fund, Shoghi Effendi wishes you to make it quite clear to her that her money-offerings should be made to the Bahá'í fund, and not to any individual. This being an important principle governing all Bahá'í publications and publishing societies, it should be duly emphasized and clearly understood, so that no difficulty may appear in the future. Of course, contributions should be accepted only when made by the Bahá'ís themselves. You should, therefore, first ascertain whether Miss ... is a true Bahá'í, and then and only then accept her contributions to your book fund.

14 April 1934

- 48 The question you have raised in connection with the recommendation made by the Convention delegates this year to the effect of installing a Radio sending station in the Temple involves a fundamental principle governing the Temple Fund which the Guardian has already explained in several communications. He wishes me to stress again that under no circumstances should the believers accept any financial help from non-Bahá'ís for use in connection with specific administrative activities of the Faith such as the Temple construction fund, and other local or national Bahá'í administrative funds. The reason for this is twofold: First because the institutions which the Bahá'ís are gradually building are in the nature of gifts from Bahá'u'lláh to the world; and secondly the acceptance of funds from non-believers for specific Bahá'í use would, sooner or later, involve the Bahá'ís in unforeseen complications and difficulties with others, and thus cause incalculable harm to the body of the Cause.

12 July 1938

- 49 You may not perhaps know that in connection with all National Assemblies the Guardian is advising that rules and regulations should not be multiplied and new statements on "procedure" issued; we should be elastic in details and rigid in principles; consequently he does not want your Assembly to issue statements of a binding nature unless absolutely necessary. In this connection he will answer your questions about sanctions: there is nothing to object to in paragraphs 1, 2 and 4 of your letter of March 4th, but no. 3 is incorrect; it is only those who have been spiritually

excommunicated by the Guardian with whom the believers are forbidden to associate, and not a person who is being punished by being deprived of his voting rights. As contributions to Bahá'í Funds are used to support the administration of the Faith, they should not be accepted from those who are deprived of their voting rights; but such believers should not be prevented from being buried in a Bahá'í Cemetery or receiving charity—which we even give to non-Bahá'ís...

8 May 1947, Dawn of a New Day

- 50 Any Bahá'í can give to the Cause's Funds, adult or child. No statement is required on this subject; Bahá'í children have always given to the Cause, everywhere. Whatever situation may arise in a class which non-Bahá'í children attend is for the teacher of the class to solve. No ruling should be made to cover such things.

18 August 1949

- 51 Regarding Mr ... bequest to the Temple: your Assembly should inform his widow that, because he was not a Bahá'í, we cannot use his money for our purposes, as we consider our Faith and its institutions our free gift to humanity; you can, however, and indeed should, accept it for charity and expend it in his name.

5 July 1950, Bahá'í News, no. 236, October 1950, p. 2

- 52 Thank you for the report you enclosed in your letter regarding the Fund, and in this connection he wishes to answer your question about Mrs ... Trust Fund: We cannot accept money from non-Bahá'ís for the Cause. It would seem if the family of Mrs ... wish to do this for her (and it is certainly a highly praiseworthy idea) they must take action during her lifetime to establish such a Trust as the property of Mrs ... otherwise the Cause could only accept to use the money for charitable purposes, for Bahá'í and non-Bahá'í.

4 October 1950

- 53 As regards the question of the Bahá'í School in India: As this institution is run by Bahá'ís but for the benefit of both Bahá'ís and any other group sending its children there, he sees no reason why a school concert should not receive money from the public attending, and use it for the school

itself. It is not the same as a bazaar where the things sold are solely for the Bahá'í Fund.

30 June 1952

- 54 As regards the question of accepting contributions from people whose voting rights are suspended, the Guardian says this is not permissible.

21 June 1953, Dawn of a New Day

BAHÁ'Í MEETINGS

A compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and letters written by
and on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled January 1989

Extracts from the Writings

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 The friends of God, one and all, are remembered by the Supreme Pen: The bounties of the Source of Bounty are at every moment visibly descending. It behoveth the friends in whatever land they be, to gather together in meetings, and therein to speak wisely and with eloquence, and to read the verses of God; for it is God's Words that kindle love's fire and set it ablaze.

From a Tablet

- 2 By My life and My Cause! Round about whatever dwelling the friends of God may enter, and from which their cry shall rise as they praise and glorify the Lord, shall circle the souls of true believers and all the favoured angels. And should the door of the true eye be opened unto some, they shall witness the Supreme Concourse as it circleth and crieth: "Blessed art thou, O house, for God hath made thee a resting-place for those He favoureth, and a lodging for those He holdeth dear, and a home for those in whom He hath placed His trust. Unto thee be His praise and His glory and His endless grace."

From a Tablet

- 3 They who are the beloved of God, in whatever place they gather and whomsoever they may meet, must evince, in their attitude towards God, and in the manner of their celebration of His praise and glory, such humility and submissiveness that every atom of the dust beneath their feet may attest the depth of their devotion. The conversation carried by these holy souls should be informed with such power that these same atoms of dust will be thrilled by its influence. They should conduct themselves in such manner that the earth upon which they tread may never be allowed to address to them such words as these: "I am to be preferred above you. For witness, how patient I am in bearing the burden which the husbandman layeth upon me. I am the instrument that continually imparteth unto all beings the blessings with which He Who is the Source of all grace hath entrusted me. Notwithstanding the honor conferred upon me, and the

unnumbered evidences of my wealth—a wealth that supplieth the needs of all creation—behold the measure of my humility, witness with what absolute submissiveness I allow myself to be trodden beneath the feet of men...”

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

- 4 Blessed is the house that hath attained unto My tender mercy, wherein My remembrance is celebrated, and which is ennobled by the presence of My loved ones, who have proclaimed My praise, cleaved fast to the cord of My grace and been honoured by chanting My verses. Verily they are the exalted servants whom God hath extolled in Qayyúmu'l-Asmá' and other scriptures. Verily He is the All-Hearing, the Answerer, He Who perceiveth all things.

From a Tablet

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

- 5 Praise be to God! that ye are gathered in one assembly like unto the stars of the Pleiades, are illumined with the light of the knowledge of God and through the outpouring of the cloud of the love of God, ye are the fresh flowers of the meadow and plain; ye are intimate and familiar with infinite unity and love.

Therefore, this meeting is blessed. But if it is firmly established and become constant, it will bring forth great results and most weighty developments will be attained. Consequently, persevere ye in renewing your meetings and display utmost magnanimity in firmness and steadfastness. When the root of the tree of the garden is well established and its protection is safeguarded, it will bring forth luscious fruits.

Likewise, when the regiment of an army and the individuals of a cohort are united and related with ease, untold triumphs will be acquired. But if they come together one day and disperse another day, no fruits will be produced.

Therefore, as ye have prepared an army of heaven and become the host of life, ye must continue to hold meetings, have spiritual communications, be firm in resolution, steadfast in purpose and be constant and persevering so that ye may win celestial conquests.

I supplicate and entreat at the Threshold of God to assist and confirm you in firmness and steadfastness and cause you to guide the inhabitants of that region.

Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, vol. 3, p. 690

- 6 If thou seekest after the light of the Kingdom, hasten undoubtedly to the meetings of the believers, in order that the rays of truth may reflect in thy heart.

Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, vol. 3, p. 695

- 7 ...Hold meetings and read and chant the heavenly teachings, so that city may be illumined with the light of reality and that country become a veritable paradise by the strength of the Holy Spirit, for this cycle is the cycle of the Glorious Lord and the melody of oneness and solidarity of the world of mankind must reach the ears of the East and West.

Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, vol. 3, p. 631

- 8 Every meeting which is organized for the purpose of unity and concord will be conducive to changing strangers into friends, enemies into associates, and Abdul-Baha will be present in his heart and soul with that meeting.

Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, vol. 3, p. 553

- 9 ...One consecrated soul is preferable to a thousand other souls. If a small number of people gather lovingly together, with absolute purity and sanctity, with their hearts free of the world, experiencing the emotions of the Kingdom and the powerful magnetic forces of the Divine, and being at one in their happy fellowship, that gathering will exert its influence over all the earth. The nature of that band of people, the words they speak, the deeds they do, will unleash the bestowals of Heaven, and provide a foretaste of eternal bliss. The hosts of the Company on high will defend them, and the angels of the Abhá Paradise, in continuous succession, will come down to their aid.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 39

- 10 The hearts of all the friends rejoiced, and in particular, the heart of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, when we heard of thy rising up to serve the Cause of God, and that thou hast set apart one of the rooms in thy home for meetings of

the lovers of God, so that from it may ascend to the Lord of Revelation the clamour of chanted prayers.

By the life of God! The queens of the world, with all their castles, cannot boast of such a room, since from it shineth forth the light of lights.

We hear that thou hast in mind to embellish thy house from time to time with a meeting of Bahá'ís, where some among them will engage in glorifying the All-Glorious Lord ... Know that shouldst thou bring this about, that house of earth will become a house of heaven, and that fabric of stone a congress of the spirit.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 57

- 11 Whensoever a company of people shall gather in a meeting place, shall engage in glorifying God, and shall speak with one another of the mysteries of God, beyond any doubt the breathings of the Holy Spirit will blow gently over them, and each shall receive a share thereof.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 56

- 12 Once in every week, gather ye the steadfast friends together in a meeting-place, and there let them engage in praising and glorifying the Lord.

From a Tablet

- 13 It befitteth the friends to hold a gathering, a meeting, where they shall glorify God and fix their hearts upon Him, and read and recite the Holy Writings of the Blessed Beauty—may my soul be the ransom of His lovers! The lights of the All-Glorious Realm, the rays of the Supreme Horizon, will be cast upon such bright assemblages, for these are none other than the Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs, the Dawning-Points of God's Remembrance, which must, at the direction of the Most Exalted Pen, be established in every hamlet and city ... These spiritual gatherings must be held with the utmost purity and consecration, so that from the site itself, and its earth and the air about it, one will inhale the fragrant breathings of the Holy Spirit.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 55

- 14 Thy letter was received. Thou hast written in regard to the Sunday meeting, saying that it is established in the utmost of love. Undoubtedly you must be firm in holding it, and on the day of meeting raise such song and melody in the glorification and praise of Bahá'u'lláh that you may cause a tumult

in that city—so that everyone may hear the call of God and obtain a new spirit through the soul-refreshing breeze wafted from the rose-garden of the Covenant.

From a Tablet

- 15 If it were possible that in every city a few of the awakened ones, when opportunity offered, could hold a meeting, and therein habitually present the proofs and arguments of God, this would do much to expand the consciousness of men; provided, however, that the discourse be kept to this one theme.

From a Tablet

- 16 Ye have written as to the meetings of the friends, and how filled they are with peace and joy. Of course this is so; for wherever the spiritually minded are gathered together, there in His beauty reigneth Bahá'u'lláh. Thus it is certain that such reunions will yield boundless happiness and peace.

Today it behoveth one and all to forgo the mention of all else, and to disregard all things. Let their speaking, let their inner state be summed up thus: “Keep all my words of prayer and praise confined to one refrain; make all my life but servitude to Thee.” That is, let them concentrate all their thoughts, all their words, on teaching the Cause of God and spreading the Faith of God, and inspiring all to characterize themselves with the characteristics of God; on loving mankind; on being pure and holy in all things, and spotless in their public and private life; on being upright and detached, and fervent, and afire. All is to be yielded up, save only the remembrance of God; all is to be dispraised, except His praise. Today, to this melody of the Company on high, the world will leap and dance: “Glory be to my Lord, the All-Glorious!” But know ye this: save for this song of God, no song will stir the world, and save for this nightingale-cry of truth from the Garden of God, no melody will lure away the heart. “Whence cometh this Singer Who speaketh the Beloved’s name?”

Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, sec. 54

- 17 Verily, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá inhaleth the fragrance of the love of God from every meeting-place where the Word of God is uttered and proofs and arguments set forth that shed their rays across the world, and where they recount the tribulations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá at the evil hands of those who have violated the Covenant of God.

O handmaid of the Lord! Speak thou no word of politics; thy task concerneth the life of the soul, for this verily leadeth to man's joy in the world of God. Except to speak well of them, make thou no mention of the earth's kings, and the worldly governments thereof. Rather, confine thine utterance to spreading the blissful tidings of the Kingdom of God, and demonstrating the influence of the Word of God, and the holiness of the Cause of God. Tell thou of abiding joy and spiritual delights, and godlike qualities, and of how the Sun of Truth hath risen above the earth's horizons: tell of the blowing of the spirit of life into the body of the world.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 53

- 18 ...Rest you assured that the breathings of the Holy Spirit will loosen your tongue. Speak, therefore; speak out with great courage at every meeting. When you are about to begin your address, turn first to Bahá'u'lláh and ask for the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, then open your lips and say whatever is suggested to your heart; this, however, with the utmost courage, dignity and conviction. It is my hope that from day to day your gatherings will grow and flourish, and that those who are seeking after truth will hearken therein to reasoned arguments and conclusive proofs. I am with you heart and soul at every meeting; be sure of this.

Hold you the Nineteen Day Feasts with utmost dignity.

From a Tablet

- 19 At these meetings, there should be no extraneous conversation whatever. Rather, the assemblage should confine itself to reading and reciting the Holy Words, and to the discussion of matters relating to the Cause of God: expounding, for example, conclusive proofs and arguments, and the Writings of the Best Beloved of mankind. Those who present themselves at these gatherings must first array themselves in spotless clothing, turn their faces toward the Kingdom of Abhá, and then with lowliness and submissiveness enter in. During the readings they must maintain complete silence. Should anyone wish to speak, he should say his say in all humility, with exactitude and eloquence.

From a Tablet

- 20 All the meetings must be for teaching the Cause and spreading the Message, and suffering the souls to enter in the Kingdom of Bahá'u'lláh. Look at me. All my thoughts are centered around the proclamation of the Kingdom.

I have a Lamp in my hand searching through the lands and seas to find souls who can become heralds of the Cause. Day and night I am engaged in this work. Any other deliberations in the meetings are futile and fruitless. Convey the message! Attract the hearts! Sow the seeds! Teach the Cause to those who do not know.

I enter all meetings, all churches, so that the Cause may be spread. When the MOST IMPORTANT work is before our sight, we must let go the *Important* one.

If the meetings or Spiritual Assembly has any other occupation, the time is spent in futility. All the deliberations, all consultation, all the talks and addresses must revolve around one focal center and that is: TEACH THE CAUSE! TEACH! TEACH! Convey the Message! Awaken the souls!

Now is the time of laying the foundation. Now we must gather brick, stone, wood, iron, and other building materials! This is not the time of decoration. We must strive day and night and think and work. What can I say that may become effective? What can I do that may bring results? What can I write that may bring forth fruits?

Nothing else will be useful, today. The interests of such a Glorious Cause will not advance without undivided attention. While we are carrying this load we cannot carry any other load!

Star of the West, vol. 4, no. 15 (12 December 1913), p. 256

- 21 Amongst other things is the holding of the meetings for teaching so that blessed souls and the old ones from amongst the believers may gather together the youths of the love of God in schools of instruction and teach them all the divine proofs and irrefragable arguments, explain and elucidate the history of the Cause, and interpret also the prophecies and proofs which are recorded and are extant in the divine Books and Epistles regarding the Manifestation of the Promised One, so that the young ones may go in perfect knowledge in all these degrees.

Tablets of the Divine Plan

- 22 ...Such a gathering as this is worthy of thanksgiving; it is peerless and unique among meetings. Other meetings are held from motives of material interests—such as social, political, commercial, educational—but this assemblage has no other purpose than attainment to the divine Kingdom; therefore, it is unique, unequalled. The hearts have turned to God; spirits

are exalted through the glad tidings of God; the intentions of all are directed to God. What better meeting could be imagined than this?

Such a gathering is fundamentally spiritual, sincere and most important. But we must arise in the accomplishment of its purposes, for our attention is directed toward the heavenly Kingdom unto which we must render faithful service. Therefore, all individuals present here must be in the attitude of perfect love and fellowship, manifesting the utmost humility and self-sacrifice, turning our thoughts toward the Kingdom of God so that our meeting may be an expression of the glorified hosts of the Supreme Concourse.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 23 Thou hast written concerning the meetings and gathering-places of the believers of God. Such assemblies and gatherings will greatly aid the promotion of the Word and all the audience, whether friends or not, will become affected. But when the friends have the intention of entering into these meetings they must disengage the heart from all other reflections, ask the Inexhaustible Divine Confirmation, and with the utmost devotion and humility set their feet in the gathering-place. Let them not introduce any topic in the meeting except the mentioning of the True One, neither must they confuse that merciful assembly with complex outside questions. They must ... either commune or supplicate and pray to God, either read Tablets or give out advices and exhortations.

Star of the West, vol. 2, no. 6 (24 June 1911), p. 5

- 24 You have written concerning the spiritual meetings. The foundation of the spiritual meetings must be the teaching and delivering of the Cause of God. In these meetings the believers and maid-servants of the Merciful must proclaim the proofs and arguments and explain the signs of the appearance of the Beauty of Abhá—May my life be a sacrifice to the beloved ones! Meanwhile they may read some Tablets and Communes, and at the end of the meetings, if they desire to sing with the utmost supplication and meekness, it is acceptable. But the fundamental principle of the establishment of spiritual meetings is for the sake of teaching and delivering the Truth so that those souls who are present may become informed of the Divine Evidences and Proofs.

Star of the West, vol. 2, no. 6 (24 June 1911), p. 5

- 25 ...Let the beloved of God gather together and associate most lovingly and spiritually and happily with one another, conducting themselves with the greatest courtesy and self-restraint. Let them read the holy verses, as well as essays which are of benefit, and the letters of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; encourage and inspire one another to love each and all; chant the prayers with serenity and joy; give eloquent talks, and praise the matchless Lord.

From a Tablet

From the writings of Shoghi Effendi

- 26 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 fellow-men.

12 March 1923, Bahá'í Administration

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 27 With regard to the question that you had asked, Shoghi Effendi feels that as he has formerly said in Bahá'í meetings it is quite proper for some of the friends to deliver talks, but their speeches must have a direct bearing on the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and our dear Master. It is not absolutely necessary that in all the meetings only the writings and utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master should be read, but when lectures and talks are given they must bear either directly or indirectly on the Cause.

10 February 1926

- 28 Regarding your question as to the advisability of holding Bahá'í meetings at a time coinciding with church meetings; the Guardian would advise the friends to avoid such a coincidence, as otherwise many church people may feel offended, and this may lead to unnecessary and even harmful misunderstandings and developments which may injure the Cause and affect its prestige in the eyes of the public. The friends should, under all circumstances, be careful not to arouse unnecessarily any feelings of religious antagonism.

5 September 1936, Bahá'í News, no. 111, October 1937, p. 1

- 29 Since you have found in the Bahá'í Teachings the fulfilment of your highest aspirations and the realization of those ideals most dear to your heart, it is your paramount duty now to spare no effort for their study and their dissemination.

To this end, the Guardian would recommend that, in addition to your studies of Bahá'í writings, you closely associate with your fellow-Bahá'ís, and take part in various activities of your local group, so that you may not only acquire a theoretical knowledge of the Cause, but grow to become a loving, active and efficient member of the Community.

25 November 1938

- 30 ...In some places the Bahá'ís have held meetings for prayer, for people who desire to meet and pray. As we have such wonderful prayers and meditations in our writings, the reading of these with friends who are interested in and crave for this type of small meeting is often a step towards attracting them to the Faith. Perhaps you could start such an activity in your city.

4 February 1950

- 31 We should try not to introduce any set patterns into our teaching methods; however, if this form of group meditation produces unity and a deeper understanding of the teachings, he sees no reason why it should be not used at least in the beginning of a teaching class—providing the people want to, like it, and fully understand it has nothing to do with the teachings of the Faith, but is a method which sometimes proves helpful.

30 July 1956

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE
FORMATIVE
AGE
OF OUR FAITH

A compilation of extracts from the writings and letters
of Shoghi Effendi

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

Extracts from the Writings

- 32 The passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, so sudden in the circumstances which caused it, so dramatic in its consequences, could neither impede the operation of such a dynamic forceⁱ nor obscure its purpose. Those fervid appeals, embodied in the Will and Testament of a departed Master, could not but confirm its aim, define its character and reinforce the promise of its ultimate success.

Out of the pangs of anguish which His bereaved followers have suffered, amid the heat and dust which the attacks launched by a sleepless enemy had precipitated, the Administration of Bahá’u’lláh’s invincible Faith was born. The potent energies released through the ascension of the Center of His Covenant crystallized into this supreme, this infallible Organ for the accomplishment of a Divine Purpose. The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá unveiled its character, reaffirmed its basis, supplemented its principles, asserted its indispensability, and enumerated its chief institutions...

21 April 1933, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh

- 33 With ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ascension, and more particularly with the passing of His well-beloved and illustrious sister the Most Exalted Leaf—the last survivor of a glorious and heroic age—there draws to a close the first and most moving chapter of Bahá’í history, marking the conclusion of the Primitive, the Apostolic Age of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. It was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Who, through the provisions of His weighty Will and Testament, has forged the vital link which must for ever connect the age that has just expired with the one we now live in—the Transitional and Formative period of the Faith—a stage that must in the fullness of time reach its blossom and yield its fruit in the exploits and triumphs that are to herald the Golden Age of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh.

Dearly-beloved friends! The onrushing forces so miraculously released through the agency of two independent and swiftly successive Manifestations are now under our very eyes and through the care of the chosen

stewards of a far-flung Faith being gradually mustered and disciplined. They are slowly crystallizing into institutions that will come to be regarded as the hallmark and glory of the age we are called upon to establish and by our deeds immortalize. For upon our present-day efforts, and above all upon the extent to which we strive to remodel our lives after the pattern of sublime heroism associated with those gone before us, must depend the efficacy of the instruments we now fashion—instruments that must erect the structure of that blissful Commonwealth which must signalize the Golden Age of our Faith.

8 February 1934, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 34 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who incarnates an institution for which we can find no parallel whatsoever in any of the world's recognized religious systems, may be said to have closed the Age to which He Himself belonged and opened the one in which we are now laboring. His Will and Testament should thus be regarded as the perpetual, the indissoluble link which the mind of Him Who is the Mystery of God has conceived in order to insure the continuity of the three ages that constitute the component parts of the Bahá'í Dispensation. The period in which the seed of the Faith had been slowly germinating is thus intertwined both with the one which must witness its efflorescence and the subsequent age in which that seed will have finally yielded its golden fruit.

The creative energies released by the Law of Bahá'u'lláh, permeating and evolving within the mind of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, have, by their very impact and close interaction, given birth to an Instrument which may be viewed as the Charter of the New World Order which is at once the glory and the promise of this most great Dispensation. The Will may thus be acclaimed as the inevitable offspring resulting from that mystic intercourse between Him Who communicated the generating influence of His divine Purpose and the One Who was its vehicle and chosen recipient. Being the Child of the Covenant—the Heir of both the Originator and the Interpreter of the Law of God—the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá can no more be divorced from Him Who supplied the original and motivating impulse than from the One Who ultimately conceived it. Bahá'u'lláh's inscrutable purpose, we must ever bear in mind, has been so thoroughly infused into the conduct of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and their motives have been so closely wedded together, that the mere attempt to dissociate the teachings of the former from any system which the ideal Exemplar of those same teachings

has established would amount to a repudiation of one of the most sacred and basic truths of the Faith.

The Administrative Order, which ever since ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ascension has evolved and is taking shape under our very eyes in no fewer than forty countries of the world, may be considered as the framework of the Will itself, the inviolable stronghold wherein this new-born child is being nurtured and developed. This Administrative Order, as it expands and consolidates itself, will no doubt manifest the potentialities and reveal the full implications of this momentous Document—this most remarkable expression of the Will of One of the most remarkable Figures of the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh. It will, as its component parts, its organic institutions, begin to function with efficiency and vigor, assert its claim and demonstrate its capacity to be regarded not only as the nucleus but the very pattern of the New World Order destined to embrace in the fullness of time the whole of mankind.

8 February 1934, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh

- 35 Dearly-beloved friends: Though the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh has been delivered, the World Order which such a Revelation must needs beget is as yet unborn. Though the Heroic Age of His Faith is passed, the creative energies which that Age has released have not as yet crystallized into that world society which, in the fullness of time, is to mirror forth the brightness of His glory. Though the framework of His Administrative Order has been erected, and the Formative Period of the Bahá’í Era has begun, yet the promised Kingdom into which the seed of His institutions must ripen remains as yet uninaugurated...

“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...

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.

A titanic, a spiritual struggle, unparalleled in its magnitude yet unspeakably glorious in its ultimate consequences, is being waged as a result of these opposing tendencies, in this age of transition through which the organized community of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh and mankind as a whole are passing...

It is not my purpose to call to mind, much less to attempt a detailed analysis of, the spiritual struggles that have ensued, or to note the victories that have redounded to the glory of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh since the day of its foundation. My chief concern is not with the happenings that have distinguished the First, the Apostolic Age of the Bahá'í Dispensation, but rather with the outstanding events that are transpiring in, and the tendencies which characterize, the formative period of its development, this Age of Transition, whose tribulations are the precursors of that Era of blissful felicity which is to incarnate God's ultimate purpose for all mankind.

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

- 36 The moment had now arrived for that undying, that world-vitalizing Spirit that was born in Shíráz, that had been rekindled in Ṭíhrán, that had been

fanned into flame in Baghdád and Adrianople, that had been carried to the West, and was now illuminating the fringes of five continents, to incarnate itself in institutions designed to canalize its outspreading energies and stimulate its growth. The Age that had witnessed the birth and rise of the Faith had now closed. The Heroic, the Apostolic Age of the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, that primitive period in which its Founders had lived, in which its life had been generated, in which its greatest heroes had struggled and quaffed the cup of martyrdom, and its pristine foundations been established—a period whose splendors no victories in this or any future age, however brilliant, can rival—had now terminated with the passing of One Whose mission may be regarded as the link binding the Age in which the seed of the newborn Message had been incubating and those which are destined to witness its efflorescence and ultimate fruition.

The Formative Period, the Iron Age, of that Dispensation was now beginning, the Age in which the institutions, local, national and international, of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh were to take shape, develop and become fully consolidated, in anticipation of the third, the last, the Golden Age destined to witness the emergence of a world-embracing Order enshrining the ultimate fruit of God's latest Revelation to mankind, a fruit whose maturity must signalize the establishment of a world civilization and the formal inauguration of the Kingdom of the Father upon earth as promised by Jesus Christ Himself...

The last twenty-three years of the first Bahá'í century may thus be regarded as the initial stage of the Formative Period of the Faith, an Age of Transition to be identified with the rise and establishment of the Administrative Order, upon which the institutions of the future Bahá'í World Commonwealth must needs be ultimately erected in the Golden Age that must witness the consummation of the Bahá'í Dispensation. The Charter which called into being, outlined the features and set in motion the processes of, this Administrative Order is none other than the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His greatest legacy to posterity, the brightest emanation of His mind and the mightiest instrument forged to insure the continuity of the three ages which constitute the component parts of His Father's Dispensation...

The Administrative Order which this historic Document has established, it should be noted, is, by virtue of its origin and character, unique in the annals of the world's religious systems...

The Document establishing that Order, the Charter of a future world civilization, which may be regarded in some of its features as supplementary to no less weighty a Book than the Kitáb-i-Aqdas...

Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, sec. XXII

- 37 The first seventy-seven years of the preceding century, constituting the Apostolic and Heroic Age of our Faith, fell into three distinct epochs, of nine, of thirty-nine and of twenty-nine years' duration, associated respectively with the Bábí Dispensation and the ministries of Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This Primitive Age of the Bahá'í Era, unapproached in spiritual fecundity by any period associated with the mission of the Founder of any previous Dispensation, was impregnated, from its inception to its termination, with the creative energies generated through the advent of two independent Manifestations and the establishment of a Covenant unique in the spiritual annals of mankind.

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

During this Formative Age of the Faith, and in the course of present and succeeding epochs, the last and crowning stage in the erection of the framework of the Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh—the election of the Universal House of Justice—will have been completed, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Mother-Book of His Revelation, will have been codified and its laws promulgated, the Lesser Peace will have been established, the unity of mankind will have been achieved and its maturity attained, the Plan conceived by 'Abdu'l-Bahá will have been executed, the emancipation of the Faith from the fetters of religious orthodoxy will have been effected, and its independent religious status will have been universally recognized, whilst in the course of the Golden Age, destined to consummate the Dispensation itself, the banner of the Most Great Peace, promised by its Author, will have been unfurled, the World Bahá'í Commonwealth will

have emerged in the plenitude of its power and splendor, and the birth and efflorescence of a world civilization, the child of that Peace, will have conferred its inestimable blessings upon all mankind.

5 June 1947, Shoghi Effendi, Citadel of Faith

HUQÚQU'LLÁH

THE RIGHT OF GOD

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

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled January 1989

Foundations of the Law of Huqúqu'lláh

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláhⁱ

- 1 Magnified art Thou, O Lord of the entire creation, the One unto Whom all things must turn! With my inner and outer tongues I bear witness that Thou hast manifested and revealed Thyself, sent down Thy signs, and proclaimed Thy testimonies. I testify to Thy self-sufficiency from aught else except Thee, and Thy sanctity above all earthly things. I entreat Thee by the transcendent glory of Thy Cause and the supreme potency of Thy Word to grant confirmation unto him who desireth to offer what Thou hast prescribed unto him in Thy Book and to observe that which will shed forth the fragrance of Thine acceptance. Verily Thou art the Almighty, the All-Gracious, the All-Forgiving, the All-Generous.
- 2 Thine intention to pay a visit to the blessed House is acceptable and well-pleasing in the sight of this Wronged One...
Say: O people, the first duty is to recognize the one true God—magnified be His glory—the second is to show forth constancy in His Cause and, after these, one's duty is to purify one's riches and earthly possessions according to that which is prescribed by God. Therefore it becometh thee to meet thine obligation to the Right of God first, then to direct thy steps toward His blessed House. This hath been brought to thine attention as a sign of favour.
- 3 Should anyone acquire one hundred mithqáls of gold, nineteen mithqáls thereof are God's and to be rendered unto Him, the Fashioner of earth and heaven. Take heed, O people, lest ye deprive yourselves of so great a bounty.

ⁱ All passages from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá in this compilation are extracts from Tablets translated from the original Persian and Arabic unless otherwise noted.

This We have commanded you, though We are well able to dispense with you and with all who are in the heavens and on earth; in it there are benefits and wisdoms beyond the ken of anyone but God, the Omniscient, the All-Informed. Say: By this means He hath desired to purify what ye possess and to enable you to draw nigh unto such stations as none can comprehend save those whom God hath willed. He, in truth, is the Beneficent, the Gracious, the Bountiful. O people! Deal not faithlessly with the Right of God, nor, without His leave, make free with its disposal. Thus hath His commandment been established in the holy Tablets, and in this exalted Book. He who dealeth faithlessly with God shall in justice meet with faithlessness himself; he, however, who acteth in accordance with God's bidding shall receive a blessing from the heaven of the bounty of his Lord, the Gracious, the Bestower, the Generous, the Ancient of Days. He, verily, hath willed for you that which is yet beyond your knowledge, but which shall be known to you when, after this fleeting life, your souls soar heavenwards and the trappings of your earthly joys are folded up. Thus admonisheth you He in Whose possession is the Guarded Tablet.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 97

- 4 Nothing that existeth in the world of being hath ever been or will ever be worthy of mention. However, if a person be graciously favoured to offer a pennyworth—nay, even less—in the path of God, this would in His sight be preferable and superior to all the treasures of the earth. It is for this reason that the one true God—exalted be His glory—hath in all His heavenly Scriptures praised those who observe His precepts and bestow their wealth for His sake. Beseech ye God that He may enable everyone to discharge the obligation of Ḥuqúq, inasmuch as the progress and promotion of the Cause of God depend on material means. If His faithful servants could realize how meritorious are benevolent deeds in these days, they would all arise to do that which is meet and seemly. In His hand is the source of authority and He ordaineth as He willeth. He is the Supreme Ruler, the Bountiful, the Equitable, the Revealer, the All-Wise.

- 5 For a number of years Ḥuqúq was not accepted ... However, in recent years We have, in view of the exigencies of the times, accepted the payment of the Ḥuqúq, but have forbidden solicitation thereof. Everyone must have the utmost regard for the dignity of the Word of God and for the exaltation of His Cause. Were a person to offer all the treasures of the earth at the

cost of debasing the honour of the Cause of God, were it even less than a grain of mustard, such an offering would not be permissible. All the world hath belonged and will always belong to God. If one spontaneously offereth Huqúq with the utmost joy and radiance it will be acceptable, and not otherwise. The benefit of such deeds reverteth unto the individuals themselves. This measure hath been ordained in view of the necessity for material means, for “averse is God from putting aught into effect except through its means”. Thus instructions were given to receive the Huqúq.

6 The one true God—exalted be His glory—hath ever been and will continue to be exalted above every expression of praise and is sanctified from the world of existence and all the riches therein. Whatsoever proceedeth from Him produceth a fruit the benefits of which revert to the individuals themselves. Erelong will they perceive the truth of that which the Tongue of Grandeur hath uttered aforetime and will utter hereafter. And such benefits will indeed accrue if the Huqúq is offered with the utmost joy and radiance and in a spirit of perfect humility and lowliness.

7 O Zayn! Such souls as comply with the injunction of God prescribed in the Book are regarded as most excellent in the estimation of God. There can be no doubt that whatsoever is revealed from the heaven of divine commandment is by virtue of His wisdom and is in the best interests of the people themselves. Moreover, although these insignificant amounts are not worthy of mention, they are well pleasing, since the donors offer them for the sake of God. If the offering be but a single grain it is regarded as the crowning glory of all the harvests of the world.

8 Whoso is privileged to pay the Right of God will be numbered with such as have observed the ordinances of the one true God—magnified be His glory—and have fulfilled that which is set down by the All-Glorious Pen.

Time and again have We written and commanded that no one should solicit such payment. The offering of every person that voluntarily tendereth the Huqúqu'lláh with the utmost joy and pleasure may be accepted, otherwise acceptance was not and is not permissible. Those that are oblivious of their duty should be briefly reminded. Deeds must be performed with willingness, and in all circumstances high regard must be given to the dignity of the Cause of God. Formerly We have mentioned that were a person to possess the whole world and would tender his possessions at the

cost of degrading the honour of the Cause, even to the extent of a grain of mustard, it would be essential and imperative to refuse to accept such wealth. Such is the Cause of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. Well is it with them that act accordingly.

The ordinance prescribing the payment of Ḥuqúq is but a favour vouchsafed by the one true God—exalted be His glory—and the benefits arising therefrom shall fall to the donors themselves. It behoveth all to render thanks unto God, the Most Exalted, Who hath graciously enabled them to meet the obligation of Ḥuqúq. We held back the Pen for a long period during which no instruction was issued in this respect, until such time as the requirements of His inscrutable wisdom demanded the acceptance of Ḥuqúq. “Averse is God from putting aught into effect except through its means.” It is essential for certain people to receive aid, and others need attention and care, but all this must take place by the leave of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

- 9 And now concerning what thou hast mentioned regarding the Ḥuqúq. This hath been ordained especially for the one true God—exalted be His glory—and should be forwarded to the court of His Holy Presence. In His grasp is the source of authority. He doeth what He pleaseth and ordaineth what He chooseth...

This ordinance 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.

- 10 This is the Book of Generosity which hath been revealed by the King of Eternity. Whoso adorneth himself with this virtue hath distinguished himself and will be blessed by the All-Merciful from His exalted Kingdom of Glory. However, despite his high rank and prominent position, were he

to pass beyond the limits, he would be regarded as among the prodigal by the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. Cling ye unto moderation. This is the commandment that He Who is the All-Possessing, the Most High hath enjoined upon you in His Generous Book. O ye that are the exponents of generosity and the manifestations thereof! Be generous unto them whom ye find in manifest poverty. O ye that are possessed of riches! Take heed lest outward appearance deter you from benevolent deeds in the path of God, the Lord of all mankind.

Say: I swear by God! No one is despised in the sight of the Almighty for being poor. Rather is he exalted, if he is found to be of them who are patient. Blessed are the poor that are steadfast in patience, and woe betide the rich that hold back Ḥuqúqu'lláh and fail to observe that which is enjoined upon them in His Preserved Tablet.

Say: Pride not yourselves on earthly riches ye possess. Reflect upon your end and upon the recompense for your works that hath been ordained in the Book of God, the Exalted, the Mighty. Blessed is the rich man whom earthly possessions have been powerless to hinder from turning unto God, the Lord of all names. Verily he is accounted among the most distinguished of men before God, the Gracious, the All-Knowing.

Say: The appointed Day is come. This is the Springtime of benevolent deeds, were ye of them that comprehend. Strive ye with all your might, O people, that ye may bring forth that which will truly profit you in the worlds of your Lord, the All-Glorious, the All-Praised.

Say: Hold ye fast unto praiseworthy characteristics and goodly deeds and be not of them that tarry. It behoveth everyone to cleave tenaciously unto that which is conducive to the exaltation of the Cause of God, your Lord, the Mighty, the Powerful.

Say: Behold ye not the world, its changes and chances, and its varying colours? Wherefore are ye satisfied with it and with all the things therein? Open your eyes and be of them that are endued with insight. The day is fast approaching when all these things will have vanished as fast as the lightning, nay even faster. Unto this beareth witness the Lord of the Kingdom in this wondrous Tablet.

Wert thou to be enraptured by the uplifting ecstasy of the verses of God, thou wouldst yield thanks unto thy Lord and say: "Praise be unto Thee, O Desire of the hearts of them that hasten to meet Thee!" Rejoice then with exceeding gladness, inasmuch as the Pen of Glory hath turned unto thee and hath revealed in thy honour that which the tongues of creation and the tongues of transcendence are powerless to describe.

- 11 It is incumbent upon everyone to discharge the obligation of Ḥuqúq. The advantages gained from this deed revert to the persons themselves. However, the acceptance of the offerings dependeth on the spirit of joy, fellowship and contentment that the righteous souls who fulfil this injunction will manifest. If such is the attitude, acceptance is permissible and not otherwise. Verily thy Lord is the All-Sufficing, the All-Praised.
- 12 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.
- 13 Ḥuqúqu'lláh is indeed a great law. It is incumbent upon all to make this offering, because it is the source of grace, abundance, and of all good. It is a bounty which shall remain with every soul in every world of the worlds of God, the All-Possessing, the All-Bountiful.
- 14 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. Hence it is enjoined upon every individual to offer that which is the Right of God.
- 15 Great God! In this glorious Dispensation the treasures laid up by kings and queens are not worthy of mention, nor will they be acceptable in the Presence of God. However, a grain of mustard offered by His loved ones will be extolled in the exalted court of His holiness and invested with the ornament of His acceptance. Immeasurably exalted is His bounty, immeasurably glorified is His majesty.
- 16 The benefits accruing from benevolent works shall fall to the individuals concerned. In such matters only a word would suffice. Should anyone offer Ḥuqúq with utmost joy and radiance, manifesting a spirit of resignation and content, his offering shall be acceptable before God, otherwise He

can dispense with all the peoples of the earth ... Well is it with them that have fulfilled that which is prescribed in the Book of God. It is incumbent upon everyone to observe that which God hath purposed, for whatsoever hath been set forth in the Book by the Pen of Glory is an effective means for the purging, the purification and sanctification of the souls of men and a source of prosperity and blessing. Happy are they that have observed His commandments.

No goodly deed was or will ever be lost, for benevolent acts are treasures preserved with God for the benefit of those who act. Blessed the servant and the maidservant who have fulfilled their obligation in the path of God our Lord, the Lord of all worlds ... The Right of God must be paid whenever possible and should be offered in a spirit of joy and radiance. Those that are unable to pay will be invested with the ornament of His forgiveness.

- 17 There can be no doubt that whatsoever hath been revealed from the All-Glorious Pen, be it ordinances or prohibitions, conferreth benefits upon the believers themselves. For example, among the commandments is that of the Huqúqu'lláh. If the people attain the privilege of paying the Huqúq, the one true God—exalted be His glory—will of a certainty confer blessing upon them. Moreover, such payment will enable them and their offspring to benefit from their possessions. As thou dost observe, large portions of people's wealth are lost to them as God causeth strangers, or heirs in comparison with whom strangers would have been preferable, to lay hands on their possessions.

God's consummate wisdom is far beyond any description or fitting mention. Verily, people see with their own eyes and yet deny; they are aware, yet they pretend not to know. Had they observed the ordinance of God they would have attained the good of this world and the next.

- 18 The question of the Huqúq dependeth on the willingness of the individuals themselves. From every true believer who is willing to tender the Right of God spontaneously and with the utmost joy and radiance, the offering is graciously acceptable, but not otherwise. Verily, thy Lord is independent of all mankind. Consider thou that which the All-Merciful hath revealed in the Qur'án: "O men! Ye are but paupers in need of God, but God is the Self-Sufficient, the All-Praised."ⁱ

i Qur'án 35:15.

At all times one must have the utmost regard for the dignity and honour of the Cause of God.

- 19 Thou hast written that they have pledged themselves to observe maximum austerity in their lives with a view to forwarding the remainder of their income to His exalted presence. This matter was mentioned at His holy court. He said: Let them act with moderation and not impose hardship upon themselves. We would like them both to enjoy a life that is well-pleasing.
- 20 There is a prescribed ruling for the Ḥuqúqu'lláh. After the House of Justice hath come into being, the law thereof will be made manifest, in conformity with the Will of God.
- 21 Glorified art Thou, O my compassionate Lord! I entreat Thee by the tumult of the ocean of Thy holy utterance, and by the manifold tokens of Thy supreme sovereignty, and the compelling evidences of Thy Divinity, and the hidden mysteries that lie concealed within Thy knowledge, to give me Thy grace to serve Thee and Thy chosen ones, and enable me to dutifully offer Thy Ḥuqúq which Thou hast ordained in Thy Book.

I am the one, O my Lord, who hath set his affections on Thy realm of glory, and hath clung tenaciously to the hem of Thy generosity. O Thou Who art the Lord of all being and the Ruler of the kingdom of names, I beseech Thee not to deny me the things Thou dost possess, nor to withhold from me that which Thou hast ordained for Thy chosen ones.

I implore Thee, O Lord of all names and Creator of the heavens, to assist me to be steadfast in Thy Cause, through Thy strengthening grace, in such wise that the vanities of the world may not suffer me to be shut out as by a veil, nor to be hindered by the violent commotions of the wicked-doers who have risen up to lead Thy people astray in Thy days. Destine for me then, O my heart's Desire, the good of this world and the world to come. Verily Thou art powerful to do as Thou willest. No God is there but Thee, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous.

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 22 O friends of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! The Lord, as a sign of His infinite bounties, hath graciously favored His servants by providing for a fixed money offering (Ḥuqúq), to be dutifully presented unto Him, though He, the True One and His servants have been at all times independent of all created things, and God verily is the All-Possessing, exalted above the need of any gift from His creatures. This fixed money offering, however, causeth the people to become firm and steadfast and draweth Divine increase upon them.

Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 23 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.

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.

In surveying the vast range of creation thou shalt perceive that the higher a kingdom of created things is on the arc of ascent, the more conspicuous are the signs and evidences of the truth that co-operation and reciprocity at the level of a higher order are greater than those that exist at the level of a lower order. For example, the evident signs of this fundamental reality are more discernible in the vegetable kingdom than in the mineral, and still more manifest in the animal world than in the vegetable.

And thus when contemplating the human world thou beholdest this wondrous phenomenon shining resplendent from all sides with the utmost perfection, inasmuch as in this station acts of co-operation, mutual assistance and reciprocity are not confined to the body and to things that pertain to the material world, but for all conditions, whether physical or spiritual, such as those related to 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 Ḥuqúqu'lláh is established, inasmuch as its proceeds are dedicated to the furtherance of these ends. Otherwise the one true God hath ever been and will always be independent of all else beside Him. Even as He hath enabled all created things to partake of His boundless grace and loving-kindness, likewise is He able to bestow riches upon His loved ones out of the 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!

We earnestly hope that in this Most Great Cycle the wondrous attributes of the All-Merciful may, through the infinite bounty and blessings of the King of Glory, find expression in the lives of the servants of God in such wise that the sweet savours thereof will shed fragrance upon all regions.

This matter needeth further details, but We have treated it in brief.

- 24 O my heavenly friends! It is certain and evident that the Incomparable One is always praised for His absolute wealth, distinguished for His all-embracing mercy, characterized by His eternal grace, and known for His gifts to the world of existence. Nonetheless, in accordance with His inscrutable wisdom and in order to apply a unique test to distinguish the friend from the stranger, He hath enjoined the Ḥuqúq upon His servants and made it obligatory.

Those who have observed this weighty ordinance have received heavenly blessings and in both worlds their faces have shone radiantly and their nostrils have been perfumed by the sweet savours of God's tender mercy. One of the tokens of His consummate wisdom is that the payment of the Ḥuqúq will enable the donors to become firm and steadfast and will exert a great influence on their hearts and souls. Furthermore, the Ḥuqúq will be used for charitable purposes.

- 25 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 Ḥuqúq, 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 Ḥuqúq offering is but a test applied by Him unto His servants and maidservants. Thus every true and sincere believer will offer Ḥuqúq 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.

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 26 Great is the recompense that God has ordained for the true and devoted souls, the pure and detached beings who have spontaneously bequeathed a portion of their earthly possessions to the Cause of God, either during their own lifetimes or through their wills, and have had the privilege and honour of discharging their obligations to Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

Give assurance on my behalf to the donors and to the survivors of those who have ascended unto God, affirming that these efforts and donations are bound to attract divine confirmations, heavenly blessings and incalculable favours, and to promote the manifold interests of the International Bahá'í Community. Well is it with them, inasmuch as God has enabled them to fulfil that which shall elevate their stations in this world and in the world to come.

23 June 1945

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

- 27 Such an exceptional confluence of imminent achievements—the publication of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the progress of the building projects on Mount Carmel, the conclusion of the Six Year Plan, the inception of the Holy Year—animates the expectations of the Bahá'í world, sets the stage for mightier endeavours than have already been attempted, and points us all to the opening of a new phase of history. It seems fitting, then, that the sacred law which enables each one to express his or her personal sense of devotion to God in a profoundly private act of conscience that promotes the common good, which directly connects the individual believer with the Central Institution of the Faith, and which, above all, ensures to the obedient and the sincere the ineffable grace and abundant blessings of Providence, should, at this favourable juncture, be embraced by all who profess their belief in the Supreme Manifestation of God. With humility before our sovereign Lord, we now announce that as of Riḍván 1992, the beginning of the Holy Year, the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the Right of God, will become universally applicable. All are lovingly called to observe it.

Riḍván 1991

- 28 And now, amid the eager anticipations occasioned by the two major commemorative events ⁱ and by the imminent publication of the Mother Book of the Bahá'í Revelation, the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh takes effect as part of the constant practice of the members of our entire world community. May the promised divine bounties associated with the activation of this holy law be showered upon the beloved of the Lord in every land.

Riḍván 1992

- 29 It is the ardent hope of the Universal House of Justice that the spirit of the Holy Year and the effect of obedience to the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh will produce a quickening of the believers' awareness of the sacred character of the funds of the Faith and of the essential part they play in carrying out the purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.

19 June 1992, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 30 The institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh will, during the course of this Dispensation, contribute to the spiritualization of humanity through the promotion of a new attitude to the acquisition and use of material resources. It will provide the material resources necessary for great collective enterprises designed to improve all aspects of life, and will be a powerful element in the growth of a world civilization.

12 January 2003

- 31 As to your fear over money, the acquisition of wealth is not in itself a fear-some objective, it is a practical necessity. The problem with wealth arises from inappropriate attitudes toward possessing and using it. In this regard, you may find it helpful to read the Hidden Words (Persian) numbers 80, 81 and 82. As in so many other aspects of personal life, Bahá'u'lláh's teachings provide a means for safeguarding us from the test of wealth by ordaining the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, providing the opportunity to contribute to the Bahá'í Funds, and encouraging philanthropic endeavors for the well-being of all.

7 October 2005, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

ⁱ A reference to the solemn occasion of the one hundredth anniversary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh and the celebration of the centenary of the inauguration of His mighty Covenant.

Application of the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

32 They that have kept their promises, fulfilled their obligations, redeemed their pledges and vows, rendered the Trust of God and His Right unto Him—these are numbered among the inmates of the all-highest Paradise. Thus from His mighty Prison doth the Wronged One announce unto them this glad-tiding. Blessed are the servants and maidservants that have performed their deeds and blessed is the man that hath cleaved tenaciously unto praiseworthy acts and fulfilled that which is enjoined upon him in the Book of God, the Lord of the worlds.

33 The payment of the Right of God is conditional upon one's financial ability. If a person is unable to meet his obligation, God will verily excuse him. He is the All-Forgiving, the All-Generous.

34 **QUESTION:** Concerning the basic sum on which Ḥuqúqu'lláh is payable.

ANSWER: The basic sum on which Ḥuqúqu'lláh is payable is nineteen mithqáls of gold. In other words, when money to the value of this sum hath been acquired, a payment of Ḥuqúq falleth due. Likewise Ḥuqúq is payable when the value, not the number, of other forms of property reacheth the prescribed amount. Ḥuqúqu'lláh is payable no more than once. A person, for instance, who acquireth a thousand mithqáls of gold, and payeth the Ḥuqúq, is not liable to make a further such payment on this sum, but only on what accrueth to it through commerce, business and the like. When this increase, namely the profit realized, reacheth the prescribed sum, one must carry out what God hath decreed. Only when the principal changeth hands is it once more subject to payment of Ḥuqúq, as it was the first time. The Primal Point hath directed that Ḥuqúqu'lláh must be paid on the value

of whatsoever one possesseth; yet, in this Most Mighty Dispensation, We have exempted the household furnishings, that is such furnishings as are needed, and the residence itself.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, no. 8

- 35 **QUESTION:** Which is to take precedence: the Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the debts of the deceased or the cost of the funeral and burial?

ANSWER: The funeral and burial take precedence, then settlement of debts, then payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. Should the property of the deceased prove insufficient to cover his debts, the remainder of his estate should be distributed among these debts in proportion to their size.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, no. 9

- 36 **QUESTION:** The ordinance of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Is the residence, with the accompanying fixtures and necessary furnishings, included in the property on which Ḥuqúq is payable, or is it otherwise?

ANSWER: In the laws revealed in Persian We have ordained that in this Most Mighty Dispensation the residence and the household furnishings are exempt—that is, such furnishings as are necessary.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, no. 42

- 37 **QUESTION:** If a person hath, for example, a hundred túmáns, payeth the Ḥuqúq on this sum, loseth half the sum in unsuccessful transactions and then, through trading, the amount in hand is raised again to the sum on which Ḥuqúq is due—must such a person pay Ḥuqúq or not?

ANSWER: In such an event the Ḥuqúq is not payable.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, no. 44

- 38 **QUESTION:** If, after payment of Ḥuqúq, this same sum of one hundred túmáns is lost in its entirety, but subsequently regained through trade and business dealings, must Ḥuqúq be paid a second time or not?

ANSWER: In this event as well, payment of Ḥuqúq is not required.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, no. 45

- 39 **QUESTION:** May a person, in drawing up his will, assign some portion of his property—beyond that which is devoted to payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and the settlement of debts—to works of charity, or is he entitled to do no more than allocate a certain sum to cover funeral and burial expenses, so that the rest of his estate will be distributed in the manner fixed by God among the designated categories of heirs?

ANSWER: A person hath full jurisdiction over his property. If he is able to discharge the Ḥuqúqu'lláh, and is free of debt, then all that is recorded in his will, and any declaration or avowal it containeth, shall be acceptable. God, verily, hath permitted him to deal with that which He hath bestowed upon him in whatever manner he may desire.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, no. 69

- 40 **QUESTION:** If the deceased hath not settled his obligation to Ḥuqúqu'lláh, nor paid his other debts, are these to be discharged by proportionate deductions from the residence, personal clothing and the rest of the estate, or are the residence and personal clothing set aside for the male offspring, and consequently the debts must be settled from the rest of the estate? And if the rest of the estate is insufficient for this purpose, how should the debts be settled?

ANSWER: Outstanding debts and payments of Ḥuqúq should be settled from the remainder of the estate, but if this is insufficient for the purpose, the shortfall should be met from his residence and personal clothing.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, no. 80

- 41 **QUESTION:** When one's wealth exceeds nineteen, is it necessary for it to increase by a further nineteen before Ḥuqúq is due again, or would it be due on any increase?

ANSWER: Any amount added to nineteen is exempt from Ḥuqúq until it reacheth a further nineteen.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, no. 90

- 42 **QUESTION:** Regarding the appointments of a place of business, which are needed for carrying on one's work or profession: are they subject to the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, or are they covered by the same ruling as the household furnishings?

ANSWER: They are covered by the same ruling as the household furnishings.
The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, no. 95

- 43 The minimum amount subject to Ḥuqúqu'lláh is reached when one's possessions are worth the number of Váḥid;ⁱ that is, whenever one owneth nineteen mithqáls of gold, or acquireth possessions attaining this value, after having deducted therefrom the yearly expenses, the Ḥuqúq becometh applicable and its payment is obligatory.
- 44 It hath been decreed by God that a property which is not lucrative, that is, yieldeth no profit, is not subject to the payment of Ḥuqúq. Verily He is the Ordainer, the Bountiful.

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 45 Thou hast enquired about the Ḥuqúq. From one's annual income, all expenses during the year are deductible, and on what is left 19% is payable to the Ḥuqúq. Thus, a person hath earned £1,000 income out of his business. After deducting his annual expenses of, say, £600, he would have a surplus of £400 on which Ḥuqúq is payable at the rate of 19%. This would amount to £76 to be offered for charitable purposes to the Ḥuqúq.

The Ḥuqúq is not levied on one's entire possessions each year. A person's wealth may be worth £100,000. How can he be expected to pay Ḥuqúq on this property every year? For instance, whatever income thou hast earned in a particular year, you should deduct from it your expenses during that year. The Ḥuqúq will then be payable on the remainder. Possessions on which Ḥuqúq was paid the previous year will be exempt from further payment.

- 46 As to the Ḥuqúq, it is payable on whatever is left over after deducting one's yearly expenses. However, any money or possession which is necessary in producing income for one's subsistence, and on which Ḥuqúq hath once been paid, is exempt from Ḥuqúq. This exemption also applieth to a property on which Ḥuqúq hath already been paid, and the income of which doth not exceed one's needs ... Disposition of the Ḥuqúq, wholly or partly,

i Nineteen.

is permissible, but this should be done by permission of the authority in the Cause to whom all must turn.

- 47 Ḥuqúq is applied on everything one possesseth. However, if a person hath paid the Ḥuqúq on a certain property, and the income from that property is equal to his needs, no Ḥuqúq is payable by that person.

Ḥuqúq is not payable on agricultural tools and equipment, and on animals used in ploughing the land, to the extent that these are necessary.

- 48 As to the way the Ḥuqúq must be paid: Having deducted the expenses incurred during the year, any excess of income derived from one's property, profession or business is subject to the payment of Ḥuqúq.

From the Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 49 **QUESTION:** As to the matter of Ḥuqúq, does it mean 1/19th of one's net income or one's gross income? For example, in America, there is a tax on the gross income, after certain exemptions are made. How is the Ḥuqúq to be worked out?

ANSWER: The substance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's explanation was: After one has paid all his necessary expenses 19% of what is left is then taken by him and given as Ḥuqúq. For example, if a person has 100 piastres left after all his expenses have been paid, then 19 piastres are taken as Ḥuqúq for the Cause of God. This is done at the end of the year after he has ascertained what his expenses are. For every hundred piastres, 19 are taken for Ḥuqúq.

He pays this once, then there is no more Ḥuqúq to be paid on that sum. It is finished. Next year he will pay on the amount he has left over in his possession after his expenses have been deducted, and after the amount he paid Ḥuqúq on the previous year is also deducted.

For example, at the end of the first year a man has 1000 piastres left after all his expenses are paid, then 190 piastres are taken as Ḥuqúq; at the end of the next year after all expenses are determined, he may have 2000 piastres left. As he has already paid Ḥuqúq on 1000 piastres the previous year this sum is deducted from the 2000 and he pays Ḥuqúq on 1000 piastres (or 190 piastres). The third year the net amount of what he owns may be 2500 piastres, he deducts 2000 piastres from this amount and pays

19% on 500 piastres or 95 piastres. If at the end of the 4th year he has 2500 piastres, no Ḥuqúq is taken.

QUESTION: In the deduction of our necessary expenses, are contributions to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, teaching and other activities of the Cause considered a part of Ḥuqúq or should they be taken separately?

ANSWER: 'Abdu'l-Bahá replied that Ḥuqúq was separate and independent of these and came first. After that had been determined then the other affairs could be looked after. He smiled and said when Ḥuqúq is given 'Abdu'l-Bahá will ascertain how much of it is for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, how much for teaching and how much for the needy, etc.

26 November 1919, in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi circa 1920

From letters by and on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 50 Regarding the Ḥuqúqu'lláh ... this is applied to one's merchandise, property and income. After deducting the necessary expenses, whatever is left as profit, and is an addition to one's capital, such a sum is subject to Ḥuqúq. When one has paid Ḥuqúq once on a particular sum, that sum is no longer subject to Ḥuqúq, unless it should pass from one person to another. One's residence and the household furnishings are exempt from Ḥuqúq. Ḥuqúqu'lláh is paid to the Centre of the Cause.

April/May 1927, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 51 You will find references to the Ḥuqúq in the book of Aqdas ... All matters not specifically provided by Bahá'u'lláh are to be referred to the Universal House of Justice.

16 December 1927, appended to a letter

- 52 One mithqál consists of nineteen nakhuds. The weight of twenty-four nakhuds equals four and three-fifths grammes. Calculations may be made on this basis.

17 November 1937, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 53 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 Ḥuqúq 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 Ḥuqúq, therefore when the transfer of ownership takes place such possessions continue to be exempt.

29 September 1942, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

From letters by the Universal House of Justice:

- 54 Some of the dear friends who observe their Ḥuqúqu'lláh obligations have written asking about the relationship that exists between contribution to the Funds and the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. That is, if a person who intends to meet his Ḥuqúqu'lláh obligations offers contributions to other Funds and projects instead, would he be exempted from the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh or not?

The Holy Texts relevant to this matter are clear but, since this question has been repeatedly asked by the friends, it was decided to elucidate it for their information.

Payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is a spiritual obligation binding on the people of Bahá. The injunction is laid down in the Most Holy Book, and clear and conclusive explanations are embodied in various Tablets.

Every devoted believer who is able to meet the specified conditions, must pay the Ḥuqúqu'lláh, without any exception. Indeed according to the explicit Text of the Most Holy Book, failure to comply with this injunction is regarded as a betrayal of trust, and the divine call: "Whoso dealeth dishonestlyⁱⁱ with God will in justice be exposed", is a clear reference to such people.

The Centre of the Covenant has affirmed the obligation of Ḥuqúq in these words: "The Lord as a sign of His infinite bounties hath graciously favoured His servants by providing for a fixed money offering,ⁱⁱⁱ to be dutifully presented unto Him, though He, the True One and His servants have been at all times independent of all created things."

i Editor: In the original compilation, the following extracts are listed with letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice.

ii The word "dishonestly" has been replaced with the word "faithlessly" in the authorized English translation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. See extract 3 in this compilation.

iii Ḥuqúq.

This weighty ordinance, as testified by the Pen of Glory is invested with incalculable benefit and wisdom. It purifies one's possessions, averts loss and disaster, conduces to prosperity and honour and imparts divine increase and blessing. It is a sacrifice offered for and related to God, and an act of servitude leading to the promotion of His Cause. As affirmed by the Centre of the Covenant, Ḥuqúq offerings constitute a test for the believers and enable the friends to become firm and steadfast in faith and certitude.

In brief, payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is one of the binding spiritual responsibilities of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh and the proceeds thereof revert to the Authority in the Cause to whom all must turn. Moreover, the Ancient Beauty—magnified be His praise—has affirmed that after the establishment of the Universal House of Justice necessary rulings would be enacted in this connection in conformity with that which God has purposed, and that no one, except the Authority to which all must turn, has the right to dispose of this Fund. In other words, whatever portion of one's wealth is due to the Ḥuqúqu'lláh belongs to the World Centre of the Cause of God, not to the individuals concerned.

Thus the friends should not follow their own volition and judgement in using any of the funds set aside for Ḥuqúqu'lláh for any other purpose, even for charitable contributions of the Faith.

We earnestly hope that everyone may be privileged to observe this sacred and blessed obligation which would ensure the attainment of true happiness and would serve to promote the execution of Bahá'í enterprises throughout the world.

25 October 1970

55 We are deeply touched by your loving letter of 27 December 1972 expressing the wish to follow the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh with respect to your inheritance from your mother...

This Law of the Aqdas stipulates that nineteen percent of one's capital is payable as Ḥuqúqu'lláh when such capital has reached an amount of at least "nineteen mithqáls in gold" ... In determining the amount a believer should pay, he should first deduct any debts and expenses he may have, and pay nineteen percent on the remainder of his capital if it is equal to at least nineteen mithqáls of gold.

...to observe this Law of the Aqdas ... you should determine the total value of your inheritance in cash and other assets less any expenses or debts you may have, and consider the circumstances under which you may

be able to pay Ḥuqúqu'lláh on the net value of your inheritance. The time and conditions of payment are left to each individual.

For example, if one's assets include property or shares in addition to cash, he may find it disadvantageous or inconvenient to pay nineteen percent of the value of the non-cash assets until they are disposed of, at which time he would prefer to fulfill this spiritual obligation. Any expenses that may be involved in disposing of one's assets should be deducted before calculating the net value on which Ḥuqúqu'lláh is payable.

21 January 1973

- 56 The devoted believer who is privileged to pay “the right of God”, far from seeking excuses for evading this spiritual obligation, will do his utmost to meet it. On the other hand, inasmuch as obedience to this Law is a matter of conscience, and payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is a voluntary act, it would not be seemly to go beyond informing the ... friends of their spiritual obligation, and leaving to them to decide what they wish to do about it.

The same principle applies to those friends who spend lavishly on their families, who purchase or build residences and furnish them far in excess of their needs, and rationalize these expenditures in their desire to avoid payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

26 February 1973

- 57 ...many details in the computation of Ḥuqúqu'lláh have been left by Bahá'u'lláh to the judgement and conscience of the individual believer. For example, He exempts such household equipment and furnishings as are needful, but He leaves it to the individual to decide which items are necessary and which are not. Contributions to the funds of the Faith cannot be considered as part of one's payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh; moreover, if one owes Ḥuqúqu'lláh and cannot afford both to pay it and to make contributions to the Fund, the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh should take priority over making contributions. But as to whether contributions to the Fund may be treated as expenses in calculating the amount of one's assets on which Ḥuqúqu'lláh is payable, this is left to the judgement of each individual in the light of his own circumstances.

16 September 1979, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 58 It is clear from the Writings that a person is exempt from paying Ḥuqúqu'lláh on his residence and such household and professional equipment as are

needful. It is left to the discretion of the individual to decide which items are necessary and which are not. It is obvious that the friends should not spend lavishly on residences and furnishings and rationalize these expenditures in their desire to avoid payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. No specific text has been found exempting capital used to earn income. The Universal House of Justice leaves such matters to the consciences of individual believers.

9 April 1980, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 59 Your second question asks whether, where there is perfect understanding between husband and wife and she is empowered to manage her husband's property as well as her own, she could pay the amount of Ḥuqúqu'lláh applicable to all their possessions or, since the husband owns a portion of the property, she should pay only the amount of Ḥuqúqu'lláh on her own share of the property.

In answering this question one should remember that the Ḥuqúqu'lláh is payable on possessions that are indisputably recognised as being one's own and not on property that one merely controls or uses. However, in cases similar to the one you have mentioned above, it is incumbent on husband and wife to take counsel together and to define precisely the limits of their personal belongings, then they should either jointly or individually render to the Ḥuqúq the amount they consider to be their binding obligation.

10 January 1982, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 60 As to the question raised by Mr ... kindly inform him that in a letter to an individual believer the beloved Guardian explained that Ḥuqúqu'lláh is payable only once on a given property, whether personal or real, but should this property pass from one person to another, such as through inheritance, it becomes again subject to the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. This in effect means that heirs receiving a share of their inheritance from an estate must pay Ḥuqúqu'lláh, if the share they are receiving increases their wealth to a level calling for the discharge of this sacred obligation.

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

- 61 As regards your question concerning the principal residence and subsidiary rulings relevant to it, we wish to let you know that in these days it is not deemed advisable to enact detailed rulings for Ḥuqúqu'lláh. Thus the

friends are left free, and whenever no definite rulings exist they may fulfil in each case that which they understand from the texts, and may honour their Ḥuqúqu'lláh obligations according to their own judgement and the promptings of their own conscience.

4 March 1984

- 62 ...if a believer has calculated his liability to Ḥuqúqu'lláh and knows that he owes some, he should pay this in preference to making any other contributions.

However, during the course of the year a believer may well be making contributions to various funds, or giving money to charity, just as he is spending his money on a wide range of activities associated with his daily life. The ... Universal House of Justice leaves it to his judgement to follow either of the following courses:

- (a) To treat such contributions as expenses. They would then reduce the balance of savings he would have left at the end of the year on which Ḥuqúqu'lláh is payable.
- (b) To consider that he should make such contributions only out of money on which Ḥuqúqu'lláh has been paid.

This ruling also leaves it open to the individual to treat some contributions in one way and some in the other. The House of Justice leaves all such details to the judgement and conscience of the individual believer.

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

- 63 If, as you say, you are not in a position ever to accumulate assessable property equivalent in value to 19 mithqáls in gold, then, as the texts explain, you have no obligation to pay Ḥuqúqu'lláh. However, this does not mean that you may not contribute to this Fund if you wish to do so out of your love for Bahá'u'lláh and the generosity of your heart.

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

- 64 1. One believer cannot discharge the obligation of another to pay Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

2. It is not permissible for a believer to earmark for any purpose a payment he makes to Ḥuqúqu'lláh, nor may he make such payment in honour of anyone.

22 March 1989

- 65 Essentially, the Ḥuqúqu'lláh should be paid by a believer during the course of his life whenever his surplus property reaches the assessable level. A certain leeway is provided in the law, inasmuch as reference is made to the annual expenses which should be deducted before the liability to Ḥuqúqu'lláh is calculated. Ideally, when a Bahá'í dies, the only payment to Ḥuqúqu'lláh which should need to be provided for in his Will is such additional liability as may be found to exist when his affairs are reckoned up as at the date of his death.

The House of Justice hopes that as the believers acquaint themselves with the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and start to pay it, they will also learn not only how to calculate it during the course of their lives but will thereby be enabled to understand how to provide for the payment of the balance remaining at their deaths.

1 October 1989, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 66 The House of Justice does not envisage issuing any specific method of calculation for the use of the friends. They should be left free to work out their own methods on the basis of the texts and examples already before them.

1 July 1991, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 67 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 28 December 1991 in which you pose a question related to calculating the property on which you are due to pay Ḥuqúqu'lláh. The information provided by you is summarized as follows.

You have in your possession a collection of items in the nature of heirlooms, some of which are probably quite valuable, and which you call "The Family Museum". This collection yields no income, and never has, apart from a few occasions on which you have put it on display to raise money for charity. You wish to know whether you should now have this collection valued so that you can include it in your property for the purposes of computing your Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

The House of Justice has asked us to say that it is not necessary to bring such a possession into account immediately. If it is sold, in whole or in part, then the proceeds become assessable to Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

9 February 1992, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 68 The payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is a personal obligation on each Bahá'í, and it is for him to meet this obligation in accordance with his own conscience; it cannot be demanded from him by any of the institutions of the Faith. A part of this obligation is for a Bahá'í to make provision in his will for the payment of whatever remains of his debt to Ḥuqúqu'lláh at the end of his life. The Bahá'í law of intestacy, likewise, provides for the payment of such a balance of Ḥuqúqu'lláh before the distribution of the estate to the heirs.

The Law of Inheritance as revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, which is applicable when the deceased has left no will, is explicit in stating:

Division of the estate should take place only after the Ḥuqúqu'lláh hath been paid...

Likewise, in relation to the making of a Will, Bahá'u'lláh has stated:

A person hath full jurisdiction over his property. If he is able to discharge the Ḥuqúqu'lláh, and is free of debt, then all that is recorded in his will, and any declaration or avowal it containeth, shall be acceptable. God, verily, hath permitted him to deal with that which He hath bestowed upon him in whatever manner he may desire.

This makes it clear that the responsibility of a testator to pay his debts and his Ḥuqúqu'lláh have precedence over his freedom to leave his property in whatever other manner he wishes.

30 April 1992

- 69 The question is whether the property on which a person is obliged to compute his Ḥuqúqu'lláh is all that he possesses at the date on which the Law becomes applicable to him, or only on such property as he amasses subsequent to that date.

Our conclusion is that the property which is assessable to Ḥuqúqu'lláh is all that a person possesses on the date that the Law becomes applicable to him. This does not mean, of course, that he must immediately pay the

Ḥuqúqu'lláh that is due, since to do so might require him to dispose of many of his belongings and place him in a very difficult situation. But the principle of computation is clear, and the Ḥuqúqu'lláh due should ultimately be paid.

4 May 1992, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 70 You ask about the applicability of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh to the money that a believer spends on “travelling for the Faith, living a little more generously” and so forth. Our impression from answers given to other questions is that this is a matter for the conscience of the individual. There is, in fact, a vast range of expenditures which could, or could not, be included under the heading of normal annual expenses which are to be set against income before arriving at the sum assessable to Ḥuqúqu'lláh. In the specific case of contributions to the various funds of the Faith, the Universal House of Justice has already stated that it is for the individual to decide whether he will consider these as part of his normal expenditure or will pay them out of his savings which have been cleared.

14 February 1993

- 71 The Office of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in the Holy Land referred to the Universal House of Justice the questions on the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh attached to your letter of 21 April 1993, and we have been instructed to send you the following answers.

1. There are, indeed, differences among a person's debts in relation to the calculation and payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. With regard to computation, debts are, naturally, to be offset against assets. With regard to priority of payment, one should take into account the terms of a loan. If a schedule of payments has been specified, and one will be able to meet them from anticipated income when they are due, one should, of course, pay one's Ḥuqúqu'lláh in the meantime. If, however, one cannot meet the payment of both, the debt must take precedence.
2. The relative priority of the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and of contributing to the funds of the Faith is made clear in section 10ⁱ of the compilation on Ḥuqúqu'lláh. The House of Justice does not wish to go beyond this at the present time.

i In this compilation, the statement appears as extract 63.

3. Freedom is left to each husband and wife to decide whether to comply with their obligations to Ḥuqúqu'lláh jointly or separately because the House of Justice does not wish to interfere with the right of each couple to decide how they wish to deal with their own finances. One couple may prefer to own their property jointly; another may prefer to keep their respective properties separate; or there may be various combinations of these arrangements.

8 July 1993, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 72 Your letters of 24 and 25 May 1993 and the booklet you sent were received by the Office of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. The two questions you raised were referred to the Universal House of Justice, which has now instructed us to send you the following reply.

1. Funds being saved up for the purchase of a residence are not *in themselves* exempt from Ḥuqúqu'lláh. Thus, if the person were to die before purchasing a residence, these savings would be assessable to Ḥuqúq. However ... it is left to the individual, who is saving to buy a residence, to decide whether to pay Ḥuqúqu'lláh on the money as he saves it, and then count the exemption when the residence is actually purchased, or to postpone the inclusion of the savings in his calculation of Ḥuqúqu'lláh until after the residence is purchased, at which time, of course, the value of the residence becomes exempt.
2. ...computations for Ḥuqúqu'lláh in practice should be made on the basis of the *accumulation* of savings, not just on each year separately. Only in this way can one take account of losses in one year which reduce one's liability in the next, or compute the profit or loss on the sale of an investment which was purchased in an earlier year.

8 October 1993, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 73 Your ... question centers on the provision for Ḥuqúqu'lláh in Bahá'í wills. Your understanding that the obligation to pay Ḥuqúqu'lláh arises during one's lifetime and is normally to be carried out with lifetime giving is correct, although at the same time it is true that there may be cases where a believer dies without having made provision in his or her will for payment of the unpaid portion of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, if any. The event of death does not remove from a believer the obligation to pay Ḥuqúqu'lláh. Whatever portion

is due to be paid is therefore a debt due from the believer's estate at the time of his or her death. The cost of the funeral and burial, the payment of the debts of the deceased, and the payment of whatever portion of Ḥuqúqu'lláh remains due are prior charges on the estate which must be met before arriving at the amount of the property which has to be divided in accordance with the provisions of the law of inheritance. Thus, whether or not a person makes a will or, having made a will, whether he or she makes provision in it for the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the Ḥuqúqu'lláh should be paid, like all debts, before the rest of the estate is divided.

In light of this, it is certainly advisable for a believer to make the necessary arrangements for payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh prior to his or her death, in order to avoid complications or confusions which could arise. It should be noted that the question of a legal wording to include provision in a will for the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh after a believer has died is dependent upon so many factors, that it would be preferable to seek legal advice so that wording which is appropriate and in accordance with the laws governing inheritance can be used. Obviously, unless the believer leaves a clear accounting of his or her property and payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh to date, if any, it will not be possible for anyone to calculate accurately what remains to be paid at the time of death. While the application of the principles involved in payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh may well require subsidiary legislation by the House of Justice in the future, at the present time it falls to the executor or administrator of an estate to apply them to the extent possible, using his or her best judgment and taking into account the information available. Finally, while the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is each individual's own responsibility, a believer may be referred to the nearest Representative of the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, who could advise him or her in the light of any specific circumstances.

1 July 1996, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 74 In Bahá'í law each individual believer, whether man or woman, is responsible for paying Ḥuqúqu'lláh on the property he or she owns or acquires; this presumes the right of individual ownership of property. In the case of a married couple, however, the Universal House of Justice has indicated that they may choose to pay their Ḥuqúqu'lláh jointly, if they so wish, and there is no prohibition against joint ownership, whether by a couple or by two or more business partners. Each individual is under the obligation of making a will. In the Questions and Answers no. 78 we read that, in the

case of intestacy, apart from used clothing, whatever there may be among the husband's possessions, whether jewellery or otherwise, belongs to the husband, "except what is proven to have been gifts to the wife". Similarly, in a letter written on behalf of the Guardian in Persian we find the following: "You have asked concerning the division of furniture and property, after the completion of the year of waiting ... The Guardian stated that whatever belonged to the wife and constituted her personal property remains hers and that no one has any right to interfere."

It is clear, therefore, that the property of a husband and wife are regarded as separate except insofar as one makes gifts to the other or they agree to own all or part of the property jointly. In other words, it is for the husband and wife themselves to decide how their property is held. An inheritance or gift received by one spouse would remain the property of that individual unless he or she decides otherwise.

It is also possible for a husband and wife to enter into an agreement at the time of marriage, or later, concerning the apportionment of their property.

The status of the ownership of the property then affects what becomes of it in the case of divorce or the death of one of the parties.

This is a very brief summary of the situation. Undoubtedly in the years to come the Universal House of Justice will be called upon to decide on specific issues of detail as they arise. It must also be remembered that at the present time the implementation of Bahá'í law in such matters is dependent upon the provisions of the civil law, which takes precedence.

15 October 1998, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 75 As to whether Ḥuqúqu'lláh is acceptable from Bahá'ís who have been deprived of their voting rights, the House of Justice has stated:

After considering precedents set by the beloved Guardian, we have come to the conclusion that Ḥuqúqu'lláh is not acceptable from such believers ... Any believer who is under the sanction of deprivation of administrative rights and who offers to pay Ḥuqúqu'lláh should simply be told that such a payment is not acceptable. If he remits a payment, it should be returned to him.

12 September 2000, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 76 The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter dated 31 January 2002, inquiring if a company, owned only by a Bahá'í, may make contributions to the Fund and pay Huqúqu'lláh.

The obligation to pay Huqúqu'lláh rests on individual believers, not on corporate bodies, even if they are wholly owned by Bahá'ís. On the other hand, if the owners of a company, which is entirely Bahá'í-owned, wish their company to make a donation to Huqúqu'lláh, such a contribution is acceptable. It does not, of course reduce the obligation of the individual believers concerned to pay their own Huqúqu'lláh.

With regard to the Bahá'í Fund, it is entirely permissible for contributions to be made to the Fund from a business which is owned solely by Bahá'ís.

12 February 2002, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 77 Your memorandum refers to us the question of a believer who sells his or her principal residence to move into a nursing home or a similar care facility. The inquiry is whether the difference between the sale price of the residence and the sum required to pay the nursing home fees should be subject to the Right of God.

