



Compilations on Bahá'í Life



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ISBN 978-1-925320-15-2

Revised September 2023

Distributed by
Bahá'í Distribution Services
173 Mona Vale Road
Ingleside NSW 2101

bds@bahai.org.au
www.bahaibooks.com.au

Body text typeset in 10.5/14pt Minion 3
Other text typeset in Vincenza

CONTENTS

Bahá'í Education	7
Chaste & Holy Life	73
The Bahá'í Standard	75
A Chaste and Holy Life	79
The Power of Example	90
Consultation	95
Covenant	115
A Covenant	117
The Greater Covenant	119
The Lesser Covenant	121
The Lesser Covenant	125
Response to the Lesser Covenant	131
The Power of the Covenant	133
Crisis & Victory	137
“The hosts of the world ... launching their assault”	139
“The resistless march of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh”	157
“The security of our precious Faith”	174
Index (Crisis & Victory)	189
Deepening our Knowledge of the Faith	193
Excellence In all Things	239

Family Life	259
Preservation of the Bond between Husband and Wife	261
Parent-Child Relationships and Responsibilities.....	279
Enhancing Family Life.....	300
Fire & Light.....	315
Light & Mercy.....	359
Mental Health.....	361
Tests and Difficulties	366
Marriages.....	373
The Cause of Unity	375
Creating Families that Illuminate the World.....	382
The Ideal Milieu for Learning the Principles of Consultation.....	388
Addressing Challenges.....	396
Prayers.....	422
Music.....	429
Obligatory Prayer & Fasting.....	441
Prayers by Bahá'u'lláh for the Fast.....	453
Power of Divine Assistance.....	463
Prayer & Devotional Life	487
The Power of Prayer	489
Communion with God.....	492
The Spirit and Form of Prayer.....	496
The Role of Meditation.....	499
Prayer, Meditation and Action	502
Obligatory Prayer.....	504
The Devotional Character of the Community	508
Further Considerations.....	512
Additional Passages.....	516

Prayer & Meditation	521
Study of the Bahá'í Faith.....	543
7 April 1999	545
Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith	549
Trustworthiness.....	589

BAHÁ'Í EDUCATION

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

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled 1991

The newly born babe of that Day excels the wisest and most venerable men of this time, and the lowliest and most unlearned of that period shall surpass in understanding the most erudite and accomplished divines of this age...

The Báb, quoted in The Dawn-Breakers: Nabíl's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation, trans. and ed. Shoghi Effendi

Bahá'í Education

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of guiding mankind to the straight Path of Truth. The purpose underlying Their revelation hath been to educate all men, that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High.

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

- 2 We have decreed, O people, that the highest and last end of all learning be the recognition of Him Who is the Object of all knowledge...

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

- 3 Consider ... the revelation of the light of the Name of God, the Educator. Behold, how in all things the evidences of such a revelation are manifest, how the betterment of all beings dependeth upon it. This education is of two kinds. The one is universal. Its influence pervadeth all things and sustaineth them. It is for this reason that God hath assumed the title, "Lord of all worlds." The other is confined to them that have come under the shadow of this Name, and sought the shelter of this most mighty Revelation. They, however, that have failed to seek this shelter, have deprived themselves of this privilege, and are powerless to benefit from the spiritual sustenance that hath been sent down through the heavenly grace of this Most Great Name. How great the gulf fixed between the one and the other!

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

- 4 Man is the supreme Talisman. Lack of a proper education hath, however, deprived him of that which he doth inherently possess. Through a word proceeding out of the mouth of God he was called into being; by one word more he was guided to recognize the Source of his education; by yet another word his station and destiny were safeguarded. The Great Being

saith: Regard man as a mine rich in gems of inestimable value. Education can, alone, cause it to reveal its treasures, and enable mankind to benefit therefrom.

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

- 5 Bend your minds and wills to the education of the peoples and kindreds of the earth, that haply the dissensions that divide it may, through the power of the Most Great Name, be blotted out from its face, and all mankind become the upholders of one Order, and the inhabitants of one City.

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

- 6 We prescribe unto all men that which will lead to the exaltation of the Word of God amongst His servants, and likewise, to the advancement of the world of being and the uplift of souls. To this end, the greatest means is education of the child. To this must each and all hold fast. We have verily laid this charge upon you in manifold Tablets as well as in My Most Holy Book. Well is it with him who deferreth thereto.

We ask of God that He will assist each and every one to obey this inescapable command that hath appeared and been caused to descend through the Pen of the Ancient of Days.

From a Tablet

- 7 Unto every father hath been enjoined the instruction of his son and daughter in the art of reading and writing and in all that hath been laid down in the Holy Tablet. He that putteth away that which is commanded unto him, the Trustees are then to take from him that which is required for their instruction, if he be wealthy, and if not the matter devolveth upon the House of Justice. Verily, have We made it a shelter for the poor and needy. He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My Glory, My loving kindness, My Mercy, that have compassed the world.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, note no. 76

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

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of the World

- 9 Strain every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections, for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both within and without. It is not desirable that a man be left without knowledge or skills, for he is then but a barren tree. Then, so much as capacity and capability allow, ye needs must deck the tree of being with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception and eloquent speech.

From a Tablet

- 10 Man is even as steel, the essence of which is hidden: through admonition and explanation, good counsel and education, that essence will be brought to light. If, however, he be allowed to remain in his original condition, the corrosion of lusts and appetites will effectively destroy him.

From a Tablet

- 11 There are many things which will, if neglected, be wasted, and come to nothing. How often in this world do we see a child who has lost his parents and who, unless attention be devoted to his education and training, can produce no fruit. And better off dead than alive is he who produceth no fruit.

From a Tablet

- 12 It is the bounden duty of parents to rear their children to be staunch in faith, the reason being that a child who removeth himself from the religion of God will not act in such a way as to win the good pleasure of his parents and his Lord. For every praiseworthy deed is born out of the light of religion, and lacking this supreme bestowal the child will not turn away from any evil, nor will he draw nigh unto any good.

From a Tablet

- 13 The fear of God hath ever been the prime factor in the education of His creatures. Well is it with them that have attained thereunto!

Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

- 14 That which is of paramount importance for the children, that which must precede all else, is to teach them the oneness of God and the laws of God. For lacking this, the fear of God cannot be inculcated, and lacking the fear of God an infinity of odious and abominable actions will spring up, and sentiments will be uttered that transgress all bounds...

The parents must exert every effort to rear their offspring to be religious, for should the children not attain this greatest of adornments, they will not obey their parents, which in a certain sense means that they will not obey God. Indeed, such children will show no consideration to anyone, and will do exactly as they please.

From a Tablet

- 15 ...Schools must first train the children in the principles of religion, so that the Promise and the Threat recorded in the Books of God may prevent them from the things forbidden and adorn them with the mantle of the commandments; but this in such a measure that it may not injure the children by resulting in ignorant fanaticism and bigotry.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Words of Paradise

- 16 ...Arts, crafts and sciences uplift the world of being, and are conducive to its exaltation. Knowledge is as wings to man's life, and a ladder for his ascent. Its acquisition is incumbent upon everyone. The knowledge of such sciences, however, should be acquired as can profit the peoples of the earth, and not those which begin with words and end with words...

In truth, knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him. Happy the man that cleaveth unto it, and woe betide the heedless.

Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

- 17 ...The learned of the day must direct the people to acquire those branches of knowledge which are of use, that both the learned themselves and the generality of mankind may derive benefits therefrom. Such academic pursuits as begin and end in words alone have never been and will never be of any worth. The majority of Persia's learned doctors devote all their lives to the study of a philosophy the ultimate yield of which is nothing but words.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Maqṣúd

- 18 It is incumbent upon the children to exert themselves to the utmost in acquiring the art of reading and writing ... Writing skills that will provide for urgent needs will be enough for some; and then it is better and more fitting that they should spend their time in studying those branches of knowledge which are of use.

As for what the Supreme Pen hath previously set down, the reason is that in every art and skill, God loveth the highest perfection.

From a Tablet

- 19 In the treasures of the knowledge of God there lieth concealed a knowledge which, when applied, will largely, though not wholly, eliminate fear. This knowledge, however, should be taught from childhood, as it will greatly aid in its elimination.

Epistle to the Son of the Wolfⁱ

- 20 It beseemeth ... the ... officials of the Government to convene a gathering and choose one of the divers languages, and likewise one of the existing scripts, or else to create a new language and a new scripts or else to create a new language and a new script to be taught children in schools throughout the world. They would, in this way, be acquiring only two languages, one their own native tongue, the other the language in which all the peoples of the world would converse. Were men to take fast hold on that which hath been mentioned, the whole earth would come to be regarded as one country, and the people would be relieved and freed from the necessity of acquiring and teaching different languages...

Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

- 21 Teach ye your children the verses that have been divinely revealed, that they may recite them in most melodious voices. This is what hath been set down in His mighty Book.

From a Tablet

- 22 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.

Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 150

- 23 At the outset of every endeavor, it is incumbent to look to the end of it. Of all the arts and sciences, set the children to studying those which will result in

i Regarding this passage, an extract from a letter dated 5 January 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer states: "Unfortunately it would seem that the knowledge 'which could largely eliminate fear' has not been disclosed or identified by Bahá'u'lláh; so we do not know what it is".

This extract is also published in *Bahá'í News*, no. 210 (August 1948), p. 3.

advantage to man, will ensure his progress and elevate his rank. Thus the noisome odors of lawlessness will be dispelled, and thus through the high endeavors of the nation's leaders, all will live cradled, secure and in peace ...

The Great Being saith: The man of consummate learning and the sage endowed with penetrating wisdom are the two eyes to the body of mankind. God willing, the earth shall never be deprived of these two greatest gifts...

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Tablet of Maqṣúd

- 24 As to the children: We have directed that in the beginning they should be trained in the observances and laws of religion; and thereafter, in such branches of knowledge as are of benefit, and in commercial pursuits that are distinguished for integrity, and in deeds that will further the victory of God's Cause or will attract some outcome which will draw the believer closer to his Lord.

We beg of God to assist the children of His loved ones and adorn them with wisdom, good conduct, integrity and righteousness.

He, verily, is the Forgiving, the Clement.

From a Tablet

- 25 O Ḥusayn! O thou Preceptor!

From His Most Great Prison, the countenance of the Ancient of Days is turned towards thee, and He teacheth thee that which will draw thee nigh unto God, the Lord of mankind.

Blessed is that teacher who shall arise to instruct the children, and to guide the people into the pathways of God, the Bestower, the Well-Beloved.

From a Tablet

- 26 Blessed is that teacher who remaineth faithful to the Covenant of God, and occupieth himself with the education of children. For him hath the Supreme Pen inscribed that reward which is revealed in the Most Holy Book.

Blessed, blessed is he!

From a Tablet

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

27 O God, O Thou Who hast cast Thy splendour over the luminous realities of men, shedding upon them the resplendent lights of knowledge and guidance, and hast chosen them out of all created things for this supernal grace, and hast caused them to encompass all things, to understand their inmost essence, and to disclose their mysteries, bringing them forth out of darkness into the visible world! "He verily showeth His special mercy to whomsoever He will."ⁱ

O Lord, help Thou Thy loved ones to acquire knowledge and the sciences and arts, and to unravel the secrets that are treasured up in the inmost reality of all created beings. Make them to hear the hidden truths that are written and embedded in the heart of all that is. Make them to be ensigns of guidance amongst all creatures, and piercing rays of the mind shedding forth their light in this, the "first life"ⁱⁱ. Make them to be leaders unto Thee, guides unto Thy path, runners urging men on to Thy Kingdom.

Thou verily art the Powerful, the Protector, the Potent, the Defender, the Mighty, the Most Generous.

O Company of God! To each created thing, the Ancient Sovereignty hath portioned out its own perfection, its particular virtue and special excellence, so that each in its degree may become a symbol denoting the sublimity of the true Educator of humankind, and that each, even as a crystalline mirror, may tell of the grace and splendour of the Sun of Truth.

And from amongst all creatures He hath singled out man, to grant him His most wondrous gift, and hath made him to attain the bounties of the Company on High. That most precious of gifts is attainment unto His unfailing guidance, that the inner reality of humankind should become as a niche to hold this lamp; and when the scattering splendours of this light do beat against the bright glass of the heart, the heart's purity maketh the beams to blaze out even stronger than before, and to shine in glory on the minds and souls of men.

The attainment of the most great guidance is dependent upon knowledge and wisdom, and on being informed as to the mysteries of the Holy Words. Wherefore must the loved ones of God, be they young or old,

i Qur'án 3:67

ii Cf Gen. 56:62

be they men or women, each one according to his capabilities, strive to acquire the various branches of knowledge, and to increase his understanding of the mysteries of the Holy Books, and his skill in marshalling the divine proofs and evidences.

The eminent Sadru's-Sudur, who hath verily attained a most exalted station in the Retreats of Bliss, inaugurated the teaching meeting. He was the first blessed soul to lay the foundation of this momentous institution. God be praised, during the course of his life he educated persons who today are strong and eloquent advocates of the Lord God, disciples who are indeed pure and spiritual descendants of him who was so close to the Holy Threshold. After his passing, certain blessed individuals took steps to perpetuate his teaching work, and when He learned of it, this Captive's heart rejoiced.

At this time, likewise, I most urgently request the friends of God to make every effort, as much as lieth within their competence, along these lines. The harder they strive to widen the scope of their knowledge, the better and more gratifying will be the result. Let the loved ones of God, whether young or old, whether male or female, each according to his capabilities, bestir themselves and spare no efforts to acquire the various current branches of knowledge, both spiritual and secular, and of the arts. Whensoever they gather in their meetings let their conversation be confined to learned subjects and to information on the knowledge of the day.

If they do thus, they will flood the world with the Manifest Light, and change this dusty earth into gardens of the Realm of Glory.

From a Tablet

- 28 O THOU true friend! Read, in the school of God, the lessons of the spirit, and learn from love's Teacher the innermost truths. Seek out the secrets of Heaven, and tell of the overflowing grace and favor of God.

Although to acquire the sciences and arts is the greatest glory of mankind, this is so only on condition that man's river flow into the mighty sea, and draw from God's ancient source His inspiration. When this cometh to pass, then every teacher is as a shoreless ocean, every pupil a prodigal fountain of knowledge. If, then, the pursuit of knowledge lead to the beauty of Him Who is the Object of all Knowledge, how excellent that goal; but if not, a mere drop will perhaps shut a man off from flooding grace, for with learning cometh arrogance and pride, and it bringeth on error and indifference to God.

The sciences of today are bridges to reality; if then they lead not to reality, naught remains but fruitless illusion. By the one true God! If learning be not a means of access to Him, the Most Manifest, it is nothing but evident loss.

It is incumbent upon thee to acquire the various branches of knowledge, and to turn thy face toward the beauty of the Manifest Beauty, that thou mayest be a sign of saving guidance amongst the peoples of the world, and a focal center of understanding in this sphere from which the wise and their wisdom are shut out, except for those who set foot in the Kingdom of lights and become informed of the veiled and hidden mystery, the well-guarded secret.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 72

- 29 Man is in the ultimate degree of materiality and the beginning of spirituality; that is, he is at the end of imperfection and the beginning of perfection. He is at the furthestmost degree of darkness and the beginning of the light. That is why the station of man is said to be the end of night and the beginning of day, meaning that he encompasses all the degrees of imperfection and that he potentially possesses all the degrees of perfection. He has both an animal side and an angelic side, and the role of the educator is to so train human souls that the angelic side may overcome the animal.

Some Answered Questions, sec. 64

- 30 ...man is said to be the greatest sign of God—that is, he is the Book of Creation—for all the mysteries of the universe are found in him. Should he come under the shadow of the true Educator and be rightly trained, he becomes the gem of gems, the light of lights, and the spirit of spirits; he becomes the focal centre of divine blessings, the wellspring of spiritual attributes, the dawning-place of heavenly lights, and the recipient of divine inspirations. Should he, however, be deprived of this education, he becomes the embodiment of satanic attributes, the epitome of animal vices, and the source of all that is oppressive and dark.

This is the wisdom of the appearance of the Prophets: to educate humanity, that this lump of coal may become a diamond and this barren tree may be grafted and yield fruit of the utmost sweetness and delicacy. And after the noblest stations in the world of humanity have been attained, further progress can be made only in the degrees of perfection, not in station, for the degrees are finite but the divine perfections are infinite.

Some Answered Questions, sec. 64

- 31 Close investigation will show that the primary cause of oppression and injustice, of unrighteousness, irregularity and disorder, is the people's lack of religious faith and the fact that they are uneducated. When, for example, the people are genuinely religious and are literate and well-schooled, and a difficulty presents itself, they can apply to the local authorities; if they do not meet with justice and secure their rights and if they see that the conduct of the local government is incompatible with the divine good pleasure and the king's justice, they can then take their case to higher courts and describe the deviation of the local administration from the spiritual law. Those courts can then send for the local records of the case and in this way justice will be done. At present, however, because of their inadequate schooling, most of the population lack even the vocabulary to explain what they want.

The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 32 The primary, the most urgent requirement is the promotion of education. It is inconceivable that any nation should achieve prosperity and success unless this paramount, this fundamental concern is carried forward. The principal reason for the decline and fall of peoples is ignorance. Today the mass of the people are uninformed even as to ordinary affairs, how much less do they grasp the core of the important problems and complex needs of the time.

The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 33 Observe carefully how education and the arts of civilization bring honor, prosperity, independence and freedom to a government and its people.

The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 34 But education is of three kinds: material, human, and spiritual. Material education aims at the growth and development of the body, and consists in securing its sustenance and obtaining the means of its ease and comfort. This education is common to both man and animal.

Human education, however, consists in civilization and progress, that is, sound governance, social order, human welfare, commerce and industry, arts and sciences, momentous discoveries, and great undertakings, which are the central features distinguishing man from the animal.

As to divine education, it is the education of the Kingdom and consists in acquiring divine perfections. This is indeed true education, for by its virtue man becomes the focal centre of divine blessings and the embod-

iment of the verse “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness.” This is the ultimate goal of the world of humanity.

Now, we need an educator who can be at the same time a material, a human, and a spiritual educator, that his authority may have effect at every degree of existence. And should anyone say, “I am endowed with perfect reason and comprehension, and have no need for such an educator”, he would be denying the obvious. It is as though a child were to say, “I have no need of education, but will act and seek the perfections of existence according to my own thinking and intelligence”, or as though a blind man were to claim, “I have no need of sight, for there are many blind people who get by.”

It is therefore clear and evident that man stands in need of an educator. This educator must undeniably be perfect in every way and distinguished above all men. For if he were like others he could never be their educator, particularly since he must at once be their material, human, and spiritual educator. That is, he must organize and administer their material affairs and establish a social order, that they may aid and assist each other in securing the means of livelihood and that their material affairs may be ordered and arranged in every respect.

He must likewise lay the foundations of human education—that is, he must so educate human minds and thoughts that they may become capable of substantive progress; that science and knowledge may expand; that the realities of things, the mysteries of the universe, and the properties of all that exists may be revealed; that learning, discoveries, and major undertakings may day by day increase; and that matters of the intellect may be deduced from and conveyed through the sensible.

He must also impart spiritual education, so that minds may apprehend the metaphysical world, breathe the sanctified breaths of the Holy Spirit, and enter into relationship with the Concourse on high, and that human realities may become the manifestations of divine blessings, that perchance all the names and attributes of God may be reflected in the mirror of the human reality and the meaning of the blessed verse “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness” may be realized.ⁱ

Some Answered Questions, sec. 3

- 35 There are some who imagine that an innate sense of human dignity will prevent man from committing evil actions and insure his spiritual and

i Cf Gen. 1:26

material perfection. That is, that an individual who is characterized with natural intelligence, high resolve, and a driving zeal, will, without any consideration for the severe punishments consequent on evil acts, or for the great rewards of righteousness, instinctively refrain from inflicting harm on his fellow men and will hunger and thirst to do good. And yet, if we ponder the lessons of history it will become evident that this very sense of honor and dignity is itself one of the bounties deriving from the instructions of the Prophets of God. We also observe in infants the signs of aggression and lawlessness, and that if a child is deprived of a teacher's instructions his undesirable qualities increase from one moment to the next. It is therefore clear that the emergence of this natural sense of human dignity and honor is the result of education. Secondly, even if we grant for the sake of the argument that instinctive intelligence and an innate moral quality would prevent wrongdoing, it is obvious that individuals so characterized are as rare as the philosopher's stone. An assumption of this sort cannot be validated by mere words, it must be supported by the facts. Let us see what power in creation impels the masses toward righteous aims and deeds!

Aside from this, if that rare individual who does exemplify such a faculty should also become an embodiment of the fear of God, it is certain that his strivings toward righteousness would be strongly reinforced.

The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 36 As to the differences among human beings and the superiority or inferiority of some individuals to others, the materialists are of two schools of thought: one group is of the opinion that these differences and the superior qualities of some individuals are inborn, and are, as they would put it, an exigency of nature. According to them, it is obvious that differences within the species are inherent. For example, there are, in nature, different kinds of trees; animals, too, are varied in their nature; even minerals vary naturally among themselves, and you have here a quarry filled with stones, there a mine of rubies, translucent and richly red; here a shell with pearl enclosed, there only a bit a clay.

The other school of traditional philosophers holdeth to the view that the differences among individuals and the varying levels of intellects and talents derive from education: for with training, a crooked branch can grow straight, and a barren tree of the desert can be domesticated, it can be grafted and made to bear fruit, which may be bitter, but with time turneth sweet. At first, its fruit may be small; but it will grow large and full of flavour, a delight to the taste.

The strongest proof adduced by the second group is this, that the tribes of Africa are, generally speaking, ignorant and wild, while the civilized peoples of America are, in general, possessed of wisdom and understanding, which proveth that the difference between these two peoples is due to education and experience. Such are the stated views of the philosophers.

The Manifestations of God, on the other hand, affirm that differences are demonstrably and indisputably innate, and that "We have caused some of you to excel others"¹ is a proven and inescapable fact. It is certain that human beings are, by their very nature, different one from the other. Observe a small group of children, born of the same parents, attending the same school, receiving the same education, living on the same diet: some, becoming well educated, will achieve a high degree of advancement; some will reach a middle level; and some will not prove educable at all. It is therefore clear that the disparity among individuals is due to differences of degree which are innate.

But the Manifestations also consider that training and education demonstrably exert a tremendous influence. If, for example, a child is deprived of schooling he will certainly remain ignorant, and his knowledge will be limited to what he is able to find out for himself; but if he is brought to a qualified teacher to study the sciences and arts, he will learn of the discoveries made by thousands of other human beings. Thus education is a guide to those who have gone astray; it maketh the blind to see; it bestoweth judgement on the foolish, and a yield of greatness on the unproductive; it causeth the mute to speak, and turneth the false dawn into the true morning's light; through it the tiny seed will become a towering palm, and the runaway slave, a reigning king.

Thus is it certain that education exerteth an influence, and for this reason the Manifestation of God, the Well-Springs of His mercy, are raised up in the world, that through the breaths of holiness They may educate the human race, and make of the sucking child a strong and valiant man. Through Them will the outcasts of the earth become the cherished companions of Heaven, and the portionless receive their due.

From a Tablet

37 **QUESTION:** *How many kinds of character has man, and what is the cause of the differences and varieties in men?*

ANSWER: He has the innate character, the inherited character, and the acquired character which is gained by education.

As to the innate character, although the innate nature bestowed by God upon man is purely good, yet that character differs among men according to the degrees they occupy: All degrees are good, but some are more so than others. Thus every human being possesses intelligence and capacity, but intelligence, capacity, and aptitude differ from person to person. This is self-evident.