We have decided that it should be left to the discretion of the individual concerned to determine the course of action to be followed, having regard for his own assessment of his personal circumstances and intentions, as well as his own understanding of the text.

12 July 2004

- 78 ...if one's assets include property or shares in addition to cash, the individual might sustain financial loss or may face other difficulties in paying nineteen percent of the value of the non-cash assets before they are disposed of, and he may therefore prefer to pay the Huqúqu'lláh once they are dispensed with. Any expenses that may be involved in disposing of one's assets should be deducted before calculating the net value on which Huqúqu'lláh is payable.

We also remind you that Huqúqu'lláh is payable on all that a person possesses on the date that the Law becomes applicable to him. This does not mean, of course, that the Huqúqu'lláh payment that is due must be made immediately, since to do so might require an individual to dispose of many of his belongings and could place him in a difficult situation. The

principle of the computation, however, is clear, and the Ḥuqúqu'lláh due should ultimately be paid.

10 May 2006, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 79 The basic principle is that when a believer passes away, his principal residence, as well as items such as necessary furnishings and tools of trade, remains exempt when computing how much, if any, Ḥuqúqu'lláh remains to be paid on his estate.

Subject to the terms of the will, a beneficiary may well receive some or all of these items. Whether or not he is required to pay Ḥuqúqu'lláh on these newly acquired assets will depend on the purpose for which he uses them. If they are used for purposes subject to exemption, such as his principal residence, necessary furnishings, or tools of trade, he would be exempt from paying Ḥuqúqu'lláh on them. However, if he uses them for other purposes, such as converting them to cash, the exemption would not apply.

21 May 2006, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 80 When funds are offered by a believer in honour of another Bahá'í, the donor should be informed that it cannot be accepted as a Ḥuqúqu'lláh payment on behalf of the other believer. The donor can then be given the option of his providing these funds as a Ḥuqúqu'lláh payment on his own behalf or as a contribution to the Bahá'í International Fund in honour of the other individual or of having the funds returned to him.

12 June 2006

Functions of the Trustees of Huqúqu'lláh and the Spiritual Assemblies

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

81 He is the True, the Faithful!

O Abu'l-Ḥasan!ⁱ God willing thou art sustained by His lordly favours and art occupied with such deeds as befit His Day. Regard faith as a tree: its fruits and leaves, its branches and boughs are, and ever have been, truthfulness, trustworthiness, rectitude of conduct, and forbearance. Be assured of God's sustaining grace, and engage thyself with service to His Faith. We have designated thee a trustee of God, have bidden thee to observe that which shall exalt the Cause of Him Who is the Lord of the worlds, and have bestowed upon thee the right to receive Huqúqu'lláh. Consort with the people in a spirit of amity and concord, and be unto them a loyal counsellor and a loving companion. Content thyself then with that which We have ordained for thee.

82 As to the question of Huqúq: Reference to this matter is in no wise permissible ... it is entirely dependent upon the willingness of the individuals themselves. They are well acquainted with the commandment of God and are familiar with that which was revealed in the Book. Let him who wisheth observe it, and let him who wisheth ignore it. Verily, thy Lord is the Self-Sufficing, the All-Praised. Indeed, independence of all things is as a door of guidance unto His faithful servants. Well is it with them that have severed themselves from the world and have arisen to serve His Cause. Verily, they are numbered with the people of Bahá at the court of His resplendent Beauty.

i Known as Jináb-i-Amín, Trustee of the Huqúq in the days of Bahá'u'lláh.

83 O Abu'l-Ḥasan!ⁱ

May my Glory rest upon thee! Fix thy gaze upon the glory of the Cause. Speak forth that which will attract the hearts and the minds. To demand the Ḥuqúq is in no wise permissible. This command was revealed in the Book of God for various necessary matters ordained by God to be dependent upon material means. Therefore, if someone, with utmost pleasure and gladness, nay with insistence, wisheth to partake of this blessing, thou mayest accept. Otherwise acceptance is not permissible.

84 Whenever they make reference to the Ḥuqúq, let them confine themselves to a mere word uttered for the sake of God and this will suffice; coercion is unnecessary, inasmuch as God hath never wished that those engaged in His service should experience any hardship. Verily He is the Forgiving, the Merciful, the Gracious, the All-Bountiful.

85 If a person is willing to offer the Right of God, such offering should be received by the Trustees, to whom reference hath been made in the Book of God. This ordinance hath, in view of certain considerations, been revealed from the heaven of divine Revelation as a token of His grace. The advantages arising therefrom shall fall to the individuals themselves. Verily He speaketh the truth and there is none other God but Him, the Mighty, the Powerful.

Any amount received by them will be transmitted. Great is the blessedness of them that observe His bidding.

86 Whoso desireth to offer Ḥuqúqu'lláh with the utmost joy and eagerness should pay it to trustworthy persons like unto thyselfⁱⁱ and obtain a receipt, so that whatsoever is effected may conform to His sanction and permission. Verily He is the Knowing, the Wise.

87 Thou hast written that those individuals had been told that payments for the Ḥuqúqu'lláh cannot be handed over to every person. This assertion is indeed true. The Ḥuqúqu'lláh should be kept in the custody of trusted individuals and forwarded to His holy court through the Trustees of God.

i Ibid.

ii Ḥájí Abu'l-Ḥasan-i-Ardikání.

- 88 To discharge one's obligations is highly praiseworthy in the sight of God. However, it is not permitted to solicit Ḥuqúq from anyone. Beseech ye the one true God to enable His loved ones to offer that which is the Right of God, inasmuch as the observance of this injunction would cause one's possessions to be purified and protected and would become the means of attracting goodly gifts and heavenly blessings.
- 89 Someone must needs remind the servants of God, that perchance they may be privileged to meet their obligation of Ḥuqúq, thus attaining a sublime station and gaining a reward that would last for ever. The payments for the Ḥuqúq should be kept in the custody of a trusted person and a report submitted so that steps may be taken according to the good pleasure of God.
- 90 O Amín! Upon thee be My glory. It behoveth thee to have the utmost regard for the dignity of the Cause of God in all circumstances ... We exhort thee to keep thine eyes directed to the horizon of dignity and, while being mindful of His sublime words: "...yet warn them, for in truth warning will profit the believers",ⁱⁱⁱ to give the friends of God a gentle reminder in a spirit of amity and concord. Indeed, whoever is graciously enabled to fulfil this obligation, he will be reckoned among the sincere lovers of God in the lucid Book; but if not, no one should contend with him.

In this Day the glances of God—exalted be His glory—are directed towards the hearts of men and to the goodly pearls treasured therein. This beseemeth the Lord and His chosen ones—glorified be His majesty. It behoveth thee to pray on behalf of the friends and loved ones of God, that He may graciously enable them to fulfil that which is ordained in the Book, and that they may not be hindered by vain imaginings and the transitory things of the world.

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 91 A third requisite^{iv} is the promulgation of the divine commandments among the friends, such as the Obligatory Prayers, Fasting, Pilgrimage, Ḥuqúqu'lláh and all the other ordinances.

iii Qur'án 51:55.

iv For them that take counsel together, i.e., the members of the Spiritual Assemblies.

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 92 The paying of the Ḥuqúq is a spiritual obligation; the friends must not be obliged by the Assemblies to pay it, but they should be encouraged to fulfil this spiritual obligation laid upon them in the Aqdas.

12 October 1946

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

- 93 Since the Ḥuqúqu'lláh has, according to the injunction in the Book, been designated as one of the institutions of the Cause, and inasmuch as the fulfilment of this obligation is binding on the people of Bahá, therefore it is deemed appropriate that your Spiritual Assembly should fully familiarize the dear friends in Persia with the significance of this momentous responsibility and to promulgate gradually in the entire community such ordinances related to Ḥuqúqu'lláh as are laid down in His perspicuous Book. Obviously in pursuance of the explicit Texts solicitation of the Ḥuqúqu'lláh is not permissible, but it is the responsibility of those Trustees of the Cause to address appeals of a general character to the dear friends, so that they may become more informed about this essential obligation. God willing, through the occasional reminders issued by your Assembly, they may gain the privilege and honour of achieving this benevolent deed—a deed that draws forth heavenly blessings, serves as a means of purifying the earthly possessions of the devoted friends, and promotes the international activities of the people of Bahá.

27 October 1963

- 94 Undoubtedly the friends are illumined with the light of the fear of God and are fully conscious of the need to purify and protect their possessions in accordance with the decisive Words revealed by our Lord, the Most High.

In these turbulent days, we that yearn for Him, fervently turn in prayer to the court of the Lord of mankind that He may graciously enable that august Assembly to repeatedly remind the lovers of the Beauty of the All-Merciful of the vital importance and the binding character of this sacred and heavenly injunction. Through issuing announcements, distributing leaflets and in gatherings, schools and conferences held by the

followers of our Zealous Lord, they should be guided and encouraged to observe strictly and conscientiously that which His divine commandment has enjoined upon them, so that those believers who are adorned with the fear of God may be shielded from the dire consequences foreshadowed in His ominous warnings, may become the recipients of His assured blessings and be enabled to partake of the outpourings of His infallible spiritual grace.

12 September 1969

- 95 The continuing responsibility for educating the believers in the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is shared by all the institutions of the Faith. But your deputies and their representatives, through the close relationships which they are forming with individual believers, will be able to advance their understanding of the spiritual and practical aspects of this law in an especially effective way. The primary need at this time, we believe, is ... for the friends to be encouraged to understand and accept the responsibility which rests on every true-hearted follower of the Faith to apply the principles of the law to the specific details of his or her own condition. The members of your institution, through wise and tactful comments and explanations, can assist them to do this, while refraining from exerting, or appearing to exert, any form of pressure.

A major challenge now before those devoted friends who have been called to serve as your deputies and representatives is the organization of their own work to ensure a reliable system for the acceptance, receipting, custody and remittance of the funds of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. It is love for Bahá'u'lláh which will be the primary motive for the friends in obeying this law, but they will carry out their duty with greater assurance and promptitude the greater their confidence in and respect for those on whom has been conferred the responsibility of receiving this Right of God on your behalf.

13 November 1992

- 96 The functions you have been summoned to perform are vital. You are charged with the responsibility to educate the believers in the law presented to them in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas to render payment unto God of a specific portion of their material assets. Your task is essentially spiritual, that of drawing the attention of the friends to their obligations as followers of Bahá'u'lláh and thus of playing a significant role in fostering the development of the

relationships of love and obedience which must bind the believer to his Creator. In a world preoccupied with self-indulgence, you are called upon to revive the hallowed concept of religious duty and obligation.

The work in which you are engaged is most challenging. It concerns promulgation of a law which is fundamental to the individual's spiritual life, and the attitude with which it is carried out is an essential feature of its observance. The befitting discharge of your functions requires the utmost sensitivity and discretion, to avoid undue pressure on believers to adhere to a law which is a matter of conscience, and to find the proper mode of communication which provides timely reminders while refraining from unproductive repetition.

Central to the success of your endeavours is the extent to which you are able to create and sustain a relationship of love and trust with the believers you are called upon to assist, so that they will, through their association and interaction with you, be motivated to adhere wholeheartedly to the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and to partake of its inestimable spiritual benefits.

These are still early days in the worldwide development of the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, which will expand and flourish in the centuries to come, and will provide material resources essential for the advancement of the human race. How important, then, that such an institution be distinguished by the impeccable probity with which it is administered, and by the evident trustworthiness of those who serve it. Assuredly your efforts will continue to be exerted in a manner that will enhance the high reputation which the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh has acquired in the eyes of the believers.

14 February 1997

- 97 One of the tasks of the Representatives is to assist in educating the believers in the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and its importance. Naturally, this process of education cannot be limited to those whose possessions reach the amount to bring them within the obligation of the law, since this fact is often known only to the individual concerned. Children, also, should learn the law of the Right of God as part of their Bahá'í education. Sometimes friends become so enthused with the concept of this law that they express the wish to make contributions to the Ḥuqúqu'lláh Fund, even though they are not obliged to do so. The House of Justice has stated that it is permissible for the Representatives to accept such contributions.

In other words, if someone, out of their love for the Cause, makes a payment to Ḥuqúqu'lláh, it is not for the Representative to question whether or not that person is under obligation to pay it; he should graciously accept it.

This, as you can see, is quite different from actually encouraging Bahá'ís to pay more Ḥuqúqu'lláh than the law of God requires them to do, and such encouragement would be a departure from the spirit of the law as Bahá'u'lláh has revealed it.

13 September 1998, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 98 It is clear that, over the past decade, more and more believers have become informed of the significance of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, and are following its provisions. You may well contemplate with satisfaction the results of your labours, as you formulate your plans for the extension of the influence of this mighty law to all segments of the worldwide Bahá'í community. Your integrity, the scrupulous care with which you have handled the funds entrusted to you, and your efficiency in providing receipts and maintaining accurate records have all contributed to the confidence of the believers in this institution and to the high prestige with which it is held in the Bahá'í community.

In carrying out your functions, you are assisting in the advancement of a process which will, in the centuries ahead, give rise to a transformation of society far beyond our present capacity to comprehend.

12 January 2003

- 99 Furthermore, efforts at fostering the development of institutions operating at the World Centre were especially evident in the continuing evolution of the institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh under the distinguished leadership of the Trustee, the Hand of the Cause of God 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá. Through his wise initiative and constant endeavour, Dr. Varqá has inspired the education of the friends everywhere concerning the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. In the decade since the law was universally applied, a network of national and regional boards of trustees has been brought into existence, which provides coordination and direction to the service of an increasing number of deputies and representatives. Knowledge of this great law has spread widely, and friends from all continents are responding to it with a spirit of devotion, which the Trustee hopes will

touch those who have not yet availed themselves of the promised blessings flowing from adherence to this law.

Riḍván 2003

100 With the approach of the meeting ... which will mark your inaugural meeting as members of the International Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, we have decided that it is now appropriate to provide you with guidance about your work and the development of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the Right of God, in the years ahead.

As stated in our letter ... notifying you of your appointment, your duties are those of the trusteeship of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, following in the path of the Chief Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the Hand of the Cause Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá...

A major element of the duties to be undertaken by the Deputies and Representatives throughout the world will continue to be the education of believers in the Right of God. The required education should be accomplished in a moderate and patient manner, so that the hearts of the believers are attracted to obedience to the provisions of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh as part of their yearning to pursue the path of spiritual development prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh. The most important features of the law should be presented in as simple a form as possible, to avoid the dear friends obligated to pay Ḥuqúqu'lláh from becoming inhibited about doing so by an unwarranted fear of its complexity of application.

Under all conditions, due attention should be given to preserving the dignity of the Faith...

We ask you to propose ... details for a network of National or Regional Boards embracing the entire worldwide community and to recommend the membership of these Boards. In countries where there are a substantial number of believers obligated to pay Ḥuqúqu'lláh, a National Board is appropriate. Regional Boards should be set up to cover other groups of countries, with the expectation that each Regional Board will be replaced by a number of National Boards in the future, as the Bahá'í community grows.

The members of these Boards will be appointed to serve for a term of three years and will be eligible for reappointment. No specific date is set for the appointment, so that a replacement can be approved whenever a Deputy is unable to discharge the functions. We have decided that Counsellors should not be eligible for membership to these Boards.

The Regional and National Boards would have the function of appointing Representatives, for a term of three years; as in the case of Deputies, when a Representative is appointed to replace an existing member unable to carry out the functions, the new appointee will serve for a full three years.

To the extent possible the Representatives will not be required to receive and transmit funds or to issue receipts ... This modification in the functions of the Representatives means that their work will be educational...

25 January 2005

- 101 New developments have, likewise, taken place at the World Centre. We have decided that the time is propitious to bring into being an International Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh to guide and supervise the work of Regional and National Boards of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh throughout the world. It will operate in close collaboration with the Chief Trustee, the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, and will be able to benefit from his knowledge and counsel in carrying out its duties. The three members now appointed to the International Board of Trustees are Sally Foo, Ramin Khadem, and Grant Kvalheim. Their term of office will be determined at a later date. The members of the Board will not transfer their residence to the Holy Land but will utilize the services of the Office of Ḥuqúqu'lláh at the World Centre in performing their functions.

Riḍván 2005

- 102 The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter dated 4 December 2005 concerning the permissibility of individuals paying Ḥuqúqu'lláh via their National Spiritual Assembly and has forwarded it to our Department for reply.

...the believers may prefer to make their payments through the treasurers of their National Assemblies, and the House of Justice has maintained the right of the friends to pay their Ḥuqúqu'lláh in this way if they so choose.

19 January 2006, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 103 The Institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh has steadily progressed under the stewardship of the Hand of the Cause of God Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá, appointed Trustee by Shoghi Effendi fifty years ago, culminating in the establishment in 2005 of an international board designed to promote the continued

widespread application of this mighty law, a source of inestimable blessings for all humanity.

Riḍván 2006

Disbursement of Ḥuqúqu'lláh Funds

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 104 It is the binding command of God that in every locality whatever hath been or will be made available for the Ḥuqúqu'lláh should be submitted to His Holy Presence. Any instructions issued in this respect should be observed accordingly, so that all matters may be well-ordered.
- 105 And now concerning the poor, thou hast written to ask whether it is permissible to pay them out of the Right of God. This is conditional upon permission having been granted. In each locality where the Right of God is being received, details of it must be submitted to His exalted presence together with a statement describing the position of the needy ones. Verily He doeth what He willeth and ordaineth what He pleaseth. If permission were to be given universally it would lead to strife and give rise to trouble.

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 106 According to the explicit text of the Most Holy Book the amounts offered for the Ḥuqúq should be deposited in a place and be disbursed, as necessary. However thou shouldst not require anyone there to offer the Ḥuqúq unless someone is prepared to do so willingly and of his own free choice.

From a Letter Written by Shoghi Effendi

- 107 In accordance with the explicit text of the Will and Testament, Ḥuqúqu'lláh should be expended on teaching the Cause of God in countries throughout

the East and the West, establishing institutions, building Bahá'í Temples and promoting benevolent undertakings and the general weal.

15 January 1933

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

- 108 'Abdu'l-Bahá in one of His Tablets has stated: "Disposition of the Ḥuqúq, wholly or partly, is permissible, but this should be done by permission of the authority in the Cause to whom all must turn." The provision in His Will and Testament that the Ḥuqúqu'lláh "is to be offered through the Guardian of the Cause of God..." is clearly in accord with this principle. In another Tablet 'Abdu'l-Bahá referred to the Universal House of Justice as "the authority in the Cause to whom all must turn" and it is clear that in the absence of the Guardian it is the supreme and central institution of the Cause. Moreover, before 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'u'lláh had revealed the following: "There is a prescribed ruling for the Ḥuqúqu'lláh. After the House of Justice hath come into being, the law thereof will be made manifest, in conformity with the Will of God." In accordance with these explicit texts it is clearly within the jurisdiction of the Universal House of Justice to decide about the receipt and disbursement of Ḥuqúqu'lláh at the present time.

2 March 1972

- 109 Concerning the Ḥuqúqu'lláh ... the disposition of the Ḥuqúqu'lláh is a prerogative reserved to the Center of the Faith. The Universal House of Justice is invested with a number of "powers and duties" enumerated in its Constitution such as "preservation of the Sacred Texts", "advanc[ing] the interests of the Faith", "propagat[ing] and teach[ing] its Message", and so forth. The funds collected from the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh are expended in pursuit of these purposes, as the House of Justice deems appropriate.

18 July 1994, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 110 You have asked as to where and how the House of Justice reports on its uses of the funds received through payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. The House of Justice does not issue an accounting of the current expenditure of these funds. However, there is no secret as to the uses to which the funds are put. The Sacred Texts affirm that the Ḥuqúqu'lláh is to be paid to the

Authority in the Faith to whom all must turn, and indicate that these funds may 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”. Decisions concerning such factors as the timing, the methods of disbursement and the amount rest with the House of Justice.

In these days, as during the ministry of Shoghi Effendi, all funds received by the Head of the Faith are used to promote the interests of the Faith at the World Centre and worldwide. The *Institution of Huqúqu'lláh Newsletter*; issue no. 6, mentions that the funds are spent for such purposes as, “promotion of the teaching and proclamation of the Faith worldwide; care, maintenance and restoration of Bahá'í Holy Places; building up of the Bahá'í World Administrative Centre; support of the work of the many Bahá'í institutions and agencies; erection and restoration of Bahá'í Houses of Worship; establishment and support of new institutions; charitable and benevolent undertakings; and support of the worldwide manifold interests of the Faith.”

The effective utilization of Huqúqu'lláh and other funds available to the House of Justice is manifest in the great developments taking place at the World Centre and throughout the Bahá'í world community, many of whose national budgets must be subsidized by the House of Justice, owing to the fact that the vast majority of the world's Bahá'ís are poor and cannot adequately support their national funds...

The Huqúqu'lláh, as its name “The Right of God” implies, has a special character which distinguishes it from all other Bahá'í funds. Its nature and purpose, and the blessings with which payment of it has been endowed can be read in the compilation which has been issued on the subject...

In accordance with Bahá'í principle, contributions to the various Bahá'í funds, as well as payments of the Right of God, are offered confidentially and are receipted ... You may rest assured that at the Bahá'í World Centre a method of financial management has been instituted to keep scrupulous accounts and also to prevent any significant incidence of extravagance or, God forbid, malfeasance from occurring undetected and unchecked. It is a method that maintains both the confidentiality of individual contributions and the integrity of the use of all funds entrusted to the House of Justice.

16 February 1998, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 111 As to the specific concern that prompted your inquiry, the use of funds from Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the disbursement of which is entirely at the discretion of the Head of the Faith, entails a wide range of applications that will eventually address various needs of society in ways that will also contribute toward the solution of economic problems. However, it is much too early in the worldwide observance of the Law, and is not possible in the current state of the Bahá'í community or of society, for the House of Justice to elaborate on these details. For the time being, the Ḥuqúqu'lláh is used principally for the work of the Bahá'í community, which, of course, includes its initial efforts at social and economic development.

8 September 1999, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 112 As you are aware, the obligation of believers to pay Ḥuqúqu'lláh is set out in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and it is offered to the Head of the Faith, now the House of Justice. Disbursement of these funds is decided by the House of Justice and is presently directed to the vital task of raising the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, which is the essential prerequisite for the enduring resolution of the afflictions humanity is now experiencing.

The House of Justice ensures that detailed accounts of Ḥuqúqu'lláh income and expenditures are maintained by the International Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and its Office of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in the Holy Land. It monitors the functioning of the Institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh and is well satisfied that matters are being handled with the highest level of integrity.

Such an assurance from the House of Justice is, of course, sufficient for members of the Bahá'í community. At this time the House of Justice sees no need to present information on Ḥuqúqu'lláh accounts to external audiences; if a situation arises in the future where there is public controversy over this issue, it will take whatever action it deems appropriate at that time.

25 July 2006, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

A Codification of the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

PREPARED BY THE RESEARCH DEPARTMENT OF THE BAHÁ'Í WORLD
CENTRE IN 1987, AND REVISED IN 2007, AT THE REQUEST OF THE
UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

I. Preamble

Ḥuqúqu'lláh (The Right of God) is a great law (13)ⁱ and a sacred institution. Laid down in The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book, it is one of the key instruments for constructing the foundation and supporting the structure of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. It has far-reaching ramifications that extend from promoting the welfare of the individual to buttressing the authority and extending the activity of the Head of the Faith. In providing a regular and systematic source of revenue for the Central Institution of the Cause, Bahá'u'lláh has assured the means for the independence and decisive functioning of the World Centre of His Faith.

By identifying this law as “The Right of God”, Bahá'u'lláh has re-emphasized the nature of the relationship between human beings and their Creator as a Covenant based on mutual assurances and obligations; and, by designating the Central Authority in the Cause, to which all must turn, as the recipient of this Right, He has created a direct and vital link between every individual believer and the Head of His Faith that is unique in the structure of His World Order. This law enables the friends to recognize the elevation of their economic activity to the level of divine acceptability; it is a means for the purification of their wealth and a magnet attracting divine blessings. The computation and the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, within the general guidelines set forth, are exclusively a matter of conscience between the individual and God (56, 82); demanding or soliciting the Ḥuqúqu'lláh is

i The numbers in brackets refer to the paragraphs of the 2007 revision of the compilation on Ḥuqúqu'lláh issued by the Universal House of Justice as revised in August 2009.

prohibited (56, 82, 83, 93, 106)—only appeals, reminders and exhortations of a general nature, under the auspices of the institutions of the Faith, are permissible (94, 96, 97, 100). That the observance and enforcement of this law, so crucial to the material well-being of the emerging Bahá'í commonwealth (29), should thus have been left entirely to the faith and conscience of the individual gives substance to, and sheds light on, what the beloved Master calls the spiritual solution to economic problems. Indeed, the implications of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh for the realization of a number of the principles of the Faith, such as the elimination of extremes of wealth and poverty, and a more equitable distribution of resources, will increasingly become manifest as the friends assume in ever greater measure the responsibility for observing it.

The fundamentals of the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh are promulgated in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Further elaborations of its features are to be found in other Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, in Tablets from 'Abdu'l-Bahá and in letters from Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice, mostly in response to questions raised by the friends. All these major references have been compiled by the Research Department of the House of Justice and separately published. A study of that compilation makes it clear that the application of the law has been progressive, and will continue to be so, as its ramifications and subsidiary rulings are elucidated.

The following is a preliminary attempt at codifying the information in the Writings on the subject of Ḥuqúqu'lláh. It should be emphasized, however, that the friends should not attempt to read into it an element of rigidity or total comprehensiveness. The questions put to Bahá'u'lláh, the Master and Shoghi Effendi were from friends residing in places and times with infinitely simpler economic systems and relationships than those which obtain today. What can be learned from them are clear guiding principles whose application to changing and more complex conditions must be considered. The subject will undoubtedly occupy the House of Justice in evolving legislation, as necessary, for a long time to come. As the Fifth Epoch of the Formative Age of our Faith unfolds before the eyes of an increasingly watchful humanity, the universal assumption of the obligation of Ḥuqúqu'lláh by the friends serves as a clear illustration of a new level of spiritual maturity being attained by the community of the Greatest Name throughout the world.

II. A Bounty Granted by God

God, while being wholly independent of all created things, has in His bounty given us this law (3, 13, 22), for the progress and promotion of the Cause depend on material means (4, 29). Obedience to this law enables the believer to be firm and steadfast in the Covenant (22), provides a reward in every world of the worlds of God (13) and is a unique test of true faith (24). The Ḥuqúqu'lláh is to be offered joyfully and without hesitation (6, 8, 83). When the Ḥuqúqu'lláh is offered in this spirit it will impart prosperity and protection to the friends, purify their worldly possessions (2, 9, 17, 31, 54, 88) and enable them and their offspring to benefit from the fruits of their endeavours (17).

III. Determining the Amount of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

Everything that a believer possesses, with the exception of certain specific items, is subject once and only once to the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

A. Exempt from assessment to Ḥuqúqu'lláh are:

1. The residence and its needfulⁱ furnishings (36)
2. The needful business and agricultural equipment which produce income for one's subsistence (42, 46, 47)

B. Conditions under which payment falls due:

1. Ḥuqúqu'lláh is payable as soon as a person's assessable possessions reach or exceed the value of 19 mithqáls of gold (43). [19 mithqáls equal approximately 2.2 troy ounces or approximately 69.2 grams (52).]
 - a) The amount to be paid is 19% of the value of the assessable property (3, 34).
 - b) The payment is calculated on whole units of 19 mithqáls of gold (41).
2. Ḥuqúqu'lláh is payable on further units of 19 mithqáls of gold when subsequently acquired possessions, after the deduction of the annual expenses, raise the value of the assessable property sufficiently. Among the expenses to be deducted are:
 - a) The general expenses of living (45, 48, 49)

i See III.C.5.

- b) Losses and expenses incurred on the sale of possessions (55, 78)
- c) Sums which are paid to the state, such as taxes and duties (49)
- 3. When a person receives a gift or bequest it is to be added to his or her possessions and augments the total value in the same way as does an excess of annual income over expenditure (60, 74).
- 4. If a property increases in value, Ḥuqúqu'lláh is not payable on that increase until it is realized, e.g., on the sale of the property (67).
- 5. If possessions decrease, such as through the expenses of a year exceeding the income received, Ḥuqúqu'lláh falls due again only after the loss has been made good and the total value of one's assessable possessions is augmented (37, 38, 41, 43, 45–47, 49, 60, 72).
- 6. The payment of debts takes precedence over the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh (35, 68, 71).
- 7. The payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is dependent on the person's financial ability to meet his obligations (33).
- 8. On the death of a believer, the completion of his or her payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh is accomplished in the following manner:
 - a) The first charge on the estate is the expense of burial (35).
 - b) Secondly, the debts of the deceased must be paid (40).
 - c) The Ḥuqúqu'lláh still payable on the property should then be paid. In establishing the value of the property on which Ḥuqúqu'lláh has not already been paid, the following are among the deductions to be made: expenses of burial (35), debts of the deceased (40), loss of value of the assets when realized (55) and expenses incurred in realizing the assets (55). The principal residence as well as items such as necessary furnishings and tools of trade remain exempt (79).
- C. Further notes on determining Ḥuqúqu'lláh:
 - 1. Each believer should learn not only how to calculate Ḥuqúqu'lláh during the course of his or her life but also how to provide for the payment of the balance remaining at the date of death (65, 68).
 - 2. Although the law provides a certain leeway in the timing of the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, it should preferably be paid by a believer during the course of his or her life whenever it falls due (73); in this case the only payment to Ḥuqúqu'lláh which should be provided for by the will is such additional liability as may be found to exist when the believer's financial affairs are determined at the date of death (65).

3. One believer cannot discharge the obligation of another to pay Ḥuqúqu'lláh nor can a payment to Ḥuqúqu'lláh be earmarked for any purpose or be made in honour of anyone (64, 80).
4. The law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh imposes an obligation only on individual believers, not on Bahá'í institutions or corporate bodies (76).
5. It is left to the individual to decide which expenses are to be regarded as “necessary” and therefore deductible in computing the annual accretion to savings and which furnishings of the household are to be regarded as “needful” and therefore exempt from the payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh (19, 45, 46, 48–50, 56–58, 61, 70).
6. Although references are made to annual payments of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the time and method of payment are left to the discretion of the individual believer (69, 72, 78). There is, therefore, no obligation to liquidate one's assets in haste in order to fulfil one's current obligations to Ḥuqúqu'lláh (55).
7. Husband and wife are free to decide whether they want to honour their Ḥuqúqu'lláh obligations jointly or individually (59, 71, 74).
8. The account of Ḥuqúqu'lláh should be kept separate from other contributions inasmuch as the disposition of the funds of the Ḥuqúqu'lláh is subject to decision by the Central Authority in the Cause to which all must turn, whereas the purposes of the contributions to other funds may be determined by the donors themselves.
9. Payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh has priority over making contributions to other funds of the Faith (49, 54, 57), as well as over the cost of pilgrimage (2). It is, however, left to the discretion of the believer whether or not to treat contributions to the fund as an expense when arriving at the value of his or her property in calculating the sum to be paid as Ḥuqúqu'lláh (57) or to make contributions only out of money on which Ḥuqúqu'lláh has been paid (62). He or she also has the discretion to treat some contributions in one way and some in the other (62).

IV. Applicability of the Law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

For many decades the sacred law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh had been applied only to the believers from the Middle East. The worldwide application was instituted by the House of Justice as from Riḍván 1992, the beginning

of the Holy Year marking the hundredth anniversary of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh (28).

V. Payment of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

Until the passing of the Hand of the Cause of God appointed to act as Chief Trustee, the Ḥuqúqu'lláh was paid to the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, the Deputies or their appointed Representatives (85, 87, 102). The body of the International Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh, appointed by the House of Justice, acts in place of the Chief Trustee (100, 101, 103). This Institution appoints the members of the Regional and National Boards of Trustees and supervises the work of the Deputies and Representatives. It utilizes the services of the Office of Ḥuqúqu'lláh at the Bahá'í World Centre in performing such functions as issuing receipts (101).

VI. Management of Ḥuqúqu'lláh

Decisions on the necessary ordinances concerning Ḥuqúqu'lláh (51, 54), as well as on its disposition, lie within the sole jurisdiction of the Central Authority in the Cause. The Ḥuqúqu'lláh can be employed for charitable purposes (24, 25, 45) or for other purposes useful to the Cause of God (109, 110, 112).

THE
INSTITUTION
OF THE
COUNSELLORS

Prepared by the the Universal House of Justice

Introduction

More than three decades have passed since the establishment, in 1968, of the Continental Boards of Counsellors. During this time the institution has accumulated invaluable experience, and its influence is being ever more strongly felt throughout the Bahá'í world. The occupation by the International Teaching Centre of its seat on Mount Carmel offers a propitious occasion for a document to be issued that describes the operations of the institution of the Counsellors. Accordingly, we have prepared a digest of the guidance previously given on this subject, which we hope will increase the friends' understanding of not only the responsibilities of the Counsellors and their auxiliaries but also the workings of the Administrative Order in general.

The document consists of two parts. In the first, we provide an overview of the various components of the institution and their duties. The second part is a list of statements addressing specific aspects of its functioning.

The Administrative Order conceived by Bahá'u'lláh accomplishes its divinely ordained purpose through a system of institutions, each with its defined sphere of action. The central governing body of the Order is the Universal House of Justice, whose terms of reference are the revealed Word of Bahá'u'lláh together with the interpretations and expositions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian. Under its guidance, legislative, executive and judicial authority over the affairs of the Bahá'í community is exercised by Local and National Spiritual Assemblies. This authority is also exercised by Regional Councils, committees and other agencies established by these institutions, to the extent that it is so delegated.

Together with the authority vested in elected corporate bodies to make decisions binding on the community is the spiritual, moral and intellectual influence that the Administrative Order exerts on both the lives of believers and the work of the Faith's institutions. This influence acquires a special character through the services performed by those individuals who are appointed to the high rank of Counsellors and by their deputies. More specifically, the Continental Counsellors and the members of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants are charged with functions

relating to the protection and propagation of the Faith. In carrying out their duties, the Continental Counsellors receive their guidance from the International Teaching Centre, an institution whose mandate is global and which functions in close proximity to the Universal House of Justice.

Acting in their respective roles, the two institutions of the Counsellors and the Spiritual Assemblies share responsibility for the protection and propagation of the Faith. The harmonious interaction between them ensures the constant flow of guidance, love and encouragement to the believers and invigorates their individual and collective endeavours to advance the Cause. The value of such interaction is underscored by words of the Guardian, in a cable message dated 4 June 1957, referring at the time to the Hands of the Cause and National Assemblies: "SECURITY PRECIOUS FAITH PRESERVATION SPIRITUAL HEALTH BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITIES VITALITY FAITH ITS INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS PROPER FUNCTIONING ITS LABORIOUSLY ERECTED INSTITUTIONS FRUITION ITS WORLDWIDE ENTERPRISES FULFILMENT ITS ULTIMATE DESTINY ALL DIRECTLY DEPENDENT BEFITTING DISCHARGE WEIGHTY RESPONSIBILITIES NOW RESTING MEMBERS THESE TWO INSTITUTIONS..."

Freed from those administrative functions assigned to elected bodies, the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members are able to concentrate their energies on the task of promoting adherence to principle on the part of individual Bahá'ís, Bahá'í institutions and Bahá'í communities. Their understanding of the Teachings, together with the wisdom that comes from the experience gained through intimate involvement in the many aspects of Bahá'í activity, especially qualifies them to offer advice that assists the work of elected bodies. Further, the fact that they occupy a rank higher than that of the Spiritual Assemblies ensures that they are kept properly informed and that Spiritual Assemblies give due consideration to their advice and recommendations. The administrative processes of the Faith are not only concerned with judicial matters, laws and regulations, and programmes that direct action, but also embrace those measures that elicit from the friends wholehearted response and channel their energies. Counsellors and their auxiliaries bring to bear on all such administrative processes their ability as individuals of proven devotion and consecrated spirit. Similarly, they play a vital part in encouraging the friends and in fostering individual initiative, diversity and freedom of action. In their endeavours they strive to follow in the footsteps of the Hands of the Cause,

whom ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called on “to diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to promote learning, to improve the character of all men and to be, at all times and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things.”

The Universal House of Justice

1 January 2001

International and Continental Counsellors & the Auxilliary Boards

Historical Persepctive

The institution of the Hands of the Cause of God was created by Bahá'u'lláh and formally defined and established by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament. Under the direction of the Guardian, the functions of the institution were elucidated and elaborated. In due course, Shoghi Effendi brought into being the Auxiliary Boards for the Protection and Propagation of the Faith to serve the work of the Hands of the Cause and to ensure that their vital influence would permeate the Bahá'í community.

With the passing of Shoghi Effendi and the conclusion of the Universal House of Justice that it could not legislate to make possible the appointment of additional Hands of the Cause, it became necessary for it to devise a means of extending into the future the critical functions of protection and propagation vested in these high-ranking officers of the Faith. The first step in this development was taken in November 1964 when the Universal House of Justice clarified its relationship with the institution of the Hands by stating that "responsibility for decisions on matters of general policy affecting the institution of the Hands of the Cause, which was formerly exercised by the beloved Guardian, now devolves upon the Universal House of Justice as the supreme and central institution of the Faith to which all must turn." At that time, too, the number of Auxiliary Board members was increased, and the Hands of the Cause in each continent were called upon to appoint one or more members of their Auxiliary Boards to act in an executive capacity on their behalf and in their name.

In June 1968 the Continental Boards of Counsellors were brought into being. This momentous decision was accompanied by several developments

in the work of the Hands of the Cause: the services of such Hands as were previously assigned to continents became worldwide, each Hand operating individually in direct relationship to the Universal House of Justice; the Hands of the Cause ceased to be responsible for the direction of the Auxiliary Boards, which became auxiliary institutions of the Continental Boards of Counsellors; the Hands of the Cause Residing in the Holy Land were given the task of acting as liaison between the Universal House of Justice and the Boards of Counsellors; and the working interrelationships between the Hands and the Boards of Counsellors were clarified. Reference was also made to the future establishment of an international teaching centre by the Universal House of Justice, with the assistance of the Hands Residing in the Holy Land. The International Teaching Centre was established in June 1973. That same year Auxiliary Board members were authorized to name assistants.

The existence of the institution of the Hands of the Cause, and subsequently of the Counsellors, comprising individuals who play such a vital role in advancing the interests of the Faith, but who have no legislative, executive or judicial authority, and are entirely devoid of priestly functions or the right to make authoritative interpretations, is a feature of Bahá'í administration unparalleled in the religions of the past. Bahá'u'lláh, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá after Him, invested both the elected institutions of the Faith and certain appointed individuals with the functions of protection and propagation.

Referring to the International Teaching Centre, the Universal House of Justice has stated that its establishment brought to fruition the work of the Hands of the Cause Residing in the Holy Land. The Teaching Centre is charged with the tasks of coordinating, stimulating and directing the activities of the Continental Boards of Counsellors and acts as liaison between them and the Universal House of Justice.

In the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice it is stated:

The institution of the Boards of Counsellors was brought into being by the Universal House of Justice to extend into the future the specific functions of protection and propagation conferred upon the Hands of the Cause of God. The members of these Boards are appointed by the Universal House of Justice.

In the same document the two Auxiliary Boards originally established by the beloved Guardian are described:

In each zone there shall be two Auxiliary Boards, one for the protection and one for the propagation of the Faith, the numbers of whose members shall be set by the Universal House of Justice. The members of these Auxiliary Boards shall serve under the direction of the Continental Boards of Counsellors and shall act as their deputies, assistants and advisers.

The International Teaching Centre

The International Teaching Centre has nine members appointed as International Counsellors by the Universal House of Justice from among all the adult believers in the world for a five-year term, each term starting on 23 May immediately following the International Bahá'í Convention. The Hands of the Cause of God have been permanent members of the Teaching Centre ever since its inception.

The work of the Teaching Centre is essentially corporate in character. Its responsibilities call on it to serve as a source of information and analysis for the Universal House of Justice and to provide guidance and resources to the Continental Counsellors. It is required to be fully informed of the situation of the Cause in all parts of the world and alert to possibilities for the expansion of the Faith, the consolidation of its institutions, and the development of Bahá'í community life. It has to analyse these possibilities in relation to global plans, anticipating needs worldwide and ensuring that the necessary resources become available to national communities. In this context, it gives particular attention to the development of human resources, helping communities increase their capacity to endow growing contingents of believers with spiritual insight, knowledge of the Faith, and skills and abilities of service.

The International Teaching Centre is invested with the mandate to watch over the security and ensure the protection of the Faith of God. It must investigate all cases of incipient Covenant-breaking—employing, as necessary, the services of the Continental Counsellors and their auxiliaries and evaluating their reports—and decide whether the offender should be expelled from the Cause, submitting the decision to the Universal

House of Justice for its consideration. It follows a similar procedure for the reinstatement of a contrite Covenant-breaker. More broadly, it needs to be attentive to the spiritual health of the Bahá'í community, urging the Counsellors and their auxiliaries to strengthen the believers to resist the influence of both external and internal sources of opposition to the Cause, and to assist National and Local Spiritual Assemblies in resolving questions that could raise doubt about the integrity of the Faith and its Teachings.

The Continental Boards of Counsellors

Presently, five Continental Boards of Counsellors serve the five major regions of the world: Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australasia and Europe. The term of office of the Counsellors and the precise boundaries of the region in which each Board operates are fixed by the Universal House of Justice, as is the number on each Board. The term of office—first established to begin on the Day of the Covenant, 26 November 1980—is currently five years.

Counsellors function as such only within the continental area of the Board to which they are appointed; should they move their residence out of that continent, they automatically relinquish their membership. The first obligation of Counsellors is to the work of their own Boards. However, they collaborate with the members of the other Boards who serve adjacent areas, and may carry out specific functions in continents other than their own when asked by the International Teaching Centre or directly by the Universal House of Justice.

Each Board of Counsellors holds a number of meetings during its term of service to consult on the various dimensions of its work in the propagation and protection of the Faith. Certain matters, such as the appointment of Auxiliary Board members and the allocation of funds, are decided by the entire Board. In the performance of other functions—for example, in providing stimulus to different components of the Bahá'í community in a particular zone in the continent—several Counsellors come together to consult and collaborate so that their abilities are used in a complementary fashion. Some duties, including the supervision and guidance of the Auxiliary Board members in an area, are generally performed by one Counsellor on behalf of the Board. In general, it should be borne in mind that, unlike other institutions of the Administrative Order, which must

function as corporate bodies, Counsellors operate primarily as individuals. In handling most matters, they each have a wide range of possibilities available to them according to the flexibility inherent in their institution.

Fundamental to the work of the Counsellors is the understanding that all members of the Continental Board bear responsibility for the entire continent and need to familiarize themselves, to the extent possible, with the conditions of the Cause in the countries therein. Through periodic reports from individual Counsellors, the Board is kept abreast of developments in every area of the continent and is able to offer guidance to assist its members in the execution of their duties. Whereas no Counsellor is to be regarded as having exclusive responsibility for any one territory, the detailed familiarity acquired by each through close interaction with the National Spiritual Assembly and Auxiliary Board members in a particular area represents a valuable asset to all the Counsellors on the Board.

The Auxiliary Boards

The members of the Auxiliary Boards are appointed from among the believers of each continent by the Continental Board of Counsellors for five-year periods beginning on the Day of the Covenant of the year following the appointment of the Counsellors themselves. They should be twenty-one years of age or older. The full membership of the Continental Board makes the appointments in consultation, which, if necessary, can be carried out by mail.

The members of an Auxiliary Board are responsible individually to the Board of Counsellors which appoints them. They do not themselves constitute a decision-making body. However, Auxiliary Board members may confer and collaborate with each other as long as care is taken not to depart from this principle.

Each Auxiliary Board member is assigned a specific territory, and although for practical purposes such a territory may coincide with a particular country or National Assembly area, there is no hard and fast rule that it must do so. Auxiliary Boards are continental institutions, and there need not be any correlation between the boundaries of the territories assigned to their members and national frontiers. Unless specifically deputized by the Counsellors, an Auxiliary Board member does not function as such outside the area to which he or she has been assigned. For obvious

reasons, it is preferable for Auxiliary Board members to reside in the area they serve; however, if an area has no suitable candidate for this post, the Counsellors may decide to make an alternative arrangement.

When assigning areas to members of the Auxiliary Boards, the Continental Board of Counsellors ensures that the entire continental area is divided up among the members of each of the two Auxiliary Boards. That is to say, the Bahá'ís of any one locality are to have both a Protection Board member and a Propagation Board member to whom they can refer.

Assistants to Auxiliary Board Members

Each Continental Board of Counsellors authorizes individual Auxiliary Board members to appoint assistants. The correct designation is “assistants to the Auxiliary Board members” and not “assistants to the Auxiliary Board”. An assistant is appointed by an Auxiliary Board member to work in a specified area and functions as an assistant only in relation to that area. Assistants, like Auxiliary Board members, operate as individuals, not as a consultative body.

The duration of service of assistants is left to each Continental Board to decide for itself and need not be universally standardized. Auxiliary Board members may name some assistants for definite terms, others not. Appointments may be made for a limited period, such as a year or two, with the possibility of reappointment. In certain cases a Board of Counsellors may wish to permit Auxiliary Board members to name assistants for a particular project or projects, some of which may be of very short term.

Service on National, Regional and Local Administrative Bodies

All adult Bahá'ís, including Continental Counsellors and members of the Auxiliary Boards, are eligible to vote in elections for delegates or in elections for members of a Local Spiritual Assembly. The rank and specific duties of the Counsellors render them ineligible for service on local, regional or national administrative bodies. Auxiliary Board members are eligible for any elective office but if elected to such a post on a national, regional or local

level must decide whether to retain membership on the Board or accept the post as they cannot serve in both capacities at the same time.

Whether elected to a Spiritual Assembly or a Regional Council, or as a delegate to the National Convention, a Board member should be allowed a reasonable length of time to make a choice and should feel no compulsion to decide immediately after the results of the election are announced. Membership on an Auxiliary Board would be regarded as a valid reason for resignation from an elected body.

While the closest relationship is to be fostered between the members of the institution of the Counsellors and the Spiritual Assemblies and their agencies, Auxiliary Board members are not appointed to committees, as voting or non-voting members. Certain agencies such as an Association for Bahá'í Studies, or a committee responsible for some aspect of social and economic development, which require professional expertise in their members, fall in a different category. Counsellors or Board members with the necessary professional skills may serve on these boards and committees, provided, of course, that such service does not interfere with their duties. By the same token, an Auxiliary Board member may have an employer/employee relationship with a National Spiritual Assembly, for example, as a public relations officer or as the administrator of an establishment belonging to the Assembly. It is also possible for a Counsellor to represent the interests of the Bahá'í community in relations with the authorities of a country on behalf of the National Assembly.

Intimate involvement in institute operations is a part of the evolving functions of Auxiliary Board members and, therefore, they may serve on boards or committees that oversee the affairs of training institutes. In serving as a member of such a body, an Auxiliary Board member has no consultative or decision-making privileges different from those of the other members. The participation of Auxiliary Board members in the institute work, of course, is not limited to membership on the boards of directors; many also serve as coordinators and act as teachers.

A National Spiritual Assembly, national committee, Regional Council or Local Spiritual Assembly may directly request an Auxiliary Board member, as it would any other believer, to perform such tasks as offering a course at a summer school or speaking at a conference. It is left to the discretion of the Board member to determine whether fulfilling the request would interfere with other commitments.

Believers can serve at the same time both as assistants to Auxiliary Board members and on Local and National Assemblies, Regional Councils and committees, and function as their officers. Thus, the appointment of a believer as a Board member's assistant does not require the resignation of that person from other administrative bodies, nor does it, in and of itself, constitute a reason for accepting such a resignation. If an individual believes that there is a special reason for not accepting appointment as an assistant, he or she is, of course, free to draw the matter to the attention of the Auxiliary Board member concerned or to consult with the Spiritual Assembly.

Duties of the Continental Counsellors and Their Auxiliaries

The Continental Boards of Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies both have specific functions relating to the protection and propagation of the Faith. The duties of the Counsellors include directing the Auxiliary Board members, consulting and collaborating with National Spiritual Assemblies, and keeping the International Teaching Centre and thus the Universal House of Justice informed about the conditions of the Cause in their areas.

Counsellors have the duty to stimulate on each continent the expansion and consolidation of the Faith and to promote the spiritual, intellectual, and social aspects of Bahá'í life. The spiritual health of the community and the vitality of the faith of the individual, the strengthening of the foundations of family life, and the study of the Teachings receive special attention from the Counsellors and those called upon to assist them. They are likewise concerned with enhancing the capacity of the friends and their institutions to devise systematic plans of action, to execute them energetically, and to learn from experience in the course of building the world civilization envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh. In this context, promoting a culture of growth within the Bahá'í community is fundamental to the work of the Counsellors.

The Auxiliary Boards for Protection and Propagation have distinct functions. They do have certain tasks in common, however, especially in the area of deepening and consolidation. From the outset, the Guardian envisioned that the Auxiliary Boards would assist the Hands "in the

discharge of their dual and sacred task of safeguarding the Faith and of promoting its teaching activities.” Among the tasks defined by the Guardian for the Auxiliary Board members are: to stimulate and strengthen the teaching work in cooperation with existing administrative bodies; to help activate weak centres, groups and Assemblies through their visits; to assist in the efficient and prompt execution of plans; to keep in touch with pioneers, helping them to persevere and pointing out to them the sacredness of their responsibility; to encourage individuals and Assemblies through correspondence and through visits; to impress upon the believers that the foundation of all Bahá'í activity is unity; to encourage the friends to contribute freely to the various Funds; and to bring to their attention the importance of individual effort and initiative. Further, Shoghi Effendi assigned to the Protection Board the specific duty of watching over the security of the Faith. Members of the Auxiliary Board for Protection, as experience shows, also assist in propagating the Cause, but focus much of their energies on deepening the friends' knowledge of the Covenant and fostering a spirit of love and unity. Their efforts contribute significantly to the growth of the Bahá'í community, for the protection of the Faith is intimately linked to its propagation.

The flexibility and ease with which the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members can respond to a perceived need in the community—such as the need for encouragement, explanation of plans, deepening in the Teachings, protection of the Covenant—are notable elements of their functioning. This flexibility enables them to operate as occasions demand, whether it is in giving counsel at a meeting, advising an individual in private, helping the friends to understand and obey a ruling of the Spiritual Assembly, or dealing with issues of the Covenant. In all these settings they are able to draw attention to relevant Texts, to impart information, explore situations, and acquaint themselves with conditions in ways not always possible to a Spiritual Assembly. They are able then to share with Spiritual Assemblies, as deemed necessary, ideas, analyses, perceptions and advice, which inevitably enhance the ability of these Assemblies to serve their communities. Where Local Assemblies are new or weak, Auxiliary Board members encourage them to organize their work. In all cases, they rally the local believers in support of the Assembly's initiatives.

As to the role of the assistants, they have the general responsibility of aiding the Auxiliary Board members to carry out their functions. The nature of their contribution, however, is reflected in the range of specific

tasks assigned to each by the Auxiliary Board member whom he or she assists. The precise character of such tasks is determined by the Board member's perception of the needs and potential of the communities that he or she serves, and it is in this context, for the most part, that the orientation and guidance of assistants become significant.

Collaboration with National Spiritual Assemblies

The relationship of the Continental Boards of Counsellors to National Spiritual Assemblies is one of loving cooperation between two institutions of the Faith that are serving the same ends and are eager to see the same divine confirmations descend upon the efforts of the friends to promote and firmly establish the Cause. It is an evolving relationship that becomes richer as the two institutions face the challenge of building Bahá'í communities and witness with pride the onward march of the Faith.

As Continental Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies work together to ensure the expansion and consolidation of the community, the National Assemblies make all the necessary executive decisions and take responsibility for their implementation. The Counsellors bring to their functions a continental perspective which, when offered to the Assembly in the form of counsel, advice, recommendations, suggestions or commentary, enriches the latter's understanding, acquaints it with a broader experience than its own, and encourages it to maintain a world-embracing vision.

As appointees of the Universal House of Justice, the Counsellors assist the Head of the Faith to broaden the base, foster the strength and ensure the security of the National Spiritual Assemblies and the institutions and communities under their jurisdiction. Through the Auxiliary Boards, the Counsellors spread the benefits of their functions to the Local Spiritual Assemblies and the grassroots of the community.

The Counsellors, in the discharge of their responsibilities, support the initiatives adopted by a National Spiritual Assembly, initiatives that often arise from joint deliberations of the two institutions. The Auxiliary Board members explain to the friends the nature and purpose of these initiatives, motivate them to rise and respond to the call of the Assembly, and encourage them to persist in unified action. The Counsellors, of course,

have a wide latitude in determining in what manner their institution will carry out these tasks.

A crucial feature of the work of the Counsellors that enables them to offer valuable advice to the National Spiritual Assemblies is their aloofness from administrative details, a freedom that allows them to concentrate on the vital issues of the Cause. Care must be exercised, however, that this aloofness does not give rise to extreme situations. Counsellors should not become inhibited from expressing their views to the National Spiritual Assemblies on administrative matters, and National Spiritual Assemblies should not feel restricted in availing themselves of the opportunity of consulting the Counsellors on such issues.

The Counsellors have not only the right but the obligation to deliberate with, advise, and offer suggestions to the National Spiritual Assemblies in the discharge of their specific functions. They alert National Assemblies to any problems or tendencies in the Bahá'í community which they feel require attention. Their concern in this respect extends to the very functioning of the National Assemblies. If the Counsellors notice serious departures from administrative or other principles in the work of a National Spiritual Assembly or its agencies, they are to consult with the Assembly about the matter and suggest corrective action. This they must do irrespective of any apprehension that such a step might give rise to tension between the two institutions.

The attitude of the Counsellors and the National Spiritual Assemblies towards each other is not motivated by a legalistic application of the rules of their functional relationship. The discharge of joint responsibilities is only possible within the framework of the spiritual requisites for all successful Bahá'í relationships. Interactions between the two institutions flourish in an atmosphere of love and according to the dictates of genuine respect. Bahá'u'lláh's admonition is highly instructive in this regard; He says: "Abase not the station of the learned in Bahá and belittle not the rank of such rulers as administer justice amidst you."

Mode of Interaction

The manner in which interactions between the Continental Counsellors and their auxiliaries, on the one hand, and National Assemblies and their agencies, on the other, take place is regulated in order to maintain dynamic

interdependence. Just as Counsellors have direct consultative relations with National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, so do they have direct relations with Regional Bahá'í Councils. Counsellors can deputize an Auxiliary Board member to meet with a National Spiritual Assembly for a particular purpose, but not as a regular practice. They can also authorize the Board members to meet with Regional Councils as needs dictate. National and Local Spiritual Assemblies cannot give any directions to Auxiliary Board members, much as they depend upon their vital services. If a National Spiritual Assembly wishes an Auxiliary Board member to undertake a specific service as a Board member, it must convey its request to the Counsellors. With the approval of the Counsellors, Regional Councils may seek the views of Auxiliary Board members serving their regions on all aspects of their work. If the National Spiritual Assembly agrees, it may also be advisable from time to time for an Auxiliary Board member to meet with a national committee to consult on the situation in an area. But this, too, should not be done on a regular basis. Counsellors for their part do not normally communicate directly with national committees.

These few limitations on the mode of interaction enhance collaboration between the institution of the Counsellors and Spiritual Assemblies. They ensure that the energies and time of the Auxiliary Board members are not diffused as a result of their engagement in the administration of teaching. Thus, the dangers of two extreme situations are avoided: one in which the Auxiliary Board member gradually takes over the direction of a national committee, and the other whereby he or she is sent hither and thither at the direction of the committee or the Assembly as a mere travelling teacher.

The effective discharge of their responsibilities by both the Counsellors and the National Spiritual Assemblies calls for regular and frequent exchange of information. The National Spiritual Assembly is in contact with all the elements of its community through national committees, Regional Councils, Local Spiritual Assemblies, and other agencies. The Auxiliary Board members also have direct contact with Local Spiritual Assemblies, groups, and individual believers and thus keep current with developments in the community. Naturally, both institutions welcome all the information that they regularly receive from each other. Direct exchange of information between National Assemblies or their committees and the Auxiliary Board members is highly desirable. Reports that contain only news and information can be shared freely among them.

However, recommendations by a Board member requiring action by a National Assembly or its agencies need to be referred to the Counsellors, who may share them in their entirety with the National Assembly, or modify or reject them.

At the outset of the work of the year or at times when new plans are being formulated, it is often useful to arrange for consultations between the Auxiliary Board members and the National or Regional Teaching Committees or Regional Councils before these plans are given final definition. A highly fruitful practice has developed in many parts of the world whereby members of a number of institutions and agencies of a country, or a region thereof, come together in a meeting of consultation to reach a common vision for the growth of their community and discuss strategies for action. These “institutional meetings” help to steer the friends away from thinking merely in terms of the mechanics of projects and to infuse their plans and subsequent action with the spirit of the Faith. They do much to reinforce the confidence of the institutions in devising the teaching strategies that will best serve the needs of their respective regions and in mobilizing the support of the Local Assemblies and the believers.

Regular contact with Local Spiritual Assemblies in the area assigned to an Auxiliary Board member is an indispensable requirement of his or her functioning. In most areas, frequent consultations are only possible through assistants. The nature of these consultations, of course, depends on the tasks that the assistant is carrying out on behalf of the Auxiliary Board member.

Involvement with Institutes

Involvement in the operation of a training institute, by both Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members, has to be considered in a special light. Institutes are regarded as centres of learning, and their character harmonizes with, and provides scope for the exercise of, the educational responsibilities of the Auxiliary Board members. These centres offer the Counsellors and Board members immediate access to a formal means of educating the believers, in addition to other avenues available to them such as conferences, summer schools, and meetings with the friends. The Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies need to consult on the details of their collaboration in overseeing the budgets and the functioning of training institutes and in

planning programme content, developing curricula, and delivering courses. When a board of directors is named, its membership is decided upon by the National Spiritual Assembly in consultation with the Counsellors and with their full support.

The Individual and the Community

The authority to direct the affairs of the Faith locally, nationally and internationally is divinely conferred on elected institutions. The power to act, however, resides primarily in the entire body of the believers. This power is unlocked at the level of individual initiative and at the level of collective volition. If the Cause is to realize Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for humankind, every institution of the Faith must be concerned with the release of power in both these expressions, as they are with ensuring the wise administration of the community's affairs. The institution of the Counsellors is particularly charged with this vital task and is endowed with the capacity to accomplish it.

A distinguishing characteristic of Bahá'í life is the spirit of servitude to God. To labour in the arena of service, the individual draws upon his love for Bahá'u'lláh, the power of the Covenant, the dynamics of prayer, the inspiration and education derived from regular study of the Holy Texts, and the transformative forces that operate upon his soul as he strives to behave in accordance with the divine laws and principles. Therefore, these are all themes of an ongoing relationship between the Auxiliary Board members and the believers.

The role of the individual is of unique importance in the work of the Cause. It is the individual who manifests the vitality of faith upon which the success of the teaching work and the development of the community depends. Bahá'u'lláh's command to each believer to teach His Faith confers an inescapable responsibility which cannot be transferred to, or assumed by, any institution of the Cause. It is incumbent upon the individual to seize opportunities, form friendships, build relationships, and win the cooperation of others in common service to the Faith and society. The individual must convert into action the decisions made by consultative bodies.

Stimulating individual initiative is one of the paramount duties of the Auxiliary Board members, a duty they can perform with the help of

assistants they must carefully select, train and nurture. It involves constant encouragement of the friends, evoking the valour of the heroes of the Faith and bringing to their attention the importance of exemplifying in their lives the glory of the Teachings. It calls for fervent and moving appeals to the believers to be the cause of unity and harmony at all times, to attract receptive souls to the Cause, to teach them, nourish their faith and lead them to the shores of certitude. It requires building confidence and changing fear and hesitation into courage and perseverance. It asks of the Board members and those they serve alike to forget their own weaknesses and fix their reliance on the power of divine confirmations. Further, it implies accompanying the friends in their endeavours as they develop the capabilities of effective service.

The role of the training institute in the development of these capabilities can hardly be overemphasized. The Auxiliary Board members are to use this powerful instrument to change passive acceptance of the Faith into a passion for teaching. As they generate enthusiasm, they need to help guide it into channels of systematic endeavour. It is in this context of systematic action that fostering sound individual initiative and promoting united collective action become two complementary aims ever engaging the Auxiliary Board member.

One of the greatest challenges before all the institutions of the Faith during this Formative Age is the development of local communities, communities that are characterized by tolerance and love and guided by a strong sense of purpose and a collective will. It is these communities that serve as the environment in which the capacities of all components—men, women, youth and children—are developed and their powers are multiplied in unified action.

At the heart of the community must function a strong Local Spiritual Assembly. When a community is blessed with such an institution, the earnest collaboration between the Auxiliary Board members and the Local Assembly generates the dynamics of a joyous and active life conducive to spiritual transformation and systematic growth. Together, while each works within the sphere of activity assigned to it, these institutions create an atmosphere of learning and disciplined behaviour, characterized by patience and forbearance toward mistakes. They build and maintain unity of thought and action in an environment free of excessive criticism, of backbiting, of conflict and contention, which at the same time welcomes the expression of concern on the part of every believer. Through wise

counsel and loving support, they educate the friends to hearken to the Assembly's decisions and to align their behaviour with the exigencies of harmonious community life.

An essential feature of the culture that the two institutions strive to create is a transformed attitude towards material means. Bahá'í life, whether individual or collective, should be marked by generosity of spirit. The Auxiliary Board members promote this spirit as they educate the members of the community about the funds of the Faith, instilling in them the desire to give sacrificially and helping them to experience its liberating effects.

Both the Auxiliary Board member for Protection and the Auxiliary Board member for Propagation take it upon themselves to ensure that proper attention is devoted to the various components of the community. They see to it that current impediments to the full participation of women in the larger society are, one by one, removed from the Bahá'í community. They nurture the habits of scholarship among the friends and the spirit of tolerance that it needs in order to flourish. They keep before everyone's eyes the imperative of the spiritual education of children and do everything in their power to help establish and maintain regular classes for the children. And, with complete confidence in the capacity of youth for heroic service to the Cause, they assist them in realizing their full potential as vital agents for the expansion of the Faith and the transformation of society.

It is clear that such a formidable set of responsibilities cannot be discharged properly by one or two individuals in relation to a growing number of local communities. It is here that the significance of the freedom given the Auxiliary Board members to name assistants for a wide variety of tasks, to direct them and to lovingly supervise their activities becomes evident. Oftentimes, the work of the Board members is not carried out in the context of communities that enjoy the leadership of a mature Spiritual Assembly. In a community where the Local Assembly is at the very early stages of its development, the role of the assistants in promoting the establishment of study groups, devotional meetings, classes for the spiritual education of children, and the Nineteen Day Feast is even more crucial. Further, the Auxiliary Board members give attention to strengthening the Local Spiritual Assemblies, helping them to master the art of consultation, to gain confidence in making decisions, to adhere courageously to principle, and to learn how to mobilize the friends in unified action.

This challenging conception of the work of the Auxiliary Board members calls for a fundamental departure from limited assumptions about social order which, in the world today, determine administrative theory and practice. For it aspires to infuse every act, individual and collective, with spiritual meaning. It places the sacred at the heart of community life, making it the focus of all reflection on activity. Great indeed is the power latent in any unified Bahá'í community no matter how small it may initially be, no matter how meager the resources available to it. Great, too, are the confirmations that descend on the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants as they selflessly dedicate themselves to releasing this power.

Formulation and Implementation of Plans

With the opening of the fourth epoch of the Formative Age, a procedure was activated whereby national plans are formulated in joint consultation between National Spiritual Assemblies and Continental Counsellors. This development ensures two significant benefits: It enables each institution to draw on the experience and insight particular to the other, thereby making available to the planning process two distinct channels of information from two levels of Bahá'í administration; and it also assures to the Counsellors a necessary familiarity with the background, rationale, and content of national plans, which as a matter of principle they are expected to support.

Creating a national plan involves far more than consultation between the Counsellors and the National Assembly. Excellent results can be achieved, for example, by holding consultative meetings among the various institutions in a country and with the active supporters of the Faith to discuss fully the possible provisions of the plan and their implications. Once the major elements of the national plan have been identified, it is desirable for the planning process to move quickly to the regional level, and subsequently to the level of smaller areas and finally to the local community. The balance that can be achieved in this process between nationally sponsored campaigns and grassroots efforts is a necessary condition for success.

National plans, formulated in the context of the global plans of the Faith, serve as the framework within which the friends can undertake

action. Through them, National Assemblies not only set goals to be pursued by themselves and their agencies, but also give direction to the believers, define for them priorities and areas of action, and elicit from them wholehearted response to the directives of the Universal House of Justice. Accordingly, they adopt measures to provide resources—literature, pioneers and travelling teachers, regional and national events, and funds as required—to support the initiatives of the friends.

The plans of action that Regional Councils, Area Teaching Committees and Local Spiritual Assemblies devise in the ensuing process need to go beyond the mere enumeration of goals to include an analysis of approaches to be adopted and lines of action to be followed. Indeed, at this level, planning and implementation must go hand in hand. If learning is to be the primary mode of operation in a community, then visions, strategies, goals and methods have to be re-examined time and again. As tasks are accomplished, obstacles removed, resources multiplied and lessons learned, modifications have to be made in goals and approaches, but in a way that continuity of action is maintained.

The involvement of the Auxiliary Board members in this process of design and implementation is multifaceted. They contribute to deliberations in which the worldwide aims and accomplishments of the Faith are analysed, the condition of society and the forces operating within it are examined, opportunities and needs are detected. They bring their knowledge of the Faith to bear on consultations that generate shared vision and strategies for growth. Their familiarity with the friends and their talents, particularly as these are developed through the efforts of the training institute, enables them to draw attention to the characteristics of plans of action that are realistic and within the grasp of the believers. The network of assistants they each can name provides them with the means for stimulating activity at the local level and following it to completion. And above all, the love and respect in which they are held create for them the opportunity to act as standard-bearers and lead the community in action.

The Fund

Occupied as it is in the promotion of spiritual and material civilization, the institution of the Counsellors is naturally concerned with the multiplication and management of material means. The Counsellors have a keen interest

in all the funds of the Faith, and the Auxiliary Board members make every effort to educate the believers, new and old, on the spiritual significance of contributing to the Fund. They also help develop in the various institutions and agencies of the community the capacity to expend funds in a judicious and effective manner. When a National Assembly requires subsidy from the Bahá'í International Fund to meet its annual expenses, the Universal House of Justice asks for the comments of a Counsellor who works closely with that Assembly. The Counsellors also have at their disposal a number of subvention funds which enable them to supplement the finances of National Spiritual Assemblies when there are special needs or opportunities that cannot otherwise be met.

As to the expenses of the institution itself, in a message dated 6 April 1954, the Guardian called for the initiation of five Continental Bahá'í Funds. These Funds, now well established, support the activities of the Counsellors and their auxiliaries—their travels and their administrative expenses—and are managed each by one member of the Board appointed the Trustee of the Continental Fund by the Universal House of Justice.

One of the inestimable bounties of contributing to the funds of the Faith is the opportunity it provides to respond to the call of Bahá'u'lláh to deputize others who may teach in one's stead. Deputization funds have been established at all levels—local, national and international—to provide a link between those wishing to deputize and those eager to arise and serve in the teaching field. The International Deputization Fund is administered by the International Teaching Centre, which receives recommendations from the Continental Counsellors with respect to its allocation. In its 1996 *Riḍván* message, the Universal House of Justice stated that deputizing a teacher serving a training institute is one means of fulfilling such responsibility, and it opened up the possibility of contributing through the Continental Fund for this purpose. Auxiliary Board members and their assistants who operate at the grassroots of the community are in an ideal position to motivate the believers to respond to the call for deputization and to provide them with detailed information about current needs, making their presentations immediately relevant to the interest of the friends.

Protection of the Cause

The pivot of the oneness of humankind is the power of the Covenant, and this power quickens every distinguishing element of Bahá'í life. It is in the context of this unique characteristic of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation that the institution of the Counsellors approaches its sacred duty to protect the Faith. Auxiliary Board members, particularly those assigned to protection, have to be ever conscious of the imperative need for a centre on which all must focus: 'Abdu'l-Bahá the Centre of the Covenant and His designated successors, the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice.

In discharging their obligations related to protection, the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members endeavour to nourish the roots of certitude, fan the flame of an all-embracing love in the hearts of the friends, combat the age-old habit of conflict and contention and fortify bonds of friendship and unity, promote adherence to principle and the ethical standards enshrined in the Teachings, raise the believers' sight above the limitations of self-centredness that they may dedicate their energies to the welfare of the human race, and strengthen their allegiance to the Order of Bahá'u'lláh. Helping the believers to meet high moral standards does not require prying into their private lives. The nature of this responsibility is essentially educative. The loving advice Board members offer Local Assemblies, on the one hand, and the warm fellowship they and their assistants cultivate with the friends, on the other, are ready means through which they are able to advance this educational process. The cumulative effect of these efforts, combined with the benefits the friends derive from formal courses, for instance those offered by the training institute, contributes greatly to the creation of healthy and vibrant local communities. This educational process includes the imposition of sanctions by the Spiritual Assemblies, whenever it becomes absolutely necessary. In such cases the advice of the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members to the Assembly can be of particular value.

Although deepening the friends' understanding of the Covenant and increasing their love and loyalty to it are of paramount importance, the duties of the Auxiliary Board members for Protection do not end here. The Board members must remain ever vigilant, monitoring the actions of those who, driven by the promptings of ego, seek to sow the seeds of doubt in the minds of the friends and undermine the Faith. In general, when-

ever believers become aware of such problems, they should immediately contact whatever institution they feel moved to turn to, whether it be a Counsellor, an Auxiliary Board member, the National Spiritual Assembly or their own Local Assembly. It then becomes the duty of that institution to ensure that the report is fed into the correct channels and that all the other institutions affected are promptly informed. Not infrequently, the responsibility will fall on an Auxiliary Board member, in coordination with the Assembly concerned, to take some form of action in response to the situation. This involvement will include counselling the believer in question; warning him, if necessary, of the consequences of his actions; and bringing to the attention of the Counsellors the gravity of the situation, which may call for their intervention. Naturally, the Board member has to exert every effort to counteract the schemes and arrest the spread of the influence of those few who, despite attempts to guide them, eventually break the Covenant.

The need to protect the Faith from the attacks of its enemies may not be generally appreciated by the friends, particularly in places where attacks have been infrequent. However, it is certain that such opposition will increase, become concerted, and eventually universal. The writings clearly foreshadow not only an intensification of the machinations of internal enemies, but a rise in the hostility and opposition of its external enemies, whether religious or secular, as the Cause pursues its onward march towards ultimate victory. Therefore, in the light of the warnings of the Guardian, the Auxiliary Boards for Protection should keep “constantly” a “watchful eye” on those “who are known to be enemies, or to have been put out of the Faith”, discreetly investigate their activities, alert intelligently the friends to the opposition inevitably to come, explain how each crisis in God’s Faith has always proved to be a blessing in disguise, and prepare them for the “dire contest which is destined to range the Army of Light against the forces of darkness”.

Coordination and the Provision of Resources

The work of the Counsellors and their deputies is distinguished by the complementarity and interplay of two capacities. On the one hand, the members of this institution have the latitude as individuals to observe, to analyse, to arrive at conclusions, and to formulate advice to others and

plans of action for themselves. On the other hand, the worldwide activity of these officers of the Faith displays a coherence that is in consonance with the continual guidance of the Universal House of Justice. This coherence is achieved through ongoing interaction between the Continental Counsellors and the International Teaching Centre.

In coordinating, stimulating and directing the Continental Boards of Counsellors, the Teaching Centre makes available to them a number of resources. These include the services of individuals with specific expertise, as well as several funds—for deputizing pioneers and travelling teachers, for subsidizing literature, for assisting teaching projects and growth programmes, for supporting the operations of training institutes—which the Teaching Centre allocates either directly for a project or in lump sums to be expended at the discretion of the Boards of Counsellors. The provision of these resources enables the institution of the Counsellors to assist the believers to respond to the exigencies of a dynamic and expanding community.

A resource made available to the Counsellors by the International Teaching Centre and through them to the community at large is an accumulating store of wisdom born of experience—the experience of a highly diverse community dedicated to the creation of a new civilization. Through the network of Counsellors, Auxiliary Board members and assistants, the Teaching Centre can observe the workings of individual and collective endeavours, analysing their methods and approaches, and introducing the conclusions it draws into the processes of the systematic growth of the Faith. Thus in the institution of the Counsellors we have a system through which the lessons learned in the remotest spots on the globe can be shared with the entire body of the believers, enriching consultation, stimulating experimentation and inspiring confidence that the great enterprise in which the Bahá'í world is engaged is assured of success.

Some Specific Aspects of the Functioning of the Institution

The International Teaching Centre

- ✽ In making decisions, the International Teaching Centre acts as a corporate body. However, the discharge of its duties also requires its members to travel. During their travels, the International Counsellors will at times present the views of the Teaching Centre and at others offer general advice and encouragement.
- ✽ The International Teaching Centre works principally through the Continental Counsellors in accomplishing its objectives; its advice to the Counsellors enables them and their auxiliaries to draw on its insights in their interactions with the friends. Thus its access to Spiritual Assemblies and individual Bahá'ís, apart from certain international pioneers and travelling teachers, is indirect. The Teaching Centre does not correspond with Spiritual Assemblies or Regional Councils. If it receives letters from them, or from individuals that are not concerned with pioneering or travel-teaching, it refers them to the Universal House of Justice.
- ✽ Among the structures that help facilitate the efforts of the International Teaching Centre and the Continental Counsellors in the promotion of pioneering and travel-teaching are the Continental Pioneer Committees, which work under the Teaching Centre's direction. Their functions reinforce those of the National Spiritual Assemblies and their agencies.
- ✽ The correspondence of the International Teaching Centre with the Continental Counsellors is intended for their guidance and information and as a resource that assists them in carrying out their duties. In consulting with a National Spiritual Assembly, a Counsellor may decide to share a letter from the Teaching Centre in its entirety, or parts thereof, with the

Assembly. But he or she may also choose not to do so in order, for instance, to avoid the impression that the Assembly is being induced to give greater attention to the views propounded.

- ☼ Should circumstances prevent the Universal House of Justice from making new appointments at the end of any five-year term, the International Teaching Centre will continue to function until such time as appointments can be made.

Continental Counsellors

- ☼ Within the lines of policy set by the Universal House of Justice, each Continental Board of Counsellors has wide discretion to decide such matters as the division of its continental area into zones and the delineation of the boundaries of the zones. While there is great value in the meeting of a group of Counsellors to consult on the conditions and needs of countries in a specific zone, care should be taken that undue emphasis on zonal groups not turn them into rigid structures.
- ☼ Each Board of Counsellors determines the procedures in accordance with which its members are to administer the work of the Auxiliary Boards, travel in the area under the jurisdiction of the Board, relate to National Spiritual Assemblies, and interact with Regional Councils, Local Spiritual Assemblies and individuals.
- ☼ Each Board makes arrangements for the handling of its correspondence, designates its official address and establishes a central office and, if need be, auxiliary offices. Documents pertaining to the purchase or rent of property for offices and ownership of equipment may be held in the name of the Board of Counsellors, if it is legally acceptable, and if not, in the name of a Spiritual Assembly or a trusted individual. As to legal recognition, at present it is adequate for the Continental Boards to benefit from the recognition granted to National Spiritual Assemblies.
- ☼ The work of the Board's offices should be carried on in the name of the Continental Board of Counsellors and not in the name of the office itself. The letters of the Board of Counsellors are each signed by one of

the Counsellors on its behalf and not with the impersonal designation: "Continental Board of Counsellors".

- ✽ Both the Continental Boards of Counsellors, and the individual members thereof, correspond directly with the Bahá'í World Centre on any number of issues related to the work of the institution. Under normal circumstances, all such correspondence is sent to the International Teaching Centre, which shares it with the Universal House of Justice and its agencies at the World Centre as needed. The Counsellors may also write to the Universal House of Justice, or any of its agencies, as individual believers. In addition, they may correspond directly with the Office of Social and Economic Development at the World Centre, whether in the capacity of Counsellors or as individual believers, on matters related to development.
- ✽ Counsellors may correspond with National Spiritual Assemblies outside their continent as needs may arise.
- ✽ A Counsellor can send a newsletter to a group of Auxiliary Board members and their assistants or address a circular letter to the Local Spiritual Assemblies or the believers in an area. However, if a Counsellor were to prepare a document in a newsletter format for regular distribution to the believers in a community, this would cause confusion in the minds of the friends. Bulletins put out by the Continental Board of Counsellors, as by National Spiritual Assemblies themselves, are not subject to review by a reviewing committee; neither are the bulletins published and distributed by Auxiliary Board members for their assistants. Nevertheless, it is desirable to keep the National Assembly informed of such publications.
- ✽ The files of the members of the Continental Boards of Counsellors and Auxiliary Boards belong to the institution; they are not to be regarded as personal files. A Board of Counsellors needs to ensure that provisions are in place for the proper upkeep of its files and for the disposition of the materials gathered by those friends whose term of service on the Boards has come to an end.
- ✽ The statement that the Counsellors are free from those administrative functions assigned to elected bodies does not mean that they have no administrative duties. The Counsellors carry out numerous such tasks related

to the operation of their offices, the funds at their disposal, and the work of the Auxiliary Board members. Further, they may be given assignments by the Universal House of Justice which require them to assume temporarily administrative functions normally exercised by an elected body.

- ☼ Counsellors may be appointed Deputies of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.
- ☼ Should the membership of a community drop to nine, a Counsellor may serve temporarily on the Local Spiritual Assembly, and as an officer if so elected, until a replacement is available.
- ☼ If at any time and for any reason, communication with the Bahá'í World Centre is cut off, the Counsellors in each continent, collectively and individually, are to assist National Spiritual Assemblies to ensure the continuation of the teaching work and the normal administration of the Faith without interruption until communications can be restored.
- ☼ Should it prove unfeasible at the end of any five-year term for the Universal House of Justice to review and renew the membership of the Continental Boards, the Boards are to continue to discharge their responsibilities, even if one or more of their members are unable to function, until propitious conditions prevail for the House of Justice to consider new appointments.
- ☼ As appointed officers of the Faith, the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members should receive the respect of the friends. Regarding the use of the word "Counsellor" to refer to a particular member of a Continental Board of Counsellors, there is no objection to doing this. However, the exaggerated use of titles related to these ranks is undesirable. The title should not become inseparable from a Counsellor's personal name, as would be the case of referring to a member of the Board of Counsellors as, for example, "Counsellor Jones". Nor is it advisable to address them simply as "Counsellor".
- ☼ It is natural that at times, for example, in introducing someone, his or her past services as a member of a Board of Counsellors would be mentioned. However, it should be understood that "Former Counsellor" is not a title carried by a person.

Auxiliary Board Members

- ✧ It is not necessary for a Continental Board of Counsellors to consult with National Spiritual Assemblies on specific appointments of Auxiliary Board members. The decision whether or not to do so is left entirely to the Counsellors.
- ✧ The Board of Counsellors can make changes in the membership of an Auxiliary Board at any time during the five-year term of office, if it finds that, for whatever reason, an Auxiliary Board member is unable to carry out the assigned functions.
- ✧ The question as to which of the two Boards—Propagation or Protection—a Local Spiritual Assembly or individual believer should turn to on a particular issue is not a matter to be regulated, but can be gradually clarified as experience is gained at the local level. If an Auxiliary Board member feels that a matter would have been better referred to his or her colleague, this could easily be arranged.
- ✧ While membership on an Auxiliary Board should be regarded as a valid reason for resignation from a National Spiritual Assembly, if there are special circumstances for which the Assembly feels it would be detrimental to the interests of the Faith for a Board member to resign, but he or she insists on doing so, the matter should be referred to the Universal House of Justice. Pending its decision, the Board member should continue his or her membership on the National Assembly and explain the situation to the Continental Board of Counsellors.
- ✧ There may be special circumstances within a country that make it necessary for a believer to serve both on an Auxiliary Board and on a committee, or even on the National Spiritual Assembly or a Regional Council, if elected. In each instance, this is seen as a temporary measure, put in place at the instruction of the Universal House of Justice.
- ✧ There are a number of situations that can arise related to Auxiliary Board members and the electoral process which are left to the decision of the National Spiritual Assembly. These include the procedure to be followed if

an Auxiliary Board member declines to serve as a delegate, when elected; whether it is permissible to ask Auxiliary Board members to serve as tellers; and the timing of the election of officers when an Auxiliary Board member elected to the Assembly asks for time to choose one or the other avenue of service. A delegate who is appointed to an Auxiliary Board may continue to serve as a delegate until the next National Convention.

- ✧ It is preferable for an Auxiliary Board member not to be elected as an officer of a unit convention; however, if so elected, he or she may accept, without having to resign from the Auxiliary Board.
- ✧ A ballot in the election of a Spiritual Assembly or Regional Council or for the delegates to a National Convention should not be invalidated because it contains the name of a member of an Auxiliary Board.
- ✧ Auxiliary Board members may be appointed Deputies or Representatives of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.
- ✧ As with the Counsellors, should the membership of a community drop to nine, an Auxiliary Board member may serve temporarily on the Local Spiritual Assembly, and as an officer if elected, until a replacement is available. An Auxiliary Board member need not ask for permission to serve on a Local Assembly under these circumstances, but should notify the Board of Counsellors accordingly.

Assistants

- ✧ There is no objection to the appointment of youth as assistants to Auxiliary Board members. The matter is left to the discretion of the Counsellors.
- ✧ Officers of elected bodies may be appointed assistants to Auxiliary Board members. Much depends upon local circumstances, and members of the Auxiliary Boards are to exercise wisdom and discretion in making such appointments.
- ✧ It is not appropriate for Auxiliary Board members to appoint assistants to help them solely in doing clerical and office work.

- ✱ A Propagation or Protection Board member in an area may use the services of an assistant appointed by the other member, provided it is cleared with him or her first. The two Board members can arrive at an understanding between them so that every case need not be discussed separately.
- ✱ While it would not be wise to give one assistant a regular supervisory role over other assistants, there is no reason to prevent a member of the Auxiliary Board from asking one of his or her assistants, as and when a need may arise, to extend help, provide guidance, and deepen the knowledge and understanding of other assistants.
- ✱ Assistants who are members of a Spiritual Assembly, Regional Council, or committee do not function as assistants in the context of that membership, and they have the same duty to observe the confidentiality of its consultations as does any other member.

Interactions with National, Regional and Local Administrative Bodies

- ✱ Although ordinarily Counsellors are not in contact with national committees, a National Spiritual Assembly may authorize a direct relationship between the two for a special purpose and for a certain period of time.
- ✱ Normally in deliberations between the Counsellors—individually, in groups, or as an entire Board—and a National Spiritual Assembly, the chairman of the Assembly presides. There may be circumstances in which the Assembly invites one of the Counsellors to chair a session. When several National Spiritual Assemblies are represented in a meeting called by the Counsellors, it would be appropriate for one of the Counsellors to chair the consultation.
- ✱ It is natural for the friends to turn to the Counsellors for advice in case of need, even if the individuals concerned are members of the National Spiritual Assembly. This does not, of course, mean that the Counsellors would encourage the National Assembly members to regularly share with them matters which are the direct concern of the Assembly.

- ✧ It is within the discretion of a National Spiritual Assembly to share its minutes, or parts thereof, with the Counsellors. However, it is inappropriate for a Continental Board of Counsellors to share minutes of its meetings with National Spiritual Assemblies. If the Board of Counsellors agrees, a National Spiritual Assembly may share copies of its minutes with the Auxiliary Board members in the country.
- ✧ A Spiritual Assembly or Regional Council may decide to include in its minutes, or to attach to them as an appendix, a record of advice or information given orally to it by a Counsellor. If the Counsellor wishes to review the wording of such a record for accuracy, this courtesy should of course be extended to him or her. Such a verification is clearly not the same thing as submitting the minutes themselves to the approval of an external authority.
- ✧ Although a National Spiritual Assembly may decide to encourage the Local Assemblies under its jurisdiction to share their minutes with the Auxiliary Board members in their area in order to develop close communication, Local Assemblies are not required to do so. This is left to their discretion.
- ✧ The Counsellors do not receive instructions about their work from National Spiritual Assemblies. However, as individual believers, they are always under the jurisdiction of the National Spiritual Assembly wherever they may happen to be. If a National Assembly learns of specific instances when something said or done by a Counsellor may be harmful to the work of the Cause, it should deal with the problem promptly by discussing the matter lovingly but frankly with the Counsellors, citing specific examples.
- ✧ If a National Spiritual Assembly believes that the actions of an Auxiliary Board member are giving rise to problems, it should refer the matter to the Counsellors rather than approach the Board member directly. But where the matter is purely personal, it may be preferable for the Assembly to take it up with the Board member initially in the hope that the problem can be solved confidentially, although, of course, any serious problem with a Board member should be reported to the Counsellors in any case.
- ✧ An Auxiliary Board member is subject to the same sanctions as any other believer in connection with his or her actions as an individual Bahá'í. In the first instance, however, before the National Spiritual Assembly takes such an action, the matter needs to be discussed with the Counsellors.

- ✧ If a member of the Auxiliary Board finds any problem with the workings of the National Spiritual Assembly or one of its agencies which he or she feels requires attention, it is his or her obligation to report it to the Counsellors, who in turn, if they agree, will handle the matter with the National Assembly involved.
- ✧ The administration and education of Auxiliary Board members are duties discharged by the Counsellors, and the training of assistants is a direct concern of the Auxiliary Board members. A National Spiritual Assembly cannot assume these responsibilities. If the Counsellors and a National Assembly conclude in their consultations that in order for an Auxiliary Board member to work effectively in a particular area of endeavour some specific training is required, this could be arranged by the Counsellors.
- ✧ It is not necessary for an Auxiliary Board member to deputize an assistant to meet with a Local Spiritual Assembly. Assistants may meet with Local Spiritual Assemblies as they pursue the specific tasks assigned to them by the Board members. There are, of course, occasions when an Auxiliary Board member asks an assistant to meet with an Assembly on a particular matter.
- ✧ An assistant may undertake a specific task requested by a National or Local Spiritual Assembly in his or her capacity as an individual believer, but not as an assistant.
- ✧ It is inappropriate for assistants to meet with the National Spiritual Assembly in their capacity as assistants.
- ✧ Auxiliary Board members do not direct Local Spiritual Assemblies or individual believers in their activities, but are entirely free to make suggestions and recommendations they judge wise and necessary. Further, they help Local Assemblies to achieve the level of spiritual unity, activity and development enjoined in the writings. It falls on the Auxiliary Board members to build up a warm and loving relationship with Local Spiritual Assemblies and believers so that they will spontaneously turn to them for advice and assistance.

- ✧ In the relationship between Auxiliary Board members and Local Spiritual Assemblies, to overstress distinctions is not only unnecessary but detrimental to the spirit of loving collaboration and encouragement which is essential to the progress of the Faith in every locality. The differentials of rank, functions or procedures between agencies of the Bahá'í administration are meant to canalize, not obstruct, the work of the Cause; all these features of the administration are properly viewed in the context of humble service to the Blessed Perfection, which is the loftiest objective of all who gather under the banner of the Most Great Name.
- ✧ It should not be assumed that collaboration between the Counsellors and their auxiliaries, on the one hand, and Assemblies and their agencies, on the other, implies that they must be actively involved in the same project at the same time. No doubt, in many cases simultaneous participation would be useful and even necessary, but the work of the Counsellors, of the National Spiritual Assembly and of all their subsidiary institutions can well be carried on separately and at different times, provided that they do not conflict and that information on the work done and the results achieved is shared fully and freely.
- ✧ In general, it is not the task of Auxiliary Board members, but rather that of the Spiritual Assemblies, to deal with the personal problems of individuals and conflicts between them and with disciplinary matters. However, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants are vital elements of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, with functions which include the counselling of believers. If a believer approaches an Auxiliary Board member or an assistant with a personal matter, it is for the Board member or assistant to decide whether to give advice or ask the believer to turn to the Spiritual Assembly.
- ✧ In reaching a decision on whether or not to pioneer, a believer is free to consult with the National Spiritual Assembly and its executive agencies or with a Counsellor or Auxiliary Board member. Any one of these individuals or agencies is similarly free to initiate such consultation and offer suggestions, leaving the final decision in the matter to the believer concerned. The role of the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members in the promotion of pioneering is of particular significance. The Board members are in an especially advantageous position to provide the friends with information from the documents at their disposal regarding the needs of the Faith.

Once a believer decides to enter this field of service, he or she should be referred by the Board member to the proper channel, whether it be a national agency or the Continental Pioneer Committee, which will handle the administrative details.

- ✱ Responsibility for administering travel-teaching projects falls on the National Assembly and its attendant agencies. This does not preclude contacts between travelling teachers and the Counsellors or Auxiliary Board members. Indeed, such contact can assist both parties provided it is recognized that administrative authority in these matters rests with the Assemblies and their committees.
- ✱ With their continental perspective, the Counsellors can readily identify opportunities for collaboration between neighbouring national communities, especially in areas near their borders, and even across continental boundaries. In such instances the Counsellors are encouraged to arrange consultations between the relevant National Spiritual Assemblies and help them design effective collaborative ventures.
- ✱ In parts of certain continents, the distribution of Bahá'í literature represents a formidable challenge, in which case the Board of Counsellors may create a mechanism attached to the office of one of its members to disseminate information about literature and monitor the situation in the countries affected. In this capacity, the Counsellor involved would be free to communicate with Publishing Trusts as needed.
- ✱ Counsellors are alert to opportunities in their areas, both inside and outside the Bahá'í community, for the believers to become involved in activities of social and economic development. They focus both on encouraging individual initiative in this field of endeavour and on creating the capacity within the appropriate organizations to design and implement programmes. Their work entails consultation with National Spiritual Assemblies and Regional Councils on the role that social and economic development efforts are to play in the growth of the community and on how they are to complement activities for expansion and consolidation. The Counsellors' intimate involvement with training institutes enables them to help these agencies undertake training in the area of social and economic development and even to implement projects, when the institutes are strong enough to do so.

Elections and Conventions

- ✧ Counsellors present at a National Convention are accorded the freedom to participate in the deliberations. Counsellors also have the right of the floor at the International Convention, but, since there is so little time and so many delegates, they refrain from exercising this right, for the most part.
- ✧ If no Counsellors can attend a National Convention, they may appoint for that Convention one or two Auxiliary Board members to act as their special deputies. Auxiliary Board members present at a National Convention who are not deputized by the Counsellors do not have the privilege of the floor unless this is given to them by the Convention.
- ✧ The Counsellors and the National Spiritual Assemblies need to work together to ensure that the sanctity of Bahá'í elections is not violated. Educating the believers in the fundamentals of Bahá'í elections during the year and acquainting the delegates with the sacred nature of their responsibility are activities that can be performed within the framework of collaboration between the two institutions. Auxiliary Board members and their assistants may participate in efforts to help the friends in the elections of Local Assemblies, Regional Councils and delegates. One practice that has proved fruitful is for the National Spiritual Assembly to arrange for a meeting on the day or evening before the National Convention, during which one or more Counsellors speak to the delegates on the spiritual significance of Bahá'í elections and the duties of a delegate.
- ✧ The Counsellors should watch carefully for practices which might be construed, correctly or otherwise, to be electioneering. When such practices are observed, the Counsellors should bring the matter to the attention of the National Spiritual Assembly in an appropriate manner. In the event that there are significant departures from established Bahá'í procedure in the conduct of a National Convention, the Counsellors or their representatives attending the Convention should advise the Bahá'í World Centre.

Conferences

- ✱ There is wide scope for Counsellors to call special gatherings involving a number of national communities, but such conferences should be approved at the Bahá'í World Centre before any implementation. Furthermore, it is appropriate for the Counsellors to suggest to the National Assemblies concerned the holding of international conferences, for example, international youth conferences, and to encourage activities which would generate the enthusiasm needed for the events.
- ✱ The Counsellors may hold conferences for the Auxiliary Board members in an entire continent or any portion thereof. It may be desirable at times to invite National Assembly members to meet with Board members at these conferences, assisting them if necessary from the Continental Fund.
- ✱ Within a national community, conferences and seminars are called by the National Spiritual Assembly or its committees, and not by the Counsellors or Auxiliary Board members. This is to avoid an impression of two parallel series of conferences in the same country, one of which is under the aegis of the National Assembly and the other under that of the Counsellors.
- ✱ An Auxiliary Board member may invite the members of a few neighbouring Local Spiritual Assemblies within his or her area of responsibility to a conference for consultation on projects or problems affecting them. Clearly Auxiliary Board members can also call meetings for their assistants on their own initiative.

Budgets, Subvention Funds and Properties

- ✱ Counsellors are free to consult with a National Spiritual Assembly about the relative magnitudes of the allocations from the National Fund for various purposes.
- ✱ An important aspect of the consultations between Counsellors and a National Spiritual Assembly is the use of subvention funds at the disposition of the Counsellors. While the purposes of these various funds are each well

defined, there is a great deal of flexibility in their application. Funds to help in the promotion of literature and audiovisual materials can be used, for example, to subsidize partially or fully the purchase, translation, and production of various items; to develop core literature programmes; or to enhance the capacity of Publishing Trusts and agencies to produce and distribute literature and audiovisual materials in an efficient and financially viable manner. Subvention funds for the promotion of teaching can be made available to enable a National Assembly to take advantage of unexpected immediate opportunities, to assist long-term endeavours, or even to support programmes for the growth of the Faith in an entire area. Other funds are placed at the disposition of the Counsellors for the operation of training institutes, the deputization of some of their staff, and for small capital expenses. The mechanisms for the disbursement of all these funds are established by the International Teaching Centre, as needs dictate.

- ✧ Counsellors or their deputies may consult with Regional Councils in formulating their annual budgets, which are then submitted to the National Spiritual Assembly for its approval. It is also within the discretion of the Counsellors to allocate financial assistance to a Regional Council from the subvention funds at their disposition.
- ✧ The administration of Bahá'í properties, in all its aspects, is an issue to be dealt with by National Spiritual Assemblies and does not normally fall within the area of the Counsellors' responsibility. However, if at any time the Counsellors should observe that matters related to a given property are proving to be prejudicial to the best interests of the Faith, they have the obligation to bring their concerns to the attention of the National Assembly.

The Continental Fund

- ✧ Each Continental Board of Counsellors submits its budget to the International Teaching Centre at the beginning of the year. If the projected contributions to the Continental Fund do not meet the expected expenditures, the Board receives assistance from the Bahá'í International Fund.
- ✧ A Continental Board of Counsellors is, in principle, free to contribute from the Continental Fund to any Bahá'í Fund or undertaking as it wishes. It

will, naturally, hesitate to do so if its operations are being subsidized by the Bahá'í International Fund.

- ✱ There is no objection to the Counsellors' sharing, partly or wholly, the details of the Continental Fund with the National Spiritual Assemblies or the friends in the continent they serve. Although this practice is not encouraged, the decision in such matters lies entirely with the Board of Counsellors itself.
- ✱ National communities are not in the same stage of development, and circumstances vary greatly from one community to another. Thus, in educating the friends on the funds of the Faith, the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members may choose to place emphasis on the Local and National Funds in some areas, while in others they also include the Continental Fund in their general appeal to the friends. It would be permissible, and indeed desirable, for many National and Local Assemblies to call for contributions to the Continental Fund.
- ✱ Auxiliary Board members and their assistants should not ordinarily be involved in the active collection of contributions to the Continental Fund. Such contributions can be made through Local Spiritual Assemblies and the National Spiritual Assembly, as well as directly to the Continental Fund when the Counsellors have made provisions for this. However, an Auxiliary Board member or an assistant who is requested to do so by the friends, particularly in remote areas, may accept from them a contribution for transmittal to the Continental or other Funds, for the sake of convenience.
- ✱ Expenses for the Auxiliary Board members to carry out their work should, if necessary, be met by the Continental Fund. If the need exists, a Board of Counsellors may decide to provide a budget to an Auxiliary Board member so that he or she can serve the Faith full time for a predetermined period. In making this decision, the Counsellors need to consider the long-term implications of such a step.
- ✱ Normally, because of the localized nature of the work of the assistants, they are able to perform their duties without support from the Continental Fund.

- ✱ While it is possible for the friends to channel deputization for a training institute teacher through any Fund that is convenient, the emphasis on the Continental Fund is significant since the Counsellors are in a position to identify institutes needing such support. Earmarked contributions for this purpose channelled through the Local or National Fund would ultimately be turned over to the relevant Continental Fund for disbursement.

THE
LOCAL
SPIRITUAL
ASSEMBLY

A compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and letters written by and on behalf
of Shoghi Effendi

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled September 2017

Establishment and Station

- 1 ...The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather counsellors to the number of Bahá, and should it exceed this number it does not matter. It behoveth them to be the trusted ones of the Merciful among men and to regard themselves as the guardians appointed of God for all that dwell on earth...

Bahá'u'lláh, cited in Bahá'í Administration

- 2 Addressing the nations, the Ancient Beauty ordaineth that in every city in the world a house be established in the name of justice wherein shall gather pure and steadfast souls to the number of the Most Great Name. At this meeting they should feel as if they were entering the Presence of God, inasmuch as this binding command hath flowed from the Pen of Him Who is the Ancient of Days. The glances of God are directed towards this Assembly.

From a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh

- 3 'Abdu'l-Bahá is constantly engaged in ideal communication with any Spiritual Assembly which is instituted through the divine bounty, and the members of which, in the utmost devotion, turn to the divine Kingdom and are firm in the Covenant. To them he is whole-heartedly attached and with them he is linked by everlasting ties...

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 46

- 4 These Spiritual Assemblies are aided by the Spirit of God. Their defender is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Over them He spreadeth His Wings. What bounty is there greater than this? These Spiritual Assemblies are shining lamps and heavenly gardens, from which the fragrances of holiness are diffused over all regions, and the lights of knowledge are shed abroad over all created things. From them the spirit of life streameth in every direction. They, indeed, are the potent sources of the progress of man, at all times and under all conditions.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in God Passes By, sec. XXII

- 5 ...it is of the utmost importance that in accordance with the explicit text of the “Kitáb-i-Aqdas”, the Most Holy Book, in every locality, be it city or hamlet, where the number of adult (21 years and above) declared believers exceeds nine,ⁱ a local “Spiritual Assembly” be forthwith established. To it all local matters pertaining to the Cause must be directly and immediately referred for full consultation and decision. The importance, nay the absolute necessity of these local Assemblies is manifest when we realize that in the days to come they will evolve into the local Houses of Justice...

12 March 1923, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 6 Let us recall His explicit and often repeated assurances that every Assembly elected in that rarefied atmosphere of selflessness and detachment is in truth appointed of God, that its verdict is truly inspired, that one and all should submit to its decision unreservedly and with cheerfulness.

23 February 1924, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 7 Designated as “Spiritual Assemblies”—an appellation that must in the course of time be replaced by their permanent and more descriptive title of “Houses of Justice,” bestowed upon them by the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation; instituted, without any exception, in every city, town and village where nine or more adult believers are resident; annually and directly elected, on the first day of the greatest Bahá'í Festival by all adult believers, men and women alike; invested with an authority rendering them unanswerable for their acts and decisions to those who elect them; solemnly pledged to follow, under all conditions, the dictates of the “Most Great Justice” that can alone usher in the reign of the “Most Great Peace” which Bahá'u'lláh has proclaimed and must ultimately establish; charged with the responsibility of promoting at all times the best interests of the communities within their jurisdiction, of familiarizing them with their plans and activities and of inviting them to offer any recommendations they might wish to make; cognizant of their no less vital task of demonstrating, through association with all liberal and humanitarian movements, the universality and comprehensiveness of their Faith; dissociated entirely from all sectarian organizations, whether religious or secular; assisted by committees annually appointed by, and directly responsible to, them, to each of which a particular branch of Bahá'í activity is assigned for study

i When the number of believers is exactly nine, they constitute themselves as the Local Spiritual Assembly by joint declaration.

and action; supported by local funds to which all believers voluntarily contribute; these Assemblies, the representatives and custodians of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, numbering at the present time, several hundred, and whose membership is drawn from the diversified races, creeds and classes constituting the world-wide Bahá'í community, have, in the course of the last two decades, abundantly demonstrated, by virtue of their achievements, their right to be regarded as the chief sinews of Bahá'í society, as well as the ultimate foundation of its administrative structure.

Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By, sec. XXII

- 8 That the Spiritual Assemblies of today will be placed in time by the Houses of Justice, and are to all intents and purposes identical and not separate bodies, is abundantly confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself. He has in fact in a Tablet addressed to the members of the first Chicago Spiritual Assembly, the first elected Bahá'í body instituted in the United States, referred to them as the members of the "House of Justice" for that city, and has thus with His own pen established beyond any doubt the identity of the present Bahá'í Spiritual Assemblies with the Houses of Justice referred to by Bahá'u'lláh. For reasons which are not difficult to discover, it has been found advisable to bestow upon the elected representatives of Bahá'í communities throughout the world the temporary appellation of Spiritual Assemblies, a term which, as the position and aims of the Bahá'í Faith are better understood and more fully recognized, will gradually be superseded by the permanent and more appropriate designation of House of Justice...

Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

Membership

—Qualifications and Election—

- 9 If we but turn our gaze to the high qualifications of the members of Bahá'í Assemblies ... we are filled with feelings of unworthiness and dismay, and would feel truly disheartened but for the comforting thought that if we rise to play nobly our part every deficiency in our lives will be more than compensated by the all-conquering spirit of His grace and power. Hence it is incumbent upon the chosen delegates to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, the names of only those who can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience...

3 June 1925, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 10 With reference to your next question concerning the qualifications of the members of the Spiritual Assembly: there is a distinction of fundamental importance which should be always remembered in this connection, and this is between the Spiritual Assembly as an institution, and the persons who compose it. These are by no means supposed to be perfect, nor can they be considered as being inherently superior to the rest of their fellow-believers. It is precisely because they are subject to the same human limitations that characterize the other members of the community that they have to be elected every year. The existence of elections is a sufficient indication that Assembly members, though forming part of an institution that is divine and perfect, are nevertheless themselves imperfect. But this does not necessarily imply that their judgement is defective. For as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has repeatedly emphasized Bahá'í Assemblies are under the guidance and protection of God. The elections, especially when annual, give the community a good opportunity to remedy any defect or imperfection from which the Assembly may suffer as a result of the actions of its members. Thus a safe method has been established whereby the quality of membership in Bahá'í Assemblies can be continually raised and improved. But, as already stated,

the institution of the Spiritual Assembly should under no circumstances be identified with, or be estimated merely through, the personal qualifications of the members that compose it.

15 November 1935, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 11 ...I feel that reference to personalities before the election would give rise to misunderstanding and differences. What the friends should do is to get thoroughly acquainted with one another, to exchange views, to mix freely and discuss among themselves the requirements and qualifications for such a membership without reference or application, however indirect, to particular individuals. We should refrain from influencing the opinion of others, of canvassing for any particular individual, but should stress the necessity of getting fully acquainted with the qualifications of membership referred to in our Beloved's Tablets and of learning more about one another through direct, personal experience rather than through the reports and opinions of our friends.

14 May 1927, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í News Letter, no.18, June 1927, p. 9

- 12 These local Spiritual Assemblies will have to be elected directly by the friends, and every declared believer of 21 years and above, far from standing aloof and assuming an indifferent or independent attitude, should regard it his sacred duty to take part, conscientiously and diligently, in the election, the consolidation, and the efficient working of his own local Assembly.

12 March 1923, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 13 ...the elector ... is called upon to vote for none but those whom prayer and reflection have inspired him to uphold ... the practice of nomination, so detrimental to the atmosphere of a silent and prayerful election, is viewed with mistrust inasmuch as it gives the right to the majority of a body that, in itself, under the present circumstances, often constitutes a minority of all the elected delegates, to deny that God-given right of every elector to vote only in favour of those whom he is conscientiously convinced are the most worthy candidates...

27 May 1927, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

Taking Counsel Together

—Functions—

- 14 It is incumbent upon them to take counsel together and to have regard for the interests of the servants of God, for His sake, even as they regard their own interests, and to choose that which is meet and seemly. Thus hath the Lord your God ... commanded you. Beware lest ye put away that which is clearly revealed in His Tablet. Fear God, O ye that perceive!

Bahá'u'lláh, cited in Bahá'í Administration

- 15 Once in session, it behoveth them to converse, on behalf of God's servants, upon the affairs and interests of all. They should, for instance, accord precedence to the teaching of the Cause, inasmuch as it is a matter of supreme importance, so that all people, even as a single soul, may enter within the Tabernacle of divine Unity, and all humanity may become even as a single body. 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.

The teaching of the Cause of God should be considered with a view to what, in the particular conditions of each time and age, is most conducive to its advancement and, similarly, other matters; whatever is then decided upon should be carried into effect. Care, however, should be taken lest aught be implemented contrary to that which hath been sent down in the divine verses in this Revelation of imperishable glory. For whatsoever the one true God—exalted be His glory!—hath prescribed unto His servants, the same is to their best advantage. He, verily, is kinder to you than ye are to yourselves; He, verily, is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.

Should these souls comply with the prescribed conditions, they shall assuredly be aided through His invisible bestowals. This, truly, is an undertaking whose benefit embraceth all.

From a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh

- 16 The prime requisites for them that take counsel together are purity of motive, radiance of spirit, detachment from all else save God, attraction to His Divine Fragrances, humility and lowliness amongst His loved ones, patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold. Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Bahá shall be vouchsafed to them. In this day, assemblies of consultation are of the greatest importance and a vital necessity. Obedience unto them is essential and obligatory. The members thereof must take counsel together in such wise that no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed. The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions. If after discussion a decision be carried unanimously, well and good; but if, the Lord forbid, differences of opinion should arise, a majority of voices must prevail.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Bahá'í Administration

- 17 ...Whenever ye enter the council-chamber, recite this prayer with a heart throbbing with the love of God and a tongue purified from all but His remembrance, that the All-Powerful may graciously aid you to achieve supreme victory: "O God, my God! We are servants of Thine that have turned with devotion to Thy Holy Face, that have detached ourselves from all beside Thee in this glorious Day. We have gathered in this spiritual assembly, united in our views and thoughts, with our purposes harmonized to exalt Thy Word amidst mankind. O Lord, our God! Make us the signs of Thy divine Guidance, the Standards of Thy exalted Faith amongst men, servants to Thy mighty Covenant, O Thou our Lord Most High! Manifestations of Thy Divine Unity in Thine Abhá Kingdom, and resplendent stars shining upon all regions. Lord! Aid us to become seas surging with the billows of Thy wondrous Grace, streams flowing from Thy all-glorious Heights, goodly fruits upon the Tree of Thy heavenly Cause, trees waving through the breezes of Thy Bounty in Thy celestial Vineyard. O God! Make our souls dependent upon the Verses of Thy Divine Unity, our hearts cheered with the outpourings of Thy Grace, that we may unite even as the waves of one sea and become merged together as the rays of Thine effulgent Light; that our thoughts, our views, our feelings may become as

one reality, manifesting the spirit of union throughout the world. Thou art the Gracious, the Bountiful, the Bestower, the Almighty, the Merciful, the Compassionate.”

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Bahá'í Administration

- 18 ...The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the assembly. They must be wholly freed from estrangement and must manifest in themselves the Unity of God, for they are the waves of one sea, the drops of one river, the stars of one heaven, the rays of one sun, the trees of one orchard, the flowers of one garden. Should harmony of thought and absolute unity be non-existent, that gathering shall be dispersed and that assembly be brought to naught. The second condition: They must when coming together turn their faces to the Kingdom on High and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one's views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. The honoured members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another, nay, he must with moderation set forth the truth, and should differences of opinion arise a majority of voices must prevail, and all must obey and submit to the majority. It is again not permitted that any one of the honoured members object to or censure, whether in or out of the meeting, any decision arrived at previously though that decision be not right, for such criticism would prevent any decision from being enforced. 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 ... If this be so regarded, that assembly shall be of God, but otherwise it shall lead to coolness and alienation that proceed from the Evil One...

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Bahá'í Administration

- 19 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. Should they endeavour to fulfil these conditions the Grace of the Holy Spirit

shall be vouchsafed unto them, and that assembly shall become the centre of the Divine blessings, the hosts of Divine confirmation shall come to their aid, and they shall day by day receive a new effusion of Spirit.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Bahá'í Administration

- 20 A perusal of some of the words of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the duties and functions of the Spiritual Assemblies in every land (later to be designated as the local Houses of Justice) emphatically reveals the sacredness of their nature, the wide scope of their activity, and the grave responsibility which rests upon them...

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.

It is incumbent upon them to be vigilant and cautious, discreet and watchful, and protect at all times the Temple of the Cause from the dart of the mischief-maker and the onslaught of the enemy.

They must endeavour to promote amity and concord amongst the friends, efface every lingering trace of distrust, coolness and estrangement from every heart, and secure in its stead an active and whole-hearted cooperation for the service of the Cause.

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 colour, 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 fellow-men...

These rank among the most outstanding obligations of the members of every Spiritual Assembly...

First paragraph: 5 March 1922, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration
Remainder: 12 March 1923, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 21 ...he feels that you should turn to your Local Assembly, in the strictest confidence, and seek their aid and advice. These bodies have the sacred obligation to help, advise, protect, and guide the believers in every way within their power when appealed to—indeed they were established just for the purpose of keeping order and unity and obedience to the law of God amongst the believers.

You should go to them as a child would to its parents...

28 September 1941, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 22 Bahá'u'lláh has given the promise that in every Assembly where unity and harmony prevail, there His glorious spirit will not only be present, but will animate, sustain and guide all the friends in all their deliberations.

It is to unity that the Guardian has been continually calling the friends. For where a united will exists, nothing can effectively oppose and hamper the forces of constructive development.

*17 November 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
Bahá'í News, no. 190, December 1946, p. 1*

- 23 The members of these Assemblies, on their part, must disregard utterly their own likes and dislikes, their personal interests and inclinations, and concentrate their minds upon those measures that will conduce to the welfare and happiness of the Bahá'í Community and promote the common weal.

12 March 1923, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 24 Let us also remember that at the very root of the Cause lies the principle of the undoubted right of the individual to self-expression, his freedom to declare his conscience and set forth his views...

And when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious, and cordial consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote and abide by the voice of the majority, which we are told by our Master to be the voice of truth, never to be challenged, and always to be whole-heartedly enforced. To this voice the friends must heartily respond, and regard it as the only means that can ensure the protection and advancement of the Cause.

23 February 1924, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 25 Bahá'ís are not required to vote on an Assembly against their consciences. It is better if they submit to the majority view and make it unanimous. But they are not forced to. What they must do, however, is to abide by the majority decision, as this is what becomes effective. They must not go around undermining the Assembly by saying they disagreed with the majority. In other words, they must put the Cause first and not their own opinions. He (a Spiritual Assembly member) can ask the Assembly to reconsider a matter, but he has no right to force them or create inharmony because they won't change. Unanimous votes are preferable, but certainly cannot be forced upon Assembly members by artificial methods such as are used by other societies.

*19 October 1947, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi,
Bahá'í News, no. 202, December 1947, p. 3*

- 26 But before the majority of the Assembly comes to a decision, it is not only the right but the sacred obligation of every member to express freely and openly his views, without being afraid of displeasing or alienating any of his fellow-members. In view of this important administrative principle of frank and open consultation, the Guardian would advise you to give up the method of asking other members to voice your opinion and suggestions. This indirect way of expressing your views to the Assembly not only creates an atmosphere of secrecy which is most alien to the spirit of the Cause, but would also lead to many misunderstandings and complications. The Assembly members must have the courage of their convictions, but must also express whole-hearted and unqualified obedience to the well-considered judgement and directions of the majority of their fellow-members.

28 October 1935, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 27 The friends should therefore not feel discouraged at the differences of opinion that may prevail among the members of an Assembly, for these, as experience has shown, and as the Master's words attest, fulfil a valuable function in all Assembly deliberations. But once the opinion of the majority has been ascertained, all the members should automatically and unreservedly obey it, and faithfully carry it out. Patience and restraint, however, should at all times characterize the discussions and deliberations of the elected representatives of the local community, and no fruitless and hair-splitting discussions indulged in, under any circumstances.

18 April 1939, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 28 There is only one principle on which to conduct the work of an Assembly, and that is the supremacy of the will of the majority. The majority decisions must be courageously adopted and carried out by the Assembly, quite regardless of the opinionated adherence to their own views which any minority may cling to.

20 November 1941, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 29 He ... pointed out to them that the attitude of “all for one and one for all” was very incorrect. An Assembly constitutes within its area of jurisdiction the Trustees of the Faith. Its members must at all times put the interests of the Faith above personality and impartially go into any matter brought to its attention. Theoretically it is always possible for a member of an Assembly to be unworthy or insincere. To take the attitude that any blame cast upon or any charge made against an Assembly member is a charge against the body itself is very wrong. An Assembly must protect the Faith and neither blindly accuse nor blindly defend one of its members...

The Bahá'ís must learn to forget personalities and to overcome the desire—so natural in people—to take sides and fight about it. They must also learn to really make use of the great principle of consultation. There is a time set aside at the Nineteen Day Feasts for the Community to express its views and make suggestions to its Assembly; the Assembly and the believers should look forward to this happy period of discussion, and neither fear it nor suppress it. Likewise the Assembly members should fully consult, and in their decisions put the interests of the Cause first and not personalities, the will of the majority prevailing.

...One of the healing remedies Bahá'u'lláh has given to a sick world is the Assembly (which in future will become a House of Justice); its members have very sacred and heavy responsibilities, its power to steer the Community, to protect and assist its members is likewise very great.

30 June 1949, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, The Light of Divine Guidance

Attendance and Resignation

- 30 ...it is only too obvious that unless a member can attend regularly the meetings of his Local Assembly, it would be impossible for him to discharge the duties incumbent upon him, and to fulfil his responsibilities, as a representative of the community. Membership in a Local Spiritual Assembly carries with it, indeed, the obligation and capacity to remain in close touch with local Bahá'í activities, and the ability to attend regularly the sessions of the Assembly.

16 February 1935, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Bahá'í Administration

- 31 ...it is establishing a dangerous precedent to allow Assemblies to put a time limit on non-attendance of their members at meetings of the S.A., beyond which that person is automatically dropped from the Assembly and a vacancy declared ... There should be no time limit fixed by Assemblies beyond which a person is dropped. Every case of prolonged absence from the sessions of the Assembly should be considered separately by that Assembly, and if the person is seen to not want to attend meetings, or to be held away from them indefinitely because of illness or travel, then a vacancy could legitimately be declared and a new member be elected.

Written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í News, no. 208, June 1948, p. 7

- 32 With reference to your question whether it would be permissible for a believer to resign from the Local Assembly: under special circumstances, such as illness, one may do so, but only after, and never before, one has been elected to the membership of the Assembly. Personal differences and disagreements among Assembly members surely afford no sufficient ground for such resignation, and certainly can not justify absence from Assembly meetings. Through the clash of personal opinions, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated, the spark of truth is often ignited, and Divine guidance revealed...

18 April 1939, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 33 The remedy to Assembly inharmony cannot be in the resignation or abstinence of any of its members. It must learn, in spite of disturbing elements, to

continue to function as a whole, otherwise the whole system would become discredited through the introduction of exceptions to the rule.

20 November 1941, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Assembly

—Relation to Believers—

34 Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority, but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand and fellowship, candour and courage on the other.

The duties of those whom the friends have freely and conscientiously elected as their representatives are no less vital and binding than the obligations of those who have chosen them. Their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent. They must regard themselves in no other light but that of chosen instruments for a more efficient and dignified presentation of the Cause of God. They should never be led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles. They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavour by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candour, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they should serve, but also their esteem and real affection. They must at all times avoid the spirit of exclusiveness, the atmosphere of secrecy, free themselves from a domineering attitude, and banish all forms of prejudice and passion from their deliberations. They should, within the limits of wise discretion, take the friends into their confidence, acquaint them with their plans, share with them their problems and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel...

23 February 1924, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 35 The first quality for leadership, both among individuals and Assemblies, is the capacity to use the energy and competence that exists in the rank and file of its followers. Otherwise the more competent members of the group will go at a tangent and try to find elsewhere a field of work and where they could use their energy.

Shoghi Effendi hopes that the Assemblies will do their utmost in planning such teaching activities that every single soul will be kept busy.
30 August 1930, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 36 The administrators of the Faith of God must be like unto shepherds. Their aim should be to dispel all the doubts, misunderstandings and harmful differences which may arise in the community of the believers. And this they can adequately achieve provided they are motivated by a true sense of love for their fellow-brethren coupled with a firm determination to act with justice in all the cases which are submitted to them for their consideration.

9 March 1934, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 37 There is no task more urgently necessary than the assurance of perfect harmony and fellowship among the friends, especially between the Local Assemblies and individual believers. The Local Assemblies should inspire confidence in the individual believers, and these in their turn should express their readiness to fully abide by the decisions and directions of the Local Assembly. The two must learn to co-operate, and to realize that only through such a cooperation can the institutions of the Cause effectively and permanently function. While obedience to the Local Assembly should be unqualified and whole-hearted, yet that body should enforce its decisions in such a way as to avoid giving the impression that it is animated by dictatorial motives. The spirit of the Cause is one of mutual co-operation, and not that of a dictatorship.

28 October 1935, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Believers

—Relation to Assembly—

38 ...It is incumbent upon everyone not to take any step without consulting the Spiritual Assembly, and they must assuredly obey with heart and soul its bidding and be submissive unto it, that things may be properly ordered and well arranged. Otherwise every person will act independently and after his own judgement, will follow his own desire, and do harm to the Cause.
'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Bahá'í Administration

39 ...all matters without any exception whatsoever, regarding the interests of the Cause in ... [a] locality, individually or collectively, should be referred exclusively to the Spiritual Assembly in that locality, which shall decide upon it, unless it be a matter of national interest, in which case it shall be referred to the National Body...
5 March 1922, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

40 In order to avoid division and disruption, that the Cause may not fall a prey to conflicting interpretations, and lose thereby its purity and pristine vigour, that its affairs may be conducted with efficiency and promptness, it is necessary that everyone should conscientiously take an active part in the election of these Assemblies, abide by their decision, enforce their decree, and co-operate with them whole-heartedly in their task of stimulating the growth of the Movement throughout all regions...
12 March 1923, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

41 I fully approve and whole-heartedly and unreservedly uphold the principle to which you refer that personalities should not be made centres around which the community may revolve, but that they should be subordinated under all conditions and however great their merits to the properly constituted Assemblies. You and your co-workers can never overestimate or overemphasize this cardinal principle of Bahá'í Administration.
11 April 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Bahá'í Administration

- 42 Regarding the principle that the Cause must not be allowed to centre around any Bahá'í personality, the Guardian wishes to make it clear that it was never intended that well-qualified individual teachers should not receive from Local Assemblies every encouragement and facilities to address the public. What the Guardian meant was that the personality and the popularity of such a speaker should never be allowed to eclipse the authority, or detract from the influence, of the body of the elected representatives in every local community. Such an individual should not only seek the approval, advice and assistance of the body that represents the Cause in his locality, but should strive to attribute any credit he may obtain to the collective wisdom and capacity of the Assembly under whose jurisdiction he performs his services. Assemblies and not individuals constitute the bedrock on which the Administration is built. Everything else must be subordinated to, and be made to serve and advance the best interests of, these elected custodians and promoters of the Law of Bahá'u'lláh.

12 August 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Principles of Bahá'í Administration

- 43 Regarding consultation: Any person can refer a matter to the Assembly for consultation whether the other party wishes to or not. In matters which affect the Cause the Assembly should, if it deems it necessary, intervene even if both sides don't want it to, because the whole purpose of the Assemblies is to protect the Faith, the Communities and the individual Bahá'ís as well.

17 October 1944, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í News, no. 177, November 1945, p. 2

- 44 The believers should learn to turn more often to their Assemblies for advice and help and at an earlier date, and the Assemblies, on the other hand, should act with more vigilance and a greater sense of Community responsibility towards every situation that may damage the prestige of the Faith in the eyes of the public. When decisions have been reached by the Assembly, they must be carried out loyally and willingly by all concerned.

13 March 1944, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 45 One of the fundamentals involved in our Administrative Order, which we must remember will become the pattern for our World Order, is that even if an Assembly makes an ill-advised decision it must be upheld in order to preserve the unity of the Community. Appeal can be made from the Local Assembly's decision to the National Assembly ... But the principle

of authority invested in our elected bodies must be upheld. This is not something which can be learned without trial and test...

30 June 1949, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, The Light of Divine Guidance

- 46 The believers should have confidence in the directions and orders of their Assembly, even though they may not be convinced of their justice or right. Once the Assembly, through a majority vote of its members, comes to a decision the friends should readily obey it. Specially those dissenting members within the Assembly whose opinion is contrary to that of the majority of their fellow-members should set a good example before the community by sacrificing their personal views for the sake of obeying the principle of majority vote that underlies the functioning of all Bahá'í Assemblies.

28 October 1935, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 47 The Assembly may make a mistake, but, as the Master pointed out, if the Community does not abide by its decisions, or the individual Bahá'í, the result is worse, as it undermines the very institution which must be strengthened in order to uphold the principles and laws of the Faith. He tells us God will right the wrongs done. We must have confidence in this and obey our Assemblies. He therefore strongly urges you to work directly under your Bahá'í Assembly, to accept your responsibilities as a voting member, and do your utmost to create harmony within the community.

1949, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 48 What the Master desired to protect the friends against was continual bickering and opinionatedness. A believer can ask the Assembly why they made a certain decision and politely request them to reconsider. But then he must leave it at that, and not go on disrupting local affairs through insisting on his own views. This applies to an Assembly member as well. We all have a right to our opinions, we are bound to think differently; but a Bahá'í must accept the majority decision of his Assembly, realizing that acceptance and harmony—even if a mistake has been made—are the really important things, and when we serve the Cause properly, in the Bahá'í way, God will right any wrongs done in the end.

19 October 1947, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 49 Just as the individual believers are bound to support and sustain their Local Assembly, for the preservation of the unity of the Faith and the

strengthening of its as yet embryonic World Order, so must the Local Assemblies obey and sustain their national representatives. The closer the co-operation between Local and National Assemblies, the greater will be the power and radiance which can and must stream forth from these institutions to the suffering ranks of humanity.

29 July 1942, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Prospects of the Future

- 50 The administrative machinery of the Cause having now sufficiently evolved, its aim and object fairly well grasped and understood, and its method and working made more familiar to every believer, I feel the time is ripe when it should be fully and consciously utilized to further the purpose for which it has been created. It should, I strongly feel, be made to serve a twofold purpose. On one hand, it should aim at a steady and gradual expansion of the Movement along lines that are at once broad, sound and universal; and on the other, it should ensure the internal consolidation of the work already achieved...

11 May 1926, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 51 The friends must never mistake the Bahá'í administration for an end in itself. It is merely the instrument of the spirit of the Faith. This Cause is a Cause which God has revealed to humanity as a whole. It is designed to benefit the entire human race, and the only way it can do this is to reform the community life of mankind, as well as seeking to regenerate the individual. The Bahá'í Administration is only the first shaping of what in future will come to be the social life and laws of community living. As yet the believers are only just beginning to grasp and practise it properly. So we must have patience if at times it seems a little self-conscious and rigid in its workings. It is because we are learning something very difficult but very wonderful—how to live together as a community of Bahá'ís, according to the glorious teachings.

14 October 1941, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 52 Ours, dearly-beloved co-workers, is the paramount duty to continue, with undimmed vision and unabated zeal, to assist in the final erection of that Edifice the foundations of which Bahá'u'lláh has laid in our hearts, to derive added hope and strength from the general trend of recent events, however dark their immediate effects, and to pray with unremitting fervour that He may hasten the approach of the realization of that Wondrous Vision which

constitutes the brightest emanation of His Mind and the fairest fruit of the fairest civilization the world has yet seen.

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

- 53 And now as I look into the future, I hope to see the friends at all times, in every land, and of every shade of thought and character, voluntarily and joyously rallying round their local and in particular their national centres of activity, upholding and promoting their interests with complete unanimity and contentment, with perfect understanding, genuine enthusiasm, and sustained vigour. This indeed is the one joy and yearning of my life, for it is the fountainhead from which all future blessings will flow, the broad foundation upon which the security of the Divine Edifice must ultimately rest...

24 September 1924, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

THE INSTITUTION OF THE
MASHRIQU'L
ADHKÁR

A compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, letters written 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 September 2017

The Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, “the Dawning-place of the Praise of God”,¹ is described by the Universal House of Justice, in its letter dated 18 December 2014 to the Bahá'ís in Iran, as “a unique concept in the annals of religion” that “symbolizes the teachings of the new Day of God”.² The House of Justice further states that the House of Worship is a “collective centre of society to promote cordial affection” and that it

stands as a universal place of worship open to all the inhabitants of a locality irrespective of their religious affiliation, background, ethnicity, or gender and a haven for the deepest contemplation on spiritual reality and foundational questions of life, including individual and collective responsibility for the betterment of society. Men and women, children and youth, are held in its embrace as equals.³

The extraordinary significance of this matchless institution for the unity and well-being of humanity is underscored throughout the writings of the Faith. Bahá'u'lláh, for instance, proclaims, “Blessed are they that occupy themselves in the House of Worship with the remembrance of Him Who is the Lord of the righteous!”⁴ ‘Abdu'l-Bahá affirms that while the House of Worship is “built upon earth, in reality it is an institution of the Concourse on high” and its “pinnacles shall soar to the apex of heaven”.⁵ In another Tablet He refers to it as “the dawning-place of lights and the gathering place of the righteous”, in which “noble souls ... offer supplications, intone divine verses, and chant prayers with wondrous melodies” such that “the inmates of the Concourse on high hearken and call out, crying, ‘Happy are we; let all the world rejoice!’”⁶ It is, the Master declares, “the first visible and manifest establishment of the Lord”,⁷ being so momentous a structure that even the act of “laying but one brick for [it] or one of its dependencies is like unto building a lofty edifice”.⁸ As Shoghi Effendi states, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is a “symbol and harbinger of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh”.⁹ It is, in the

words of the House of Justice, a beacon of light “against the gloom of hatred and inequity”.¹⁰ Eight continental Temples now illumine the world, while local and national ones are beginning to emerge, each one summoning “all comers to worship the One Who is their Creator, their sovereign Lord, the Giver of Light to the world”¹¹ and galvanizing “an entire people to reach for a more profound sense of unified purpose”.¹² Each reminds us of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s assurance that “a hundred thousand Mashriqu’l-Adhkárs shall be reared in glory, dignity, and utmost majesty”.¹³

To assist in further understanding the nature of this divine institution and its profound implications for the spiritual regeneration of humanity, the attached compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as well as from the letters written by, or on behalf of, Shoghi Effendi and the Universal House of Justice is provided. Some of the concepts that may be gleaned from various passages in the compilation are discussed below.

1. The Influence of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár

In the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, Bahá’u’lláh calls on the peoples of the world to build

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 becometh 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.¹⁴

‘Abdu’l-Bahá elaborates on the importance of this institution, referring to the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár as “the lodestone of divine confirmations” and “the mighty foundation of the Lord, the firm pillar of the Faith of God”. In the same Tablet, He states that the establishment of the House of Worship “is a means for the exaltation of the Word of God” and that the “praise and glorification emanating from it cheereth the heart of every righteous soul”. He thus exhorts the friends to “be occupied therein with prayer and the worship of God, the recitation of the verses and words of God, and the chanting of heavenly odes in glorification of the All-Merciful”.¹⁵

Elsewhere, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes the House of Worship as “a centre wherein the spirits are gladdened and the hearts attracted to the Abhá Kingdom”¹⁶ and avers that it has “a powerful influence on every phase of life”,¹⁷ awakening the friends¹⁸ and promoting the oneness of human-kind.¹⁹ By gathering together in this edifice to make mention of the Lord, “bonds of unity”²⁰ are forged while affection grows and flourishes “in the human heart”.²¹ Indeed, through the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár, which “causeth hearts to be illumined, souls to become spiritual, and the fragrances of the Kingdom of Glory to be inhaled”, the world of humanity is “transformed into another world, and the susceptibilities of the heart are heightened to such a degree that they encompass the entire creation”.²² According to Shoghi Effendi, the impact of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár is “incalculable and mysterious”,²³ directly bolstering the faith of the individual, while also serving, in the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as “the greatest means of diffusing the sweet savours of the Lord”.²⁴ “As a potent symbol and an integral element of the divine civilization towards which Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation ushers all peoples,” the House of Justice observes in a letter written on its behalf, “the House of Worship becomes the focal point of the community from which it emerges.”²⁵ “The people shall hasten to worship in that heavenly Temple,” the Master declares, “the fragrance of God will be diffused, the Divine Teachings will take root in the hearts like unto the establishment of the spirit in the souls of men, and the people will stand firm in the Cause of your Lord, the All-Merciful.”²⁶

2. A Place of Worship

‘Abdu’l-Baha explains that “pure and radiant hearts are the dawning-places of the mention of God from which the melodies of supplication and prayer continually reach the Concourse on high”, and He states that should the hearts of the friends become divine temples through the bounty of God, “they would assuredly exert the utmost endeavour ... to build the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár, so that the outward frame may reveal the inward reality and the outer form give tidings of the inner meaning”.²⁷ Several themes are found in the writings associated with this place of worship and the inward reality it manifests, including the power of prayer, the effects of communal worship, and the nature of devotions within the central edifice itself.

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh calls attention to the potency of reciting the verses of God in Houses of Worship:

Teach your children the verses revealed from the heaven of majesty and power, so that, in most melodious tones, they may recite the Tablets of the All-Merciful in the alcoves within the Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs. Whoever hath been transported by the rapture born of adoration for My Name, the Most Compassionate, will recite the verses of God in such wise as to captivate the hearts of those yet wrapped in slumber. Well is it with him who hath quaffed the Mystic Wine of everlasting life from the utterance of his merciful Lord in My Name—a Name through which every lofty and majestic mountain hath been reduced to dust.²⁸

The House of Justice elucidates the theme of the power of prayer, explaining that the Twin Luminaries have taught us that prayer is “the essential spiritual conversation of the soul with its Maker, direct and without intermediation”, “the morning’s dew” that “brings freshness to the heart and cleanses it”, and “a fire that burns away the veils and a light that leads to the ocean of reunion with the Almighty”.²⁹ The quality of prayer is pivotal. Upon it “depend the development of the limitless capacities of the soul and the attraction of the bounties of God”. When it is “motivated by the love of God”, its powers are manifested. “It is to be expressed”, the House of Justice continues,

with a sincere and pure heart conducive to contemplation and meditation so that the rational faculty can be illumined by its effects. Such prayer will transcend the limitation of words and go well beyond mere sounds. The sweetness of its melodies must gladden and uplift the heart and reinforce the penetrating power of the Word, transmuting earthly inclinations into heavenly attributes and inspiring selfless service to humankind.³⁰

A second theme is that of communal worship, which Bahá'ís and their friends around the world understand to be fundamental to the pattern of collective endeavour aimed at the spiritual and material betterment of society. Essential to this pattern, the House of Justice maintains, “is the devotional meeting—a communal aspect of the godly life and a dimension of the concept of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár”.³¹ When “integrated into the core

of community life”, such gatherings become “occasions where any soul may enter, inhale the heavenly fragrances, experience the sweetness of prayer, meditate upon the Creative Word, be transported on the wings of the spirit, and commune with the one Beloved”.³² The holding of such gatherings is “a further step in the implementation” of the law of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár,³³ one that evokes the spirit of the House of Worship in any locality.³⁴

A third theme is the manner in which worship is conducted within the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. Houses of Worship, 'Abdu'l-Bahá asserts, “bestow firmness and constancy upon the friends” and “are places of supplication and invocation to the Threshold of His grandeur”.³⁵ Vital to such worship and the creation of what Shoghi Effendi describes as “a serenely spiritual atmosphere”³⁶ is the setting aside of rituals and rites. As the House of Justice observes, Shoghi Effendi

decries the trappings of elaborate and ostentatious ceremony and warns against any inference “that the interior of the central Edifice itself will be converted into a conglomeration of religious services” offering “a spectacle of incoherent and confused sectarian observances and rites.”³⁷

Instead, devotional services are to be unhampered by uniformity or ritualistic forms of any kind,³⁸ and are, Shoghi Effendi advises in a letter written on his behalf, to be “simple, dignified, and designed to uplift the soul and educate it through hearing the creative word”.³⁹ In another letter written on his behalf he states, “The more universal and informal the character of Bahá'í worship in the Temple the better.”⁴⁰

Such worship may also include vocal music.⁴¹ In letters written on its behalf, the House of Justice clarifies that lyrics sung in the House of Worship should be “based upon Bahá'í or other sacred writings”, including the Writings and talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, should “contain Bahá'í themes”,⁴² may involve “the repetition of verses from prayers or selections from the Writings”, and may allow for “slight alterations in the text ... to conform with musical requirements”.⁴³ “The musical style of the piece can be determined by the composer, provided that he or she bears in mind the spiritual obligation to treat the Sacred Texts with the propriety, dignity and reverence due them.”⁴⁴

Through such an unassuming but embracing approach, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár embodies a distinguishing feature of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh—the principle of unity in diversity—and marks, according

to Shoghi Effendi, the establishment “upon the face of the earth, in the most visible and tangible manner, a beauteous likeness and enduring expression of the vital and unbounded spirit of the Cause of Him Who is the Lord of all worlds”.⁴⁵ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself asserts:

The *Mashriqu’l-Adhkár* is a divine edifice in this nether world and a means for attaining the oneness of humanity, inasmuch as all the peoples of the world shall gather in fellowship and harmony within the *Mashriqu’l-Adhkár* and, chanting the anthems of Divine Unity, engage in the praise and glorification of the Lord of Hosts.⁴⁶

3. Worship and Service

As potent and far-reaching as are the spiritual forces released by individual and collective devotions offered within the *Mashriqu’l-Adhkár* and as essential as is a vibrant devotional life to one’s spiritual development, worship must also result, the House of Justice notes, in “deeds that give outward expression to that inner transformation”.⁴⁷ Shoghi Effendi points out that the “very purpose” of the community—a community that is “divinely ordained, organically united, clear-visioned, vibrant with life”—is “regulated by the twin directing principles of the worship of God and of service to one’s fellow-men”.⁴⁸ Indeed, the indispensable connection between these directing principles is integral to the oneness of humankind, which, as the House of Justice notes, “is at once the operating principle and ultimate goal” of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation.⁴⁹

The inseparability of worship and service, which finds full expression in the *Mashriqu’l-Adhkár*, is progressively manifesting itself as the community implements the provisions of its framework for action with increasing effectiveness. The House of Justice observes that the friends “have not failed to appreciate the dynamic interaction between worship and endeavours to uplift the spiritual, social, and material conditions of society”.⁵⁰ In its Ridván 2012 message to the Bahá’ís of the world, the House of Justice states:

The *Mashriqu’l-Adhkár*, described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as “one of the most vital institutions of the world”, weds two essential, inseparable aspects of Bahá’í life: worship and service. The union of these two is also reflected

in the coherence that exists among the community-building features of the Plan, particularly the burgeoning of a devotional spirit that finds expression in gatherings for prayer and an educational process that builds capacity for service to humanity. The correlation of worship and service is especially pronounced in those clusters around the world where Bahá'í communities have significantly grown in size and vitality, and where engagement in social action is apparent.⁵¹

4. Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár

In the fullness of time, Shoghi Effendi states, the central edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár will be surrounded by "such institutions of social service as shall afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant".⁵² The indispensability of "a dynamic coherence between the spiritual and practical requirements of life on earth", the House of Justice writes, "is unmistakably illustrated" in Bahá'u'lláh's "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".⁵³ 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains in this regard that the House of Worship is "connected with a hospital, a drug dispensary, a traveler's hospice, a school for orphans, and a university for advanced studies". As such, "The Temple is not only a place for worship; rather, in every respect is it complete and whole".⁵⁴

Shoghi Effendi highlights the vital interplay between worship and service and offers the following vision of the corresponding interrelationship between the central edifice and its dependencies:

Divorced from the social, humanitarian, educational, and scientific pursuits centring around the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, Bahá'í worship, however exalted in its conception, however passionate in fervour, can never hope to achieve beyond the meagre and often transitory results produced by the contemplations of the ascetic or the communion of the passive worshipper. It cannot afford lasting satisfaction and benefit to the worshipper himself, much less to humanity in general, unless and until translated and transfused into that dynamic and disinterested service to the cause of humanity which it is the supreme privilege of the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to facilitate and promote. Nor

will the exertions, no matter how disinterested and strenuous, of those who within the precincts of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* will be engaged in administering the affairs of the future Bahá'í Commonwealth fructify and prosper unless they are brought into close and daily communion with those spiritual agencies centring in and radiating from the central Shrine of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*. Nothing short of direct and constant interaction between the spiritual forces emanating from this House of Worship centring in the heart of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* and the energies consciously displayed by those who administer its affairs in their service to humanity can possibly provide the necessary agency capable of removing the ills that have so long and so grievously afflicted humanity. For it is assuredly upon the consciousness of the efficacy of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, reinforced on one hand by spiritual communion with His Spirit, and on the other by the intelligent application and the faithful execution of the principles and laws He revealed, that the salvation of a world in travail must ultimately depend. And of all the institutions that stand associated with His holy Name, surely none save the institution of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* can most adequately provide the essentials of Bahá'í worship and service, both so vital to the regeneration of the world. Therein lies the secret of the loftiness, of the potency, of the unique position of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* as one of the outstanding institutions conceived by Bahá'u'lláh.⁵⁵

The first stirrings of the relationship between the spiritual and the practical as embodied in a House of Worship can be found in the pioneering efforts of the believers in 'Ishqábád. In its letter dated 1 August 2014 to the Bahá'ís of the World, the House of Justice recounts:

On a befitting tract of land in the centre of the city that had been obtained some years before with the consent of the Blessed Beauty Himself, facilities were built for communal well-being—a meeting hall, schools for children, a hostel for visitors, and a small clinic, among others. A sign of the notable achievements of the Bahá'ís in 'Ishqábád, who in those productive years became distinguished for their prosperity, magnanimity, and intellectual and cultural attainments, was their attention to ensuring that all Bahá'í children and youth were literate in a society with rampant illiteracy, especially among girls ... For over twenty years, the friends experienced the heavenly joy of having realized their lofty aim: the establishment of a focal point of worship, a nerve centre of

community life, a place where souls gathered at daybreak for humble invocation and communion before flowing out of its doors to engage in their daily pursuits.⁵⁶

In other words, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, the House of Justice relates in a subsequent letter, is concurrently “the place from which spiritual forces are to radiate”, “the focal point for dependencies to be raised up for the well-being of humanity”, and “the expression of a common will and eagerness to serve”.⁵⁷ “These dependencies”, the same letter continues, are “centres of education and scientific learning as well as cultural and humanitarian endeavour” that “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”.⁵⁸

5. Raising up a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár

Since the revelation of the law of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár by the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh, its implementation has followed a process of gradual, organic unfoldment commensurate with the capacity of the community. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that these “Dawning-Points of God's Remembrance ... must, at the direction of the Most Exalted Pen, be established in every hamlet and city”.⁵⁹ Their beginnings, the Master indicates, could assume even the humblest of forms:

As to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, it is of the utmost importance. The purpose is this: A spot should be designated, even if it is a small place beneath layers of earth and stone, and it should, out of prudence, be kept hidden and concealed lest it arouse the hostility of the mischief-makers. At least once a week, it should become the gathering place of the chosen friends who have discovered the secrets and become the intimates of divine mysteries. It may assume any form, for even if it be an underground pit, that pit shall become a sheltering paradise, an exalted bower, and a garden of delight.⁶⁰

Opportunities first arose for the establishment of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in 'Ishqábád and in Wilmette during the Ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Subsequently, a continental House of Worship was established in seven other locations around the world, culminating in October 2016 with the inauguration of the Temple in Santiago, Chile. Yet, even as the continental stage was drawing to a close, a new horizon was opening up to the Bahá'í world owing to the growing momentum in community building—founded on collective worship and raising capacity for service—that had been stimulated by the series of global Plans beginning in 1996. In its *Riḍván* message to the Bahá'ís of the world that year, the House of Justice emphasized that “the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behaviour” involving “the practice of collective worship of God”. It was, therefore, “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”.⁶¹ In its *Riḍván* message five years later, the House of Justice anticipated the building of national *Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs* during the Fifth Epoch of the Formative Age, a development that would “unfold throughout successive stages of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s Divine Plan”.⁶² Specifically, it observed:

A feature of the Fifth Epoch will be the enrichment of the devotional life of the community through the raising up of national Houses of Worship, as circumstances in national communities permit. The scheduling of these projects will be determined by the Universal House of Justice in relation to the advancement of the process of entry by troops within countries.⁶³

By 2012, the requisite criteria were “demonstrably met”⁶⁴ in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Papua New Guinea. This was a highly significant development. “With the construction of the last of the continental temples in Santiago under way,” the House of Justice stated that year in its *Riḍván* message, “the initiation of projects for building national Houses of Worship offers yet another gratifying evidence of the penetration of the Faith of God into the soil of society.”⁶⁵ The House of Justice also affirmed in a subsequent letter written on its behalf that the House of Worship is “an integral part of the process of community building, and its construction represents an important milestone in the development of a community”.⁶⁶

Equally encouraging was that by *Riḍván* 2012 it had become clear that the emergence of a local House of Worship could be contemplated in

clusters serving as sites for the dissemination of learning about the junior youth spiritual empowerment programme and where “the entire scheme of expansion and consolidation”⁶⁷ was being fortified—specifically, at that time, in Battambang, Cambodia; Bihar Sharif, India; Matunda Soy, Kenya; Norte del Cauca, Colombia; and Tanna, Vanuatu. Expounding on this vision, the following passage from the Riḍván 2014 message directly correlated the evolution of the programme of growth in a cluster with the establishment of a local Mashriq’l-Adhkár:

In more and more clusters, the programme of growth is increasing in scope and complexity, commensurate with the rising capacity of the Plan’s three protagonists—the individual, the community, and the institutions of the Faith—to create a mutually supportive environment. And we are delighted that, as anticipated, there are a growing number of clusters where a hundred or more individuals are now facilitating the engagement of a thousand or more in weaving a pattern of life, spiritual, dynamic, transformative. 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 Mashriq’l-Adhkár is to be established.⁶⁸

In the Riḍván 2012 message, the House of Justice underscored the magnitude of this advance in community life and provided the following vision regarding the impending construction of both the two national and the five local Houses of Worship:

Beloved co-workers: The ground broken by the hand of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá a hundred years ago is to be broken again in seven more countries, this being but the prelude to the day when within every city and village, in obedience to the bidding of Bahá’u’lláh, a building is upraised for the worship of the Lord. From these Dawning-Points of the Remembrance of God will shine the rays of His light and peal out the anthems of His praise.⁶⁹

The House of Justice called attention to this same vision in its message of 1 September 2017 to those gathered for the dedication of the House of Worship in Battambang, Cambodia, announcing that “a new dawn is breaking in the development of the institution of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*” and affirming that this historic occasion prefigured

the appearance of many more local as well as national *Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs*, in obedience to Bahá'u'lláh's commandment revealed in His Most Holy Book: “Build ye houses of worship throughout the lands in the name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions.”⁷⁰

The opening of this new stage of raising up national and local Temples also made it possible to learn more about what is entailed in building a House of Worship, including practical considerations such as choosing a suitable location and deciding how big the edifice should be, as well as about how a sense of ownership of the project should be fostered among the local population. The selection of architects was identified as a special concern, since they, according to the House of Justice,

are presented with the singular challenge of designing Temples “as perfect as is possible in the world of being” that harmonize naturally with the local culture and the daily lives of those who will gather to pray and meditate therein. The task calls for creativity and skill to combine beauty, grace, and dignity with modesty, functionality, and economy.⁷¹

Throughout this evolutionary process, the community has had increasing opportunities to explore how indispensable is the spirit of unity in which such efforts are undertaken. In this regard, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states the following concerning the development of plans for the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* in 'Ishqábád:

All matters must be made a means of unity and concord, so that fellowship and harmony among the beloved of God might increase as day followeth day.

Now, this matter of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* must itself be implemented in such a manner as to foster unity and concord among the friends. That is to say, ye should first consult together, and thereafter

devise a plan. If ye follow these steps, divine confirmations shall continuously be vouchsafed unto you.⁷²

The Master also provides the following counsel:

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.⁷³

Expanding on the concept of collaboration, Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, stresses that laying the foundation of the House of Worship “requires ceaseless cooperation and mutual support, and is conditioned upon sacrifice”.⁷⁴ In another letter written on his behalf he cautions, “It is devotion, sincerity and genuine enthusiasm which in the long run can ensure the completion of our beloved Temple.” And he states, “Material considerations, though essential, are not the most vital by any means.”⁷⁵ Similarly, the House of Justice, in expressing how moved it was by the worldwide response to its call for seven new Houses of Worship, offers the following observation:

Particularly in the nations and localities recently designated for the construction of a House of Worship, we have witnessed the friends' spontaneous expressions of joy; their immediate and heartfelt commitment to lend their share in carrying out the critical work at hand and to increase the dynamism of those activities integral to the emergence of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár within a population; their sacrificial

contributions of time, energy, and material resources, in a variety of forms; and their sustained efforts to awaken growing contingents to the vision of those edifices dedicated wholly to the remembrance of God that will be founded in their midst. Indeed, the ready response of the community of the Greatest Name augurs well for its ability to further these collective undertakings.⁷⁶

With this guidance in mind and in order to appreciate the spirit of true service required for the establishment of this lofty institution, it is helpful to reflect on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's longing to participate in the construction of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* in 'Ishqábád and on His earnest appeal that the friends carry it out in His stead.

Do thou on behalf of 'Abdu'l-Bahá move the earth, carry the mortar, and haul the stones for the building of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* so that the rapture of this service may bring joy and gladness to the Centre of Servitude. That *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* is the first visible and manifest establishment of the Lord. Therefore, it is this servant's hope that each and every virtuous and righteous soul will sacrifice his all, evince great happiness and exultation, and rejoice in carrying the earth and mortar so that this Divine Edifice may be raised, the Cause of God may spread, and in every corner of the world the friends may arise with the utmost resolve to accomplish this great task. Were 'Abdu'l-Bahá not imprisoned and were there not obstacles in his path, he himself would assuredly hasten to 'Ishqábád and carry the earth for the building of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* with the utmost joy and gladness. It behoveth the friends now to arise with this intention in mind and serve in my place so that in a short time this Edifice may be revealed to all eyes, the loved ones of God may engage in making mention of the Abhá Beauty, the melodies of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* may rise at dawn-tide to the Concourse on high, and the songs of the nightingales of God may bring joy and ecstasy to the denizens of the All-Glorious Realm. Thus will the hearts rejoice, the souls delight in joyful tidings, and the minds be illumined. This is the highest hope of the sincere ones; this is the dearest wish of them that are nigh unto God.⁷⁷

Endnotes

- 1 The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, note 53
- 2 See extract 67
- 3 See extract 6
- 4 See extract 67
- 5 See extract 28
- 6 See extract 9
- 7 See extract 66
- 8 See extract 28
- 9 See extract 43
- 10 See extract 67
- 11 From a letter dated 14 October 2016 written by the Universal House of Justice to the friends gathered in Santiago, Chile, for the dedication of the Mother Temple of South America
- 12 See extract 69
- 13 See extract 29
- 14 See extract 1
- 15 See extract 31
- 16 See extract 35
- 17 See extract 16
- 18 See extract 30
- 19 See extract 25
- 20 See extract 16
- 21 See extract 13
- 22 See extract 30
- 23 See extract 57
- 24 See extract 28
- 25 See extract 69
- 26 See extract 10
- 27 See extract 21
- 28 See extract 3
- 29 See extract 67
- 30 See extract 67
- 31 See extract 67
- 32 See extract 68
- 33 See extract 62
- 34 See extract 68
- 35 See extract 28
- 36 See extract 38
- 37 See extract 58
- 38 See extract 49
- 39 See extract 53
- 40 See extract 45
- 41 See extract 53
- 42 See extract 81
- 43 See extract 75
- 44 See extract 75
- 45 See extract 37
- 46 See extract 25
- 47 See extract 67
- 48 See extract 41
- 49 See extract 60
- 50 See extract 66
- 51 See extract 64
- 52 See extract 38
- 53 See extract 60
- 54 See extract 18
- 55 See extract 38
- 56 See extract 66
- 57 See extract 67
- 58 See extract 67
- 59 See extract 8
- 60 See extract 35
- 61 See extract 61
- 62 See extract 63
- 63 See extract 63
- 64 See extract 64
- 65 See extract 64
- 66 See extract 78
- 67 See extract 64
- 68 See extract 65
- 69 See extract 64
- 70 See extract 70
- 71 See extract 66
- 72 See extract 20
- 73 See extract 22
- 74 See extract 50
- 75 See extract 48
- 76 See extract 66
- 77 See extract 66

Extracts from the Writings

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 54 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.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, note no. 53

- 55 Blessed is he who, at the hour of dawn, centering his thoughts on God, occupied with His remembrance, and supplicating His forgiveness, directeth his steps to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár and, entering therein, seateth himself in silence to listen to the verses of God, the Sovereign, the Mighty, the All-Praised. Say: The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is each and every building which hath been erected in cities and villages for the celebration of My praise. Such is the name by which it hath been designated before the throne of glory, were ye of those who understand.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 115

- 56 Teach your children the verses revealed from the heaven of majesty and power, so that, in most melodious tones, they may recite the Tablets of the All-Merciful in the alcoves within the Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs. Whoever hath been transported by the rapture born of adoration for My Name, the Most Compassionate, will recite the verses of God in such wise as to captivate the hearts of those yet wrapped in slumber. Well is it with him who hath quaffed the Mystic Wine of everlasting life from the utterance of his merciful Lord in My Name—a Name through which every lofty and majestic mountain hath been reduced to dust.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 150

- 57 Regarding what ye had written as to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár's having been established in the Land of Táⁱ and that, by the grace of God, it hath been and is being instituted in other places: this matter was mentioned in His Holy and Most Exalted Presence, whereupon the tongue of the Ancient of Days made answer: "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."

From a Tablet

- 58 This is that which hath been uttered by the Tongue of the Unconstrained concerning the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. He, glorified be His might and exalted His dominion, saith:

"Render thou praise unto Him Who is the Desire of the world for having confirmed thee in the service of His Cause. The people of the world are agitated, mischief and sedition abound, and all have arisen to extinguish His light. Yet despite this, thou and His chosen ones have been actively engaged in the mention and remembrance of God.

"This edifice shall be remembered eternally, for it hath been reared in the name of the One true God and during the days of God, and hath been adorned with the ornament of His behest. Beseech Him Who is the Eternal Truth to confirm each and every soul in the service of His Cause, that all may remain steadfast and abide by what God hath sent down in His Book.

"How altogether vain and fleeting are the things of this world. Erelong shall all return to nothingness, and only that will endure which the Most Exalted Pen hath ordained at the bidding of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting."

From a Tablet

- 59 Blessed are they that occupy themselves in the House of Worship with the remembrance of Him Who is the Lord of the righteous! Blessed are they that arise in the service of this House! Blessed are they that have raised up this House! They enter therein in a state of peace and yearning, and take their leave therefrom with reluctance and regret. We beseech God, immeasurably exalted is He, Our Lord and your Lord, to assist you by means both

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visible and invisible, and to ordain for you that which shall last as long as His name shall endure, a name that overshadoweth all other names. No God is there but Him, the Ever-Forgiving, the All-Merciful.

From a Tablet

- 60 By My life and My Cause! Round about whatever dwelling the friends of God may enter, and from which their cry shall rise as they praise and glorify the Lord, shall circle the souls of true believers and all the favoured angels. And should the door of the true eye be opened unto some, they shall witness the Supreme Concourse as it circleth and crieth: "Blessed art thou, O house, for God hath made thee a resting-place for those He favoureth, and a lodging for those He holdeth dear, and a home for those in whom He hath placed His trust. Unto thee be His praise and His glory and His endless grace."

From a Tablet

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 61 It befitteth the friends to hold a gathering, a meeting, where they shall glorify God and fix their hearts upon Him, and read and recite the Holy Writings of the Blessed Beauty—may my soul be the ransom of His lovers! The lights of the All-Glorious Realm, the rays of the Supreme Horizon, will be cast upon such bright assemblages, for these are none other than the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs*, the Dawning-Points of God's Remembrance, which must, at the direction of the Most Exalted Pen, be established in every hamlet and city ... These spiritual gatherings must be held with the utmost purity and consecration, so that from the site itself, and its earth and the air about it, one will inhale the fragrant breathings of the Holy Spirit.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 55

- 62 O ye true friends of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! At this moment my thoughts are turned towards you. Sunset is drawing nigh and a multitude of hardships have deprived me of comfort, yet calling you to mind bringeth me the utmost joy and delight. Thus do I turn to the Ever-Forgiving Lord, beseeching Him to reinforce you with an abundant measure of His mighty grace.