For example, take a number of children from the same place and family, attending the same school and instructed by the same teacher, raised on the same food and in the same climate, wearing the same clothing and studying the same lessons: It is certain that among these children some will become skilled in the arts and sciences, some will be of average ability, and some will be dull. It is therefore clear that in man's innate nature there is a difference in degree, aptitude, and capacity, but it is not a matter of good or evil—it is merely a difference of degree. One occupies the highest degree, another the middle degree, and yet another the lowest degree. Thus man, the animal, the plant, and the mineral all exist, but the existence of these four kinds of beings is different. Indeed, what a difference there is between the existence of man and that of the animal! Yet all these do exist, and it is evident that in existence there are differences of degree.

As to differences in inherited character, they arise from the strength and weakness of man's constitution; that is, if the parents are of weak constitution, then the children will be likewise, and if they are strong, then the children will also be robust. Moreover, the excellence of the bloodline exerts a major influence; for the goodly seed is like the superior stock that exists, likewise, among plants and animals. For example, you see that children born of a weak and sickly mother and father will naturally have a weak constitution and nerves, will lack patience, endurance, resolution, and perseverance, and will be impulsive, for they have inherited the weakness and frailty of their parents.

Aside from this, certain families and lineages have been singled out for a special blessing. Thus the descendants of Abraham received the special blessing that all the Prophets of the House of Israel were raised up

from among their ranks. This is a blessing that God bestowed upon that lineage. Moses, through both His father and His mother; Christ, through His mother; Muḥammad; the Báb; and all the Prophets and Holy Ones of Israel belong to that lineage. Bahá'u'lláh too is a lineal descendant of Abraham, for Abraham had other sons besides Ishmael and Isaac who in those days emigrated to the regions of Persia and Afghanistan, and the Blessed Beauty is one of their descendants.

Hence it is evident that inherited character also exists, to such a degree that if one's character does not conform to that of one's forebears, one would not be accounted among that lineage in spirit even if one were a descendant in body. Such is the case of Canaan, who is not reckoned among the descendants of Noah.ⁱ

As to the differences of character arising from education, they are great indeed, for education exerts an enormous influence. Through education the ignorant become learned, the cowardly become courageous, the crooked branch becomes straight, the acrid and bitter fruit of the mountains and woods becomes sweet and succulent, and the five-petalled flower puts forth a hundred petals. Through education barbarous nations become civilized and even animals take on human-like manners. Education must be accorded the greatest importance; for just as diseases are highly communicable in the world of bodies, so is character highly communicable in the realm of hearts and spirits. The differences caused by education are enormous and exert a major influence.

Now, someone might say that, since the capacity and aptitude of souls differ, such difference in capacity must inevitably lead to a difference in character. But this is not so, for capacity is of two kinds: innate and acquired. The innate capacity, which is the creation of God, is wholly and entirely good—in the innate nature there is no evil. The acquired capacity, however, can become the cause of evil. For example, God has created all men in such a fashion, and has given them such a capacity and disposition, that they are benefited by sugar and honey and are harmed or killed by poison. This is an innate capacity and disposition that God has bestowed equally upon all men. But man may begin little by little to take poison by ingesting a small quantity every day and gradually increasing it until he reaches the point where he would perish if he were not to consume several grams of opium every day, and where his innate capacities are completely subverted. Consider how the innate capacity and disposition

i Gen. 9:22–7

can be so completely changed, through variation of habit and training, as to be entirely perverted. It is not on account of their innate capacity and disposition that one reproaches the wicked, but rather on account of that which they themselves have acquired.

In the innate nature of things there is no evil—all is good. This applies even to certain apparently blameworthy attributes and dispositions which seem inherent in some people, but which are not in reality reprehensible. For example, you can see in a nursing child, from the beginning of its life, the signs of greed, of anger, and of ill temper; and so it might be argued that good and evil are innate in the reality of man, and that this is contrary to the pure goodness of the innate nature and of creation. The answer is that greed, which is to demand ever more, is a praiseworthy quality provided that it is displayed under the right circumstances. Thus, should a person show greed in acquiring science and knowledge, or in the exercise of compassion, high-mindedness, and justice, this would be most praiseworthy. And should he direct his anger and wrath against the bloodthirsty tyrants who are like ferocious beasts, this too would be most praiseworthy. But should he display these qualities under other conditions, this would be deserving of blame.

Some Answered Questions, sec. 57

- 38 As to the difference between that material civilization now prevailing, and the divine civilization which will be one of the benefits to derive from the House of Justice, it is this: material civilization, through the power of punitive and retaliatory laws, restraineth the people from criminal acts; and notwithstanding this, while laws to retaliate against and punish a man are continually proliferating, as ye can see, no laws exist to reward him. In all the cities of Europe and America, vast buildings have been erected to serve as jails for the criminals.

Divine civilization, however, so traineth every member of society that no one, with the exception of a negligible few, will undertake to commit a crime. There is thus a great difference between the prevention of crime through measures that are violent and retaliatory, and so training the people, and enlightening them, and spiritualizing them, that without any fear of punishment or vengeance to come, they will shun all criminal acts. They will, indeed, look upon the very commission of a crime as a great disgrace and in itself the harshest of punishments. They will become enamoured of human perfections, and will consecrate their lives to what-

ever will bring light to the world and will further those qualities which are acceptable at the Holy Threshold of God.

See then how wide is the difference between material civilization and divine. With force and punishments, material civilization seeketh to restrain the people from mischief, from inflicting harm on society and committing crimes. But in a divine civilization, the individual is so conditioned that with no fear of punishment, he shunneth the perpetration of crimes, seeth the crime itself as the severest of torments, and with alacrity and joy, setteth himself to acquiring the virtues of humankind, to furthering human progress, and to spreading light across the world.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 105

- 39 Among the safeguards of the Holy Faith is the training of children, and this is among the weightiest of principles in all the Divine Teachings. Thus from the very beginning mothers must rear their infants in the cradle of good morals—for it is the mothers who are the first educators—so that, when the child cometh to maturity, he will prove to be endowed with all the virtues and qualities that are worthy of praise.

And further, according to the Divine commandments, every child must learn reading and writing, and acquire such branches of knowledge as are useful and necessary, as well as learning an art or skill. The utmost care must be devoted to these matters; any neglect of them, any failure to act on them, is not permissible.

Observe how many penal institutions, houses of detention and places of torture are made ready to receive the sons of men, the purpose being to prevent them, by punitive measures, from committing terrible crimes—whereas this very torment and punishment only increaseth depravity, and by such means the desired aim cannot be properly achieved.

Therefore must the individual be trained from his infancy in such a way that he will never undertake to commit a crime, will, rather, direct all his energies to the acquisition of excellence, and will look upon the very commission of an evil deed as in itself the harshest of all punishments, considering the sinful act itself to be far more grievous than any prison sentence. For it is possible so to train the individual that, although crime may not be completely done away with, still it will become very rare.

The purport is this, that to train the character of humankind is one of the weightiest commandments of God, and the influence of such training is the same as that which the sun exerteth over tree and fruit. Children

must be most carefully watched over, protected and trained; in such consisteth true parenthood and parental mercy.

Otherwise, the children will turn into weeds growing wild, and become the cursed, Infernal Tree, not right from wrong, distinguishing not the highest of human qualities from all that is mean and vile; they will be brought up in vainglory, and will be hated of the Forgiving Lord.

Wherefore doth every child, new-risen in the garden of Heavenly love, require the utmost training and care.

From a Tablet

40 The root cause of wrongdoing is ignorance, and we must therefore hold fast to the tools of perception and knowledge. Good character must be taught. Light must be spread afar, so that, in the school of humanity, all may acquire the heavenly characteristics of the spirit, and see for themselves beyond any doubt that there is no fiercer Hell, no more fiery abyss, than to possess a character that is evil and unsound; no more darksome pit nor loathsome torment than to show forth qualities which deserve to be condemned.

The individual must be educated to such a high degree that he would rather have his throat cut than tell a lie, and would think it easier to be slashed with a sword or pierced with a spear than to utter calumny or be carried away by wrath.

Thus will be kindled the sense of human dignity and pride, to burn away the reapings of lustful appetites. Then will each one of God's beloved shine out as a bright moon with qualities of the spirit, and the relationship of each to the Sacred Threshold of his Lord will be not illusory but sound and real, will be as the very foundation of the building, not some embellishment on its façade.

It followeth that the children's school must be a place of utmost discipline and order, that instruction must be thorough, and provision must be made for the rectification and refinement of character; so that, in his earliest years, within the very essence of the child, the divine foundation will be laid and the structure of holiness raised up.

Know that this matter of instruction, of character rectification and refinement, of heartening and encouraging the child, is of the utmost importance, for such are basic principles of God.

Thus, if God will, out of these spiritual schools illumined children will arise, adorned with all the fairest virtues of humankind, and will shed their light not only across Persia, but around the world.

It is extremely difficult to teach the individual and refine his character once puberty is passed. By then, as experience has shown, even if every effort be exerted to modify some tendency of his, it all availeth nothing. He may, perhaps, improve somewhat today; but let a few days pass and he forgetteth, and turneth backward to his habitual condition and accustomed ways. Therefore it is in early childhood that a firm foundation must be laid. While the branch is green and tender it can easily be made straight.

Our meaning is that qualities of the spirit are the basic and divine foundation, and adorn the true essence of man; and knowledge is the cause of human progress. The beloved of God must attach great importance to this matter, and carry it forward with enthusiasm and zeal.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 111

- 41 Were there no educator, all souls would remain savage, and were it not for the teacher, the children would be ignorant creatures.

It is for this reason that, in this new cycle, education and training are recorded in the Book of God as obligatory and not voluntary. That is, it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son, to nurse them from the breast of knowledge and to rear them in the bosom of sciences and arts. Should they neglect this matter, they shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 98

- 42 And among the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh is the promotion of education. Every child must be instructed in sciences as much as is necessary. If the parents are able to provide the expenses of this education, it is well, otherwise the community must provide the means for the teaching of that child.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 227

- 43 There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakeable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is learning and the use of the mind, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God.

To promote knowledge is thus an inescapable duty imposed on every one of the friends of God. It is incumbent upon that Spiritual Assembly, that assemblage of God, to exert every effort to educate the children, so that from infancy they will be trained in Bahá'í conduct and the ways of

God, and will, even as young plants, thrive and flourish in the soft-flowing waters that are the counsels and admonitions of the Blessed Beauty. Work then with heart and soul, loose your tongues to further this endeavour, sacrifice your possessions so that the School of 'Ishqábád will ever advance in discipline and order.ⁱ

From a Tablet

- 44 Thou didst write as to the children: From the very beginning, the children must receive divine education and must continually be reminded to remember their God. Let the love of God pervade their inmost being, commingled with their mother's milk.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 99

- 45 My wish is that these children should receive a Bahá'í education, so that they may progress both here and in the Kingdom, and rejoice thy heart.

In a time to come, morals will degenerate to an extreme degree. It is essential that children be reared in the Bahá'í way, that they may find happiness both in this world and the next. If not, they shall be beset by sorrows and troubles, for human happiness is founded upon spiritual behaviour.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 100

- 46 Child education is a matter of the utmost importance. The infant, while yet a suckling, must receive Bahá'í training, and the loving spirit of Christ and Bahá'u'lláh must be breathed into him, that he may be reared in accord with the verities of the Gospel and the Most Holy Book.

From a Tablet

- 47 O thou who gazest upon the Kingdom of God!

Thy letter was received and we note that thou art engaged in teaching the children of the believers, that these tender little ones have been learning the Hidden Words and the prayers and what it meaneth to be a Bahá'í.

The instruction of these children is even as the work of a loving garden-er who tendeth his young plants in the flowering fields of the All-Glorious. There is no doubt that it will yield the desired results; especially is this true of instruction as to Bahá'í obligations and Bahá'í conduct, for the little children must needs be made aware in their very heart and soul that "Bahá'í" is not just a name but a truth. Every child must be trained in the

i Cf. Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 97

things of the spirit, so that he may embody all the virtues and become a source of glory to the Cause of God. Otherwise, the mere word “Bahá’í”, if it yield no fruit, will come to nothing.

Strive then to the best of thine ability to let these children know that a Bahá’í is one who embodieth all the perfections, that he must shine out like a lighted taper—not be darkness upon darkness and yet bear the name “Bahá’í”.

Name thou this school the Bahá’í Sunday School.

From a Tablet

- 48 We have previously written and sent out a detailed letter regarding the education of children in faith, certitude, learning and spiritual knowledge, and their being taught to call upon the Heavenly Kingdom with suppliant hearts.

It is certain that ye will exert every effort toward this end.

From a Tablet

- 49 As to thy question regarding the education of children: It behoveth thee to nurture them at the breast of the love of God, and urge them onward to the things of the spirit—that they may turn their faces unto God; that their ways may conform to the rules of good conduct and their character be second to none; that they make their own all the graces and praiseworthy qualities of humankind; that they acquire a sound knowledge of the various branches of learning—so that from the very beginning of life they may become spiritual beings, dwellers in the Kingdom, enamoured of the sweet breaths of holiness, and may receive an education religious, spiritual, and of the Heavenly Realm. Verily will I call upon God to grant them a happy outcome in this.

Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, sec. 122

- 50 Exert every effort to acquire the various branches of knowledge and true understanding. Strain every nerve to achieve both material and spiritual accomplishments.

Encourage the children from their earliest years to master every kind of learning, and make them eager to become skilled in every art—the aim being that through the favouring grace of God, the heart of each one may become even as a mirror disclosing the secrets of the universe, penetrating the innermost reality of all things; and that each may earn world-wide fame in all branches of knowledge, science and the arts.

Certainly, certainly, neglect not the education of the children. Rear them to be possessed of spiritual qualities, and be assured of the gifts and favours of the Lord.

From a Tablet

- 51 O ye two servants at the Holy Threshold!

We have been greatly cheered and refreshed to know that ye have organized meetings for the education of children. Whoso is active in those meetings whether as a teacher of the children or a sponsor, will certainly become the recipient of confirmations from the invisible Realm, and endless bounties will compass him about.

With great joy, therefore, encouragement is offered for this highly laudable endeavour that ye may witness an exceeding great reward.

Await ye the sure and certain confirmations of the All-Merciful.

From a Tablet

- 52 O ye two well-loved handmaids of God! Whatever a man's tongue speaketh, that let him prove by his deeds. If he claimeth to be a believer, then let him act in accordance with the precepts of the Abhá Kingdom.

Praised be God, ye two have demonstrated the truth of your words by your deeds, and have won the confirmations of the Lord God. Every day at first light, ye gather the Bahá'í children together and teach them the communes and prayers. This is a most praiseworthy act, and bringeth joy to the children's hearts: that they should, at every morn, turn their faces toward the Kingdom and make mention of the Lord and praise His Name, and in the sweetest of voices, chant and recite.

These children are even as young plants, and teaching them the prayers is as letting the rain pour down upon them, that they may wax tender and fresh, and the soft breezes of the love of God may blow over them, making them to tremble with joy.

Blessedness awaiteth you, and a fair haven.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 115

- 53 O thou steadfast in the Covenant!

Your letter hath come and imparted great delight, with its word that, praised be God, the youth of the Abhá paradise are verdant and tender, from showers scattered out of clouds of heavenly grace; that they thrive and flourish in the April rains of heavenly guidance, and are progressing day by day.

It is certain that each and every one of them will grow to be as a banner of guidance, a symbol of the bestowals that come from the Realm of the All-Glorious. They will be sweet-singing nightingales in the gardens of knowledge, gazelles delicate and comely, roaming the plains of the love of God. You must attach the greatest importance to the education of children, for this is the foundation of the Law of God, and the bedrock of the edifice of His Faith.

If it were known how much joy you have imparted through what hath been done for the children, the believers would surely educate all their children in the same way.

From a Tablet

54 O true companions!

All humankind are as children in a school, and the Dawning-Points of Light, the Sources of divine revelation, are the teachers, wondrous and without peer. In the school of realities they educate these sons and daughters, according to teachings from God, and foster them in the bosom of grace, so that they may develop along every line, show forth the excellent gifts and blessings of the Lord, and combine human perfections; that they may advance in all aspects of human endeavour, whether outward or inward, hidden or visible, material or spiritual, until they make of this mortal world a wide-spread mirror, to reflect that other world which dieth not.

...Because, in this most momentous of ages, the Sun of Truth hath risen at the highest point of the spring equinox, and cast its rays on every clime, it shall kindle such tremulous excitement, it shall release such vibrations in the world of being, it shall stimulate such growth and development, it shall stream out with such a glory of light, and clouds of grace shall pour down such plentiful waters, and fields and plains shall teem with such a galaxy of sweet-smelling plants and blooms, that this lowly earth will become the Abhá Kingdom, and this nether world the world above. Then will this fleck of dust be as the vast circle of the skies, this human place the palace-court of God, this spot of clay the Dayspring of the endless favours of the Lord of Lords.

Wherefore, O loved ones of God! Make ye a mighty effort till you yourselves betoken this advancement and all these confirmations, and become focal centres of God's blessings, daysprings of the light of His unity, promoters of the gifts and graces of civilized life. Be ye in that land

vanguards of the perfections of humankind; carry forward the various branches of knowledge, be active and progressive in the field of inventions and the arts. Endeavour to rectify the conduct of men, and seek to excel the whole world in moral character. While the children are yet in their infancy feed them from the breast of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence, rear them in the embrace of bounty. Give them the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship. Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 102

- 55 The education and training of children is among the most meritorious acts of humankind and draweth down the grace and favour of the All-Merciful, for education is the indispensable foundation of all human excellence and alloweth man to work his way to the heights of abiding glory. If a child be trained from his infancy, he will, through the loving care of the Holy Gardener, drink in the crystal waters of the spirit and of knowledge, like a young tree amid the rilling brooks. And certainly he will gather to himself the bright rays of the Sun of Truth, and through its light and heat will grow ever fresh and fair in the garden of life.

Therefore must the mentor be a doctor as well: that is, he must, in instructing the child, remedy its faults; must give him learning, and at the same time rear him to have a spiritual nature. Let the teacher be a doctor to the character of the child, thus will he heal the spiritual ailments of the children of men.

If, in this momentous task, a mighty effort be exerted, the world of humanity will shine out with other adornings, and shed the fairest light. Then will this darksome place grow luminous, and this abode of earth turn into Heaven. The very demons will change to angels then, and wolves to shepherds of the flock, and the wild-dog pack to gazelles that pasture on the plains of oneness, and ravening beasts to peaceful herds; and birds of prey, with talons sharp as knives, to songsters warbling their sweet native notes.

For the inner reality of man is a demarcation line between the shadow and the light, a place where the two seas meetⁱ; is the lowest point on the

i Qur'án 25:55, 35:13, 55:19–25. See also Marriage Prayer revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá

arc of descentⁱⁱ, therefore is it capable of gaining all the grades above. With education it can achieve all excellence; devoid of education it will stay on, at the lowest point of imperfection.

Every child is potentially the light of the world—and at the same time its triple darkness; wherefore must the question of education be accounted as of primary importance. From his infancy, the child must be nursed at the breast of God's love, and nurtured in the embrace of His knowledge, that he may radiate light, grow in spirituality, be filled with wisdom and learning, and take on the characteristics of the angelic host.

Since ye have been assigned to this holy task, ye must therefore exert every effort to make that school famed in all respects throughout the world; to make it the cause of exalting the Word of the Lord.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 103

- 56 Among the greatest of all services that can possibly be rendered by man to Almighty God is the education and training of children, young plants of the Abhá Paradise, so that these children, fostered by grace in the way of salvation, growing like pearls of divine bounty in the shell of education, will one day bejewel the crown of abiding glory.

It is, however, very difficult to undertake this service, even harder to succeed in it. I hope that thou wilt acquit thyself well in this most important of tasks, and successfully carry the day, and become an ensign of God's abounding grace; that these children, reared one and all in the holy Teachings, will develop natures like unto the sweet airs that blow across the gardens of the All-Glorious, and will waft their fragrance around the world.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 106

- 57 Blessed art thou, since thou art engaged in rendering a service which will make thy face to shine in the Abhá Kingdom, and that is the education and training of children. If one should, in the right way, teach and train the children, he will be performing a service than which none is greater at the sacred Threshold. According to what we have heard, you are succeeding in this. You must, however, struggle unceasingly to perfect yourself and win ever higher achievements.

ii See *Some Answered Questions*, sec. 81

At all times, I implore Almighty God to make you the means of illuminating the minds of those children, of bringing their hearts to life and sanctifying their souls.

From a Tablet

- 58 It is the hope of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that those youthful souls in the schoolroom of the deeper knowledge will be tended by one who traineth them to love. May they all, throughout the reaches of the spirit, learn well of the hidden mysteries; so well that in the Kingdom of All-Glorious, each one of them, even as a nightingale endowed with speech, will cry out the secrets of the Heavenly Realm, and like unto a longing lover pour forth his sore need and utter want of the Beloved.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 107

- 59 O thou handmaid of God!

Do thou establish a heavenly school and be thou a teacher in that house of learning. Educate the children in the things of God; and, even as pearls, rear them in the heart of the shell of divine guidance.

Strive thou with heart and soul; see to it that the children are raised up to embody the highest perfections of humankind, to such a degree that every one of them will be trained in the use of the mind, in acquiring knowledge, in humility and lowliness, in dignity, in ardour and love.

From a Tablet

- 60 Make ye inquiries as to a woman teacher. She must be extremely modest, even-tempered, forbearing, and well bred, and she must be expert in the English language.

From a Tablet

- 61 In thy school, instruct thou God's children in the customs of the Kingdom. Be thou a teacher of love, in a school of unity. Train thou the children of the friends of the Merciful in the rules and ways of His loving-kindness. Tend the young trees of the Abhá Paradise with the welling waters of His grace and peace and joy. Make them to flourish under the downpour of His bounty. Strive with all thy powers that the children may stand out and grow fresh, delicate, and sweet, like the ideal trees in the gardens of Heaven.

All these gifts and bounties depend upon love for the Beauty of the All-Glorious, and on the blessings in the teachings of the Most High, and the spiritual instructions of the Supreme Concourse, and on ecstasy and ardour and diligent pursuit of whatsoever will redound to the eternal honour of the community of man.

From a Tablet

- 62 Make every effort to acquire the advanced knowledge of the day, and strain every nerve to carry forward the divine civilization. Establish schools that are well organized, and promote the fundamentals of instruction in the various branches of knowledge through teachers who are pure and sanctified, distinguished for their high standards of conduct and general excellence, and strong in faith; scholars and educators with a thorough knowledge of sciences and arts.

It is incumbent upon the exalted body of the Hands of the Cause of God to watch over and protect these schools in every way, and see to their requirements, so that all the means of progress will continually be at hand, and the lights of learning will illumine the whole world.

From a Tablet

- 63 O thou steadfast in the Covenant!

In reply to thy letter, I am obliged to be brief: Praise thou God that thou hast succeeded in becoming a teacher of young Bahá'ís, young trees of the Abhá Paradise, and at the same time art able to benefit the other children as well.

According to the explicit divine Text, teaching the children is indispensable and obligatory. It followeth that teachers are servants of the Lord God, since they have arisen to perform this task, which is the same as worship. You must therefore offer praise with every breath, for you are educating your spiritual children.

The spiritual father is greater than the physical one, for the latter bestoweth but this world's life, whereas the former endoweth his child with life everlasting. This is why, in the Law of God, teachers are listed among the heirs.

Now you in reality have acquired all these spiritual children free and gratis, and that is better than having physical children; for such children are not grateful to their fathers, since they feel that the father serveth them because he must—and therefore no matter what he doeth for them, they

pay it no mind. Spiritual children, however, are always appreciative of their father's loving kindness. This verily is out of the grace of thy Lord, the Beneficent.

From a Tablet

64 O thou who art steadfast in the Covenant!

Thou hast exerted strenuous efforts for the education of children and I have been, and am, infinitely pleased with thee. Praise God, thou hast been enabled to serve in this field, and it is certain that the confirmations of the Abhá Kingdom will encompass thee, and thou shalt achieve prosperity and success.

65 Today the training and education of the believers' children is the pre-eminent goal of the chosen. It is the same as servitude to the Sacred Threshold and waiting upon the Blessed Beauty. Joyously, therefore, canst thou pride thyself on this.

From a Tablet

66 O thou teacher of the children of the Kingdom!

Thou hast arisen to perform a service which would justly entitle thee to vaunt thyself over all the teachers on earth. For the teachers of this world make use of human education to develop the powers, whether spiritual or material, of humankind, whilst thou art training these young plants in the gardens of God according to the education of Heaven, and art giving them the lessons of the Kingdom.

The result of this kind of teaching will be that it will attract the blessings of God, and make manifest the perfections of man.

Hold thou fast to this kind of teaching, for the fruits of it will be very great. The children must, from their infancy, be raised to be spiritual and godly Bahá'ís. If such be their training, they will remain safe from every test.

From a Tablet

67 O ye recipients of the favours of God!

In this new and wondrous Age, the unshakeable foundation is the teaching of sciences and arts. According to explicit Holy Texts, every child must be taught crafts and arts, to the degree that is needful. Wherefore, in every city and village, schools must be established and every child in that city or village is to engage in study to the necessary degree.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 109

68 O ye of high resolve and noble aims!

Your letter was eloquent, its contents original and sensitively expressed, and it betokened your great and praiseworthy efforts to educate the children, both girls and boys. This is among the most important of all human endeavours. Every possible means of education must be made available to Bahá'í children, tender plants of the divine garden, for in this consisteth the illumination of humankind.

Praised be God, the friends in 'Ishqábád have laid a solid foundation, an unassailable base. It was in the City of Love that the first Bahá'í House of Worship was erected; and today in this city the means for the education of children are also being developed, inasmuch as even during the war years this duty was not neglected, and indeed deficiencies were made up for. Now must ye widen the scope of your endeavours and draw up plans to establish schools for higher education, so that the City of Love will become the Bahá'í focal centre for science and the arts. Thanks to the bountiful assistance of the Blessed Beauty, means for this will be provided.

Devote ye particular attention to the school for girls, for the greatness of this wondrous Age will be manifested as a result of progress in the world of women. This is why ye observe that in every land the world of women is on the march, and this is due to the impact of the Most Great Manifestation, and the power of the teachings of God.

Instruction in the schools must begin with instruction in religion. Following religious training, and the binding of the child's heart to the love of God, proceed with his education in the other branches of knowledge.

From a Tablet

69 One of the friends hath sent us a letter regarding the school at 'Ishqábád, to the effect that, praised be God, the friends there are now working hard to get the school in order, and have appointed teachers well qualified for their task, and that from this time forward the greatest care will be devoted to the supervision and management of the school.

It is likewise my hope that the favours and bestowals of God, the bountiful King, will encompass you, so that the friends may come to excel the others in all things.

One of the most important of undertakings is the education of children, for success and prosperity depend upon service to and worship of God, the Holy, the All-Glorified.

Among the greatest of all great services is the education of children, and promotion of the various sciences, crafts and arts. Praised be God, ye are now exerting strenuous efforts toward this end. The more ye persevere in this most important task, the more will ye witness the confirmations of God, to such a degree that ye yourselves will be astonished.

This verily is a matter beyond all doubt, a pledge that shall certainly be redeemed.

From a Tablet

- 70 The services ye are rendering in support of the Ta'yíd School merit the highest praise. It is certain that God in His bounty will send down His manifold, heavenly blessings upon you.

The believers are in duty bound to establish schools where children can acquire knowledge, and since these friends have pledged themselves to make sacrifices in this connection, and are contributing to the support of the Ta'yíd School, 'Abdu'l-Bahá in all lowliness and submission offereth thanks and praise to the Kingdom of Mysteries. He asketh that bounties will be sent down unto you, and peace of mind, so that ye may succeed in rendering this most laudable service with ease and joy.

O Thou Provider! These souls are doing good. Make them dear to both worlds, make them the recipients of measureless grace. Thou art the Powerful, Thou art the Able, Thou art the Giver, the Bestower, the Incomparable Lord.

From a Tablet

- 71 What thou hadst written as to the school is a cause for great rejoicing, and delighteth the heart. The friends one and all were cheered and refreshed by this news.

This school is one of the vital and essential institutions which indeed support and bulwark the edifice of humankind. God willing, it will develop and be perfected along every line. Once this school hath, in every respect, been perfected, once it hath been made to flourish and to surpass all other schools, then, each following the other, more and more schools must be established.

Our meaning is that the friends must direct their attention toward the education and training of all the children of Persia, so that all of them, having, in the school of true learning, achieved the power of understanding and come to know the inner realities of the universe, will go on to uncover

the signs and mysteries of God, and will find themselves illumined by the lights of the knowledge of the Lord, and by His love. This truly is the very best way to educate all peoples.

From a Tablet

- 72 Make ye every effort to improve the Tarbíyat School and to develop order and discipline in this institution. Utilize every means to make this School a garden of the All-Merciful, from which the lights of learning will cast their beams, and wherein the children, whether Bahá'í or other, will be educated to such a degree as to become God's gifts to man, and the pride of the human race. Let them make the greatest progress in the shortest span of time, let them open wide their eyes and uncover the inner realities of all things, become proficient in every art and skill, and learn to comprehend the secrets of all things even as they are—this faculty being one of the clearly evident effects of servitude to the Holy Threshold.

It is certain that ye will make every effort to bring this about, will also draw up plans for the opening of a number of schools. These schools for academic studies must at the same time be training centres in behaviour and conduct, and they must favour character and conduct above the sciences and arts. Good behaviour and high moral character must come first, for unless the character be trained, acquiring knowledge will only prove injurious. Knowledge is praiseworthy when it is coupled with ethical conduct and virtuous character; otherwise it is a deadly poison, a frightful danger. A physician of evil character, and who betrayeth his trust, can bring on death, and become the source of numerous infirmities and diseases.

Devote ye the utmost attention to this matter, for the basic, the foundation-principle of a school is first and foremost moral training, character and the rectification of conduct.

From a Tablet

- 73 The All-Merciful hath created humankind for the adornment of this contingent world, so that men may array the earth with the manifold blessings of Heaven; that the inner reality of the human being may, like unto a lamp of the spirit, cause the community of man to become as a mirror for the assemblage on high.

It is clear that learning is the greatest bestowal of God; that knowledge and the acquirement thereof is a blessing from Heaven. Thus is it

incumbent upon the friends of God to exert such an effort and strive with such eagerness to promote divine knowledge, culture and the sciences, that ere long those who are schoolchildren today will become the most erudite of all the fraternity of the wise. This is a service rendered unto God Himself, and it is one of His inescapable commandments.

Wherefore, O loving friends, strive with heart and soul and strength to make the Tarbíyat School a center of enlightenment, and a well-spring of truth, that the children of God may shine with the rays of boundless learning, and that these tender plants of the divine garden may grow and flourish in the grace that showereth down from the clouds of knowledge and true understanding, and advance to such a degree as to astonish the company of those who know.

I swear by the bounty of God's wisdom that if they win this great prize, the members of the Tarbíyat School will be admitted to the assemblage of God, and that unto them, beyond a peradventure, the portals of His grace will open wide.

From a Tablet

- 74 God be praised that ye have succeeded in establishing a school in Mihdíábád and are, with great energy and enthusiasm, engaged in educating the children.

In this new and wondrous Cause, the advancement of all branches of knowledge is a fixed and vital principle, and the friends, one and all, are obligated to make every effort toward this end, so that the Cause of the Manifest Light may be spread abroad, and that every child, according to his need, will receive his share of the sciences and arts—until not even a single peasant's child will be found who is completely devoid of schooling.

It is essential that the fundamentals of knowledge be taught; essential that all should be able to read and write. Wherefore is this new institution most worthy of praise, and its programme to be encouraged. The hope is that other villages will take you for a model, and that in every village where there is a certain number of believers, a school will be founded where the children can study reading, writing, and basic knowledge.

This is what bringeth joy to the heart of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cheer and peace to His soul.

From a Tablet

- 75 The method of instruction which ye have established, beginning with proofs of the existence of God and the oneness of God, the mission of the Prophets and Messengers and Their teachings, and the wonders of the universe, is highly suitable. Keep on with this. It is certain that the confirmations of God will attend you. It is also highly praiseworthy to memorize the Tablets, divine verses and sacred traditions.

Ye will surely exert every effort in teaching, and in furthering understanding.

From a Tablet

- 76 As to the children: From the age of five their formal education must begin. That is, during the daytime they should be looked after in a place where there are teachers, and should learn good conduct.

Here they should be taught, in play, some letters and words and a little reading—as it is done in certain countries where they fashion letters and words out of sweets and give them to the child. For example, they make an “a” out of candy and say its name is “a”, or make a candy “b” and call it “b”, and so on with the rest of the alphabet, giving these to the young child. In this way, children will soon learn their letters ...

When the children are ready for bed, let the mother read or sing them the Odes of the Blessed Beauty, so that from their earliest years they will be educated by these verses of guidance.

From a Tablet

- 77 Thou didst ask as to the education of children. Those children who, sheltered by the Blessed Tree, have set foot upon the world, those who are cradled in the Faith and are nurtured at the breast of grace—such must from the beginning receive spiritual training directly from their mothers. That is, the mother must continually call God to mind and make mention of Him, and tell of His greatness, and instill the fear of Him in the child, and rear the child gently, in the way of tenderness, and in extreme cleanliness. Thus from the very beginning of life every child will be refreshed by the gentle wafting of the love of God and will tremble with joy at the sweet scent of heavenly guidance. In this lieth the beginning of the process; it is the essential basis of all the rest.

And when the child hath reached the age where he can make distinctions, let him be placed in a Bahá'í school, in which at the beginning the Holy Texts are recited and religious concepts are taught. At this school

the child is to study reading and writing as well as some fundamentals of the various branches of knowledge, such as can be learned by children.

At the start the teacher must place a pen in the child's hand, arrange the children in groups, and instruct each group according to its capacity. When the children have, in a given place, been seated in rows, and each holdeth a pen, and each hath a paper before him, and the teacher hath suspended a blackboard in front of the children, let him write thereon with his chalk and have the children copy what he hath written. For example, let the teacher write an alif (a) and say, "This is an alif." Let the children then copy it and repeat: "This is an alif." And so on, till the end of the alphabet. As soon as they properly recognize the letters, let the teacher make combinations of the letters, while the children follow his lead, writing the combinations on their paper, until, by this method, they come to recognize all the letters, singly and combined in words. Let the teacher then proceed to writing sentences, while the children copy what he hath written, each on his own sheet of paper. Let the teacher then explain the meaning of the sentence to the children.

And once they have become skilled in the Persian tongue, let the teacher first translate and write out single words and ask the students the meaning of those words. If a pupil hath grasped a little of this, and hath translated the word, let the teacher praise him; if all the students are unable to accomplish this, let the teacher write the foreign language translation beneath the given word. For example, let him write samá (heaven) in Arabic, and ask: "How do we say this in Persian?" If one of the children replieth, "The Persian translation of this word is asiman", let the teacher praise and encourage him. If they are unable to answer, let the teacher himself give the translation and write it down, and let the children copy it.

Later, let the teacher ask: "How do they say this in Russian, or French, or Turkish?" If they know the answer, excellent. If not, let the teacher say, "In Russian, or French, the translation is thus and so", write the word on the board, and have the children copy it down. When the children have become skilled in translating single words, let the teacher combine the words into a sentence, write this on the board and ask the children to translate it. If they are unable, let the teacher himself translate the sentence and write down the translation. It would of course be preferable for him to make use of several languages.

In this way, over a short period—that is, three years—the children will, as a result of writing the words down, become fully proficient in a number

of languages, and will be able to translate a passage from one language to another. Once they have become skilled in these fundamentals, let them go on to learning the elements of the other branches of knowledge, and once they have completed this study, let each one who is able and hath a keen desire for it, enrol in higher institutions of learning and study advanced courses in the sciences and arts.

Not all, however, will be able to engage in these advanced studies. Therefore, such children must be sent to industrial schools where they can also acquire technical skills, and once the child becomes proficient in such a skill, then let consideration be given to the child's own preference and inclinations. If a child hath a liking for commerce, then let him choose commerce; if industry, then industry; if for higher education, then the advancement of knowledge; if for some other of the responsibilities of humankind, then that. Let him be placed in the field for which he hath an inclination, a desire, and a talent.

But the indispensable basis of all is that he should develop spiritual characteristics and the praiseworthy virtues of humankind. This is the primary consideration. If a person be unlettered, and yet clothed with divine excellence, and alive in the breaths of the Spirit, that individual will contribute to the welfare of society, and his inability to read and write will do him no harm. And if a person be versed in the arts and every branch of knowledge, and not live a religious life, and not take on the characteristics of God, and not be directed by a pure intent, and be engrossed in the life of the flesh—then he is harm personified, and nothing will come of all his learning and intellectual accomplishments but scandal and torment.

If, however, an individual hath spiritual characteristics, and virtues that shine out, and his purpose in life be spiritual and his inclinations be directed toward God, and he also study other branches of knowledge—then we have light upon light¹: outer being luminous, his private character radiant, his heart sound, his thought elevated, his understanding swift, his rank noble.

Blessed is he who attaineth this exalted station.

From a Tablet

- 78 The subjects to be taught in children's school are many, and for lack of time We can touch on only a few: First and most important is training in behaviour and good character; the rectification of qualities; arousing the

i Qur'án 24:35

desire to become accomplished and acquire perfections, and to cleave unto the religion of God and stand firm in His Laws: to accord total obedience to every just government, to show forth loyalty and trustworthiness to the ruler of the time, to be well wishers of mankind, to be kind to all.

And further, as well as in the ideals of character, instruction in such arts and sciences as are of benefit, and in foreign tongues. Also, the repeating of prayers for the well-being of ruler and ruled; and the avoidance of materialistic works that are current among those who see only natural causation, and tales of love, and books that arouse the passions.

To sum up, let all the lessons be entirely devoted to the acquisition of human perfections.

Here, then, in brief are directions for the curriculum of these schools.

From a Tablet

79 As to the organization of the schools: If possible the children should all wear the same kind of clothing, even if the fabric is varied. It is preferable that the fabric as well should be uniform; if, however, this is not possible, there is no harm done. The more cleanly the pupils are, the better; they should be immaculate. The school must be located in a place where the air is delicate and pure. The children must be carefully trained to be most courteous and well-behaved. They must be constantly encouraged and made eager to gain all the summits of human accomplishment, so that from their earliest years they will be taught to have high aims, to conduct themselves well, to be chaste, pure, and undefiled, and will learn to be of powerful resolve and firm of purpose in all things. Let them not jest and trifle, but earnestly advance unto their goals, so that in every situation they will be found resolute and firm.

Training in morals and good conduct is far more important than book learning. A child that is cleanly, agreeable, of good character, well-behaved—even though he be ignorant—is preferable to a child that is rude, unwashed, ill-natured, and yet becoming deeply versed in all the sciences and arts. The reason for this is that the child who conducts himself well, even though he be ignorant, is of benefit to others, while an ill-natured, ill-behaved child is corrupted and harmful to others, even though he be learned. If, however, the child be trained to be both learned and good, the result is light upon light.

Children are even as a branch that is fresh and green; they will grow up in whatever way you train them. Take the utmost care to give them

high ideals and goals, so that once they come of age, they will cast their beams like brilliant candles on the world, and will not be defiled by lusts and passions in the way of animals, heedless and unaware, but instead will set their hearts on achieving everlasting honour and acquiring all the excellences of humankind.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 110

- 80 As to the education of children, exert every effort to further this; it is of the utmost importance. So too, the education of girls in all the rules of righteous conduct, that they may grow up with a good character and high standards of behaviour. For mothers are the first educators of the child, and every child at the beginning of life is like a fresh and tender branch in his parents' hands. His father and mother can train him in any way they choose.

From a Tablet

- 81 The school for girls taketh precedence over the school for boys, for it is incumbent upon the girls of this glorious era to be fully versed in the various branches of knowledge, in sciences and the arts and all the wonders of this pre-eminent time, that they may then educate their children and train them from their earliest days in the ways of perfection.

If, as she ought, the mother possesseth the learning and accomplishments of humankind, her children, like unto angels, will be fostered in all excellence, in right conduct and beauty. Therefore the School for Girls that hath been established in that place must be made the object of the deep concern and high endeavours of the friends. The teachers of that school are handmaids close to the Sacred Threshold, for they are of those who, obedient to the commandments of the Blessed Beauty, have arisen to educate the girl children.

The day will come when those children will be mothers, and each one of them in her deep gratitude will offer up prayers and supplications to Almighty God and ask that her teachers will be granted joy and well-being forever, and a high station in the Kingdom of God.

Name ye this school the Mawhibat School (The School of Bounty).

From a Tablet

- 82 Our hearts rejoiced at thy letter concerning a school for girls.

Praised be God that there is now a school of this type in Ṭihrán where young maidens can, through His bounty, receive an education and with all

vigour acquire the accomplishments of humankind. Erelong will women in every field keep pace with the men.

Until now, in Persia, the means for women's advancement were non-existent. But now, God be thanked, ever since the dawning of the Morn of Salvation, they have been going forward day by day. The hope is that they will take the lead in virtues and attainments, in closeness to the Court of Almighty God, in faith and certitude—and that the women of the East will become the envy of the women of the West.

Praised be God, thou art confirmed in thy service, art exerting every effort in this work and taking great pains; and so, too, the teacher in the school, Miss Lillian Kappes. Give her my most affectionate greetings.

From a Tablet

- 83 In past centuries the girl children of Persia were deprived of all instruction. They had neither school nor academy, no kindly tutor and no teacher. Now in this greatest of centuries the bounty of the All-Bountiful hath encompassed the girls as well, and many schools have been founded in Persia for the education of girl children—but what is missing from them is character training, and this despite the fact that such training is more important than instruction, for it is the primary accomplishment of humankind.

Praised be God, a school for girls hath now been established in Hamadán. Ye who are the teachers thereof must devote more of your efforts to character training than instruction, and must raise up your girl children to be modest and chaste, of good character and conduct—and in addition must teach them the various branches of knowledge.

If ye follow this course, the confirmations of the All-Glorious Kingdom, in a great rolling swell, will rise and surge above that school.

My hope is that ye will succeed in this.

From a Tablet

- 84 In this holy Cause the question of orphans hath the utmost importance. The greatest consideration must be shown towards orphans; they must be taught, trained and educated. The Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, especially, must by all means be given to them as far as is possible.

I supplicate God that thou mayest become a kind parent to orphaned children, quickening them with the fragrances of the Holy Spirit, so that they will attain the age of maturity as true servants of the world of humanity and as bright candles in the assemblage of mankind.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 112

- 85 Your letter hath come and hath occasioned the utmost joy, with its news that, praised be God, in Hamadán a welfare and relief association hath been established. I trust that this will become a source of general prosperity and assistance, and that means will be provided to set the hearts of the poor and weak at rest, and to educate the orphans and other children.

The question of training the children and looking after the orphans is extremely important, but most important of all is the education of girl children, for these girls will one day be mothers, and the mother is the first teacher of the child. In whatever way she reareth the child, so will the child become, and the results of that first training will remain with the individual throughout his entire life, and it would be most difficult to alter them. And how can a mother, herself ignorant and untrained, educate her child? It is therefore clear that the education of girls is of far greater consequence than that of boys. This fact is extremely important, and the matter must be seen to with the greatest energy and dedication.

God sayeth in the Qur'án that they shall not be equals, those who have knowledge and those who have it notⁱ. Ignorance is thus utterly to be blamed, whether in male or female; indeed, in the female its harm is greater. I hope, therefore, that the friends will make strenuous efforts to educate their children, sons and daughters alike. This is verily the truth, and outside the truth there is manifestly naught save perdition.

From a Tablet

- 86 Thou didst write about the believers' daughters who attend the schools of other faiths. It is true that, while these children do learn a little in such schools, still the character and behaviour of the women teachers have an effect on them, and through the inculcation of doubts and ambiguities, the minds of these girls are influenced and changed.

It is incumbent upon the friends to provide a school for Bahá'í girls whose women teachers will educate their pupils according to the teachings of God. There must the girls be taught spiritual ethics and holy ways.

A child is as a young plant: it will grow in whatever way you train it. If you rear it to be truthful, and kind, and righteous, it will grow straight, it will be fresh and tender, and will flourish. But if not, then from faulty training it will grow bent, and stand awry, and there will be no hope of changing it.

i Qur'án 39:12

Certainly, the women teachers from Europe give instruction in language and scripts, and housekeeping, and embroidery and sewing; but their pupils' character is completely altered, to such a point that the girls no longer care for their mothers, their disposition is spoiled, they misbehave, they become self-satisfied and proud.

Rather, girls ought to be trained in such a manner that from day to day they will become more self-effacing, more humble, and will defer to and obey their parents and forebears, and be a comfort and a solace to all.

From a Tablet

- 87 Consider that if the mother is a believer, the children will become believers too, even if the father denieth the Faith; while, if the mother is not a believer, the children are deprived of faith, even if the father be a believer convinced and firm. Such is the usual outcome, except in rare cases.

For this reason both fathers and mothers must carefully watch over their little daughters and have them thoroughly taught in the schools by highly qualified women teachers, so that they may familiarize themselves with all the sciences and arts and become acquainted with and reared in all that is necessary for human living, and will provide a family with comfort and joy.

It is therefore incumbent upon the Spiritual Assembly of 'Ishqábád to take the lead in this most urgent matter, so that by the grace and favour of God they may establish an institution which will be a source of security and happiness forever and ever.

From a Tablet

- 88 O handmaids of the beauty of Abhá! Your letter hath come, and its perusal brought great joy. Praised be God, the women believers have organized meetings where they will learn how to teach the Faith, will spread the sweet savours of the Teachings and make plans for training the children.

This gathering must be completely spiritual. That is, the discussions must be confined to marshalling clear and conclusive proofs that the Sun of Truth hath indeed arisen. And further, those present should concern themselves with every means of training the girl children; with teaching the various branches of knowledge, good behaviour, a proper way of life, the cultivation of a good character, chastity and constancy, perseverance, strength, determination, firmness of purpose; with household management, the education of children, and whatever especially applieth to the

needs of girls—to the end that these girls, reared in the stronghold of all perfections, and with the protection of a goodly character, will, when they themselves become mothers, bring up their children from earliest infancy to have a good character and conduct themselves well.

Let them also study whatever will nurture the health of the body and its physical soundness, and how to guard their children from disease.

When matters are thus well arranged, every child will become a peerless plant in the gardens of the Abhá Paradise.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 94

- 89 Today it is obligatory for the loved ones of God, and their imperative duty, to educate the children in reading, writing, the various branches of knowledge, and the expansion of consciousness, that on all levels they may go forward day by day.

The mother is the first teacher of the child. For children, at the beginning of life, are fresh and tender as a young twig, and can be trained in any fashion you desire. If you rear the child to be straight, he will grow straight, in perfect symmetry. It is clear that the mother is the first teacher and that it is she who establisheth the character and conduct of the child.

Wherefore, O ye loving mothers, know ye that in God's sight, the best of all ways to worship Him is to educate the children and train them in all the perfections of humankind; and no nobler deed than this can be imagined.ⁱ

From a Tablet

- 90 O Handmaids of the Lord!

The spiritual assemblage that ye established in that illumined city is most propitious. Ye have made great strides; ye have surpassed the others, have arisen to serve the Holy Threshold, and have won heavenly bestowals. Now with all spiritual zeal must ye gather in that enlightened assemblage and recite the Holy Writings and engage in remembering the Lord. Set ye forth His arguments and proofs. Work ye for the guidance of the women in that land, teach the young girls and the children, so that the mothers may educate their little ones from their earliest days, thoroughly train them, rear them to have a goodly character and good morals, guide them to all the virtues of humankind, prevent the development of any behaviour that would be worthy of blame, and foster them in the embrace

i Cf. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 114*

of Bahá'í education. Thus shall these tender infants be nurtured at the breast of the knowledge of God and His love. Thus shall they grow and flourish, and be taught righteousness and the dignity of humankind, resolution and the will to strive and to endure. Thus shall they learn perseverance in all things, the will to advance, high-mindedness and high resolve, chastity and purity of life. Thus shall they be enabled to carry to a successful conclusion whatsoever they undertake.