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is the dawning-place of lights and the gathering place of the righteous. Whenever a company of noble souls assemble in a heavenly gathering there and offer supplications, intone divine verses, and chant prayers with wondrous melodies, the inmates of the Concourse on high hearken and call out, crying, "Happy are we; let all the world rejoice!" for, praise be unto God, souls from among the angels of the Kingdom of Glory have arisen in the nether world to commune with their Lord and intone the verses of Divine Unity in a gathering of holiness. What bounty is there greater than this?

From a Tablet

- 63 O friends of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and his co-sharers and partners in the servitude of the Lord of Hosts! Verily, the greatest affair and the most important matter today is to establish a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár and to found a Temple, from which the voices of praise may rise to the Kingdom of the majestic Lord. Blessed are ye for having thought of this and intended to erect such an edifice, surpassing all in devoting your wealth to this great purpose and this splendid undertaking. Ye will soon see the angels of confirmation successively sustaining you, and the hosts of reinforcement rushing forth before you.

When the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is completed, when the lights are emanating therefrom, and the righteous assemble therein, when prayers are offered to the Kingdom of divine mysteries and the voice of glorification is raised to the Supreme Lord, then shall the believers rejoice, and their hearts be dilated, overflowing with the love of the ever-living and self-subsisting God.

The people shall hasten to worship in that heavenly Temple, the fragrance of God will be diffused, the Divine Teachings will take root in the hearts like unto the establishment of the spirit in the souls of men, and the people will stand firm in the Cause of your Lord, the All-Merciful.

From a Tablet

- 64 Of those who arise in the service of this edifice there shall be no soul but shall be imbued by God with a power emanating from His mighty Kingdom, and upon him shall rain such spiritual, heavenly blessings as shall fill his heart with a wondrous light and illumine his eyes to behold the glory of the Ancient of Days.

From a Tablet

- 65 O thou who art firm in the Covenant! Thy letter was received and its purport was made plain and evident. Thou hadst written of the high endeavour, the exertion and the determination evinced by the loved ones of God, of their irrepressible enthusiasm for the construction of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, and of the engagement of their blessed persons in carrying its building stones. In truth, this news brought such joy to the hearts as is impossible to describe or recount, for it conjured the image of that noble assemblage bearing stones in the utmost humility and meekness and yet considering themselves exalted above the kings of the world.

From a Tablet

- 66 Thou hast asked about places of worship and the underlying reason therefor. The wisdom in raising up such buildings is that at a given hour, the people should know it is time to meet, and all should gather together, and, harmoniously attuned one to another, engage in prayer; with the result that out of this coming together, unity and affection shall grow and flourish in the human heart.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 58

- 67 We hear that thou hast in mind to embellish thy house from time to time with a meeting of Bahá'ís, where some among them will engage in glorifying the All-Glorious Lord ... Know that shouldst thou bring this about, that house of earth will become a house of heaven, and that fabric of stone a congress of the spirit.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 57

- 68 In the future, God willing, there will be erected throughout all the regions ... temples of outstanding beauty and dignity, in which grace and elegance combine with a fineness of proportion that is delightful to behold.

From a Tablet

- 69 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.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 60

- 70 Jináb-i-Karbilá'í Muhammad-Hádí, the custodian of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, is my master. In other words, I am his servant, for he is a servant of the Blessed Beauty. He sweepeth the grounds of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. This is not servitude, but sovereignty. The service he rendereth is no mere ordinary thing; nay, it is a bounty from God, pure and true.

From a Tablet

- 71 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.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 64

- 72 Whensoever a company of people shall gather in a meeting place, shall engage in glorifying God, and shall speak with one another of the mysteries of God, beyond any doubt the breathings of the Holy Spirit will blow gently over them, and each shall receive a share thereof.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 56

- 73 Thy letter and the two plans for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár were received. Both plans were reviewed, and cheered the hearts. The loved ones and handmaids of God engaged, each and every one, in speaking thy praise. Thou shouldst, however, consult with the members of the Spiritual Assembly concerning the form and design of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, in order that ye

may reach a decision together. All matters must be made a means of unity and concord, so that fellowship and harmony among the beloved of God might increase as day followeth day.

Now, this matter of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* must itself be implemented in such a manner as to foster unity and concord among the friends. That is to say, ye should first consult together, and thereafter devise a plan. If ye follow these steps, divine confirmations shall continuously be vouchsafed unto you. The friends in 'Ishqábád made the raising up of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* the means of creating perfect fellowship. With the utmost love and sincerity, they elected a committee, and that committee attended to establishing, organizing, arranging, and designing the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*. Divine confirmations were vouchsafed day after day, and—praised be God!—it was constructed in great soundness and majesty.

From a Tablet

- 74 Truly, pure and radiant hearts are the dawning-places of the mention of God from which the melodies of supplication and prayer continually reach the Concourse on high. I beg of God to make each of your hearts a divine temple in which the lamp of the Most Great Guidance may be lit. Should the hearts receive a bounty such as this, they would assuredly exert the utmost endeavour and become fully determined to build the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, so that the outward frame may reveal the inward reality and the outer form give tidings of the inner meaning.

From a Tablet

- 75 O ye friends of the East and the West! Among the foundations of the religion of God, the inner significances of the Word of God, and the duties of the friends of God, the greatest is cooperation and mutual aid, for the realm of humanity—nay, all the innumerable beings found in the world of existence—depend upon it. Should cooperation and mutual aid cease to exist among created things, the world of being would disintegrate utterly ...

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.

From a Tablet

76 Thou hadst written that the friends intend to contribute towards the cost of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*. This news imparted infinite joy, inasmuch as the abundant effusions of the Kingdom, the heavenly outpourings of God's grace, and His unfailing confirmations are directed towards the establishment of the bonds of unity, harmony, and fellowship in the world of humanity. Therefore, this worthy act on the part of the friends in the East to gather and send contributions to the West is praiseworthy, meritorious, and among the distinctive characteristics of this Dispensation. It was unheard of in the past for the East to lend its material support to the West, that is, for the friends in Persia to aid in the building of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* in America. This is the first occasion of its kind; therefore, its effects will surely be laudable and it will bring forth admirable results.

Praise be to the Ancient Beauty for having conferred such ties of friendship and harmony upon the human race, for having established such a mighty foundation, and for having promoted such a sublime aspiration. Thanks be to the Most Great Name for having raised aloft such a tabernacle in the midmost heart of the world, through which the various nations of the earth shall become unified and associate with one another in friendship; the disparate nations of the world shall become one country and its numerous lands one homeland; all the different governments shall join together in union and harmony; the roots of injustice shall be eradicated; and the foundations of war, conflict, pillage, plunder, hatred, and hostility shall be destroyed. This cooperation and collaboration between the East and the West provideth sufficient and irrefutable proof that this blessed aim will be achieved.

From a Tablet

- 77 O thou who art firm in the Covenant! The glad-tidings of the impending completion of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, the arrangement of its gardens, and, erelong, the flowing of its fountains, brought infinite joy. The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár shall truly become a place of great happiness and joy. The strength and elegance of its structure, the orderly arrangement of its pathways, the design of its flowerbeds, the gushing of its fountains, the blossoming of its trees, the freshness of its air, and the charm and beauty of its appearance combine to create a paradise of utmost delight. It shall truly be without peer or likeness.

From a Tablet

- 78 The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is a divine edifice in this nether world and a means for attaining the oneness of humanity, inasmuch as all the peoples of the world shall gather in fellowship and harmony within the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár and, chanting the anthems of Divine Unity, engage in the praise and glorification of the Lord of Hosts. Thy joy must, of a certainty, rest in diffusing the light of divine guidance.

From a Tablet

- 79 The first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in America was instituted in Chicago, and this honor and distinction is infinite in value. Out of this Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, without doubt, thousands of Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs will be born.

Tablets of the Divine Plan

- 80 Thy letter dated 23 November 1918 was received. Its contents indicated that, praise be to God, thou art engaged in the service of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, so that this universal edifice may be established. Indeed thou hast exerted great effort in this respect, and I entertain the hope that this endeavour may grow day by day. Deeds are like unto trees; planting a tree is easy, while nurturing it until it yieldeth its fruit is difficult. So far, effort hath been expended in laying the foundations of the Temple, but its completion is a difficult matter. My hope is that the friends of God may be assisted therein.

From a Tablet

- 81 O ye who are firm in the Covenant and Testament of God! The notebook containing your plans for the establishment of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár and its dependencies—consisting of a hospital, schools, a hostel, and homes for the infirm and the poor—and furthermore, the names of those who have

contributed funds for this endeavour, was received and read. Praise be to God that He hath assisted blessed souls to arise and accomplish such a momentous task and to lay the foundation of an edifice that shall endure for all eternity, whose pinnacles shall soar to the apex of heaven.

Although this Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is being built upon earth, in reality it is an institution of the Concourse on high, and therefore it can be said to reach the highest heavens. Render ye thanks unto God that ye have arisen to offer such a momentous service, inasmuch as in this age and century the establishment of Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs is of the utmost importance. These edifices will bestow firmness and constancy upon the friends. They are places of supplication and invocation to the Threshold of His grandeur and are the greatest means of diffusing the sweet savours of the Lord. In these days, laying but one brick for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár or one of its dependencies is like unto building a lofty edifice. I am, therefore, well pleased with the beloved of the Lord for having succeeded in rendering so vital and important a service. It is my hope that this structure will be established in the utmost beauty and strength and that its dependencies will gradually be completed.

From a Tablet

- 82 ...consider thou the manner in which Hájí Mírzá Muhammad-Taqí Afnán, that sanctified spirit and confirmed soul, arose to serve this great Cause. Forsaking a life of ease and comfort in Yazd, he hastened to 'Ishqábád to labour for the Cause of God. How self-sacrificing he was in the rearing of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár! He dedicated his life wholly to this task, until he succeeded in establishing the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in that land. How extraordinary indeed was his service, for this is the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár that hath been raised up in the world in God's name. Its significance, therefore, is very great. And yet, in the future a hundred thousand Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs shall be reared in glory, dignity, and utmost majesty. The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of 'Ishqábád hath the station of the mother, and the other Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs are like unto spiritual children that shall be born of it.

From a Tablet

- 83 O ye loved ones of God! The news was received that a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár hath been established, that in that land the praise and glorification of God hath reached the Kingdom of Glory and the melodies of worship and praise

of that glorious Beloved have ascended to the Concourse on high. What boundless joy and delight were produced by these glad-tidings, inasmuch as the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár causeth the friends to be awakened, to remember God, and to be in a state of humble prayer. The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár causeth hearts to be illumined, souls to become spiritual, and the fragrances of the Kingdom of Glory to be inhaled. The world of humanity is thereby transformed into another world, and the susceptibilities of the heart are heightened to such a degree that they encompass the entire creation. My hope is that a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár be established in every quarter and in each corner of the country, even if this be done with the utmost discretion and circumspection, and, for prudence's sake, be confined to chosen and trusted friends among the loved ones of God, until such time as the spread of its fame may not arouse dismay and turmoil among the heedless.

O ye beloved of God! Behold how abundant shall be the freshness, tenderness, spirituality, and radiance that are attained when ye assemble in that gathering place of the spirit, occupy yourselves at dawnⁱ with the remembrance of God, and, after reciting prayers, make mention together of the Most Bountiful Lord in sweet melodies. These melodies shall reach unto the Kingdom of Glory, and these songs shall cheer and gladden the Concourse on high.

From a Tablet

- 84 The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is the lodestone of divine confirmations. The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is the mighty foundation of the Lord, the firm pillar of the Faith of God. The establishment of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is a means for the exaltation of the Word of God. The praise and glorification emanating from it cheereth the heart of every righteous soul. The holy fragrances of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár vivify the souls of the righteous, and its vitalizing breezes confer life upon the pure in heart. The lamps of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, like unto the resplendent rays of dawn, illuminate the horizons. The melody of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár cheereth the souls of the Concourse on high, and the recitation within it of the verses of His Divine Unity bringeth joy and gladness to the inmates of the Kingdom of Glory.

In this day, the greatest matter and most consummate service to be offered at the Sacred Threshold of God is the establishment of the

i Bahá'u'lláh clarifies, in Questions and Answers, no. 15 of *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, that by “dawn” is meant “the earliest dawn of day, between dawn and sunrise, or even up to two hours after sunrise.”

Mashriqu'l-Adhkár ... The purpose is that the loved ones of God should, while exercising the utmost wisdom, be occupied therein with prayer and the worship of God, the recitation of the verses and words of God, and the chanting of heavenly odes in glorification of the All-Merciful.

From a Tablet

- 85 O servant of Bahá! Music is regarded as a praiseworthy science at the Threshold of the Almighty, so that thou mayest chant verses at large gatherings and congregations in a most wondrous melody and raise such hymns of praise at the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to enrapture the Concourse on High. By virtue of this, consider how much the art of music is admired and praised. Try, if thou canst, to use spiritual melodies, songs and tunes, and to bring the earthly music into harmony with the celestial melody. Then thou wilt notice what a great influence music hath and what heavenly joy and life it conferreth. Strike up such a melody and tune as to cause the nightingales of divine mysteries to be filled with joy and ecstasy.

From a Tablet

- 86 Verily, with a sincere heart, I have rendered thanks unto God for His having aided the friends, despite their poverty and lowliness, to contribute to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, the pillars of which will soon be raised in the midmost heart of America.

From a Tablet

- 87 O thou true friend of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! Thy most ardent wish was for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to be reared and established. For each and every thing there is a prescribed season—and praise be to God, the time to build the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár hath now come! The greatest endeavour must therefore be exerted that this mighty edifice may be erected solidly and firmly, with refinement and grace. This is a great service to the Sacred Threshold, the renown of which shall gladden, through all eternity, the hearts of the Concourse on high in the Kingdom of holiness.

From a Tablet

- 88 As to the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, it is of the utmost importance. The purpose is this: A spot should be designated, even if it is a small place beneath layers of earth and stone, and it should, out of prudence, be kept hidden and concealed lest it arouse the hostility of the mischief-makers. At least once

a week, it should become the gathering place of the chosen friends who have discovered the secrets and become the intimates of divine mysteries. It may assume any form, for even if it be an underground pit, that pit shall become a sheltering paradise, an exalted bower, and a garden of delight. It shall become a centre wherein the spirits are gladdened and the hearts attracted to the Abhá Kingdom.

From a Tablet

- 89 As to the design of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár: it should resemble the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár of 'Ishqábád. That is, it must be a nine-sided edifice and should be erected so as to evince the utmost spirituality, elegance, loftiness, refinement, and grace, in such wise that it becometh a place which is full of charm. Insofar as possible, effort should be exerted towards ensuring the pleasantness of the site, its freshness and beauty.

From a Tablet

From the writings of Shoghi Effendi

- 90 With the passage of time, the lofty edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár will be reared in the vicinity and surroundings of the historic Bahá'í holy places, enhancing the lustre, spirituality, splendour, grace, and majesty of the Bahá'í institutions and establishing upon the face of the earth, in the most visible and tangible manner, a beauteous likeness and enduring expression of the vital and unbounded spirit of the Cause of Him Who is the Lord of all worlds.

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- 91 It should be borne in mind that the central Edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, round which in the fullness of time shall cluster such institutions of social service as shall afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant, should be regarded, apart from these Dependencies, as a House solely designed and entirely dedicated to the worship of God in accordance with the few yet definitely prescribed principles established by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitábu'l-Aqdas. It should not be inferred, however, from this general statement that the interior of the central Edifice itself will be converted into a conglomeration of religious services conducted along lines associated with

the traditional procedure obtaining in churches, mosques, synagogues, and other temples of worship. Its various avenues of approach, all converging towards the central Hall beneath its dome, will not serve as admittance to those sectarian adherents of rigid formulae and man-made creeds, each bent, according to his way, to observe his rites, recite his prayers, perform his ablutions, and display the particular symbols of his faith, within separately defined sections of Bahá'u'lláh's Universal House of Worship. Far from the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár offering such a spectacle of incoherent and confused sectarian observances and rites, a condition wholly incompatible with the provisions of the Aqdas and irreconcilable with the spirit it inculcates, the central House of Bahá'í worship, enshrined within the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, will gather within its chastened walls, in a serenely spiritual atmosphere, only those who, discarding for ever the trappings of elaborate and ostentatious ceremony, are willing worshippers of the one true God, as manifested in this age in the Person of Bahá'u'lláh. To them will the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár symbolize the fundamental verity underlying the Bahá'í Faith, that religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is not final but progressive. Theirs will be the conviction that an all-loving and ever-watchful Father Who, in the past and at various stages in the evolution of mankind, has sent forth His Prophets as the Bearers of His Message and the Manifestations of His Light to mankind, cannot at this critical period of their civilization withhold from His children the Guidance which they sorely need amid the darkness which has beset them, and which neither the light of Science nor that of human intellect and wisdom can succeed to dissipate. And thus having recognized in Bahá'u'lláh the Source whence this celestial light proceeds, they will irresistibly feel attracted to seek the shelter of His House, and congregate therein, unhampered by ceremonials and unfettered by creed, to render homage to the one true God, the Essence and Orb of eternal Truth, and to exalt and magnify the name of His Messengers and Prophets Who, from time immemorial even unto our day, have, under divers circumstances and in varying measure, mirrored forth to a dark and wayward world the light of heavenly Guidance.

But however inspiring the conception of Bahá'í worship, as witnessed in the central Edifice of this exalted Temple, it cannot be regarded as the sole, nor even the essential, factor in the part which the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, as designed by Bahá'u'lláh, is destined to play in the organic life of the Bahá'í community. Divorced from the social, humanitarian, educational, and scientific pursuits centring around the Dependencies of the

Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, Bahá'í worship, however exalted in its conception, however passionate in fervour, can never hope to achieve beyond the meagre and often transitory results produced by the contemplations of the ascetic or the communion of the passive worshipper. It cannot afford lasting satisfaction and benefit to the worshipper himself, much less to humanity in general, unless and until translated and transfused into that dynamic and disinterested service to the cause of humanity which it is the supreme privilege of the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to facilitate and promote. Nor will the exertions, no matter how disinterested and strenuous, of those who within the precincts of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár will be engaged in administering the affairs of the future Bahá'í Commonwealth fructify and prosper unless they are brought into close and daily communion with those spiritual agencies centring in and radiating from the central Shrine of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. Nothing short of direct and constant interaction between the spiritual forces emanating from this House of Worship centring in the heart of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár and the energies consciously displayed by those who administer its affairs in their service to humanity can possibly provide the necessary agency capable of removing the ills that have so long and so grievously afflicted humanity. For it is assuredly upon the consciousness of the efficacy of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, reinforced on one hand by spiritual communion with His Spirit, and on the other by the intelligent application and the faithful execution of the principles and laws He revealed, that the salvation of a world in travail must ultimately depend. And of all the institutions that stand associated with His holy Name, surely none save the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár can most adequately provide the essentials of Bahá'í worship and service, both so vital to the regeneration of the world. Therein lies the secret of the loftiness, of the potency, of the unique position of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár as one of the outstanding institutions conceived by Bahá'u'lláh.

25 October 1929, Bahá'í Administration

- 92 Prayers in any language may be offered in the Temple. Nor is the offering of prayer confined to children. 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.

8 April 1931, appended to a letter

- 93 I deeply appreciate the continued and self-sacrificing endeavours of the American believers in the face of the grave financial and economic depression into which their country and the whole world is now plunged. That the Temple Edifice should arise under such circumstances, that its elaborate and exquisite ornamentation should be carried out, through the efforts of a mere handful of Bahá'í followers despite the gloom, the uncertainty and the dangers which surround them, is but another evidence of the mysterious, all-compelling power of Bahá'u'lláh Whose blessings will be bountifully vouchsafed to all who arise to carry out His purpose. The Cause is entering upon a period of unprecedented achievements. The full measure of its glory and power will be gradually manifested, if we on our part execute in their entirety the instructions and behests bequeathed to us by our beloved Master.

20 December 1931, appended to a letter

- 94 To the far-flung Bahá'í communities of East and West, most of which are being increasingly proscribed and ill treated, and none of which can claim to have had a share of the dual blessings which a specially designed and constructed House of Worship and a fully and efficiently functioning Administrative Order invariably confer, the concentration in a single locality of what will come to be regarded as the fountain-head of the community's spiritual life and what is already recognized as the mainspring of its administrative activities signalizes the launching of yet another phase in the slow and imperceptible emergence, in these declining times, of the model Bahá'í community—a community divinely ordained, organically united, clear-visioned, vibrant with life, and whose very purpose is regulated by the twin directing principles of the worship of God and of service to one's fellow-men.

4 July 1939, appended to a letter written on his behalf

- 95 From the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, ordained as a house of worship by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the representatives of Bahá'í communities, both local and national, together with the members of their respective committees, will, as they gather daily within its walls at the hour of dawn, derive the necessary inspiration that will enable them to discharge, in the course of their day-to-day exertions in the Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds—the scene of their administrative activities—their duties and responsibilities as befits the chosen stewards of His Faith.

God Passes By

- 96 The rise of this symbol and harbinger of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, as yet in the embryonic stage of its development, amidst the confusion, the anxieties, the rivalries and the recurrent crises that mark the decline of a moribund civilization, will, no doubt, lend a tremendous impetus to the onward march of the Faith in all the continents of the globe, and will, more than any other single act, direct the attention of the spiritually impoverished, the economically afflicted, the socially disturbed, and the morally disoriented masses of a sorely tried continent to its nascent institutions.
25 June 1954, appended to a letter, The Light of Divine Guidance

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 97 Among the signs of enkindlement, of grace and edification, of cheer and spirituality, is gathering in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár at the hour of dawn and offering supplications and prayers in that majestic and luminous Temple. This matter is important and will produce great results. The mere gathering of the friends at dawntide in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár shall demonstrate the power of the Cause, display the potency and influence of the Word of God, evince the attachment of the hearts to the divine commandments, and clearly manifest the turning of the souls towards the shore of His oneness. Negligence and indifference with respect to this pious act are in no wise permitted.
13 December 1928
- 98 As to the character of the meetings in the auditorium of the Temple, he feels that they should be purely devotional in character, Bahá'í addresses and lectures should be strictly excluded. For the present he feels that there would be no objection to having Bahá'í meetings, including addresses and the business sessions of the Convention, held in the Foundation Hall. Shoghi Effendi would urge that choir singing by men, women and children be encouraged in the auditorium and that rigidity in the Bahá'í service be scrupulously avoided. The more universal and informal the character of Bahá'í worship in the Temple the better. Images and pictures, with the exception of the Greatest Name, should be strictly excluded. Prayers revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master, as well as the sacred writings of the Prophets, should be read or chanted, as well as hymns based upon Bahá'í or non-Bahá'í sacred writings.
11 April 1931

- 99 He sincerely hopes that the sight of the Temple, as well as the principles it stands for, will sink down in the heart of the people in that locality and help to attract them to the Faith. It is not sufficient to build a beautiful edifice, we have to fill it with sincere and devoted souls who will seek its spiritual atmosphere.

6 May 1931

- 100 You asked concerning some plans whereby funds could be gathered for the Temple. Shoghi Effendi believes that the best and noblest method is to have free donations that are made spontaneously and with the sense of making some sacrifice in furthering the Cause. It is with sacrifice that this Temple is to be built. This is the truly worthy method. This principle therefore excludes any method whereby the help of non-Bahá'ís is included. A Bahá'í Temple should be built by the Bahá'ís alone; it is not an ordinary humanitarian activity in which the help of any person could be solicited.

14 April 1932

- 101 Your donations to the Temple as well as the remarkable manner in which you are assisting the believers in their efforts to widen the scope of their publicity work are real and abiding contributions you have made to the Faith. And although at present you are unable to contribute financially as much as you did in former years you should not feel discouraged, much less disappointed. For the best way in which you can effectively support the Temple cause is not through material means but by the moral help which is your primary obligation to extend to those who are in charge of the building of that sacred and unique Edifice. It is devotion, sincerity and genuine enthusiasm which in the long run can ensure the completion of our beloved Temple. Material considerations, though essential, are not the most vital by any means. Had it been otherwise the Temple would have never reached the stage of progress which it has already so well attained. For the resources of the community are limited, and have been severely affected during the last two years by an unprecedented and world-wide economic crisis. But despite all these material obstacles the Temple has made a steady progress and this alone is sufficient to convince every unbiased observer of the divine potency animating the Faith—a potency before which all material difficulties must inevitably wane.

30 December 1933

- 102 As regards the chanting of Tablets in the Temple, Shoghi Effendi wishes in this connection to urge the friends to avoid all forms of rigidity and uniformity in matters of worship. There is no objection to the recital or chanting of prayers in the Oriental language, but there is also no obligation whatever of adopting such a form of prayer at any devotional service in the auditorium of the Temple. It should neither be required nor prohibited. The important thing that should always be borne in mind is that with the exception of certain specific obligatory prayers Bahá'u'lláh has given us no strict or special ruling in matters of worship whether in the Temple or elsewhere. Prayer is essentially a communion between man and God, and as such transcends all ritualistic forms and formulae.

15 June 1935

- 103 He was particularly delighted by the efforts that have been exerted to purchase land for the Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds as well as the contributions that have been collected for this eagerly anticipated and meritorious endeavour ... He earnestly hopes that in the course of the current year, the friends will be confirmed in unitedly laying the foundation of that edifice and acquiring a suitable piece of land in the capital city of that country. He stated, moreover, that the completion of this endeavour requires ceaseless cooperation and mutual support, and is conditioned upon sacrifice. This momentous project will be a prelude to the establishment of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in that region, thus increasing the number of the agencies of the Cause, strengthening its divine institutions, adding to the community's influence and power, and shedding lustre and glory upon them all.

14 May 1936

- 104 This Bahá'í teaching of human fellowship and kindness implies that we must be always ready to extend every assistance and help we can to those who are in distress and suffering. Bahá'í charity is of the very essence of the Teachings, and should therefore be developed in every Bahá'í community. Charitable institutions, such as orphanages, free schools and hospitals for the poor, constitute an indispensable part of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. It is the responsibility of every local Bahá'í community to ensure the welfare of its poor and needy members, through whatever means possible.

26 June 1936

105 Concerning the copy of a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá which you had enclosed in your letter of October 20th and in which the Master defines the order in which Temple accessory buildings are to be constructed: This Tablet, Shoghi Effendi feels, should not be interpreted too rigidly as giving strictly the exact order in which these accessories are to be built. Nor should it be regarded as providing an exhaustive list of the buildings which will in future be erected around the central edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. The International House of Justice will have to lay down definitely the number and order of these future Temple accessories, and to define their relationships to each other, and to the Temple itself. If available, the Guardian would appreciate your sending him the original text of that Tablet.

As to the question of the relationship of an administrative building to the Temple: this also will have to be defined in future, but whatever the actual form which such a relationship may assume, and whatever its details, it should be based on the general principle that these two sets of Bahá'í institutions embody two vital and distinct, yet inseparable, aspects of Bahá'í life: worship and service. The central edifice of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, which is exclusively devoted to purposes of worship, represents the spiritual element, and therefore fulfils a primary function in every Bahá'í Community, whereas all other Temple accessories, whether of a strictly administrative, cultural or humanitarian character, are secondary, and come next in importance to the House of Worship itself.

28 January 1939

106 As regards the whole question of the Temple and services held in it:

He wishes to emphasize that he is very anxious, now that this first and greatest Temple of the West has been built, and will, within a few years, be used for worship and regular services by the Bahá'ís, that no forms, no rituals, no set customs be introduced over and above the bare minimum outlined in the teachings. The nature of these gatherings is for prayer, meditation and the reading of writings from the Sacred Scriptures of our Faith and other Faiths; there can be one or a number of readers; any Bahá'í chosen, or even non-Bahá'í, may read. The gatherings should be simple, dignified, and designed to uplift the soul and educate it through hearing the creative word. No speeches may be made, no extraneous matter introduced.

The use of pulpits is forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh; if, in order to be more clearly heard, the person reading stands on a low platform, there is no

objection, but this should not be incorporated as an architectural feature of the building...

The reader should stand where he or she will be best seen and heard by all. All minor details regarding this matter are left to the discretion of your Assembly to decide after receiving the advice of experts. As he already informed you, he suggests using fixed rather than movable seats.

Vocal music alone may be used and the position of the singers, or singer, is also a matter for your Assembly to decide; but again, there should be no fixed point, no architectural details marking a special spot. Acoustics should certainly be the main consideration in placing the singers...

He need not tell you how very important the decisions are which you will now be called upon to make in connection with completing the Temple ... He urges you, at all times, to receive the very best technical advice, and to bear in mind that the main thing is that the meetings in the Temple should be conducted in a beautiful and peaceful setting, in comfort and with dignity and simplicity, and that the audience should be able to hear perfectly and the tone values be pleasant to the ear.

20 July 1946

- 107 The essentials of the design, as stipulated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, are that the building should be nine-sided, and circular in shape. Aside from this, the architect is not restricted in any way in choosing his style of design.

25 June 1954, The Light of Divine Guidance

- 108 In passing, there is one point to be mentioned, and that is that the Temple in Wilmette does not constitute a pattern for other Temples, nor does it represent a new type of Bahá'í architecture. Therefore it is not necessary for your architects to endeavour to follow that pattern. What should be done is to follow the Master's instructions as to the Temple, and then create something that will be desirable and appropriate for your area.

10 February 1955, The Light of Divine Guidance

- 109 In building the Temple, one must be careful not to be carried away with the ideals and emotions of the situation, but keep oneself firmly on the ground, and realize they are buildings of steel and stone. That which will produce a House of Worship that is pleasing and attractive is what is required—not a replica of the Shrine of the Báb, or the Temple in Wilmette. We are not

seeking outstanding examples of architecture, but rather the release that will come from the construction of the first spiritual edifice in Europe.

9 November 1956

- 110 The influence that this Mother Temple of the whole Pacific area will exert when constructed is incalculable and mysterious. The beloved Master told the American friends that their Temple would be the greatest silent teacher, and there is no doubt that this one building has exerted a profound influence on the spread of the Faith, not only in the United States and the Western Hemisphere, but throughout the world. We can therefore expect that the construction of another “Mother Temple” in the heart of Australasia, and one in the centre of Africa, as well as one in the heart of Europe, will exert a tremendous influence, both locally and internationally.

19 July 1957, *Messages to the Antipodes*

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 111 We have given careful consideration to the questions you have raised in your letter of January 23, 1964 about the use of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár.

Your Assembly is free to use its discretion in choosing excerpts from the generally recognized scriptures of the older religions.

With reference to your query about the use of several readers in unison, this is permissible provided it does not seem, or become, theatrical in the view of your Assembly. Concerning the placement of the reader, the beloved Guardian has already indicated, “the reader should stand where he or she will best be seen and heard by all.”

Music in the House of Worship is to be vocal only, whether by singers or a singer. It does not matter if a guest, a capella choir or soloist is used, provided such use is not made the occasion to publicise services of Worship and the precautions you mention are taken. No doubt the excellent recordings available today would assure the highest quality of performance at low cost, but all references to vocal music in the central Edifice imply the physical presence of the singers.

In a letter through his secretary to a Chicago believer in 1931, “Bahá'í News” No. 55, page 4, Shoghi Effendi expressed the hope that “Now that the Temple is completed it will be filled to the full with pure seeking souls. It should be different from the other Houses of Worship which, even if

they are filled, their source of attraction is the music heard. Here the spirit should be so powerful as to awaken the heart of everyone that enters, to the Glory of Bahá'u'lláh."

In conclusion, a review of the closing paragraphs of the beloved Guardian's illuminating message of October 25, 1929, addressed to the American Bahá'í Community, clearly reveals the true nature of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. In them he decries the trappings of elaborate and ostentatious ceremony and warns against any inference "that the interior of the central Edifice itself will be converted into a conglomeration of religious services" offering "a spectacle of incoherent and confused sectarian observances and rites." In his concluding words, Shoghi Effendi links Bahá'í worship and service arising from the Institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár as vital to the regeneration of the world, and the secret of the unique position occupied by this lofty, potent and outstanding institution.

13 March 1964

- 112 Concerning Bahá'í marriage ceremonies, we see no objection to the ceremony being performed on the steps outside the central hall, but we suggest that an even more appropriate place would be the lodge on the Temple grounds. Also, it would be appropriate either before or after the ceremony for prayers and meditations to be recited or chanted in the Temple itself.

29 July 1973

- 113 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.

20 October 1983

114 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

115 In every land we see a growing thirst for spiritual life and moral clarity. There is recognition of the ineffectiveness of plans and programs for human betterment which are not rooted in lives of spiritual awareness and ethical virtue. Who should be better equipped to satisfy this longing than those who are already inspired by the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and aided by His Power?...

The spiritual growth generated by individual devotions is reinforced by loving association among the friends in every locality, by worship as a community and by service to the Faith and to one's fellow human beings. These communal aspects of the godly life relate to the law of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár which appears in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Although the time has not come for the building of local Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs, the holding of regular meetings for worship open to all and the involvement of Bahá'í communities in projects of humanitarian service are expressions of this element of Bahá'í life and a further step in the implementation of the Law of God.

Bahá'u'lláh has written: "We have adorned the heaven of utterance with the stars of divine wisdom and holy ordinances as a bounty on Our part. Verily, We are the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Generous. O friends of God throughout the regions! Know ye the value of these days and cling unto whatsoever hath been sent down from God, the Most Great, the Most Exalted. Verily, He remembereth you in the Most Great Prison, and

instructeth you in that which will cause you to draw nigh unto a station that delighteth the eyes of the pure in heart. Glory rest upon you and upon those who have attained unto that living fountain which floweth forth from My wondrous Pen.”

It is our prayer at the Sacred Threshold that the greater attention to the spiritual heart of the Teachings which these laws express will enhance the devotion of the friends to the Source of all bounties and attract to the Cause the receptive souls among His spiritually famished children.

28 December 1999

- 116 A feature of the Fifth Epoch will be the enrichment of the devotional life of the community through the raising up of national Houses of Worship, as circumstances in national communities permit. The scheduling of these projects will be determined by the Universal House of Justice in relation to the advancement of the process of entry by troops within countries. This development will unfold throughout successive stages of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan. Upon the completion of the Mother Temple of the West, the Guardian started a programme of constructing continental temples. The first among these were the Mashriqu’l-Adhkárs in Kampala, Sydney and Frankfurt, which were built in response to Ten Year Plan goals. The Universal House of Justice continued along these lines with the building of Temples in Panama City, Apia, and New Delhi. But this continental stage has yet to be completed: one more edifice remains to be built. It is with profound thankfulness and joy that we announce at this auspicious moment the decision to proceed with this last project. During the Five Year Plan, erection of the Mother Temple of South America in Santiago, Chile, will commence and thus fulfil a wish clearly expressed by Shoghi Effendi.

Riḍván 2001

- 117 Midafternoon on the eleventh day of the Riḍván festival one hundred years ago, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, standing before an audience several hundred strong, lifted a workman’s axe and pierced the turf covering the Temple site at Grosse Pointe, north of Chicago. Those invited to break the ground with Him on that spring day came from diverse backgrounds—Norwegian, Indian, French, Japanese, Persian, indigenous American, to name but a few. It was as if the House of Worship, yet unbuilt, was fulfilling the wishes of the Master, expressed on the eve of the ceremony, for every such edifice:

“that humanity might find a place of meeting” and “that the proclamation of the oneness of mankind shall go forth from its open courts of holiness”.

His listeners on that occasion, and all who heard Him in the course of His travels to Egypt and the West, must have but dimly comprehended the far-reaching implications of His words for society, for its values and preoccupations. Still today, can anyone claim to have glimpsed anything but an intimation, distant and indistinct, of the future society to which the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is destined to give rise? For let none suppose that the civilization towards which the divine teachings impel humankind will follow merely from adjustments to the present order. Far from it. In a talk delivered some days after He laid the cornerstone of the Mother Temple of the West, 'Abdu'l-Bahá stated that “among the results of the manifestation of spiritual forces will be that the human world will adapt itself to a new social form,” that “the justice of God will become manifest throughout human affairs”. These, and countless other utterances of the Master to which the Bahá'í community is turning time and again in this centennial period, raise awareness of the distance that separates society as it is now arranged from the stupendous vision His Father gifted to the world...

In our Riḍván message of 2001, we indicated that in countries where the process of entry by troops was sufficiently well advanced and conditions in national communities were favourable, we would approve the establishment of Houses of Worship at the national level, whose emergence would become a feature of the Fifth Epoch of the Formative Age of the Faith. With exceeding joy we now announce that national Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs are to be raised up in two countries: the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Papua New Guinea. In these, the criteria we set are demonstrably met, and the response of their peoples to the possibilities created by the current series of Plans has been nothing short of remarkable. With the construction of the last of the continental temples in Santiago under way, the initiation of projects for building national Houses of Worship offers yet another gratifying evidence of the penetration of the Faith of God into the soil of society.

One more step is possible. The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as “one of the most vital institutions of the world”, weds two essential, inseparable aspects of Bahá'í life: worship and service. The union of these two is also reflected in the coherence that exists among the community-building features of the Plan, particularly the burgeoning of a devotional spirit that finds expression in gatherings for prayer and an

educational process that builds capacity for service to humanity. The correlation of worship and service is especially pronounced in those clusters around the world where Bahá'í communities have significantly grown in size and vitality, and where engagement in social action is apparent. Some of these have been designated as sites for the dissemination of learning so as to nurture the friends' ability to advance the junior youth programme in associated regions. The capacity to sustain this programme, as we have recently indicated, also fuels the development of study circles and children's classes. Thus, beyond its primary purpose, the learning site fortifies the entire scheme of expansion and consolidation. It is within these clusters that, in the coming years, the emergence of a local *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* can be contemplated. Our hearts brimming with thankfulness to the Ancient Beauty, we rejoice to inform you that we are entering into consultations with respective National Spiritual Assemblies regarding the erection of the first local House of Worship in each of the following clusters: Battambang, Cambodia; Bihar Sharif, India; Matunda Soy, Kenya; Norte del Cauca, Colombia; and Tanna, Vanuatu.

To support the construction of the two national and five local *Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs*, we have decided to establish a Temples Fund at the Bahá'í World Centre for the benefit of all such projects. The friends everywhere are invited to contribute to it sacrificially, as their means allow.

Beloved co-workers: The ground broken by the hand of 'Abdu'l-Bahá a hundred years ago is to be broken again in seven more countries, this being but the prelude to the day when within every city and village, in obedience to the bidding of Bahá'u'lláh, a building is upraised for the worship of the Lord. From these Dawning-Points of the Remembrance of God will shine the rays of His light and peal out the anthems of His praise.

Riḍván 2012

- 118 In more and more clusters, the programme of growth is increasing in scope and complexity, commensurate with the rising capacity of the Plan's three protagonists—the individual, the community, and the institutions of the Faith—to create a mutually supportive environment. And we are delighted that, as anticipated, there are a growing number of clusters where a hundred or more individuals are now facilitating the engagement of a thousand or more in weaving a pattern of life, spiritual, dynamic, transformative. 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 ... [A] gainst 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.

Riḍván 2014

- 119 Over two years have elapsed since our announcement at Riḍván 2012 of projects to raise two national and five local Houses of Worship, to be pursued in conjunction with the construction in Santiago, Chile, of the last of the continental Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs. These undertakings, inextricably linked to the development of community life now being fostered everywhere through acts of devotion and service, are further steps in the sublime task entrusted to humanity by Bahá'u'lláh to build Houses of Worship “throughout the lands in the name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions”—centres in which souls may gather “harmoniously attuned one to another” to hear the divine verses and to offer supplications, and from which “the voices of praise may rise to the Kingdom” and the “fragrance of God” be diffused.

We are deeply moved by the response in every part of the world to our call. Particularly in the nations and localities recently designated for the construction of a House of Worship, we have witnessed the friends' spontaneous expressions of joy; their immediate and heartfelt commitment to lend their share in carrying out the critical work at hand and to increase the dynamism of those activities integral to the emergence of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár within a population; their sacrificial contributions of time, energy, and material resources, in a variety of forms; and their sustained efforts to awaken growing contingents to the vision of those edifices dedicated wholly to the remembrance of God that will be founded in

their midst. Indeed, the ready response of the community of the Greatest Name augurs well for its ability to further these collective undertakings...

In four countries, the projects have reached the stage of preparing a design for the Temple edifice. This begins with the selection of potential architects and the formulation of an architectural brief defining the requirements for the structure, and it ultimately results in a contract for the final design. Architects are presented with the singular challenge of designing Temples “as perfect as is possible in the world of being” that harmonize naturally with the local culture and the daily lives of those who will gather to pray and meditate therein. The task calls for creativity and skill to combine beauty, grace, and dignity with modesty, functionality, and economy. A number of architects from near and far have gladly offered their services, and while such contributions are of course welcomed, National Assemblies are giving due regard to the value of engaging architects who are well acquainted with the area where the edifice will be built...

As the friends worldwide rejoice in these heartening advances, their energies remain focused on the processes gaining strength in cluster after cluster. In this, they have not failed to appreciate the dynamic interaction between worship and endeavours to uplift the spiritual, social, and material conditions of society. May all those who are thus labouring in towns and cities, neighbourhoods and villages, derive insights from the exertions made to raise up the first two Houses of Worship at the turn of the twentieth century, in the East and then in the West.

In the city of ‘Ishqábád, a devoted band of believers who settled from Persia, and who, for a time, found peace and tranquillity in Turkistán, bent their energies towards the creation of a pattern of life that would reflect the exalted spiritual and social principles enshrined in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. In a span of a few decades, this group, originally consisting of a handful of families, was joined there by others and grew to a few thousand believers. This community, fortified by ties of camaraderie and animated by unity of purpose and a spirit of faithfulness, was enabled to reach a high degree of cohesiveness and development, for which it gained renown throughout the Bahá'í world. These friends, guided by their understanding of the divine Teachings, and within the bounds of the religious freedom they were accorded, toiled to create the conditions that would lead to the founding of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, that “crowning institution in every Bahá'í community”. On a befitting tract of land in

the centre of the city that had been obtained some years before with the consent of the Blessed Beauty Himself, facilities were built for communal well-being—a meeting hall, schools for children, a hostel for visitors, and a small clinic, among others. A sign of the notable achievements of the Bahá'ís in 'Ishqábád, who in those productive years became distinguished for their prosperity, magnanimity, and intellectual and cultural attainments, was their attention to ensuring that all Bahá'í children and youth were literate in a society with rampant illiteracy, especially among girls. Within such an environment of unified endeavour and progress, and fostered at every stage of development by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a magnificent House of Worship emerged—the most prominent edifice in the area. For over twenty years, the friends experienced the heavenly joy of having realized their lofty aim: the establishment of a focal point of worship, a nerve centre of community life, a place where souls gathered at daybreak for humble invocation and communion before flowing out of its doors to engage in their daily pursuits. While the forces of irreligion eventually swept through the region and thwarted hopes, the brief appearance of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in 'Ishqábád is an enduring testament to the volition and effort of a body of believers who established a rich pattern of life deriving its impetus from the power of the Creative Word.

In the Western Hemisphere, shortly after work commenced on the House of Worship in 'Ishqábád, the members of the nascent Bahá'í community in North America were galvanized to demonstrate their faith and devotion by constructing a Temple of their own, and they wrote in 1903 to seek the Master's consent. From that moment, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár became inseparably intertwined with the fate of those dedicated servants of Bahá'u'lláh. While progress on this complex project was obstructed over decades by the effects of two world wars and a widespread economic depression, each stage in its development was intimately tied to the expansion of the community and the unfoldment of its administration. On the same day as the interment of the sacred remains of the Báb on Mount Carmel in March 1909, delegates gathered to establish the Bahá'í Temple Unity, a national organization whose elected Board became the nucleus of the far-flung local communities of the continent. This development soon gave rise to the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada. 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself laid the cornerstone of the building during His travels to North America, endowing the Mother Temple of the West with tremendous spiritual potentialities.

And contributions for this historic enterprise flowed from Bahá'í centres in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Pacific—a demonstration of the solidarity and sacrifice of the Bahá'ís of the East and West.

As the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in every land centre their thoughts on God and occupy themselves each day with His remembrance, ceaselessly exerting effort in His Name, let them draw inspiration from these stirring words addressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to a believer who was devoted to building the first House of Worship, raised under His close and loving direction:

Hasten now to 'Ishqábád, in the utmost detachment and aflame with the fire of attraction, and convey to the friends of God ardent greetings from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Kiss thou each one's face and express this servant's deep and sincere affection to all. Do thou on behalf of 'Abdu'l-Bahá move the earth, carry the mortar, and haul the stones for the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár so that the rapture of this service may bring joy and gladness to the Centre of Servitude. That Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is the first visible and manifest establishment of the Lord. Therefore, it is this servant's hope that each and every virtuous and righteous soul will sacrifice his all, evince great happiness and exultation, and rejoice in carrying the earth and mortar so that this Divine Edifice may be raised, the Cause of God may spread, and in every corner of the world the friends may arise with the utmost resolve to accomplish this great task. Were 'Abdu'l-Bahá not imprisoned and were there not obstacles in his path, he himself would assuredly hasten to 'Ishqábád and carry the earth for the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár with the utmost joy and gladness. It behoveth the friends now to arise with this intention in mind and serve in my place so that in a short time this Edifice may be revealed to all eyes, the loved ones of God may engage in making mention of the Abhá Beauty, the melodies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár may rise at dawn-tide to the Concourse on high, and the songs of the nightingales of God may bring joy and ecstasy to the denizens of the All-Glorious Realm. Thus will the hearts rejoice, the souls delight in joyful tidings, and the minds be illumined. This is the highest hope of the sincere ones; this is the dearest wish of them that are nigh unto God.

1 August 2014

- 120 The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is a unique concept in the annals of religion and symbolizes the teachings of the new Day of God. A collective centre of society to promote cordial affection, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár stands as a

universal place of worship open to all the inhabitants of a locality irrespective of their religious affiliation, background, ethnicity, or gender and a haven for the deepest contemplation on spiritual reality and foundational questions of life, including individual and collective responsibility for the betterment of society. Men and women, children and youth, are held in its embrace as equals. This singular and integral universality is captured in the very structure of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, whose design as a nine-sided edifice conveys a sense of completeness and perfection symbolized by that number.

As the place from which spiritual forces are to radiate, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is the focal point for dependencies to be raised up for the well-being of humanity and is the expression of a common will and eagerness to serve. These dependencies—centres of education and scientific learning as well as cultural and humanitarian endeavour—embody the ideals of social and spiritual progress to be achieved through the application of knowledge, and demonstrate how, when religion and science are in harmony, they elevate the station of the human being and lead to the flourishing of civilization. As your lives amply demonstrate, worship, though essential to the inner life of the human being and vital to spiritual development, must also lead to deeds that give outward expression to that inner transformation. This concept of worship—inseparable from service—is promulgated by the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. In this connection Shoghi Effendi states:

Divorced from the social, humanitarian, educational, and scientific pursuits centring around the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, Bahá'í worship, however exalted in its conception, however passionate in fervour, can never hope to achieve beyond the meagre and often transitory results produced by the contemplations of the ascetic or the communion of the passive worshipper. It cannot afford lasting satisfaction and benefit to the worshipper himself, much less to humanity in general, unless and until translated and transfused into that dynamic and disinterested service to the cause of humanity which it is the supreme privilege of the Dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár to facilitate and promote.

The Twin Luminaries of this resplendent age have taught us this: Prayer is the essential spiritual conversation of the soul with its Maker, direct

and without intermediation. It is the spiritual food that sustains the life of the spirit. Like the morning's dew, it brings freshness to the heart and cleanses it, purifying it from attachments of the insistent self. It is a fire that burns away the veils and a light that leads to the ocean of reunion with the Almighty. On its wings does the soul soar in the heavens of God and draw closer to the divine reality. Upon its quality depend the development of the limitless capacities of the soul and the attraction of the bounties of God, but the prolongation of prayer is not desirable. The powers latent in prayer are manifested when it is motivated by the love of God, beyond any fear or favour, and free from ostentation and superstition. It is to be expressed with a sincere and pure heart conducive to contemplation and meditation so that the rational faculty can be illumined by its effects. Such prayer will transcend the limitation of words and go well beyond mere sounds. The sweetness of its melodies must gladden and uplift the heart and reinforce the penetrating power of the Word, transmuting earthly inclinations into heavenly attributes and inspiring selfless service to humankind...

We have called upon the Bahá'ís to see in their endeavours of community building the creation of a new pattern of how society can be. Taken in its entirety, that pattern fosters capacity for service—for the education of young generations, for the empowerment of the youth, for the spiritual education of children, for the enhancement of the capacity to draw upon the influence of the Word of God in accompanying others into the field of service, and for the social and economic advancement of a people in the light of the divine teachings for the age. Essential to that pattern is the devotional meeting—a communal aspect of the godly life and a dimension of the concept of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*—which represents a marvellous opportunity for your community not only to worship the Almighty and seek His benedictions in your own lives, but to extend to your fellow citizens the spiritual energies of prayer, to restore for them the purity of worship, to kindle in their hearts faith in the confirmations of God, and to strengthen in them, no less than in yourselves, eagerness to serve the nation and humanity and to show constructive resilience in the path of justice.

Beloved friends: Gatherings dedicated to prayer throughout your blessed land, in every neighbourhood, town, village, and hamlet, and the increasing access that your compatriots are gaining to Bahá'í prayers are enabling your community to shine the light of unity in the assemblage of humanity, lending a share to the endeavours of your fellow believers

throughout the world. Plant, then, the seeds of future Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs for the benefit of all, and ignite countless beacons of light against the gloom of hatred and inequity.

18 December 2014

- 121 The systematic pursuit of the Plan in all its dimensions gives rise to a pattern of collective endeavour distinguished not only for its commitment to service, but also for its attraction to worship. The intensification of activity which the next five years requires will further enrich the devotional life shared by those who serve side by side in clusters around the world. This process of enrichment is already much advanced: witness, for instance, how gatherings for worship have been integrated into the core of community life. Devotional meetings are occasions where any soul may enter, inhale the heavenly fragrances, experience the sweetness of prayer, meditate upon the Creative Word, be transported on the wings of the spirit, and commune with the one Beloved. Feelings of fellowship and common cause are generated, particularly in the spiritually heightened conversations that naturally occur at such times and through which the “city of the human heart” may be opened. By convening a gathering for worship at which adults and children of any background are welcome, the spirit of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is evoked in any locality. The enhancement of the devotional character of a community also has an effect on the Nineteen Day Feast and can be felt at other times when the friends come together.

29 December 2015

- 122 The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is “one of the most vital institutions in the world”. A Temple and its associated dependencies embody two essential and inseparable aspects of Bahá'í life: worship and service. As a potent symbol and an integral element of the divine civilization towards which Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation ushers all peoples, the House of Worship becomes the focal point of the community from which it emerges. “The holy fragrances of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár”, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá explains, “vivify the souls of the righteous, and its vitalizing breezes confer life upon the pure in heart.” Indeed, its influence is such as to galvanize an entire people to reach for a more profound sense of unified purpose. The gaze of the Bahá'í world is at this hour fixed upon its newly dedicated Temple, and we are certain that this longed-for victory will bring jubilation to the friends everywhere. Yet they will surely not be content to simply rejoice amongst themselves.

Inspired by all that this sublime edifice stands for, let them invite others to discover the abiding joy that comes from the praise of God and from service to humankind.

Bowing our heads at the Threshold of the Ancient Beauty, we give thanks that He has enabled His devoted followers to construct so striking a Temple fashioned of glass, stone, and light, nurturing an attraction to the sacred. The gratitude we feel increases our longing for that glorious day when the blessing of a *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* will be conferred upon every city and village, and we look first with eagerness to those countries where national and local Houses of Worship are beginning to emerge. May the resplendent sight of what the community of the Greatest Name has now accomplished in Santiago spur the faithful everywhere to intensify their service, however humble, rendered for the betterment of the world, offered to the Glory of God.

14 October 2016

- 123 A full year has yet to pass since the Bahá'í world marked the completion of the last of the continental Houses of Worship, and already a new dawn is breaking in the development of the institution of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*. You are gathered at the very dawning-place itself—the site of the first local House of Worship to rise above the horizon in the stage that has now opened. The dedication of this unique edifice is a historic occasion, prefiguring the appearance of many more local as well as national *Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs*, in obedience to Bahá'u'lláh's commandment revealed in His Most Holy Book: “Build ye houses of worship throughout the lands in the name of Him Who is the Lord of all religions.”...

The emergence of a House of Worship in Battambang ... is a testament to how brightly the light of faith shines in the hearts of the friends there. Its design, the work of an accomplished Cambodian architect, reflects the grace and beauty of that nation's culture; it uses innovative techniques but blends them with forms traditional to the region; it unquestionably belongs to the land from which it has risen. Even before its dedication, the Temple has succeeded in elevating the consciousness of those who reside in its shadow about a theme that is integral to the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*—the inseparability of worship and service in the life of a community. It has fostered a greater appreciation of the importance of unity, now reinforced through the collective worship that will occur within its walls. Its emergence is a spur

to the efforts being made to nurture communities of spiritual distinction. It is an edifice of noble purpose, erected by a people of noble spirit.

1 September 2017

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 124 About the dependencies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, there are a number of references to these "important accessories" in the Tablets and Addresses of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. For example, He lists a school for orphan children, hospital and dispensary for the poor, home for the incapable, college for higher scientific education and hospice. In another place after listing the foregoing institutions He states that other philanthropic buildings are to be built ... The Universal House of Justice has also said that it has not seen any text requiring that the number of dependencies should be nine.

18 March 1974

- 125 A symbol of this process [Bahá'í involvement in development projects] may be seen in the House of Worship and its dependencies. The first part to be built is the central edifice which is the spiritual heart of the community. Then, gradually, as the outward expression of this spiritual heart, the various dependencies, those "institutions of social service as shall afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant" are erected and function. This process begins in an embryonic way long before a Bahá'í community reaches the stage of building its own Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, for even the first local centre that a Bahá'í community erects can begin to serve not only as the spiritual and administrative centre and gathering place of the community, but also as the site of a tutorial school and the heart of other aspects of community life. The principle remains, however, that the spiritual precedes the material. First comes the illumination of hearts and minds by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and then the grass roots stirring of the believers wishing to apply these teachings to the daily life of their community.

8 May 1984

- 126 The term "Mashriqu'l-Adhkár" has been used in the Writings to describe various things: the gathering of the friends for prayers at dawn; a building

where this activity takes place; the complete institution of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, with its dependencies; the central edifice of that institution, often described as a "House of Worship" or "Temple". These variants can all be seen as denoting stages or aspects of the gradual introduction of Bahá'u'lláh's concept as promulgated in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. For the development of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, several lines of action have been set in motion, and it is to these that the believers should devote their efforts and attention.

20 April 1997

- 127 The term "*Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*", when it refers to a House of Worship, denotes a building, the centre in which the people gather to hear the Word of God and to worship Him. Surrounding this central House of Worship are the dependencies of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, which express worship in the form of service to humanity.

24 February 1998

- 128 In carrying out this review, it should be noted that it is permissible to use selections from the Holy Writings as lyrics to be accompanied by musical compositions, and to repeat verses or words. A composer is free to determine the musical style, bearing in mind the spiritual obligation to treat the Sacred Texts with propriety, dignity and reverence...

Furthermore, there is no objection to the repetition of verses from prayers or selections from the Writings in songs in order to conform with musical requirements.

As stated above, slight alterations in the text are permissible, as is repetition of lines as a chorus or of short phrases such as "O God, my God" in order to conform with musical requirements. The musical style of the piece can be determined by the composer, provided that he or she bears in mind the spiritual obligation to treat the Sacred Texts with the propriety, dignity and reverence due them.

14 February 2001

- 129 The House of Justice was especially delighted to learn of the significant increase in the level of activity at the Temple, including the growing number of core activities involving participants from the wider community ... Building on this foundation, an issue of central importance for your National Assembly to earnestly address concerns the need to foster unity of thought and purpose among the believers regarding ways to bring about an

even greater degree of coherence between the endeavours at the House of Worship and the work of expansion and consolidation in the Upolu cluster.

At the heart of these exertions will be the teaching activities and processes of community-building taking place at the Temple. In particular, efforts to share the fundamental teachings of the Faith with visitors and those living in the vicinity and to extend to them an invitation to engage in study circles, devotional gatherings, children's classes, and junior youth groups held on the Temple grounds and in other parts of the cluster will need to be systematized and supported with the necessary human and financial resources. Consideration may also be given to developing a special programme that aims to share a vision of the House of Worship as the spiritual centre of the community and of the influence it can exert in the lives of the surrounding population—a vision of a Temple for the people of Samoa.

It is the ardent hope of the House of Justice that the agencies and believers serving in the Upolu cluster will be empowered to take full advantage of the presence of the House of Worship in their midst as they labour to advance the process of growth and that means of attracting visitors and enhancing their experience will be further refined over time. As with other aspects of Bahá'í community life, success in this endeavour will rest largely upon the friends functioning in a learning mode to ensure that methods and activities are continually reflected upon and improved.

27 December 2011

- 130 The House of Justice was delighted to learn that discussions among the believers about the significance of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár are creating strong connections with the undertaking and are leading to a broader participation of the Bahá'ís and their friends in this collective endeavour. Increased awareness among the believers in Colombia of the significance of the House of Worship has also generated material contributions from them; this is yet another sign of their spiritual commitment. It is hoped that this initial response will be sustained throughout the life of the project and foster a pattern of regular giving to the funds of the Faith.

10 December 2013

- 131 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

- 132 In addition, since it is envisioned that the design of the Temple will “harmonize naturally with the local culture and the daily lives of those who will gather to pray and meditate therein”, the friends could be encouraged to generate some preliminary ideas about its physical appearance. It is hoped that, ultimately, the design of the House of Worship will draw on elements and symbols with which the people of Kenya naturally identify. These ideas, forwarded to the construction office soon to be established, could be incorporated into the architectural brief defining the requirements for the project.

24 September 2014

- 133 With regard to your questions concerning the difference between continental, national and local Houses of Worship, the establishment of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* began with the construction of a Temple in various regions of the world. As they were erected, the role of these Houses of Worship in signalling the presence and promise of the Faith was emphasized often in figurative language. The Guardian wrote that a *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* is a “symbol and harbinger of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh” and frequently called the first in each continent or region a “mother temple”. The House of Justice, when referring to the initiation of projects to construct national Houses of Worship, beginning in the Fifth Epoch and following the commencement of the construction in Chile of the last of the continental Temples, writes that it “offers yet another gratifying evidence of the penetration of the Faith of God into the soil of society.”

Beyond this symbolic significance, the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* is an institution with tremendous practical potentialities. It is envisioned that wherever an Assembly is established, whether local or national, the institutions of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* and *Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds* will in time be raised. “From the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, ordained as a house of worship by Bahá'u'lláh in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*,” Shoghi Effendi wrote, “the representatives of Bahá'í communities, both local and national, together with the members of their respective committees, will, as they gather daily within its walls at the hour of dawn, derive the necessary inspiration that will

enable them to discharge, in the course of their day-to-day exertions in the Ḥaẓíratu'l-Quds—the scene of their administrative activities—their duties and responsibilities as befits the chosen stewards of His Faith.”

Furthermore, 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

- 134 Lyrics used in songs being performed in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár need not be confined to the Writings; rather, what is required is that they be based upon Bahá'í or other sacred writings and contain Bahá'í themes. It should be noted that the standard for lyrics used in songs performed is somewhat different from the standard for Writings and prayers to be read or chanted in devotional programmes in Houses of Worship. There is therefore no objection to the use of songs based on the Writings and talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

2 November 2015

Selected Prayers for the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

135 O LORD, my God! Confirm them in Thy service! Strengthen their backs in bearing the stones for the erection of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár! O Lord, my God! Illumine the faces of these righteous ones with the light that shineth from the dawning-place of Thy mysteries. Verily, thou art the Mighty and the Unconstrained and verily, Thou art the Merciful and the Compassionate.

From a Tablet

136 O GOD, my God! Lowly, humble, and tearful, I turn my face unto the Kingdom of Thy mercy and the realm of Thy singleness and fervently entreat Thee at the Threshold of Thy oneness to assist Thy true lovers to offer their contribution to the rearing of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in that land—that from this edifice, the splendours of His light may be shed abroad in every direction, and the joyous cries that extol and magnify Thy name may be raised at morn and eventide, ascending upward towards Thy celestial Concourse and Thine all-glorious Horizon.

O Lord, my God! Cause me to hear the accents of their voices and the lamentations of their hearts, despite the great distance that separateth this nearer side of the valley and that “faraway side,”ⁱ in order that my spirit may rejoice, my heart be gladdened, mine eyes be consoled, my whole being tremble for joy, and mine inmost essence be filled with bliss at such an outpouring of grace, at such manifest splendour.

O Lord, my God! Open wide the doors of Thy blessings unto every soul who ariseth to make offerings for this exalted edifice, this wondrous House of Prayer, this Dayspring of light.

i Qur'án 8:42

Verily art Thou the Omnipotent, the Mighty, the Powerful, the Tender,
the Gracious.

From a Tablet

137 **O** GOD! Send down Thy divine increase on whosoever endeavoureth to serve this edifice and exerteth himself to raise it amongst the kindreds and religions of the world. Confirm him in every good deed in promoting the welfare of mankind. Open Thou the doors of wealth and abundance unto him and make him an heir to the treasures of the Kingdom, which perish not. Make him a sign of Thy bestowals among the peoples and reinforce him by the sea of Thy generosity and bounty, surging with waves of Thy grace and favour. Verily, Thou art the Generous, the Merciful and the Bountiful.

From a Tablet

138 **O** GOD, my God! Illumine the brows of Thy true lovers and support them with angelic hosts of certain triumph. Set firm their feet on Thy straight path, and out of Thine ancient bounty open before them the portals of Thy blessings; for they are expending on Thy pathway what Thou hast bestowed upon them, safeguarding Thy Faith, putting their trust in their remembrance of Thee, offering up their hearts for love of Thee, and withholding not what they possess in adoration for Thy Beauty and in their search for ways to please Thee.

O my Lord! Ordain for them a plenteous share, a destined recompense and sure reward.

Verily, Thou art the Sustainer, the Helper, the Generous, the Bountiful, the Ever-Bestowing.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

139 **T**HE photograph which thou hadst sent of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár hath been received. It was a source of immense joy, for praise be to God, the beloved of God gathered in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár with their faces aglow like unto candles, illumining that assemblage with the light of spiritual sentiments.

My God, my Beloved, my heart's Desire! These are servants of the Threshold of Thy holiness who have prostrated themselves before the door of Thy singleness. They have entered the Dawning-Place of Thy praise and the assemblage of Thy light, beseeching Thee, humbly supplicating the Kingdom of Thy oneness, and praying fervently to Thee with their hearts fixed steadfastly upon Thee.

O my Lord! Accept their deeds, commune with them in their prayers, and inspire them with the wonders of Thy mysteries, that they may become the manifestations of Thy bounty amidst Thy creatures and the company of Thy chosen ones amongst Thy people. Verily, Thou art the Gentle, the All-Bountiful, the Gracious, the Merciful, the All-Loving.

From a Tablet

THE
NATIONAL
SPIRITUAL
ASSEMBLY

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

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled October 2023

A Pivotal Instrument of the Administrative Order

The Administrative Order: Nucleus and Pattern of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 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 It should be remembered by every follower of the Cause that the system of Bahá'í administration is not an innovation imposed arbitrarily upon the Bahá'ís of the world since the Master's passing, but derives its authority from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is specifically prescribed in unnumbered Tablets, and rests in some of its essential features upon the explicit provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. It thus unifies and correlates the principles separately laid down by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and is indissolubly bound with the essential verities of the Faith. To dissociate the administrative principles of the Cause from the purely spiritual and humanitarian teachings would be tantamount to a mutilation of the body of the Cause, a separation that can only result in the disintegration of its component parts, and the extinction of the Faith itself.
27 February 1929, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh
- 3 The Administrative Order which lies embedded in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, and which the American believers have championed and are now establishing, should, under no circumstances, be identified with the principles underlying present-day democracies. Nor is it identical with any purely aristocratic or autocratic form of government. The objectionable features inherent in each of these political systems are entirely avoided. It

blends, as no system of human polity has as yet achieved, those salutary truths and beneficial elements which constitute the valuable contributions which each of these forms of government have made to society in the past. Consultation, frank and unfettered, is the bedrock of this unique Order. Authority is concentrated in the hands of the elected members of the National Assembly. Power and initiative are primarily vested in the entire body of the believers acting through their local representatives. To generate those forces which must give birth to the body of their national administrators, and to confer, freely and fully and at fixed intervals, with both the incoming and outgoing National Assemblies, are the twofold functions, the supreme responsibility and sole prerogative of the delegates assembled in Convention. Nothing short of close and constant interaction between these various organs of Bahá'í administration can enable it to fulfil its high destiny.

18 November 1933, Shoghi Effendi

- 4 Dearly-beloved friends! The onrushing forces so miraculously released through the agency of two independent and swiftly successive Manifestations are now under our very eyes and through the care of the chosen stewards of a far-flung Faith being gradually mustered and disciplined. They are slowly crystallizing into institutions that will come to be regarded as the hall-mark and glory of the age we are called upon to establish and by our deeds immortalize. For upon our present-day efforts, and above all upon the extent to which we strive to remodel our lives after the pattern of sublime heroism associated with those gone before us, must depend the efficacy of the instruments we now fashion—instruments that must erect the structure of that blissful Commonwealth which must signalize the Golden Age of our Faith.

8 February 1934, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 5 Let no one, while this System is still in its infancy, misconceive its character, belittle its significance or misrepresent its purpose. The bedrock on which this Administrative Order is founded is God's immutable Purpose for mankind in this day. The Source from which it derives its inspiration is no one less than Bahá'u'lláh Himself. Its shield and defender are the embattled hosts of the Abhá Kingdom.... The pillars that sustain its authority and buttress its structure are the twin institutions of the Guardianship and of the Universal House of Justice. The central, the underlying aim which

animates it is the establishment of the New World Order as adumbrated by Bahá'u'lláh. The methods it employs, the standard it inculcates, incline it to neither East nor West, neither Jew nor Gentile, neither rich nor poor, neither white nor colored. Its watchword is the unification of the human race; its standard the “Most Great Peace”; its consummation the advent of that golden millennium—the Day when the kingdoms of this world shall have become the Kingdom of God Himself, the Kingdom of Bahá'u'lláh.

8 February 1934, Shoghi Effendi, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 6 In emphasizing its distinctiveness, Shoghi Effendi has pointed out that “this Administrative Order is fundamentally different from anything that any Prophet has previously established, inasmuch as Bahá'u'lláh has Himself revealed its principles, established its institutions, appointed the person to interpret His Word and conferred the necessary authority on the body designed to supplement and apply His legislative ordinances.” In another statement, he maintains that “It would be utterly misleading to attempt a comparison between this unique, this divinely-conceived Order and any of the diverse systems which the minds of men, at various periods of their history, have contrived for the government of human institutions.” “Such an attempt,” he felt, “would in itself betray a lack of complete appreciation of the excellence of the handiwork of its great Author.”

29 December 1988, The Universal House of Justice

- 7 The situation in the world, while presenting us with an acute challenge of the utmost urgency, calls to mind the encouraging global vision of Shoghi Effendi for the prospects of the Administrative Order during the second century of the Bahá'í Era, whose midpoint we are rapidly approaching. In 1946, he wrote: “The second century is destined to witness a tremendous deployment and a notable consolidation of the forces working towards the worldwide development of that Order, as well as the first stirrings of that World Order, of which the present Administrative System is at once the precursor, the nucleus and pattern—an Order which, as it slowly crystallizes and radiates its benign influence over the entire planet, will proclaim at once the coming of age of the whole human race, as well as the maturity of the Faith itself, the progenitor of that Order.”

Riḍván 1992, The Universal House of Justice

8 From the dawn of Bahá'í history, attention has been directed to the glory of the World Order which the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is destined to unfold. The Báb Himself declared, "Well is it with him who fixeth his gaze upon the Order of Bahá'u'lláh and rendereth thanks unto his Lord!" while Bahá'u'lláh affirmed, in the Mother Book of His Dispensation, that "the world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order". It is abundantly evident that the exalted aims of the Faith can be accomplished only through the instrumentality of the World Order which Bahá'u'lláh has established for that purpose. The spiritual transformation of humanity, the relief of the diverse peoples of the earth from rampant suffering, the attainment and preservation of true peace in the world, the birth of a world civilization—all such noble objectives of the Cause of God will remain unrealized unless they are associated with that radical change in the structure and functioning of human society inherent in the growth and fruition of His divinely ordained Order. The institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, now being raised in all parts of the world through the endeavours of the believers, are the precursor, the nucleus and the pattern of that World Order which will, in the course of time, exert its full benevolent influence on all the peoples of the earth.

Shoghi Effendi explained that the revelation by Bahá'u'lláh of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas "preserves for posterity the basic laws and ordinances on which the fabric of His future World Order must rest." And he referred to "the triple impulse generated through the revelation of the Tablet of Carmel by Bahá'u'lláh and the Will and Testament as well as the Tablets of the Divine Plan bequeathed by the Centre of His Covenant—the three Charters which have set in motion three distinct processes, the first operating in the Holy Land for the development of the institutions of the Faith at its World Centre and the other two, throughout the rest of the Bahá'í world, for its propagation and the establishment of its Administrative Order." These three processes, although distinct, are closely interrelated. Developments at the World Centre of the Faith, the heart and nerve-centre of the Administrative Order, must necessarily exert a pronounced influence on the organic body of the worldwide Bahá'í community, and be affected by its vitality. The Administrative Order may best be viewed as the chief instrument for the prosecution of the Divine Plan, while that Plan has become recognized as the most potent agency for the development of the administrative structure of the Faith. It follows that, for the sound and

balanced growth of the Faith and the speedy attainment of world order, due attention must be paid to all three processes.

4 January 1994, The Universal House of Justice

- 9 The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is the divinely ordained system for which nations and peoples so desperately search. Hailed by the Báb in the Persian Bayan, its foundational features prescribed by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, this Order is without precedent in human history for its standard of justice and its commitment to the practical realization of the oneness of mankind, as well as for its capacity to promote change and the advancement of world civilization. It provides the means by which the Divine Will illumines the path of human progress and guides the eventual establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

Throughout the entire planet the devoted followers of Bahá'u'lláh are labouring to develop further the Bahá'í Administrative Order described by the Guardian “not only as the nucleus but the very pattern of the New World Order”, thus setting the foundation for a world civilization destined to yield its dazzling splendour in the centuries to come. They do so notwithstanding the conditions of turmoil and disorder alluded to by Bahá'u'lláh in affirming that “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.”

25 March 2007, The Universal House of Justice

Role of the National Spiritual Assembly

- 10 The Spiritual Assemblies to be established in this Age of God, this holy century, have, it is indisputable, had neither peer nor likeness in the cycles gone before. For those assemblages that wielded power were based on the support of mighty leaders of men, while these Assemblies are based on the support of the Beauty of Abhá. The defenders and patrons of those other assemblages were either a prince, or a king, or a chief priest, or the mass of the people. But these Spiritual Assemblies have for their defender, their supporter, their helper, their inspirer, the omnipotent Lord.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, par. 40.2

- 11 Designated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will as the "Secondary Houses of Justice," they constitute the electoral bodies in the formation of the International House of Justice, and are empowered to direct, unify, coordinate and stimulate the activities of individuals as well as local Assemblies within their jurisdiction. Resting on the broad base of organized local communities, themselves pillars sustaining the institution which must be regarded as the apex of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, these Assemblies are elected, according to the principle of proportional representation, by delegates representative of Bahá'í local communities assembled at Convention during the period of the Ridván Festival; are possessed of the necessary authority to enable them to insure the harmonious and efficient development of Bahá'í activity within their respective spheres; are freed from all direct responsibility for their policies and decisions to their electorates; are charged with the sacred duty of consulting the views, of inviting the recommendations and of securing the confidence and cooperation of the delegates and of acquainting them with their plans, problems and actions; and are supported by the resources of national funds to which all ranks of the faithful are urged to contribute.

Shoghi Effendi, God Passes By

- 12 It would be impossible at this stage to ignore the indispensability or to overestimate the unique significance of the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly—the pivot round which revolve the activities of the believers throughout the American continent. Supreme is their position, grave their responsibilities, manifold and arduous their duties. How great

the privilege, how delicate the task of the assembled delegates whose function it is to elect such national representatives as would by their record of service ennoble and enrich the annals of the Cause! If we but turn our gaze to the high qualifications of the members of Bahá'í Assemblies, as enumerated in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets, we are filled with feelings of unworthiness and dismay, and would feel truly disheartened but for the comforting thought that if we rise to play nobly our part every deficiency in our lives will be more than compensated by the all-conquering spirit of His grace and power. Hence it is incumbent upon the chosen delegates to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, the names of only those who can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience. May the incoming National Spiritual Assembly—the privileged and chosen servants of the Cause—immortalize their term of stewardship by deeds of loving service, deeds that will redound to the honour, the glory and the power of the Most Great Name.

3 June 1925, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 13 As to the National Assembly, whose inescapable responsibility is to guard the integrity, coordinate the activities, and stimulate the life, of the entire community, its chief concern, at the present moment, should be to anxiously deliberate on how best to enable both individual believers and Local Assemblies to fulfill their respective tasks. Through their repeated appeals, through their readiness to dispel all misunderstandings and remove all obstacles, through the example of their lives, their unrelaxing vigilance, their high sense of justice, their humility, consecration and courage, they must demonstrate to those whom they represent their capacity to play their part in the progress of the Plan in which they, no less than the rest of the community, are involved. May the all-conquering Spirit of Bahá'u'lláh be so infused into each component part of this harmoniously functioning System as to enable it to contribute its proper share to the consummation of the Plan.

30 January 1938, Shoghi Effendi, This Decisive Hour

- 14 As the process of internal expansion and consolidation gains momentum, the elected national representatives of this Community must not fail to consecrate themselves to the no less fundamental task of enriching continually

the spiritual life of its members, of deepening their understanding of the essential verities, tenets and principles underlying their Faith, of demanding a strict adherence to its laws and statutes, and of setting an example to their fellow-believers through a fuller reflection, in their personal lives and conduct, of the ennobling truths animating the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

24 June 1954, Shoghi Effendi

- 15 The purpose of the administration at this time is to blow on the fire newly kindled in the hearts of these people who have accepted the Faith, to create in them the desire and capacity to teach, to facilitate the pioneer and teaching work, and help deepen the knowledge and understanding of the friends.

15 July 1957, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 16 Like a wise and loving parent the Assembly should conduct the affairs of the Bahá'ís, constantly and patiently, encouraging them and instilling enthusiasm for the work to be done.

29 July 1957, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 17 One of the purposes of the structure provided by the institutions of the Administrative Order is to facilitate the flow of guidance, information, and funds—between the institutions themselves but often between individuals or groups and the institutions. It is true that the flow of each of these, most notably the flow of information that takes place in everyday conversation, can occur through informal means; yet all require formal systems and instruments, some of which are highly structured, such as an accounting system or a statistical report, and others of which are less so, for instance, a meeting called to address a particular issue or an assignment given to a secretary to carry out on behalf of a body.

24 June 2010, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

An Ethos of Loving Service

- 18 Let it be made clear to every inquiring reader that among the most outstanding and sacred duties incumbent upon those who have been called upon to initiate, direct and co-ordinate the affairs of the Cause are those that require them to win by every means in their power the confidence and affection of those whom it is their privilege to serve. Theirs is the

duty to investigate and acquaint themselves with the considered views, the prevailing sentiments, the personal convictions of those whose welfare it is their solemn obligation to promote. Theirs is the duty to purge once for all their deliberations and the general conduct of their affairs from that air of self-contained aloofness, from the suspicion of secrecy, the stifling atmosphere of dictatorial assertiveness, in short from every word and deed that might savour of partiality, self-centeredness and prejudice. Theirs is the duty, while retaining the sacred and exclusive right of final decision in their hands, to invite discussion, provide information, ventilate grievances, welcome advice from even the most humble and insignificant member of the Bahá'í Family, expose their motives, set forth their plans, justify their actions, revise if necessary their verdict, foster the spirit of individual initiative and enterprise, and fortify the sense of interdependence and co-partnership, of understanding and mutual confidence between them on one hand and all Local Assemblies and individual believers on the other.