Let the mothers consider that whatever concerneth the education of children is of the first importance. Let them put forth every effort in this regard, for when the bough is green and tender it will grow in whatever way ye train it. Therefore is it incumbent upon the mothers to rear their little ones even as a gardener tendeth his young plants. Let them strive by day and by night to establish within their children faith and certitude, the fear of God, the love of the Beloved of the worlds, and all good qualities and traits. Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 95

- 91 ...O maid-servants of the Merciful! It is incumbent upon you to train the children from their earliest babyhood! It is incumbent upon you to beautify their morals! It is incumbent upon you to attend to them under all aspects and circumstances, inasmuch as God—glorified and exalted is He!—hath ordained mothers to be the primary trainers of children and infants. This is a great and important affair and a high and exalted position, and it is not allowable to slacken therein at all!

If thou walkest in this right path, thou wouldst become a real mother to the children, both spiritually and materially...

Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, vol. 3, p. 606

- 92 Deliver my longings and greetings to the consolation of thine eyeⁱ ... and to thy younger son ... Verily I love them both even as a compassionate father loveth his dear children. As to thee, have for them an abundant love and

i "Consolation of thine eye" - idiomatic Persian expression meaning "child"

exert thine utmost in training them, so that their being may grow through the milk of the love of God, forasmuch as it is the duty of parents to perfectly and thoroughly train their children.

There are also certain sacred duties on children toward parents, which duties are written in the Book of God, as belonging to God.ⁱⁱ The (children's) prosperity in this world and the Kingdom depends upon the good pleasure of parents, and without this they will be in manifest loss.

Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, vol. 2, p. 262

- 93 ...O dear one of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! Be the son of thy father and be the fruit of that tree. Be a son that hath been born of his soul and heart and not only of the water and clay. A real son is such an one as hath branched from the spiritual part of a man. I ask God that thou mayest be at all times confirmed and strengthened.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 117

- 94 O ye dear children!

Your father is compassionate, clement and merciful unto you and desireth for you success, prosperity and eternal life in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, it is incumbent upon you, dear children, to seek his good pleasure, to be guided by his guidance, to be drawn by the magnet of the love of God and be brought up in the lap of the love of God; that ye may become beautiful branches in the Gardens of EL-ABHÁ, verdant and watered by the abundance of the gift of God.

Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. III

- 95 It is incumbent upon the youth to walk in the footsteps of Hakímⁱⁱⁱ to be trained in his ways, for such important souls as he and his like have now ascended to the Kingdom of Abhá. The youth must grow and develop and take the place of their fathers, that this abundant grace, in the posterity of each one of the loved ones of God who bore great agonies, may day by day increase, until in the end it shall yield its fruit on earth and in Heaven.

From a Tablet

ii In Questions and Answers, an appendix to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh lays upon children the obligation of serving their parents and categorically states that after the recognition of the oneness of God, the most important of all duties for children is to have due regard for the rights of their parents.

iii One of the distinguished believers of Qazvín

- 96 The Sunday school for the children in which the Tablets and Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh are read, and the Word of God is recited for the children is indeed a blessed thing. Thou must certainly continue this organized activity without cessation, and attach importance to it, so that day by day it may grow and be quickened with the breaths of the Holy Spirit. If this activity is well organized, rest thou assured that it will yield great results. Firmness and steadfastness, however, are necessary, otherwise it will continue for some time, but later be gradually forgotten. Perseverance is an essential condition. In every project firmness and steadfastness will undoubtedly lead to good results; otherwise it will exist for some days, and then be discontinued.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 124

- 97 O ye children of the the Kingdom:

Your letters with your photographs have been received. From the perusal of the letters the utmost heartfelt emotions were experienced and at the sight of the portraits a spiritual joy and gladness was felt. Praise be to God the letters were indicative of the turning of the faces toward the Kingdom and from those faces it was evident that the light of the love of God is manifest and resplendent upon the brows.

I pray to God that in this school on Sundays ye may acquire heavenly knowledge, ye may secure a training of merciful characteristics and that ye may advance from day to day so that each of you may become a peerless shrub in the Divine Rose-garden and may be adorned with full foliage, and fruits.

From a Tablet to the children of the Bahá'í school, Urbana, Illinois

- 98 O young trees and plants, matchless and tender, that grow in the meadows of guidance! O ye newcomers to the Fraternity of Truth!

Although now ye be learners, the hope is that through showerings from the clouds of grace, ye will become teachers; that ye will flourish even as flowers and fragrant herbs in the garden of that knowledge which is both of the mind and of the heart; that each one of you will grow as a tree rich in yield, fair, fresh and strong, heavy with sweet fruit.

May the hidden confirmations of God make each one of you to become a well-spring of knowledge. May your hearts ever receive inspiration from the Denizens of the Concourse on high. May the drop become as the great sea; may the mote dazzle as the shining sun.

His Holiness the Báb hath said: "Should a tiny ant desire in this day to be possessed of such power as to be able to unravel the abstrusest and most bewildering passages of the Qur'án, its wish will no doubt be fulfilled, inasmuch as the mystery of eternal might vibrates within the innermost being of all created things." If so helpless a creature can be endowed with so subtle a capacity, how much more efficacious must be the power released through the liberal effusions of the grace of Bahá'u'lláh! What confirmations will be garnered, what influxes of the heart!

Wherefore, O ye illumined youth, strive by night and by day to unravel the mysteries of the mind and spirit, and to grasp the secrets of the Day of God. Inform yourselves of the evidences that the Most Great Name hath dawned. Open your lips in praise. Adduce convincing arguments and proofs. Lead those who thirst to the fountain of life; grant ye true health to the ailing. Be ye apprentices of God; be ye physicians directed by God, and heal ye the sick among humankind. Bring those who have been excluded into the circle of intimate friends. Make the despairing to be filled with hope. Waken them that slumber; make the heedless mindful. Such are the fruits of this earthly life. Such is the station of resplendent glory.

From a Tablet

From the Talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 99 Among these children many blessed souls will arise, if they be trained according to the Bahá'í Teachings. If a plant is carefully nurtured by a gardener, it will become good, and produce better fruit. These children must be given a good training from their earliest childhood. They must be given a systematic training which will further their development from day to day, in order that they may receive greater insight, so that their spiritual receptivity be broadened. Beginning in childhood they must receive instruction. They cannot be taught through books. Many elementary sciences must be made clear to them in the nursery; they must learn them in play, in amusement. Most ideas must be taught them through speech, not by book learning. One child must question the other concerning these things, and the other child must give the answer. In this way, they will make great progress. For example, mathematical problems must also be taught in the form of questions and answers. One of the children asks a question and the other must give the answer. Later on, the children will of

their own accord speak with each other concerning these same subjects. The children who are at the head of the class must receive premiums. They must be encouraged and when any one of them shows good advancement, for the further development they must be praised and encouraged therein. Even so in Godlike affairs. Oral questions must be asked and the answers must be given orally. They must discuss with each other in this manner.

The Bahá'í World, Vol. 9 (1940-1944)

- 100 Educate the children in their infancy in such a way that they may become exceedingly kind and merciful to the animals. If the animal is sick they should endeavour to cure it; if it is hungry they should feed it; if it is thirsty, they should satisfy its thirst; if it is tired they should give it rest.

Man is generally sinful and the animal is innocent; unquestionably one must be more kind and merciful to the innocent. The harmful animals, such as the bloodthirsty wolf, the poisonous snake and other injurious animals are excepted, because mercy towards these is cruelty to man, and other animals.

The Bahá'í World, Vol. 9 (1940-1944)

- 101 The art of music is divine and effective. It is the food of the soul and spirit. Through the power and charm of music the spirit of man is uplifted. It has wonderful sway and effect in the hearts of children, for their hearts are pure and melodies have great influence in them. The latent talents with which the hearts of these children are endowed will find expression through the medium of music. Therefore, you must exert yourselves to make them proficient; teach them to sing with excellence and effect. It is incumbent upon each child to know something of music, for without knowledge of this art the melodies of instrument and voice cannot be rightly enjoyed. Likewise, it is necessary that the schools teach it in order that the souls and hearts of the pupils may become vivified and exhilarated and their lives be brightened with enjoyment.

Today illumined and spiritual children are gathered in this meeting. They are the children of the Kingdom. The Kingdom of heaven is for such souls as these, for they are near to God. They have pure hearts. They have spiritual faces. The effect of the divine teachings is manifest in the perfect purity of their hearts. That is why Christ has addressed the world, saying, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven"—that is, men must become pure in

heart to know God. The teachings have had great effect. Spiritual souls! Tender souls! The hearts of all children are of the utmost purity. They are mirrors upon which no dust has fallen. But this purity is on account of weakness and innocence, not on account of any strength and testing, for as this is the early period of their childhood, their hearts and minds are unsullied by the world. They cannot display any great intelligence. They have neither hypocrisy nor deceit. This is on account of the child's weakness, whereas the man becomes pure through his strength. Through the power of intelligence he becomes simple; through the great power of reason and understanding and not through the power of weakness he becomes sincere. When he attains to the state of perfection, he will receive these qualities; his heart becomes purified, his spirit enlightened, his soul is sensitized and tender—all through his great strength. This is the difference between the perfect man and the child. Both have the underlying qualities of simplicity and sincerity—the child through the power of weakness and the man through the power of strength...

I give you my advice, and it is this: Train these children with divine exhortations. From their childhood instill in their hearts the love of God so they may manifest in their lives the fear of God and have confidence in the bestowals of God. Teach them to free themselves from human imperfections and to acquire the divine perfections latent in the heart of man. The life of man is useful if he attains the perfections of man. If he becomes the center of the imperfections of the world of humanity, death is better than life, and nonexistence better than existence. Therefore, make ye an effort in order that these children may be rightly trained and educated and that each of them may attain perfection in the world of humanity. Know ye the value of these children for they are all my children.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 102 If a pupil is told that his intelligence is less than his fellow pupils, it is a very great drawback and handicap to his progress. He must be encouraged to advance...

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 103 ...According to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh the family, being a human, unit must be educated according to the rules of sanctity. All the virtues must be taught the family. The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be

transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honor of one, the honor of all.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 104 He promulgated the adoption of the same course of education for man and woman. Daughters and sons must follow the same curriculum of study, thereby promoting unity of the sexes. When all mankind shall receive the same opportunity of education and the equality of men and women be realized, the foundations of war will be utterly destroyed. Without equality this will be impossible because all differences and distinction are conducive to discord and strife. Equality between men and women is conducive to the abolition of warfare for the reason that women will never be willing to sanction it. Mothers will not give their sons as sacrifices upon the battlefield after twenty years of anxiety and loving devotion in rearing them from infancy, no matter what cause they are called upon to defend. There is no doubt that when women obtain equality of rights, war will entirely cease among mankind.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 105 The child must not be oppressed or censured because it is undeveloped; it must be patiently trained...

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 106 Bahá'u'lláh has announced that inasmuch as ignorance and lack of education are barriers of separation among mankind, all must receive training and instruction. Through this provision the lack of mutual understanding will be remedied and the unity of mankind furthered and advanced. Universal education is a universal law...

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 107 The education of each child is compulsory ... In addition to this wide-spread education each child must be taught a profession, art, or trade, so that every

member of the community will be enabled to earn his own livelihood. Work done in the spirit of service is the highest form of worship ...

Abdu'l-Bahá on Divine Philosophy

From the writings of Shoghi Effendi and letters on his behalfⁱ

- 108 For the members of the Children's Educational Work Committee ... I supplicate Divine Assistance, that He may graciously aid them in a work which was so near and dear to the Master's heart and enable them to assist in the rise of future devoted and efficient servants to the Cause of God.

23 December 1922, Bahá'í Administration

- 109 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.

12 March 1923, Bahá'í Administration

- 110 As to the spiritual activities of the "Children of the Kingdom" in America, my hope and prayer is that they may grow to become efficient servants of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. Their devotion and self-sacrifice, their readiness to help the cause of the Bahá'í Temple, their activity in connection with the "Bahá'í Magazine" are all unmistakable signs of the glorious future of the Cause in that land. May the care and loving-kindness of the Heavenly Father guide them, protect them and aid them in their future mission in life.

26 November 1923

- 111 A basic and vital requirement of these days is the matter of educating the boys and girls. One of the duties devolving upon the members of Spiritual Assemblies is that, with the support of the friends, they should exert all their powers to establish schools for the instruction of boys and girls in the things of the spirit, the fundamentals of teaching the Faith, reading the Sacred Writings, learning the history of the Faith, the secular branches of knowledge, the various arts and skills, and the different languages—so that Bahá'í methods of instruction will become so widely known that children

i Editor: Written by Shoghi Effendi unless otherwise referenced.

from every level of society will seek to acquire divine teachings as well as secular knowledge in Bahá'í schools, and thereby means for the promotion of the Cause of God will be provided.

19 December 1923

- 112 The “Magazine of the Children of the Kingdom”, the latest issue of which I have just received from that indefatigable pioneer of your cause ... has kindled in me such fresh hopes that I feel moved to send you this message of love and confidence in the great part you are destined to play for the future of the Cause.

I feel it is urgent and important that this first and only organ of the Bahá'í youth throughout the world should, in whatever it publishes, instil in its readers, and particularly in every Bahá'í child, the sense of his unique opportunities and future responsibilities in the great task that awaits him in future.

Its duty is to initiate, promote and mirror forth the various activities of the rising generation throughout the Bahá'í world, to establish and strengthen a bond of true fellowship amongst all the children of 'Abdu'l-Bahá whether in the East or in the West, and to unfold to their eyes the vision of a golden future before them. It should impress upon their hearts the vital necessity of establishing, now, whilst in their tender age, a firm foundation for their mission in life.

The cause of the Children of the Kingdom, whom the Master so loved, and on whom He showered many a blessing and infinite loving-kindness, is, I assure you, still dear and close to our hearts. In you, the descendants of the heroic pioneers of a world Movement, rests the hope of achieving the task which they have so nobly begun—their task for the service and salvation of all mankind.

As to my humble share of service and support, I can but pray on your behalf, and supplicate during my hours of prayer at the three Holy Shrines, the guidance, the blessings, and the assistance of Bahá'u'lláh, beseeching Him most fervently to enable you, in the happy days to come, to establish His Kingdom and fulfil His Word.

May your Magazine inspire you to achieve this end.

30 December 1923

- 113 'Abdu'l-Bahá has always attached very great importance to the education of children and we take this opportunity to congratulate you on your signal

success in this field of service. We hope some day your work will extend into the East extensively where it is so badly needed.

9 April 1925, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 114 In connection with the question that you had asked as to whether you should take a trip to the Holy Land or keep the sum to defray the expense of a young man you are educating, Shoghi Effendi wishes me to write you that although it means profound pleasure to him and to the members of the holy family, to welcome you in the home of our beloved Master and to share with you the eternal outpourings of His Grace in and around His blessed Shrine, he deems it of greater importance for you to keep up helping the young boy whom you have undertaken to educate. This he would advise you with a deep realization of Bahá'u'lláh's most pregnant utterance that he who educates his child or another's it is just as though he is educating a child of Bahá'u'lláh Himself.

29 May 1925, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 115 Among the sacred obligations devolving upon the Spiritual Assemblies is the promotion of learning, the establishing of schools and creation of the necessary academic equipment and facilities for every boy and girl.

Every child, without exception, must from his earliest years make a thorough study of the art of reading and writing, and according to his own tastes and inclinations and the degree of his capacity and powers, devote extreme diligence to the acquisition of learning beneficial arts and skills, various languages, speech, and contemporary technology.

To assist the children of the poor in the attainment of these accomplishments, and particularly in learning the basic subjects, is incumbent upon the members of the Spiritual Assemblies, and is accounted as one of the obligations laid upon the conscience of the trustees of God in every land.

“He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My Glory, My Loving-Kindness, My Mercy, that have compassed the world.”ⁱ

8 June 1925

- 116 Shoghi Effendi was very interested to hear of the plans you are making for the education of your children. He hopes that they will all grow to be ardent

i Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, The seventh Ishráq

adherents of the Bahá'í Cause, able servants of the Blessed Threshold, and eloquent speakers on religious and social subjects. He desires to be remembered to them as well as to their dear father.

24 December 1925, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 117 We had heard through various channels the wonderful way your children had grown to speak about the Cause in public. Shoghi Effendi's hope is that they will, the three of them, become able and devoted speakers on the Cause and subjects akin to it. To do this properly they will need a firm foundation of scientific and literary training which fortunately they are obtaining. It is just as important for the Bahá'í young boys and girls to become properly educated in colleges of high standing as it is to be spiritually developed. The mental as well as the spiritual side of the youth has to be developed before he can serve the Cause efficiently. From Shoghi Effendi's postscript:

...I will specially pray for your dear children, that they, too, firmly-grounded through a well-guided plan of sound education, may in days to come serve efficiently and effectively the Cause of God. They are richly endowed with gifts, and my prayer is that a proper training may enable them to utilize those gifts for the propagation of God's Faith.

28 November 1926, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 118 In philanthropic enterprises and acts of charity, in promotion of the general welfare and furtherance of the public good including that of every group without any exceptions whatever, let the beloved of God attract the favourable attention of all, and lead all the rest.

Let them, freely and without charge, open the doors of their schools and their higher institutions for the study of sciences and the liberal arts, to non-Bahá'í children and youth who are poor and in need ... and next is the propagation of learning and the promulgation of Bahá'í rules of conduct, practices and laws. At this time, when the nation has awakened out of its sleep of negligence, and the Government has begun to consider the promotion and expansion of its educational establishment, let the Bahá'í representatives in that country arise in such a manner that as a result of their high endeavours in every hamlet, village and town, of every province and district, preliminary measures will be taken for the setting up of institutions for the study of sciences, the liberal arts and religion. Let Bahá'í children without any exceptions learn the fundamentals of reading and writing and familiarize themselves with the rules of conduct, the cus-

toms, practices and laws as set forth in the Book of God; and let them, in the new branches of knowledge, in the arts and technology of the day, in pure and praiseworthy characteristics—Bahá'í conduct, the Bahá'í way of life—become so distinguished above the rest that all other communities, whether Islamic, Zoroastrian, Christian, Judaic or materialist, will of their own volition and most gladly enter their children in such advanced Bahá'í institutions of learning and entrust them to the care of Bahá'í instructors.

So too is the promotion and execution of the laws set forth in the Book of God.

January 1929

- 119 Your short but impressive letter addressed to Shoghi Effendi was received. He perused it with deep interest and charged me to thank you on his behalf and to express his fondest hopes that you will pursue with an abiding zeal your academic studies. Being a Bahá'í you are certainly aware of the fact that Bahá'u'lláh considered education as one of the most fundamental factors of a true civilization. This education, however, in order to be adequate and fruitful, should be comprehensive in nature and should take into consideration not only the physical and the intellectual side of man but also his spiritual and ethical aspects. This should be the programme of the Bahá'í youth all over the world.

9 July 1931, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 120 We hope that before long the Bahá'ís will even afford to have schools that would provide the children the intellectual and spiritual education as prescribed in the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master.

25 December 1931, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 121 He is very glad to know that you attach importance to the training of the children, for whatever they learn in that early stage of their development will leave its traces upon their whole life. It becomes part of their nature.

There is no especial book which the Guardian can recommend. It is for the older friends to attempt a compilation that would suit that purpose, and after many attempts a good one will ultimately be produced.

The Master used to attach much importance to the learning by heart of Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb. During His days it was a usual work of the children of the household to learn Tablets by heart; now, however, those children are grown up and do not have time for such a thing. But the

practice is most useful to implant the ideas and spirit those words contain into the mind of the children.

With "The Dawn-Breakers" in your possession you could also arrange interesting stories about the early days of the Movement which the children would like to hear. There are also stories about the life of Christ, Muḥammad and the other prophets which if told to the children will break down any religious prejudice they may have learned from older people of little understanding.

Such stories regarding the life of different prophets together with their sayings will also be useful to better understand the literature of the Cause for there is constant reference to them. It is however the work of experienced people to bring together such materials and make of them interesting text books for the children.

The Cause will gradually produce people who would answer these needs. It is only a question of time. What we should strive to do is to stimulate different individuals who have the talent to attempt the task.

19 October 1932, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 122 He was deeply gratified to hear that the friends are attaching such a great importance to the teaching and training of Bahá'í children. The education of the youth is, undoubtedly, of paramount importance as it serves to deepen their understanding of the Cause and to canalize their energies along the most profitable lines. Inasmuch, however, as the national expenses of the Cause in America are daily increasing, the members of your Committee should be very careful not to extend beyond their financial resources the sphere of their activities. The plans your Committee has made should not develop to such an extent as to hamper the progress of the Temple work.

20 April 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 123 Shoghi Effendi wishes you particularly to give all your attention to the education of your boys so that they may become sincere, loyal and active Bahá'ís. It is to the youth that we should look for help, and it is, therefore, the sacred obligation of the parents to provide their children with a thorough Bahá'í training.

31 May 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 124 The Bahá'í Faith ... advocates compulsory education...

June 1933

- 125 He was deeply gratified to learn that your material conditions are improving and he sincerely hopes that they will give you an opportunity to give to ... and ... the best educational training, so that they may become, in a not distant future, devoted servants and champions of the Cause.

Your responsibility as a mother, and especially as a Bahá'í mother, whose sacred obligation is to look after the training of the children along Bahá'í lines, is indeed immense. It is hoped that through God's help and guidance you will be enabled to fully discharge your duties.

22 July 1933, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 126 Shoghi Effendi was deeply saddened to learn from your letter ... of the rather serious situation which your daughter's conduct and her general attitude towards the Cause have created...

Although he highly deplores this fact, and is fully aware of the bad repercussions which it may have on the Cause, yet he feels that nothing short of your motherly care and love and of the counsels which you and the friends can give her, can effectively remedy this situation. Above all, you should be patient, and confident that your efforts to that end are being sustained and guided through the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh. He is surely hearing your prayers, and will no doubt accept them, and thus hasten the gradual and complete materialization of your hopes and expectations for your daughter and for the Cause.

The Guardian would advise you, therefore, not to take any drastic action with regard to your daughter's attendance at the meetings ... For in this way there is much greater chance to reform her character than through force or any other drastic method. Love and kindness have far greater influence than punishment upon the improvement of human character.

The Guardian, therefore, trusts that by this means you will succeed in gradually introducing a fundamental change in your daughter's life, and also in making of her a better and truer believer. He is fervently praying on her behalf that she may fully attain this station.

26 January 1935, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 127 The Guardian sees no objection that reference be made to the fact that the teaching classes and conferences which the believers are now organizing might evolve in the distant future into departments of education, or such institutions of learning as will be established in the future Bahá'í social order.

12 July 1938, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 128 As regards your plans: the Guardian fully approves indeed of your view that no matter how urgent and vital the requirements of the teaching work may be you should under no circumstances neglect the education of your children, as towards them you have an obligation no less sacred than towards the Cause.

Any plan or arrangement you may arrive at which would combine your twofold duties towards your family and the Cause, and would permit you to resume active work in the field of pioneer teaching, and also to take good care of your children so as to not jeopardize their future in the Cause would meet with the whole-hearted approval of the Guardian.

17 July 1938, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 129 The Guardian wishes me to assure you, in particular, of his supplications on behalf of your children, that they may, through Divine confirmations and assistance, and under your loving care and protection, receive such training as may lead them to fully recognize and unreservedly accept the Faith, and provide them with the necessary spiritual equipment to effectively and loyally serve and promote its interests in the future.

As a Bahá'í mother you have certainly a most sacred and weighty responsibility for their spiritual development in the Cause, and you should from now endeavour to instil into their hearts the love of Bahá'u'lláh and thus prepare them for the full recognition and acceptance of His Station once they attain the age and capacity to do so.