18 October 1927, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 19 Administrative efficiency and order should always be accompanied by an equal degree of love, of devotion and of spiritual development. Both of them are essential and to attempt to dissociate one from the other is to deaden the body of the Cause. In these days, when the Faith is still in its infancy, great care must be taken lest mere administrative routine stifles the spirit which must feed the body of the Administration itself. That spirit is its propelling force and the motivating power of its very life.

But as already emphasized, both the spirit and the form are essential to the safe and speedy development of the Administration. To maintain full balance between them is the main and unique responsibility of the administrators of the Cause.

10 December 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 20 The friends must never mistake the Bahá'í administration for an end in itself. It is merely the instrument of the spirit of the Faith. This Cause is a Cause which God has revealed to humanity as a whole. It is designed to benefit the entire human race, and the only way it can do this is to reform the Community life of mankind, as well as seeking to regenerate the individual. The Bahá'í Administration is only the first shaping of what in future will come to be the social life and laws of community living. As yet the believers are only just beginning to grasp and practice it properly. So

we must have patience if at times it seems a little self-conscious and rigid in its workings. It is because we are learning something very difficult but very wonderful—how to live together as a community of Bahá'ís, according to the glorious teachings.

14 October 1941, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Messages to the Antipodes

- 21 Contemplating Bahá'u'lláh's warning that "whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence," we come to appreciate that the Administrative Order He has conceived embodies the operating principles which are necessary to the maintenance of that moderation which will ensure the "true liberty" of humankind. All things considered, does the Administrative Order not appear to be the structure of freedom for our Age? 'Abdu'l-Bahá offers us comfort in this thought, for He has said that "the moderate freedom which guarantees the welfare of the world of mankind and maintains and preserves the universal relationships is found in its fullest power and extension in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh."

Within this framework of freedom a pattern is set for institutional and individual behaviour which depends for its efficacy not so much on the force of law, which admittedly must be respected, as on the recognition of a mutuality of benefits, and on the spirit of cooperation maintained by the willingness, the courage, the sense of responsibility, and the initiative of individuals—these being expressions of their devotion and submission to the will of God. Thus there is a balance of freedom between the institution, whether national or local, and the individuals who sustain its existence.

29 December 1988, The Universal House of Justice

- 22 In general one can say that modern democracies have been established as the outcome of attempts to limit the power of absolute monarchy, of dictatorships, or of certain dominant classes. This may have come about gradually through the centuries, or tumultuously by a series of revolutions. Thus, even when democratic constitutions and structures have been established, there remains a suspicion of authority as such, and a tension between the degree of freedom accorded to individual citizens and the imposition of sufficient public discipline to protect the weak against the selfish pursuits of the strong among the citizenry. The operation of transparency, accountability, freedom of the press and critical dialogue is thus imbued with a spirit of partisanship that easily descends into the merciless invasion of personal privacy, the dissemination of calumny, the exaggeration of mistrust, and

the misuse of the news media at the hands of vested interests. The reaction of those who attempt to protect themselves against such distortions of the system produces secretiveness, concealment of uncomfortable facts, and reciprocal misuse of the media—in all, a perpetuation of disharmony in the social fabric.

In contrast to these patterns bred by traditional antagonisms, the Bahá'í system is based upon the ideals of unity, harmony, justice, diversity and forbearance in the building of a divinely conceived administrative structure through a process of mutual learning and discovery. As already noted, the element of power-seeking is entirely absent. All members of a Bahá'í community, no matter what position they may temporarily occupy in the administrative structure, are expected to regard themselves as involved in a learning process, as they strive to understand and implement the laws and principles of the Faith. As part of this process, the Assemblies are encouraged to continually share their hopes and cares and the news of developments with the members of the community and to seek their views and support. There are, of course, matters such as the personal problems of a believer which he (or she) brings to his Assembly for advice, the amounts of the contributions of individual believers to the Fund, and so forth, in relation to which the Assembly must observe strict confidentiality. As in any just system of government the proper balance has to be sought and found between extremes. In this connection, you will recall Shoghi Effendi's statement in Bahá'í Administration:

Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá'í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion, and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candour, and courage on the other.

18 July 2000, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 23 “Let us take heed lest in our great concern for the perfection of the administrative machinery of the Cause,” he [the Guardian] stated, “we lose sight of the Divine Purpose for which it has been created.” The Bahá'í administrative machinery, he reiterated again and again, “is to be regarded as a means, and not an end in itself”. It is intended, he made clear, “to

serve a twofold purpose". On the one hand, "it should aim at a steady and gradual expansion" of the Cause "along lines that are at once broad, sound and universal." On the other, "it should ensure the internal consolidation of the work already achieved." And he went on to explain: "It should both provide the impulse whereby the dynamic forces latent in the Faith can unfold, crystallize, and shape the lives and conduct of men, and serve as a medium for the interchange of thought and the coordination of activities among the divers elements that constitute the Bahá'í community."

It is our earnest hope that, in your efforts over the next Plan to promote the sound and harmonious development of Bahá'í administration at all levels, from the local to the national, you will do your utmost to help the friends carry out their functions in the context of the organic process of growth gathering momentum across the globe. The realization of this hope will hinge, to a large extent, on the degree to which those who have been called upon to render such service—whether elected to a Spiritual Assembly or named to one of its agencies, whether designated an institute coordinator or appointed one of your deputies—recognize the great privilege that is theirs and understand the boundaries which this privilege establishes for them.

Service on the institutions and agencies of the Faith is indeed a tremendous privilege, but not one that is sought by the individual; it is a duty and responsibility to which he or she may be called at any given time. It is understandable, of course, that all those involved in Bahá'í administration would rightly feel they have been invested with a singular honour in forming part, in whatever way, of a structure designed to be a channel through which the spirit of the Cause flows. Yet they should not imagine that such service entitles them to operate on the periphery of the learning process that is everywhere gaining strength, exempt from its inherent requirements. Nor should it be supposed that membership on administrative bodies provides an opportunity to promote one's own understanding of what is recorded in the Sacred Text and how the teachings should be applied, steering the community in whatever direction personal preferences dictate. Referring to members of Spiritual Assemblies, the Guardian wrote that they "must disregard utterly their own likes and dislikes, their personal interests and inclinations, and concentrate their minds upon those measures that will conduce to the welfare and happiness of the Bahá'í Community and promote the common weal." Bahá'í institutions do exercise authority to guide the friends, and exert moral, spiritual

and intellectual influence on the lives of individuals and communities. However, such functions are to be performed with the realization that an ethos of loving service pervades Bahá'í institutional identity. Qualifying authority and influence in this manner implies sacrifice on the part of those entrusted to administer the affairs of the Faith. Does not 'Abdu'l-Bahá tell us that "when a lump of iron is cast into the forge, its ferrous qualities of blackness, coldness and solidity, which symbolize the attributes of the human world, are concealed and disappear, while the fire's distinctive qualities of redness, heat and fluidity, which symbolize the virtues of the Kingdom, become visibly apparent in it." As He averred, "ye must in this matter—that is, the serving of humankind—lay down your very lives, and as ye yield yourselves, rejoice."...

Referring to rectitude of conduct, Shoghi Effendi spoke of the "justice, equity, truthfulness, honesty, fair-mindedness, reliability, and trustworthiness" that must "distinguish every phase of the life of the Bahá'í community." Though applicable to all its members, this requisite was directed principally, he underscored, to its "elected representatives, whether local, regional, or national," whose sense of moral rectitude should stand in clear contrast to "the demoralizing influences which a corruption-ridden political life so strikingly manifests". The Guardian called for "an abiding sense of undeviating justice" in a "strangely disordered world" and quoted extensively from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, setting the sights of the friends on the highest standards of honesty and trustworthiness. He appealed to the believers to exemplify rectitude of conduct in every aspect of their lives—in their business dealings, in their domestic lives, in all manner of employment, in every service they render to the Cause and to their people—and to observe its requirements in their uncompromising adherence to the laws and principles of the Faith. That political life everywhere has continued to deteriorate at an alarming rate in the intervening years, as the very conception of statesmanship has been drained of meaning, as policies have come to serve the economic interests of the few in the name of progress, as hypocrisy has been allowed to undermine the operation of social and economic structures, is evident. If indeed great effort was required for the friends to uphold the high standards of the Faith then, how much greater must be the exertion in a world that rewards dishonesty, that encourages corruption, and that treats truth as a negotiable commodity. Profound is the confusion that threatens the foundations of society, and unwavering must be the resolve of all

those involved in Bahá'í activity, lest the slightest trace of self-interest becloud their judgement. Let the coordinators of every training institute, the members of every Area Teaching Committee, every Auxiliary Board member and every one of his or her assistants, and all members of every local, regional and national Bahá'í body, whether elected or appointed, appreciate the significance of the Guardian's plea to ponder in their hearts the implications of the moral rectitude which he described with such clarity. May their actions serve as a reminder to a beleaguered and weary humanity of its high destiny and its inherent nobility.

28 December 2010, The Universal House of Justice

Interdependence of the Elected and the Appointed

- 24 The Continental Boards of Counsellors and the National Spiritual Assemblies share in the functions of propagation and protection, but the Counsellors specialize in these functions from a different level and in a different manner. From a continental vantage point, the Counsellors bring a perspective to their functions which, when offered to a National Assembly in the form of counsel, advice, recommendations, suggestions or commentary, enriches the latter's understanding, acquaints it with a broader experience than its own, and encourages it to maintain a world-embracing vision....

With the opening of the fourth epoch of the Formative Age, a procedure was activated by which the goals of national plans are formulated in joint consultations of National Spiritual Assemblies and Continental Counsellors. It initiated a new phase in the maturation of the Administrative Order. This development ensures two significant benefits in particular: It enables each institution to draw on the experiences and insights particular to the other, thereby making available to the planning process two distinct channels of information from two levels of Bahá'í administration; and it also assures to the Counsellors a necessary familiarity with the background, rationale, and content of national plans, which as a matter of principle they are expected to support. Both institutions obtain strength from such collaboration....

19 May 1994, The Universal House of Justice

- 25 Further, in addition to the Spiritual Assemblies, the Bahá'í Administrative Order also contains the institutions of the Continental Boards of Counsellors and their Auxiliary Boards. Their endeavours, with the individuals, the community and the institutions, are intended to help maintain the true spirit of the Faith, to counsel the governing institutions and to assist them to attain the high ideals set before them by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master. As the House of Justice wrote in a letter dated 24 April 1972: "The existence of institutions of such exalted rank, comprising individuals who play such a vital role, who yet have no legislative, administrative or judicial authority, and are entirely devoid of priestly functions or the right to make authoritative interpretations, is a feature of Bahá'í administration unparalleled in the religions of the past." The House of Justice went on to comment that, only as the Bahá'í community grows, and the believers are increasingly able to contemplate its administrative structure uninfluenced by concepts from past ages, will the vital interdependence of these two arms of the administration be properly understood and the value of their interaction be fully recognized.

18 July 2000, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 26 The Administrative Order conceived by Bahá'u'lláh accomplishes its divinely ordained purpose through a system of institutions, each with its defined sphere of action. The central governing body of the Order is the Universal House of Justice, whose terms of reference are the revealed Word of Bahá'u'lláh together with the interpretations and expositions of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian. Under its guidance, legislative, executive and judicial authority over the affairs of the Bahá'í community is exercised by Local and National Spiritual Assemblies. This authority is also exercised by Regional Councils, committees and other agencies established by these institutions, to the extent that it is so delegated.

Together with the authority vested in elected corporate bodies to make decisions binding on the community is the spiritual, moral and intellectual influence that the Administrative Order exerts on both the lives of believers and the work of the Faith's institutions. This influence acquires a special character through the services performed by those individuals who are appointed to the high rank of Counsellors and by their deputies. More specifically, the Continental Counsellors and the members of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants are charged with functions relating to the protection and propagation of the Faith. In carrying out

their duties, the Continental Counsellors receive their guidance from the International Teaching Centre, an institution whose mandate is global and which functions in close proximity to the Universal House of Justice.

Acting in their respective roles, the two institutions of the Counsellors and the Spiritual Assemblies share responsibility for the protection and propagation of the Faith. The harmonious interaction between them ensures the constant flow of guidance, love and encouragement to the believers and invigorates their individual and collective endeavours to advance the Cause....

Freed from those administrative functions assigned to elected bodies, the Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members are able to concentrate their energies on the task of promoting adherence to principle on the part of individual Bahá'ís, Bahá'í institutions and Bahá'í communities. Their understanding of the Teachings, together with the wisdom that comes from the experience gained through intimate involvement in the many aspects of Bahá'í activity, especially qualifies them to offer advice that assists the work of elected bodies. Further, the fact that they occupy a rank higher than that of the Spiritual Assemblies ensures that they are kept properly informed and that Spiritual Assemblies give due consideration to their advice and recommendations. The administrative processes of the Faith are not only concerned with judicial matters, laws and regulations, and programmes that direct action, but also embrace those measures that elicit from the friends wholehearted response and channel their energies.

The Institution of the Counsellors

- 27 The relationship of the Continental Boards of Counsellors to National Spiritual Assemblies is one of loving cooperation between two institutions of the Faith that are serving the same ends and are eager to see the same divine confirmations descend upon the efforts of the friends to promote and firmly establish the Cause. It is an evolving relationship that becomes richer as the two institutions face the challenge of building Bahá'í communities and witness with pride the onward march of the Faith.

As Continental Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies work together to ensure the expansion and consolidation of the community, the National Assemblies make all the necessary executive decisions and take responsibility for their implementation. The Counsellors bring to their functions a continental perspective which, when offered to the Assembly in the form of counsel, advice, recommendations, suggestions or com-

mentary, enriches the latter's understanding, acquaints it with a broader experience than its own, and encourages it to maintain a world-embracing vision.

As appointees of the Universal House of Justice, the Counsellors assist the Head of the Faith to broaden the base, foster the strength and ensure the security of the National Spiritual Assemblies and the institutions and communities under their jurisdiction. Through the Auxiliary Boards, the Counsellors spread the benefits of their functions to the Local Spiritual Assemblies and the grassroots of the community.

The Counsellors, in the discharge of their responsibilities, support the initiatives adopted by a National Spiritual Assembly, initiatives that often arise from joint deliberations of the two institutions. The Auxiliary Board members explain to the friends the nature and purpose of these initiatives, motivate them to rise and respond to the call of the Assembly, and encourage them to persist in unified action. The Counsellors, of course, have a wide latitude in determining in what manner their institution will carry out these tasks.

A crucial feature of the work of the Counsellors that enables them to offer valuable advice to the National Spiritual Assemblies is their aloofness from administrative details, a freedom that allows them to concentrate on the vital issues of the Cause. Care must be exercised, however, that this aloofness does not give rise to extreme situations. Counsellors should not become inhibited from expressing their views to the National Spiritual Assemblies on administrative matters, and National Spiritual Assemblies should not feel restricted in availing themselves of the opportunity of consulting the Counsellors on such issues.

The Counsellors have not only the right but the obligation to deliberate with, advise, and offer suggestions to the National Spiritual Assemblies in the discharge of their specific functions. They alert National Assemblies to any problems or tendencies in the Bahá'í community which they feel require attention. Their concern in this respect extends to the very functioning of the National Assemblies. If the Counsellors notice serious departures from administrative or other principles in the work of a National Spiritual Assembly or its agencies, they are to consult with the Assembly about the matter and suggest corrective action. This they must do irrespective of any apprehension that such a step might give rise to tension between the two institutions.

The Institution of the Counsellors

28 Your efforts to improve your understanding of the nature of collaboration with the Counsellors, the success of which is essential to the advancement of the Cause, are warmly appreciated by the House of Justice. As you know from your study of *The Institution of the Counsellors*, “the relationship of the Continental Boards of Counsellors to National Spiritual Assemblies is one of loving cooperation between two institutions of the Faith that are serving the same ends and are eager to see the same divine confirmations descend upon the efforts of the friends to promote and firmly establish the Cause.” Within a close and respectful relationship, the Counsellors and National Assemblies collaborate in carrying out a wide range of responsibilities with which they are entrusted and many of which they share.

As a way of better understanding the process of that collaboration, it may prove helpful to look at the broader perspective of decision making and consultation. You are, of course, familiar with the principle that in general a National Assembly makes a final decision when only its members are present. In practice, it is reasonable to exercise a degree of flexibility, especially in the specific case of your consultations with the Counsellors. For example, on those occasions when matters of mutual concern are discussed with the Counsellors—such as the training institute or other areas that are dependent for their success on the two institutions working together in full agreement—it is often the case that unity of thought is achieved during consultation, including decisions on specific actions that need to be pursued. In such cases, it would be appropriate for the National Assembly to simply accept the results of deliberations and record them in the minutes as its decision. As mentioned in *The Institution of the Counsellors*: “The attitude of the Counsellors and the National Spiritual Assemblies towards each other is not motivated by a legalistic application of the rules of their functional relationship”; and “Interactions between the two institutions flourish in an atmosphere of love according to the dictates of genuine respect”.

As the Counsellors and National Assemblies approach their work, they would do well to avoid extremes. Too much emphasis on the merits of consensus can result in the imposition of the stricture that everything is to be decided together. On the other hand, a sterile focus on roles can lead to a rigid application of the inadequate generalization that Counsellors advise, National Assemblies decide, and Counsellors support. Moreover, if during a joint meeting, a National Assembly member withholds views that differ from what the Counsellor has said, only to make his case to the National

Assembly once it is alone, he deprives all participants of the opportunity to achieve clarity and a common understanding. Flexibility is also needed here, for not all consultation is intended to reach a specific conclusion, such as that at a Convention where the aim is to build a unity of thought or generate a vision, a strategic direction, or a readiness or inclination for action. Nor does all consultation between the two institutions take place within the council chamber; scope needs to be provided for ongoing consultation, for example, between a Counsellor and the Secretary of the National Assembly, as plans agreed upon are implemented and responses to new developments are worked out. Addressing the question of flexibility in the administration of the Cause, the Guardian stated in a letter to a National Assembly, “This is the whole spirit of Bahá’u’lláh’s system: rigid conformity to great essential laws, elasticity, and even a certain necessary element of diversity, in secondary matters”. And the House of Justice has warned of the consequences of too fixed an adherence to the technical aspects of our administrative functioning: “But occupation with the mechanics of Bahá’í Administration, divorced from the animating spirit of the Cause, leads to a distortion, to an arid secularization foreign to the nature of the Administration”.

As stated in *The Institution of the Counsellors*, the relationship of the Continental Board of Counsellors to the National Spiritual Assembly “is an evolving relationship that becomes richer as the two institutions face the challenge of building Bahá’í communities and witness with pride the onward march of the Faith.” New dimensions of the “dynamic interdependence” between these two institutions will emerge over time as the work of the Cause advances and becomes more complex, giving rise to new approaches to decision making. The art and skill of Bahá’í consultation is also evolving; as the principles of consultation are practiced more fully, the quality of collaboration among the institutions will be enhanced, giving further impetus to the growth and development of the Faith and enriching the spiritual life of the community. The House of Justice has confidence in your capacity to resolve the questions you have raised, through your ongoing, thorough study of *The Institution of the Counsellors* and your loving consultation with the Counsellors.

25 March 2012, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 29 In the realm of Bahá’í administration, the capacity of National Spiritual Assemblies to manage the affairs of their communities in all their growing

complexity has been considerably enhanced. They have benefited in particular from new heights of collaboration with the Counsellors, who have been instrumental in systematizing the gathering of insights from the grassroots across the world and ensuring they are widely disseminated.

Riḍván 2021, The Universal House of Justice

Facilitating an Evolving Framework for Action

Evolution of the Administrative Order and its Institutions

30 Conscious of their high calling, confident in the society-building power which their Faith possesses, they [the community of the Most Great Name] press forward, undeterred and undismayed, in their efforts to fashion and perfect the necessary instruments wherein the embryonic World Order of Bahá'u'lláh can mature and develop. It is this building process, slow and unobtrusive, to which the life of the world-wide Bahá'í Community is wholly consecrated, that constitutes the one hope of a stricken society. For this process is actuated by the generating influence of God's changeless Purpose, and is evolving within the framework of the Administrative Order of His Faith.

In a world the structure of whose political and social institutions is impaired, whose vision is befogged, whose conscience is bewildered, whose religious systems have become anemic and lost their virtue, this healing Agency, this leavening Power, this cementing Force, intensely alive and all-pervasive, has been taking shape, is crystallizing into institutions, is mobilizing its forces, and is preparing for the spiritual conquest and the complete redemption of mankind. Though the society which incarnates its ideals be small, and its direct and tangible benefits as yet inconsiderable, yet the potentialities with which it has been endowed, and through which it is destined to regenerate the individual and rebuild a broken world, are incalculable.

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

31 [A] fundamental principle 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 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

- 32 As for the institutions, entry by troops will act upon them as much as they will act upon it. The evolution of local and national Bahá'í Assemblies at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part of their members as well as on the part of those who elect them, for the Bahá'í community is engaged in an immense historical process that is entering a critical stage. Bahá'u'lláh has given to the world institutions to operate in an Order designed to canalize the forces of a new civilization. Progress towards that glorious realization requires a great and continuous expansion of the Bahá'í community, so that adequate scope is provided for the maturation of these institutions. This is a matter of immediate importance to Bahá'u'lláh's avowed supporters in all lands.

For such an expansion to be stimulated and accommodated, the Spiritual Assemblies must rise to a new stage in the exercise of their responsibilities as channels of divine guidance, planners of the teaching work, developers of human resources, builders of communities, and loving shepherds of the multitudes. They can realize these prospects through increasing the ability of their members to take counsel together in accordance with the principles of the Faith and to consult with the friends under their jurisdiction, through fostering the spirit of service, through spontaneously collaborating with the Continental Counsellors and their auxiliaries, and through cultivating their external relations. Particularly must the progress in the evolution of the institutions be manifest in the multiplication of localities in which the functioning of the Spiritual Assembly enhances the individual believers' capacity to serve the Cause and fosters unified action. In sum, the maturity of the Spiritual Assembly must be measured not only by the regularity of its meetings and the efficiency of its functioning, but also by the continuity of the growth of Bahá'í membership, the effectiveness of the interaction between the

Assembly and the members of its community, the quality of the spiritual and social life of the community, and the overall sense of vitality of a community in the process of dynamic, ever-advancing development.

Riḍván 1996, The Universal House of Justice

- 33 The institutions of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh, rooted in the provisions of His Revelation, have emerged gradually and organically, as the Bahá'í community has grown through the power of the divine impulse imparted to humankind in this age. The characteristics and functions of each of these institutions have evolved, and are still evolving, as are the relationships between them. The writings of the beloved Guardian expound the fundamental elements of this mighty System and make it clear that the Administrative Order, although different in many ways from the World Order which it is the destiny of the Bahá'í Revelation to call into being, is both the “nucleus” and “pattern” of that World Order. Thus, the evolution of the institutions of the Administrative Order, while following many variants to meet changing conditions in different times and places, should strictly follow the essential principles of Bahá'í administration which have been laid down in the Sacred Text and in the interpretations provided by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian.

30 May 1997, The Universal House of Justice

- 34 In your deliberations on the nature of this next stage in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan, you need to take into account the magnitude of the changes occurring in the fortunes of the Faith. At the World Centre, the raising of the great edifices now standing on the Arc represents a major step in the consolidation of a divinely appointed Administrative Order. The Four Year Plan witnessed a remarkable increase in the institutional capacity of Bahá'í communities in every continent. The evolution of National and Local Spiritual Assemblies has visibly accelerated, and Regional Councils, where they have been established, have brought a new energy and effectiveness to the work of the Cause. With the birth and efflorescence of more than 300 training institutes, the Faith now possesses a powerful instrument for developing the human resources needed to sustain large-scale expansion and consolidation. Further, the ability of the Bahá'í community to influence the course of human affairs, both through its dealings with governments and organizations of civil society and through its endeavours in social and economic development, has been greatly enhanced. The Cause of

Bahá'u'lláh stands at the threshold of a new epoch, at a moment in history when, despite confusion and outbursts of fresh hostility, the world has made real strides towards peace. One clearly sees an increasing receptivity to His all-pervasive and resplendent Spirit.

9 January 2001, The Universal House of Justice

- 35 As you are well aware, the Administrative Order is being developed under the direction and supervision of the Universal House of Justice. As the interests of the Cause decree, the House of Justice provides elaboration of the functions assigned to Spiritual Assemblies, Regional Bahá'í Councils, Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members, and of the growing interaction between these various bodies. All of this occurs within the framework of the fundamental principles governing the distinction between the duties conferred on elected institutions and functions specified for institutions which operate primarily as individuals.

8 February 2004, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 36 Eighty years ago, a letter written on behalf of the Guardian described Bahá'í administration as “the first shaping of what in future will come to be the social life and laws of community living”. Today, at the beginning of the second century of the Formative Age, the shape of Bahá'í administration has developed considerably, and its continued development will be essential for the release of the society-building power of the Faith.

30 December 2021, The Universal House of Justice

A Learning Mode

- 37 The culture of the Bahá'í community experienced a change. This change is noticeable in the expanded capability, the methodical pattern of functioning and the consequent depth of confidence of the three constituent participants in the Plan—the individual, the institutions and the local community. That is so because the friends concerned themselves more consistently with deepening their knowledge of the divine Teachings and learned much—and this more systematically than before—about how to apply them to promulgating the Cause, to managing their individual and collective activities, and to working with their neighbours. In a word, they entered into a learning mode from which purposeful action was pursued.

The chief propellant of this change was the system of training institutes established throughout the world with great rapidity—an accomplishment which, in the field of expansion and consolidation, qualifies as the single greatest legacy of the Four Year Plan.

In the increased capacity of individuals to teach the Faith, as shown in the thrust of individual initiatives; in the improved ability of Spiritual Assemblies, Councils and committees to guide the endeavours of the friends; in the introduction of new patterns of thought and action which influenced the collective behaviour of the local community—in all such respects the system of training institutes demonstrated its indispensability as an engine of the process of entry by troops.

Riḍván 2000, The Universal House of Justice

- 38 Encouraging, too, are the determined steps being taken by National Spiritual Assemblies, in collaboration with the Counsellors, to respond to the administrative challenges brought by large-scale growth at the cluster level. Schemes that are emerging tend to call for one or more individuals named by the training institute to coordinate the delivery of courses in the main sequence, as well as programmes for children and junior youth. An Area Teaching Committee appointed by the Regional Council, or by the National Assembly itself, is also required to administer other aspects of systematic effort to achieve accelerated expansion and consolidation. Auxiliary Board members work on both fronts to ensure that the two movements which have come to characterize the process of growth proceed unhampered. While these various components are being established in cluster after cluster, there is still much to be learned about the functions each is to perform and about the relationships among them. What is important is that the current degree of flexibility, which allows for the creation of new instruments as needed, not be compromised so that the scheme of coordination represents a response to the demands of growth itself. We count on you and National Assemblies to guide this learning process.

27 December 2005, The Universal House of Justice

- 39 To read the writings of the Faith and to strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation are obligations laid on every one of His followers. All are enjoined to delve into the ocean of His Revelation and to partake, in keeping with their capacities and inclinations, of the pearls of wisdom that lie therein. In this

light, local deepening classes, winter and summer schools, and specially arranged gatherings in which individual believers knowledgeable in the writings were able to share with others insights into specific subjects emerged naturally as prominent features of Bahá'í life. Just as the habit of daily reading will remain an integral part of Bahá'í identity, so will these forms of study continue to hold a place in the collective life of the community. But understanding the implications of the Revelation, both in terms of individual growth and social progress, increases manifold when study and service are joined and carried out concurrently. There, in the field of service, knowledge is tested, questions arise out of practice, and new levels of understanding are achieved. In the system of distance education that has now been established in country after country—the principal elements of which include the study circle, the tutor and the curriculum of the Ruhi Institute—the worldwide Bahá'í community has acquired the capacity to enable thousands, nay millions, to study the writings in small groups with the explicit purpose of translating the Bahá'í teachings into reality, carrying the work of the Faith forward into its next stage: sustained large-scale expansion and consolidation.

Let no one fail to appreciate the possibilities thus created. Passivity is bred by the forces of society today. A desire to be entertained is nurtured from childhood, with increasing efficiency, cultivating generations willing to be led by whoever proves skilful at appealing to superficial emotions. Even in many educational systems students are treated as though they were receptacles designed to receive information. That the Bahá'í world has succeeded in developing a culture which promotes a way of thinking, studying, and acting, in which all consider themselves as treading a common path of service—supporting one another and advancing together, respectful of the knowledge that each one possesses at any given moment and avoiding the tendency to divide the believers into categories such as deepened and uninformed—is an accomplishment of enormous proportions. And therein lie the dynamics of an irrepressible movement....

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. Specifically, a space has been created, in

the agency of the reflection meeting, for those engaged in activities at the cluster level to assemble from time to time in order to reach consensus on the current status of their situation, in light of experience and guidance from the institutions, and to determine their immediate steps forward. A similar space is opened by the institute, which makes provision for those serving as tutors, children's class teachers, and animators of junior youth groups in a cluster to meet severally and consult on their experience. Intimately connected to this grassroots consultative process are the agencies of the training institute and the Area Teaching Committee, together with the Auxiliary Board members, whose joint interactions provide another space in which decisions pertaining to growth are taken, in this case with a higher degree of formality. The workings of this cluster-level system, born of exigencies, point to an important characteristic of Bahá'í administration: Even as a living organism, it has coded within it the capacity to accommodate higher and higher degrees of complexity, in terms of structures and processes, relationships and activities, as it evolves under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.

Riḍván 2010, The Universal House of Justice

- 40 Among the myriad tasks facing the National Assembly at this time are facilitating the flow of guidance and encouragement to the believers and the community; supporting the work of the Councils and the regional institutes ...; carrying out the external affairs work; putting in place provisions for the care of the properties of the Faith; making sure that sufficient quantities of suitable literature are at hand for teaching and deepening activities in clusters; assisting the friends in their efforts to gather reliable statistics using the Statistical Report Program; and instituting proper record keeping and responsible stewardship of the funds of the Faith. While some of these tasks will require your direct involvement, others are the responsibilities of the agencies that operate under your general guidance but have sufficient latitude of work to function with a spirit of learning. It is vital that your approach in all this be rooted in a desire to raise the capacity of your community and its institutions to shoulder the work of the Cause.
- 23 September 2012, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice*

- 41 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. In this respect, it may be useful to give consideration to insights that have contributed to the community's progress: the relationship between study and action, the need for focus, which is not to be confused with uniformity, the challenge of fostering the capacity of individuals and accompanying others in service, the dynamics of organic development, the institutional arrangements necessary to sustain ever more complex patterns of activity, the coherence required among all areas of endeavour, and sound relations among individuals, the community, and the institutions. 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.

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. The friends who seek to excel in scholarly activity will, of course, strive to live up to the high expectations set forth by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Whatever the extent of their achievements, they are an integral part of the community; they are not exempt from obligations placed upon any believer and, at the same time, deserve the community's understanding, forbearance, support, and respect....

... The training institute is pivotal in the development of the capacity of veteran and new believers for active involvement in the work of expansion and consolidation. Beyond this, the institute provides the structure for an educational process with three distinct stages that will increas-

ingly serve cohorts of individuals from age six into adulthood. In the experience offered by the institute, participants are not merely presented with information, but through study of the courses and involvement in the community-building activities in which their lessons find practical expression, they acquire knowledge, skills, and spiritual insights that enable them to effectively foster personal and social change. Yet, whatever the scope of its curriculum and no matter how fundamental it is to the progress of the community, involvement in the institute is only a part of a lifetime of inquiry in which these friends will be engaged—one that will include exploration of the Revelation as well as various disciplines of knowledge. The upcoming youth conferences, which will draw tens of thousands of young people, are representative of swelling numbers who, shaped by the institute process at the dawning of their maturity, will set their footsteps firmly in the path of learning and action that will extend throughout their academic studies and beyond. The House of Justice looks to rising generations of Bahá'ís to wholeheartedly address a wide range of intellectual challenges, overcome all pitfalls and obstacles, and render service for the betterment of the world. In the decades ahead, then, a host of believers will enter diverse social spaces and fields of human endeavour.

24 July 2013, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 42 Just like individuals, the agencies emerging in a cluster need assistance as they take up their duties. The help that Auxiliary Board members provide in this regard is essential, but it is also an important responsibility of Regional Bahá'í Councils or, where no Council exists, of the National Spiritual Assembly itself, and it is a pressing concern for training institutes as well. The capacity to serve ably at the cluster level increases when spaces are created in which the believers involved can study guidance, reflect on their actions in its light and draw insights therefrom, and also become connected with the wider body of knowledge being generated in surrounding clusters and further afield. Instead of formulating plans in the abstract, consultations conducted in such spaces often aim at capturing the reality of the cluster at that particular moment and identifying the immediate next steps to facilitate progress. Those serving at the regional or national level may do much to advise the friends and expand their vision of what can be accomplished, but they would not seek to impose their own expectations on the planning process; rather, they are helping the believers who are labouring in a cluster to gradually enhance their ability to devise

and implement a course of action informed by the experience accumulating at the grassroots of the community and familiarity with actual conditions. In order to develop the capacity of cluster agencies to learn and to act systematically, regional and national institutions need to be conscientious and methodical in their own efforts to assist them.

29 December 2015, The Universal House of Justice

- 43 During this period, the adoption of an evolving framework for action has enabled the friends to progressively nurture and refine essential capacities, giving rise to simple acts of service at first, leading to more elaborate patterns of action, which in turn demanded the development of capacities still more complex. In this way, a systematic process of human resource development and community building has been started in thousands of clusters—and, in many of them, become far advanced. The focus has not been solely on the individual believer, or the community, or the institutions of the Faith; all three inseparable participants in the evolution of the new World Order are being stimulated by the spiritual forces released through the unfoldment of the Divine Plan. The signs of their progress are more and more apparent: in the confidence that countless believers have acquired to share accounts of Bahá'u'lláh's life and discuss the implications of His Revelation and peerless Covenant; in the growing contingents of souls who, as a result, have been attracted to His Cause and are contributing to the achievement of His unifying vision; in the ability of Bahá'ís and their friends, at the very grassroots of the community, to describe in eloquent terms their experience of a process capable of transforming character and shaping social existence; in the significantly larger numbers of those indigenous to a country who, as members of Bahá'í institutions and agencies, are now guiding the affairs of their communities; in the reliable, generous, and sacrificial giving to the Fund, so vital for sustaining the advancement of the Faith; in the unprecedented efflorescence of individual initiative and collective action in support of community-building activities; in the enthusiasm of so many selfless souls in the prime of youth who are bringing immense vigour to this work, notably by tending to the spiritual education of younger generations; in the enhancement of the devotional character of the community through regular gatherings for worship; in the rise in capacity at all levels of Bahá'í administration; in the readiness of institutions, agencies, and individuals to think in terms of process, to read their immediate reality and assess their resources in the places where they live, and to make plans on that basis;

in the now familiar dynamic of study, consultation, action, and reflection that has cultivated an instinctive posture of learning; in the mounting appreciation for what it means to give effect to the Teachings through social action; in the multiplying opportunities being sought and seized to offer a Bahá'í perspective on discourses prevalent in society; in the awareness of a global community that, in all its endeavours, it is hastening the emergence of divine civilization by manifesting the society-building power inherent in the Cause; indeed, in the friends' growing consciousness that their efforts to foster inner transformation, to widen the circle of unity, to collaborate with others in the field of service, to help populations take charge of their own spiritual, social, and economic development—and, through all such efforts, to bring about the betterment of the world—express the very purpose of religion itself.

Ridván 2016, The Universal House of Justice

- 44 As you are aware, each of the various institutions and agencies of the Faith in your country holds a measure of responsibility for promoting the spiritual and material development of your community. Through your loving assistance and with the aid of the Counsellors, the capacity of these entities to act in an effective manner will certainly increase. This will no doubt require that they be afforded sufficient latitude to function in a spirit of learning and be provided with encouragement, support, and material resources as needed. Yours is the task to create an environment that allows the institutions and agencies to flourish and to guide them without becoming excessively directive in your oversight of their work. Overall, it besseems you to delight in the progress of the believers and the achievements of the institutions and agencies of the Faith operating at the regional, cluster, and local level, alert to their successes as well as to instances where encouragement and counsel may be helpful. The development of the institutions and agencies in your country will naturally be the subject of ongoing reflection and consultation between your Assembly and the Counsellors.

9 February 2017, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Building Institutional Capacity and Developing Human Resources

Regional Bahá'í Councils

45 The expansion of the Bahá'í community and the growing complexity of the issues which are facing National Spiritual Assemblies in certain countries have brought the Cause to a new stage in its development. They have caused us in recent years to examine various aspects of the balance between centralization and decentralization. In a few countries we have authorized the National Spiritual Assemblies to establish State Bahá'í Councils or Regional Teaching and Administrative Committees. From the experience gained in the operation of these bodies, and from detailed examination of the principles set forth by Shoghi Effendi, we have reached the conclusion that the time has arrived for us to formalize a new element of Bahá'í administration, between the local and national levels, comprising institutions of a special kind, to be designated as "Regional Bahá'í Councils".

Regional Bahá'í Councils will be brought into being only with our permission and only in countries where conditions make this step necessary. Nevertheless, we find it desirable to inform all National Spiritual Assemblies of the nature of this historic development, and to make clear its place in the evolution of national and local Bahá'í institutions....

Regional Bahá'í Councils partake of some, but not all, characteristics of Spiritual Assemblies, and thus provide a means of carrying forward the teaching work and administering related affairs of a rapidly growing Bahá'í community in a number of situations. Without such an institution, the development of a national committee structure required to cover the needs in some countries would run the danger of over-complexity through adding a further layer of committees under the regional committees, or the danger of excessive decentralization through conferring too much autonomy on committees which are characterized by the Guardian as "bodies that should be regarded in no other light than that of expert advisers and executive assistants."

The distinguishing effects of the establishment of Regional Bahá'í Councils are the following:

- It provides for a level of autonomous decision making on both teaching and administrative matters, as distinct from merely executive action, below the National Assembly and above the Local Assemblies.
- It involves the members of Local Spiritual Assemblies of the area in the choice of the members of the Council, thus reinforcing the bond between it and the local believers while, at the same time, bringing into public service capable believers who are known to the friends in their own region.
- It establishes direct consultative relationships between the Continental Counsellors and the Regional Bahá'í Councils.
- It offers the possibility of forming a Regional Bahá'í Council in an ethnically distinct region which covers parts of two or more countries. In such a situation the Council is designated to work directly under one of the National Assemblies involved, providing copies of its reports and minutes to the other National Assembly.
- The greater degree of decentralization involved in the devolution of authority upon Regional Bahá'í Councils requires a corresponding increase in the capacity of the National Spiritual Assembly itself to keep fully informed of what is proceeding in all parts of the territory over which it has ultimate jurisdiction.

30 May 1997, The Universal House of Justice

- 46 Collateral with the demonstrated efficacy of training institutes is the pragmatic emergence of Regional Bahá'í Councils in selected countries where conditions have made the establishment of these institutions necessary and viable. Where there is close interaction between a Council and a training institute, the stage is set for a galvanic coherence of the processes effecting expansion and consolidation in a region, and for the practical matching of the training services of institutes to the developmental needs of local communities. Moreover, the operational guidelines whereby the Continental Counsellors and the Regional Councils have direct access to each other give rise to a further institutional relationship which, along with that connecting the Councils to the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, effectuates a dynamic integration of functions at the regional level.

Riḍván 1999, The Universal House of Justice

- 47 Thus, at all levels, elements of the Bahá'í administration became involved in the planning process, and reached beyond this stage to that of

implementation, at which the institutional capacity to cope with entry by troops had to be created. Two major steps were taken in this regard: one was the establishment of training institutes; the other was the formal establishment and widespread introduction of Regional Bahá'í Councils as a feature of the administration between the local and national levels to strengthen the administrative capacity of certain communities where the growing complexity of the issues facing National Spiritual Assemblies required this development.

Riḍván 2000, The Universal House of Justice

- 48 The administration of teaching is preeminent among the categories of responsibility in which a National Spiritual Assembly exercises its authority to direct and coordinate the affairs of its community. The execution of this responsibility is of a different character, however, from that of, say, the administration of justice; for whereas the latter is properly concentrated in the activity of the Assembly, which must itself render judgments on cases submitted to it, the former is essentially concerned with efforts initiated and maintained at the base of the community and thus calls for a decentralized mode of management—a means of functioning that makes possible the mobilization of action among the generality of believers, whose individual initiatives must be accommodated in a coherent movement of teaching at the level of clusters. Where rapid or substantial growth is occurring, such management ensures that due attention is given not only to executing the plan for expansion and consolidation, but also to addressing the needs of varying patterns of growth from one area to another, to coping with emerging new realities, as well as to applying the lessons of experience in rapidly changing situations. This closeness of attention is not possible from the top, whatever mechanisms may be set in place at the National Center. Particularly at this stage in the evolution of the Divine Plan, when the community must prepare administratively to accommodate entry by troops, your responsibility towards the expansion of the Faith demands a high degree of devolution of administrative authority to appropriate subsidiary institutions, so that the requisites for maintaining progressive activity in the clusters can be adequately met.

For example, in this context, all programmatic and administrative matters pertaining to growth of the Faith in its area are the proper concern of every Regional Bahá'í Council and are to be dealt with by it in accordance with the requirements for the execution of the Five Year Plan

in your community. The Regional Councils are the executive instruments of the National Spiritual Assembly authorized to act on its behalf in devising and promoting programs dedicated to fulfilling the aim of advancing the process of entry by troops. The Councils direct and coordinate the work of cluster agencies, as well as ensure the collaborative involvement of Local Spiritual Assemblies in cluster and core activities.

5 January 2006, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 49 A new chapter in the evolution of the Administrative Order ... is now opening, endowed with immense promise. As those dedicated believers called to serve on Regional Councils now take up their responsibilities, no doubt they will be conscious that they function as members of corporate bodies and not, of course, as individual leaders. Indeed, it will be essential for them to remain mindful of the admonitions in the Bahá'í writings that apply to all those charged with the administration of the affairs of the Faith—that they are to approach their work in the spirit of “humble fellowship” and that they must not allow themselves to be considered the “central ornaments of the body of the Cause”. So promising a process of growth unfolding in your country at the level of the cluster should not come to revolve around their expectations or to rely on their personal presence. Guarding against the least trace of any such tendency will greatly redound to their effectiveness. For the reality of the situation in many instances is that the richest experience exists at the grassroots, when a nucleus of believers labors intensively to build capacity within a population to take charge of its own spiritual and social advancement. All those who aim to assist the process of learning at this level must remain sensitive to conditions in individual clusters, lest frequent requests for reports or summons to gatherings—however well intentioned—sap energy or dissipate focus. Rather will they wish to do everything within their means to provide support, to lovingly encourage, to facilitate the efforts under way, and to respond, with flexibility and dispatch, to needs as they arise.

9 August 2012, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 50 Of course, a National Spiritual Assembly ultimately has responsibility for fostering all aspects of a Bahá'í community's development. Although it pursues various lines of action itself, in many cases it fulfils this responsibility by ensuring that Regional Councils or specialized agencies are able to take steps to advance areas of endeavour entrusted to them. As the capacity

of the friends increases and the size of a community grows, the work of a National Assembly in its manifold dimensions becomes commensurately more complex. Therefore, and in view of the magnitude of the task before the institutions in the coming Plan, National Assemblies—as well as Councils—will benefit from periodically considering, in collaboration with you, whether their administrative operations, and indeed elements of their own functioning, could be adjusted or enhanced in ways that would better support the growth process.

29 December 2015, The Universal House of Justice

- 51 Where a Regional Council has developed an enhanced capacity for administration, including an ability to provide appropriate kinds of support to many clusters at once, this has been conducive to the accelerated progress of the whole region.

30 December 2021, The Universal House of Justice

The Training Institute

- 52 We are greatly heartened by the news reaching us of the enthusiastic response of the friends to the Four Year Plan. Particularly encouraging are the efforts of National Spiritual Assemblies everywhere to establish training institutes and to systematically address the development of human resources. The number of national and regional institutes is rapidly increasing, and indications are that there may be more than one hundred operating in the world by the close of the first year of the Plan. We cherish the hope that from each of these centres of learning will issue forth ever-growing contingents of believers capable of carrying out a wide array of services to the Cause, creating thus in every country the capacity to sustain the process of entry by troops.

6 August 1996, The Universal House of Justice

- 53 Prior to our launching the current series of global Plans focused on the single aim of advancing the process of entry by troops, the Bahá'í community had passed through a stage of rapid, large-scale expansion in many parts of the world—an expansion which ultimately was impossible to sustain. The challenge, then, lay not so much in swelling the ranks of the Cause with new adherents, at least from populations of proven receptivity, but

in incorporating them into the life of the community and raising up from among them adequate numbers dedicated to its further expansion. So crucial was it for the Bahá'í world to address this challenge that we made it a central feature of the Four Year Plan and called upon National Spiritual Assemblies to spend the greater part of their energies creating institutional capacity, in the form of the training institute, to develop human resources. Ever-increasing contingents of believers, we indicated, would need to benefit from a formal programme of training designed to endow them with the knowledge and spiritual insights, with the skills and abilities, required to carry out the acts of service that would sustain large-scale expansion and consolidation.

Today as we observe the workings of those clusters which are in a robust state of growth, we note that in every one of them the friends have continued to strengthen the institute process, while learning to mobilize their expanding nucleus of active supporters of the Faith, to establish an efficient scheme for the coordination of their efforts, to weave their individual initiatives and collective endeavours into an effective pattern of unified action, and to draw on the analysis of pertinent information in planning the cycles of their activities. That they have found the means for carrying forward the work of expansion and consolidation hand in hand—the key to sustained growth—is demonstrable. Such evidence will surely inspire every devoted believer to remain resolute on the path of systematic learning that has been set.

Riḍván 2007, The Universal House of Justice

- 54 Surely you have observed that a longing to arise and actively participate in the work of community building and contribute to the transformation of society is especially discernible among the youth—who, at every stage in the growth of the Cause of God, have made vital contributions to its progress. The institute is charged with a sacred duty to release the capacity inherent in the youth and channel their time and energy, skills and talents, towards the provision of spiritual education to a rising generation. Yet, this capacity will only develop in an environment in which young people feel the trust and confidence of the institutions, as well as the love and encouragement of the community and their families. As affirmed by the Guardian, the future rests upon the youth. As such, they must gain valuable experience in all affairs of the Faith so that they are prepared and have the strength to shoulder weighty responsibilities. They must have the opportunity to make

sacrifices for the progress of the Faith, as the generations before them have done. The House of Justice trusts that you will support them unequivocally, having faith in their abilities and seeking at all times to empower them to achieve greater heights of service.

9 February 2017, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 55 Cherished friends, this is truly a moment to give thanks to the Best-Beloved. There are a great many reasons to be encouraged. Yet we are only too aware of the scale of the task that remains. Fundamentally, as we have previously indicated, there must emerge in many hundreds of clusters a growing band of believers who can maintain, with those around them, a sustained focus on nurturing growth and building capacity, and who are distinguished by their ability and their discipline to reflect on action and learn from experience. Raising up and accompanying an expanding nucleus of individuals in each place—not just at the level of the cluster but within neighbourhoods and villages—is at once a formidable challenge and a critical need. But where this is occurring, the results speak for themselves.

We are reassured to see that the institutions of the Faith are keeping this supreme need at the forefront of their thinking, devising effective mechanisms to enable the insights arising from progress to be widely applied. At the same time, greater experience is endowing national, regional, and local bodies alike with broader vision. They are becoming involved in all aspects of the community's development and are concerned with the well-being of people beyond its formal membership. Conscious of the profound implications the institute process holds for the advancement of peoples, they are paying particular attention to how the training institute can be strengthened. They remain mindful of the need to maintain the community's focus on the requirements of the Plan and call the ever-widening circle of friends to higher and higher levels of unity. They faithfully uphold their responsibility to refine their administrative and financial systems so that the work of expansion and consolidation can be properly supported. In all this, they are ultimately occupied with cultivating in the community those conditions that conduce to the release of powerful spiritual forces.

Riḍván 2018, The Universal House of Justice

- 56 Your Assembly comes into existence at the opening of a new series of Plans, at a time when the world is in desperate need of the divine remedy

Bahá'u'lláh has prescribed. Therefore, one of the great tasks before you will be to foster growth by raising up the human resources necessary to answer this need in your country, especially from amongst the youth. At every stage in the growth of the Cause of God, youth have made vital contributions to its progress. For them to continue to flourish, it is essential to create an environment in which they feel the trust of the institutions and the love of their community and thus arise to meet the challenges ahead of them with confidence, joy, and courage. You should have faith in their abilities and seek at all times to empower them to achieve greater heights of service.

21 April 2021, The Universal House of Justice

Local Spiritual Assemblies

- 57 He is constantly yearning for happy news concerning the spread of the Message and this, he is firmly convinced, depends mainly on the united and combined efforts of the friends and the Assemblies. Without unity, co-operation and selfless service the friends will surely be unable to attain their goal. How can we possibly increase in number and in strength if we do not present a united front to those forces, both from without and within, which threaten to undermine the very edifice of the Cause? Unity is, therefore, the main key to success. And the best way to ensure and consolidate the organic unity of the Faith is to strengthen the authority of the Local Assemblies and to bring them within the full orbit of the National Assembly's jurisdiction. The National Assembly is the head, and the Local Assemblies are the various organs of the body of the Cause. To ensure full co-operation between these various parts is to safeguard the best interests of the Faith by enabling it to counteract those forces which threaten to create a breach within the ranks of the faithful.

20 September 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 58 The National Spiritual Assemblies and their agencies on the one hand, and the Counsellors and their auxiliaries on the other, clearly have a duty to foster the establishment and development of Bahá'í communities, including their divinely ordained local institutions. This duty can be discharged mainly through sustained educational programmes which create in the believers the awareness of the importance of the Teachings in every area of their individual and social lives and which engender in them the desire

and determination to elect and support their Local Spiritual Assemblies. These programmes should take full advantage of the provision that has been made for the temporary formation of administrative committees of three or more members in localities where Local Assemblies are not elected, or where the members of a Local Assembly fail to meet.

26 December 1995, The Universal House of Justice

- 59 On previous occasions we have explained that the maturity of a Spiritual Assembly cannot be assessed by the regularity of its meetings and the efficiency of its functioning alone. Rather its strength must be measured, to a large extent, by the vitality of the spiritual and social life of the community it serves—a growing community that welcomes the constructive contributions of both those who are formally enrolled and those who are not....

The development that we are sure to witness in Local Spiritual Assemblies over the next several years is made possible by the growing strength of National Spiritual Assemblies, whose ability to think and act strategically has risen perceptibly, especially as they have learned to analyse the community-building process at the grassroots with increasing acuity and effectiveness and to inject into it, as needed, assistance, resources, encouragement, and loving guidance. In countries where conditions demand it, they have devolved a number of their responsibilities in this respect to Regional Councils, decentralizing certain administrative functions, enhancing institutional capacity in areas under their jurisdiction, and fostering more sophisticated sets of interactions. It is no exaggeration to say that the full engagement of National Assemblies was instrumental in creating the final thrust required to attain the goal of the current Plan, and we expect to see further developments in this direction as, in concert with the Counsellors, they exert in the course of the critical, fleeting months ahead a supreme effort to ready their communities to embark on the next five-year enterprise.

Riḍván 2010, The Universal House of Justice

- 60 It is particularly pleasing to note your efforts to work closely with Local Spiritual Assemblies in order to learn more about the effective facilitation of the flow of guidance and information to all the believers. In this connection, you may wish to focus such efforts initially on a few selected Local Assemblies in localities that have a large Bahá'í population or where growth is accelerating. After some experience has been gained, these efforts could

be extended to other Assemblies. In addition, beyond the dissemination of guidance and information to the communities, it is vital that you also help the institutions and agencies in your country consider effective ways of assisting the believers, as well as their friends from the wider society who are labouring together with them, to grow in their capacity to study the guidance and apply it in the context of the experience being generated at the grassroots.

17 June 2020, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

The Institution of the Fund

- 61 And as the progress and extension of spiritual activities is dependent and conditioned upon material means, it is of absolute necessity that immediately after the establishment of local as well as national Spiritual Assemblies, a Bahá'í Fund be established, to be placed under the exclusive control of the Spiritual Assembly. All donations and contributions should be offered to the Treasurer of the Assembly, for the express purpose of promoting the interests of the Cause, throughout that locality or country. It is the sacred obligation of every conscientious and faithful servant of Bahá'u'lláh who desires to see His Cause advance to contribute freely and generously for the increase of that Fund. The members of the Spiritual Assembly will at their own discretion expend it to promote the Teaching Campaign, to help the needy, to establish educational Bahá'í institutions, to extend in every way possible their sphere of service. I cherish the hope that all the friends, realizing the necessity of this measure, will bestir themselves and contribute, however modestly at first, towards the speedy establishment and the increase of that Fund.

12 March 1923, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 62 Of course, the participation of the friends in the courses of the training institute enhances their capacity to converse with their fellow believers about the spiritual significance of contributing to the Fund and to cultivate an environment in which it is natural to offer voluntary service to the Cause. Beyond this, raising awareness among the friends of the need for a continuous flow of material means to support the work of the Faith will be essential as the community continues to expand.

28 October 2013, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

63 As institutions and agencies seek to accelerate the processes of expansion and consolidation in every land, the question of financial resources will surely claim increased attention. Indeed, an important aspect of enhancing institutional capacity over the coming years will be the ongoing development of local and national Funds. For this to occur, the generality of the friends must be invited to consider afresh the responsibility of all believers to support the work of the Faith through their own means and, further, to manage their financial affairs in the light of the teachings.

The future civilization envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh is a prosperous one, in which the vast resources of the world will be directed towards humanity's elevation and regeneration, not its debasement and destruction. The act of contributing to the Fund, then, is imbued with profound meaning: it is a practical way of hastening the advent of that civilization, and a necessary one, for as Bahá'u'lláh Himself has explained, "He Who is the Eternal Truth—exalted be His glory—hath made the fulfilment of every undertaking on earth dependent on material means." Bahá'ís conduct their lives in the midst of a society acutely disordered in its material affairs. The process of community building they are advancing in their clusters cultivates a set of attitudes towards wealth and possessions very different from those holding sway in the world. The habit of regularly giving to the Funds of the Faith—including in-kind contributions particularly in certain places—arises from and reinforces a sense of personal concern for the welfare of the community and the progress of the Cause. The duty to contribute, just like the duty to teach, is a fundamental aspect of Bahá'í identity which strengthens faith. The sacrificial and generous contributions of the individual believer, the collective consciousness promoted by the community of the needs of the Fund, and the careful stewardship of financial resources exercised by the institutions of the Faith can be regarded as expressions of the love that binds these three actors more closely together. And ultimately, voluntary giving fosters an awareness that managing one's financial affairs in accordance with spiritual principles is an indispensable dimension of a life lived coherently. It is a matter of conscience, a way in which commitment to the betterment of the world is translated into practice.

29 December 2015, The Universal House of Justice

64 The ongoing attention you are giving to educating the believers regarding the spiritual significance of contributing to the Funds of the Faith is

warmly noted. As you no doubt realize, giving regularly and sacrificially to the Fund is intimately connected to an individual's consciousness of and dedication to promoting the Plans of the Faith. Thus as efforts are further systematized, in each of the clusters in your country where the growth process is under way, it is expected that contributing to the Fund will increasingly come to be viewed as integral to that process. In this light, beyond educating the friends concerning their sacred responsibility, your Assembly may wish to emphasize the strengthening of a culture in which the believers use whatever means are available to them in order to support the activities unfolding in their own communities. Such participation, by raising awareness of the needs and providing a range of possibilities to contribute to meeting them, will ultimately enable growing numbers of believers to increase their commitment to giving to the Funds of the Faith.

18 October 2017, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 65 With regard to the exercise of economy, much can be learned from the evolving practices in a few of the stronger regions in your country. The House of Justice has been heartened to see from the reports received at the Bahá'í World Centre that within your national community there is already widespread consciousness of the need for the judicious use of the funds and that a culture marked by resilience, resourcefulness, and a sense of collective responsibility has taken root, especially in advanced clusters, whereby the friends draw as much as possible upon whatever material resources exist in the community when carrying out their activities. For example, there appears to be an increasing number of localities where resources, such as food and housing, needed for organizing institute campaigns, local conferences, youth gatherings, or reflection meetings are offered by the community. There have also been examples of friends contributing in various ways to the construction of facilities for the cluster. Further still, this culture is most evident in a few communities with strong Local Spiritual Assemblies, whereby teams have been established to facilitate various logistical aspects related to the activities of the training institute, a promising approach that can be applied in other localities. In order to cultivate such a culture more widely, these and other experiences will need to be documented and shared across the clusters in your country.

The House of Justice noted with pleasure your intention to set in motion several lines of action with the aim of raising the consciousness of the believers in ... regarding their sacred obligation of contributing to the

Funds of the Faith. In addition to the various actions you are contemplating in order to reach out to the generality of the believers ..., you are asked to give special attention to youth and young adults. After all, a community is never static; those friends at the forefront of supporting the funds today have set a pace that must be followed by successive generations who will be prepared to shoulder this responsibility. As young people arise to play their part in fostering the spiritual and social advancement of their communities, joyful giving should naturally be an integral aspect of their spiritual education and lived experience.

In addition, throughout your country, there are multitudes engaged in the community-building process who are increasingly taking charge of their own spiritual and material development, inspired by the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and bolstered by the methods and instruments of the global Plans. While those who are yet to enrol in the Faith do not have the bounty of contributing to the Funds of the Faith, it would be natural that, as active protagonists, they would wish to assume ever-greater responsibility for meeting the material requirements of activities that they have come to regard as their own. There will thus be a need to foster in neighbourhoods and villages an atmosphere that welcomes and accommodates such a desire. The institutions and agencies of the Faith have much to learn about the participation of populations in meeting the material requirements of the processes unfolding at the grassroots.

30 May 2023, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Releasing the Society-Building Power of the Cause

Propagation of Divine Teachings

- 66 In the Spiritual Assembly, the discussions must be confined to beneficial matters, that is, the exaltation of the Word of God, the propagation of the divine Teachings, the education of souls, the training of children, the protection and fostering of orphans, assistance to the poor and needy, relief for the weak and aged, and the promotion of benevolent pursuits and charitable deeds. But the greatest of all is the diffusion of the sweet savours of God, for this is the foundation.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 67 As the administrative work of the Cause steadily expands, as its various branches grow in importance and number, it is absolutely necessary that we bear in mind this fundamental fact that all these administrative activities, however harmoniously and efficiently conducted, are but means to an end, and should be regarded as direct instruments for the propagation of the Bahá'í Faith. Let us take heed lest in our great concern for the perfection of the administrative machinery of the Cause, we lose sight of the Divine Purpose for which it has been created. Let us be on our guard lest the growing demand for specialization in the administrative functions of the Cause detain us from joining the ranks of those who in the forefront of battle are gloriously engaged in summoning the multitude to this new Day of God. This indeed should be our primary concern; this is our sacred obligation, our vital and urgent need. Let this cardinal principle be ever borne in mind, for it is the mainspring of all future activities, the remover of every embarrassing obstacle, the fulfilment of our Master's dearest wish.

10 January 1926, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 68 The dissemination of Bahá'í literature should, likewise, be simultaneously carried out with increasing vigour. Whatever measures are required to ensure a more systematic and extensive propagation of the teachings of the Faith among the masses must be promptly and unhesitatingly adopted.
24 October 1947, Shoghi Effendi
- 69 When each National Spiritual Assembly carefully compares the demands of the waiting public and the needs of the believers for Bahá'í literature with the current supply, it will realize how urgent is the need for it to multiply its efforts to ensure that a comprehensive range of our literature is made constantly available. The basic literature of the Faith must be translated into languages that are most suitable and in demand for the spread and development of the Faith in accordance with the goals of the Plan. In each national area the agencies for obtaining and disseminating Bahá'í literature should be greatly strengthened so that they will efficiently ensure an uninterrupted supply of the literature which is available from the various Publishing Trusts and organize its distribution throughout the area, through Local Assemblies and groups, by sale at conferences and summer schools, and directly to individuals. At the same time these agencies should ensure that the monies received from the sale of literature are kept separate from other funds of the Faith and are used for the replenishment of stocks of books and the widening of the range of literature available. National Assemblies must also give consideration to the need to cover the cost of certain literature out of the National Fund, so that it can be supplied free or sold at a price within the reach of those who urgently require it.
25 May 1975, The Universal House of Justice
- 70 The idea that principle is maintained while practical strategies evolve according to the needs of the Faith also holds true for the administrative arrangements that support teaching. National Assemblies have always had the obligation to create efficient teaching structures, often with agencies at various levels, such as national, provincial or area teaching committees; the Regional Bahá'í Councils and Cluster Growth Committees constitute such structures to guide the progress of clusters. Local Assemblies always worked in the context of a national or regional teaching plan, and they now work, in advanced areas, in the context of an intensive programme of growth that operates at the level of a cluster. Ultimately, of course, it is the individual who must teach the Faith and carry out the other activities for expansion

and consolidation. As the House of Justice wrote at the beginning of the effort to systematically advance the process of entry by troops, “thousands upon thousands of believers will need to be aided to express the vitality of their faith through constancy in teaching the Cause”. The role of the Spiritual Assembly in teaching is primarily that of fostering and supporting such initiative.

29 August 2006, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Contributing to Social Transformation

Social Action

- 71 Among the primary obligations of the Spiritual Assemblies is to provide, and carry through, effective measures for the advancement of the cause of women. It would be good if each Spiritual Assembly could form a special committee whose members night and day would devote their time and attention exclusively to urging and encouraging, ennobling and dignifying the honoured handmaids of the Merciful; to promoting education for girls; to perfecting and extending the women’s assemblies and gatherings; and to ensuring the cooperation of the women with the men in rendering services to the Cause and in strengthening the foundation of the Spiritual Assemblies.... Now is the time for providing the means and the day for the advancement of women in both inner and outer perfections. Whatsoever has been set down by the Pen of the Most High and revealed from the Pen of the Covenant, rest assured that the changes and chances of the times, the affairs of the world, and the measures and enterprises of the men of the earth will, in an indirect manner, gradually so conspire to furnish hidden, invisible means for the fulfilment of these explicit divine utterances that we shall all be bewildered, amazed, and admonished. Now is the time for confidence; today, the day for exertion and self-sacrifice. We must, with praiseworthy actions, observe the divine commandments and put our whole trust in the True One so that whatsoever He has purposed may come to pass without delay.

19 December 1923, Shoghi Effendi

- 72 The Assembly should, after earnest consultation and thorough examination and assessment of the requirements of the Cause and the needs of the people, make certain provisions according to its means and capacity, so that, in the course of time, necessary aid may be extended to the poor, the weak, and the needy from all backgrounds, and the common weal and the best interests of the Faith may likewise be rapidly promoted.

July 1926, Shoghi Effendi

- 73 The most immediate access to the dynamic influence of the sacred Word is through reading. The ability to read is therefore a fundamental right and privilege of every human being. Bahá'u'lláh promotes this right in His command to parents to ensure the instruction of their sons and daughters in the “art of reading and writing.” For this essential reason, in our last Ridván message we called attention to the need for systematic attention to be given to eventually eliminating illiteracy from the Bahá'í community. This matter must assume its proper importance as a continuing objective of that community.

Let each National and Local Spiritual Assembly, according to necessity and circumstance, address itself to this objective, conscious that even where total achievement is not immediately possible, opportunities must be sought to make steady progress. Let each be confident that the shining example set by Iran, the mother community of the Bahá'í world, under the inspiration of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and the urging of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, upholds a standard all can follow. In the earliest years of this century, when no systematic, overall plan of education existed in Iran, the Bahá'ís seized their chance and organized a widespread programme of education. Its teachers were distinguished for their ability to foster child, youth and adult education, which led to significant self-improvement among the Iranian Bahá'ís. The emergence of a literate Bahá'í community was an outstanding result.

Some local or national Bahá'í communities may wish to follow the example of those who have already instituted their own literacy projects and are achieving notable success; others may wish to participate in literacy programmes organized by governmental or non-governmental organizations. Each community will have to determine whether to engage in one or the other, or to do both. Progress will depend not only on the initiatives of Bahá'í institutions in relation to children, but also on the active interest of adult believers who want to learn to read. Such friends

should definitely be encouraged and assisted to achieve, with dignity, their heart's desire. Certainly, the willing participation of the friends in an undertaking of such importance to the upliftment of individuals and the consolidation of the Bahá'í community as a whole will attract divine favours and confirmations.

10 July 1989, The Universal House of Justice

- 74 The promotion of learning of every kind among the Faith's members is an activity fundamental to the achievement of the community's wide-ranging goals. Consequently, the encouragement of individual believers to acquire knowledge, the operation of Bahá'í schools, universities, and training institutes, the organization of study groups, and the work of task forces dedicated to relating the principles of the Revelation to the challenges facing humankind all represent activities with which both the Counsellors and their auxiliaries, on the one hand, and National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, on the other, must concern themselves. In shouldering these demanding responsibilities, Bahá'í institutions everywhere find their efforts greatly enhanced by the assistance of believers whose intellectual pursuits, qualities of character, and devotion to the Cause particularly fit them to contribute their services.

14 March 1996, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 75 Whatever the nature of the cluster, it is imperative to pay close attention to children and junior youth everywhere. Concern for the moral and spiritual education of young people is asserting itself forcefully on the consciousness of humanity, and no attempt at community building can afford to ignore it. What has become especially apparent during the current Five Year Plan is the efficacy of educational programmes aimed at the spiritual empowerment of junior youth. When accompanied for three years through a programme that enhances their spiritual perception, and encouraged to enter the main sequence of institute courses at the age of fifteen, they represent a vast reservoir of energy and talent that can be devoted to the advancement of spiritual and material civilization. So impressed are we by the results already achieved, and so compelling is the need, that we will urge all National Assemblies to consider the junior youth groups formed through programmes implemented by their training institutes a fourth core activity in its own right and to promote its wide-scale multiplication.

27 December 2005, The Universal House of Justice

76 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. The individual, the community, and the institutions of the Faith—inseparable protagonists in the advancement of civilization—are in a position to demonstrate the distinctive features of the Bahá'í way of life, characterized by increased maturity in the discharge of their responsibilities and in their relationships with each other. They are summoned to a fuller expression of the Faith's society-building powers. Agencies and projects dedicated to social action may have to adapt their approaches in order to meet expanded needs; efforts to do this are sure to infuse ongoing programmes with deeper meaning and purpose. Further, Bahá'í contributions to discourses newly prevalent in society are generating heightened interest, and there is a responsibility to be discharged here too. At a time when the urgency of attaining higher levels of unity, founded on the incontestable truth of humanity's oneness, is becoming apparent to larger and larger numbers, society stands in need of clear voices that can articulate the spiritual principles that underlie such an aspiration.

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, The Universal House of Justice

77 The initial stirrings of grassroots social action begin to be seen in a cluster as the availability of human resources increases and capacity for a wider range of tasks develops. Villages have proven to be notably fertile ground from which social action initiatives have emerged and been sustained, but in urban settings too, friends living there have succeeded in carrying out activities and projects suited to the social environment, at times by working with local schools, agencies of civil society, or even government bodies. Social action is being undertaken in a number of important fields, including the environment, agriculture, health, the arts, and particularly

education. Over the course of the Nine Year Plan, and especially as the study of specific institute courses stimulates greater activity in this area, we expect to see a proliferation of formal and informal efforts to promote the social and economic development of a people. Some of these community-based initiatives will require basic administrative structures to sustain their work. Where conditions are propitious, Local Spiritual Assemblies will need to be encouraged to learn how best to cultivate new, fledgling initiatives and to foster efforts that show promise. In some cases, the needs associated with a particular field of endeavour will warrant the establishment of a Bahá'í-inspired organization, and we anticipate the appearance of more such organizations during the coming Plan. For their part, National Spiritual Assemblies will have to find ways in which they can stay well informed about what is being learned at the grassroots of their communities and analyse the experience being gained; in some places this will call for the creation of an entity dedicated to following social action. Looking across the Bahá'í world, we are delighted to see how much momentum has already been generated in this area of endeavour through the encouragement and support of the Bahá'í International Development Organization....

We wish to stress that, historically and now, social action and efforts to participate in the prevalent discourses of society have emerged not only in the context of growth, but also as a result of individual Bahá'ís striving to contribute to society's progress in ways available to them. As a personal response to Bahá'u'lláh's summons to work for the betterment of the world, believers have variously chosen to adopt certain vocations and have sought out opportunities to support the activities of like-minded groups and organizations. Projects, both large and small, have been started in order to respond to a range of social issues. Numerous Bahá'í-inspired organizations have been established by groups of individuals to work for many different objectives, and specialist entities have been founded to give attention to a particular discourse. All of these efforts, at whatever scale they have been undertaken, have benefited from being able to draw on the principles and insights guiding the activities occurring at the grassroots of the worldwide Bahá'í community, and they have also benefited from the wise counsels of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies. We rejoice to see these diverse, harmonious expressions of faith by the devoted followers of the Blessed Beauty, in response to the tribulations of a perplexed and sorely agitated world.

30 December 2021, The Universal House of Justice

- 78 In many parts of the world, a natural outcome of the participation of individuals and families in the institute process has been an increased consciousness of the importance of education in all its forms. Friends serving as children's class teachers take a keen interest in the broad educational development of those they teach, while friends serving as tutors and animators are naturally concerned with the extent to which those approaching or entering adulthood—girls and boys alike—can access and benefit from education of many kinds, not limited to the courses offered by the institute itself. For instance, they can encourage young people to look towards apprenticeships or university studies. We have been struck by how, in many communities, engagement in the institute process by large numbers has gradually reshaped this aspect of culture within a population. The institutions of the Faith will need to take responsibility for ensuring that, as consciousness is raised in this way, the noble aspirations that arise in young people as a result—aspirations to acquire the education and training that will allow them to offer a lifetime of meaningful service to their society—can be fulfilled. The long-term development of a community and, ultimately, of a nation, from generation to generation, depends to a large degree on the effort made to invest in those who will assume responsibility for collective social progress.

30 December 2021, The Universal House of Justice

Involvement in the Discourses of Society

- 79 It is I feel for the national representatives of the believers in every land to utilize and combine both methods, the outspoken as well as the gradual, in such a manner as to secure the greatest benefit and the fullest advantage for this steadily-growing Cause. Every staunch and high-minded believer is thoroughly convinced of the unfailing efficacy of every humanitarian undertaking which boldly and unreservedly proclaims the source of its motive power to be the consciousness of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Yet, if we but call to mind the practice generally adopted by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, we cannot fail to perceive the wisdom, nay the necessity, of gradually and cautiously disclosing to the eyes of an unbelieving world the implications of a Truth which, by its own challenging nature, it is so difficult for it to comprehend and embrace....

As the Movement extends the bounds of its influence and its opportunities for fuller recognition multiply, the twofold character of the obligations imposed on its national elected representatives should, I feel, be increasingly emphasized. Whilst chiefly engaged in the pursuit of their major task, consisting chiefly in the formation and the consolidation of Bahá'í administrative institutions, they should endeavour to participate, within recognized limits, in the work of institutions which, though unaware of the claim of the Bahá'í Cause, are prompted by a sincere desire to promote the spirit that animates the Faith. In the pursuit of their major task their function is to preserve the identity of the Cause and the purity of the mission of Bahá'u'lláh. In their minor undertaking their purpose should be to imbue with the spirit of power and strength such movements as in their restricted scope are endeavouring to achieve what is near and dear to the heart of every true Bahá'í. It would even appear at times to be advisable and helpful as a supplement to their work for the Bahá'ís to initiate any undertaking not specifically designated as Bahá'í, provided that they have ascertained that such an undertaking would constitute the best way of approach to those whose minds and hearts are as yet unprepared for a full acceptance of the claim of Bahá'u'lláh. These twofold obligations devolving upon organized Bahá'í communities, far from neutralizing the effects of one another or of appearing antagonistic in their aims, should be regarded as complementary and fulfilling, each in its way, a vital and necessary function.

It is for the national representatives of the Bahá'í Cause to observe the conditions under which they labour, to estimate the forces that are at work in their own surroundings, to weigh carefully and prayerfully the merits of either procedure, and to form a correct judgement as to the degree of emphasis that should be placed upon these twofold methods. Then and only then will they be enabled to protect and stimulate on one hand the independent growth of the Bahá'í Faith, and on the other vindicate the claim of its universal Principles to the doubtful and unbelieving.

20 February 1927, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 80 Learning about the participation of Bahá'ís in the discourses of society will advance as more and more believers throughout the world contribute to this area of activity over the coming years. This will occur at a number of levels. A growing number of individual believers will bring insights based on the writings to conversations in a variety of social spaces in which they find

themselves—some will be related to life in their localities while others will be connected to their professions. Bahá'í-inspired agencies will naturally contribute to discourses associated with aspects of social and economic development relevant to their work. Further, as programs of growth advance and the friends are drawn into the life of society around them, their efforts to overcome challenges facing their communities through the application of spiritual principles will invariably entail participation in discourses at the grassroots. That Bahá'í involvement in the discourses of society will grow organically at all levels, in line with the increasing capacity of the believers, is evident. Equally clear is the centrality of the role of the training institute to this process.

While a National Spiritual Assembly need not make specific plans for the above-mentioned areas, its involvement is required to guide participation in discourses at the national level—a task that can be assigned to its Office of External Affairs. The first step to be taken by such an Office, however, would not be to select topics on which to focus its efforts. Rather, it would seek to gradually familiarize itself with a variety of social spaces at the national level and learn about the associated discourses. As it does so, it will naturally avoid abstruse and divisive discussions and become increasingly adept at identifying spaces in which Bahá'ís can contribute ideas based on the teachings of the Faith. A brief word of caution is required: the purpose of participation in the discourses of society is not to persuade others to accept a Bahá'í position or to engage in direct teaching. Nor should it be understood as a public relations activity or academic exercise. Rather, those involved adopt a posture of learning and engage in genuine conversations in which they can offer insights drawn from the writings and from their experience in applying them as a contribution to the advancement of a given discourse.

6 February 2011, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 81 Our spirits have been lifted by seeing how capably National Spiritual Assemblies, the unflagging generals of the Army of Light, have guided their communities and shaped their response to the crisis.ⁱ They have been strongly supported by the Counsellors and their auxiliaries who, as always, have heroically raised aloft the standard of loving service. While staying well informed about the often rapidly changing conditions in their countries, Assemblies have made the necessary arrangements for administering

i The coronavirus pandemic.

the affairs of the Cause, and in particular for conducting elections, where these remain feasible. Through regular communications, institutions and agencies have offered wise counsel, comforting reassurance, and constant encouragement. In many instances, they have also started to identify constructive themes that are emerging from the discourses opening up in their societies. The expectation we expressed in our Naw-Rúz message that this test of humanity's endurance would grant it greater insight is already being realized. Leaders, prominent thinkers, and commentators have begun to explore fundamental concepts and bold aspirations that, in recent times, have been largely absent from public discourse. At present these are but early glimmerings, yet they hold out the possibility that a moment of collective consciousness may be in view.

Riḍván 2020, The Universal House of Justice

- 82 As you are aware, the promotion of the Bahá'í community's intellectual life and its effort to focus the light of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation on the evolution of thought and the exploration of social reality is becoming ever more important. This is particularly the case as the Bahá'í community continues to be drawn further into the life of society and seeks alongside others to address the countless complex problems facing humanity, all against a backdrop of accelerating forces of disintegration. There are, of course, numerous contributors to this important work, including the institutions and agencies of the Faith, certain organizations, as well as many individual believers.

29 November 2022, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Spiritual Health and Vitality of the Bahá'í Community

- 83 The National Assembly is the guardian of the welfare of the Faith, a most sacred and heavy responsibility and one which is inescapable. They must be ever vigilant, ever on the look-out, ever ready to take action, and, on all matters of fundamental principle, refuse to compromise for an instant. Only in this way can the body of the Faith be free of disease.

14 August 1957, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 84 The aim of any Spiritual Assembly should be to develop a warm and loving relationship with the believers in its community, so that it can most effectively nurture and encourage them in the acquisition of a deeper understanding of the teachings, and can assist them to follow the Bahá'í principles in their personal conduct. The Assembly should aspire to being regarded by the members of the community as a loving parent, wise in its understanding of the varying degrees of maturity of those entrusted to its care, compassionate in dealing with the problems which arise as a result of any shortcomings, ever prepared to guide them to the correct path, and very patient as they strive to effect the necessary changes in their behaviour. Such an approach is far removed from the harshly judgmental and punitive approach which so often characterizes the administration of law in the wider society. The Bahá'í application of justice, firmly rooted in spiritual principle and animated by the desire to foster the spiritual development of the members of the community, will increasingly be seen as a distinctive and highly attractive feature of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

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

- 85 The appearance of a united, firmly based and self-sustaining community must be a major goal of a Spiritual Assembly. Composed of a membership reflecting a diversity of personalities, talents, abilities and interests, such a community requires a level of internal interaction between the Assembly and the body of the believers based on a commonly recognized commitment to service, and in which a sense of partnership based on appreciation of each other's distinctive sphere of action is fully recognized and unfailingly upheld, and no semblance of a dichotomy between the two appears. In such a community leadership is that expression of service by which the

Spiritual Assembly invites and encourages the use of the manifold talents and abilities with which the community is endowed, and stimulates and guides the diverse elements of the community towards goals and strategies by which the effects of a coherent force for progress can be realized.