20 April 1939, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 130 With regard to your activities in connection with the training and education of Bahá'í children: needless to tell you what a vital importance the Guardian attaches to such activities, on which so much of the strength, welfare and growth of the Community must necessarily depend. What a more sacred privilege, and also what a weightier responsibility than the task of rearing up the new generation of believers, and of inculcating into their youthful and receptive minds the principles and teachings of the Cause, and of thus preparing them to fully assume, and properly discharge the weighty responsibilities and obligations of their future life in the Bahá'í Community.

28 April 1939, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 131 You have asked him for detailed information concerning the Bahá'í educational programme: there is as yet no such thing as a Bahá'í curriculum, and there are no Bahá'í publications exclusively devoted to this subject, since

the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá do not present a definite and detailed educational system, but simply offer certain basic principles and set forth a number of teaching ideals that should guide future Bahá'í educationalists in their efforts to formulate an adequate teaching curriculum which would be in full harmony with the spirit of the Bahá'í Teachings, and would thus meet the requirements and needs of the modern age.

These basic principles are available in the sacred writings of the Cause, and should be carefully studied, and gradually incorporated in various college and university programmes. But the task of formulating a system of education which would be officially recognized by the Cause, and enforced as such throughout the Bahá'í world is one which [the] present-day generation of believers cannot obviously undertake, and which has to be gradually accomplished by Bahá'í scholars and educationalists of the future.

7 June 1939, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 132 With regard to the statement attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and which you have quoted in your letter regarding a "problem child": these statements of the Master, however true in their substance, should never be given a literal interpretation. 'Abdu'l-Bahá could have never meant that a child should be left to himself, entirely free. In fact Bahá'í education, just like any other system of education, is based on the assumption that there are certain natural deficiencies in every child, no matter how gifted, which his educators, whether his parents, schoolmasters, or his spiritual guides and preceptors, should endeavour to remedy. Discipline of some sort, whether physical, moral or intellectual, is indeed indispensable, and no training can be said to be complete and fruitful if it disregards this element. The child when born is far from being perfect. It is not only helpless, but actually is imperfect, and even is naturally inclined towards evil. He should be trained, his natural inclinations harmonized, adjusted and controlled, and if necessary suppressed or regulated, so as to ensure his healthy physical and moral development. Bahá'í parents cannot simply adopt an attitude of non-resistance towards their children, particularly those who are unruly and violent by nature. It is not even sufficient that they should pray on their behalf. Rather they should endeavour to inculcate, gently and patiently, into their youthful minds such principles of moral conduct and initiate them into the principles and teachings of the Cause with such tactful and loving care as would enable them to become "true sons of God" and

develop into loyal and intelligent citizens of His Kingdom. This is the high purpose which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has clearly defined as the chief goal of every education.

9 July 1939, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 133 The task of bringing up a Bahá'í child, as emphasized time and again in Bahá'í writings, is the chief responsibility of the mother, whose unique privilege is indeed to create in her home such conditions as would be most conducive to both his material and spiritual welfare and advancement. The training which a child first receives through his mother constitutes the strongest foundation for his future development, and it should therefore be the paramount concern of your wife ... to endeavour from now imparting to her new-born son such spiritual training as would enable him later on to fully assume and adequately discharge all the responsibilities and duties of Bahá'í life.

16 November 1939, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 134 With regard to your little daughter ... he is truly rejoiced and encouraged to realize how eager you both are to provide her with a thoroughly Bahá'í training, and is confident that under your wise and devoted care, and through the unfailing protection and guidance of Bahá'u'lláh she will in time develop into a devoted and loyal servant of the Faith.

12 December 1939, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 135 With this in mind, the Guardian thinks it would be preferable not to place the child in a purely Catholic institution, and to give her instead a broad spiritual and intellectual training that would enable her, at a later age, to fully appreciate the spirit of the Cause. While it should be your constant endeavour to bring her up in a thoroughly religious atmosphere, you should also be careful in keeping her away from all such influences that would tend to breed in her the spirit of religious bigotry, and thus narrow down the horizon of her spiritual understanding.

12 December 1939, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 136 With reference to the question of the training of children: given the emphasis placed by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the necessity for the parents to train their children while still in their tender age, it would seem preferable that they should receive their first training at home at the hand

of their mother, rather than be sent to a nursery. Should circumstances, however, compel a Bahá'í mother to adopt the latter course there can be no objection.

13 November 1940, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 137 The question of the training and education of children in case one of the parents is a non-Bahá'í is one which solely concerns the parents themselves, who should decide about it the way they find best and most conducive to the maintenance of the unity of their family, and to the future welfare of their children. Once the child comes of age, however, he should be given full freedom to choose his religion, irrespective of the wishes and desires of his parents.

14 December 1940, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 138 The Guardian was delighted to hear of your youth group. The children who are trained in the world-embracing teachings of Bahá'u'lláh cannot but grow up to be a truly new race of men. He hopes these young people will prepare themselves for the great task which will face them in the future, that of helping to rebuild the world with the aid and inspiration of the Bahá'í teachings.

25 December 1941, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 139 These Bahá'í children are of such great importance to the future. They will live in times, and have to meet problems, which never faced their elders. And the Cause alone can equip them to properly serve the needs of a future, war-weary, disillusioned, unhappy humanity. So their task will be very great and a very responsible one, and too much care cannot be devoted to their upbringing and preparation.

11 January 1942, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 140 ...The Guardian feels that it would be better for either the mothers of Bahá'í children—or some Committee your Assembly might delegate the task to—to choose excerpts from the Sacred Words to be used by the child rather than just something made up. Of course prayer can be purely spontaneous, but many of the sentences and thoughts combined in Bahá'í writings of a devotional nature are easy to grasp, and the revealed Word is endowed with a power of its own.

8 August 1942, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 141 You Bahá'í children and young people have both great privileges and great obligations ahead of you, for your generation will be the ones to help build up a new, better and more beautiful world after the dark years of this war are passed. You should prepare yourselves for this great task by trying to grasp the true meaning of the teachings and not just merely accepting them as something you are taught. They are like a wonderful new world of thought just beginning to be explored, and when we realize that Bahá'u'lláh has brought teachings and laws for a thousand years to come, we can readily see that each new generation may find some greater meaning in the writings than the ones gone before did.

14 October 1942, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 142 The Guardian, in his remarks to ... about parents' and children's, wives' and husbands' relations in America, meant that there is a tendency in that country for children to be too independent of the wishes of their parents and lacking in the respect due to them ...

22 July 1943, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 143 Regarding your question about children fighting: the statement of the Master, not to strike back, should not be taken so extremely literally that Bahá'í children must accept to be bullied and thrashed. If they can manage to show a better way of settling disputes than by active self-defence, they should naturally do so.

11 May 1945, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 144 You ask him about the fear of God: perhaps the friends do not realize that the majority of human beings need the element of fear in order to discipline their conduct? Only a relatively very highly evolved soul would always be disciplined by love alone. Fear of punishment, fear of the anger of God if we do evil, are needed to keep people's feet on the right path. Of course we should love God—but we must fear Him in the sense of a child fearing the righteous anger and chastisement of a parent; not cringe before Him as before a tyrant, but know His mercy exceeds His justice!

26 July 1946, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 145 He is sorry to hear your little boy is not developing satisfactorily; very few children are really bad. They do, however, sometimes have complicated personalities and need very wise handling to enable them to grow into normal, moral, happy adults. If you feel convinced your son will really

benefit from going to Father Flanagan's school you could send him there. But in general we should certainly always avoid sending Bahá'í children to orthodox religious schools, especially Catholic, as the children receive the imprint of religious beliefs we as believers know are outdated and no longer for this age. He will especially pray for the solution of this problem.
30 May 1947, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 146 Regarding the questions you asked him: there is no objection to children who are as yet unable to memorize a whole prayer learning certain sentences only.

He does not feel that the friends should make a practice of saying grace or of teaching it to children. This is not part of the Bahá'í Faith, but a Christian practice, and as the Cause embraces members of all races and religions we should be careful not to introduce into it the customs of our previous beliefs. Bahá'u'lláh has given us the obligatory prayers, also prayers before sleeping, for travellers, etc. We should not introduce a new set of prayers He has not specified, when He has given us already so many, for so many occasions.

Your work for child education is certainly important, and he urges you to keep it up.

27 September 1947, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 147 In regard to your question: he feels this is a matter for you and your husband to decide, especially in view of his attitude towards the Cause; the children, being minors, are under your jurisdiction, and you both have sacred rights and responsibility as regards their future.

24 November 1947, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 148 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, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 149 Just because you are children does not mean you cannot serve the Faith, and teach it, by your example and by the way you let people see that you are better and more intelligent than most other children.

16 March 1952, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 150 The general principle ... is that a request for excuse from School sessions on Bahá'í Holy Days is desirable. This applies to all Bahá'í children regardless of their age. Children of Bahá'í parents, under the age of 15, are considered Bahá'ís.

What a Bahá'í parent or your Assembly should do is apply to the School Board to grant to their children permission to remain away from School on Bahá'í Holy Days, and then abide by whatever decision the School Board may make, and not try in any way to force the matter.

19 August 1952, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 151 The beloved Guardian was greatly delighted to learn of the success of the institute for teaching the Indian children. He feels this is a very fine method of implanting the teachings of the Faith in the hearts and the minds of the young children, so that they may grow and develop into strong and virile men and women who will serve the Cause. Likewise through this effort, he hopes you will be able to attract some of the parents.

18 February 1954, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 152 The Guardian will pray for the spiritual development of your dear son. On the shoulders of the youth today rests the future of the Faith. Therefore they should be well educated and trained not only in the Teachings of the Faith, but also in secular matters.

24 May 1954, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 153 The Guardian is happy to see you are teaching the children, as a firm foundation of the Teachings in their minds will greatly assist in forming their characters, and enable them to become well-balanced and useful believers when they mature.

6 March 1955, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 154 In explaining the fear of God to children, there is no objection to teaching it as 'Abdu'l-Bahá so often taught everything, in the form of parables. Also the child should be made to understand that we don't fear God because

He is cruel, but we fear Him because He is just, and, if we do wrong and deserve to be punished, then in His justice He may see fit to punish us. We must both love God and fear Him.

15 February 1957, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 155 Individual Bahá'ís may press for getting religion taught in the public schools, but this should not be done officially, as we don't yet carry enough weight.

15 August 1957, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

CHASTE & HOLY LIFE

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

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled September 1988

Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations. It demands daily vigilance in the control of one's carnal desires and corrupt inclinations. It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures. It requires total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks, from opium, and from similar habit-forming drugs. It condemns the prostitution of art and of literature, the practices of nudism and of companionate marriage, infidelity in marital relationships, and all manner of promiscuity, of easy familiarity, and of sexual vices...

The Advent of Divine Justice

The Bahá'í Standard

The Nature of Bahá'í Law

- 1 They whom God hath endued with insight will readily recognize that the precepts laid down by God constitute the highest means for the maintenance of order in the world and the security of its peoples...

O ye peoples of the world! Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures. Thus hath it been sent down from the heaven of the Will of your Lord, the Lord of Revelation...

Say: From My laws the sweet smelling savour of My garment can be smelled, and by their aid the standards of victory will be planted upon the highest peaks. The Tongue of My power hath, from the heaven of My omnipotent glory, addressed to My creation these words: "Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty." Happy is the lover that hath inhaled the divine fragrance of his Best-Beloved from these words, laden with the perfume of a grace which no tongue can describe. By My life! He who hath drunk the choice wine of fairness from the hands of My bountiful favour, will circle around My commandments that shine above the Dayspring of My creation.

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

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

- 2 Just as there are laws governing our physical lives, requiring that we must supply our bodies with certain foods, maintain them within a certain range of temperatures, and so forth, if we wish to avoid physical disabilities, so also there are laws governing our spiritual lives. These laws are revealed to mankind in each age by the Manifestation of God, and obedience to them is of vital importance if each human being, and mankind in general,

is to develop properly and harmoniously. Moreover, these various aspects are interdependent. If an individual violates the spiritual laws for his own development he will cause injury not only to himself but to the society in which he lives. Similarly, the condition of society has a direct effect on the individuals who must live within it.

6 February 1973, Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968–1973

- 3 We have considered your several letters and have noted your questions, and your view that many Bahá'í youth in ... are confused, and are pleading for guidance in simple clear language on how to meet daily situations, particularly those involving sex.

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 toward 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.

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.

17 October 1968, Universal House of Justice

- 4 As to chastity, this is one of the most challenging concepts to get across in this very permissive age, but Bahá'ís must make the utmost effort to uphold Bahá'í standards, no matter how difficult they may seem at first. Such efforts will be made easier if the youth will understand that the laws and standards of the Faith are meant to free them from untold spiritual and moral difficulties in the same way that a proper appreciation of the laws of nature enables one to live in harmony with the forces of the planet.

14 January 1985, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

True Liberty

- 5 Consider the pettiness of men's minds. They ask for that which injureth them, and cast away the thing that profiteth them...

Know ye that the embodiment of liberty and its symbol is the animal. That which beseemeth man is submission unto such restraints as will protect him from his own ignorance, and guard him against the harm of the mischief-maker. Liberty causeth man to overstep the bounds of propriety, and to infringe on the dignity of his station. It debaseth him to the level of extreme depravity and wickedness.

Regard men as a flock of sheep that need a shepherd for their protection. This, verily, is the truth, the certain truth. We approve of liberty in certain circumstances, and refuse to sanction it in others. We, verily, are the All-Knowing.

Say: True liberty consisteth in man's submission unto My commandments, little as ye know it. Were men to observe that which We have sent down unto them from the Heaven of Revelation, they would, of a certainty, attain unto perfect liberty. Happy is the man that hath apprehended the Purpose of God in whatever He hath revealed from the Heaven of His Will, that pervadeth all created things. Say: The liberty that profiteth you is to be found nowhere except in complete servitude unto God, the Eternal Truth. Whoso hath tasted of its sweetness will refuse to barter it for all the dominion of earth and heaven.

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

- 6 ...with regard to the peoples who clamour for freedom: 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.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 227

The Bahá'í Standard of Chastity

- 7 The chosen ones of God ... should not look at the depraved condition of the society in which they live, nor at the evidences of moral degradation and frivolous conduct which the people around them display. They should not

content themselves merely with relative distinction and excellence. Rather they should fix their gaze upon nobler heights by setting the counsels and exhortations of the Pen of Glory as their supreme goal. Then it will be readily realized how numerous are the stages that still remain to be traversed and how far off the desired goal lies—a goal which is none other than exemplifying heavenly morals and virtues.

30 October 1924, Shoghi Effendi

- 8 It must be remembered, however, that the maintenance of such a high standard of moral conduct is not to be associated or confused with any form of asceticism, or of excessive and bigoted puritanism. The standard inculcated by Bahá'u'lláh seeks, under no circumstances, to deny anyone the legitimate right and privilege to derive the fullest advantage and benefit from the manifold joys, beauties, and pleasures with which the world has been so plentifully enriched by an All-Loving Creator. "Should a man," Bahá'u'lláh Himself reassures us, "wish to adorn himself with the ornaments of the earth, to wear its apparels, or partake of the benefits it can bestow, no harm can befall him, if he alloweth nothing whatever to intervene between him and God, for God hath ordained every good thing, whether created in the heavens or in the earth, for such of His servants as truly believe in Him. Eat ye, O people, of the good things which God hath allowed you, and deprive not yourselves from His wondrous bounties. Render thanks and praise unto Him, and be of them that are truly thankful."

The Advent of Divine Justice

- 9 The Bahá'í standard is very high, more particularly when compared with the thoroughly rotten morals of the present world. But this standard of ours will produce healthier, happier, nobler people, and induce stabler marriages...

19 October 1947, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

A Chaste and Holy Life

Definition

- 10 Such a chaste and holy life, with its implications of modesty, purity, temperance, decency, and clean-mindedness, involves no less than the exercise of moderation in all that pertains to dress, language, amusements, and all artistic and literary avocations. It demands daily vigilance in the control of one's carnal desires and corrupt inclinations. It calls for the abandonment of a frivolous conduct, with its excessive attachment to trivial and often misdirected pleasures. It requires total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks, from opium, and from similar habit-forming drugs. It condemns the prostitution of art and of literature, the practices of nudism and of companionate marriage, infidelity in marital relationships, and all manner of promiscuity, of easy familiarity, and of sexual vices. It can tolerate no compromise with the theories, the standards, the habits, and the excesses of a decadent age. Nay rather it seeks to demonstrate, through the dynamic force of its example, the pernicious character of such theories, the falsity of such standards, the hollowness of such claims, the perversity of such habits, and the sacrilegious character of such excesses.

The Advent of Divine Justice

Chastity

- 11 He is My true follower who, if he come to a valley of pure gold, will pass straight through it aloof as a cloud, and will neither turn back, nor pause. Such a man is, assuredly, of Me. From his garment the Concourse on high can inhale the fragrance of sanctity ... And if he met the fairest and most comely of women, he would not feel his heart seduced by the least shadow of desire for her beauty. Such an one, indeed, is the creation of spotless chastity. Thus instructeth you the Pen of the Ancient of Days, as bidden by your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful.

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

- 12 Purity and chastity have been, and still are, the most great ornaments for the handmaidens of God. God is My Witness! The brightness of the light of chastity sheddeth its illumination upon the worlds of the spirit, and its fragrance is wafted even unto the Most Exalted Paradise.

Bahá'u'lláh, cited in The Advent of Divine Justice

- 13 Concerning the positive aspects of chastity the Universal House of Justice states that the Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse and holds that the institution of marriage has been established as the channel of its rightful expression. Bahá'ís do not believe that the sex impulse should be suppressed but that it should be regulated and controlled.

Chastity in no way implies withdrawal from human relationships. It liberates people from the tyranny of the ubiquity of sex. A person who is in control of his sexual impulses is enabled to have profound and enduring friendships with many people, both men and women, without ever sullyng that unique and priceless bond that should unite man and wife.

8 May 1979, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Moderation

- 14 Whatsoever passeth beyond the limits of moderation will cease to exert a beneficial influence. Consider for instance such things as liberty, civilization and the like. However much men of understanding may favourably regard them, they will, if carried to excess, exercise a pernicious influence upon men.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 15 The choice of clothing and the cut of the beard and its dressing are left to the discretion of men. But beware, O people, lest ye make yourselves the playthings of the ignorant.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 16 Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation. As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 17 We have made it lawful for you to listen to music and singing. Take heed, however, lest listening thereto should cause you to overstep the bounds of propriety and dignity. Let your joy be the joy born of My Most Great Name, a Name that bringeth rapture to the heart, and filleth with ecstasy the minds of all who have drawn nigh unto God.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 51

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

30 June 1952, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Daily Vigilance of Actions

- 19 Arise, O people, and, by the power of God's might, resolve to gain the victory over your own selves, that haply the whole earth may be freed and sanctified from its servitude to the gods of its idle fancies—gods that have inflicted such loss upon, and are responsible for the misery of, their wretched worshippers. These idols form the obstacle that impedeth man in his efforts to advance in the path of perfection.

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

- 20 O SON OF BEING!

Bring thyself to account each day ere thou art summoned to a reckoning; for death, unheralded, shall come upon thee and thou shalt be called to give account for thy deeds.

The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, Arabic no. 31

- 21 For desire is a flame that has reduced to ashes uncounted lifetime harvests of the learned, a devouring fire that even the vast sea of their accumulated knowledge could never quench. How often has it happened that an individual who was graced with every attribute of humanity and wore the jewel of true understanding, nevertheless followed after his passions until his excellent qualities passed beyond moderation and he was forced into excess. His pure intentions changed to evil ones, his attributes were no longer put to uses worthy of them, and the power of his desires turned him aside from righteousness and its rewards into ways that were dangerous and dark. A good character is in the sight of God and His chosen ones and the possessors of insight, the most excellent and praiseworthy of all things, but always on condition that its centre of emanation should be reason and knowledge and its base should be true moderation.

The Secret of Divine Civilization

Abandonment of Frivolous Conduct

- 22 O MY FRIEND!

Thou art the daystar of the heavens of My holiness, let not the defilement of the world eclipse thy splendour. Rend asunder the veil of heedlessness, that from behind the clouds thou mayest emerge resplendent and array all things with the apparel of life.

The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, Persian no. 73

- 23 Disencumber yourselves of all attachment to this world and the vanities thereof. Beware that ye approach them not, inasmuch as they prompt you to walk after your own lusts and covetous desires, and hinder you from entering the straight and glorious Path.

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

- 24 [In] “The Advent of Divine Justice” the beloved Guardian is describing the requirements not only of chastity, but of “a chaste and holy life”—both the adjectives are important. One of the signs of a decadent society, a sign which is very evident in the world today, is an almost frenetic devotion to pleasure and diversion, an insatiable thirst for amusement, a fanatical devotion to games and sport, a reluctance to treat any matter seriously, and a scornful, derisory attitude towards virtue and solid worth. Abandonment

of “a frivolous conduct” does not imply that a Bahá’í must be sour-faced or perpetually solemn. Humour, happiness, joy are characteristics of a true Bahá’í life. Frivolity palls and eventually leads to boredom and emptiness, but true happiness and joy and humour that are parts of a balanced life that includes serious thought, compassion and humble servitude to God, are characteristics that enrich life and add to its radiance.

Shoghi Effendi’s choice of words was always significant, and each one is important in understanding his guidance. In this particular passage, he does not forbid “trivial” pleasures, but he does warn against “excessive attachment” to them and indicates that they can often be “misdirected”. One is reminded of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s caution that we should not let a pastime become a waste of time.

8 May 1979, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Alcohol

- 25 Become ye intoxicated with the wine of the love of God, and not with that which deadeneth your minds, O ye that adore Him! Verily, it hath been forbidden unto every believer, whether man or woman.

Bahá’u’lláh, cited in The Advent of Divine Justice

- 26 The drinking of wine is, according to the text of the Most Holy Book, forbidden; for it is the cause of chronic diseases, weakeneth the nerves, and consumeth the mind.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in The Advent of Divine Justice

Drugs

- 27 As to opium, it is foul and accursed. God protect us from the punishment He inflicteth on the user. According to the explicit Text of the Most Holy Book, it is forbidden, and its use is utterly condemned. Reason showeth that smoking opium is a kind of insanity, and experience attesteth that the user is completely cut off from the human kingdom. May God protect all against the perpetration of an act so hideous as this, an act which layeth in ruins the very foundation of what it is to be human, and which causeth the user to be dispossessed for ever and ever. For opium fasteneth on the soul, so

that the user's conscience dieth, his mind is blotted away, his perceptions are eroded. It turneth the living into the dead. It quencheth the natural heat. No greater harm can be conceived than that which opium inflicteth. Fortunate are they who never even speak the name of it; then think how wretched is the user.

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

- 28 Regarding hashish, you had pointed out that some Persians have become habituated to its use. Gracious God! This is the worst of all intoxicants, and its prohibition is explicitly revealed. Its use causeth the disintegration of thought and the complete torpor of the soul. How could anyone seek this fruit of the infernal tree, and by partaking of it, be led to exemplify the qualities of a monster? How could one use this forbidden drug, and thus deprive himself of the blessings of the All-Merciful?

Alcohol consumeth the mind and causeth man to commit acts of absurdity, but ... this wicked hashish extinguisheth the mind, freezeth the spirit, petrifieth the soul, wasteth the body and leaveth man frustrated and lost.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, note no. 170

- 29 Concerning the so-called "spiritual" virtues of the hallucinogens ... spiritual stimulation should come from turning one's heart to Bahá'u'lláh, and not through physical means such as drugs and agents. From the description given in your letter it appears that hallucinogenic agents are a form of intoxicant. As the friends, including the youth, are required strictly to abstain from all forms of intoxicants, and are further expected conscientiously to obey the civil law of their country, it is obvious that they should refrain from using these drugs.

A very great responsibility for the future peace and well-being of the world is borne by the youth of today. Let the Bahá'í youth by the power of the Cause they espouse be the shining example for their companions.

15 April 1965, Universal House of Justice

- 30 Bahá'ís should not use hallucinogenic agents, including LSD, peyote and similar substances, except when prescribed for medical treatment. Neither should they become involved in experiments with such substances.

11 January 1967, Universal House of Justice

Bahá'í Attitude Toward Sex

- 31 Briefly stated the Bahá'í conception of sex is based on the belief that chastity should be strictly practiced by both sexes, not only because it is in itself highly commendable ethically, but also due to its being the only way to a happy and successful marital life. Sex relationships of any form, outside marriage, are not permissible therefore, and whoso violates this rule will not only be responsible to God, but will incur the necessary punishment from society.

The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse, but condemns its illegitimate and improper expression such as free love, companionate marriage and others, all of which it considers positively harmful to man and to the society in which he lives. The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this very purpose that the institution of marriage has been established. The Bahá'ís do not believe in the suppression of the sex impulse but in its regulation and control.

5 September 1938, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 32 Concerning your question whether there are any legitimate forms of expression of the sex instinct outside of marriage; according to the Bahá'í Teachings no sexual act can be considered lawful unless performed between lawfully married persons. Outside of marital life there can be no lawful or healthy use of the sex impulse. The Bahá'í youth should, on the one hand, be taught the lesson of self-control which, when exercised, undoubtedly has a salutary effect on the development of character and of personality in general, and on the other should be advised, nay even encouraged, to contract marriage while still young and in full possession of their physical vigour. Economic factors, no doubt, are often a serious hindrance to early marriage, but in most cases are only an excuse, and as such should not be overstressed.

13 December 1940, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 33 Chastity implies both before and after marriage an unsullied, chaste sex life. Before marriage absolutely chaste, after marriage absolutely faithful to one's chosen companion. Faithful in all sexual acts, faithful in word and in deed.

The world today is submerged, amongst other things, in an over-exaggeration of the importance of physical love, and a dearth of spiritual values. In as far as possible the believers should try to realize this and rise above the level of their fellowmen who are, typical of all decadent periods in history, placing so much over-emphasis on the purely physical side of mating. Outside of their normal, legitimate married life they should seek to establish bonds of comradeship and love which are eternal and founded on the spiritual life of man, not on his physical life. This is one of the many fields in which it is incumbent on the Bahá'ís to set the example and lead the way to a true human standard of life, when the soul of man is exalted and his body but the tool for his enlightened spirit. Needless to say this does not preclude the living of a perfectly normal sex life in its legitimate channel of marriage.

28 September 1941, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Immoral Practices are Condemned

- 34 Ye are forbidden to commit adultery, sodomy and lechery. Avoid them, O concourse of the faithful. By the righteousness of God! Ye have been called into being to purge the world from the defilement of evil passions. This is what the Lord of all mankind hath enjoined upon you, could ye but perceive it. He who relateth himself to the All-Merciful and committeth satanic deeds, verily he is not of Me. Unto this beareth witness every atom, pebble, tree and fruit, and beyond them this ever-proclaiming, truthful and trustworthy Tongue.

Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet

- 35 When we realize that Bahá'u'lláh says adultery retards the progress of the soul in the afterlife—so grievous is it—and that drinking destroys the mind, and not to so much as approach it, we see how clear are our teachings on these subjects.

30 September 1949, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 36 Amongst the many other evils afflicting society in this spiritual low-water mark in history is the question of immorality, and overemphasis of sex. Homosexuality, according to the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, is spiritually condemned. This does not mean that people so afflicted must not be helped

and advised and sympathized with. It does mean that we do not believe that it is a permissible way of life; which, alas, is all too often the accepted attitude nowadays.

We must struggle against the evils in society by spiritual means, and by medical and social ones as well. We must be tolerant but uncompromising, understanding but immovable in our point of view.

21 May 1954, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 37 A number of sexual problems, such as homosexuality and transsexuality can well have medical aspects, and in such cases recourse should certainly be had to the best medical assistance. But it is clear from the teaching of Bahá'u'lláh that homosexuality is not a condition to which a person should be reconciled, but is a distortion of his or her nature which should be controlled and overcome. This may require a hard struggle, but so also can be the struggle of a heterosexual person to control his or her desires. The exercise of self-control in this, as in so very many other aspects of life, has a beneficial effect on the progress of the soul. It should, moreover, be borne in mind that although to be married is highly desirable, and Bahá'u'lláh has strongly recommended it, it is not the central purpose of life. If a person has to wait a considerable period before finding a spouse, or if ultimately, he or she must remain single, it does not mean that he or she is thereby unable to fulfil his or her life's purpose.

6 February 1973, Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968–1973

- 38 Your letter asking for direct or indirect references in the Writings of the Faith to rape or sexual assault was referred to the Research Department, and we have been asked to convey to you the following comments.

“Lechery” is clearly forbidden by Bahá'u'lláh,ⁱ and Shoghi Effendi has stated that a “chaste and holy life”, according to the teachings of the Faith, implies a condemnation of “all manner” of “sexual vices”.ⁱⁱ

As to the contents of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, one of the provisions of that Most Holy Book is “not to indulge one’s passions” (see “Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas...”). Furthermore, reference should be made to one of the “prohibitions” mentioned ... [in] the “Synopsis”, namely “adultery”. This word so appears in this book because entries in a synopsis should by necessity be brief, and

i *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*

ii *The Advent of Divine Justice*

by the original word used by Bahá'u'lláh in the Aqdas, i.e., “ziná”, adultery is generally and mainly intended. However, this by no means covers *all* the meanings of the concept of “ziná” in legal language used in Arabic and Persian. One of the forms of “ziná”—i.e., when the illicit sexual intercourse is performed through force or violence—is rape or sexual assault.

As to the punishments for such acts as rape, these will be determined in the future by the Universal House of Justice.

8 June 1982, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Application of the Principle of a Chaste and Holy Life

39 ...[absolute chastity] is mainly and directly concerned with the Bahá'í youth, who can contribute so decisively to the virility, the purity, and the driving force of the life of the Bahá'í community, and upon whom must depend the future orientation of its destiny, and the complete unfoldment of the potentialities with which God has endowed it...

As to a chaste and holy life, it should be regarded as no less essential a factor that must contribute its proper share to the strengthening and vitalization of the Bahá'í community, upon which must in turn depend the success of any Bahá'í plan or enterprise ... All of them, be they men or women, must, at this threatening hour when the lights of religion are fading out, and its restraints are one by one being abolished, pause to examine themselves, scrutinize their conduct, and with characteristic resolution arise to purge the life of their community of every trace of moral laxity that might stain the name, or impair the integrity, of so holy and precious a Faith.

A chaste and holy life must be made the controlling principle in the behaviour and conduct of all Bahá'ís, both in their social relations with the members of their own community, and in their contact with the world at large. It must adorn and reinforce the ceaseless labours and meritorious exertions of those whose enviable position is to propagate the Message, and to administer the affairs, of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. It must be upheld, in all its integrity and implications, in every phase of the life of those who fill the ranks of that Faith, whether in their homes, their travels, their clubs, their societies, their entertainments, their schools, and their universities. It must be accorded special consideration in the conduct of the

social activities of every Bahá'í summer school and any other occasions on which Bahá'í community life is organized and fostered. It must be closely and continually identified with the mission of the Bahá'í youth, both as an element in the life of the Bahá'í community, and as a factor in the future progress and orientation of the youth of their own country.

The Advent of Divine Justice

The Power of Example

A Praiseworthy Character

- 40 Whoso ariseth, in this Day, to aid Our Cause, and summoneth to his assistance the hosts of a praiseworthy character and upright conduct, the influence flowing from such an action will, most certainly, be diffused throughout the whole world.

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

- 41 A Bahá'í is known by the attributes manifested by him, not by his name: he is recognized by his character, not by his person.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 42 ...by upholding Bahá'í law in the face of all difficulties we not only strengthen our own characters but influence those around us.

6 February 1973, Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968–1973

The Importance of Deeds

- 43 O SON OF MY HANDMAID!

Guidance hath ever been given by words, and now it is given by deeds. Every one must show forth deeds that are pure and holy, for words are the property of all alike, whereas such deeds as these belong only to Our loved ones. Strive then with heart and soul to distinguish yourselves by your deeds. In this wise We counsel you in this holy and resplendent tablet.

The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, Persian no. 76

- 44 One righteous act is endowed with a potency that can so elevate the dust as to cause it to pass beyond the heaven of heavens. It can tear every bond asunder, and hath the power to restore the force that hath spent itself and vanished...

Be pure, O people of God, be pure; be righteous, be righteous...

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

- 45 The Guardian has urged, over and over again, the paramount necessity for Bahá'í Youth to exemplify the Teachings, most particularly the *moral* aspect of them. If they are not distinguished for their high conduct they cannot expect other young people to take the Cause very seriously.

He heartily agrees with you that unless we *practise* the Teachings we cannot possibly expect the Faith to grow, because the fundamental purpose of all religions—including our own—is to bring man nearer to God, and to change his character, which is of the utmost importance. Too much emphasis is often laid on the social and economic aspects of the Teachings; but the moral aspect cannot be over-emphasized.

6 September 1946, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

The Effect of Example

- 46 The betterment of the world can be accomplished through pure and goodly deeds, through commendable and seemly conduct.

Bahá'u'lláh, cited in The Advent of Divine Justice

- 47 Let your acts be a guide unto all mankind, for the professions of most men, be they high or low, differ from their conduct. It is through your deeds that ye can distinguish yourselves from others. Through them the brightness of your light can be shed upon the whole earth. Happy is the man that heedeth My counsel, and keepeth the precepts prescribed by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

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

- 48 These are the days for rendering the divine Cause victorious and effective aid! The victory of God's Faith is dependent upon teaching; and teaching is conditional upon righteous actions and goodly deeds and conduct. The foundation-stone of a life lived in the way of God is the pursuit of moral excellence and the acquisition of a character endowed with qualities that are well-pleasing in His sight. The Bahá'ís should adorn themselves with this holy raiment; with this mighty sword they should conquer the citadels of men's hearts. People have grown weary and impatient of rhetoric and

discourse, of preaching and sermonizing. In this day, the one thing that can deliver the world from its travail and attract the hearts of its peoples is deeds, not words; example, not precept; saintly virtues, not statements and charters issued by governments and nations on socio-political affairs. In all matters, great or small, word must be the complement of deed, and deed the companion of word: each must supplement, support and reinforce the other. It is in this respect that the Bahá'ís must seek distinction...

8 December 1923, Shoghi Effendi

- 49 It is primarily through the potency of noble deeds and character, rather than by the power of exposition and proofs that the friends of God should demonstrate to the world that what has been promised by God is bound to happen, that it is already taking place and that the divine glad-tidings are clear, evident and complete. For unless some illustrious souls step forth into the arena of service and shine out resplendent in the assemblage of men, the task of vindicating the truth of this Cause before the eyes of enlightened people would be formidable indeed. However, if the friends become embodiments of virtue and good character, words and arguments will be superfluous. Their very deeds will well serve as eloquent testimony, and their noble conduct will ensure the preservation, integrity and glory of the Cause of God.

19 December 1923, Shoghi Effendi

- 50 There is no doubt that the standard of spotless chastity inculcated by Bahá'u'lláh in His teachings can be attained by the friends only when they stand forth firmly and courageously as uncompromising adherents of the Bahá'í way of life, fully conscious that they represent teachings which are the very antithesis of the corrosive forces which are so tragically destroying the fabric of man's moral values. The present trend in modern society and its conflict with our challenging principles of moral conduct, far from influencing the believers to compromise their resolve to adhere undeviatingly to the standards of purity and chastity set forth for them by their Faith, must stimulate them to discharge their sacred obligations with determination and thus combat the evil forces undermining the foundations of individual morality.

22 May 1966, Universal House of Justice

51 It is the challenging task of the Bahá'ís to obey the law of God in their own lives, and gradually to win the rest of mankind to its acceptance.

In considering the effect of obedience to the laws on individual lives, one must remember that the purpose of this life is to prepare the soul for the next. Here one must learn to control and direct one's animal impulses, not to be a slave to them. Life in this world is a succession of tests and achievements, of falling short and of making new spiritual advances. Sometimes the course may seem very hard, but one can witness, again and again, that the soul who steadfastly obeys the law of Bahá'u'lláh, however hard it may seem, grows spiritually, while the one who compromises with the law for the sake of his own apparent happiness is seen to have been following a chimera: he does not attain the happiness he sought, he retards his spiritual advance and often brings new problems upon himself.

6 February 1973, Messages from the Universal House of Justice 1968–1973

CONSULTATION

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

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

Consultation

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

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

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 2 Say: No man can attain his true station except through his justice. No power can exist except through unity. No welfare and no well-being can be attained except through consultation.

From a Tablet

- 3 Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude. It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth. For everything there is and will continue to be a station of perfection and maturity. The maturity of the gift of understanding is made manifest through consultation.

From a Tablet

- 4 Such matters should be determined through consultation, and whatever emergeth from the consultation of those chosen, that indeed is the command of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting.

From a Tablet

- 5 In all things it is necessary to consult. This matter should be forcibly stressed by thee, so that consultation may be observed by all. The intent of what hath been revealed from the Pen of the Most High is that consultation may be fully carried out among the friends, inasmuch as it is and will always be a cause of awareness and of awakening and a source of good and well-being.

From a Tablet

- 6 It behooveth 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. 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.
5 March 1922, cited in Bahá'í Administration

- 7 If in the first group of people who have gathered, unanimity is not achieved, new people shall be added, after which a group equal in number to the Greatest Nameⁱ or fewer or greater shall be chosen from their midst by lots; whereupon the consultation shall be renewed; whatever is the result shall be obeyed. If the second time opinions again differ, repeat the process a third time. This time obey the majority vote. Verily He directeth whom He willeth to the straight Path.ⁱⁱ
From a Tablet

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

- 8 ...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.
5 March 1922, cited in Bahá'í Administration
- 9 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,

i Nine

ii "This statement appears in Questions and Answers, described by Shoghi Effendi as an appendix to *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*. It was revealed before Spiritual Assemblies had been established and was in answer to a question about the Bahá'í teaching on consultation. The emergence of Spiritual Assemblies, to which the friends may always turn, in no way prohibits them from following, if they wish, the procedure outlined in the above passage when they desire to consult on their personal problems. The quotation clearly indicates Bahá'u'lláh's preference for unanimity."
28 February 1978, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

patience and long-suffering in difficulties and servitude to His exalted Threshold. Should they be graciously aided to acquire these attributes, victory from the unseen Kingdom of Bahá shall be vouchsafed to them ... The members thereof must take counsel together in such wise that no occasion for ill-feeling or discord may arise. This can be attained when every member expresseth with absolute freedom his own opinion and setteth forth his argument. Should any one oppose, he must on no account feel hurt for not until matters are fully discussed can the right way be revealed. The shining spark of truth cometh forth only after the clash of differing opinions. 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.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 43

- 10 ...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 ... 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.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 45

- 11 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

- 12 If they agree upon a subject, even though it be wrong, it is better than to disagree and be in the right, for this difference will produce the demolition of the divine foundation. Though one of the parties may be in the right and they disagree that will be the cause of a thousand wrongs, but if they agree and both parties are in the wrong, as it is in unity the truth will be revealed and the wrong made right.

Cited in 29 December 1988 message by the Universal House of Justice

- 13 The question of consultation is of the utmost importance, and is one of the most potent instruments conducive to the tranquillity and felicity of the people. For example, when a believer is uncertain about his affairs, or when he seeketh to pursue a project or trade, the friends should gather together and devise a solution for him. He, in his turn, should act accordingly. Likewise in larger issues, when a problem ariseth, or a difficulty occur-reth, the wise should gather, consult, and devise a solution. They should then rely upon the one true God, and surrender to His Providence, in whatever way it may be revealed, for divine confirmations will undoubtedly

assist. Consultation, therefore, is one of the explicit ordinances of the Lord of mankind.

From a Tablet

- 14 Man must consult on all matters, whether major or minor, so that he may become cognizant of what is good. Consultation giveth him insight into things and enableth him to delve into questions which are unknown. The light of truth shineth from the faces of those who engage in consultation. Such consultation causeth the living waters to flow in the meadows of man's reality, the rays of ancient glory to shine upon him, and the tree of his being to be adorned with wondrous fruit. The members who are consulting, however, should behave in the utmost love, harmony and sincerity towards each other. The principle of consultation is one of the most fundamental elements of the divine edifice. Even in their ordinary affairs the individual members of society should consult.

From a Tablet

- 15 Every one of the friends should highly praise the other and each should regard himself as evanescent and as naught in the presence of others. All matters should be consulted upon in the meeting and whatever is the majority vote should be carried out. I swear by the one true God, it is better that all should agree on a wrong decision, than for one right vote to be singled out, inasmuch as single votes can be sources of dissension, which lead to ruin. Whereas, if in one case they take a wrong decision, in a hundred other cases they will adopt right decisions, and concord and unity are preserved. This will offset any deficiency, and will eventually lead to the righting of the wrong.

From a Tablet

- 16 The purpose of consultation is to show that the views of several individuals are assuredly preferable to one man, even as the power of a number of men is of course greater than the power of one man. Thus consultation is acceptable in the presence of the Almighty, and hath been enjoined upon the believers, so that they may confer upon ordinary and personal matters, as well as on affairs which are general in nature and universal.

For instance, when a man hath a project to accomplish, should he consult with some of his brethren, that which is agreeable will of course be investigated and unveiled to his eyes, and the truth will be disclosed.

Likewise on a higher level, should the people of a village consult one another about their affairs, the right solution will certainly be revealed. In like manner, the members of each profession, such as in industry, should consult, and those in commerce should similarly consult on business affairs. In short, consultation is desirable and acceptable in all things and on all issues.

15 February 1922, cited in a letter by Shoghi Effendi

- 17 Regarding thy question about consultation of a father with his son, or a son with his father, in matters of trade and commerce, consultation is one of the fundamental elements of the foundation of the Law of God. Such consultation is assuredly acceptable, whether between father and son, or with others. There is nothing better than this. Man must consult in all things for this will lead him to the depths of each problem and enable him to find the right solution.

From a Tablet

- 18 The honoured members of the Spiritual Assembly should exert their efforts so that no differences may occur, and if such differences do occur, they should not reach the point of causing conflict, hatred and antagonism, which lead to threats. When you notice that a stage has been reached when enmity and threats are about to occur, you should immediately postpone discussion of the subject, until wranglings, disputations, and loud talk vanish, and a propitious time is at hand.

From a Tablet

- 19 Settle all things, both great and small, by consultation. Without prior consultation, take no important step in your own personal affairs. Concern yourselves with one another. Help along one another's projects and plans. Grieve over one another. Let none in the whole country go in need. Befriend one another until ye become as a single body, one and all...ⁱ

From a Tablet

- 20 Every meeting which is organized for the purpose of unity and concord will be conducive to changing strangers into friends, enemies into associates, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá will be present in His heart and soul with that meeting.

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

i *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 102*

21 In this Cause consultation is of vital importance, but spiritual conference and not the mere voicing of personal views is intended. In France I was present at a session of the senate, but the experience was not impressive. Parliamentary procedure should have for its object the attainment of the light of truth upon questions presented and not furnish a battleground for opposition and self-opinion. Antagonism and contradiction are unfortunate and always destructive to truth. In the parliamentary meeting mentioned, altercation and useless quibbling were frequent; the result, mostly confusion and turmoil; even in one instance a physical encounter took place between two members. It was not consultation but comedy.

The purpose is to emphasize the statement that consultation must have for its object the investigation of truth. He who expresses an opinion should not voice it as correct and right but set it forth as a contribution to the consensus of opinion, for the light of reality becomes apparent when two opinions coincide. A spark is produced when flint and steel come together. Man should weigh his opinions with the utmost serenity, calmness and composure. Before expressing his own views he should carefully consider the views already advanced by others. If he finds that a previously expressed opinion is more true and worthy, he should accept it immediately and not willfully hold to an opinion of his own. By this excellent method he endeavors to arrive at unity and truth. Opposition and division are deplorable. It is better then to have the opinion of a wise, sagacious man; otherwise, contradiction and altercation, in which varied and divergent views are presented, will make it necessary for a judicial body to render decision upon the question. Even a majority opinion or consensus may be incorrect. A thousand people may hold to one view and be mistaken, whereas one sagacious person may be right. Therefore, true consultation is spiritual conference in the attitude and atmosphere of love. Members must love each other in the spirit of fellowship in order that good results may be forthcoming. Love and fellowship are the foundation.

The most memorable instance of spiritual consultation was the meeting of the disciples of Jesus Christ upon the mount after His ascension. They said, "Jesus Christ has been crucified, and we have no longer association and intercourse with Him in His physical body; therefore, we must be loyal and faithful to Him, we must be grateful and appreciate Him, for He has raised us from the dead, He made us wise, He has given us eternal life. What shall we do to be faithful to Him?" And so they held council. One of them said, "We must detach ourselves from the chains and fetters

of the world; otherwise, we cannot be faithful." The others replied, "That is so." Another said, "Either we must be married and faithful to our wives and children or serve our Lord free from these ties. We cannot be occupied with the care and provision for families and at the same time herald the Kingdom in the wilderness. Therefore, let those who are unmarried remain so, and those who have married provide means of sustenance and comfort for their families and then go forth to spread the message of glad-tidings." There were no dissenting voices; all agreed, saying, "That is right." A third disciple said, "To perform worthy deeds in the Kingdom we must be further self-sacrificing. From now on we should forego ease and bodily comfort, accept every difficulty, forget self and teach the Cause of God." This found acceptance and approval by all the others. Finally a fourth disciple said, "There is still another aspect to our faith and unity. For Jesus' sake we shall be beaten, imprisoned and exiled. They may kill us. Let us receive this lesson now. Let us realize and resolve that though we are beaten, banished, cursed, spat upon and led forth to be killed, we shall accept all this joyfully, loving those who hate and wound us." All the disciples replied, "Surely we will—it is agreed; this is right." Then they descended from the summit of the mountain, and each went forth in a different direction upon his divine mission.

This was true consultation. This was spiritual consultation and not the mere voicing of personal views in parliamentary opposition and debate.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 22 The first duty of the members is to effect their own unity and harmony, in order to obtain good results. If there be no unity, or the Committee becomes the cause of inharmony, undoubtedly, it is better that it does not exist...

Therefore, when the unity of the members of the Committee is established, their second duty is to read the verses and communes, to be in a state of commemoration and mindfulness, that they may see each other as if in the presence of God.

Published in Star of the West, vol. 8, no. 9

From the writings of Shoghi Effendi

- 23 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.

23 February 1924, Bahá'í Administration

- 24 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. 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, Bahá'í Administration

- 25 Not infrequently, nay oftentimes, the most lowly, untutored, and inexperienced among the friends will, by the sheer inspiring force of selfless and ardent devotion, contribute a distinct and memorable share to a highly involved discussion in any given assembly...

29 January 1925, Bahá'í Administration

- 26 Indeed it has ever been the cherished desire of our Master 'Abdu'l-Bahá that the friends in their councils, local as well as national, should by their candour, their honesty of purpose, their singleness of mind, and the thoroughness of their discussions achieve unanimity in all things...

29 January 1925, Bahá'í Administration

- 27 Consultation, frank and unfettered, is the bedrock of this unique Order...

18 November 1933, appended to a letter

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 28 Concerning the attendance of certain individuals at the meeting of the Assemblies and at the invitation of that body: This Shoghi Effendi considers to be as expert advice, which is absolutely necessary for good administration. The members of the Assembly are not supposed to know everything on every subject, so they can invite a person, versed in that question, to attend their meetings and explain his views. But naturally he will have no right to vote.

Unfolding Destiny

- 29 We are often told by the Master that under such circumstances we should consult our friends, especially the Assemblies, and seek their advice. It would be nice if you should follow that advice and take some of the friends into your confidence. Maybe God's will is best attained through consultation.