The maintenance of a climate of love and unity depends largely upon the feeling among the individuals composing the community that the Assembly is a part of themselves, that their cooperative interactions with that divinely ordained body allow them a fair latitude for initiative and that the quality of their relationships with both the institution and their fellow believers encourages a spirit of enterprise invigorated by an awareness of the revolutionizing purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, by a consciousness of the high privilege of their being associated with efforts to realize that purpose, and by a consequent, ever-present sense of joy. In such a climate, the community is transformed from being the mere sum of its parts to assuming a wholly new personality as an entity in which its members blend without losing their individual uniqueness. The possibilities for manifesting such a transformation exist most immediately at the local level, but it is a major responsibility of the National Assembly to nurture the conditions in which they may flourish.

The authority to direct the affairs of the Faith locally, nationally and internationally, is divinely conferred on elected institutions. However, the power to accomplish the tasks of the community resides primarily in the mass of the believers. The authority of the institutions is an irrevocable necessity for the progress of humanity; its exercise is an art to be mastered. The power of action in the believers is unlocked at the level of individual initiative and surges at the level of collective volition. In its potential, this mass power, this mix of individual potentialities, exists in a malleable form susceptible to the multiple reactions of individuals to the sundry influences at work in the world. To realize its highest purpose, this power needs to express itself through orderly avenues of activity. Even though individuals may strive to be guided in their actions by their personal understanding of the Divine Texts, and much can be accomplished thereby, such actions, untempered by the overall direction provided by authorized institutions, are incapable of attaining the thrust necessary for the unencumbered advancement of civilization.

Individual initiative is a pre-eminent aspect of this power; it is therefore a major responsibility of the institutions to safeguard and stimulate it. Similarly, it is important for individuals to recognize and accept that the

institutions must act as a guiding and moderating influence on the march of civilization. In this sense, the divine requirement that individuals obey the decisions of their Assemblies can clearly be seen as being indispensable to the progress of society. Indeed, individuals must not be abandoned entirely to their own devices with respect to the welfare of society as a whole, neither should they be stifled by the assumption of a dictatorial posture by members of the institutions.

The successful exercise of authority in the Bahá'í community implies the recognition of separate but mutually reinforcing rights and responsibilities between the institutions and the friends in general, a recognition that in turn welcomes the need for cooperation between these two interactive forces of society. As was stated in advice given by Shoghi Effendi: "The individuals and assemblies must learn to cooperate, and to cooperate intelligently, if they desire to adequately discharge their duties and obligations towards the Faith. And no such cooperation is possible without mutual confidence and trust."

19 May 1994, The Universal House of Justice

- 86 They [the institutions of the Faith] do not pry into the personal lives of individuals. Nor are they vindictive and judgemental, eager to punish those who fall short of the Bahá'í standard. Except in extreme cases of blatant and flagrant disregard for the law that could potentially harm the Cause and may require them to administer sanctions, their attention is focused on encouragement, assistance, counsel, and education.

19 April 2013, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 87 The challenge you face in helping the friends in your community to understand the Bahá'í teachings and to apply them in their lives, as the forces of materialism continue to grow in strength, is appreciated by the Universal House of Justice.... [T]he issues involved can best be considered in light of the relationships that the Administrative Order seeks to forge among the individual, the institutions, and the community. While responsibility for adhering to the Bahá'í standard rests primarily on the individual believer, it is incumbent upon the institutions of the Faith to support the individual, largely through educational endeavours, and to foster a pattern of community life that is conducive to the spiritual upliftment of its members. It is understood, of course, that in the assumption of these and other sacred duties, Bahá'í institutions may find it necessary at times

to take specific action as a means of protecting the community and the integrity of Bahá'í law.

In discharging their educational responsibilities towards the body of the believers, the institutions of the Faith need to bear in mind how little is accomplished when their efforts are reduced to repeated admonitions or to dogmatic instruction in proper conduct. Rather should their aim be to raise consciousness and to increase understanding. Theirs is not the duty to pry into personal lives or to impose Bahá'í law on the individual but to create an environment in which the friends eagerly arise to fulfil their obligations as followers of Bahá'u'lláh, to uphold His law, and to align their lives with His teachings. The efforts of the institutions will bear fruit to the extent that the friends, especially those of the younger generation, find themselves immersed in the activities of a vibrant and growing community and feel confirmed in the mission with which Bahá'u'lláh has entrusted them.

One of the most effective instruments at your disposal in this respect is the training institute. It strives to engage the individual in an educational process in which virtuous conduct and self-discipline are developed in the context of service, fostering a coherent and joyful pattern of life that weaves together study, worship, teaching, community building and, in general, involvement in other processes that seek to transform society. At the heart of the educational process is contact with the Word of God, whose power sustains every individual's attempts to purify his or her heart and to walk a path of service with "the feet of detachment". The Guardian encouraged young believers to learn through "active, whole-hearted and continued participation" in community activities. Addressed to one young believer, a letter written on his behalf explained: "Bahá'í community life provides you with an indispensable laboratory, where you can translate into living and constructive action the principles which you imbibe from the Teachings." "By becoming a real part of that living organism", the letter went on, "you can catch the real spirit which runs throughout the Bahá'í Teachings." Such wholehearted participation in the work of the Faith provides an invaluable context for the exertion made by young and old alike to align their lives with Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. This is not to say that individuals will not err from time to time, perhaps on occasion in serious ways. Yet, when the desire to uphold the Bahá'í standard is nurtured through service to the common weal in an environment of unfailing love and warm encouragement, the friends will not feel, in the

face of such difficulty, that they have no other recourse but to withdraw from community activity out of a sense of shame or, worse, to cover the challenges they are experiencing with the veneer of propriety, living a life in which public words do not conform to private deeds.

Clearly, then, individual moral development needs to be addressed in concert with efforts to enhance the capacities of the community and its institutions.... The environment sought is, at the most fundamental level, one of love and support, in which the believers, all endeavouring to achieve the Bahá'í standard in their personal conduct, show patience and respect to each other and, when needed, receive wise counsel and ready assistance. Gossip and backbiting have no place in the Bahá'í community; nor do judgemental attitudes and self-righteousness.

What is essential for every National Assembly to acknowledge in this connection is that, if mutual love and support within the community, important as it is, becomes the only focus, a stagnant environment engendered by an insular mentality will develop. The worldwide Bahá'í community is charged with an historic mission. It must acquire capacity to address increasingly complex spiritual and material requirements as it becomes larger and larger in size. The 28 December 2010 message of the House of Justice indicated: "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." The current series of global Plans sets out provisions for gradually building individual and collective capacity for the community's mission. The institutions of a Bahá'í community that has been allowed to become complacent will find it difficult to protect the younger members from the forces of gross materialism, with the accompanying moral decay, that are assailing society. This, then, points to the nature of the capacity-building process in which every Bahá'í institution must energetically engage.

23 April 2013, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 88 As you are doubtless aware, the House of Justice has advised that responsibility for guiding certain areas of endeavour, among them initiatives of international scope and those related to the promotion of Bahá'í studies,

is to be retained by Bahá'í institutions, which are tasked with directing the efforts of the community along effective avenues of action.

28 June 2016, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 89 The first requirement that an Assembly must exercise in upholding the laws of the Faith in its jurisdiction lies in having a sound approach to the general education of the believers about the laws, and such educational efforts can be set within the context of the greater purpose of the Revelation to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. In this way, the friends will obey the laws not through fear of punishment, but out of love for Bahá'u'lláh and an appreciation that these laws are conducive to their own spiritual and material development and to social well-being. While this approach—necessarily gradual and long-term—proceeds, Assemblies must use good judgement in applying the laws, bearing in mind their responsibility to lovingly and patiently educate new believers and younger generations within the Faith.

The application of these principles requires much thought, particularly in light of the ever-evolving situation in those neighbourhoods and villages where large numbers are participating in community-building activities, some of whom, often from among the youth, have embraced the Faith. In such places, as you have surely observed, the new Bahá'ís remain deeply embedded in the society around them and are engaged, along with many others, in activities that gradually change the dynamics within the whole population and help it move towards Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a New World Order. It is clear from your letter that the new believers in such places are becoming increasingly aware of the laws of the Faith and are trying to uphold them in their own lives. Nevertheless, it can be expected that the underlying social milieu of which they are inextricably a part, especially in the context of extended families, may at times compel them to compromise their efforts in this regard. Perhaps nowhere is this more challenging than in following the laws of personal status, such as marriage and burial.

What is needed in places that are becoming centers of intense activity, the House of Justice feels, is for a greater effort to be made to ensure that education about Bahá'í laws is directed not only to those who have formally enrolled in the Faith, but to all those who are in one way or another connected with the community-building process. The House of Justice has been very pleased to note that, in several clusters in ..., the friends are developing the capacity to reach out to a large number of households on

a regular basis, to share Bahá'í principles, to invite greater participation in activities, and to gradually develop a pattern of community life based on the teachings of the Faith. Building on this experience, it should not be difficult to introduce a discourse within many households on the nature of Bahá'í family life and some of the laws of Bahá'u'lláh related to personal status. In doing so, you would naturally wish to clarify that the purpose of the laws given by the Manifestation of God is not to limit human possibilities or introduce new ritualistic practices to replace the old ones. Rather, it is to make it possible for human beings to experience true freedom and to fulfil their true potential, both individually and collectively. How often have the friends from the wider society, having attended a Bahá'í marriage ceremony, proclaimed their joy and wonder at its simplicity and dignity, being devoid of the ritualistic elements that many find cumbersome and uncondusive to the upliftment of the soul. And how often, having become familiar with the provisions of Bahá'í marriage law, have they marvelled at the way it avoids reducing the marital bond to an economic transaction, but rather preserves its sacredness and integrity, and upholds the sanctity of the family unit. Indeed, every Bahá'í wedding is an opportunity to demonstrate to the larger public the special character of Bahá'í laws.

23 April 2018, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

The Three Protagonists

- 90 What has given me still greater pleasure is to learn that the members of this Central Body, which has assumed so grave a responsibility and is facing such delicate and difficult tasks, command individually and collectively not only the sympathy of their spiritual brethren and sisters but also can confidently rely on their active and whole-hearted support in the campaign of service to the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. It is indeed as it should be, for if genuine and sustained cooperation and mutual confidence cease to exist between individual friends and their Local and National Assemblies, the all-beneficent work of the Cause must cease and nothing else can enable it to function harmoniously and effectively in future.

23 December 1922, Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í Administration

- 91 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 insured. 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, Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent, 1923–1957

- 92 “Regard the world as the human body,” wrote Bahá'u'lláh to Queen Victoria. We can surely regard the Bahá'í world, the army of God, in the same way. In the human body, every cell, every organ, every nerve has its part to play. When all do so the body is healthy, vigorous, radiant, ready for every call made upon it. No cell, however humble, lives apart from the body, whether 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

- 93 At Ridván 1996, the Bahá'ís of the world will embark on a global enterprise aimed at one major accomplishment: a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. This is to be achieved through marked progress in the activity and development of the individual believer, of the institutions, and of the local community. That an advance in this process depends on the progress of all three of these intimately connected participants is abundantly clear. The next four years must witness a dramatic upsurge in effective teaching activities undertaken at the initiative of the individual. Thousands upon thousands of believers will need to be aided to express the vitality of their faith through constancy in teaching the Cause and by supporting the plans of their institutions and the endeavours of their communities. They should be helped to realize that their efforts will be sustained by the degree to which their inner life and private character “mirror forth in their manifold aspects the splendour of those eternal principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh.” An acceleration in the tempo of individual teaching must necessarily be complemented by a multiplication in the number of regional and local teaching projects. To this end the institutions should be assisted in increasing their ability to consult according to Bahá'í principles, to unify the friends in a common vision, and to use their talents in service to the Cause. Furthermore, those who enter the Faith must be integrated into vibrant local communities, characterized by tolerance and love and guided by a strong sense of purpose and collective will, environments in which

the capacities of all components—men, women, youth and children—are developed and their powers multiplied in unified action.

26 December 1995, Universal House of Justice

- 94 Shoghi Effendi underscored the absolute necessity of individual initiative and action. He explained that without the support of the individual, “at once wholehearted, continuous and generous,” every measure and plan of his National Spiritual Assembly is “foredoomed to failure,” the purpose of the Master’s Divine Plan is “impeded”; furthermore, the sustaining strength of Bahá’u’lláh Himself “will be withheld from every and each individual who fails in the long run to arise and play his part.” Hence, at the very crux of any progress to be made is the individual believer, who possesses the power of execution which only he can release through his own initiative and sustained action. Regarding the sense of inadequacy that sometimes hampers individual initiative, a letter written on his behalf conveys the Guardian’s advice: “Chief among these, you mention the lack of courage and of initiative on the part of the believers, and a feeling of inferiority which prevents them from addressing the public. It is precisely these weaknesses that he wishes the friends to overcome, for these do not only paralyse their efforts but actually serve to quench the flame of faith in their hearts. Not until all the friends come to realize that every one of them is able, in his own measure, to deliver the Message, can they ever hope to reach the goal that has been set before them by a loving and wise Master.... Everyone is a potential teacher. He has only to use what God has given him and thus prove that he is faithful to his trust.”...

The community, as distinguished from the individual and the institutions, assumes its own character and identity as it grows in size. This is a necessary development to which much attention is required both with respect to places where large-scale enrolment has occurred and in anticipation of more numerous instances of entry by troops. A community is of course more than the sum of its membership; it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders; it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unrelenting 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

- 95 None of the accomplishments of the individual or the community could be sustained without the guidance, encouragement and support of the third participant in the Plan—the institutions of the Faith. It is heartening to see to what extent the institutions are promoting individual initiative, channelling energies into the teaching field, underscoring the value of systematic action, fostering the spiritual life of the community and nurturing a welcoming environment. In helping the community to remain focused on the aim of the Plan, they are learning in practical terms what it means to maintain unity of vision among the friends, to put mechanisms in place that facilitate their endeavours and to allocate resources in accordance with priorities wisely set. These priorities include, of course, areas of activity that require the specialized skills of individuals. Worthy of particular mention in this category are the work of external affairs, which National Spiritual Assemblies are following diligently, and ventures of social and economic development, as, for example, undertaken by Bahá'í-inspired organizations. While tending to needs of this kind, the institutions find themselves increasingly capable of directing the thrust of the effort exerted by the generality of the believers towards the prosecution of the central tasks of the Plan.

27 December 2005, Universal House of Justice

96 On several occasions we have indicated that the aim of the series of global Plans that will carry the Bahá'í world to the celebration of the centenary of the Faith's Formative Age in 2021 will be achieved through marked progress in the activity and development of the individual believer, of the institutions, and of the community. At this, the midway point of what will be a quarter of a century of consistent, focused exertion, the evidences of increased capacity are everywhere apparent. Of particular significance is the widening impact of the dynamism flowing from the interactions between the three participants in the Plan. Institutions, from the national to the local level, see with ever greater clarity how to create conditions conducive to the expression of the spiritual energies of a growing number of believers in pursuit of a common goal. The community is serving more and more as that environment in which individual effort and collective action, mediated by the institute, can complement each other in order to achieve progress. The vibrancy it manifests and the unity of purpose that animates its endeavours are drawing into its swelling ranks those from every walk of life eager to dedicate their time and energies to the welfare of humanity. That the doors of the community are more widely open for any receptive soul to enter and receive sustenance from Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is clear. No greater testament is there to the efficacy of the interactions among the Plan's three participants than the dramatic acceleration in the tempo of teaching that was witnessed this past year. The advance made in the process of entry by troops was significant indeed.

Within the sphere of these enhanced interactions, individual initiative is becoming increasingly effective. In previous messages we have referred to the impetus that the institute process imparts to the exercise of initiative by the individual believer....

What we continue to find encouraging is how well disciplined is this individual initiative. Communities everywhere are gradually internalizing the lessons being learned from systematization, and the framework defined by the current series of Plans lends consistency and flexibility to the endeavours of the friends. Far from restricting them, this framework enables them to seize opportunities, to build relationships, and to translate into reality a vision of systematic growth. In a word, it gives shape to their collective powers.

Riḍván 2008, Universal House of Justice

97 Every follower of Bahá'u'lláh knows well that the purpose of His Revelation is to bring into being a new creation. No sooner had "the First Call gone forth from His lips than the whole creation was revolutionized, and all that are in the heavens and all that are on earth were stirred to the depths." The individual, the institutions, and the community—the three protagonists in the Divine Plan—are being shaped under the direct influence of His Revelation, and a new conception of each, appropriate for a humanity that has come of age, is emerging. The relationships that bind them, too, are undergoing a profound transformation, bringing into the realm of existence civilization-building powers which can only be released through conformity with His decree. At a fundamental level these relationships are characterized by cooperation and reciprocity, manifestations of the interconnectedness that governs the universe. So it is that the individual, with no regard for "personal benefits and selfish advantages," comes to see him- or herself as "one of the servants of God, the All-Possessing," whose only desire is to carry out His laws. So it is that the friends come to recognize that "wealth of sentiment, abundance of good-will and effort" are of little avail when their flow is not directed along proper channels, that "the unfettered freedom of the individual should be tempered with mutual consultation and sacrifice," and that "the spirit of initiative and enterprise should be reinforced by a deeper realization of the supreme necessity for concerted action and a fuller devotion to the common weal." And so it is that all come to discern with ease those areas of activity in which the individual can best exercise initiative and those which fall to the institutions alone. "With heart and soul", the friends follow the directives of their institutions, so that, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains, "things may be properly ordered and well arranged". This, of course, is not a blind obedience; it is an obedience that marks the emergence of a mature human race which grasps the implications of a system as far-reaching as Bahá'u'lláh's new World Order.

And those who are called upon from among the ranks of such enkindled souls to serve on the institutions of that mighty system understand well the Guardian's words that "their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent." "Never" would they be "led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles." "With extreme humility," they approach

their tasks and “endeavour, by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candour, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win, not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they serve, but also their esteem and real affection.” Within the environment thus created, institutions invested with authority see themselves as instruments for nurturing human potential, ensuring its unfoldment along avenues productive and meritorious.

Composed of such individuals and such institutions, the community of the Greatest Name becomes that spiritually charged arena in which powers are multiplied in unified action. It is of this community that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes: “When any souls grow to be true believers, they will attain a spiritual relationship with one another, and show forth a tenderness which is not of this world. They will, all of them, become elated from a draught of divine love, and that union of theirs, that connection, will also abide forever. Souls, that is, who will consign their own selves to oblivion, strip from themselves the defects of humankind, and unchain themselves from human bondage, will beyond any doubt be illumined with the heavenly splendours of oneness, and will all attain unto real union in the world that dieth not.”

28 December 2010, Universal House of Justice

- 98 To observe the Bahá’í world at work is to behold a vista bright indeed. In the life of the individual believer who desires, above all, to invite others into communion with the Creator and to render service to humanity can be found signs of the spiritual transformation intended for every soul by the Lord of the Age. In the spirit animating the activities of any Bahá’í community dedicated to enhancing the capacity of its members young and old, as well as of its friends and collaborators, to serve the common weal can be perceived an indication of how a society founded upon divine teachings might develop. And in those advanced clusters where activity governed by the framework of the Plan is in abundance and the demands of ensuring coherence amongst lines of action are most pressing, the evolving administrative structures offer glimmerings, however faint, of how the institutions of the Faith will incrementally come to assume a fuller range of their responsibilities to promote human welfare and progress. Clearly, then, the development of the individual, the community, and the institutions holds immense promise. But beyond this, we note with particular joy how

the relationships binding these three are marked by such tender affection and mutual support.

By contrast, relations among the three corresponding actors in the world at large—the citizen, the body politic, and the institutions of society—reflect the discord that characterizes humanity's turbulent stage of transition. Unwilling to act as interdependent parts of an organic whole, they are locked in a struggle for power which ultimately proves futile. How very different the society which 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in unnumbered Tablets and talks, depicts—where everyday interactions, as much as the relations of states, are shaped by consciousness of the oneness of humankind. Relationships imbued with this consciousness are being cultivated by Bahá'ís and their friends in villages and neighbourhoods across the world; from them can be detected the pure fragrances of reciprocity and cooperation, of concord and love. Within such unassuming settings, a visible alternative to society's familiar strife is emerging. So it becomes apparent that the individual who wishes to exercise self-expression responsibly participates thoughtfully in consultation devoted to the common good and spurns the temptation to insist on personal opinion; a Bahá'í institution, appreciating the need for coordinated action channelled toward fruitful ends, aims not to control but to nurture and encourage; the community that is to take charge of its own development recognizes an invaluable asset in the unity afforded through whole-hearted engagement in the plans devised by the institutions. Under the influence of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, the relationships among these three are being endowed with new warmth, new life; in aggregate, they constitute a matrix within which a world spiritual civilization, bearing the imprint of divine inspiration, gradually matures.

Riḍván 2012, Universal House of Justice

- 99 The series of global Plans that began at Riḍván will last a full twenty-five years. It will carry the ark of the Cause into the third century of the Bahá'í Era and conclude at Riḍván 2046. During this period, the Bahá'í world will be focused on a single aim: the release of the society-building power of the Faith in ever-greater measures. The pursuit of this overall aim will require a further rise in the capacity of the individual believer, the local community, and the institutions of the Faith. These three constant protagonists of the Plan each have a part to play, and each one has capacities and qualities that must be developed. However, each is incapable of manifesting its full potential on its own. It is by strengthening their dynamic relationships with

one another that their powers are combined and multiplied. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains that the more the qualities of cooperation and mutual assistance are manifested by a people, “the more will human society advance in progress and prosperity”; in the Faith, this principle distinguishes and shapes the interactions of individuals, institutions, and communities, and it endows the body of the Cause with moral vigour and spiritual health.

30 December 2021, Universal House of Justice

THE
NINETEEN
DAY
FEAST

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

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled September 2017

Introductory Letter

The Universal House of Justice

Bahá'í World Centre

27 August 1989

To the followers of Bahá'u'lláh

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Nineteen Day Feast, its framework, purpose and possibilities, have in recent years become a subject of increasing inquiry among the friends. It occupied much of the consultation at the Sixth International Bahá'í Convention last year, and we feel the time has come for us to offer clarifications.

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh encompasses all units of human society; integrates the spiritual, administrative and social processes of life; and canalizes human expression in its varied forms towards the construction of a new civilization. The Nineteen Day Feast embraces all these aspects at the very base of society. Functioning in the village, the town, the city, it is an institution of which all the people of Bahá are members. It is intended to promote unity, ensure progress, and foster joy.

“If this feast be held in the proper fashion,” `Abdu'l-Bahá states, “the friends will, once in nineteen days, find themselves spiritually restored, and endued with a power that is not of this world.” To ensure this glorious outcome the concept of the Feast must be adequately understood by all the friends. The Feast is known to have three distinct but related parts: the devotional, the administrative, and the social. The first entails the recitation of prayers and reading from the Holy Texts. The second is a general meeting where the Local Spiritual Assembly reports its activities, plans and problems to the community, shares news and messages from the World Centre and the National Assembly, and receives the thoughts and recommendations of the friends through a process of consultation. The third involves the partaking

of refreshments and engaging in other activities meant to foster fellowship in a culturally determined diversity of forms which do not violate principles of the Faith or the essential character of the Feast.

Even though the Feast requires strict adherence to the threefold aspects in the sequence in which they have been defined, there is much room for variety in the total experience. For example, music may be introduced at various stages, including the devotional portion; 'Abdu'l-Bahá recommends that eloquent, uplifting talks be given; originality and variety in expressions of hospitality are possible; the quality and range of the consultation are critical to the spirit of the occasion. The effects of different cultures in all these respects are welcome factors which can lend the Feast a salutary diversity, representative of the unique characteristics of the various societies in which it is held and therefore conducive to the upliftment and enjoyment of its participants.

It is notable that the concept of the Feast evolved in stages in relation to the development of the Faith. At its earliest stage in Iran, the individual friends, in response to Bahá'u'lláh's injunctions, hosted gatherings in their homes to show hospitality once every nineteen days and derived inspiration from the reading and discussion of the Teachings. As the community grew, 'Abdu'l-Bahá delineated and emphasized the devotional and social character of the event. After the establishment of Local Spiritual Assemblies, Shoghi Effendi introduced the administrative portion and acquainted the community with the idea of the Nineteen Day Feast as an institution. It was as if a symphony, in three movements, had now been completed.

But it is not only in the sense of its gradual unfoldment as an institution that the evolution of the Feast must be regarded; there is a broader context yet. The Feast may well be seen in its unique combination of modes as the culmination of a great historic process in which primary elements of community life—acts of worship, of festivity and other forms of togetherness—over vast stretches of time have achieved a glorious convergence. The Nineteen Day Feast represents the new stage in this enlightened age to which the basic expression of community life has evolved. Shoghi Effendi has described it as the foundation of the new World Order, and in a letter written on his behalf, it is referred to as constituting “a vital medium for maintaining close and continued contact between the believers themselves,

and also between them and the body of their elected representatives in the local community”.

Moreover, because of the opportunity which it provides for conveying messages from the national and international levels of the administration and also for communicating the recommendations of the friends to those levels, the Feast becomes a link that connects the local community in a dynamic relationship with the entire structure of the Administrative Order. But considered in its local sphere alone there is much to thrill and amaze the heart. Here it links the individual to the collective processes by which a society is built or restored. Here, for instance, the Feast is an arena of democracy at the very root of society, where the Local Spiritual Assembly and the members of the community meet on common ground, where individuals are free to offer their gifts of thought, whether as new ideas or constructive criticism, to the building processes of an advancing civilization. Thus it can be seen that aside from its spiritual significance, this common institution of the people combines an array of elemental social disciplines which educate its participants in the essentials of responsible citizenship.

If the Feast is to be properly experienced, beyond an understanding of the concept must also be the preparation of it and the preparation for it. Although the Local Spiritual Assembly is administratively responsible for the conduct of the Feast, it often calls upon an individual or a group of individuals to make preparations—a practice which is consonant with the spirit of hospitality so vital to the occasion. Such individuals can act as hosts and are sometimes concerned with the selection of the prayers and readings for the devotional portion; they may also attend to the social portion. In small communities the aspect of personal hospitality is easy to carry out, but in large communities the Local Spiritual Assemblies, while retaining the concept of hospitality, may find it necessary to devise other measures.

Important aspects of the preparation of the Feast include the proper selection of readings, the assignment, in advance, of good readers, and a sense of decorum both in the presentation and the reception of the devotional programme. Attention to the environment in which the Feast is to be held, whether indoors or outdoors, greatly influences the experience. Cleanliness, arrangement of the space in practical and decorative ways—play a significant part. Punctuality is also a measure of good preparation.

To a very large extent, the success of the Feast depends on the quality of the preparation and participation of the individual. The beloved master offers the following advice: "Give ye great weight to the Nineteen Day gatherings, so that on these occasions the beloved of the Lord and the handmaids of the Merciful may turn their faces toward the Kingdom, chant the communes, beseech God's help, become joyfully enamoured each of the other, and grow in purity and holiness, and in the fear of God, and in resistance to passion and self. Thus will they separate themselves from this elemental world, and immerse themselves in the ardours of the spirit."

In absorbing such advice, it is illuminating indeed to view the Nineteen Day Feast in the context in which it was conceived. It is ordained in the "Kitáb-i-Aqdas" in these words: "It hath been enjoined upon you once a month to offer hospitality, even should ye serve no more than water, for God hath willed to bind your hearts together, though it be through heavenly and earthly means combined". It is clear, then, that the Feast is rooted in hospitality, with all its implications of friendliness, courtesy, service, generosity and conviviality. The very idea of hospitality as the sustaining spirit of so significant an institution introduces a revolutionary new attitude to the conduct of human affairs at all levels, an attitude which is critical to that world unity which the Central Figures of our Faith laboured so long and suffered so much cruelty to bring into being. It is in this divine festival that the foundation is laid for the realization of so unprecedented a reality.

That you may all attain the high mark set for the Feast as a "bringer of joy", the "groundwork of agreement and unity", the "key to affection and fellowship" will remain an object of our ardent supplications at the Holy Threshold.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
The Universal House of Justice

General Statements

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 Verily, it is enjoined upon you to offer a feast, once in every month, though only water be served; for God hath purposed to bind hearts together, albeit through both earthly and heavenly means.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, note no. 82

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

- 2 O thou steadfast in the Covenant!
Thou hast written ... concerning the Feast. This festivity, which is held on a day of the nineteen-day month, was established by His Holiness the Báb, and the Blessed Beauty directed, confirmed and warmly encouraged the holding of it. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance. You should unquestionably see to it with the greatest care, and make its value known, so that it may become solidly established on a permanent basis. Let the beloved of God gather together and associate most lovingly and spiritually and happily with one another, conducting themselves with the greatest courtesy and self-restraint. Let them read the holy verses, as well as essays which are of benefit, and the letters of `Abdu'l-Bahá; encourage and inspire one another to love each and all; chant the prayers with serenity and joy; give eloquent talks, and praise the matchless Lord.

The host, with complete self-effacement, showing kindness to all, must be a comfort to each one, and serve the friends with his own hands.

If the Feast is befittingly held, in the manner described, then this supper will verily be the Lord's Supper, for its fruits will be the very fruits of that Supper, and its influence the same.

From a Tablet

- 3 As to the Nineteen Day Feast, ye must give this your most careful attention, and firmly establish it. For this Feast bringeth bliss and unity and love to the lovers of God.

From a Tablet

- 4 Ye have written of the Nineteen Day festivities. This Feast is a bringer of joy. It is the groundwork of agreement and unity. It is the key to affection and fellowship. It diffuseth the oneness of mankind.

From a Tablet

- 5 O ye loyal servants of the Ancient Beauty! In every cycle and dispensation, the feast hath been favoured and loved, and the spreading of a table for the lovers of God hath been considered a praiseworthy act. This is especially the case today, in this dispensation beyond compare, this most generous of ages, when it is highly acclaimed, for it is truly accounted among such gatherings as are held to worship and glorify God. Here the holy verses, the heavenly odes and laudations are intoned, and the heart is quickened, and carried from itself.

The primary intent is to kindle these stirrings of the spirit, but at the same time it follows quite naturally that those present should partake of food, so that the world of the body may mirror the spirit's world, and flesh take on the qualities of soul; and just as the spiritual delights are here in profusion, so too the material delights.

Happy are ye, to be observing this rule, with all its mystic meanings, thus keeping the friends of God alert and heedful, and bringing them peace of mind, and joy.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 48

- 6 Thy letter hath been received. Thou didst write of the Nineteen Day festivity, and this rejoiced my heart. These gatherings cause the divine table to descend from heaven, and draw down the confirmations of the All-Merciful. My hope is that the breathings of the Holy Spirit will be wafted over them, and that each one present shall, in great assemblies, with an eloquent tongue and a heart flooded with the love of God, set himself to acclaiming the rise of the Sun of Truth, the dawn of the Day-Star that lighteth all the world.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 49

- 7 Give ye great weight to the Nineteen Day gatherings, so that on these occasions the beloved of the Lord and the handmaids of the Merciful may turn their faces toward the Kingdom, chant the communes, beseech God's help, become joyfully enamoured each of the other, and grow in purity and holiness, and in the fear of God, and in resistance to passion and self. Thus will they separate themselves from this elemental world, and immerse themselves in the ardours of the spirit.

From a Tablet

- 8 I beg of God, out of His endless bounties, that many such gatherings will be held, and that the Nineteen Day festivity will also be observed, so that men and women believers will occupy themselves with making mention of God, and praising and glorifying Him, and guiding the people aright.

From a Tablet

- 9 O thou who art steadfast in the Covenant!

Your detailed letter hath been received, but because of the press of work a brief answer must suffice. You have asked as to the Feast in every Bahá'í month. This Feast is held to foster comradeship and love, to call God to mind and supplicate Him with contrite hearts, and to encourage benevolent pursuits. That is, the friends should there dwell upon God and glorify Him, read the prayers and holy verses, and treat one another with the utmost affection and love. Should trouble arise between two of the friends, let both be invited in, and efforts be made to compose their differences. Let all discussion centre on the doing of charitable acts and holy deeds, that laudable results may be the fruit thereof.

From a Tablet

- 10 As to the Nineteen Day Feast, it rejoiceth mind and heart. If this feast be held in the proper fashion, the friends will, once in nineteen days, find themselves spiritually restored, and endued with a power that is not of this world.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 51

- 11 As to the Nineteen Day festivity, it is of the utmost importance that the friends should gather at a meeting where, in complete attunement and love, they should engage in the remembrance of God and His praise, and converse as to the glad tidings of God, and proofs of the Advent of Bahá'u'lláh,

and should recount the high deeds and sacrifices of the lovers of God in Persia, and tell of the martyrs' detachment from the world, and their ecstasy, and of how the believers there stood by one another and gave up everything they had. The Nineteen Day festivity is, therefore, of very great importance.

From a Tablet

- 12 ...make of the Feasts occasions of joy and fellowship reminiscent of the feasts that our forebears used to hold in connection with their commemoration of the Lord's Supper.

From a Tablet

- 13 Vigorous steps must be taken to establish the Nineteen Day reception throughout the whole community. Since this Feast is confined to believers only, conclusive proofs must there be set forth as to the people of the Bayán, so that newcomers, unaware of the situation, may be made aware of it.

From a Tablet

- 14 It befitteth the friends to hold a gathering, a meeting, where they shall glorify God and fix their hearts upon Him, and read and recite the Holy Writings of the Blessed Beauty—may my soul be the ransom of His lovers! The lights of the All-Glorious Realm, the rays of the Supreme Horizon, will be cast upon such bright assemblages, for these are none other than the Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs, the Dawning-Points of God's Remembrance, which must, at the direction of the most Exalted Pen, be established in every hamlet and city ... These spiritual gatherings must be held with the utmost purity and consecration, so that from the site itself, and its earth and the air about it, one will inhale the fragrant breathings of the Holy Spirit.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 55

- 15 Thou hast written of that meeting held in the quarter where standeth the city gate of 'Abdu'l-'Azím. Do not call it a meeting. Call it a confluence of holy souls; a convocation of those who love the Lord; a retreat for the people of the All-Merciful; a palace-hall for all who sing His praise. For the members of that gathering are each one a lighted taper, and that council a mansion of the moon and stars. It hath been blessed by the Lord of all mankind, and hath made current the Feast as set forth in the Most Holy Book.

From a Tablet

- 16 And thou, O my dear daughter, stay thou at all times in close touch with my honoured daughter, Mrs ... and be thou her friend. Rest you assured that the breaking of the Holy Spirit will loosen your tongue. Speak, therefore; speak out with great courage at every meeting. When you are about to begin your address, turn first to Bahá'u'lláh and ask for the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, then open your lips and say whatever is suggested to your heart; this, however, with the utmost courage, dignity and conviction. It is my hope that from day to day your gatherings will grow and flourish, and that those who are seeking after truth will hearken therein to reasoned arguments and conclusive proofs. I am with you heart and soul at every meeting; be sure of this.

Hold you the Nineteen Day Feasts with utmost dignity.

From a Tablet

- 17 You must continue to keep the Nineteen Day Feast. It is very important; it is very good. But when you present yourselves in the meetings, before entering them, free yourselves from all that you have in your heart, free your thoughts and your minds from all else save God, and speak to your heart. That all may make this a gathering of love, make it the cause of illumination, make it a gathering of attraction of the hearts, surround this gathering with the Lights of the Supreme Concourse, so that you may be gathered together with the utmost love.

O God! Dispel all those elements which are the cause of discord, and prepare for us all those things which are the cause of unity and accord! O God! Descend upon us Heavenly Fragrance and change this gathering into a gathering of Heaven! Grant to us every benefit and every food. Prepare for us the Food of Love! Give to us the Food of Knowledge! Bestow upon us the Food of Heavenly Illumination!

In your hearts remember these things, and then enter the Unity Feast.

Each one of you must think how to make happy and pleased the other members of your Assembly, and each one must consider all those who are present as better and greater than himself, and each one must consider himself less than the rest. Know their station as high, and think of your own station as low. Should you act and live according to these behests, know verily, of a certainty, that that Feast is the Heavenly Food. That Supper is the "Lord's Supper"! I am the Servant of that gathering.

Star of the West, vol. IV, no. 7 (13 July 1913), p. 120

18 The Nineteen Day Feast was inaugurated by the Báb and ratified by Bahá'u'lláh, in His holy book, the Akdas [sic], so that people may gather together and outwardly show fellowship and love, that the divine mysteries may be disclosed. The object is concord, that through this fellowship hearts may become perfectly united, and reciprocity and mutual helpfulness be established. Because the members of the world of humanity are unable to exist without being banded together, cooperation and mutual helpfulness is the basis of human society. Without the realization of these two great principles no great movement is pressed forward...

In brief, this is my hope: that the Nineteen Day Feast become the cause of great spiritual solidarity between the friends, that it may bring believers into the bond of unity, and we will then be so united together that love and wisdom will spread from this centre to all parts. This Feast is a divine Feast. It is a Lord's supper. It attracts confirmation of God like a magnet. It is the cause of the enlightenment of hearts.

Every day great feasts and banquets are being spread with the object of material enjoyment and relish of food. People partake of certain delicacies and waters from various fountains, that they may have a good time. Balls and dances follow. All these are for the body, but this fellowship is of the enjoyment of God, for the partaking of spiritual food, for the elucidation of spiritual subjects, for the discussion and interpretation of the teachings and counsels of God. It is absolute spirituality.

It is my hope that the Nineteen Day Feast may become firmly established and organized so that the holy realities are behind this meeting may leave behind all prejudices and conflict, and make their hearts as a treasury of love. Even if there is the slightest feeling between certain souls—a lack of love—it must be made to entirely disappear. There must be the utmost translucency and purity of intention.

They must enjoy the love of God, acquire the power for the promotion of the happiness of mankind and the Word of God. With such high mention must this Feast become an established institution. When they gather in this meeting, all those present must turn their faces toward the Kingdom of Abhá, and from their hearts supplicate, invoke and entreat toward the lofty throne, beg of God's forgiveness for all shortcomings, read the teachings and arise to His service.

Then spread the feast and give refreshments. Assuredly great results will be the outcome of such meetings. Material and spiritual benefits will be assured. All who are present will be intoxicated with the breezes of

the Love of God, and the Breath of the Holy Spirit will with tremendous power inspire the hearts.

If this meeting be established on such a rock, it will become a power which will attract heavenly confirmations, be the means of the appearance of the Light of God, and the reality of every subject will become unfolded. Such a meeting will be under the protection of God. It is my hope that you will continually hold these meetings and that each time it will become more and more the centre of all the virtues, the point for the effulgence of God.

May your hearts be enlightened!

May your faces become radiant!

May your spirits be illumined!

May your thoughts find wider range of vision!

May your spiritual susceptibilities be increased!

May the realm of God surround you, and may your hearts become the treasury of heaven!

This is my hope.

29 December 1912, cited in Bahá'í News Letter, no. 33, July 1929, pp. 1-2

The Threefold Feast Celebration

From the writings of Shoghi Effendi

- 19 Still other factors promoting the development of that Order and contributing to its consolidation have been the systematic institution of the Nineteen Day Feast, functioning in most Bahá'í communities in East and West, with its threefold emphasis on the devotional, the administrative and the social aspects of Bahá'í community life...

God Passes By, sec. XXII

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 20 Regarding the nature of the Nineteen Day Feasts, the Guardian feels that the excellent statement on their nature, function and purpose published in one of the recent issues of the "News Letter" is so comprehensive and faithful in its presentation that he does not find it necessary to restate and enlarge upon the matter. He has no objection, however, if you feel the need to elaborate the thought expressed in that statement, stressing particularly the spiritual, administrative and social aspects of this vital Bahá'í institution.

6 September 1933, Bahá'í News, no. 79, November 1933, p. 3

- 21 As to your question concerning Bahá'í Feasts, Shoghi Effendi strongly feels that on such occasions the friends should emphasize both the spiritual and the administrative elements. For these are equally essential to the success of every Bahá'í festival. To maintain the right balance between them is, therefore, the duty and responsibility of every individual Bahá'í or group. Until the believers learn to combine the two, there can be no hope of their gaining any real and permanent benefit from such religious celebrations.

A good part of the Feast must of course be devoted to the reading of the Holy Words. For it is through them that the friends can get the inspiration and the vision they need for the successful accomplishment of their work for the Cause.

27 May 1934

- 22 With regard to your question concerning the Nineteen Day Feasts: These gatherings are no doubt of a special importance to the friends, as they have both a social and an administrative significance, and as such should be regularly attended by all confirmed believers. They should also be observed according to the Bahá'í calendar every nineteen days.

12 April 1935

- 23 Concerning the nature of the Nineteen Day Feast: In the "Aqdas", Bahá'u'lláh has clearly revealed the spiritual and social character of this institution. Its administrative significance, however, has been stressed by the Guardian in direct response to the growing needs of the Bahá'í community in this formative period of the Bahá'í Era for better training in the principles and practice of Bahá'í administration.

29 July 1935

- 24 Regarding the Nineteen Day Feast: in a previous letter to the National Spiritual Assembly the Guardian had made it clear that, although not a binding ordinance, this Feast has been regarded by Bahá'u'lláh as highly desirable and meritorious. In the "Aqdas" He has specially emphasized its spiritual and devotional character, and also its social importance in the Bahá'í community as a means for bringing about closer fellowship and unity among the believers. The administrative significance of this Feast has been stated by the Guardian in view of the increasing need among the friends for better training in the principles and methods of Bahá'í Administration.

The significance of the Nineteen Day Feast is thus threefold. It is a gathering of a devotional, social and administrative importance. When these three features are all combined, this Feast can and will surely yield the best and the maximum of results. The friends, however, should be on their guard lest they overstress the significance of this institution created by Bahá'u'lláh. They should also take care not to undertake or minimize its importance.

2 October 1935

- 25 He was very glad to know you are holding the Feasts, as these form a rallying-point for the friends and help to unite them and deepen them in the Faith.

5 March 1946

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

- 26 A group, of course, is not an administrative body and there is no objection to the members of a group making decisions within their scope on any occasion when all of them happen to be together, even if this should be at a Nineteen Day Feast. The Nineteen Day Feast can only be an official administrative occasion where there is a Local Spiritual Assembly to take charge of it, present reports to the friends, and receive their recommendations. But groups, spontaneous gatherings of the friends, and even isolated believers should certainly remember the day and say prayers together. In the case of a group, it may well hold the Feast in the manner in which a Local Spiritual Assembly would do so, recognizing of course that it has no official administrative standing.

31 October 1972

- 27 Regarding changing the order of the Feast, it is clear from Shoghi Effendi's instructions that the Nineteen Day Feast programme should start with the spiritual part, and not with the social part, which includes refreshments, or breaking bread together ... However, if it is found that some sort of association among the friends or the serving of food and refreshments will be helpful, if this takes place at the outset, there is no objection to this practice, provided it is clear that it is not part of the Feast.

23 January 1985

Feast Times

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 28 As to your question relative to the last Nineteen Day Feast, Shoghi Effendi sees no objection if the friends choose to celebrate it on one of the intercalary days. They may also celebrate it during the month of fasting, provided they abstain from food.

2 August 1934

- 29 Your third question concerns the day on which the Feast should be held every month. The Guardian stated in reply that no special day has been fixed, but it would be preferable and most suitable if the gathering of the friends should be held on the first day of each Bahá'í month.

1 December 1936

- 30 Regarding the time for the holding of the Nineteen Day Feasts and elections: the Guardian would advise your Assembly to urge the friends to hold such gatherings on the prescribed day before sunset. If impossible, then it is permissible to hold them on the preceding day. In connection with the nine holy days however the friends should consider it obligatory to celebrate them on the prescribed day before sunset.

24 December 1939

- 31 The Naw-Ruz Feast should be held on March 21 before sunset and has nothing to do with the Nineteen Day Feast. The Nineteen Day Feast is administrative in function whereas the Naw-Ruz is our New Year, a Feast of hospitality and rejoicing.

5 July 1950

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 32 As to your questions concerning the times for Feasts and Holy Days: The Bahá'í Day is from sunset to sunset, therefore if in summer the sun sets too late to enable the Nineteen Day Feast to be held on the preceding evening, it should be held on the day itself. As long as the meeting begins before sunset it is considered to be held on the day which comes to an end with that sunset. Naturally Nineteen Day Feasts should be held on the first day of the Bahá'í month if possible, but if it should be difficult to do so, for example if it coincides with a regular public meeting evening, it is permissible to hold it on the following day, i.e. on a succeeding day of the Bahá'í month.

23 June 1964

Feast Locations

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 33 There is no objection to holding meetings in the open air as long as they are conducted with dignity.

22 November 1941

- 34 Each city will have its own Spiritual Assembly, not a number of district ones. Naturally, district Nineteen Day Feasts can be held where there are very many Bahá'ís in one city.

31 March 1949

- 35 The matter of where the Nineteen Day Feasts should be held is certainly one for the Spiritual Assembly to decide; but the Hazíratu'l-Quds seems the logical place on most occasions. Until the friends have a place of worship in ... this building will also be used for devotional meetings, as well as for administrative purposes.

If, under some circumstances, some special Feast is offered in the home of one of the believers, with the approval of the Spiritual Assembly, there can be no objection; but, generally speaking, he feels it is better to use the Hazíratu'l-Quds.

18 February 1954

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 36 We understand and appreciate the problems involved in the holding of Nineteen Day Feasts in the large cities such as New York and Los Angeles and we have no objection to your Assembly authorizing the Local Assembly to provide for the holding of the Feast in different localities as an experiment, if the Local Assembly so wishes, bearing in mind the following precautions:

The tendency in metropolitan areas is towards segregation, and therefore the Local Assembly should be alert to prevent a similar pattern developing in Bahá'í meetings by reason of the location of the Feast.

The Local Assembly should be watchful that neither the unity of the community nor control by the Local Assembly is dissipated by this practice.

23 January 1967

- 37 Your letter of August 9th posing the problem of holding Nineteen Day Feasts and other Bahá'í activities in the two communities "which have grown so large that it is impossible to conduct such activities in homes is welcomed by us, and we hope you will meet this problem before long in other communities.

We leave it to your discretion as to whether these large communities should purchase adequate facilities to accommodate the believers at Feasts and other Bahá'í activities, rent facilities, or hold several simultaneous Feasts, still utilizing homes.

21 August 1972

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 38 Difficulties of travelling to the Nineteen Day Feasts, and other occasions, which may be met in certain parishes can be overcome by your authorizing the Local Assembly in such a parish to hold more than one Feast within its area. There is no need to establish rigid boundaries for such a purpose, and the friends should be allowed to attend the Feast in their parish most convenient to them; but all should note that every Feast in the area is a portion of the same Feast under the jurisdiction of the Local Spiritual Assembly. Occasions should be provided for the entire Bahá'í community of the parish to meet together, and Feast days need not be excluded from such occasions.

14 January 1980

- 39 As to the question of holding meetings to commemorate Bahá'í Holy Days on a regional basis, the House of Justice has ruled that it may be desirable in certain areas for the believers in neighbouring localities to join together with other communities in observing Holy Days and certain

events. Such matters should be referred to and determined by National Spiritual Assemblies. Observance of the Nineteen Day Feasts and other local activities, however, should be held in the respective civil areas.

20 March 1986

- 40 The problems implied by your inquiry are not insurmountable. For instance, the Local Spiritual Assembly could be authorized to appoint an administrative committee in each of a number of sub-units of the city; and these committees could deal with the urgent needs of the friends in these areas on behalf of the Assembly; and if found desirable, the Spiritual Assembly could authorize the holding of separate Nineteen Day Feasts in several sub-units. In such a decentralized system, the Local Spiritual Assembly would have to provide for the overall coordination of the efforts of the friends in all sub-units of the city.

The sub-division of the city should be seen merely as an administrative necessity meant to serve the good of the whole community; in this sense, the Assembly should guard strenuously against creating too many sub-units, contenting itself with the minimum action in this respect. Given the racial and social stratification of large cities, the Spiritual Assembly would also have to exert the utmost care not to allow the Bahá'í community of... to become, in effect, racially or socially fragmented, even though one race or stratum may be dominant in a sub-unit of the city. One of the questions that should remain uppermost in the minds of the Assembly, the committees and the individual friends is how to uphold at all times, through their functions and deeds, the primary principle and goal of our Faith, namely, the unity of the human race.

20 December 1987

Attendance of Believers at the Feast

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 41 In regard to the Nineteen Day Feasts, Shoghi Effendi is of the opinion that the believers should be impressed with the importance of attending these gatherings which, in addition to their spiritual significance, constitute a vital medium for maintaining close and continued contact between the believers themselves, and also between them and the body of their elected representatives in the local community.

No radical action, such as the expulsion of any believer from the community, should, however, be taken in case anyone fails to attend these Feasts. It is for every individual believer to realize what the Cause requires from him in this matter. Any threat or menace can be of no avail, unless it is based on appeal to individual conscience and responsibility.

22 December 1934

- 42 Also regarding the Nineteen Day Feasts: these are not strictly obligatory, but the believers should endeavour to regularly attend them, mainly for the following two reasons: first, because they foster the spirit of service and fellowship in the community and secondly, in view of the fact that they afford the believers a splendid opportunity to fully discuss the affairs of the Cause and to find ways and means for continued improvement in the conduct of Bahá'í activities.

30 November 1936

- 43 Attendance at Nineteen Day Feasts is not obligatory, but highly desirable, and effort should be made by the friends not to deprive themselves of this spiritual and communal rallying-point once in every Bahá'í month.

23 December 1948

- 44 The Guardian has never heard of any ruling by which a believer who does not attend three consecutive day Nineteen Day Feasts can be deprived of his voting rights. He does not consider that such action is justifiable at all. The whole question is whether a person considers himself a Bahá'í or not, and is willing to adhere to the principles of the Faith and accept the authority of the Guardian and the Administration—whether that individual is able, or always in a condition psychologically to attend Feasts and Bahá'í meetings is an entirely different subject. If a person makes it quite clear that they do not wish to be considered an active member of the Bahá'í Community and be affiliated with it and exert their voting right, then their name should be removed from the voting list; but if a person considers himself or herself a Bahá'í, and for various reasons is not able to be active in the affairs of the Community, then they should certainly not be removed from our voting list, least of all at present, when the number of the Bahá'í Community is so small.

2 March 1951

- 45 He fully appreciates the difficult position your Assembly will be placed in if you adhere to the principle that the members of an Assembly and voting members of a community must live within the civic limits. However, he feels that Paris can be no exception to this general rule which he wishes the Bahá'ís to adhere to ALL OVER THE WORLD, in spite of any temporary inconvenience it may cause.

This does not mean that the Bahá'ís of Paris living outside the civic limits should not attend the Nineteen Day Feast and the Bahá'í Holy Days; on the contrary, they should take an active part in the affairs of the community in the sense of assisting with the teaching work, while at the same time not being active in the administrative work. He feels sure that in the end you will find that, far from having been weakened, your community will grow and be strengthened by this adherence to principle.

20 February 1953

- 46 It is inconceivable and wholly inadmissible that any Bahá'ís in a Community should be permitted to hold a Feast in their home and refuse admission to another believer; and your Assembly should write accordingly in very strong terms to the ... Assembly, pointing out that the Guardian is not only surprised to learn of this situation, but disapproves of it in the strongest terms.

Any Bahá'í may attend a Feast—a local Bahá'í, a Bahá'í from out of town, certainly an isolated Bahá'í from the neighbourhood.

27 May 1957, Unfolding Destiny

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 47 In reply to your letter of November 8th we feel that all friends, whatever their circumstances, should be encouraged to observe the Nineteen Day Feast. Obviously it can only be an official administrative occasion where there is a Local Spiritual Assembly to take charge of it, present reports to the friends, and receive their recommendations. But groups, spontaneous gatherings of friends, and even isolated believers should certainly remember the day and say prayers together. In the case of a group it may well hold the Feast in the manner in which a Local Spiritual Assembly would do so, recognizing of course that it has no official administrative standing.

As to visitors to a Nineteen Day Feast, Bahá'ís from anywhere in the world should of course be warmly welcomed, and may take part in consultation. However, only members of the local community can vote on recommendations to the Local Spiritual Assembly.

1 December 1968

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 48 It is not quite correct to say that a Nineteen Day Feast is changed into a Unity Feast as a result of the presence of non-Bahá'ís. What can happen is that the consultative portion of the Feast has to be postponed”.

If it is decided to postpone part or all of the consultative portion of the Feast, the House of Justice states that it is within the discretion of the Local Spiritual Assembly to decide whether another meeting should be held during the Bahá'í month to complete it, or whether it can be postponed until the following Nineteen Day Feast.

5 September 1983

- 49 A Bahá'í who is visiting another community may participate fully in the consultation of the Nineteen Day Feast, but has no right to vote on recommendations being made to the Local Spiritual Assembly. Out of courtesy,

however, a visitor would normally refrain from taking too much time of the consultation.

Any Bahá'í, whether an isolated believer or a member of a local community or group, may convey his suggestions and recommendations to the National Spiritual Assembly at any time and thus take part in the consultative aspect of Bahá'í community life. Isolated believers and the members of groups may also, of course, attend the Nineteen Day Feasts of communities when they wish to.

23 July 1985

- 50 With respect to your question asking whether a Local Spiritual Assembly may cancel its Nineteen Day Feast in order to attend Feast in another community, the House of Universal Justice advises that the Nineteen Day Feast should not be cancelled. However, there is no objection to two or more local communities holding a joint Nineteen Day Feast occasionally, although it is not proper to allow such joint Feasts to be held on a regular basis. If members of a community find that the plan to hold such a joint Feast would produce inconvenience to them, they should take the matter up with their Local Spiritual Assembly.

26 April 1987

Restrictions Upon Feast Attendance

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 51 As regards your question concerning the Nineteen Day Feasts: this is really a matter of secondary importance, and should be decided by the Assembly; meetings which have been publicly advertised for a certain date cannot, obviously, be cancelled. As to non-Bahá'ís attending: this should by all means be avoided, but if non-believers come to a Nineteen Day Feast, they should not be put out, as this might hurt their feelings.

21 September 1946

- 52 The beloved Guardian has instructed me to write you concerning an action recently taken by your National Assembly, as published in your January-February Bahá'í News, that non-Bahá'ís may attend Nineteen Day Feasts if “the earnestness of their interest in the Faith” is vouched for by a declared believer.

The Guardian wishes me to direct your attention to the fact that none of the institutions of the Faith nor its cardinal principles may be changed under any circumstances.

The Nineteen Day Feast is an institution of the Cause, first established by the Báb, later confirmed by Bahá'u'lláh, and now made a prominent part of the administrative order of the Faith. These Nineteen Day Feasts are for the Bahá'ís, and the Bahá'ís exclusively, and no variation from this principle is permitted.

Thus the Guardian feels you should rescind the action taken by your Assembly in opening the Feasts to “near Bahá'ís”, as it is not consistent with the spirit of the administrative order for non-Bahá'ís or near Bahá'ís to attend the Nineteen Day Feasts, particularly the administrative portion of the Feast.

The Guardian realizes that the spirit which animated you in making the suggested proposal, in order that the teaching work might go forward more aggressively; but he feels in the long run it would be detrimental to the Faith, and therefore should be rescinded as indicated above.

28 May 1954

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 53 The principle universally applicable is that non-Bahá'ís are not invited to the Nineteen Day Feast. If in Persia it has happened that non-Bahá'ís are present at a Nineteen Day Feast this is an exception and not a rule.

It is well understood in Persia that if a non-Bahá'í should inadvertently attend a Nineteen Day Feast he would be treated courteously. However, it is equally important for the friends to understand that they should refrain from inviting non-Bahá'ís to these special gatherings, ordained by Bahá'u'lláh not only for spiritual refreshment and unity, but also for consultation between the Spiritual Assembly and the body of believers on the domestic affairs of the community.

4 February 1974

- 54 In reply to your memorandum of 16 November 1975 requesting elucidation of a statement from the Guardian published on page 367 of Volume IV of "Amr va Khalq" ... later instructions of the beloved Guardian clearly forbid attendance at the Nineteen Day Feast by those deprived of their voting rights and the quotation published in "Amr va Khalq" should therefore be replaced by another statement by the Guardian.

24 November 1975

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 55 The main thing to remember is that a group is not an administrative institution within the Bahá'í Administrative Order; it is, however, the embryo of a Local Spiritual Assembly and while remaining under the direct authority of the National Spiritual Assembly should obviously be encouraged to prepare itself for the time when it will establish that divine institution. There is no objection whatever to its electing officers such as a secretary, chairman

and treasurer, holding Nineteen Day Feasts and observances of the Holy Days, undertaking teaching and extension work, so long as it is always understood that the directive authority is the National Spiritual Assembly and not the group itself.

13 June 1974

- 56 It can be explained, in a friendly manner, that the Nineteen Day Feast is an entirely private religious and domestic occasion for the Bahá'í community when its internal affairs are discussed and its members meet for personal fellowship and worship. No great issue should be made of it for there is certainly nothing secret about the Feast but it is organized for Bahá'ís only.

4 November 1967

- 57 Regarding the Nineteen Day Feast, the principle universally applicable is that non-Bahá'ís are not invited to attend, and if you are asked about this you can explain that the nature of the Feast is essentially domestic and administrative. During the period of consultation the Bahá'ís should be able to enjoy perfect freedom to express their views on the work of the Cause, unembarrassed by the feeling that all they are saying is being heard by someone who has not accepted Bahá'u'lláh and who might thereby gain a very distorted picture of the Faith. It would also be very embarrassing for any sensitive Bahá'í to find himself plunged into the midst of a discussion of the detailed affairs of a Bahá'í community of which he is not a part. A non-Bahá'í who asks to be invited to a Feast will usually understand if this matter is explained to him.

12 August 1981

- 58 The following guidance on this subject was sent to a believer on 24 March 1970 by the House of Justice:

“when a non-Bahá'í does appear at a Feast he should not be asked to leave; rather the Assembly should omit the consultative part of the Feast, and the non-Bahá'í should be made welcome”.

No doubt you are familiar with this instruction. Likewise, occasionally if the Feast is held in the home of the family where the spouse is not a Bahá'í,

it would be discourteous not to allow the non-Bahá'í member of the family to attend at least the social and spiritual parts of the Feast.

8 January 1985

- 59 ...if a non-Bahá'í does appear at a Nineteen Day Feast he should be made to feel welcome, but a Bahá'í should certainly not invite a non-Bahá'í to attend.

From all of the foregoing it can be seen that, basically, the resolution of this difficulty is a matter of loving education.

23 January 1985

Youth and Children at Feasts

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 60 Concerning your inquiry asking if children under fifteen of non-Bahá'í parents could attend Nineteen Day Feasts or other events held exclusively for Bahá'ís when the children consider themselves as Bahá'ís, such children may be permitted to attend Bahá'í functions provided that their parents have given their consent. This applies only, of course, to children under the age of fifteen years.

4 August 1970

- 61 Concerning the declaration of young people under the age of 18... we can accept a child of the age of 15 and over as a Bahá'í even if his parents do not consent and this remains true even though according to the law of Finland they cannot be officially transferred to the Bahá'í register. You should not, therefore, exclude such believers from the Nineteen Day Feasts. However, although such believers should not be swayed from their belief by their parents' objections, they should, in view of the stress that the Teachings place upon the respect due to parents and in view of the law in Finland, obey their parents as far as taking part in Bahá'í activities is concerned. Their aim should be to gradually awaken in their parents' hearts the same love for Bahá'u'lláh that has fired their own and not to antagonize their parents needlessly or contribute in any way to disharmony in their families at this crucial point in their development.

1 March 1972

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 62 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 11 October 1976 inquiring whether children placed in the home of Bahá'ís for temporary or prolonged care are permitted to attend Bahá'í functions, and we have

been asked to inform you that such children may be permitted to attend the Nineteen Day Feasts and other Bahá'í functions, and that no distinction should be made between them and the children of Bahá'ís in this regard.

31 October 1976

- 63 The House of Justice has instructed us to say that children should be trained to understand the spiritual significance of the gatherings of the followers of the Blessed Beauty, and to appreciate the honour and bounty of being able to take part in them, whatever their outward form may be. It is realized that some Bahá'í observances are lengthy and it is difficult for very small children to remain quiet for so long. In such cases one or other of the parents may have to miss part of the meeting in order to care for the child. The Spiritual Assembly can also perhaps help the parents by providing for a children's observance, suited to their capacities, in a separate room during part of the community's observance. Attendance at the whole of the adult celebration thus becomes a sign of growing maturity and a distinction to be earned by good behaviour.

In any case, the House of Justice points out that parents are responsible for their children and should make them behave when they attend Bahá'í meetings. If children persist in creating a disturbance they should be taken out of the meeting. This is not merely necessary to ensure the properly dignified conduct of Bahá'í meetings but is an aspect of the training of children in courtesy, consideration for others, reverence, and obedience to their parents.

14 October 1982

- 64 It would not be administratively proper for a Bahá'í youth under 21 years of age to act as Chairman of the Nineteen Day Feast. However, no great issue should be made of this as it is a purely private matter.

22 February 1984

- 65 In response to the question you have raised in your letter of 18 October 1984 concerning the place of children in the community, especially with regard to Nineteen Day Feasts, we are asked to share with you the following quotation from a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Assembly on the subject.

Since children of Bahá'í parents are considered to be Bahá'ís, they are to be encouraged to attend all Feasts, there to share the reading of the Writings and prayers and be bathed in the spirit of the community. It is the hope of the House of Justice that every Feast will be a feast of love when the children will give and receive the tangible affection of the community and its individual members.

The House of Justice noted the suggestion you have made about holding Feasts on a weekend close to the first day of the Bahá'í month to facilitate the attendance of children and their parents. This is a matter for the Local Assembly to discuss and decide upon.

22 November 1984

The Feast Celebration

—Prayers and Scriptural Readings—

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 66 With regard to your question concerning the use of music in the Nineteen Day Feasts, he wishes you to assure all the friends that he not only approves of such a practice, but thinks it even advisable that the believers should make use in their meetings of hymns composed by Bahá'ís themselves, and also of such hymns, poems and chants as are based on the Holy Words.
April 1935
- 67 Regarding your questions: the Devotional part of the Nineteen Day Feast means the reading of prayers by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master. If, after this, there is a period of reading of the teachings, his [the Guardian's] writings may be included, but this does not form part of the devotional aspect of the meeting.
15 December 1947
- 68 Regarding the question you asked him about the Bahá'í sacred writings: These should be regarded as the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and `Abdu'l-Bahá, and only these should be read during the purely devotional part of the Feast.
11 May 1948
- 69 During the devotional part of the Nineteen Day Feast any part of the writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and the Master can be read, also from the Bible and Qur'an, as these are all sacred scriptures. This part of the meeting need not be confined to prayers, though prayers can and should be read during it.
18 October 1948

- 70 The question regarding the devotional part of the Feast has been obscured because once he used the term “devotional” in its strict sense, which of course means prayer, and once loosely, in the sense in which the Bahá'ís usually understand it, and that is the meeting together and reading from the teachings which precedes the administrative—or consultative—aspect of the Nineteen Day Feast. The two statements in no way change the method of holding this part of the Feast which, in the East at any rate, is always opened with prayers and afterwards Tablets and excerpts from Bahá'u'lláh's, or the Master's or the Guardian's, writings may be read or, for that matter, the Bible or Qur'an quoted.

11 April 1949

- 71 Music is permitted during the spiritual part—or any part—of the Nineteen Day Feast.

30 June 1952

- 72 Regarding the questions you raised in your letter:

First, he feels that, although in principle there is certainly no reason why excerpts from other Sacred Scriptures should not be read in the spiritual part of our Feasts, as this is particularly an occasion when Bahá'ís get together to deepen their own spiritual life, it is, generally speaking, advisable for them to read from their own holy Writings in the spiritual part of the Feast.

18 February 1954

- 73 The Writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh can certainly be read any time at any place; likewise the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá are read freely during the spiritual part of the Feast. The Guardian has instructed that during the spiritual part of the Feast, his own Writings should not be read. In other words, during the spiritual part of the Feast, readings should be confined to the Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and, to a lesser extent, of the Master; but during that part of the Feast the Guardian's Writings should not be read. During the period of administrative discussion of the Feast, then the Guardian's Writings may be read. Of course during the administrative part of the Feast there can be no objection to the reading of the Writings of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh or `Abdu'l-Bahá.

27 April 1956

- 74 Instrumental music may be used at the Bahá'í Feasts. There is no objection to showing appreciation by the clapping of hands.

If an individual has a teaching appointment on the same evening as a Nineteen Day Feast, it is left to the individual to judge which is the most important.

20 August 1956

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 75 We have noted in your Minutes of 27 December, page 1, a statement, "It was agreed to advise the friends in ... that it was not correct to sing a song composed by a Bahá'í at the devotional part of the Nineteen Day Feast."

It is not clear what your framework of reference for consultation happened to be, nor if a direct question was referred to your National Assembly for decision. However, 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, for, as you know, "music is the language of the spirit."

Inasmuch as the spirit of our gathering 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

- 76 Moreover, it should be borne in mind that the Persian writings of Shoghi Effendi are unique in nature, and many of them, unlike his English letters and messages addressed to the western believers, are interspersed with supplications, prayers and homilies of a devotional character which are suitable for the spiritual part of Bahá'í Feasts.ⁱ

15 October 1972

i See also extract 73, referring to the use of the Guardian's Persian writings in the devotional portion of the Feast in Eastern Bahá'í communities.

The Feast Celebration

—Consultation—

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 77 The main purpose of the Nineteen Day Feasts is to enable individual believers to offer any suggestion to the Local Assembly, which in its turn will pass it to the National Spiritual Assembly. The Local Assembly is, therefore, the proper medium through which local Bahá'í communities can communicate with the body of the national representatives. The Convention should be regarded as a temporary gathering, having certain specific functions to perform during a limited period of time. Its status is thus limited in time to the Convention sessions, the function of consultation at all other times being vested in the entire body of the believers through the Local Spiritual Assemblies.

18 November 1933

- 78 The chief opportunity which the friends have for discussion on administrative questions is during the Nineteen Day Feasts, at which time the members of the Assembly can meet with the body of the believers and discuss in common the affairs of the Cause, and suggest new policies and methods. But even then no reference to individuals should be made.

27 March 1938

- 79 Now with reference to your last dear letter in which you had asked whether the believers have the right to openly express their criticism of any Assembly action or policy: it is not only the right, but the vital responsibility of every loyal and intelligent member of the Community to offer fully and frankly, but with due respect and consideration to the authority of the Assembly, any suggestion, recommendation or criticism he conscientiously feels he should in order to improve and remedy certain existing conditions or trends in his local Community, and it is the duty of the Assembly also to give

careful consideration to any such views submitted to them by any one of the believers. The best occasion chosen for this purpose is the Nineteen Day Feast, which, besides its social and spiritual aspects, fulfils various administrative needs and requirements of the Community, chief among them being the need for open and constructive criticism and deliberation regarding the state of affairs within the local Bahá'í Community.

But again it should be stressed that all criticisms and discussions of a negative character which may result in undermining the authority of the Assembly as a body should be strictly avoided. For otherwise the order of the Cause itself will be endangered, and confusion and discord will reign in the Community.

13 December 1939

- 80 The Bahá'ís must learn to forget personalities and to overcome the desire—so natural in people—to take sides and fight about it. They must also learn to really make use of the great principle of consultation. There is a time set aside at the Nineteen Day Feasts for the Community to express its views and make suggestions to its Assembly; the Assembly and the believers should look forward to this happy period of discussion, and neither fear it nor suppress it. Likewise the Assembly members should fully consult, and in their decisions put the interests of the Cause first and not personalities, the will of the majority prevailing.

30 June 1949

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 81 As you no doubt realize by this time, enrolling large numbers of new believers in a short period of time brings with it many problems of consolidation, but we are certain that you will be able to handle these problems and move on to even greater achievements.

We note from reading your minutes that the enthusiasm of some of the new believers is being tested by the reading of long, wordy letters at Nineteen Day Feasts, and we think that something should be done about this. While it is important that the believers be informed about important messages from the Holy Land and other important items, it is true that the reading of messages at Nineteen Day Feasts can become a very boring and trying experience particularly for new believers not acquainted with many

aspects of Bahá'í administration. We think you should consider other ways and means by which believers could be informed of vital and necessary information, such as through bulletins, institutes and other meetings.

6 September 1971

- 82 As cited in Article IV of the By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly, "While retaining the sacred right of final decision in all matters pertaining to the Bahá'í community, the Spiritual Assembly shall ever seek the advice and consultation of all members of the community, keep the community informed of all its affairs, and invite full and free discussion on the part of the community of all matters affecting Faith".

The actual voting on recommendations made at Nineteen Day Feasts to decide whether they should be forwarded to the Local Assembly is a secondary matter which may be left for decision by the Local Spiritual Assemblies themselves. It is not prohibited that the Local Assembly secretary record suggestions made at Nineteen Day Feasts for consideration by the Assembly. The important point to keep in mind is the provision made in the By-Laws as mentioned above.

21 January 1982

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 83 Bahá'í youth between the ages of 15 and 21 may certainly take part in discussions, and should be encouraged to do so, but they may not vote on recommendations to the Assembly until they 21.

16 September 1979

- 84 As a Local Spiritual Assembly is responsible for the organization of Nineteen Day Feasts, and is expected to make a report of its activities to the community at the Feast, in addition to responding to suggestions submitted to it, a Local Assembly should meet at least once a Bahá'í month. However, the Universal House of Justice does not wish to draw hard and fast rules in this matter, and prefers to leave this question to the discretion of each National Assembly.

If a local community, under the direction of its Local Assembly, observes Nineteen Day Feasts regularly, and it occasionally has a joint Feast with one or more other communities, you may credit in your statistics each Assembly for having held its own Nineteen Day Feast. You, of

course, realize that joint Feasts do not fulfil the purpose of the Nineteen Day Feast in its strict sense, and should not become a regular practice among the friends.

15 February 1982

- 85 If the friends at a Nineteen Day Feast agree with a recommendation, either unanimously or by a majority, it constitutes a recommendation from the Feast to the Assembly. On the other hand, if an individual believer makes a suggestion that other friends do not take up, it may still be considered by the Assembly...

27 July 1982

- 86 There are a number of factors involved in understanding the nature of appropriate interaction between a believer and his or her Local Spiritual Assembly during the consultative part of the Nineteen Day Feast. Chief among these is an appreciation of the purpose of this most important Institution of the Cause `Abdu'l-Bahá described the Feast in these terms:

This Feast is a bringer of joy. It is the groundwork of agreement and unity. It is the key to affection and fellowship. It diffuseth the oneness of mankind.ⁱ

25 July 1984

- 87 The By-Laws of a Local Spiritual Assembly clearly imply the roles of the chairman and vice-chairman for meetings of the Assembly. For Feasts, the chairman or an appointed representative of the Spiritual Assembly presides during the period of consultation. However, this is not specified in the By-Laws and is a secondary matter left to the discretion of the National Assembly in each country; that Assembly may either adopt a uniform procedure for Local Assemblies to follow, or leave the matter to the discretion of the Local Assembly itself...

23 December 1986

i see also extract 4

The Feast Celebration

—Socializing—

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 88 We can understand the desire of some of the friends to provide a warm welcome at the Feasts to newly declared believers and particularly youth, and we see no objection to the Assembly giving a reception before the actual Feast to achieve this purpose. As the Feast is frequently held in the evening, the Assembly might consider it desirable to arrange for the believers to have a light evening meal together before the Feast is held or it could, for example, arrange for social activities of an appropriate kind while the friends are gathering prior to the actual commencement of the Nineteen Day Feast. This should not, however, take the place of the social part of the Feast itself.

21 January 1973

The Blending of Cultures in the Feast Celebration

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 89 We have considered your letter of March 11, 1970 concerning the difficulties you are experiencing in getting the Indian believers on reservations to hold regular Nineteen Day Feasts.

In applying instructions about Nineteen Day Feasts, as well as other matters of administration, to indigenous believers it is important that the process of weaning them away from the old forms should be accomplished gradually so as not to destroy their spirit, and your Assembly should not be too rigid in these matters.

3 April 1970

- 90 The International Teaching Centre has sent us a copy of your letter of 10 October 1982 asking about language problems brought about by the influx of Iranians who do not understand English. It is important that the Iranian friends be encouraged to make the effort to learn the language used in the country and become integrated into the life and activities of the community.

The Nineteen Day Feasts and other official gatherings of the friends should be conducted in whatever is the conventional local language. This does not mean, of course, that at such gatherings some of the readings could not be in the language of the immigrants, or that, if these friends so wish, some classes and conferences may not be held and conducted in their own language for their benefit. The essential thing is, as stated above, to promote the integration of the immigrants into the community and avoid feelings of estrangement or disunity on account of language.

10 November 1982

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 91 The Local Spiritual Assembly of “ is correct in its decision to conduct the Nineteen Day Feasts in Spanish and to not translate the proceedings in Persian, especially in view of the fact that some of the Spanish friends are becoming alienated from the community. Although the Iranian believers should make every effort to attend the Nineteen Day Feasts, they should not expect such meetings to be conducted in Persian. They should try to learn Spanish, particularly if they are planning to make their home in Spain. There is no objection, however, to Persian friends if they so wish having special meetings for fellowship and deepening conducted in Persian.
6 February 1983
- 92 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
- 93 In answer to your question about the presence of pets during Bahá'í meetings held in homes in Europe, the House of Justice asks us to explain that the European attitude to pets is very different from that of the people of, for example, North Africa, and that this is a minor matter of which no issue should be made.
29 August 1983
- 94 Wherever linguistic problems exist, the House of Justice welcomes the holding of special classes and gatherings for the Iranian friends in addition to the regular community meetings, so that they will have the opportunity to study the Holy Writings in their own language and will be kept informed of what is going on in the Bahá'í community of Canada. Nineteen Day Feasts and Local Spiritual Assembly meetings should be conducted in English or

French, as the case may be, since these are the languages of your country. If, however, it is possible to make arrangements for the Iranians who have not yet learned the language to benefit in some way from the topics discussed at such meetings without interfering with the smooth running of the meetings, this factor could be taken into consideration.

7 February 1984

- 95 The House of Justice has given the advice to Spiritual Assemblies faced with questions of possible conflict between tribal practices and Bahá'í law, that such Assemblies 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.

25 October 1987

Letter 17 May 2009

*The Universal House of Justice,
Department of the Secretariat*

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In its Ridván message of 2008, the Universal House of Justice referred to the widening impact of the dynamism flowing from the interactions between the three participants in the Five Year Plan. The celebration of the Nineteen Day Feast has not remained unaffected by this growing dynamism. Everywhere the devotional portion of the Feast is enriched by the sense of reverence cultivated through personal prayer and regular devotional gatherings. The administrative portion is animated by reports on the progress of the Cause, as well as insights contributed by eager believers drawn from diverse populations, both newly enrolled and long-standing, engaged in Bahá'í activity. The social portion transcends polite formalities, becoming the joyous reunion of ardent lovers, of tested companions united in a common purpose, whose conversations are elevated by spiritual themes.

Over the course of the Plan, in response to questions that have been raised about the Nineteen Day Feast, the House of Justice has described how certain fundamental principles are to be applied within the context of a steadily expanding community that is embracing souls from all walks of life, from every background. Since its comments in this respect may well be of interest to all National Spiritual Assemblies, we have been asked to write to you as follows.

Decentralization of the Feast in urban centres

The decentralization of the Nineteen Day Feast in urban centres, where a significant percentage of humanity currently resides, is an inevitable

consequence of the growth of the Faith, marking a significant stage in the organic development of a local community. While care should be taken to avoid instituting this practice precipitously when the number of believers in the entire city is relatively small, a Local Spiritual Assembly should not feel obliged to prolong the pattern of hosting a community-wide Feast if it is no longer propitious. Such a change may be required when limited time or facilities hamper the satisfactory observance of the three parts of the Feast in a single location, most notably the portion devoted to consultation on community affairs. Experience to date has demonstrated the salutary effect of decentralizing the Feast on the quality of participation, on bonds of fellowship, and on the overall process of growth. Although some believers may yearn for the enthusiasm generated by large community gatherings, this need can be met on other occasions arranged by the Assembly.