12 November 1930

- 30 With proper consultation some method is sure to be found. There is no need to wait until an Assembly is constituted to start consulting. The view of two earnest souls is always better than one...

16 June 1932

- 31 The principle of consultation, which constitutes one of the basic laws of the Administration, should be applied to all Bahá'í activities which affect the collective interests of the Faith, for it is through co-operation and continual exchange of thoughts and views that the Cause can best safeguard and foster its interests. Individual initiative, personal ability and resourcefulness, though indispensable, are, unless supported and enriched by the collective experiences and wisdom of the group, utterly incapable of achieving such a tremendous task.

30 August 1933

- 32 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.

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

- 33 Through the clash of personal opinions, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated, the spark of truth is often ignited, and Divine guidance revealed. 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

- 34 In your last question, concerning cases when those needed for consultation are not available and a person is uncertain on the course to be followed in an important matter, you ask whether it is permissible for him to resort to the practice of “istikhārīh”ⁱ using the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The Guardian has stated that in such cases what is necessary and essential is for the person to turn his heart wholly to God and to beseech aid from the Source of Grace and inspiration and nothing else. If it is possible to postpone the decision it would be preferable and more proper to do so, until the means for consultation are made available.

23 April 1941

- 35 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.

The believers, loving the Cause above all else and putting its interests first, must be ready to bear the hardships entailed, of whatever nature they may be. Only through such persistence and self-sacrifice can we ever hope to preserve on the one hand our divine institutions intact, and on the other force ourselves to become nobler, better instruments to serve this glorious Faith.

20 November 1941

i This is a process of divination, such as is done through bibliomancy, when a Holy Book is opened at random and guidance is sought for one’s problem by reading passages of the Book on the opened page.

- 36 The questions you ask in your letter about individual guidance have two aspects, one might say. It is good that people should turn to God and beseech His aid in solving their problems and guiding their acts, indeed every day of their lives, if they feel the desire to do so. But they cannot possibly impose what they feel to be their guidance on anyone else, let alone on Assemblies or Committees, as Bahá'u'lláh has expressly laid down the law of consultation and never indicated that anything else superseded it.
25 January 1943

- 37 The Guardian advises that you should refer to other doctors, and follow the majority vote.ⁱⁱ
14 February 1945

- 38 You have pointed out that on consultative bodies it may sometimes happen that in a given case the view of one of the members is better and has greater merit than that of the others, but these members are not prepared to accept such a view. The Guardian stated that it is necessary and imperative to consult frankly and with pure motives before arriving at a decision. Once the decision is taken, it is incumbent upon all to follow the majority view, and to enforce and put it into effect, even if the decision is a wrong one.
1 February 1946

- 39 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.

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 in harmony

ii This advice was given by the Guardian in a case when the inquirer sought the Guardian's counsel, since one doctor's view was that an operation was needed, while another doctor did not consider such an operation necessary.

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

- 40 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...

The Light of Divine Guidance

- 41 There are no dissenting votes in the Cause. When the majority of an Assembly decides a matter the minority, we are told by the Master, should accept this. To insist on having one's dissenting vote recorded is not good, and achieves no constructive end...

19 March 1950

- 42 The Guardian regrets that, in the light of the Master's statement that the deliberations of Assemblies must be secret and confidential, it is not possible to have a non-Assembly member in the National Spiritual Assembly meeting. You must always remember that, in matters of principle, there can be no deviation; in America it may be possible for you to find a wholly trustworthy believer; but if your Assembly is permitted to have non-Assembly secretaries present, then the same privilege must be accorded oriental and Latin American Assemblies; and can these other countries be assured of finding people of the calibre you have found? Highly personal subjects, damaging to the honour and happiness of others, are often taken up by National Assemblies, and the danger that confidence will be betrayed is already great enough with the 9 chosen representatives of the whole Community, let alone introducing non-Assembly members. You will just have to make your minutes a little more compact and sacrifice, if necessary, a certain amount of efficiency in order to follow this very important principle.

5 July 1950

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 43 Although Local Spiritual Assemblies are primarily responsible for counselling believers regarding personal problems, there may be times, when in the judgement of the National or Local Assembly, it would be preferable to assign counselling or advisory duties to individuals or committees. This is within the discretion of the Assembly.

27 March 1966

- 44 It is important to realise that the spirit of Bahá'í consultation is very different from that current in the decision-making processes of non-Bahá'í bodies.

The ideal of Bahá'í consultation is to arrive at a unanimous decision. When this is not possible a vote must be taken. In the words of the beloved Guardian: "...when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious and cordial consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote and abide by the voice of the majority, which we are told by the Master to be the voice of truth, never to be challenged, and always to be whole-heartedly enforced".

As soon as a decision is reached it becomes the decision of the whole Assembly, not merely of those members who happened to be among the majority.

When it is proposed to put a matter to the vote, a member of the Assembly may feel that there are additional facts or views which must be sought before he can make up his mind and intelligently vote on the proposition. He should express this feeling to the Assembly, and it is for the Assembly to decide whether or not further consultation is needed before voting.

Whenever it is decided to vote on a proposition all that is required is to ascertain how many of the members are in favour of it; if this is a majority of those present, the motion is carried; if it is a minority, the motion is defeated. Thus the whole question of "abstaining" does not arise in Bahá'í voting. A member who does not vote in favour of a proposition is, in effect, voting against it, even if at that moment he himself feels that he has been unable to make up his mind on the matter.

6 March 1970

45 Your letter of 14 February 1973 enquiring about the uses of Bahá'í consultation has been received.

This is, of course, a matter in which rigidity should be avoided.

When a believer has a problem concerning which he must make a decision, he has several courses open to him. If it is a matter that affects the interests of the Faith he should consult with the appropriate Assembly or committee, but individuals have many problems which are purely personal and there is no obligation upon them to take such problems to the institutions of the Faith; indeed, when the needs of the teaching work are of such urgency it is better if the friends will not burden their Assemblies with personal problems that they can solve by themselves.

A Bahá'í who has a problem may wish to make his own decision upon it after prayer and after weighing all the aspects of it in his own mind; he may prefer to seek the counsel of individual friends or of professional counselors such as his doctor or lawyer so that he can consider such advice when making his decision; or in a case where several people are involved, such as a family situation, he may want to gather together those who are affected so that they may arrive at a collective decision. There is also no objection whatever to a Bahá'í's asking a group of people to consult together on a problem facing him.

It should be borne in mind that all consultation is aimed at arriving at a solution to a problem and is quite different from the sort of group baring of the soul that is popular in some circles these days and which borders on the kind of confession that is forbidden in the faith. On the subject of confession the Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf to an individual believer: "We are forbidden to confess to any person, as do the Catholics to their priests, our sins and shortcomings, or to do so in public, as some religious sects do. However, if we spontaneously desire to acknowledge we have been wrong in something, or that we have some fault of character, and ask another person's forgiveness or pardon, we are quite free to do so. The Guardian wants to point out, however, that we are not obliged to do so. It rests entirely with the individual."

19 March 1973

*From a Letter Written on behalf of
the Universal House of Justice*

46 The statement which you quoteⁱ in the second paragraph of your letter is taken from a Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá which was addressed by Him to the friends in Tíhrán at a time when, without the knowledge and permission of the Spiritual Assembly and contrary to government regulations, one of the friends undertook to print the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The instructions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá which you quote were issued on that occasion and in that context.

The Universal House of Justice has pointed out that when Shoghi Effendi enumerates the functions of a Local Spiritual Assembly,ⁱⁱ ... he indicates that the local matters to be referred to the Local Spiritual Assembly are those “pertaining to the Cause”. This does not mean, of course, that personal problems may not be referred to Bahá’í Assemblies. The Local Spiritual Assembly, however, is not the only institution or agency to which the friends may turn for consultation on personal matters. Such consultation could be held with members of one’s family, with friends, or with experts. For example in one of His Tablets ‘Abdu’l-Bahá envisages the possibility of experts in one profession conferring together.

8 April 1975

i See extract no. 8.

ii *Bahá’í Administration*, Letter of 12 March 1923.

THE COVENANT

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

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled December 1987

A Covenant

“...a binding agreement between God and man...”

- 1 The first duty prescribed by God for His servants is the recognition of Him Who is the Dayspring of His Revelation and the Fountain of His laws, Who representeth the Godhead in both the Kingdom of His Cause and the world of creation. Whoso achieveth this duty hath attained unto all good ... It behooveth every one who reacheth this most sublime station, this summit of transcendent glory, to observe every ordinance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. These twin duties are inseparable. Neither is acceptable without the other...

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

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

- 2 ...Follow not, therefore, your earthly desires, and violate not the Covenant of God, nor break your pledge to Him. With firm determination, with the whole affection of your heart, and with the full force of your words, turn ye unto Him, and walk not in the ways of the foolish ... Break not the bond that uniteth you with your Creator, and be not of those that have erred and strayed from His ways.

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

- 3 Great is thy blessedness inasmuch as thou hast been faithful to the Covenant of God and His Testament ... Dedicate thyself to the service of the Cause of thy Lord, cherish His remembrance in thy heart and celebrate His praise in such wise that every wayward and heedless soul may thereby be roused from slumber.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 4 ...ye must conduct yourselves in such a manner that ye may stand out distinguished and brilliant as the sun among other souls. Should any one of you enter a city, he should become a centre of attraction by reason of his sincerity, his faithfulness and love, his honesty and fidelity, his truthfulness and loving-kindness towards all the peoples of the world, so that the people of that city may cry out and say: "This man is unquestionably a Bahá'í, for his manners, his behaviour, his conduct, his morals, his nature, and disposition reflect the attributes of the Bahá'ís." Not until ye attain this station can ye be said to have been faithful to the Covenant and Testament of God. For He hath, through irrefutable Texts, entered into a binding Covenant with us all, requiring us to act in accordance with His sacred instructions and counsels.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 35

The Greater Covenant

“...the Greater Covenant which every Manifestation of God makes with His followers...”

The Pattern

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

Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 6 Abraham, on Him be peace, made a covenant concerning Moses and gave the glad-tidings of His coming. Moses made a covenant concerning the promised Christ, and announced the good news of His advent to the world. Christ made a covenant concerning the Paraclete and gave the tidings of His coming. The Prophet Muḥammad made a covenant concerning the Báb, and the Báb was the One promised by Muḥammad, for Muḥammad gave the tidings of His coming. The Báb made a Covenant concerning the Blessed Beauty, Bahá'u'lláh, and gave the glad-tidings of His coming for the Blessed Beauty was the One promised by the Báb. Bahá'u'lláh made a covenant concerning a Promised One Who will become manifest after one thousand or thousands of years. That Manifestation is Bahá'u'lláh's Promised One, and will appear after a thousand or thousands of years. He, moreover, with His Supreme Pen, entered into a great Covenant and Testament with all the Bahá'ís whereby they were all commanded to follow the Centre of the Covenant after His ascension, and depart not, even to a hair's breadth, from obeying Him.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Bahá'í World Faith

The Advent of Bahá'u'lláh

- 7 This is the Day, O my Lord, which Thou didst announce unto all mankind as the Day whereon Thou wouldst reveal Thy Self, and shed Thy radiance, and shine brightly over all Thy creatures. Thou hast, moreover, entered into a covenant with them, in Thy Books, and Thy Scriptures, and Thy Scrolls, and Thy Tablets, concerning Him Who is the Day-Spring of Thy Revelation, and hast appointed the Bayán to be the Herald of this Most Great and all-glorious Manifestation, and this most resplendent and most sublime Appearance.

Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh concerning the next Manifestation

- 8 Verily God will raise up Him Whom God shall make manifest, and after Him Whomsoever He willeth, even as He hath raised up prophets before the Point of the Bayán. He in truth hath power over all things.

Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 9 Whoso layeth claim to a Revelation direct from God ... ere the expiration of a full thousand years, such a man is assuredly a lying imposter ... Should a man appear ... ere the lapse of a full thousand years—each year consisting of twelve months according to the Qur'án, and of nineteen months of nine-teen days each, according to the Bayán—and if such a man reveal to your eyes all the signs of God, unhesitatingly reject him!

Bahá'u'lláh, cited in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 10 Centuries ... nay, countless ages, must pass away ere the Day-Star of Truth shineth again in its midsummer splendour, or appeareth once more in the radiance of its vernal glory ... Concerning the Manifestations that will come down in the future “in the shadows of the clouds,” ... know, verily, that in so far as their relation to the Source of their inspiration is concerned, they are under the shadow of the Ancient Beauty. In their relation, however, to the age in which they appear, each and every one of them “doeth whatsoever He willeth.”

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

The Lesser Covenant

“...that Bahá’u’lláh made with His followers regarding ‘Abdu’l-Bahá...”

Appointment

- 11 It is incumbent upon the Aghşán, the Afnán and My kindred to turn, one and all, their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch. Consider that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book: “When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces toward Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.” The object of this sacred verse is none other except the Most Mighty Branch (‘Abdu’l-Bahá). Thus have We graciously revealed unto you our potent Will, and I am verily the Gracious, the All-Powerful.

Bahá’u’lláh, cited in The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh

- 12 In accordance with the explicit text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá’u’lláh hath made the Centre of the Covenant the Interpreter of His Word—a Covenant so firm and mighty that from the beginning of time until the present day no religious Dispensation hath produced its like.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh

- 13 Today, the most important affair is firmness in the Covenant, because firmness in the Covenant wards off differences...

...Bahá’u’lláh covenanted, not that I (‘Abdu’l-Bahá) am the Promised One, but that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the Expounder of the Book and the Centre of His Covenant, and that the Promised One of Bahá’u’lláh will appear after one thousand or thousands of years. This is the Covenant which Bahá’u’lláh made. If a person shall deviate, he is not acceptable at the threshold of Bahá’u’lláh. In case of difference, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá must be consulted. All must revolve around his good pleasure. After ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, whenever the Universal House of Justice is organized it will ward off differences.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited in Star of the West, vol. IV, no. 14

- 14 Inasmuch as great differences and divergences of denominational belief had arisen throughout the past, every man with a new idea attributing it to God, Bahá'u'lláh desired that there should not be any ground or reason for disagreement among the Bahá'ís. Therefore, with His own pen He wrote the Book of His Covenant, addressing His relations and all people of the world, saying,

“Verily, I have appointed One Who is the Center of My Covenant. All must obey Him; all must turn to Him; He is the Expounder of My Book, and He is informed of My purpose. All must turn to Him. Whatsoever He says is correct, for, verily, He knoweth the texts of My Book. Other than He, no one doth know My Book.” The purpose of this statement is that there should never be discord and divergence among the Bahá'ís but that they should always be unified and agreed ... Therefore, whosoever obeys the Center of the Covenant appointed by Bahá'u'lláh has obeyed Bahá'u'lláh, and whosoever disobeys Him has disobeyed Bahá'u'lláh...

...Beware! Beware! lest anyone should speak from the authority of his own thoughts or create a new thing out of himself. Beware! Beware! According to the explicit Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh you should care nothing at all for such a person. Bahá'u'lláh shuns such souls.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 15 He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Center and Pivot of Bahá'u'lláh's peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted Handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá'í virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being “round Whom all names revolve”, the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation—styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the “Mystery of God”—an expression by which Bahá'u'lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the

incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.

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

- 16 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

Uniqueness of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant

- 17 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

- 18 To direct and canalize these forces let loose by this Heaven-sent process, and to insure their harmonious and continuous operation after His ascension, an instrument divinely ordained, invested with indisputable authority, organically linked with the Author of the Revelation Himself, was clearly indispensable. That instrument Bahá'u'lláh had expressly provided

through the institution of the Covenant, an institution which he had firmly established prior to His ascension. This same Covenant He had anticipated in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, had alluded to it as He bade His last farewell to the members of His family, who had been summoned to His bed-side, in the days immediately preceding His ascension, and had incorporated it in a special document which He designated as “the Book of My Covenant,” and which He entrusted, during His last illness, to His eldest son ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Written entirely in His own hand ... this unique and epoch-making Document, designated by Bahá'u'lláh as His “Most Great Tablet,” and alluded to by Him as the “Crimson Book” in His “Epistle to the Son of the Wolf,” can find no parallel in the Scriptures of any previous Dispensation, not excluding that of the Báb Himself. For nowhere in the books pertaining to any of the world’s religious systems, not even among the writings of the Author of the Bábí Revelation, do we find any single document establishing a Covenant endowed with an authority comparable to the Covenant which Bahá'u'lláh had Himself instituted.

God Passes By, cha. XIV

- 19 ...There is, though, a great difference between this and previous Dispensations, for Bahá'u'lláh has written that this is “the Day which shall not be followed by night” (God Passes By). He has given us His Covenant which provides for a continuing centre of divine guidance in the world. The Bahá'í Faith has not lacked for ambitious men who would seize the reins of authority and distort the Faith for their own ends, but in every case they have broken themselves and dashed their hopes on the rock of the Covenant.

14 January 1979, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

The Lesser Covenant

“...that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá perpetuated through the Administrative Order...”

Twin Successors

- 20 O my loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon the Aghṣán (Branches), the Afnán (Twigs) of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abhá Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi—the youthful branch branched from the two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees and the fruit grown from the union of the two offshoots of the Tree of Holiness,—as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the guardian of the Cause of God, he unto whom all the Aghṣán, the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause of God and His loved ones must turn. He is the expounder of the words of God and after him will succeed the first-born of his lineal descendents.

The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- 21 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 day-springs of knowledge and understanding, must be steadfast in God’s faith and the well-wishers of all mankind.

The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- 22 ...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.

The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- 23 ...They [Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá] 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.

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

- 24 ...under the Covenant of God, Shoghi Effendi was, during his ministry as Guardian of the Cause, the point of authority in the Faith to which all were to turn... The same thing applies to the position occupied by the Universal House of Justice in its relationship to the friends.

9 November 1981, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

Authority

- 25 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; 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.

The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 26 ...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.

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

- 27 ...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.

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

The Passing of Shoghi Effendi

- 28 At the time of our beloved Shoghi Effendi's death it was evident, from the circumstances and from the explicit requirements of the Holy Textsⁱ, 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.

9 March 1965, Universal House of Justice

- 29 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

i Shoghi Effendi had no children and all the surviving Aghsán had broken the Covenant.

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.

6 October 1963, Universal House of Justice

The Universal House of Justice

- 30 The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is unbroken, its all-encompassing power inviolate. The two unique features which distinguish it from all religious covenants of the past are unchanged and operative. The revealed Word, in its original purity, amplified by the divinely guided interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, remains immutable, unadulterated by any man-made creeds or dogmas, unwarrantable inferences, or unauthorized interpretations. The channel of Divine guidance, providing flexibility in all the affairs of mankind, remains open through that Institution which was founded by Bahá'u'lláh and endowed by Him with supreme authority and unfailing guidance, and of which the Master wrote: "Unto this body all things must be referred." How clearly we can see the truth of Bahá'u'lláh's assertion: "The Hand of Omnipotence hath established His Revelation upon an unassailable, an enduring foundation. Storms of human strife are powerless to undermine its basis, nor will men's fanciful theories succeed in damaging its structure."

October 1963, Universal House of Justice

- 31 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.

27 May 1966, Universal House of Justice

- 32 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...

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 legisla-

tive 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 ... 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.”

27 May 1966, Universal House of Justice

- 33 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.

7 December 1969, Universal House of Justice

- 34 ...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.

9 March 1965, Universal House of Justice

35 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 center 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 centers 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 everyone 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 Center of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.”

7 December 1969, Universal House of Justice

Response to the Lesser Covenant

The response assures that “...the Faith can remain united and pure.”

- 36 ...the power of the Covenant will protect the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh from the doubts of the people of error. It is the fortified fortress of the Cause of God and the firm pillar of the religion of God. Today no power can conserve the oneness of the Bahá'í world save the Covenant of God; otherwise differences like unto a most great tempest will encompass the Bahá'í world. It is evident that the axis of the oneness of the world of humanity is the power of the Covenant and nothing else ... Therefore, in the beginning the believers must make their steps firm in the Covenant so that the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh may encircle them from all sides, the cohorts of the Supreme Concourse may become their supporters and helpers, and the exhortations and advices of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, like unto the pictures engraved on stone, may remain permanent and ineffaceable in the tablets of all hearts.

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

- 37 Walk, therefore, with a sure step and engage with the utmost assurance and confidence in the promulgation of the divine fragrances, the glorification of the Word of God and firmness in the Covenant. Rest ye assured that if a soul ariseth in the utmost perseverance and raiseth the Call of the Kingdom and resolutely promulgateth the Covenant, be he an insignificant ant he shall be enabled to drive away the formidable elephant from the arena, and if he be a feeble moth he shall cut to pieces the plumage of the rapacious vulture.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 184

- 38 The progress of the Cause of God gathers increasing momentum and we may with confidence look forward to the day when this Community, in God's good time, shall have traversed the stages predicated for it by its

Guardian, and shall have raised on this tormented planet the fair mansions of God's Own Kingdom wherein humanity may find surcease from its self-induced confusion and chaos and ruin, and the hatreds and violence of this time shall be transmuted into an abiding sense of world brotherhood and peace. All this shall be accomplished within the Covenant of the everlasting Father, the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh.

Riḍván 1973, Universal House of Justice

- 39 The Bahá'ís must cling firmly to the knowledge that the Cause is safely in God's hands, that the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is incorruptible and that they can have complete confidence in the ability of the Universal House of Justice to function "under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One".
28 May 1975, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

The Power of the Covenant

- 40 Today the pulsating power in the arteries of the body of the world is the spirit of the Covenant—the spirit which is the cause of life. Whosoever is vivified with this spirit, the freshness and beauty of life become manifest in him, he is baptized with the Holy Spirit, he is born again, is freed from oppression and tyranny, from heedlessness and harshness which deaden the spirit, and attains to everlasting life.

Praise thou God that thou art firm in the Covenant and the Testament and art turning thy face to the Luminary of the world, His Highness Bahá'u'lláh.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Star of the West, vol. 14, No. 7

- 41 It is indubitably clear ... that the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant.

The power of the Covenant is as the heat of the sun which quickeneth and promoteth the development of all created things on earth. The light of the Covenant, in like manner, is the educator of the minds, the spirits, the hearts and souls of men.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in God Passes By, cha. XIV

- 42 Today, the Lord of Hosts is the defender of the Covenant, the forces of the Kingdom protect it, heavenly souls tender their services, and heavenly angels promulgate and spread it broadcast. If it is considered with insight, it will be seen that all the forces of the universe, in the last analysis serve the Covenant.

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

- 43 ...No power can eliminate misunderstandings except that of the Covenant. The power of the Covenant is all-embracing, and resolveth all difficulties, for the Pen of Glory hath explicitly declared that whatever misunderstanding may arise should be referred to the Centre of the Covenant.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 44 Were it not for the protecting power of the Covenant to guard the impregnable fort of the Cause of God, there would arise among the Bahá'ís, in one day, a thousand different sects as was the case in former ages. But in this Blessed Dispensation, for the sake of the permanency of the Cause of God and the avoidance of dissension amongst the people of God, the Blessed Beauty (may my soul be a sacrifice unto Him), has through the Supreme Pen written the Covenant and the Testament...

'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in Bahá'í World Faith

- 45 ...Launched through these very actsⁱ into the troublesome seas of ceaseless tribulation, piloted by the mighty arm of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and manned by the bold initiative and abundant vitality of a band of sorely-tried disciples, the Ark of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant has, ever since those days, been steadily pursuing its course contemptuous of the storms of bitter misfortune that have raged and which must continue to assail it as it forges ahead towards the promised haven of undisturbed security and peace.

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

- 46 The Covenant is the “axis of the oneness of the world of humanity” because it preserves the unity and integrity of the Faith itself and protects it from being disrupted by individuals who are convinced that only their understanding of the Teachings is the right one - a fate that has overcome all past Revelations. The Covenant is, moreover, embedded in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh Himself. Thus, as you clearly see, to accept Bahá'u'lláh is to accept His Covenant; to reject His Covenant is to reject Him.