In this connection, we are requested to draw your attention to the 27 December 2005 message of the House of Justice which indicated that, as the process of growth continued to gather momentum worldwide, urban centres would need to be divided into progressively smaller areas, perhaps ultimately into neighbourhoods, as a means of facilitating planning and implementation. Not only would such areas become focal points of activity, the message suggested, but in each the Nineteen Day Feast would be conducted. Already in some cities around the world the Feast is held at the intimate level of the neighbourhood.

Dividing a local community into areas for the purpose of celebrating the Feast is not without certain challenges. In many cities around the world, for instance, people have been segregated into areas according to various factors such as race, ethnicity, and economic conditions. A Local Assembly must be mindful that barriers entrenched in the wider population are not inadvertently perpetuated in the local Bahá'í community as a whole. By the same token, it must recognize that, for believers newly enrolled in the community, the desire to assume responsibility for the affairs of the Faith is cultivated more readily in gatherings close to home, in a familiar environment.

In deciding to decentralize the Feast, a Local Assembly will need to determine how the devotional portion will be organized and how reports, news, and announcements will be shared. A common set of materials

for the administrative part of the Feast would generally be disseminated each Bahá'í month to every area designated to host a gathering, including any particular topics or questions that should be raised. The Assembly will also want to ensure that consultations in each area are fruitful and productive, that the views of the friends are brought to its attention, and that it responds to recommendations in a loving and constructive manner. To this end, it may decide to designate one or more friends to act on its behalf in chairing the gathering, recording the results of consultations, and receiving contributions to the Fund.

Choice of language

As a general principle, the Nineteen Day Feast and other official Bahá'í gatherings should be conducted in the conventional language spoken by the people of the locality. However, as social and economic conditions throughout the world continue to change, it is not unreasonable to assume that more and more people will be forced to migrate to urban centres, forming pockets of minorities, each with a distinct language, as can already be seen, for example, in the concentrations of Spanish-speaking populations in North America or of certain tribal populations in Africa. In such instances, when the Feast is decentralized, the question may well arise as to whether the programme can be conducted in the language spoken by the minority population most prevalent in a neighbourhood. At this stage, the House of Justice does not wish to lay down any hard and fast rules, and it is left to the discretion of the Local Spiritual Assembly concerned to decide, under the guidance of the National Spiritual Assembly, how to address the matter, approaching it with both flexibility and an attitude of learning.

Naturally, whether the Feast is held centrally or in several locations, a Local Assembly will want all the friends to feel that they are part of one unified community, irrespective of linguistic differences, and will take steps to ensure that an inviting atmosphere is created. To this end, selections from the Writings in the diverse languages spoken by the friends might well be included in the devotional programme of the Feast. Further, suitable ways should be found to inform believers not fluent in the language in which the Feast is conducted of the content of major messages and announcements. During consultations, they should be afforded an opportunity to express

their views, in their own language if necessary. It should be feasible to offer any translation needed in a manner that does not interfere with the smooth running of the meeting.

Attendance of those who are not Bahá'ís

The Nineteen Day Feast is an institution of the Cause, which serves, in part, as a means for the Bahá'í community to address its affairs in a full and frank manner, without fear of creating misunderstandings among those unfamiliar with its purpose. It is for this reason that participation is limited to members of the Bahá'í community.

In general, the believers are discouraged from inviting those who are not Bahá'ís to the commemoration of the Feast. However, friends of the Faith do sometimes appear unexpectedly, and they are not to be turned away. Courtesy and the spirit of fellowship require that they be warmly received. In this light, unanticipated visitors, who were by and large infrequent in the past, have been welcome to join the devotional and social portions of the Feast, but either they were asked to absent themselves during the administrative portion or that segment of the programme would be eliminated entirely.

Now, with the Plan's framework for action well established in so many places, growing numbers enjoy ready access to Bahá'í community life through the core activities, and there is greatly increased likelihood that those who are close to the Faith will learn about the Nineteen Day Feast and appear at its celebration. The House of Justice has decided that, in such instances, rather than eliminating the administrative portion completely or asking the visitors to withdraw, those conducting the programme can modify this part of the Feast to accommodate the guests. The sharing of local and national news and information about social events, as well as consultation on topics of general interest, such as the teaching work, service projects, the Fund, and so on, can take place as usual, while discussion of sensitive or problematic issues related to these or other topics can be set aside for another time when the friends can express themselves freely without being inhibited by the presence of visitors.

A similar approach to the administrative portion may be adopted when the Feast is celebrated in the home of a family with some members who are not Bahá'ís. As part of planning these occasions, careful thought must be given, on the one hand, to the requisites of hospitality and love, and, on the other, to those of confidentiality and unfettered discussion on important and sensitive subjects. The Local Assembly, in consultation with the believers who have such relatives, should endeavour to find a satisfactory way to resolve each situation that arises.

Accumulating experience

The continued expansion of the Bahá'í community in the years to come will surely give rise to a range of challenges that will affect how the devotional, administrative, and social aspects of the Nineteen Day Feast are conducted in diverse localities. Responsibility for addressing these challenges will fall, in the first instance, on Local Spiritual Assemblies. Theirs is the duty to remain alert to conditions in their communities, to consult with the friends, to respond thoughtfully to a multiplicity of needs and circumstances, and to remain flexible without compromising fundamental principles. In this connection, they would naturally seek advice from the Auxiliary Board members. National Spiritual Assemblies will, in collaboration with the Counsellors, follow developments closely, familiarize themselves with approaches taken in different localities, facilitate learning to determine which approaches prove most effective over time, and offer guidance and encouragement.

We are to assure you of the supplications of the Universal House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that the Blessed Beauty may confirm your ongoing efforts to guide the friends in discharging their vital responsibilities to promote the Cause of God throughout the world.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat

THE
UNIVERSAL
HOUSE
OF
JUSTICE

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

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled February 2021

Extracts from the Writings

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 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.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 181

- 2 O ye Men of Justice! Be ye, in the realm of God, shepherds unto His sheep and guard them from the ravening wolves that have appeared in disguise, even as ye would guard your own sons. Thus exhorteth you the Counselor, the Faithful.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 52

- 3 Endowments dedicated to charity revert to God, the Revealer of Signs. None hath the right to dispose of them without leave from Him Who is the Dawning-place of Revelation. After Him, this authority shall pass to the Aghsán, and after them to the House of Justice—should it be established in the world by then—that they may use these endowments for the benefit of the Places which have been exalted in this Cause, and for whatsoever hath been enjoined upon them by Him Who is the God of might and power. Otherwise, the endowments shall revert to the people of Bahá who speak not except by His leave and judge not save in accordance with what God hath decreed in this Tablet—lo, they are the champions of victory betwixt heaven and earth—that they may use them in the manner that hath been laid down in the Book by God, the Mighty, the Bountiful.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 42

- 4.1 “Render thanks unto thy Lord, O Carmel. The fire of thy separation from Me was fast consuming thee, when the ocean of My presence surged before thy face, cheering thine eyes and those of all creation, and filling with

delight all things visible and invisible. Rejoice, for God hath in this Day established upon thee His throne, hath made thee the dawning-place of His signs and the dayspring of the evidences of His Revelation. Well is it with him that circleth around thee, that proclaimeth the revelation of thy glory, and recounteth that which the bounty of the Lord thy God hath showered upon thee. Seize thou the Chalice of Immortality in the name of thy Lord, the All-Glorious, and give thanks unto Him, inasmuch as He, in token of His mercy unto thee, hath turned thy sorrow into gladness, and transmuted thy grief into blissful joy. He, verily, loveth the spot which hath been made the seat of His throne, which His footsteps have trodden, which hath been honoured by His presence, from which He raised His call, and upon which He shed His tears.

- 4.2 “Call out to Zion, O Carmel, and announce the joyful tidings: He that was hidden from mortal eyes is come! His all-conquering sovereignty is manifest; His all-encompassing splendour is revealed. Beware lest thou hesitate or halt. Hasten forth and circumambulate the City of God that hath descended from heaven, the celestial Kaaba round which have circled in adoration the favoured of God, the pure in heart, and the company of the most exalted angels. Oh, how I long to announce unto every spot on the surface of the earth, and to carry to each one of its cities, the glad-tidings of this Revelation—a Revelation to which the heart of Sinai hath been attracted, and in whose name the Burning Bush is calling: ‘Unto God, the Lord of Lords, belong the kingdoms of earth and heaven.’ Verily this is the Day in which both land and sea rejoice at this announcement, the Day for which have been laid up those things which God, through a bounty beyond the ken of mortal mind or heart, hath destined for revelation. Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee, and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names.”

Lawḥ-i-Karmil, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 5 It is incumbent upon the Trustees of the House of Justice to take counsel together regarding those things which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book, and to enforce that which is agreeable to them. God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth, and He, verily, is the Provider, the Omniscient.

Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih, eighth leaf, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 6 We exhort the men of the House of Justice and command them to ensure the protection and safeguarding of men, women and children. It is incumbent upon them to have the utmost regard for the interests of the people at all times and under all conditions.

Kalimát-i-Firdawsíyyih, ninth leaf, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 7 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.

Ishráqát, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 8.1 This passage, now written by the Pen of Glory, is accounted as part of the Most Holy Book: The men of God's House of Justice have been charged with the affairs of the people. They, in truth, are the Trustees of God among His servants and the daysprings of authority in His countries.

- 8.2 O people of God! That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world. Inasmuch as for each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution, such affairs should be referred to the House of Justice that the members thereof may act according to the needs and requirements of the time. They that, for the sake of God, arise to serve His Cause, are the recipients of divine inspiration from the unseen Kingdom. It is incumbent upon all to be obedient unto them. All matters of State should be referred to the House of Justice, but acts of worship must be observed according to that which God hath revealed in His Book.

Bishárát, thirteenth Glad-Tidings, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 9 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.

Ishráqát, ninth Ishráq, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

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

- 10 The sacred and youthful branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God; whoso disputeth with him hath disputed with God; whoso denieth him hath denied God; whoso disbelieveth in him hath disbelieved in God; whoso deviateth, separateth himself and turneth aside from him hath in truth deviated, separated himself and turned aside from God. May the wrath, the fierce indignation, the vengeance of God rest upon him! The mighty stronghold shall remain impregnable and safe through obedience to him who is the Guardian of the Cause of God. It is incumbent upon the members of the House of Justice, upon all the Aghsán, the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause of God to show their obedience, submissiveness and subordination unto the Guardian of the Cause of God, to turn unto him and be lowly before him.

Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 11 And now, concerning the House of Justice which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error, it must be elected by universal suffrage, that is, by the believers. Its members must be manifestations of the fear of God and daysprings of knowledge and understanding, must be steadfast in God's faith and the well-wishers of all mankind. By this House is meant the Universal House of Justice, that is, in all countries a secondary House of Justice must be instituted, and these secondary Houses of Justice must elect the members of the Universal one. Unto this body all things must be referred. It enacteth all ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the explicit Holy Text. By this body all the difficult

problems are to be resolved and the Guardian of the Cause of God is its sacred head and the distinguished member for life of that body. Should he not attend in person its deliberations, he must appoint one to represent him. Should any of the members commit a sin, injurious to the common weal, the Guardian of the Cause of God hath at his own discretion the right to expel him, whereupon the people must elect another one in his stead. This House of Justice enacteth the laws and the government enforceth them. The legislative body must reinforce the executive, the executive must aid and assist the legislative body so that through the close union and harmony of these two forces, the foundation of fairness and justice may become firm and strong, that all the regions of the world may become even as Paradise itself.

Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 12.1 This is the foundation of the belief of the people of Bahá (may my life be offered up for them): “His Holiness, the Exalted One (the Báb), is the Manifestation of the Unity and Oneness of God and the Forerunner of the Ancient Beauty. His Holiness the Abhá Beauty (may my life be a sacrifice for His steadfast friends) is the Supreme Manifestation of God and the Dayspring of His Most Divine Essence. All others are servants unto Him and do His bidding.” Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself. Whoso doth deviate therefrom is verily of them that love discord, hath shown forth malice and turned away from the Lord of the Covenant. By this House is meant that Universal House of Justice which is to be elected from all countries, that is from those parts in the East and West where the loved ones are to be found, after the manner of the customary elections in Western countries such as those of England.
- 12.2 It is incumbent upon these members (of the Universal House of Justice) to gather in a certain place and deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book. Whatsoever they decide has the same effect as the Text itself. And inasmuch as this House of Justice hath power to enact laws that are not expressly recorded in the Book and bear upon daily transactions, so also it hath power to repeal the same. Thus for example, the House of Justice enacteth today a certain law and enforceth it, and a

hundred years hence, circumstances having profoundly changed and the conditions having altered, another House of Justice will then have power, according to the exigencies of the time, to alter that law. This it can do because that law formeth no part of the Divine Explicit Text. The House of Justice is both the initiator and the abrogator of its own laws.

Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 13 Beware lest anyone falsely interpret these words, and like unto them that have broken the Covenant after the Day of Ascension (of Bahá'u'lláh) advance a pretext, raise the standard of revolt, wax stubborn and open wide the door of false interpretation. To none is given the right to put forth his own opinion or express his particular conviction. All must seek guidance and turn unto the Center of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.

Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 14 The substance is, that prior to the completion of a thousand years, no individual may presume to breathe a word. All must consider themselves to be of the order of subjects, submissive and obedient to the commandments of God and the laws of the House of Justice. Should any deviate by so much as a needle's point from the decrees of the Universal House of Justice, or falter in his compliance therewith, then is he of the outcast and rejected.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 33

- 15.1 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 favored, 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.

- 15.2 The House of Justice, however, according to the explicit text of the Law of God, is confined to men; this for a wisdom of the Lord God's, which will ere long be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 38

- 16 Praise be to God, all such doors are closed in the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh for a special authoritative Center hath been appointed—a Center that solveth all difficulties and wardeth off all differences. The Universal House of Justice, likewise, wardeth off all differences and whatever it prescribeth must be accepted and he who transgresseth is rejected. But this Universal House of Justice which is the Legislature hath not yet been instituted.

Thus it is seen that no means for dissension hath been left, but carnal desires are the cause of difference as it is the case with the violators. These do not doubt the validity of the Covenant but selfish motives have dragged them to this condition. It is not that they do not know what they do—they are perfectly aware and still they exhibit opposition.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 187

- 17.1 My purpose is this, that ere the expiration of a thousand years, no one hath the right to utter a single word, even to claim the station of Guardianship. The Most Holy Book is the Book to which all peoples shall refer, and in it the Laws of God have been revealed. Laws not mentioned in the Book should be referred to the decision of the Universal House of Justice. There will be no grounds for difference ... Beware, beware lest anyone create a rift or stir up sedition. Should there be differences of opinion, the Supreme House of Justice would immediately resolve the problems. Whatever will be its decision, by majority vote, shall be the real truth, inasmuch as that House is under the protection, unerring guidance, and care of the one true Lord. He shall guard it from error and will protect it under the wing of His sanctity and infallibility. He who opposeth it is cast out and will eventually be of the defeated.

- 17.2 The Supreme House of Justice should be elected according to the system followed in the election of the parliaments of Europe. And when the countries would be guided, the Houses of Justice of the various countries would elect the Supreme House of Justice...

- 17.3 The establishment of that House is not dependent upon the conversion of all the nations of the world. For example, if conditions were favourable and no disturbances would be caused, the friends in Persia would elect their representatives, and likewise the friends in America, in India, and other areas would also elect their representatives, and these would elect a House of Justice. That House of Justice would be the Supreme House of Justice. That is all.

From a Tablet

- 18 Thou hast asked about the general criterion with regard to heresy. Heresy referreth to such matters as are not ordained in the explicit text of the Book and which the Universal House of Justice doth not endorse.

From a Tablet

- 19.1 Those matters of major importance which constitute the foundation of the Law of God are explicitly recorded in the Text, but subsidiary laws are left to the House of Justice. The wisdom of this is that the times never remain the same, for change is a necessary quality and an essential attribute of this world, and of time and place. Therefore the House of Justice will take action accordingly.

- 19.2 Let it not be imagined that the House of Justice will take any decision according to its own concepts and opinions. God forbid! The Supreme House of Justice will take decisions and establish laws through the inspiration and confirmation of the Holy Spirit, because it is in the safekeeping and under the shelter and protection of the Ancient Beauty, and obedience to its decisions is a bounden and essential duty and an absolute obligation, and there is no escape for anyone.

- 19.3 Say, O people: Verily, the Supreme House of Justice is under the wings of your Lord, the Compassionate, the All-Merciful, that is, under His protection, His care, and His shelter; for He has commanded the firm believers to obey that blessed, sanctified and all-subduing body, whose sovereignty is divinely ordained and of the Kingdom of Heaven and whose laws are inspired and spiritual.

- 19.4 Briefly, this is the wisdom of referring the laws of society to the House of Justice. In the religion of Islám, similarly, not every ordinance was explicitly revealed; nay, not a tenth part of a tenth part was included in the Text; although all matters of major importance were specifically referred to, there were undoubtedly thousands of laws which were unspecified. These were devised by the divines of a later age according to the laws of Islamic jurisprudence and individual divines made conflicting deductions from the original revealed ordinances. All these were enforced. Today this process of deduction is the right of the body of the House of Justice, and the deductions and conclusions of individual learned men have no authority, unless they are endorsed by the House of Justice. The difference is precisely this, that from the conclusions and endorsements of the body of the House of Justice whose members are elected by and known to the world-wide Bahá'í community, no differences will arise; whereas the conclusions of

individual divines and scholars would definitely lead to differences, and result in schism, division, and dispersion. The oneness of the Word would be destroyed, the unity of the Faith would disappear, and the edifice of the Faith of God would be shaken.

From a Tablet

- 20 Such laws as are not mentioned in the Book must all be referred to the House of Justice and not to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, inasmuch as he is the interpreter of the laws that are mentioned in the Book and not the author of those that are not. However, the divinely ordained Universal House of Justice—which will, after the proclamation of the Cause of God, be universally elected by all Bahá’ís—that universal Body is empowered to enact laws that are not expressly recorded in the Book. It is binding, obligatory, and incumbent upon everyone to render obedience unto it. And whenever the House of Justice, whether unanimously or by majority vote, layeth down laws that are not expressly recorded in the Book, whoso saith why or wherefore hath indeed opposed God in the exercise of His sovereignty, disputed His proof, gainsaid His signs, and repudiated His commandments.

From a Tablet

- 21.1 Know that infallibility is of two kinds: infallibility in essence and infallibility as an attribute. The same holds true of all other names and attributes: For example, there is the knowledge of the essence of a thing and the knowledge of its attributes. Infallibility in essence is confined to the universal Manifestations of God; for infallibility is an essential requirement of Their reality, and the essential requirement of a thing is inseparable from the thing itself. The rays are an essential requirement of the sun and are inseparable from it; knowledge is an essential requirement of God and is inseparable from Him; power is an essential requirement of God and is likewise inseparable from Him. If it were possible to separate these from Him, He would not be God. If the rays could be separated from the sun, it would not be the sun. Therefore, were one to imagine the Most Great Infallibility being separated from the universal Manifestation of God, He would not be a universal Manifestation and would lack essential perfection.

- 21.2 But infallibility as an attribute is not an essential requirement; rather, it is a ray of the gift of infallibility which shines from the Sun of Truth upon certain hearts and grants them a share and portion thereof. Although these souls are not essentially infallible, yet they are under the care, protection,

and unerring guidance of God—which is to say, God guards them from error. Thus there have been many sanctified souls who were not themselves the Daysprings of the Most Great Infallibility, but who have nevertheless been guarded and preserved from error under the shadow of divine care and protection. For they were the channels of divine grace between God and man, and if God did not preserve them from error they would have led all the faithful to fall likewise into error, which would have wholly undermined the foundations of the religion of God and which would be unbecoming and unworthy of His exalted Reality.

21.3 To summarize, infallibility in essence is confined to the universal Manifestations of God, and infallibility as an attribute is conferred upon sanctified souls. For instance, the Universal House of Justice, if it be established under the necessary conditions—that is, if it be elected by the entire community—that House of Justice will be under the protection and unerring guidance of God. Should that House of Justice decide, either unanimously or by a majority, upon a matter that is not explicitly recorded in the Book, that decision and command will be guarded from error. Now, the members of the House of Justice are not essentially infallible as individuals, but the body of the House of Justice is under the protection and unerring guidance of God: This is called conferred infallibility.

21.4 Briefly, Bahá'u'lláh says that “He Who is the Dawning-place of God’s Cause” is the manifestation of “He doeth whatsoever He willeth”, that this station is reserved to that sanctified Being, and that others receive no share of this essential perfection. That is, since the essential infallibility of the universal Manifestations of God has been established, whatsoever proceeds from Them is identical with the truth and conformable to reality. They are not under the shadow of the former religion. Whatsoever They say is the utterance of God, and whatsoever They do is a righteous deed, and to no believer is given the right to object; rather must he show forth absolute submission in this regard, for the Manifestation of God acts with consummate wisdom, and human minds may be incapable of grasping the hidden wisdom of certain matters. Therefore, whatsoever the universal Manifestation of God says and does is the very essence of wisdom and conformable to reality.

Some Answered Questions, sec. 45

22 A universal, or international, House of Justice shall also be organized. Its rulings shall be in accordance with the commands and teachings of

Bahá'u'lláh, and that which the Universal House of Justice ordains shall be obeyed by all mankind. This international House of Justice shall be appointed and organized from the Houses of Justice of the whole world, and all the world shall come under its administration

As to the most great characteristic of the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, a specific teaching not given by any of the Prophets of the past: It is the ordination and appointment of the Center of the Covenant. By this appointment and provision He has safeguarded and protected the religion of God against differences and schisms, making it impossible for anyone to create a new sect or faction of belief.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

From the writings of Shoghi Effendi and letters by or on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 23 In this Charter of the future world civilization [the Kitáb-i-Aqdas] its Author—at once the Judge, the Lawgiver, the Unifier and Redeemer of mankind—announces to the kings of the earth the promulgation of the “Most Great Law” ... In it He formally ordains the institution of the “House of Justice,” defines its functions, fixes its revenues, and designates its members as the “Men of Justice,” the “Deputies of God,” the “Trustees of the All-Merciful”...

God Passes By, sec. XII

- 24 With these Assemblies, local as well as national, harmoniously, vigorously, and efficiently functioning throughout the Bahá'í world, the only means for the establishment of the Supreme House of Justice will have been secured. And when this Supreme Body will have been properly established, it will have to consider afresh the whole situation, and lay down the principle which shall direct, so long as it deems advisable, the affairs of the Cause.

12 March 1923, Bahá'í Administration

- 25 As to the order and the management of the spiritual affairs of the friends, that which is very important now is the consolidation of the Spiritual Assemblies in every centre, because on these fortified and unshakeable foundations, God's Supreme House of Justice shall be erected and firmly

i Written by Shoghi Effendi unless noted otherwise.

established in the days to come. When this most great edifice shall be reared on such an immovable foundation, God's purpose, wisdom, universal truths, mysteries and realities of the Kingdom, which the mystic Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh has deposited within the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, shall gradually be revealed and made manifest.

19 December 1923

- 26 The purpose of so much perpetual and intensive emphasis on the support and consolidation of these Spiritual Assemblies is this—that the foundation of the Cause of God must become broader and stronger day by day, that no confusion ever enter the divine order, that new and strong ties be forged between East and West, that Bahá'í unity be safeguarded and illumine the eyes of the people of the world with its resplendent beauty, so that upon these Assemblies God's Houses of Justice may be firmly established and upon these secondary Houses of Justice the lofty edifice of the Universal House of Justice may, with complete order, perfection and glory, and with no delay, be raised up. When the Universal House of Justice shall have stepped forth from the realm of hope into that of visible fulfilment and its fame be established in every corner and clime of the world, then that august body—solidly grounded and founded on the firm and unshakeable foundation of the entire Bahá'í community of East and West, and the recipient of the bounties of God and His inspiration—will proceed to devise and carry out important undertakings, world-wide activities and the establishment of glorious institutions. By this means the renown of the Cause of God will become world-wide and its light will illumine the whole earth.

1924

- 27.1 Humanity, torn with dissension and burning with hate, is crying at this hour for a fuller measure of that love which is born of God, that love which in the last resort will prove the one solvent of its incalculable difficulties and problems. Is it not incumbent upon us, whose hearts are aglow with love for Him, to make still greater effort, to manifest that love in all its purity and power in our dealings with our fellow-men? May our love for our beloved Master, so ardent, so disinterested in all its aspects, find its true expression in love for our fellow-brethren and sisters in the Faith as well as for all mankind. I assure you, dear friends, that progress in such matters as these is limitless and infinite, and that upon the extent of our achievements along this line, will ultimately depend the success of our mission in life.

27.2 And as we make an effort to demonstrate that love to the world may we also clear our minds of any lingering trace of unhappy misunderstandings that might obscure our clear conception of the exact purpose and methods of this new world order, so challenging and complex, yet so consummate and wise. We are called upon by our beloved Master in His Will and Testament not only to adopt it unreservedly, but to unveil its merit to all the world. To attempt to estimate its full value, and grasp its exact significance after so short a time since its inception would be premature and presumptuous on our part. We must trust to time, and the guidance of God's Universal House of Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions and implications.

23 February 1924, Bahá'í Administration

28 These Spiritual Assemblies have been primarily constituted to carry out these affairs, and secondly to lay a perfect and strong foundation for the establishment of the divine and Universal House of Justice. When that central pivot of the people of Bahá shall be effectively, majestically and firmly established, a new era will dawn, heavenly bounties and graces will pour out from that Source, and the all-encompassing promises will be fulfilled.
30 October 1924

29.1 Regarding the method to be adopted for the election of the National Spiritual Assemblies, it is clear that the text of the Beloved's Testament gives us no indication as to the manner in which these Assemblies are to be elected. In one of His earliest Tablets, however, addressed to a friend in Persia, the following is expressly recorded:

29.2 "At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme Baytu'l-'Adl (Universal House of Justice)".

29.3 These words clearly indicate that a three-stage election has been provided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the formation of the International House of Justice, and as it is explicitly provided in His Will and Testament that the "Secondary Houses of Justice (i.e. National Assemblies) must elect the members the Universal One", it is obvious that the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies will have to be indirectly elected by the body of the believers in their respective provinces. In view of these complementary instructions the principle, set forth in my letter of March 12th, 1923, has

been established requiring the believers (the beloved of God) in every country to elect a certain number of delegates who in turn will elect their national representatives (Secondary House of Justice or National Spiritual Assembly), whose sacred obligation and privilege will be to elect in time God's Universal House of Justice.

12 May 1925, Bahá'í Administration

- 30 Erelong, by the leave of our Lord, the Most Glorious, the veil shall be lifted from the face of His most mighty Law, and the balance of His wondrous constitution—the foundation of His most noble, lofty, and mighty House of Justice—shall be set in this holy, blessed, and snow-white Spot, the Centre round which circle all created things. Blessed be God, the Author of this wondrous Cause! Blessed be God, the Originator of this brilliant and refulgent Light! Blessed be God, the Founder of this lofty Edifice i in that distant region ii—a land wherein shall be reflected the effulgences of the gathering-places of Heaven and the lights of the sanctuaries of the Kingdom! Magnified, then, be our Lord, the Succourer, the All-Powerful, the Most Glorious!

November 1927

- 31 Your questions as regards those spiritual ordinances which should characterize a Bahá'í life individually and collectively: Shoghi Effendi says that for an answer to these we must await the formation of the International House of Justice. They are matters of importance in some ways and we must not bind them by establishing definite precedents from now.

26 April 1928, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 32.1 It should be carefully borne in mind that the local as well as the international Houses of Justice have been expressly enjoined by the Kitáb-i-Aqdas; that the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly, as an intermediary body, and referred to in the Master's Will as the "Secondary House of Justice," has the express sanction of 'Abdu'l-Bahá; and that the method to be pursued for the election of the International and National Houses of Justice has been set forth by Him in His Will, as well as in a number of His Tablets. Moreover, the institutions of the local and national Funds, that are now the necessary adjuncts to all local and national spiritual

i The Bahá'í Administrative Order.

ii The continent of America.

assemblies, have not only been established by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Tablets He revealed to the Bahá’ís of the Orient, but their importance and necessity have been repeatedly emphasized by Him in His utterances and writings. The concentration of authority in the hands of the elected representatives of the believers; the necessity of the submission of every adherent of the Faith to the considered judgment of Bahá’í Assemblies; His preference for unanimity in decision; the decisive character of the majority vote; and even the desirability for the exercise of close supervision over all Bahá’í publications, have been sedulously instilled by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as evidenced by His authenticated and widely-scattered Tablets. To accept His broad and humanitarian Teachings on one hand, and to reject and dismiss with neglectful indifference His more challenging and distinguishing precepts, would be an act of manifest disloyalty to that which He has cherished most in His life.

- 32.2 That the Spiritual Assemblies of today will be replaced in time by the Houses of Justice, and are to all intents and purposes identical and not separate bodies, is abundantly confirmed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself. He has in fact in a Tablet addressed to the members of the first Chicago Spiritual Assembly, the first elected Bahá’í body instituted in the United States, referred to them as the members of the “House of Justice” for that city, and has thus with His own pen established beyond any doubt the identity of the present Bahá’í Spiritual Assemblies with the Houses of Justice referred to by Bahá’u’lláh. For reasons which are not difficult to discover, it has been found advisable to bestow upon the elected representatives of Bahá’í communities throughout the world the temporary appellation of Spiritual Assemblies, a term which, as the position and aims of the Bahá’í Faith are better understood and more fully recognized, will gradually be superseded by the permanent and more appropriate designation of House of Justice. Not only will the present-day Spiritual Assemblies be styled differently in future, but they will be enabled also to add to their present functions those powers, duties, and prerogatives necessitated by the recognition of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, not merely as one of the recognized religious systems of the world, but as the State Religion of an independent and Sovereign Power. And as the Bahá’í Faith permeates the masses of the peoples of East and West, and its truth is embraced by the majority of the peoples of a number of the Sovereign States of the world, will the Universal House of Justice attain the plenitude of its power, and exercise, as the supreme organ of the Bahá’í

Commonwealth, all the rights, the duties, and responsibilities incumbent upon the world's future superstate.

32.3 It must be pointed out, however, in this connection that, contrary to what has been confidently asserted, the establishment of the Supreme House of Justice is in no way dependent upon the adoption of the Bahá'í Faith by the mass of the peoples of the world, nor does it presuppose its acceptance by the majority of the inhabitants of any one country. In fact, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Himself, in one of His earliest Tablets, contemplated the possibility of the formation of the Universal House of Justice in His own lifetime, and but for the unfavorable circumstances prevailing under the Turkish régime, would have, in all probability, taken the preliminary steps for its establishment. It will be evident, therefore, that given favorable circumstances, under which the Bahá'ís of Persia and of the adjoining countries under Soviet rule, may be enabled to elect their national representatives, in accordance with the guiding principles laid down in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings, the only remaining obstacle in the way of the definite formation of the International House of Justice will have been removed. For upon the National Houses of Justice of the East and the West devolves the task, in conformity with the explicit provisions of the Will, of electing directly the members of the International House of Justice. Not until they are themselves fully representative of the rank and file of the believers in their respective countries, not until they have acquired the weight and the experience that will enable them to function vigorously in the organic life of the Cause, can they approach their sacred task, and provide the spiritual basis for the constitution of so august a body in the Bahá'í world.

32.4 It must be also clearly understood by every believer that the institution of Guardianship does not under any circumstances abrogate, or even in the slightest degree detract from, the powers granted to the Universal House of Justice by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and repeatedly and solemnly confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will. It does not constitute in any manner a contradiction to the Will and Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, nor does it nullify any of His revealed instructions. It enhances the prestige of that exalted assembly, stabilizes its supreme position, safeguards its unity, assures the continuity of its labors, without presuming in the slightest to infringe upon the inviolability of its clearly-defined sphere of jurisdiction. We stand indeed too close to so monumental a document to claim for ourselves a complete understanding of all its implications, or to presume to have grasped the manifold mysteries it undoubtedly contains. Only future

generations can comprehend the value and the significance attached to this Divine Masterpiece, which the hand of the Master-builder of the world has designed for the unification and the triumph of the world-wide Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Only those who come after us will be in a position to realize the value of the surprisingly strong emphasis that has been placed on the institution of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship.

27 February 1929, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 33.1 The National Spiritual Assemblies, like unto pillars, will be gradually and firmly established in every country on the strong and fortified foundations of the Local Assemblies. On these pillars, the mighty edifice, the Universal House of Justice, will be erected, raising high its noble frame above the world of existence. The unity of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh will thus be realized and fulfilled from one end of the earth to the other. The explicit ordinances of His Most Holy Book will be promulgated, applied and carried out most befittingly in the world of creation, and the living waters of everlasting life will stream forth from that fountain-head of God's World Order upon all the warring nations and peoples of the world, to wash away the evils and iniquities of the realm of dust, heal man's age-old ills and ailments...
- 33.2 In these days the things that are regarded as the most imperative of all and upon which will depend the development of the Cause of God, the enhancement of its position and prestige and the promulgation of the laws of His Faith, are but two momentous tasks: first, to expedite preparations for the formation of the divinely ordained, the Supreme House of Justice; second, to complete the construction of the Temple in the United States...
- 33.3 ...Thus, after the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the sacred land of Iran—which, in the Will and Testament, is designated a “secondary House of Justice”—general instructions regarding the ultimate international Bahá'í election, which will result in the formation of the Universal House of Justice, would, according to the principles and teachings embodied in His Tablets and His Will and Testament, be sent directly from this land to all Bahá'í centres, in every country and territory in the East and West of the Bahá'í world. Thereupon will the hopes of the people of Bahá be realized, and that which our Master commanded and enjoined upon us in His Writings and His Will and Testament be fulfilled. Then will the Throne of Bahá'u'lláh's sovereignty be founded in the promised land and the scales of justice be raised on high. Then will the

banner of the independence of the Faith be unfurled, and His Most Great Law be unveiled and rivers of laws and ordinances stream forth from this snow-white spot with all-conquering power and awe-inspiring majesty, the like of which past ages have never seen. Then will appear the truth of what was revealed by the Tongue of Grandeur: "Call out to Zion, O Carmel, and announce the joyful tidings: He that was hidden from mortal eyes is come! His all-conquering sovereignty is manifest; His all-encompassing splendour is revealed." "...O Carmel ... Well is it with him that circleth around thee, that proclaimeth the revelation of thy glory, and recounteth that which the bounty of the Lord thy God hath showered upon thee ... Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee, and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names." O beloved of God! The appointment of the Hands of the Cause of God, the enforcement of the sacred laws of His Faith, the enactment of legislation deriving from the explicit text of His Book, the convocation of the international convention of the followers of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, and the formation of ties between the Bahá'í community and divers scientific, literary, religious and social agencies are, one and all, dependent and conditioned upon the formation and establishment of the Universal House of Justice in the Holy Land in the vicinity of those lofty, resplendent and most exalted precincts. For this Supreme Institution is the wellspring of the actions and undertakings of all the Bahá'ís, and the source of help and assistance for this feeble servant. Through that body will the hopes of the people of Bahá be fulfilled. Through it the pillars of the Faith on this earth will be firmly established and its hidden powers be revealed, its signs shine forth, its banners be unfurled and its light be shed upon all peoples.

27 November 1929

- 34.1 For Bahá'u'lláh, we should readily recognize, has not only imbued mankind with a new and regenerating Spirit. He has not merely enunciated certain universal principles, or propounded a particular philosophy, however potent, sound and universal these may be. In addition to these He, as well as 'Abdu'l-Bahá after Him, has, unlike the Dispensations of the past, clearly and specifically laid down a set of Laws, established definite institutions, and provided for the essentials of a Divine Economy. These are destined to be a pattern for future society, a supreme instrument for the establishment of the Most Great Peace, and the one agency for the unification of the world, and the proclamation of the reign of righteousness

and justice upon the earth. Not only have they revealed all the directions required for the practical realization of those ideals which the Prophets of God have visualized, and which from time immemorial have inflamed the imagination of seers and poets in every age. They have also, in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the requirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world...

34.2 In the Muḥammadan Revelation, however, although His Faith as compared with that of Christ was, so far as the administration of His Dispensation is concerned, more complete and more specific in its provisions, yet in the matter of succession, it gave no written, no binding and conclusive instructions to those whose mission was to propagate His Cause. For the text of the Qur'án, the ordinances of which regarding prayer, fasting, marriage, divorce, inheritance, pilgrimage, and the like, have after the revolution of thirteen hundred years remained intact and operative, gives no definite guidance regarding the Law of Succession, the source of all the dissensions, the controversies, and schisms which have dismembered and discredited Islám.

34.3 Not so with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. Unlike the Dispensation of Christ, unlike the Dispensation of Muḥammad, unlike all the Dispensations of the past, the apostles of Bahá'u'lláh in every land, wherever they labor and toil, have before them in clear, in unequivocal and emphatic language, all the laws, the regulations, the principles, the institutions, the guidance, they require for the prosecution and consummation of their task. Both in the administrative provisions of the Bahá'í Dispensation, and in the matter of succession, as embodied in the twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship, the followers of Bahá'u'lláh can summon to their aid such irrefutable evidences of Divine Guidance that none can resist, that none can belittle or ignore. Therein lies the distinguishing feature of the Bahá'í Revelation. Therein lies the strength of the unity of the Faith, of the validity of a Revelation that claims not to destroy or belittle previous Revelations, but to connect, unify, and fulfill them. This is the reason why Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have both revealed and even insisted upon certain details in connection with the Divine Economy which they have bequeathed to us, their followers. This is why such an emphasis has been

placed in their Will and Testament upon the powers and prerogatives of the ministers of their Faith.

- 34.4 For nothing short of the explicit directions of their Book, and the surprisingly emphatic language with which they have clothed the provisions of their Will, could possibly safeguard the Faith for which they have both so gloriously labored all their lives. Nothing short of this could protect it from the heresies and calumnies with which denominations, peoples, and governments have endeavored, and will, with increasing vigor, endeavor to assail it in future.

- 34.5 We should also bear in mind that the distinguishing character of the Bahá'í Revelation does not solely consist in the completeness and unquestionable validity of the Dispensation which the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have established. Its excellence lies also in the fact that those elements which in past Dispensations have, without the least authority from their Founders, been a source of corruption and of incalculable harm to the Faith of God, have been strictly excluded by the clear text of Bahá'u'lláh's writings. Those unwarranted practices, in connection with the sacrament of baptism, of communion, of confession of sins, of asceticism, of priestly domination, of elaborate ceremonials, of holy war and of polygamy, have one and all been rigidly suppressed by the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh; whilst the rigidity and rigor of certain observances, such as fasting, which are necessary to the devotional life of the individual, have been considerably abated.
- 21 March 1930, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*

- 35 Our present generation, mainly due to the corruptions that have been identified with organizations, seem to stand against any institution. Religion as an institution is denounced. Government as an institution is denounced. Even marriage as an institution is denounced. We Bahá'ís should not be blinded by such prevalent notions. If such were the case, all the divine Manifestations would not have invariably appointed someone to succeed Them. Undoubtedly corruptions did enter those institutions, but these corruptions were not due to the very nature of the institutions but to the lack of proper directions as to their powers and nature of their perpetuation. What Bahá'u'lláh has done is not to eliminate all institutions in the Cause but to provide the necessary safeguards that would eliminate corruptions that caused the fall of previous institutions. What those safeguards are is most interesting to study and find out and also most essential to know. In a letter that Shoghi Effendi has lately written to the friends in the West,

he mentions the distinguishing features of the institution that Bahá'u'lláh has left as well as some of the safeguards that He has provided against its corruption. One of the main things we boast about is that whereas previous religions were more or less static in their nature the Bahá'í teachings are progressive. Now, how could this progressive tendency be maintained without an institution such as the Guardianship and the House of Justice, who are empowered to legislate upon matters not referred to by Bahá'u'lláh?
25 March 1930, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 36 You asked regarding the status of the different governments when the House of Justice will be established: this is not fully explained in the teachings, and what is not definitely provided for, it is for the House of Justice to legislate upon once that body is formed.

12 January 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 37 The House of Justice, according to the explicit text of the Aqdas, has no right to change any law, regulation or ordinance that has been revealed either in the Aqdas or in any other Tablet from the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh. It can alter its own regulations and laws but never those revealed by the Founder of the Faith.

17 June 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 38.1 In the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh where the institutions of the International and Local Houses of Justice are specifically designated and formally established; in the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God which first Bahá'u'lláh and then 'Abdu'l-Bahá brought into being; in the institution of both local and national Assemblies which in their embryonic stage were already functioning in the days preceding 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ascension; in the authority with which the Author of our Faith and the Center of His Covenant have in their Tablets chosen to confer upon them; in the institution of the Local Fund which operated according to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's specific injunctions addressed to certain Assemblies in Persia; in the verses of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas the implications of which clearly anticipate the institution of the Guardianship; in the explanation which 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in one of His Tablets, has given to, and the emphasis He has placed upon, the hereditary principle and the law of primogeniture as having been upheld by the Prophets of the past—in these we can discern the faint glimmerings and discover the earliest intimation of the nature and working of the Administrative Order

which the Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá was at a later time destined to proclaim and formally establish.

38.2 An attempt, I feel, should at the present juncture be made to explain the character and functions of the twin pillars that support this mighty Administrative Structure—the institutions of the Guardianship and of the Universal House of Justice. To describe in their entirety the diverse elements that function in conjunction with these institutions is beyond the scope and purpose of this general exposition of the fundamental verities of the Faith. To define with accuracy and minuteness the features, and to analyze exhaustively the nature of the relationships which, on the one hand, bind together these two fundamental organs of the Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and connect, on the other, each of them to the Author of the Faith and the Center of His Covenant is a task which future generations will no doubt adequately fulfill. My present intention is to elaborate certain salient features of this scheme which, however close we may stand to its colossal structure, are already so clearly defined that we find it inexcusable to either misconceive or ignore.

38.3 It should be stated, at the very outset, in clear and unambiguous language, that these twin institutions of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh should be regarded as divine in origin, essential in their functions and complementary in their aim and purpose. Their common, their fundamental object is to insure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings. Acting in conjunction with each other these two inseparable institutions administer its affairs, coördinate its activities, promote its interests, execute its laws and defend its subsidiary institutions. Severally, each operates within a clearly defined sphere of jurisdiction; each is equipped with its own attendant institutions—instruments designed for the effective discharge of its particular responsibilities and duties. Each exercises, within the limitations imposed upon it, its powers, its authority, its rights and prerogatives. These are neither contradictory, nor detract in the slightest degree from the position which each of these institutions occupies. Far from being incompatible or mutually destructive, they supplement each other's authority and functions, and are permanently and fundamentally united in their aims.

38.4 Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh would be mutilated and permanently deprived of that hereditary

principle which, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written, has been invariably upheld by the Law of God. “In all the Divine Dispensations,” He states, in a Tablet addressed to a follower of the Faith in Persia, “the eldest son hath been given extraordinary distinctions. Even the station of prophethood hath been his birthright.” Without such an institution the integrity of the Faith would be imperiled, and the stability of the entire fabric would be gravely endangered. Its prestige would suffer, the means required to enable it to take a long, uninterrupted view over a series of generations would be completely lacking, and the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be totally withdrawn.

- 38.5 Severed from the no less essential institution of the Universal House of Justice this same System of the Will of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would be paralyzed in its action and would be powerless to fill in those gaps which the Author of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas has deliberately left in the body of His legislative and administrative ordinances.

8 February 1934, The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh

- 39 The Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh must in no wise be regarded as purely democratic in character inasmuch as the basic assumption which requires all democracies to depend fundamentally upon getting their mandate from the people is altogether lacking in this Dispensation. In the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith, in the enactment of the legislation necessary to supplement the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the members of the Universal House of Justice, it should be borne in mind, are not, as Bahá’u’lláh’s utterances clearly imply, responsible to those whom they represent, nor are they allowed to be governed by the feelings, the general opinion, and even the convictions of the mass of the faithful, or of those who directly elect them. They are to follow, in a prayerful attitude, the dictates and promptings of their conscience. They may, indeed they must, acquaint themselves with the conditions prevailing among the community, must weigh dispassionately in their minds the merits of any case presented for their consideration, but must reserve for themselves the right of an unfettered decision. “God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth,” is Bahá’u’lláh’s incontrovertible assurance. They, and not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them, have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation.

8 February 1934, The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh

40 But, at present—and to this the Guardian wishes to draw your careful attention—no Assembly nor even he himself can have the right of enacting any law supplementing those of the Aqdas except in exceptional circumstances when the Authorities require it. And even in such a case the enactment is purely temporary. The only body which is empowered to legislate in such matters is the International House of Justice, and the Guardian can take part in such legislation only in his capacity as a member of that body. Just as the power of interpreting the Writings is the sole right and prerogative of the Guardian, so also the power of legislation has been invested by Bahá'u'lláh solely in the International House of Justice. Thus there is a clear distinction between the powers of legislation and interpretation, though the two are closely related.

6 July 1935, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

41.1 Of these spiritual prerequisites of success, which constitute the bedrock on which the security of all teaching plans, Temple projects, and financial schemes, must ultimately rest, the following stand out as preeminent and vital ... These requirements are none other than a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities, absolute chastity in their individual lives, and complete freedom from prejudice in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or color.

41.2 The first is specially, though not exclusively, directed to their elected representatives, whether local, regional, or national, who, in their capacity as the custodians and members of the nascent institutions of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, are shouldering the chief responsibility in laying an unsailable foundation for that Universal House of Justice which, as its title implies, is to be the exponent and guardian of that Divine Justice which can alone insure the security of, and establish the reign of law and order in, a strangely disordered world.

25 December 1938, The Advent of Divine Justice

42 In the plain of 'Akká is the blessed and hallowed Sanctuary of the Most Holy Abhá Beauty, the Centre round which circle the Concourse on high, the Qiblih of the people of Bahá and dwellers of the Crimson Ark, the Heart of the world, and the Kaaba of all nations. And on Mount Carmel are the twin sacred and exalted Shrines, the sanctified throne of His Holiness the Primal Point, and the illumined remains of Him round Whom all names revolve—the Dayspring of Lights, the Retreat of Mysteries, the

Source of abounding Grace upon mankind. Around these three sacred resting-places—the tombs of the Scion of Bahá and His Remnant,ⁱ and of the twin Divine trusts, the glorious Purest Branch and the Mother of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá—the administrative centre of the community of the people of Bahá will, hereafter, gradually be instituted. Close by those Shrines the pillars of the Tribunal of Divine Justice will be erected, the Universal House of Justice will be established, and the edifice of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár of the Holy Land will be upraised, while in the sheltering shadow of these twin spiritual Centres of the people of Godⁱⁱ the august undertakings and international administrative, scientific, and social institutions of the Bahá’í Faith will take form, the throne of the Kingdom of God will be established, the standard “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá” will be planted upon the loftiest peaks, and the thunderous peal of the oneness of humanity will be sounded. Then shall be fulfilled that which was revealed in the Tablet of Carmel by the all-glorious and resplendent Pen: “Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee, and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names.”

25 December 1939

- 43 The membership of the Universal House of Justice is confined to men. Fixing the number of the members, the procedures for election and the term of membership will be known later, as these are not explicitly revealed in the Holy Text.

27 May 1940, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 44 No body can add to the laws of the Bahá’í Dispensation except the International House of Justice. The National Assemblies merely formulate at present methods of procedure to facilitate the functioning of the Administrative Order and ensure efficient conduct of the affairs of the Cause within their jurisdiction. These can always be revoked or modified whenever they have outworn their usefulness or another method would be more effective.

19 December 1943, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

i Bahíyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf.

ii The Twin Holy Shrines in ‘Akká and Haifa.

- 45 There are only two institutions which are infallible, one is the Guardianship, the other the International House of Justice.

19 October 1947, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 46 First, let me say that one of the reasons God has given us the Institution of Guardianship is to prevent men from crystallizing the Cause of God into a rigid system. Your questions are mostly along the line of trying to lay down a fixed pattern for future society, long before the time for such a pattern is ripe. Remember that Bahá'u'lláh says what is not already revealed, the International House of Justice must in the future legislate, and it can make, and abrogate if necessary, its own laws. This means not fixity in guiding society, but fluidity!

31 March 1949, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 47 Fervently praying the participation of British, American, Persian, and Egyptian National Assemblies in unique, epoch-making enterprise in African continent may prove prelude to convocation of first African Teaching Conference leading eventually to initiation of undertakings involving collaboration among all national assemblies of Bahá'í world, thereby paving way to ultimate organic union of these assemblies through formation of International House of Justice destined to launch enterprises embracing whole Bahá'í world. Acclaim simultaneous inauguration of crusade linking administrative machinery of four national assemblies of East and West within four continents and birth of first International Council at World Center of Faith, twin evidences of resistless unfoldment of embryonic, divinely appointed World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

17 January 1951, Citadel of Faith

- 48 On the success of this enterprise, unprecedented in its scope, unique in its character and immense in its spiritual potentialities, must depend the initiation, at a later period in the Formative Age of the Faith, of undertakings embracing within their range all National Assemblies functioning throughout the Bahá'í world—undertakings constituting in themselves a prelude to the launching of world-wide enterprises destined to be embarked upon, in future epochs of that same Age, by the Universal House of Justice, that will symbolize the unity and co-ordinate and unify the activities of these National Assemblies.

25 February 1951, appended to a letter

- 49 In this great Tablet [of Carmel] which unveils divine mysteries and heralds the establishment of two mighty, majestic and momentous undertakings—one of which is spiritual and the other administrative, both at the World Centre of the Faith—Bahá'u'lláh refers to an “Ark”, whose dwellers are the men of the Supreme House of Justice, which, in conformity with the exact provisions of the Will and Testament of the Centre of the Mighty Covenant, is the body which should lay down laws not explicitly revealed in the Text. In this Dispensation, these laws are destined to flow from this Holy Mountain, even as in the Mosaic Dispensation the law of God was promulgated from Zion. The “sailing of the Ark” of His laws is a reference to the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, which is indeed the Seat of Legislation, one of the branches of the World Administrative Centre of the Bahá'ís on this Holy Mountain.

21 March 1954

- 50 O ye loved ones of Bahá! This day is your day and this hour is indeed your hour. That which is imperative in this day and which will, like unto a magnet, attract the confirmations of God is this, that a large number of believers, men and women, young and old, rich and poor, learned and unlettered, white and black alike, bestir themselves for the triumph of His exalted Faith. Galvanized by a spirit of love and courage, they must, one and all, arise even as a single legion, and in the course of the remaining nine years scatter far and wide over the surface of the globe. “With the feet of detachment,” as the Ancient Beauty admonishes, must they “tread under all who are in heaven and on earth” and “cast the sleeve of holiness over all that have been created from water and clay.” With hearts detached, spirits unencumbered, souls enkindled, resolve unflinching and steps unwavering, they must strive day and night to extend the reach of the Cause of God, to diffuse its sweet savours, to consolidate its foundations, to noise abroad its fame and to multiply the ranks of its adherents. Raising the call of “Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá!” they must rush forth to the virgin territories and newly opened localities and, putting their whole trust in God, establish isolated centres, which may be likened to “points”. They must, through their efforts to teach and guide the people by words and deeds, transform these isolated centres, as soon as feasible, into groups, which are like unto “letters”. They must then develop these groups into Local Spiritual Assemblies, which are like unto complete “words”, and continually endeavour to increase the number of these Assemblies in various countries so that the means for the

befitting convocation of National Conventions can be gradually prepared, National Spiritual Assemblies, which are like unto manifest “verses”, the pillars of the Throne of Divine Justice, can be systematically erected, and upon these pillars can be raised the dome of the divine Edifice, the Universal House of Justice, which is like unto the lucid “book”, established in its designated seat on the slopes of the Vineyard of the Lord upon His holy Mountain, adorning the institutions of His New World Order with the crown of supreme distinction.

21 March 1954

*From the Constitution and letters of
the Universal House of Justiceⁱ*

- 51 Bahá'u'lláh, the Revealer of God's Word in this Day, the Source of Authority, the Fountainhead of Justice, the Creator of a new World Order, the Establisher of the Most Great Peace, the Inspirer and Founder of a world civilization, the Judge, the Lawgiver, the Unifier and Redeemer of all mankind, has proclaimed the advent of God's Kingdom on earth, has formulated its laws and ordinances, enunciated its principles, and ordained its institutions. To direct and canalize the forces released by His Revelation He instituted His Covenant, whose power has preserved the integrity of His Faith, maintained its unity and stimulated its world-wide expansion throughout the successive ministries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. It continues to fulfil its life-giving purpose through the agency of the Universal House of Justice whose fundamental object, as one of the twin successors of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is to ensure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of the Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers, and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings.

The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice

- 52.1 The provenance, the authority, the duties, the sphere of action of the Universal House of Justice all derive from the revealed Word of Bahá'u'lláh which, together with the interpretations and expositions of the Centre of the Covenant and of the Guardian of the Cause—who, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is the sole authority in the interpretation of Bahá'í Scripture—constitute

ⁱ Written by the Universal House of Justice unless otherwise referenced.

the binding terms of reference of the Universal House of Justice and are its bedrock foundation. The authority of these Texts is absolute and immutable until such time as Almighty God shall reveal His new Manifestation to Whom will belong all authority and power.

- 52.2 There being no successor to Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, the Universal House of Justice is the Head of the Faith and its supreme institution, to which all must turn, and on it rests the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the unity and progress of the Cause of God.

The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice

- 53 Among the powers and duties with which the Universal House of Justice has been invested are:

To ensure the preservation of the Sacred Texts and to safeguard their inviolability; to analyse, classify, and coordinate the Writings; and to defend and protect the Cause of God and emancipate it from the fetters of repression and persecution;

To advance the interests of the Faith of God; to proclaim, propagate and teach its Message; to expand and consolidate the institutions of its Administrative Order; to usher in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh; to promote the attainment of those spiritual qualities which should characterize Bahá'í life individually and collectively; to do its utmost for the realization of greater cordiality and comity amongst the nations and for the attainment of universal peace; and to foster that which is conducive to the enlightenment and illumination of the souls of men and the advancement and betterment of the world;

To enact laws and ordinances not expressly recorded in the Sacred Texts; to abrogate, according to the changes and requirements of the time, its own enactments; to deliberate and decide upon all problems which have caused difference; to elucidate questions that are obscure; to safeguard the personal rights, freedom and initiative of individuals; and to give attention to the preservation of human honour, to the development of countries and the stability of states;

To promulgate and apply the laws and principles of the Faith; to safeguard and enforce that rectitude of conduct which the Law of God enjoins; to preserve and develop the Spiritual and Administrative Centre of the Bahá'í Faith, permanently fixed in the twin cities of 'Akká and Haifa; to administer the affairs of the Bahá'í community throughout the

world; to guide, organize, coordinate and unify its activities; to found institutions; to be responsible for ensuring that no body or institution within the Cause abuse its privileges or decline in the exercise of its rights and prerogatives; and to provide for the receipt, disposition, administration and safeguarding of the funds, endowments and other properties that are entrusted to its care;

To adjudicate disputes falling within its purview; to give judgement in cases of violation of the laws of the Faith and to pronounce sanctions for such violations; to provide for the enforcement of its decisions; to provide for the arbitration and settlement of disputes arising between peoples; and to be the exponent and guardian of that Divine Justice which can alone ensure the security of, and establish the reign of law and order in, the world.

The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice

- 54 The Universal House of Justice was first elected on the first day of the Festival of Ridván in the one hundred and twentieth year of the Bahá'í Era i, when the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies, in accordance with the provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and in response to the summons of the Hands of the Cause of God, the Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth, brought into being this "crowning glory" of the administrative institutions of Bahá'u'lláh, the very "nucleus and forerunner" of His World Order. Now, therefore, in obedience to the Command of God and with entire reliance upon Him, we, the members of the Universal House of Justice, set our hands and its seal to this Declaration of Trust which, together with the By-Laws hereto appended, form the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice.

The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice

- 55 The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is unbroken, its all-encompassing power inviolate. The two unique features which distinguish it from all religious covenants of the past are unchanged and operative. The revealed Word, in its original purity, amplified by the divinely guided interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, remains immutable, unadulterated by any man-made creeds or dogmas, unwarrantable inferences or unauthorized interpretations. The channel of divine guidance, providing flexibility in all the affairs of mankind, remains open through that Institution which was

i 21 April 1963 A.D.

founded by Bahá'u'lláh and endowed by Him with supreme authority and unfailing guidance, and of which the Master wrote: "Unto this body all things must be referred." How clearly we can see the truth of Bahá'u'lláh's assertion: "The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure."

October 1963

- 56 After prayerful and careful study of the Holy Texts bearing upon the question of the appointment of the successor to Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, and after prolonged consultation which included consideration of the views of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, the Universal House of Justice finds that there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi.

October 1963

- 57.1 We are glad that you have brought to our attention the questions perplexing some of the believers. It is much better for these questions to be put freely and openly than to have them, unexpressed, burdening the hearts of devoted believers. Once one grasps certain basic principles of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh such uncertainties are easily dispelled. This is not to say that the Cause of God contains no mysteries. Mysteries there are indeed, but they are not of a kind to shake one's faith once the essential tenets of the Cause and the indisputable facts of any situation are clearly understood.

- 57.2 The questions put by the various believers fall into three groups. The first group centres upon the following queries: Why were steps taken to elect a Universal House of Justice with the foreknowledge that there would be no Guardian? Was the time ripe for such an action? Could not the International Bahá'í Council have carried on the work?

- 57.3 At the time of our beloved Shoghi Effendi's death it was evident, from the circumstances and from the explicit requirements of the Holy Texts, that it had been impossible for him to appoint a successor in accordance with the provisions of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This situation, in which the Guardian died without being able to appoint a successor, presented an obscure question not covered by the explicit Holy Text, and had to be referred to the Universal House of Justice. The friends should

clearly understand that before the election of the Universal House of Justice there was no knowledge that there would be no Guardian. There could not have been any such foreknowledge, whatever opinions individual believers may have held. Neither the Hands of the Cause of God, nor the International Bahá'í Council, nor any other existing body could make a decision upon this all-important matter. Only the House of Justice had authority to pronounce upon it. This was one urgent reason for calling the election of the Universal House of Justice as soon as possible.

57.4 Following the passing of Shoghi Effendi the international administration of the Faith was carried on by the Hands of the Cause of God with the complete agreement and loyalty of the National Spiritual Assemblies and the body of the believers. This was in accordance with the Guardian's designation of the Hands as the "Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth".

57.5 From the very outset of their custodianship of the Cause of God the Hands realized that since they had no certainty of divine guidance such as is incontrovertibly assured to the Guardian and to the Universal House of Justice, their one safe course was to follow with undeviating firmness the instructions and policies of Shoghi Effendi. The entire history of religion shows no comparable record of such strict self-discipline, such absolute loyalty and such complete self-abnegation by the leaders of a religion finding themselves suddenly deprived of their divinely inspired guide. The debt of gratitude which mankind for generations, nay, ages to come, owes to this handful of grief-stricken, steadfast, heroic souls is beyond estimation.

57.6 The Guardian had given the Bahá'í world explicit and detailed plans covering the period until Riqvân 1963, the end of the Ten Year Crusade. From that point onward, unless the Faith were to be endangered, further divine guidance was essential. This was the second pressing reason for the calling of the election of the Universal House of Justice. The rightness of the time was further confirmed by references in Shoghi Effendi's letters to the Ten Year Crusade's being followed by other plans under the direction of the Universal House of Justice. One such reference is the following passage from a letter addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles on 25th February 1951, concerning its Two Year Plan which immediately preceded the Ten Year Crusade:

On the success of this enterprise, unprecedented in its scope, unique in its character and immense in its spiritual potentialities, must depend

the initiation, at a later period in the Formative Age of the Faith, of undertakings embracing within their range all National Assemblies functioning throughout the Bahá'í world—undertakings constituting in themselves a prelude to the launching of world-wide enterprises destined to be embarked upon, in future epochs of that same Age, by the Universal House of Justice, that will symbolize the unity and co-ordinate and unify the activities of these National Assemblies.

57.7 Having been in charge of the Cause of God for six years, the Hands, with absolute faith in the Holy Writings, called upon the believers to elect the Universal House of Justice, and even went so far as to ask that they themselves be not voted for. The sole, sad instance of anyone succumbing to the allurements of power was the pitiful attempt of Charles Mason Remey to usurp the Guardianship.

57.8 The following excerpts from a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá state clearly and emphatically the principles with which the friends are already familiar from the Will and Testament of the Master and the various letters of Shoghi Effendi, and explain the basis for the election of the Universal House of Justice. This Tablet was sent to Persia by the beloved Guardian himself, in the early years of his ministry, for circulation among the believers.

...for 'Abdu'l-Bahá is in a tempest of dangers and infinitely abhors differences of opinion ... Praise be to God, there are no grounds for differences.

The Báb, the Exalted One, is the Morn of Truth, the splendour of Whose light shineth through all regions. He is also the Harbinger of the Most Great Light, the Abhá Luminary. The Blessed Beauty is the One promised by the sacred books of the past, the revelation of the Source of light that shone upon Mount Sinai, Whose fire glowed in the midst of the Burning Bush. We are, one and all, servants of Their threshold, and stand each as a lowly keeper at Their door.

My purpose is this, that ere the expiration of a thousand years, no one has the right to utter a single word, even to claim the station of Guardianship. The Most Holy Book is the Book to which all peoples shall refer, and in it the Laws of God have been revealed. Laws not mentioned in the Book should be referred to the decision of the Universal House of Justice. There will be no grounds for difference ... Beware, beware lest anyone create a rift or stir up sedition. Should there be

differences of opinion, the Supreme House of Justice would immediately resolve the problems. Whatever will be its decision, by majority vote, shall be the real truth, inasmuch as that House is under the protection, unerring guidance and care of the one true Lord. He shall guard it from error and will protect it under the wing of His sanctity and infallibility. He who opposes it is cast out and will eventually be of the defeated.

The Supreme House of Justice should be elected according to the system followed in the election of the parliaments of Europe. And when the countries would be guided, the Houses of Justice of the various countries would elect the Supreme House of Justice.

At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme House of Justice.

The establishment of that House is not dependent upon the conversion of all the nations of the world. For example, if conditions were favourable and no disturbances would be caused, the friends in Persia would elect their representatives, and likewise the friends in America, in India, and other areas would also elect their representatives, and these would elect a House of Justice. That House of Justice would be the Supreme House of Justice. That is all.

Makátib-i-'Abdu'l-Bahá, vol. III, pp. 500–501

57.9 The friends should realize that there is nothing in the Texts to indicate that the election of the Universal House of Justice could be called only by the Guardian. On the contrary, 'Abdu'l-Bahá envisaged the calling of its election in His own life-time. At a time described by the Guardian as “the darkest moments of His [the Master’s] life, under 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd’s regime, when He stood ready to be deported to the most inhospitable regions of Northern Africa”, and when even His life was threatened, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote to Ḥájí Mírzá Taqí Afnán, the cousin of the Báb and chief builder of the 'Ishqábád Temple, commanding him to arrange for the election of the Universal House of Justice should the threats against the Master materialize. The second part of the Master’s Will is also relevant to such a situation and should be studied by the friends.

57.10 The second series of problems vexing some of the friends centres on the question of the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice and its ability to function without the presence of the Guardian. Particular difficulty

has been experienced in understanding the implications of the following statement by the beloved Guardian:

Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh would be mutilated and permanently deprived of that hereditary principle which, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written, has been invariably upheld by the Law of God. "In all the Divine Dispensations," He states, in a Tablet addressed to a follower of the Faith in Persia, "the eldest son hath been given extraordinary distinctions. Even the station of prophethood hath been his birthright." Without such an institution the integrity of the Faith would be imperilled, and the stability of the entire fabric would be gravely endangered. Its prestige would suffer, the means required to enable it to take a long, an uninterrupted view over a series of generations would be completely lacking, and the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be totally withdrawn.

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 57.11 Let the friends who wish for a clearer understanding of this passage at the present time consider it in the light of the many other texts which deal with the same subject, for example the following passages gleaned from the letters of Shoghi Effendi:

They have also, in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the requirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world.

21 March 1930, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

It must be also clearly understood by every believer that the institution of Guardianship does not under any circumstances abrogate, or even in the slightest degree detract from, the powers granted to the Universal House of Justice by Bahá'u'lláh in the "Kitábu'l-Aqdas", and repeatedly and solemnly confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will. It does not constitute in any manner a contradiction to the Will and Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,

nor does it nullify any of His revealed instructions. It enhances the prestige of that exalted assembly, stabilizes its supreme position, safeguards its unity, assures the continuity of its labours, without presuming in the slightest to infringe upon the inviolability of its clearly-defined sphere of jurisdiction. We stand indeed too close to so monumental a document to claim for ourselves a complete understanding of all its implications, or to presume to have grasped the manifold mysteries it undoubtedly contains...

27 February 1929, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

From these statements it is made indubitably clear and evident that the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and that the Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings. The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgement on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested.

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

Each exercises, within the limitations imposed upon it, its powers, its authority, its rights and prerogatives. These are neither contradictory, nor detract in the slightest degree from the position which each of these institutions occupies.

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

Though the Guardian of the Faith has been made the permanent head of so august a body he can never, even temporarily, assume the right of exclusive legislation. He cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow-members...

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

Above all, let the hearts of the friends be assured by these words of Bahá'u'lláh:

The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure.

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

and these of 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

Verily, God effecteth that which He pleaseth; naught can annul His Covenant; naught can obstruct His favor nor oppose His Cause! He doeth with His will that which pleaseth Him and He is powerful over all things!...

Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, vol. 3, p. 598

57.12 It should be understood by the friends that before legislating upon any matter the Universal House of Justice studies carefully and exhaustively both the Sacred Texts and the Writings of Shoghi Effendi on the subject. The interpretations written by the beloved Guardian cover a vast range of subjects and are equally as binding as the Text itself.

57.13 There is a profound difference between the interpretations of the Guardian and the elucidations of the House of Justice in exercise of its function to "deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book". The Guardian reveals what the Scripture means; his interpretation is a statement of truth which cannot be varied. Upon the Universal House of Justice, in the words of the Guardian, "has been conferred the exclusive right of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the Bahá'í writings". Its pronouncements, which are susceptible of amendment or abrogation by the House of Justice itself, serve to supplement and apply the Law of God. Although not invested with the function of interpretation, the House of Justice is in a position to do everything necessary to establish the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh on this earth. Unity of doctrine is maintained by the existence of the authentic texts of Scripture and the voluminous interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, together with the absolute prohibition against anyone propounding "authoritative" or "inspired" interpretations or usurping the function of Guardian. Unity of administration is assured by the authority of the Universal House of Justice.

“Such”, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, “is the immutability of His revealed Word. Such is the elasticity which characterizes the functions of His appointed ministers. The first preserves the identity of His Faith, and guards the integrity of His law. The second enables it, even as a living organism, to expand and adapt itself to the needs and requirements of an ever-changing society.”

21 March 1930, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 57.14 Every true believer, if he is to deepen in his understanding of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, must needs combine profound faith in the unfailing efficacy of His Message and His Covenant, with the humility of recognizing that no one of this generation can claim to have embraced the vastness of His Cause nor to have comprehended the manifold mysteries and potentialities it contains. The words of Shoghi Effendi bear ample testimony to this fact:

How vast is the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh! How great the magnitude of His blessings showered upon humanity in this day! And yet, how poor, how inadequate our conception of their significance and glory! This generation stands too close to so colossal a Revelation to appreciate, in their full measure, the infinite possibilities of His Faith, the unprecedented character of His Cause, and the mysterious dispensations of His Providence.

21 March 1930, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

We are called upon by our beloved Master in His Will and Testament not only to adopt it [Bahá'u'lláh's new world order] unreservedly, but to unveil its merit to all the world. To attempt to estimate its full value, and grasp its exact significance after so short a time since its inception would be premature and presumptuous on our part. We must trust to time, and the guidance of God's Universal House of Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions and implications...

23 February 1924, Bahá'í Administration

As to the order and the management of the spiritual affairs of the friends, that which is very important now is the consolidation of the Spiritual Assemblies in every centre, because on these fortified and unshakeable foundations, God's Supreme House of Justice shall be erected and firmly established in the days to come. When this most great edifice shall be reared on such an immovable foundation, God's purpose,

wisdom, universal truths, mysteries and realities of the Kingdom, which the mystic Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh has deposited within the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, shall gradually be revealed and made manifest.

19 December 1923

57.15 Statements such as these indicate that the full meaning of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as well as an understanding of the implications of the World Order ushered in by that remarkable document, can be revealed only gradually to men's eyes, and after the Universal House of Justice has come into being. The friends are called upon to trust to time and to await the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, which, as circumstances require, will make pronouncements that will resolve and clarify obscure matters.

57.16 The third group of queries raised by the friends concerns details of functioning of the Universal House of Justice in the absence of the Guardian, particularly the matter of expulsion of members of the House of Justice. Such questions will be clarified in the Constitution of the House of Justice, the formulation of which is a goal of the Nine Year Plan. Meanwhile the friends are informed that any member committing a "sin injurious to the common weal", may be expelled from membership of the House of Justice by a majority vote of the House itself. Should any member, God forbid, be guilty of breaking the Covenant, the matter would be investigated by the Hands of the Cause of God, and the Covenant-breaker would be expelled by decision of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, subject to the approval of the House of Justice, as in the case of any other believer. The decision of the Hands in such a case would be announced to the Bahá'í world by the Universal House of Justice.

9 March 1965

58.1 You query the timing of the election of the Universal House of Justice in view of the Guardian's statement: "...given favourable circumstances, under which the Bahá'ís of Persia and of the adjoining countries under Soviet rule, may be enabled to elect their national representatives ... the only remaining obstacle in the way of the definite formation of the International House of Justice will have been removed." On 19th April 1947 the Guardian, in a letter written on his behalf by his secretary, replied to the enquiry of an individual believer about this passage: "At the time he referred to Russia

there were Bahá'ís there, now the Community has practically ceased to exist; therefore the formation of the International House of Justice cannot depend on a Russian National Spiritual Assembly. But other strong National Spiritual Assemblies will have to be built up before it can be established."

58.2 You suggest the possibility that, for the good of the Cause, certain information concerning the succession to Shoghi Effendi is being withheld from the believers. We assure you that nothing whatsoever is being withheld from the friends for whatever reason. There is no doubt at all that in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Shoghi Effendi was the authority designated to appoint his successor, but he had no children and all the surviving Aghşán had broken the Covenant. Thus, as the Hands of the Cause stated in 1957, it is clear that there was no one he could have appointed in accordance with the provisions of the Will. To have made an appointment outside the clear and specific provisions of the Master's Will and Testament would obviously have been an impossible and unthinkable course of action for the Guardian, the divinely-appointed upholder and defender of the Covenant. Moreover, that same Will had provided a clear means for the confirmation of the Guardian's appointment of his successor, as you are aware. The nine Hands to be elected by the body of the Hands were to give their assent by secret ballot to the Guardian's choice. In 1957 the entire body of the Hands, after fully investigating the matter, announced that Shoghi Effendi had appointed no successor and left no will. This is documented and established.

58.3 The fact that Shoghi Effendi did not leave a will cannot be adduced as evidence of his failure to obey Bahá'u'lláh—rather should we acknowledge that in his very silence there is a wisdom and a sign of his infallible guidance. We should ponder deeply the writings that we have, and seek to understand the multitudinous significances that they contain. Do not forget that Shoghi Effendi said two things were necessary for a growing understanding of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: the passage of time and the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.

58.4 The infallibility of the Universal House of Justice, operating within its ordained sphere, has not been made dependent upon the presence in its membership of the Guardian of the Cause. Although in the realm of interpretation the Guardian's pronouncements are always binding, in the area of the Guardian's participation in legislation it is always the decision of the House itself which must prevail. This is supported by the words of the Guardian: "The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the

International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgement on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested.

58.5 “Though the Guardian of the Faith has been made the permanent head of so august a body he can never, even temporarily, assume the right of exclusive legislation. He cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow-members, but is bound to insist upon a reconsideration by them of any enactment he conscientiously believes to conflict with the meaning and to depart from the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's revealed utterances.”

58.6 However, quite apart from his function as a member and sacred head for life of the Universal House of Justice, the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, had the right and duty “to define the sphere of the legislative action” of the Universal House of Justice. In other words, he had the authority to state whether a matter was or was not already covered by the Sacred Texts and therefore whether it was within the authority of the Universal House of Justice to legislate upon it. No other person, apart from the Guardian, has the right or authority to make such definitions. The question therefore arises: In the absence of the Guardian, is the Universal House of Justice in danger of straying outside its proper sphere and thus falling into error? Here we must remember three things: First, Shoghi Effendi, during the thirty-six years of his Guardianship, has already made innumerable such definitions, supplementing those made by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and by Bahá'u'lláh Himself. As already announced to the friends, a careful study of the Writings and interpretations on any subject on which the House of Justice proposes to legislate always precedes its act of legislation. Second, the Universal House of Justice, itself assured of divine guidance, is well aware of the absence of the Guardian and will approach all matters of legislation only when certain of its sphere of jurisdiction, a sphere which the Guardian has confidently described as “clearly defined”. Third, we must not forget the Guardian's written statement about these two Institutions: “Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other.”

58.7 As regards the need to have deductions made from the Writings to help in the formulation of the enactments of the House of Justice, there is the following text from the pen of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

Those matters of major importance which constitute the foundation of the Law of God are explicitly recorded in the Text, but subsidiary laws are left to the House of Justice. The wisdom of this is that the times never remain the same, for change is a necessary quality and an essential attribute of this world, and of time and place. Therefore the House of Justice will take action accordingly.

Let it not be imagined that the House of Justice will take any decision according to its own concepts and opinions. God forbid! The Supreme House of Justice will take decisions and establish laws through the inspiration and confirmation of the Holy Spirit, because it is in the safekeeping and under the shelter and protection of the Ancient Beauty, and obedience to its decisions is a bounden and essential duty and an absolute obligation, and there is no escape for anyone.

Say, O people: Verily the Supreme House of Justice is under the wings of your Lord, the Compassionate, the All-Merciful, that is, under His protection, His care, and His shelter; for He has commanded the firm believers to obey that blessed, sanctified and all-subduing body, whose sovereignty is divinely ordained and of the Kingdom of Heaven and whose laws are inspired and spiritual.

Briefly, this is the wisdom of referring the laws of society to the House of Justice. In the religion of Islám, similarly, not every ordinance was explicitly revealed; nay not a tenth part of a tenth part was included in the Text; although all matters of major importance were specifically referred to, there were undoubtedly thousands of laws which were unspecified. These were devised by the divines of a later age according to the laws of Islamic jurisprudence, and individual divines made conflicting deductions from the original revealed ordinances. All these were enforced. Today this process of deduction is the right of the body of the House of Justice, and the deductions and conclusions of individual learned men have no authority, unless they are endorsed by the House of Justice. The difference is precisely this, that from the conclusions and endorsements of the body of the House of Justice whose members are elected by and known to the worldwide Bahá'í community, no differences will arise; whereas the conclusions of individual divines and scholars would definitely lead to differences, and result in schism, division, and dispersion. The oneness of the Word would be destroyed, the unity of the Faith would disappear, and the edifice of the Faith of God would be shaken.

58.8 In the Order of Bahá'u'lláh there are certain functions which are reserved to certain institutions, and others which are shared in common, even though they may be more in the special province of one or the other. For example, although the Hands of the Cause of God have the specific functions of protection and propagation, and are specialized for these functions, it is also the duty of the Universal House of Justice and the Spiritual Assemblies to protect and teach the Cause—indeed teaching is a sacred obligation placed upon every believer by Bahá'u'lláh. Similarly, although after the Master authoritative interpretation was exclusively vested in the Guardian, and although legislation is exclusively the function of the Universal House of Justice, these two Institutions are, in Shoghi Effendi's words, "complementary in their aim and purpose." "Their common, their fundamental object is to ensure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings." Whereas the Universal House of Justice cannot undertake any function which exclusively appertained to the Guardian, it must continue to pursue the object which it shares in common with the Guardianship.

58.9 As you point out with many quotations, Shoghi Effendi repeatedly stressed the inseparability of these two institutions. Whereas he obviously envisaged their functioning together, it cannot logically be deduced from this that one is unable to function in the absence of the other. During the whole thirty-six years of his Guardianship Shoghi Effendi functioned without the Universal House of Justice. Now the Universal House of Justice must function without the Guardian, but the principle of inseparability remains. The Guardianship does not lose its significance nor position in the Order of Bahá'u'lláh merely because there is no living Guardian. We must guard against two extremes: one is to argue that because there is no Guardian all that was written about the Guardianship and its position in the Bahá'í World Order is a dead letter and was unimportant; the other is to be so overwhelmed by the significance of the Guardianship as to underestimate the strength of the Covenant, or to be tempted to compromise with the clear texts in order to find somehow, in some way, a "Guardian".

58.10 Service to the Cause of God requires absolute fidelity and integrity and unwavering faith in Him. No good but only evil can come from taking the responsibility for the future of God's Cause into our own hands and trying to force it into ways that we wish it to go regardless of the clear texts and our own limitations. It is His Cause. He has promised that its light will

not fail. Our part is to cling tenaciously to the revealed Word and to the Institutions that He has created to preserve His Covenant.

58.11 It is precisely in this connection that 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.

58.12 If some of the statements of the Universal House of Justice are not detailed the friends should realize that the cause of this is not secretiveness, but rather the determination of this body to refrain from interpreting the teachings and to preserve the truth of the Guardian's statement that "Leaders of religion, exponents of political theories, governors of human institutions ... need have no doubt or anxiety regarding the nature, the origin, or validity of the institutions which the adherents of the Faith are building up throughout the world. For these lie embedded in the teachings themselves, unadulterated and unobscured by unwarranted inferences, or unauthorized interpretations of His Word."

58.13 A clear distinction is made in our Faith between authoritative interpretation and the interpretation or understanding that each individual arrives at for himself from his study of its teachings. While the former is confined to the Guardian, the latter, according to the guidance given to us by the Guardian himself, should by no means be suppressed. In fact such individual interpretation is considered the fruit of man's rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, provided that no disputes or arguments arise among the friends and the individual himself understands and makes it clear that his views are merely his own. Individual interpretations continually change as one grows in comprehension of the teachings. As Shoghi Effendi explained: "To deepen in the Cause means to read the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master so thoroughly as to be able to give it to others in its pure form. There are many who have some superficial idea of what the Cause stands for. They, therefore, present it together with all sorts of ideas that are their own. As the Cause is still in its early days we must be most careful lest we fall under this error and injure the Movement we so much adore. There is no limit to the study of

the Cause. The more we read the writings the more truths we can find in them and the more we will see that our previous notions were erroneous.”ⁱ So, although individual insights can be enlightening and helpful, they can also be misleading. The friends must therefore learn to listen to the views of others without being overawed or allowing their faith to be shaken, and to express their own views without pressing them on their fellow Bahá’ís.

58.14 The Cause of God is organic, growing and developing like a living being. Time and again it has faced crises which have perplexed the believers, but each time the Cause, impelled by the immutable purpose of God, overcame the crisis and went on to greater heights.

58.15 However great may be our inability to understand the mystery and the implications of the passing of Shoghi Effendi, the strong cord to which all must cling with assurance is the Covenant. The emphatic and vigorous language of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament is at this time, as at the time of His own passing, the safeguard of the Cause:

“Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself. Whoso doth deviate therefrom is verily of them that love discord, hath shown forth malice and turned away from the Lord of the Covenant...” And again: “...All must seek guidance and turn unto the Centre of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.”

58.16 The Universal House of Justice, which the Guardian said would be regarded by posterity as “the last refuge of a tottering civilization,” is now, in the absence of the Guardian, the sole infallibly guided institution in the world to which all must turn, and on it rests the responsibility for ensuring the unity and progress of the Cause of God in accordance with the revealed Word. There are statements from the Master and the Guardian indicating that the Universal House of Justice, in addition to being the Highest Legislative Body of the Faith, is also the body to which all must turn, and is the “apex” of the Bahá’í Administrative Order, as well as the “supreme organ of the Bahá’í Commonwealth”. The Guardian has in his writings specified for the House of Justice such fundamental functions as the formulation of

i Written by the Guardian’s secretary to an individual believer, on 25 August 1926.

future world-wide teaching plans, the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith, and the guidance, organisation and unification of the affairs of the Cause throughout the world. Furthermore in "God Passes By" the Guardian makes the following statement: "the Kitáb-i-Aqdas ... not only preserves for posterity the basic laws and ordinances on which the fabric of His future World Order must rest, but ordains, in addition to the function of interpretation which it confers upon His Successor, the necessary institutions through which the integrity and unity of His Faith can alone be safeguarded." He has also, in "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh", written that the members of the Universal House of Justice "and not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them, have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation."

- 58.17 As the Universal House of Justice has already announced, it cannot legislate to make possible the appointment of a successor to Shoghi Effendi, nor can it legislate to make possible the appointment of any more Hands of the Cause, but it must do everything within its power to ensure the performance of all those functions which it shares with these two mighty Institutions. It must make provision for the proper discharge in future of the functions of protection and propagation, which the administrative bodies share with the Guardianship and the Hands of the Cause; it must, in the absence of the Guardian, receive and disburse the Ḥuqúqu'lláh, in accordance with the following statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "Disposition of the Ḥuqúq, wholly or partly, is permissible, but this should be done by permission of the authority in the Cause to whom all must turn"; it must make provision in its Constitution for the removal of any of its members who commits a sin "injurious to the common weal". Above all, it must, with perfect faith in Bahá'u'lláh, proclaim His Cause and enforce His Law so that the Most Great Peace shall be firmly established in this world and the foundation of the Kingdom of God on earth shall be accomplished.

27 May 1966

- 59.1 Your recent letter, in which you share with us the questions that have occurred to some of the youth in studying "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh", has been carefully considered, and we feel that we should comment both on the particular passage you mention and on a related passage in the same work, because both bear on the relationship between the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice.

- 59.2 The first passage concerns the Guardian's duty to insist upon a reconsideration by his fellow-members in the Universal House of Justice of any enactment which he believes conflicts with the meaning and departs from the spirit of the Sacred Writings. The second passage concerns the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice without the Guardian, namely Shoghi Effendi's statement that "Without such an institution [the Guardianship] ... the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be totally withdrawn."
- 59.3 Some of the youth, you indicate, were puzzled as to how to reconcile the former of these two passages with such statements as that in the Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá which affirms that the Universal House of Justice is "freed from all error".
- 59.4 Just as the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá does not in any way contradict the Kitáb-i-Aqdas but, in the Guardian's words, "confirms, supplements, and correlates the provisions of the 'Aqdas'", so the writings of the Guardian contradict neither the revealed Word nor the interpretations of the Master. In attempting to understand the Writings, therefore, one must first realize that there is and can be no real contradiction in them, and in the light of this we can confidently seek the unity of meaning which they contain.
- 59.5 The Guardian and the Universal House of Justice have certain duties and functions in common; each also operates within a separate and distinct sphere. As Shoghi Effendi explained, "...it is made indubitably clear and evident that the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and that the Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings. The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgement on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed." He goes on to affirm, "Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been divinely invested." It is impossible to conceive that two centres of authority, which the Master has stated "are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One", could conflict with one another, because both are vehicles of the same Divine Guidance.

59.6 The Universal House of Justice, beyond its function as the enactor of legislation, has been invested with the more general functions of protecting and administering the Cause, solving obscure questions and deciding upon matters that have caused difference. Nowhere is it stated that the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice is by virtue of the Guardian's membership or presence on that body. Indeed, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Shoghi Effendi in his "Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" have both explicitly stated that the elected members of the Universal House of Justice in consultation are recipients of unfailing Divine Guidance. Furthermore the Guardian himself in "The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh" asserted that "It must be also clearly understood by every believer that the institution of Guardianship does not under any circumstances abrogate, or even in the slightest degree detract from, the powers granted to the Universal House of Justice by Bahá'u'lláh in the "Kitábu'l-Aqdas", and repeatedly and solemnly confirmed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will. It does not constitute in any manner a contradiction to the Will and Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, nor does it nullify any of His revealed instructions."

59.7 While the specific responsibility of the Guardian is the interpretation of the Word, he is also invested with all the powers and prerogatives necessary to discharge his function as Guardian of the Cause, its Head and supreme protector. He is, furthermore, made the irremovable head and member for life of the supreme legislative body of the Faith. It is as the head of the Universal House of Justice, and as a member of that body, that the Guardian takes part in the process of legislation. If the following passage, which gave rise to your query, is considered as referring to this last relationship, you will see that there is no contradiction between it and the other texts:

"Though the Guardian of the Faith has been made the permanent head of so august a body he can never, even temporarily, assume the right of exclusive legislation. He cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow-members, but is bound to insist upon a reconsideration by them of any enactment he conscientiously believes to conflict with the meaning and to depart from the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's revealed utterances."

59.8 Although the Guardian, in relation to his fellow-members within the Universal House of Justice, cannot override the decision of the majority, it is inconceivable that the other members would ignore any objection he

raised in the course of consultation or pass legislation contrary to what he expressed as being in harmony with the spirit of the Cause. It is, after all, the final act of judgement delivered by the Universal House of Justice that is vouchsafed infallibility, not any views expressed in the course of the process of enactment.

59.9 It can be seen, therefore, that there is no conflict between the Master's statements concerning the unfailing divine guidance conferred upon the Universal House of Justice and the above passage from "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh".

59.10 It may help the friends to understand this relationship if they are aware of some of the processes that the Universal House of Justice follows when legislating. First, of course, it observes the greatest care in studying the Sacred Texts and the interpretations of the Guardian as well as considering the views of all the members. After long consultation the process of drafting a pronouncement is put into effect. During this process the whole matter may well be reconsidered. As a result of such reconsideration the final judgement may be significantly different from the conclusion earlier favoured, or possibly it may be decided not to legislate at all on that subject at that time. One can understand how great would be the attention paid to the views of the Guardian during the above process were he alive.

59.11 In considering the second passage we must once more hold fast to the principle that the teachings do not contradict themselves.

59.12 Future Guardians are clearly envisaged and referred to in the Writings, but there is nowhere any promise or guarantee that the line of Guardians would endure for ever; on the contrary there are clear indications that the line could be broken. Yet, in spite of this, there is a repeated insistence in the Writings on the indestructibility of the Covenant and the immutability of God's Purpose for this Day.

59.13 One of the most striking passages which envisage the possibility of such a break in the line of Guardians is in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself:

The endowments dedicated to charity revert to God, the Revealer of Signs. No one has the right to lay hold on them without leave from the Dawning-Place of Revelation. After Him the decision rests with the Aghṣán [Branches], and after them with the House of Justice—should it be established in the world by then—so that they may use these endowments for the benefit of the Sites exalted in this Cause, and for that which they have been commanded by God, the Almighty, the All-Powerful. Otherwise the endowments should be referred to the people of Bahá,

who speak not without His leave and who pass no judgement but in accordance with that which God has ordained in this Tablet, they who are the champions of victory betwixt heaven and earth, so that they may spend them on that which has been decreed in the Holy Book by God, the Mighty, the Bountiful.

59.14 The passing of Shoghi Effendi in 1957 precipitated the very situation provided for in this passage, in that the line of Aghṣán ended before the House of Justice had been elected. Although, as is seen, the ending of the line of Aghṣán at some stage was provided for, we must never underestimate the grievous loss that the Faith has suffered. God's purpose for mankind remains unchanged, however, and the mighty Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh remains impregnable. Has not Bahá'u'lláh stated categorically, "The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation." While 'Abdu'l-Bahá confirms: "Verily, God effecteth that which He pleaseth; naught can annul His Covenant; naught can obstruct His favour nor oppose His Cause!" "Everything is subject to corruption; but the Covenant of thy Lord shall continue to pervade all regions." "The tests of every dispensation are in direct proportion to the greatness of the Cause, and as heretofore such a manifest Covenant, written by the Supreme Pen, hath not been entered upon, the tests are proportionately severe ... These agitations of the violators are no more than the foam of the ocean ... This foam of the ocean shall not endure and shall soon disperse and vanish, while the ocean of the Covenant shall eternally surge and roar." And Shoghi Effendi has clearly stated: "The bedrock on which this Administrative Order is founded is God's immutable Purpose for mankind in this day." "...this priceless gem of Divine Revelation, now still in its embryonic state, shall evolve within the shell of His law, and shall forge ahead, undivided and unimpaired, till it embraces the whole of mankind."

59.15 In the Bahá'í Faith there are two authoritative centres appointed to which the believers must turn, for in reality the Interpreter of the Word is an extension of that centre which is the Word itself. The Book is the record of the utterance of Bahá'u'lláh, while the divinely inspired Interpreter is the living Mouth of that Book—it is he and he alone who can authoritatively state what the Book means. Thus one centre is the Book with its Interpreter, and the other is the Universal House of Justice guided by God to decide on whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Book. This pattern of centres and their relationships is apparent at every stage in the unfoldment of the Cause.

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh tells the believers to refer after His passing to the Book, and to "Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root." In the Kitáb-i-'Ahdí (the Book of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant), He makes it clear that this reference is to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In the Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh also ordains the institution of the Universal House of Justice, and confers upon it the powers necessary for it to discharge its ordained functions. The Master in His Will and Testament explicitly institutes the Guardianship, which Shoghi Effendi states was clearly anticipated in the verses of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, reaffirms and elucidates the authority of the Universal House of Justice, and refers the believers once again to the Book: "Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice," and at the very end of the Will He says: "All must seek guidance and turn unto the Centre of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error."

59.16 As the sphere of jurisdiction of the Universal House of Justice in matters of legislation extends to whatever is not explicitly revealed in the Sacred Text, it is clear that the Book itself is the highest authority and delimits the sphere of action of the House of Justice. Likewise, the Interpreter of the Book must also have the authority to define the sphere of the legislative action of the elected representatives of the Cause. The writings of the Guardian and the advice given by him over the thirty-six years of his Guardianship show the way in which he exercised this function in relation to the Universal House of Justice as well as to National and Local Spiritual Assemblies.

59.17 The fact that the Guardian has the authority to define the sphere of the legislative action of the Universal House of Justice does not carry with it the corollary that without such guidance the Universal House of Justice might stray beyond the limits of its proper authority; such a deduction would conflict with all the other texts referring to its infallibility, and specifically with the Guardian's own clear assertion that the Universal House of Justice never can or will infringe on the sacred and prescribed domain of the Guardianship. It should be remembered, however, that although National and Local Spiritual Assemblies can receive divine guidance if they consult in the manner and spirit described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, they do not share in the explicit guarantees of infallibility conferred upon the Universal House of Justice. Any careful student of the Cause can see with what care the Guardian, after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, guided

these elected representatives of the believers in the painstaking erection of the Administrative Order and in the formulation of Local and National Bahá'í Constitutions.

- 59.18 We hope that these elucidations will assist the friends in understanding these relationships more clearly, but we must all remember that we stand too close to the beginnings of the System ordained by Bahá'u'lláh to be able fully to understand its potentialities or the inter-relationships of its component parts. As Shoghi Effendi's secretary wrote on his behalf to an individual believer on 25 March 1930, "The contents of the Will of the Master are far too much for the present generation to comprehend. It needs at least a century of actual working before the treasures of wisdom hidden in it can be revealed..."

7 December 1969

- 60 Although the Universal House of Justice has to apply and supplement the laws of the Aqdas it has no right at all to change any law that Bahá'u'lláh has specifically revealed. As clearly stated by the Guardian, the provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas "remain inviolate" during the entire Dispensation.

28 April 1974

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

23 March 1975

- 62.1 Regarding your first question, it is important that when considering the references to the Guardianship in the writings of the Faith, and especially

when striving to understand how these references apply at the present time, you should realize that the word “guardianship” is used with various meanings in different contexts. In certain contexts it indicates the office and function of the Guardian himself, in others it refers to the line of Guardians, in still others it bears a more extended meaning embracing the Guardian and his attendant institutions. Nevertheless, it would be quite incorrect to state, at the present time when there is no Guardian, that the Hands of the Cause are members of the Institution of Guardianship. Nor would it be correct to so designate the International Teaching Centre, the Counsellors, the members of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants.

- 62.2 In the specific sense of referring to the office and function of the Guardian himself, the House of Justice finds that the prerogatives and duties vested in him are of three kinds. First, as was explained in a letter to an individual believer which was published in “Wellspring of Guidance”,ⁱ there are a number of functions and objects which the Guardianship shares with the Universal House of Justice and which the House of Justice must continue to pursue. Secondly, there are other functions of the Guardianship which, in the absence of a Guardian, devolve upon the Universal House of Justice, for example, the Headship of the Faith, the responsibility for directing the work of the Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God and of ensuring the continuing discharge of the functions or protection and propagation vested in that Institution, and the right to administer the *Ḥuqúqu’lláh*. Thirdly, there are those prerogatives and duties which lie exclusively within the sphere of the Guardian himself and, therefore, in the absence of a Guardian, are inoperative except insofar as the monumental work already performed by Shoghi Effendi continues to be of enduring benefit to the Faith. Such a function is that of authoritative interpretation of the Teachings.

5 May 1977, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 63.1 Shoghi Effendi was asked several times during his ministry to define the sphere of his operation and his infallibility. The replies he gave and which were written on his behalf are most illuminating. He explains that he is not an infallible authority on subjects such as economics and science, nor does he go into technical matters since his infallibility is confined to “matters which are related strictly to the Cause”. He further points out that “he is not, like the Prophet, omniscient at will”, that his “infallibility covers interpretation of the revealed word, and its application”, and that he is also

i See extract 58.

“infallible in the protection of the Faith”. Furthermore, in one of the letters, the following guideline is set forth:

It is not for individual believers to limit the sphere of the Guardian's authority, or to judge when they have to obey the Guardian and when they are free to reject his judgment. Such an attitude would evidently lead to confusion and to schism. The Guardian being the appointed interpreter of the Teachings, it is his responsibility to state what matters, affecting the interests of the Faith, demand on the part of the believers complete and unqualified obedience to his instructions.

- 63.2 It must always be remembered that authoritative interpretation of the Teachings was, after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the exclusive right of the Guardian, and fell within the “sacred and prescribed domain” of the Guardianship, and therefore the Universal House of Justice cannot and will not infringe upon that domain. The exclusive sphere of the Universal House of Justice is to “pronounce upon and deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances as Bahá’u’lláh has not expressly revealed”. Apart from this fundamental difference in the functions of the twin pillars of the Order of Bahá’u’lláh, insofar as the other duties of the Head of the Faith are concerned, the Universal House of Justice shares with the Guardian the responsibility for the application of the revealed word, the protection of the Faith, as well as the duty “to insure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its Teachings”. However, the Universal House of Justice is not omniscient; like the Guardian, it wants to be provided with facts when called upon to render a decision, and like him, it may well change its decision when new facts emerge.

22 August 1977, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 64.1 ...the Tablets of the Divine Plan, which were revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during the First World War, are the Charter for the teaching of the Faith. All the teaching plans launched by the beloved Guardian, as well as those subsequently directed by the Universal House of Justice, are stages in the implementation of this master plan conceived by the Centre of the Covenant for the diffusion of the Message of Bahá’u’lláh.

64.2 When it is working out the goals of a plan, such as the Five Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice, in collaboration with the International Teaching Centre, collates information on the current status of the Faith throughout the world, considers the condition of mankind as a whole and the direction in which political and economic events throughout the world are moving, gives thought to the specific needs of the evolving pattern of the Bahá'í community in each country, and sets goals which, in the light of the information before it, it judges to be both essential of achievement and also within the capacity of the Bahá'í communities to reach. All the goals thus set are minimum goals; that is to say, the needs of humanity are far greater than anything the Bahá'í community can plan to meet at the present time, and therefore, although the goals are set as high as the Universal House of Justice considers it possible for the Bahá'ís to reach within the time provided, the friends should always strive to exceed them if they can.

64.3 In setting the goals the House of Justice cannot take into account the unpredictable operations of God's Supreme Plan. At times it may seem that the operation of the Major Plan causes a disruption in the work of the Minor Plan, but the friends should not let this distress them. In 1955 a sudden recrudescence of the persecution of the Faith in the land of its birth intervened dramatically in the progress of the Ten Year Crusade. Referring to this, the Guardian wrote, as recorded on page 140 of "Citadel of Faith":

For though the newly launched World Spiritual Crusade, constituting at best only the Minor Plan in the execution of the Almighty's design for the redemption of mankind—has, as a result of this turmoil, paralyzing temporarily the vast majority of the organized followers of Bahá'u'lláh within His birthplace, suffered a severe setback—yet the over-all Plan of God, moving mysteriously and in contrast to the orderly and well-known processes of a clearly devised Plan, has received an impetus the force of which only posterity can adequately assess.

29 September 1977, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

65.1 You express the fear that the authority conferred upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice could lead to a progressive reduction in the "available scope for personal interpretation", and that "the actual writings of the Manifestation will have less and less import", and you instance what has happened in previous Dispensations. The House of

Justice suggests that, in thinking about this, you contemplate the way the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh has actually worked and you will be able to see how very different its processes are from those of, say, the development of the law in Rabbinical Judaism or the functioning of the Papacy in Christianity. The practice in the past in these two religions, and also to a great extent in Islám, has been to assume that the Revelation given by the Founder was the final, perfect revelation of God's Will to mankind, and all subsequent elucidation and legislation has been interpretative in the sense that it aimed at applying this basic Revelation to the new problems and situations that have arisen. The Bahá'í premises are quite different. Although the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is accepted as the Word of God and His Law as the Law of God, it is understood from the outset that Revelation is progressive, and that the Law, although the Will of God for this Age, will undoubtedly be changed by the next Manifestation of God. Secondly, only the written text of the Revelation is regarded as authoritative. There is no Oral Law as in Judaism, no Tradition of the Church as in Christianity, no Hadíth as in Islám. Thirdly, a clear distinction is drawn between interpretation and legislation. Authoritative interpretation is the exclusive prerogative of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian, while infallible legislation is the function of the Universal House of Justice.

65.2 If you study the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and of the Guardian, you will see how tremendously they differ from the interpretations of the Rabbis and the Church. They are not a progressive fossilization of the Revelation, they are for the most part expositions which throw a clear light upon passages which may have been considered obscure, they point up the intimate interrelationship between various teachings, they expound the implications of scriptural allusions, and they educate the Bahá'ís in the tremendous significances of the Words of Bahá'u'lláh. Rather than in any way supplanting the Words of the Manifestation, they lead us back to them time and again.

65.3 There is also an important distinction made in the Faith between authoritative interpretation, as described above, and the interpretation which every believer is fully entitled to voice. Believers are free, indeed are encouraged, to study the Writings for themselves and to express their understanding of them. Such personal interpretations can be most illuminating, but all Bahá'ís, including the one expressing the view, however learned he may be, should realize that it is only a personal view and can never be upheld as a standard for others to accept, nor should disputes ever be permitted to arise over differences in such opinions.

- 65.4 The legislation enacted by the Universal House of Justice is different from interpretation. Authoritative interpretation, as uttered by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian, is a divinely guided statement of what the Word of God means. The divinely inspired legislation of the Universal House of Justice does not attempt to say what the revealed Word means—it states what must be done in cases where the revealed Text or its authoritative interpretation is not explicit. It is, therefore, on quite a different level from the Sacred Text, and the Universal House of Justice is empowered to abrogate or amend its own legislation whenever it judges the conditions make this desirable. Moreover, the attitude to legislation is different in the Bahá’í Faith. The human tendency in past Dispensations has been to want every question answered and to arrive at a binding decision affecting every small detail of belief or practice. The tendency in the Bahá’í Dispensation, from the time of Bahá’u’lláh Himself, has been to clarify the governing principles, to make binding pronouncements on details which are considered essential, but to leave a wide area to the conscience of the individual. The same tendency appears also in administrative matters. The Guardian used to state that the working of National Spiritual Assemblies should be uniform in essentials but that diversity in secondary matters was not only permissible but desirable. For this reason a number of points are not expressed in the National Bahá’í Constitution (the Declaration of Trust and By-Laws of National Assemblies); these are left to each National Spiritual Assembly to decide for itself.

3 January 1982, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 66 While ultimately the major function of the Universal House of Justice will be that of legislation, it has continuing responsibility for executive and judicial functions of the institution.

19 May 1985, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 67.1 Your letter touches upon a subject which, as time passes, will increasingly engage the attention of the House of Justice in accordance with its responsibilities as explicitly assigned in the Holy Texts. For instance, Bahá’u’lláh states:

According to the fundamental laws which We have formerly revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and other Tablets, all affairs are committed to the care of just kings and presidents and of the Trustees of the House of Justice.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

Elsewhere He states:

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 Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

And yet again He asserts:

All matters of State should be referred to the House of Justice, but acts of worship must be observed according to that which God hath revealed in His Book.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas

Furthermore, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is reported to have said in a talk:

He [Bahá'u'lláh] has ordained and established the House of Justice, which is endowed with a political as well as a religious function, the consummate union and blending of church and state. This institution is under the protecting power of Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 67.2 As can be seen from the current situation in the world and the current state in the development of the Bahá'í community, statements such as these indicate a future stage in the functioning of the House of Justice and of the operation of our world community; but in the meantime, the House of Justice will determine, as particular circumstances warrant, how the Bahá'ís and their national and local institutions will relate to their respective governments.

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

68.1 ...it should be noted that in most areas of human behaviour there are acts which are clearly contrary to the law of God and others which are clearly approved or permissible; between these there is often a grey area where it is not immediately apparent what should be done. It has been a human tendency to wish to eliminate these grey areas so that every aspect of life is clearly prescribed. A result of this tendency has been the tremendous accretion of interpretation and subsidiary legislation which has smothered the spirit of certain of the older religions. In the Bahá'í Faith moderation, which is so strongly upheld by Bahá'u'lláh, is applied here also. Provision is made for supplementary legislation by the Universal House of Justice—legislation which it can itself abrogate and amend as conditions change. There is also a clear pattern already established in the Sacred Scriptures, in the interpretations made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, and in the decisions so far made by the Universal House of Justice, whereby an area of the application of the laws is intentionally left to the conscience of each individual believer. This is the age in which mankind must attain maturity, and one aspect of this is the assumption by individuals of the responsibility for deciding, with the assistance of consultation, their own course of action in areas which are left open by the law of God.

68.2 It should also be noted that it is neither possible nor desirable for the Universal House of Justice to set forth a set of rules covering every situation. Rather is it the task of the individual believer to determine, according to his own prayerful understanding of the Writings, precisely what his course of conduct should be in relation to situations which he encounters in his daily life. If he is to fulfil his true mission in life as a follower of the Blessed Perfection, he will pattern his life according to the Teachings. The believer cannot attain this objective merely by living according to a set of rigid regulations. When his life is oriented towards service to Bahá'u'lláh, and when every conscious act is performed within this frame of reference, he will not fail to achieve the true purpose of his life.

68.3 Therefore, every believer must continually study the Sacred Writings and the instructions of the beloved Guardian, striving always to attain a new and better understanding of their import to him and to his society. He should pray fervently for divine guidance, wisdom and strength to do what is pleasing to God, and to serve Him at all times and to the best of his ability.

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

- 69 One of the major concerns of the Universal House of Justice, as the Bahá'í Administrative Order unfolds, will be to ensure that it evolves in consonance with the spirit of the Bahá'í Revelation. While many beneficial aspects of human society at large can be safely incorporated into Bahá'í Administration, the House of Justice will guard against the corrupting influence of those non-Bahá'í political and social concepts and practices which are not in harmony with the divine standard.

27 April 1995, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 70.1 The House of Justice notes that you have been disturbed by some of the postings made to the email discussion group of which you have recently been a member. Email discussion groups are a new phenomenon; they can provide immense benefits for communication between people and for the teaching of the Faith, but, as you have seen, they can also give rise to far-reaching problems. The use of email requires an adjustment of perception. In the past, discussions among Bahá'ís would take place orally among groups of friends in private, or at summer schools and other Bahá'í events, or in letters between individuals. Inevitably, many erroneous statements were made; not all comments were as temperate as they should have been; many statements were misunderstood by those who heard them. After all, not all Bahá'ís have a profound knowledge of the teachings, and it is clear that even academic eminence is no guarantee of a correct understanding of the Revelation of God. Before email such extravagances had a limited range and were of an ephemeral nature. Now, the same kind of discussion is spread among a hundred or more people, who often do not know one another, in a form more durable than speech, and can be disseminated to a vast readership at the touch of a button. A new level of self-discipline, therefore, is needed by those who take part. Such discussions among Bahá'ís call for self-restraint and purity of motive as well as cordiality, frankness and openness.

- 70.2 The central, unifying element of the Faith is the Covenant. This is the institution which guarantees that the Faith and its teachings will remain true to the Revelation brought by Bahá'u'lláh and expounded by His divinely guided Interpreters. It is the one agency which can protect the Faith against the distortion and disruption to which all previous Revelations have been subjected by the efforts—whether well-intentioned or not—of the self-opinionated and ambitious among their followers to force the Cause of God into patterns which they personally favoured.

70.3 Thus, if any participant in an email discussion feels that a view put forward appears to contradict or undermine the provisions of the Covenant, he should be free to say so, explaining candidly and courteously why he feels as he does. The person who made the initial statement will then be able to re-evaluate his opinion and, if he still believes it to be valid, he should be able to explain why it is not contrary to either the letter or the spirit of the Covenant. The participants in such a discussion should avoid disputation and, if they are unable to resolve an issue, they should refer the point to the Universal House of Justice since, in accordance with the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “By this body all the difficult problems are to be resolved...” and it has the authority to decide upon “all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book.” In this way the Covenant can illuminate and temper the discourse and make it fruitful...

70.4 The Administrative Order of Bahá’u’lláh is in the process of growth and unfoldment. In its structure and functioning there are aspects which, the Guardian explained, should be uniform throughout the world. There are also secondary aspects which can be varied from country to country as decided by the responsible National Spiritual Assembly in accordance with the needs and conditions in the area under its jurisdiction. The aspects which must be uniform are set out in the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice and the Constitutions of the National and Local Spiritual Assemblies.

70.5 As the Bahá’í communities grow, the Universal House of Justice will ensure that this divinely-founded system will unfold in accordance with the unerring guidance of which it is the recipient.

70.6 Those who from time to time express their dissatisfaction with the current structure of the Administrative Order would be better advised to turn their attention to a thorough study of the principles upon which it is based, as expounded by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, and to concentrate their efforts on putting into practice the spirit and letter of these texts. Virtually every problem which is blamed on a deficiency of structure is, in fact, traceable to a defect in the manner in which the individual believers understand and implement the administrative principles of the Faith.

70.7 In “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh”, Shoghi Effendi states:

This new-born Administrative Order incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognized

forms of secular government, without being in any sense a mere replica of any one of them, and without introducing within its machinery any of the objectionable features which they inherently possess.

- 70.8 The three forms of secular government to which the Guardian refers are autocracy (rule by one person), aristocracy (rule by the best people) and democracy (rule by all the people). Referring again to these three forms of secular government, the Guardian writes, later in that same document:

Whereas this Administrative Order cannot be said to have been modelled after any of these recognized systems of government, it nevertheless embodies, reconciles and assimilates within its framework such wholesome elements as are to be found in each one of them. The hereditary authority which the Guardian is called upon to exercise, the vital and essential functions which the Universal House of Justice discharges, the specific provisions requiring its democratic election by the representatives of the faithful—these combine to demonstrate the truth that this divinely revealed Order, which can never be identified with any of the standard types of government referred to by Aristotle in his works, embodies and blends with the spiritual verities on which it is based the beneficent elements which are to be found in each one of them. The admitted evils inherent in each of these systems being rigidly and permanently excluded, this unique Order, however long it may endure and however extensive its ramifications, cannot ever degenerate into any form of despotism, of oligarchy, or of demagoguery which must sooner or later corrupt the machinery of all man-made and essentially defective political institutions.

- 70.9 In “God Passes By” the Guardian comments further on the same theme of the characteristics of the Bahá'í Administrative Order:

It incorporates within its structure certain elements which are to be found in each of the three recognized forms of secular government, is devoid of the defects which each of them inherently possesses, and blends the salutary truths which each undoubtedly contains without vitiating in any way the integrity of the Divine verities on which it is essentially founded. The hereditary authority which the Guardian of the Administrative Order is called upon to exercise, and the right of the interpretation of the Holy Writ solely conferred upon him; the powers

and prerogatives of the Universal House of Justice, possessing the exclusive right to legislate on matters not explicitly revealed in the Most Holy Book; the ordinance exempting its members from any responsibility to those whom they represent, and from the obligation to conform to their views, convictions or sentiments; the specific provisions requiring the free and democratic election by the mass of the faithful of the Body that constitutes the sole legislative organ in the world-wide Bahá'í community—these are among the features which combine to set apart the Order identified with the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh from any of the existing systems of human government.

70.10 Although the Administrative Order must now function without a living Guardian, and thus without a continuing source of divinely guided authoritative interpretation, beneficial elements of all three types of government are still embodied in this Order: in the continuing authority of the Sacred Texts and the binding effect of the interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian; in the obligation resting on the members of the House of Justice “to follow, in a prayerful attitude, the dictates and promptings of their conscience” ungoverned by “the feelings, the general opinion, and even the convictions of the mass of the faithful...”; in the election (direct or indirect) of the members of all governing bodies by the unfettered vote of the mass of the believers, uninfluenced by either nominations or electioneering and untroubled by the spirit of factionalism and of concern for power which are such common features of current society. Above all, it is firmly rooted in the “spiritual verities” revealed by Bahá'u'lláh.

70.11 In the years following the writing of the words quoted above, moreover, Shoghi Effendi not only accelerated the process of bringing the Universal House of Justice into being by appointing the International Bahá'í Council, but also, in accordance with the provisions of the Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, appointed the Hands of the Cause of God and began the development of the series of institutions comprising “eminent and devoted believers appointed for the specific purposes of protecting and propagating the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh under the guidance of the Head of that Faith”,ⁱ the vital importance of which can now be clearly seen in the functioning of the International Teaching Centre, the Continental Boards of Counsellors, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants.

i *The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice*, preamble to the By-Laws.

70.12 From certain quarters, for a number of decades, there have been repeated attempts to import into the Bahá'í Administration the concept that it is desirable and proper to bring about change in the community by forming a constituency of like-minded believers to bring pressure to bear on the elected Assemblies. Such a concept is very similar to the formation of parties and factions which is an accepted and familiar feature of many representative democracies. It is, however, wholly antithetical to the spirit of Bahá'í Administration, and would distort its nature and undermine that unity which the Covenant is designed to preserve.

70.13 The elected institutions do, indeed, have the responsibility to "acquaint themselves with the conditions prevailing among the community" and "must weigh dispassionately in their minds the merits of any case presented for their consideration", but this process is not helped by a prevalence of negative criticism and disunity among the friends.

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

71.1 You express disquiet that attempts being made to introduce a distinction between "Bahá'í laymen" and "Bahá'í scholars" with respect to the study of the Faith tend to generate a spirit of disunity among the friends. Your concern is fully justified. Such an approach to the study of the Cause would betray a fundamental misunderstanding of the pattern of Bahá'í society as set out in the Teachings of the Faith.

71.2 As you know, Bahá'u'lláh says that the pursuit of knowledge has been enjoined upon everyone, and knowledge itself is described by Him as "wings to man's life" and "a ladder for his ascent". Those whose high attainments in this respect make it possible for them to contribute in important ways to the advancement of civilization are deserving of society's recognition and gratitude.

71.3 In the study of the Revelation of God, an individual's proficiency in one of the physical or social sciences, in law, philology, or other fields of specialization will often throw valuable light on issues being examined, and such contributions are greatly to be appreciated. The field of Near East studies, mentioned in your letter, is one that can assist in this way. However, no one specialization among the many branches of scholarly research can confer upon its practitioners an authoritative role in the common effort of exploring the implications of so staggering and all-encompassing a body of truth.

- 71.4 Collateral with His summons to the pursuit of knowledge, Bahá'u'lláh has abolished entirely that feature of all past religions by which a special caste of persons such as the Christian priesthood or the Islamic 'ulamá came to exercise authority over the religious understanding and practice of their fellow believers. In a letter written in Persian on his behalf to the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Istanbul, the Guardian is at some pains to underline the importance of this marked departure from past religious history:

But praise be to God that the Pen of Glory has done away with the unyielding and dictatorial views of the learned and the wise, dismissed the assertions of individuals as an authoritative criterion, even though they were recognized as the most accomplished and learned among men, and ordained that all matters be referred to authorized centres and specified assemblies.

- 71.5 The Bahá'í Dispensation is described in the words of its Founder as “a day that shall not be followed by night”. Through His Covenant, Bahá'u'lláh has provided an unfailing source of divine guidance that will endure throughout the Dispensation. Authority to administer the affairs of the community and to ensure both the integrity of the Word of God and the promotion of the Faith's message is conferred upon the Administrative Order to which the Covenant has given birth. It is solely by the process of free election or by unsought appointment that the members of the institutions of this Order are assigned to their positions in it. There is no profession in either the teaching of the Faith or its administration for which one can train or to which a believer can properly aspire. Cautionary words of Bahá'u'lláh are particularly relevant:

Ever since the seeking of preference and distinction came into play, the world hath been laid waste. It hath become desolate...

Indeed, man is noble, inasmuch as each one is a repository of the sign of God. Nevertheless, to regard oneself as superior in knowledge, learning or virtue, or to exalt oneself or seek preference, is a grievous transgression.

- 71.6 The promotion of learning of every kind among the Faith's members is an activity fundamental to the achievement of the community's wide-ranging

goals. Consequently, the encouragement of individual believers to acquire knowledge, the operation of Bahá'í schools, universities, and training institutes, the organization of study groups, and the work of task forces dedicated to relating the principles of the Revelation to the challenges facing humankind all represent activities with which both the Counsellors and their auxiliaries, on the one hand, and National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, on the other, must concern themselves. In shouldering these demanding responsibilities, Bahá'í institutions everywhere find their efforts greatly enhanced by the assistance of believers whose intellectual pursuits, qualities of character, and devotion to the Cause particularly fit them to contribute their services.

71.7 A special responsibility in the matter rests on the Counsellors because of the duty assigned to them to assist in releasing the potential of the individual believer. The members of this institution, appointed for specific terms, have been given the task of carrying forward into the future the functions of the protection and propagation of the Faith conferred in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the Hands of the Cause. Thus, the Counsellors are called on to "diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to promote learning, to improve the character of all men and to be, at all times and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things." Like the Hands, the Counsellors have no interpretive authority, an authority conferred by the Covenant only on 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian of the Faith. While some Counsellors, like some of the Hands, will have pursued various academic or professional disciplines in their individual careers, their discharge of their duties is not dependent on proficiencies of this kind. All of them share fully in the vital task of encouraging believers everywhere in the acquisition of knowledge, in all its dimensions. All share, too, in the responsibility assigned to the institution of which they are members to protect the Faith against its enemies, both external and internal, a concern to which both the Master and the Guardian attached pre-eminent importance.

71.8 An understanding of the principles by which we explore the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh depends, too, on an appreciation of the broad nature of the authority conferred on the Universal House of Justice. Speaking of the relevant responsibilities of its elected membership, the Will and Testament states:

It is incumbent upon these members (of the Universal House of Justice) to gather in a certain place and deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book. Whatsoever they decide has the same effect as the Text itself.

- 71.9 Emphasizing, in this same Charter of the Administrative Order, the importance of believers' wholehearted adherence to the guidance given by both the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice, 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God...

14 March 1996, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 72 It is the exclusive sphere of the Universal House of Justice to "pronounce upon and deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances as Bahá'u'lláh has not expressly revealed." It carries responsibility for the application of the revealed Word, the protection of the Faith, as well as the duty "to insure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings." However, the Universal House of Justice is not omniscient, and the friends should understand that there is a difference between infallibility and omniscience. Like the Guardian, the House of Justice wants to be provided with facts when called upon to render a decision, and like him it may well change its decision when new facts emerge, or in light of changed conditions at some point in the future. We have found nothing in the writings of Shoghi Effendi which suggests that the House of Justice would on any occasion reach a "wrong decision".

14 June 1996, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 73 The institutions of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh, rooted in the provisions of His Revelation, have emerged gradually and organically, as the Bahá'í community has grown through the power of the divine impulse imparted to humankind in this age. The characteristics and functions of each of these institutions have evolved, and are still evolving, as are the

relationships between them. The writings of the beloved Guardian expound the fundamental elements of this mighty System and make it clear that the Administrative Order, although different in many ways from the World Order which it is the destiny of the Bahá'í Revelation to call into being, is both the “nucleus” and “pattern” of that World Order. Thus, the evolution of the institutions of the Administrative Order, while following many variants to meet changing conditions in different times and places, should strictly follow the essential principles of Bahá'í administration which have been laid down in the Sacred Text and in the interpretations provided by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian.

30 May 1997

- 74 Already in “The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh” Shoghi Effendi has shown, beyond any doubt, that the function of making authoritative interpretations of the Teachings is confined solely and exclusively to the Guardian. Neither the Universal House of Justice, nor any other institution, person or group of persons can assume that function. That the Universal House of Justice will never infringe on the functions reserved to the Guardian is shown, not only by its own words and actions, but by Shoghi Effendi’s statement in that same document: “Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other.” It is guaranteed by the fact that the Universal House of Justice as well as the Guardian are both “under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One”.

3 June 1997, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 75 The meanings of the terms “elucidation” and “interpretation”, as they are used with regard to the functions of Bahá'í institutions, should not of course be confused with each other. The elucidations of the Universal House of Justice stem from its legislative function, and as such differ from interpretation. The divinely inspired legislation of the House of Justice does not attempt to say what the revealed Word means—it states what must be done in cases where the revealed Text or its authoritative interpretation is not explicit; and in this context it offers explanations. It is, therefore, on quite a different level from the sacred Text, and the Universal House of Justice is empowered to abrogate or amend its own legislation whenever it judges the conditions make this desirable. The major distinction between the two functions of elucidation and interpretation, to repeat the point

differently, is that legislation with its resultant outcome of elucidation is susceptible of amendment by the House of Justice itself, whereas the Guardian's interpretation is a statement of truth which cannot be varied.

27 August 1998, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 76.1 We have received a letter from a believer in Iran with questions about the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice. We appreciate that firmness in the Covenant is among the distinctive characteristics of the believers in that land, who are informed of the principles and essential facts pertaining to the succession of authority in the Cause. Nevertheless, none among them should hesitate to seek clarification of matters about which they have questions, for the enemies of the Faith are tireless in their attempts to sow seeds of confusion and doubt. Moreover, it is beneficial, in view of the beloved Master's exhortations to us all to be ever-vigilant concerning matters of protection, for the friends to review the relevant essentials from time to time. We have therefore decided to provide you with the following comments...
- 76.2 Questions concerning the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice can be resolved through careful study of the writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi and the elucidations of the House of Justice, which, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states, will "deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book. Whatsoever they decide," He assures the friends, "has the same effect as the Text itself."
- 76.3 Prior to the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in 1921, the provisions He had put in place in His Will and Testament to safeguard the Faith and ensure its steady advancement into the future were generally unknown. The believers anticipated a day when the Universal House of Justice would be established since it had been specifically mentioned in the Sacred Texts. There was, however, no definite understanding that there would be a Guardian. Indeed, Shoghi Effendi later indicated that he had no foreknowledge of the position to which he would be called. At most, he had reportedly thought the Will and Testament might charge him, as the eldest grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, with responsibility for arranging for the election of the House of Justice. Only after the reading of the Will did the institution of the Guardianship become widely known, and the Bahá'í community worldwide acknowledged Shoghi Effendi as the Head of the Faith to whom all must turn.

76.4 An attentive reading of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will makes it clear that He did not indicate a predestined outcome but did provide for a number of circumstances which, depending on future conditions, might eventually confront the Faith. The second section of the Will, for instance, which refers only to the Universal House of Justice, with no mention of the Guardianship, was written at a time when His own life was in imminent danger and Shoghi Effendi was but a small boy. During that same period, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had made arrangements for the election of the Universal House of Justice to take place immediately, should the threat on His life materialize. Through the grace of God, the crisis passed, and it was ultimately left to Shoghi Effendi many years later, as Guardian and Head of the Faith, to determine the timing of the formation of the House of Justice. Early on he considered the possibility of holding the election soon after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in which case the House of Justice and the Guardian would have functioned simultaneously. He determined, of course, that the foundations of the Administrative Order needed first to be firmly laid at the local and national levels, and it eventually transpired that the House of Justice was established several years after his own passing. That the transition from the ministry of the Guardian to the election of the Universal House of Justice occurred with such relative ease can, itself, be attributed to the way certain provisions in the Will were formulated.

76.5 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament clearly allows for the possibility of a successor to Shoghi Effendi, and in this light, we find statements written by him or on his behalf over the course of his thirty-six-year ministry that envision future Guardians. However, there are no assurances in the Writings that the line of Guardians would continue throughout the Dispensation; rather, the possibility is envisaged that such a line would come to an end. In this respect, Bahá'u'lláh states in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas:

Endowments dedicated to charity revert to God, the Revealer of Signs. None hath the right to dispose of them without leave from Him Who is the Dawning-place of Revelation. After Him, this authority shall pass to the Aghṣán, and after them to the House of Justice—should it be established in the world by then—that they may use these endowments for the benefit of the Places which have been exalted in this Cause, and for whatsoever hath been enjoined upon them by Him Who is the God of might and power. Otherwise, the endowments shall revert to the people of Bahá who speak not except by His leave and judge not save

in accordance with what God hath decreed in this Tablet—lo, they are the champions of victory betwixt heaven and earth—that they may use them in the manner that hath been laid down in the Book by God, the Mighty, the Bountiful.

The passing of Shoghi Effendi precipitated the situation described, in which the authority vested in the Aghṣán—first in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and then in Shoghi Effendi—ended before the House of Justice was established.

- 76.6 In His Will and Testament, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá specifies in the clearest terms the conditions according to which Shoghi Effendi was to have named his successor as Guardian:

O ye beloved of the Lord! It is incumbent upon the guardian of the Cause of God to appoint in his own life-time him that shall become his successor, that differences may not arise after his passing. He that is appointed must manifest in himself detachment from all worldly things, must be the essence of purity, must show in himself the fear of God, knowledge, wisdom and learning. Thus, should the first-born of the guardian of the Cause of God not manifest in himself the truth of the words:—“The child is the secret essence of its sire,” that is, should he not inherit of the spiritual within him (the guardian of the Cause of God) and his glorious lineage not be matched with a goodly character, then must he, (the guardian of the Cause of God) choose another branch to succeed him.

The Hands of the Cause of God must elect from their own number nine persons that shall at all times be occupied in the important services in the work of the guardian of the Cause of God. The election of these nine must be carried either unanimously or by majority from the company of the Hands of the Cause of God and these, whether unanimously or by a majority vote, must give their assent to the choice of the one whom the guardian of the Cause of God hath chosen as his successor. This assent must be given in such wise as the assenting and dissenting voices may not be distinguished (i.e., secret ballot).

- 76.7 The personal views of any individual regarding the above statement, no matter how learned, cannot compare with the Guardian’s infallible understanding of the passage. Shoghi Effendi, who faithfully adhered to the wishes of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá throughout his ministry, would

never have been careless in a matter so essential to the integrity of the Faith as the question of the appointment of his successor. It is unthinkable that he would appoint someone to succeed him who did not possess the qualifications laid down by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will. It is equally untenable to suggest that he would do so in a manner which deviated from the explicit requirements in that same document, which included the affirmation of his choice by nine designated Hands of the Cause of God, so that "differences" would "not arise after his passing." How perverse the suggestion of the violators of the Covenant that Shoghi Effendi would ignore the Master's instructions and make a veiled and indirect appointment of his successor! Rather should the fact that Shoghi Effendi did not name a successor be seen as a sign of his meticulous adherence to every word of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and an indication of his conclusion that there was no qualified individual whom he could appoint.

76.8 Therefore, it should be clear to every steadfast follower of Bahá'u'lláh that the end of the line of Guardians was not the result of any decision or action taken by the Hands of the Cause of God following the sudden passing of Shoghi Effendi. The line was brought to a close when, compelled by existing circumstances and the strict provisions of the Will, Shoghi Effendi did not name a successor. To entertain the possibility that it may one day be re-established is futile. 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote that "ere the expiration of a thousand years, no one has the right to utter a single word, even to claim the station of Guardianship." And in the same passage He exhorted the friends, "Should there be differences of opinion, the Supreme House of Justice would immediately resolve the problems." The Universal House of Justice, soon after its formation, stated that it "finds that there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi."

76.9 While the line of Guardians has ended, the Covenant is preserved. The vast body of interpretations of Shoghi Effendi informs the decisions of the Universal House of Justice as the Faith continues its onward march. The unity of the Faith is safeguarded, and the realization of Bahá'u'lláh's great purpose for humanity assured. "The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation," Bahá'u'lláh has stated. "Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure."



76.10 With reference to the specific questions raised in the letter we have received, one concerns the meaning of the designation “Aghṣán”, as found in the Writings. While in some cases, as affirmed by the Guardian, the term applies specifically to Bahá’u’lláh’s sons, at other times it is used more broadly to include His male descendants. For example, in His Will and Testament ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to Shoghi Effendi as “the chosen branch”. The reference to Shoghi Effendi as Ghuṣn here—the singular form of Aghṣán—follows the usage of Bahá’u’lláh in relation to the titles He gave His sons, that is, the Most Great Branch, the Greater Branch, and the Purest Branch. A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi explains that the word Aghṣán “refers to Bahá’u’lláh’s descendants”; another describes Hussein Rabbani, the Guardian’s brother, as “the grandchild of the Master, an Afnán and Aghṣán mentioned in the Will and Testament of the Master.” It is evident, then, that the designation Aghṣán, or Ghuṣn, includes Shoghi Effendi and the other male descendants of Bahá’u’lláh.

76.11 If, at any time, male descendants of Bahá’u’lláh appear who are faithful to the Covenant, it would nevertheless not be possible for any of them to occupy the office of Guardian, for, as already explained, in the absence of appointment by Shoghi Effendi, they cannot claim the station of Guardianship and there is no way for one to be named to it by an act of the House of Justice.



76.12 Another query concerns the establishment of the Universal House of Justice. Specifically, the question has been asked whether the functioning of an “officially recognized” International Bahá’í Court in the Holy Land, mentioned by Shoghi Effendi, was an essential preliminary step in the evolution of the Universal House of Justice.

76.13 As you are no doubt aware, Shoghi Effendi explained that “‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Himself, in one of His earliest Tablets, contemplated the possibility of the formation of the Universal House of Justice in His own lifetime.” The Master described the requirements necessary for its formation, which did not include the establishment of a religious court:

The Supreme House of Justice should be elected according to the system followed in the election of the parliaments of Europe. And when the

countries would be guided the Houses of Justice of the various countries would elect the Supreme House of Justice.

At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme House of Justice.

The establishment of that House is not dependent upon the conversion of all the nations of the world. For example, if conditions were favourable and no disturbances would be caused, the friends in Persia would elect their representatives, and likewise the friends in America, in India, and other areas would also elect their representatives, and these would elect a House of Justice. That House of Justice would be the Supreme House of Justice. That is all.

76.14 Over the thirty-six years of his ministry, as he guided the Bahá'í world, striving to lay the foundations of the Administrative Order, Shoghi Effendi outlined specific developmental steps to be taken, which were intended to lead to the eventual establishment of the Universal House of Justice. The accomplishment of some depended largely on the exertions of the believers themselves—an increase in the number of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies, the appointment of the International Bahá'í Council and its evolution into an elected body. Others, however, were subject to the forces operating in society and, no matter what the efforts made by the Bahá'í community, could not be accomplished.

76.15 In 1929, for instance, the *Guardian* stated, “given favorable circumstances, under which the Bahá'ís of Persia and of the adjoining countries under Soviet rule may be enabled to elect their national representatives ... the only remaining obstacle in the way of the definite formation of the International House of Justice will have been removed.” Later, following the expulsion of Bahá'ís from Russia by the authorities, a letter written on his behalf explained, “At the time he referred to Russia there were Bahá'ís there, now the Community has practically ceased to exist; therefore the formation of the International House of Justice cannot depend on a Russian National Spiritual Assembly.”

76.16 In the same way, goals were specified by Shoghi Effendi for the establishment of Bahá'í courts, including national courts in certain countries in Asia and, as a step in the development of the International Bahá'í Council, the precursor to the Universal House of Justice, a court in the Holy Land. Recognition by the Egyptian government of the National Spiritual

Assembly as an independent Bahá'í court was sought as far back as 1929. Over time, changing conditions rendered the formation of such religious courts impossible. As the Hands of the Cause of God commented in 1959 in calling for the election of the International Bahá'í Council and the eventual establishment of the House of Justice,

We wish to assure the believers that every effort will be made to establish a Bahá'í Court in the Holy Land prior to the date set for this election. We should however bear in mind that the Guardian himself clearly indicated this goal, due to the strong trend towards the secularization of Religious Courts in this part of the world, might not be achieved.



76.17 Yet another question that has been raised concerns the discharge by the Universal House of Justice of certain functions previously performed by the Guardian. With regard to Ḥuqúqu'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained that "Disposition of the Ḥuqúq, wholly or partly, is permissible, but this should be done by permission of the authority in the Cause to whom all must turn." Likewise, the expulsion of Covenant-breakers is an obligation exercised by the Head of the Faith in the context of the duty to protect the Cause from those who would seek to undermine its unity. Shoghi Effendi, it is well known, was obliged to expel Covenant-breakers from the Faith at different points throughout his ministry, both before and after the appointment of the Hands of the Cause of God. This responsibility now falls on the Universal House of Justice, as the centre of authority to whom all must turn. The current procedures followed in this respect are outlined in the statement "The Institution of the Counsellors".

76.18 In this connection it should be noted that after the passing of Shoghi Effendi, although overwhelmed with grief, the Bahá'í world maintained its unity during the tenuous period between his ministry and the election of the Universal House of Justice. The sole challenge to its integrity appeared some two years after his death when Charles Mason Remey, who was at that time one of the Hands of the Cause, laid claim to the Guardianship. As you are aware, Remey asserted that his appointment in 1951 as president of the nascent International Bahá'í Council meant that he should automatically assume the position of head of the Universal House of Justice and was, therefore, the second Guardian.

76.19 The absurdity of Remey's claim is obvious and requires little elaboration. In 1957, he was among the Hands of the Cause who gathered in the Holy Land to consider what course of action should be taken following the unexpected passing of the Guardian. He personally affirmed that Shoghi Effendi had appointed no successor, signing a document issued unanimously by the Hands to this effect. As signatory to yet another such document, he agreed that the entire body of the Hands of the Cause would determine when and how the evolution of the International Bahá'í Council would culminate in the election of the House of Justice. For two years, as one of the nine Hands designated to serve in the Holy Land, he participated in the consultations that guided the development of the Bahá'í community. Then, without notice or discussion with his fellow Hands, he claimed the station of Guardianship, lacking explicit appointment by Shoghi Effendi as specified in the Will and Testament and in direct violation of the command of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that no one could make such a claim. Exercising the authority conferred on them in accordance with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will, the Hands of the Cause expelled him from the Faith as a Covenant-breaker.



76.20 In matters related to the Covenant, the friends must be firm and steadfast; they should be wary, lest the arguments put forward by those who sow seeds of doubt become the cause for confusion or lead to disputation and disunity. Should questions arise that cannot be resolved, they should be placed immediately before the Universal House of Justice. The friends must be especially careful to avoid being enticed by the whisperings of the remnants of the Covenant-breakers and their supporters, who seek to shake the believers' faith. Whereas in the past the violators of the Covenant sought to undermine the authority of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, today they challenge the Universal House of Justice. Of particular concern are those who, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá warns, "assert their firmness and steadfastness in the Covenant but when they come across responsive ears they secretly sow the seeds of suspicion."

76.21 Remey's small band of associates, bedevilled by half a century of infighting among competing factions, have had negligible effect on the progress of the Faith. The flurry caused by their actions does nothing more than shake a few lifeless twigs and leaves from the tree of the Cause. Those who are naïve, those who are not deepened in the Teachings or not firm in the

Covenant, those who are controlled by their egos and lust for leadership can be misled and fall away. The friends are urged to protect themselves and their community by adhering strictly to the emphatic exhortations repeated throughout the Sacred Texts. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states,

Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself. Whoso doth deviate therefrom is verily of them that love discord, hath shown forth malice and turned away from the Lord of the Covenant. By this House is meant that Universal House of Justice which is to be elected from all countries, that is from those parts in the East and West where the loved ones are to be found, after the manner of the customary elections in Western countries such as those of England...

And now, one of the greatest and most fundamental principles of the Cause of God is to shun and avoid entirely the Covenant-breakers, for they will utterly destroy the Cause of God, exterminate His Law and render of no account all efforts exerted in the past. O friends! It behooveth you to call to mind with tenderness the trials of His Holiness, the Exalted One, and show your fidelity to the Ever-Blest Beauty. The utmost endeavour must be exerted lest all these woes, trials and afflictions, all this pure and sacred blood that hath been shed so profusely in the Path of God, may prove to be in vain...

O ye beloved of the Lord! Strive with all your heart to shield the Cause of God from the onslaught of the insincere, for souls such as these cause the straight to become crooked and all benevolent efforts to produce contrary results.

- 76.22 The believers in the Cradle of the Faith, who have withstood for more than a century the onslaught of government and clergy, who triumphed over the perils posed by the rebellions of Azal and Muḥammad-‘Alí, who severed themselves from those who opposed Shoghi Effendi, will easily discount the spurious and ridiculous arguments of those few individuals who vie among themselves to exploit Remey’s deviation as a pretext for attracting a handful of personal followers. Be assured of our supplications at the Holy Threshold on behalf of the beloved friends everywhere in that sacred land.

18 February 2008

77.1 In general, the House of Justice wishes to preserve the widest possible latitude for the friends to explore the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and to share their individual understanding of the Teachings. Yet it must be remembered that, with regard to deductions drawn from the Texts, the Master clearly states:

...the deductions and conclusions of individual learned men have no authority, unless they are endorsed by the House of Justice. The difference is precisely this, that from the conclusions and endorsements of the body of the House of Justice whose members are elected by and known to the worldwide Bahá'í community, no differences will arise; whereas the conclusions of individual divines and scholars would definitely lead to differences, and result in schism, division, and dispersion. The oneness of the Word would be destroyed, the unity of the Faith would disappear, and the edifice of the Faith of God would be shaken.

77.2 The Universal House of Justice does not intend at this time to elaborate further on previous explanations given of its duties and powers. That the House of Justice itself does not find it necessary to do so should alert the friends as to the unwisdom of their attempting to define so precisely its sphere of action. Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that, while there are explicit passages in the authoritative texts that make reference to the infallibility of the House of Justice in the enactment of legislation, the argument that it is free from error only in this respect is untenable. Surely, the many emphatic statements found in the Writings, such as the following excerpt from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, should suffice to dismiss any claims of this kind:

The sacred and youthful branch, the guardian of the Cause of God as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God...

- 77.3 Apart from the question of infallibility, there is the matter of authority. A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi states: "It is not for individual believers to limit the sphere of the Guardian's authority, or to judge when they have to obey the Guardian and when they are free to reject his judgment. Such an attitude would evidently lead to confusion and to schism." In regard to the Universal House of Justice, the same understanding applies.
- 77.4 Infallibility is a profound spiritual concept inherent in the Bahá'í Writings. In meditating upon the relevant passages, the believers will naturally reach their own understanding of the subject. Individual opinions, however, should not be imposed on others, nor so promoted as to crystallize into doctrines not found in the explicit Text. When exchanging views about the Universal House of Justice—the body to which all things must be referred—the friends should exercise care lest they go to extremes, by either diminishing its station or assigning to it exaggerated attributes. What better admonition to heed in a matter of this nature than that given by the beloved Master, when some believers fell into disagreement about His own station:

These discussions will yield no result or benefit: we must set all such debates and controversies entirely aside—nay, we must consign them to oblivion and arise to accomplish that which is enjoined and required in this Day. These debates are mere words bereft of inner meaning; they are mere illusions and not reality.

That which is true and real is this: that we become united and agreed in our purpose and arise to flood this darksome world with light, to banish enmity and foreignness from among the children of men, to perfume and revive the world with the sanctified breezes of the character and conduct of the Abhá Beauty, to cast the light of divine guidance upon East and West, to raise the tabernacle of the love of God and gather all people under its sheltering shadow, to confer peace and composure upon every soul beneath the shade of the blessed Tree, to show forth such love as to astonish the enemy, to turn ravenous and bloodthirsty wolves into the gazelles of the meadows of the love of God, to cause the oppressor to taste the sweet savour of meekness, to teach them that kill the submission and acquiescence of those that suffer themselves to be killed, to spread abroad the verses of the one true God, to extol the virtues and perfections of the all-glorious Lord, to raise to the highest heaven the cry of "O Thou the Glory of Glories!", and to cause the call

of “The earth will shine with the light of her Lord!”ⁱ to reach the ears of the denizens of His Kingdom.

- 77.5 The House of Justice appeals to the friends not to become embroiled in the kind of fruitless theological discussions that caused conflict and contention in past dispensations, lest they lose sight of their responsibility to promulgate the oneness of humanity and of the role of the Covenant established by Bahá'u'lláh in uniting minds, hearts, and souls.

7 April 2008, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 78 It is heartening to note that the friends are approaching the study of the messages of the Universal House of Justice related to the Plan with such diligence. The level of discussion generated as they strive to put into practice the guidance received, and to learn from experience, is impressive. We cannot help noticing, however, that achievements tend to be more enduring in those regions where the friends strive to understand the totality of the vision conveyed in the messages, while difficulties often arise when phrases and sentences are taken out of context and viewed as isolated fragments. The institutions and agencies of the Faith should help the believers to analyse but not reduce, to ponder meaning but not dwell on words, to identify distinct areas of action but not compartmentalize. We realize that this is no small task. Society speaks more and more in slogans. We hope that the habits the friends are forming in study circles to work with full and complex thoughts and to achieve understanding will be extended to various spheres of activity.

28 December 2010

- 79 As has become progressively apparent, the organic process of growth outlined by the House of Justice in recent Plans is reaching higher levels of complexity, especially in those clusters where the number of active participants has increased significantly. The transformation of communities under way across the globe in cluster after cluster, while still in its early stages, touches upon the most fundamental of social and cultural forces, currents, and aspirations. This growth process involves a coherent and systematic pattern of activity focused upon community building and includes the multiplication of study circles and institute campaigns, the education of children, the spiritual empowerment of junior youth, individual and

i Qur'án 39:69.

collective teaching efforts, visits to the homes of believers and their friends, a cultivation of collective devotional life, social action, greater involvement in the discourses of society, as well as many other elements that enhance the capacity of individuals, institutions, and the community—the three protagonists of the Plan. Pivotal to this pattern of activity is the development of human resources through the training institute, with a sequence of courses that reinforce in the participants a posture of learning by which understanding continues to expand as they carry out acts of service of increasing complexity. This educational process nurtures a thirst for the Word of God, not only fostering an enduring habit of study and reflection on that wellspring of all progress but also enabling the friends to apply the Teachings in their own lives and in the burgeoning life of the community. In its communications with the Bahá'í world, the House of Justice has described and elucidated these unfolding developments, and the Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies, the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, as well as regional and local institutions, have laboured shoulder to shoulder with the believers who are striving to understand and respond to this guidance. As the friends, including those who do not wish to study the courses of the institute, embrace the guidance of the House of Justice in its entirety and, with love and a true Bahá'í spirit, rally around their institutions, they find that questions they may have are resolved.

18 January 2013, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 80 As you are no doubt aware, the Bahá'í teachings stress both the immutability of Bahá'u'lláh's laws and the flexibility associated with their application. Bahá'u'lláh has given the House of Justice the responsibility to supplement and apply His laws, and He states that its Ministers "may act according to the needs and requirements of the time."

1 December 2013, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 81 In striving to overcome their difficulties and create new patterns of action, the friends must, whether as individuals or members of institutions, be mindful of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's admonition about the importance of love and fellowship and His assurance that "it is in unity the truth will be revealed and the wrong made right". The system that Bahá'u'lláh has brought into the world will take decades and centuries to unfold, attaining ever-increasing levels of complexity, effectiveness, and influence. Shoghi Effendi explained that "we must trust to time, and the guidance of God's Universal House of Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions and

implications.” He also warned that “the promised glories of the Sovereignty which the Bahá'í teachings foreshadow, can be revealed only in the fullness of time”.

17 February 2014, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 82 Bahá'í administration is, of course, an integral part of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Accordingly, then, it is the continuing task of His loved ones to deepen their appreciation of the principles on which it is founded and faithfully observe them in their actions. The institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, the Guardian asserts, act as channels through which the promised blessings of Bahá'u'lláh may flow. They serve “to further the interests, to co-ordinate the activities, to apply the principles, to embody the ideals and execute the purpose of the Bahá'í Faith” and function “not only as the nucleus but the very pattern of the New World Order”.

9 July 2015, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 83.1 The House of Justice has asked us to assure you that it appreciates the deep concern you have about its membership being confined to men as well as your commitment to the principle of the equality of the sexes. However, as the House of Justice has previously explained, “the important point for Bahá'ís to remember is that in the face of the categorical pronouncements in Bahá'í Scripture establishing the equality of men and women, the ineligibility of women for membership of the Universal House of Justice does not constitute evidence of the superiority of men over women.” Regarding the membership of the Universal House of Justice, the beloved Guardian explained in a letter dated 14 December 1940 written on his behalf: “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.” That we cannot currently understand the wisdom of this limitation—a wisdom that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá emphatically promised would eventually become clear—does not mean that the wisdom does not exist or will not eventually become known.

- 83.2 Having accepted the claim of Bahá'u'lláh to be a Manifestation of God and His Teachings to be statements of divine truth, believers may rest assured that the stipulation in the Writings regarding the membership of the Universal House of Justice is not at variance with the principle of the equality of men and women that those same Writings proclaim. As Shoghi Effendi has stated in this connection ... “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.”ⁱ

16 February 2016, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 84 A careful reading of the Bahá’í writings and the guidance of the House of Justice can clarify how two matters that appear to be in tension with one another are coherent once the concepts and principles that connect them are understood. Particular circumstances in a locality, timeliness, and the periodic need for focus also have a bearing on such issues.

27 April 2017, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 85.1 Just as the Guardian has received the assurance of divine guidance and protection in fulfilling his responsibilities, so too the Universal House of Justice is provided this assurance in the Sacred Text for the discharge of its responsibilities. It is this guidance, rather than any capacity for authoritative interpretation, that ensures the conformity of its decisions with the meaning of the Sacred Text...

- 85.2 ...to fulfil such divinely appointed responsibilities and to reach its divinely guided conclusions on what Bahá’ís must do when the meaning of the Book is not explicit, the Universal House of Justice studies carefully and exhaustively both the Sacred Texts and the writings of Shoghi Effendi on a subject and then comes to a determination.

19 March 2018, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 86.1 Your letter inquiring about certain issues being discussed among the friends pertaining to the infallibility of the Universal House of Justice was received...

- 86.2 As you are surely aware, there are many statements in the Bahá’í writings that set out in broad and emphatic terms the assurance of divine guidance and protection provided to the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice and describe conferred infallibility in these terms. Among these statements are the following from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

The sacred and youthful branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty,

i See extract 15.

under the shelter and unerring guidance of the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God...



Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself.



Should that House of Justice decide, either unanimously or by a majority, upon a matter that is not explicitly recorded in the Book, that decision and command will be guarded from error. Now, the members of the House of Justice are not essentially infallible as individuals, but the body of the House of Justice is under the protection and unerring guidance of God: This is called conferred infallibility.



Let it not be imagined that the House of Justice will take any decision according to its own concepts and opinions. God forbid! The Supreme House of Justice will take decisions and establish laws through the inspiration and confirmation of the Holy Spirit, because it is in the safekeeping and under the shelter and protection of the Ancient Beauty, and obedience to its decisions is a bounden and essential duty and an absolute obligation, and there is no escape for anyone.

Say, O people: Verily the Supreme House of Justice is under the wings of your Lord, the Compassionate, the All-Merciful, that is, under His protection, His care, and His shelter; for He has commanded the firm believers to obey that blessed, sanctified and all-subduing body, whose sovereignty is divinely ordained and of the Kingdom of Heaven and whose laws are inspired and spiritual.

Moreover, Shoghi Effendi states:

In the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith, in the enactment of the legislation necessary to supplement the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the members of the Universal House of Justice, it should be borne in mind, are not, as Bahá'u'lláh's utterances clearly imply, responsible to those whom they represent, nor are they allowed to be governed by the feelings, the general opinion, and even the convictions of the mass of the faithful, or of those who directly elect them. They are to follow, in a prayerful attitude, the dictates and promptings of their conscience. They may, indeed they must, acquaint themselves with the conditions prevailing among the community, must weigh dispassionately in their minds the merits of any case presented for their consideration, but must reserve for themselves the right of an unfettered decision. "God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth," is Bahá'u'lláh's incontrovertible assurance. They, and not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them, have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation.

86.3 Beyond these and other such quotations, a number of passages from the writings describe the range of responsibilities invested in the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice. First, it is evident that each has a separate and distinct sphere. As Shoghi Effendi explains in "The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh", "it is made indubitably clear and evident that the Guardian of the Faith has been made the Interpreter of the Word and that the Universal House of Justice has been invested with the function of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the teachings." Thus, the Universal House of Justice does not engage in interpretation of the Text, and the Guardian did not enact legislation, although in some instances, as Head of the Faith, he made certain decisions to guide the actions of the friends until such time as the Universal House of Justice would be established.

86.4 While interpretation and legislation are the exclusive spheres, respectively, of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice, these functions in no way represent the full extent of their powers and responsibilities as set forth in the writings. For example, about these two institutions Shoghi Effendi writes: "Their common, their fundamental object is to insure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the

Source of our Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings. Acting in conjunction with each other these two inseparable institutions administer its affairs, coördinate its activities, promote its interests, execute its laws and defend its subsidiary institutions.” Further, concerning the Universal House of Justice, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states in His Will and Testament, “By this body all the difficult problems are to be resolved...” And He explains that it is incumbent upon the Universal House of Justice to deliberate upon “all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book.”

86.5 In response to questions about the scope of the Guardian’s infallibility, a letter written on his behalf explains: “The infallibility of the Guardian is confined to matters which are related strictly to the Cause and interpretation of the teachings; he is not an infallible authority on other subjects, such as economics, science, etc.” Another such letter states: “The Guardian’s infallibility covers interpretation of the revealed word, and its application. Likewise any instructions he may issue having to do with the protection of the Faith, or its well-being, must be closely obeyed, as he is infallible in the protection of the Faith. He is assured the guidance of both Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb, as the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá clearly reveals.” Thus, while there were indeed limits to his conferred infallibility, it was not confined merely to authoritative interpretation of the Bahá’í Writings but extended to the range of his responsibilities as Guardian and Head of the Faith. “It is not for individual believers to limit the sphere of the Guardian’s authority, or to judge when they have to obey the Guardian and when they are free to reject his judgement. Such an attitude would evidently lead to confusion and to schism”, yet another letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi states. These passages about the Guardian’s conferred infallibility and authority can also serve to assist believers in understanding the scope of the conferred infallibility and authority of the Universal House of Justice.

86.6 Finally, you ask whether it is possible to enact laws within the framework of the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh without a thorough and accurate understanding of the meaning of each one of the Writings. In the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, there is no reference to the nature and extent of the information to which the Universal House of Justice should have access when making its decisions. The House of Justice itself determines what information it needs to reach a decision. Before legislating or deciding upon any vital matter, it studies carefully and exhaustively both the Sacred

Texts and the writings of Shoghi Effendi on the subject. It also consults the views of experts as needed. The concept of conferred infallibility of the Universal House of Justice does not rest upon the power of authoritative interpretation nor access to perfect knowledge and understanding—it is an unqualified assurance of divine guidance and protection from error as described in the Bahá'í writings.

86.7 A discussion on the concept of conferred infallibility that centers on the abundant guidance set forth in the Bahá'í writings and from the Universal House of Justice can contribute to firmness and faith. But the friends cannot be naïve or vacillate when it comes to a matter so fundamental to the protection of the Cause and the integrity of the teachings as the provisions of the Covenant. Those who oppose the Faith and regrettably, in a few instances, believers who wish to advance their own personal views may use such discussions as an opportunity to weaken the confidence of Bahá'ís in the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. During the ministry of the Guardian, would his lack of omniscience have been grounds for the friends to question his protective action to expel someone from the Faith? Were the provisions of the Ten Year Crusade subject to the preferences of the generality of the friends? Were the temporary administrative measures he enacted, pending the formation of the Universal House of Justice, open to debate among individuals or institutions? Without the assurances of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá to rely upon a designated and authoritative center, any individual could have insisted upon the correctness of his or her views on any matter, and the Faith would have been mired in endless quarrelling, chaos, and division.

86.8 Thus, perhaps more important for Bahá'ís than a common understanding of the meaning of conferred infallibility is a common understanding of its purpose and the implications for how they should conduct themselves. The Covenant establishes a center to which all Bahá'ís turn, a center which is assured divine guidance and protection, and which ensures the continuity of the divinely-appointed authority that flows from the Source of the Faith, safeguards the unity of its followers, and maintains the integrity and flexibility of its teachings. Shoghi Effendi explains that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have “in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the requirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible

inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world.” This is the guarantee that the purpose of Bahá'u'lláh will ultimately be realized. “For nothing short of the explicit directions of their Book, and the surprisingly emphatic language with which they have clothed the provisions of their Will,” Shoghi Effendi explains, “could possibly safeguard the Faith for which they have both so gloriously labored all their lives. Nothing short of this could protect it from the heresies and calumnies with which denominations, peoples, and governments have endeavored, and will, with increasing vigor, endeavor to assail it in future.” In a statement in defence of the Covenant, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá indicates:

Hath the Blessed Beauty instituted this Covenant and Testament in order to exact obedience from all, or to bring about disobedience? If the latter is intended, then we have nothing to say; but if obedience and compliance are the goal, then wavering will lead to utter loss, and disobedience and waywardness are grievous error.

Again He states:

Now one must either say that the Blessed Beauty erred and led the people astray, for He directed them to obey someone who ought not to have been obeyed, or else say that the least deviation from the Covenant and the Testament entail deprivation from the bounties of Him Who is the Luminary of the world. Of these two alternatives, one must be true; there is no third.

86.9 It is evident that the purpose of the Covenant, the purpose of the divine guidance and protection vouchsafed to the Universal House of Justice, the purpose of the clear and emphatic language in which the assurance of this guidance is given, are all to establish and preserve the unity of the Faith. Without such a Covenant, as in past dispensations, everyone would insist upon the correctness of their own view, the Faith of God would be splintered, and the divine purpose—the unity of humanity—would be impossible to achieve.

86.10 The friends would do well to ponder “this unique, this wondrous System” Bahá'u'lláh has bequeathed to the world. Shoghi Effendi explains: “An exact and thorough comprehension of so vast a system, so sublime a revelation, so sacred a trust, is for obvious reasons beyond the reach and

ken of our finite minds”; yet, he assures us: “We can, however, and it is our bounden duty to seek to derive fresh inspiration and added sustenance as we labor for the propagation of His Faith through a clearer apprehension of the truths it enshrines and the principles on which it is based.” To attempt to precisely define the workings of conferred infallibility, to attribute exaggerated powers to the Universal House of Justice such as omniscience or even authoritative interpretation, or to insist that fallible human beings can use their own limited powers of reason to test the validity of divinely guided decisions and determine whether to challenge them would be futile and, ultimately, harmful. Rather, the friends are to strive to understand the guidance provided by the Universal House of Justice and thoughtfully apply it. They are free to share observations, information, or questions with the Universal House of Justice. But they should not allow themselves to be caught up in the divisive practices and intractable disputes that consumed religion in past dispensations. The collective interests of the Faith are fostered through consultation and cooperation, not conflict and contention.

18 May 2018, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 87 The House of Justice acknowledges your thoughtful and heartfelt comments on the relationship between the principle of the equality of the sexes and the ineligibility of women to serve on the House of Justice. As you are aware, Bahá'u'lláh Himself established the principle of the equality of men and women. Just as He set forth this principle, He also instructed, as confirmed in the authoritative statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, that the membership of the House of Justice be confined to men. In your letter, you explore various factors and conclude you cannot accept “the reasons thus far offered”. However, no reason has been offered in the Bahá'í writings, and the House of Justice has not provided one. In the Bahá'í writings, there is only reference to a “wisdom” that “will be gradually unfolded to the eyes of the world”. Of course, that we cannot currently understand the wisdom of the limitation does not mean that the wisdom does not exist or will not eventually become known. Until then, because we as Bahá'ís recognize Bahá'u'lláh as the Manifestation of God for this Day and place our faith in Him as the Divine Physician who will remedy the problem of the inequality of the sexes, we acknowledge the principle that “He doeth whatsoever He willeth”.

18 June 2019, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

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