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

i Events associated with the introduction of the Faith in the West.

CRISIS & VICTORY

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

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled 1987

“The hosts of the world ... are from every side launching their assault”ⁱ

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

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

Cited in The Advent of Divine Justice

- 2 Consider the former generations. Witness how every time the Day Star of Divine bounty hath shed the light of His Revelation upon the world, the people of His Day have arisen against Him, and repudiated His truth. They who were regarded as the leaders of men have invariably striven to hinder their followers from turning unto Him Who is the Ocean of God's limitless bounty...

Thou hast known how grievously the Prophets of God, His Messengers and Chosen Ones, have been afflicted. Meditate a while on the motive and reason which have been responsible for such a persecution. At no time, in no Dispensation, have the Prophets of God escaped the blasphemy of their enemies, the cruelty of their oppressors, the denunciation of the learned of their age, who appeared in the guise of uprightness and piety. Day and night they passed through such agonies as none can ever measure, except the knowledge of the one true God, exalted be His glory.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. 23

- 3 Know ye that trials and tribulations have, from time immemorial, been the lot of the chosen Ones of God and His beloved, and such of His servants as are detached from all else but Him, they whom neither merchandise nor traffic beguile from the remembrance of the Almighty, they that speak not

i 'Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

till He hath spoken, and act according to His commandment. Such is God's method carried into effect of old, and such will it remain in the future...

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. 66

- 4 By My life! Mine heart groaneth and mine eyes weep sore for the Cause of God and for them that understand not what they say and imagine what they cannot comprehend.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. 100

- 5 And if a nightingaleⁱ soar beyond the clay of self and dwell in the rose bower of the heart, and in Arabian melodies and sweet Persian tones recount the mysteries of God—a single word whereof quickeneth anew every lifeless form and bestoweth the spirit of holiness upon every mouldering bone—thou wilt behold a thousand claws of envy and a myriad talons of hatred hunting after Him and striving with all their power to encompass His death...

O My friend! Many a hound hunteth this gazelle of the desert of oneness; many an eagle pursueth this nightingale of the garden of eternity. Ravens of hatred lie in wait for this bird of the heavens of God, and the huntsman of envy stalketh this deer of the meadow of love.

The Call of the Divine Beloved

- 6 It is clear and evident that whenever the Manifestations of Holiness were revealed, the divines of their day have hindered the people from attaining unto the way of truth. To this testify the records of all the scriptures and heavenly books. Not one Prophet of God was made manifest Who did not fall a victim to the relentless hate, to the denunciation, denial, and execration of the clerics of His day! ...

...We foresee that in every city people will arise to suppress the Blessed Beauty, that the companions of that Lord of being and ultimate Desire of all men will flee from the face of the oppressor and seek refuge from him in the wilderness, whilst others will resign themselves and, with absolute detachment, will sacrifice their lives in His path...

Kitáb-i-Íqán

i This refers to Bahá'u'lláh's own Manifestation.

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

- 7 The prestige of the Faith of God has immensely increased. Its greatness is now manifest. The day is approaching when it will have cast a tremendous tumult in men's hearts. Rejoice, therefore, O denizens of America, rejoice with exceeding gladness!

Cited in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 8 In these days the Cause of God, the world over, is fast growing in power and, day by day, is spreading further and further to the utmost bounds of the earth. Its enemies, therefore, from all the kindreds and peoples of the world, are growing aggressive, malevolent, envious and bitterly hostile. It is incumbent upon the loved ones of God to exercise the greatest care and prudence in all things, whether great or small, to take counsel together and unitedly resist the onslaught of the stirrers up of strife and the movers of mischief...

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 94

- 9 O thou exalted bough of the divine Lote-Tree! ... When thou art disdained and rejected by the wicked doers be not cast down; and at the power and stiff-neckedness of the presumptuous be neither vexed nor sick at heart; for such is the way of heedless souls, from time out of mind. "O the misery of men! No Messenger cometh unto them but they laugh Him to scorn!"ⁱⁱ

Indeed, the attacks and the obstructiveness of the ignorant but cause the Word of God to be exalted, and spread His signs and tokens far and wide. Were it not for this opposition by the disdainful, this obduracy of the slanderers, this shouting from the pulpits, this crying and wailing of great and small alike, these accusations of unbelief levelled by the ignorant, this uproar from the foolish—how could news of the advent of the Primal Point and the bright dawning of the Day-Star of Bahá ever have reached to east and west? How else could the planet have been rocked from pole to pole? How else could Persia have become the focal point of scattering splendours, and Asia Minor the radiating heart of the beauty of the Lord? However else could the flame of the Manifestation have spread into the south? By what means could the cries of God have been heard in the far north? How else could His summons have been heard in the continents of

ii Qur'án 36:29.

America and of Africa the dark? How else could the cock-crow of Heaven have penetrated those ears? How else could the sweet parrots of India have come upon this sugar, or nightingales have lifted up their warblings out of the land of 'Iráq? What else could set the east and west to dancing, how else could this Consecrated Spot become the throne of the Beauty of God? How else could Sinai behold this burning brightness, how could the Advent's flame adorn that mount? How else could the Holy Land be made the footstool of God's beauty, and the holy vale of Towaⁱ become the site of excellence and grace, the sacred spot where Moses put off His shoes? How could the breaths of heaven be carried across the Vale of Holiness, how could the sweet-scented, airy streams that blow out of the Abhá gardens ever be perceived by those that dwell on the Verdant Isle? How else could the pledges of the Prophets, the joyous tidings of the holy Seers of old, the stirring promises given unto this Sacred Place by the Manifestations of God, ever have been fulfilled?

...All these blessings and bestowals, the very means of proclaiming the Faith, have come about through the scorn of the ignorant, the opposition of the foolish, the stubbornness of the dull-witted, the violence of the aggressor. Had it not been for these things, the news of the Báb's advent would not, to this day, have reached even into lands hard by. Wherefore we should never grieve over the blindness of the unwitting, the attacks of the foolish, the hostility of the low and base, the heedlessness of the divines, the charges of infidelity brought against us by the empty of mind. Such too was their way in ages past, nor would it be thus if they were of those who know; but they are benighted, and they come not close to understanding what is told them.ⁱⁱ

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 195

- 10 ...the friends in the West will unquestionably have their share of the calamities befalling the friends in the East. It is inevitable that, walking the pathway of Bahá'u'lláh, they too will become targets for persecution by the oppressors...

Now ye, as well, must certainly become my partners to some slight degree, and accept your share of tests and sorrows. But these episodes shall pass away, while that abiding glory and eternal life shall remain

i Qur'án 20:12. Also referred to as the "Sacred Vale".

ii cf. Qur'án 4:80.

unchanged forever. Moreover, these afflictions shall be the cause of great advancement.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 196

- 11 This day the powers of all the leaders of religion are directed towards the dispersion of the congregation of the All-Merciful, and the shattering of the Divine Edifice. The hosts of the world, whether material, cultural or political are from every side launching their assault, for the Cause is great, very great. Its greatness is, in this day, clear and manifest to men's eyes. It is therefore incumbent upon all who have come within the shade of the protecting wing of God's gracious providence to evince, by His divine and merciful assistance, such conspicuous steadfastness and firmness as will arrest the gaze and astound the minds of all.

At the time of the ascension of the Spirit (Jesus Christ), the company of those who accepted the new Revelation numbered no more than a few souls. So intense was the alarm and perturbation to which that event gave rise that, for a time, these souls were quite overcome by their agitation and confusion. Then, a few days later, a woman by the name of Mary Magdalene arose, and, by her own example, instilled into them a constancy and firmness which enabled them to arise for the propagation of the Word of God. Although to outward seeming they were no more than fishermen and dyers, yet, through the holy confirmations of the Cause of God, they carried the divine fragrances far and wide, sweetening the breaths of all who inhaled their fragrance and bringing new life to every understanding heart.

Take courage, then, O ye trusted friends of God, from the appearance of this mighty and all-swaying power, which was like unto a spirit that permeated the body of the world, making it vibrant with its pulse, and causing the pillars of idolatry to shake and tremble.

First three sentences: Shoghi Effendi's translation cited in The Advent of Divine Justice. The remainder of the extract is translated from the Persian.

- 12 ...a large multitude of people will arise against you, showing oppression, expressing contumely and derision, shunning your society, and heaping upon you ridicule. However, the Heavenly Father will illumine you to such an extent that, like unto the rays of the sun, you shall scatter the dark clouds of superstition, shine gloriously in the midst of Heaven and illumine the face of the earth. You must make firm the feet at the time when these trials

transpire, and demonstrate forbearance and patience. You must withstand them with the utmost love and kindness; consider their oppression and persecution as the caprice of children, and do not give any importance to whatever they do. For at the end the illumination of the Kingdom will overwhelm the darkness of the world and the exaltation and grandeur of your station will become apparent and manifest ... Rest ye assured.

Cited in Bahá'í News, Star of the West, vol. 1, no. 10 (8 September 1910), pp. 1-2

- 13 Erelong the wicked-doers in that land will arise to heap denunciations upon the true believers, and vent their spite upon the company of the faithful. Each day they will inflict a galling wound, each hour a stunning blow. Rebuking the friends for the love they bear Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, they will consider justified their denunciations, their scorn and malice, and spare no effort to do the friends whatever injury it lieth within their power to inflict. Such conduct is at one with the modes and practices of the people aforesaid: in bygone centuries, in the days of the appearance of the holy Manifestations, the people acted in just this manner; and now, in these days, it is inevitable that they will repeat such actions, nay, act with greater perversity than before ... Hence it is certain that thou wilt be afflicted with adversities, tests and injuries for the sake of the Blessed Beauty; yet these afflictions shall be the purest bounties and bestowals, and a token of thy acceptance at the Divine Threshold.

From a Tablet

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

...Therefore, my purpose is to warn and strengthen you against accusations, criticisms, revilings and derision in newspaper articles or other publications. Be not disturbed by them. They are the very confirmation of the Cause, the very source of upbuilding to the Movement. May God confirm the day when a score of ministers of the churches may arise and with bared heads cry at the top of their voices that the Bahá'ís are misguided. I would like to see that day, for that is the time when the Cause of God will spread. Bahá'u'lláh has pronounced such as these the couriers of the Cause. They will proclaim from pulpits that the Bahá'ís are fools, that they

are a wicked and unrighteous people, but be ye steadfast and unwavering in the Cause of God. They will spread the message of Bahá'u'lláh.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

From the writings of Shoghi Effendi

- 15 I am however assured and sustained by the conviction, never dimmed in my mind, that whatsoever comes to pass in the Cause of God, however disquieting in its immediate effects, is fraught with infinite Wisdom and tends ultimately to promote its interests in the world. Indeed, our experiences of the distant past, as well as of recent events, are too numerous and varied to permit of any misgiving or doubt as to the truth of this basic principle—a principle which throughout the vicissitudes of our sacred mission in this world we must never disregard or forget...

True, the Cause as every other movement has its own obstacles, complications and unforeseen difficulties, but unlike any other human organization it inspires a spirit of Faith and Devotion which can never fail to induce us to make sincere and renewed efforts to face these difficulties and smooth any differences that may and must arise.

23 December 1922, Bahá'í Administration

- 16 On one hand the remarkable revelations of the Beloved's Will and Testament, so amazing in all its aspects, so emphatic in its injunctions, have challenged and perplexed the keenest minds, whilst the ever-increasing confusion of the world, threatened as never before with disruptive forces, fierce rivalries, fresh commotions and grave disorder, have wellnigh overwhelmed the heart and damped the zeal of even the most enthusiastic believer in the destiny of mankind.

And yet, how often we seem to forget the clear and repeated warnings of Our beloved Master, Who, in particular during the concluding years of His mission on earth, laid stress on the "severe mental tests" that would inevitably sweep over His loved ones of the West—tests that would purge, purify and prepare them for their noble mission in life.

14 November 1923, Bahá'í Administration

- 17 That the Cause of God should in the days to come witness many a challenging hour and pass through critical stages in preparation for the glories

of its promised ascendancy in the New World has been time and again undeniably affirmed by our departed Master, and is abundantly proved to us all by its heroic past and turbulent history...

23 February 1924, Bahá'í Administration

- 18 We cannot believe that as the Movement grows in strength, in authority and in influence, the perplexities and the sufferings it has had to contend with in the past will correspondingly decrease and vanish. Nay, as it grows from strength to strength, the fanatical defendants of the strongholds of Orthodoxy, whatever be their denomination, realizing the penetrating influence of this growing Faith, will arise and strain every nerve to extinguish its light and discredit its name...

12 February 1927, Bahá'í Administration

- 19 For let every earnest upholder of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh realize that the storms which this struggling Faith of God must needs encounter, as the process of the disintegration of society advances, shall be fiercer than any which it has already experienced. Let him be aware that so soon as the full measure of the stupendous claim of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh comes to be recognized by those time-honoured and powerful strongholds of orthodoxy, whose deliberate aim is to maintain their stranglehold over the thoughts and consciences of men, this infant Faith will have to contend with enemies more powerful and more insidious than the cruellest torture-mongers and the most fanatical clerics who have afflicted it in the past. What foes may not in the course of the convulsions that shall seize a dying civilization be brought into existence, who will reinforce the indignities which have already been heaped upon it!

We have only to refer to the warnings uttered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in order to realize the extent and character of the forces that are destined to contest with God's holy Faith. In the darkest moments of His life, under 'Abdu'l-Ḥamíd's regime, when He stood ready to be deported to the most inhospitable regions of Northern Africa, and at a time when the auspicious light of the Bahá'í Revelation had only begun to break upon the West, He, in His parting message to the cousin of the Báb, uttered these prophetic and ominous words: "HOW GREAT, HOW VERY GREAT IS THE CAUSE! HOW VERY FIERCE THE ONSLAUGHT OF ALL THE PEOPLES AND KINDREDS OF THE EARTH! ERE LONG SHALL THE CLAMOUR OF THE MULTITUDE THROUGHOUT AFRICA, THROUGHOUT AMERICA, THE CRY OF THE EUROPEAN AND OF THE

TURK, THE GROANING OF INDIA AND CHINA, BE HEARD FROM FAR AND NEAR. ONE AND ALL THEY SHALL RISE WITH ALL THEIR POWER TO RESIST HIS CAUSE. THEN SHALL THE KNIGHTS OF THE LORD, ASSISTED BY HIS GRACE FROM ON HIGH, STRENGTHENED BY FAITH, AIDED BY THE POWER OF UNDERSTANDING, AND REINFORCED BY THE LEGIONS OF THE COVENANT, ARISE AND MAKE MANIFEST THE TRUTH OF THE VERSE: 'BEHOLD THE CONFUSION THAT HATH BEFALLEN THE TRIBES OF THE DEFEATED!'"

Stupendous as is the struggle which His words foreshadow, they also testify to the complete victory which the upholders of the Greatest Name are destined eventually to achieve. Peoples, nations, adherents of diverse faiths, will jointly and successively arise to shatter its unity, to sap its force, and to degrade its holy name. They will assail not only the spirit which it inculcates, but the administration which is the channel, the instrument, the embodiment of that spirit. For as the authority with which Bahá'u'lláh has invested the future Bahá'í Commonwealth becomes more and more apparent, the fiercer shall be the challenge which from every quarter will be thrown at the verities it enshrines.

21 March 1930, The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 20 The separation that has set in between the institutions of the Bahá'í Faith and the Islamic ecclesiastical organizations that oppose it—a movement that has originated in Egypt and is now spreading steadily throughout the Middle East, and will in time communicate its influence to the West—imposes upon every loyal upholder of the Cause the obligation of refraining from any word or action that might prejudice the position which our enemies have, in recent years and of their own accord, proclaimed and established. This historic development, the beginnings of which could neither be recognized nor even anticipated in the years immediately preceding 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing, may be said to have signalized the Formative Period of our Faith and to have paved the way for the consolidation of its Administrative Order. As this movement gains momentum, as it receives added impetus from the attitude and future action of the civil authorities in Persia, it will inevitably manifest its repercussions in the West and will rouse the leaders of the Church and finally the civil authorities to challenge the claims and eventually to recognize the independent status of the Religion of Bahá'u'lláh ... Our adversaries in the East have initiated the struggle. Our future opponents in the West will, in their turn, arise and

carry it a stage further. Ours is the duty, in anticipation of this inevitable contest, to uphold unequivocally and with undivided loyalty the integrity of our Faith and demonstrate the distinguishing features of its divinely appointed institutions.

15 June 1935, Messages to America

- 21 That the forces of irreligion, of a purely materialistic philosophy, of unconcealed paganism have been unloosed, are now spreading, and, by consolidating themselves, are beginning to invade some of the most powerful Christian institutions of the western world, no unbiased observer can fail to admit. That these institutions are becoming increasingly restive, that a few among them are already dimly aware of the pervasive influence of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, that they will, as their inherent strength deteriorates and their discipline relaxes, regard with deepening dismay the rise of His New World Order, and will gradually determine to assail it, that such an opposition will in turn accelerate their decline, few, if any, among those who are attentively watching the progress of His Faith would be inclined to question...

This menace of secularism that has attacked Islám and is undermining its remaining institutions, that has invaded Persia, has penetrated into India, and raised its triumphant head in Turkey, has already manifested itself in both Europe and America, and is, in varying degrees, and under various forms and designations, challenging the basis of every established religion...

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

- 22 Pregnant indeed are the years looming ahead of us all. The twin processes of internal disintegration and external chaos are being accelerated every day and are inexorably moving towards a climax ... The Community of the Most Great Name, the leaven that must leaven the lump, the chosen remnant that must survive the rolling up of the old, discredited, tottering Order and assist in the unfoldment of a new one in its stead, is standing ready, alert, clear-visioned, and resolute ... Fierce and manifold will be the assaults with which governments, races, classes and religions, jealous of its rising prestige and fearful of its consolidating strength, will seek to silence its voice and sap its foundations. Unmoved by the relative obscurity that surrounds it at the present time, and undaunted by the forces that will be arrayed against it in the future, this community, I cannot but feel confident,

will, no matter how afflictive the agonies of a travailing age, pursue its destiny, undeflected in its course, undimmed in its serenity, unyielding in its resolve, unshaken in its convictions.

5 July 1938, *This Decisive Hour*, no. 41

- 23 How can the beginnings of a world upheaval, unleashing forces that are so gravely deranging the social, the religious, the political, and the economic equilibrium of organized society, throwing into chaos and confusion political systems, racial doctrines, social conceptions, cultural standards, religious associations, and trade relationships—how can such agitations, on a scale so vast, so unprecedented, fail to produce any repercussions on the institutions of a Faith of such tender age whose teachings have a direct and vital bearing on each of these spheres of human life and conduct?

Little wonder, therefore, if they who are holding aloft the banner of so pervasive a Faith, so challenging a Cause, find themselves affected by the impact of these world-shaking forces. Little wonder if they find that in the midst of this whirlpool of contending passions their freedom has been curtailed, their tenets condemned, their institutions assaulted, their motives maligned, their authority jeopardized, their claim rejected...

Nor should any of the manifold opportunities, of a totally different order, be allowed to pass unnoticed which the evolution of the Faith itself, whether at its world center, or in the North American continent, or even in the most outlying regions of the earth, must create, calling once again upon the American believers to play a part, no less conspicuous than the share they have previously had in their collective contributions to the propagation of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. I can only for the moment cite at random certain of these opportunities which stand out preeminently, in any attempt to survey the possibilities of the future: ... the deliverance of Bahá'í communities from the fetters of religious orthodoxy in such Islamic countries as Persia, 'Iráq, and Egypt, and the consequent recognition, by the civil authorities in those states, of the independent status and religious character of Bahá'í National and Local Assemblies; the precautionary and defensive measures to be devised, coordinated, and carried out to counteract the full force of the inescapable attacks which organized efforts of ecclesiastical organizations of various denominations will progressively launch and relentlessly pursue; and, last but not least, the multitudinous issues that must be faced, the obstacles that must be overcome, and the responsibilities that must be assumed, to enable a sore-tried Faith to pass

through the successive stages of unmitigated obscurity, of active repression, and of complete emancipation, leading in turn to its being acknowledged as an independent Faith, enjoying the status of full equality with its sister religions, to be followed by its establishment and recognition as a State religion, which in turn must give way to its assumption of the rights and prerogatives associated with the Bahá'í state, functioning in the plenitude of its powers, a stage which must ultimately culminate in the emergence of the worldwide Bahá'í Commonwealth, animated wholly by the spirit, and operating solely in direct conformity with the laws and principles of Bahá'u'lláh...

In the conduct of this twofold crusade the valiant warriors struggling in the name and for the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh must, of necessity, encounter stiff resistance, and suffer many a setback. Their own instincts, no less than the fury of conservative forces, the opposition of vested interests, and the objections of a corrupt and pleasure-seeking generation, must be reckoned with, resolutely resisted, and completely overcome. As their defensive measures for the impending struggle are organized and extended, storms of abuse and ridicule, and campaigns of condemnation and misrepresentation, may be unloosed against them. Their Faith, they may soon find, has been assaulted, their motives misconstrued, their aims defamed, their aspirations derided, their institutions scorned, their influence belittled, their authority undermined, and their Cause, at times, deserted by a few who will either be incapable of appreciating the nature of their ideals, or unwilling to bear the brunt of the mounting criticisms which such a contest is sure to involve. "Because of 'Abdu'l-Bahá," the beloved Master has prophesied, "many a test will be visited upon you. Troubles will befall you, and suffering afflict you."

Let not, however, the invincible army of Bahá'u'lláh, who in the West, and at one of its potential storm-centers is to fight, in His name and for His sake, one of its fiercest and most glorious battles, be afraid of any criticism that might be directed against it. Let it not be deterred by any condemnation with which the tongue of the slanderer may seek to debase its motives. Let it not recoil before the threatening advance of the forces of fanaticism, of orthodoxy, of corruption, and of prejudice that may be leagued against it. The voice of criticism is a voice that indirectly reinforces the proclamation of its Cause. Unpopularity but serves to throw into greater relief the contrast between it and its adversaries, while ostracism is itself the magnetic power that must eventually win over to its camp the most vociferous and inveterate amongst its foes...

25 December 1938, The Advent of Divine Justice

- 24 Nor should a survey of the outstanding features of so blessed and fruitful a ministry omit mention of the prophecies which the unerring pen of the appointed Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant has recorded! These foreshadow the fierceness of the onslaught that the resistless march of the Faith must provoke in the West, in India and in the Far East when it meets the time-honored sacerdotal orders of the Christian, the Buddhist and Hindu religions. They foreshadow the turmoil which its emancipation from the fetters of religious orthodoxy will cast in the American, the European, the Asiatic and African continents.

God Passes By, cha. XXI

- 25 No matter how long the period that separates them from ultimate victory; however arduous the task; however formidable the exertions demanded of them; however dark the days which mankind, perplexed and sorely-tried, must, in its hour of travail, traverse; however severe the tests with which they who are to redeem its fortunes will be confronted; however afflictive the darts which their present enemies, as well as those whom Providence, will, through His mysterious dispensations raise up from within or from without, may rain upon them, however grievous the ordeal of temporary separation from the heart and nerve-center of their Faith which future unforeseeable disturbances may impose upon them, I adjure them, by the precious blood that flowed in such great profusion, by the lives of the unnumbered saints and heroes who were immolated, by the supreme, the glorious sacrifice of the Prophet-Herald of our Faith, by the tribulations which its Founder, Himself, willingly underwent, so that His Cause might live, His Order might redeem a shattered world and its glory might suffuse the entire planet—I adjure them, as this solemn hour draws nigh, to resolve never to flinch, never to hesitate, never to relax, until each and every objective in the Plans to be proclaimed, at a later date, has been fully consummated.

30 June 1952, Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950–1957

- 26 ...undeterred by the clamor which the exponents of religious orthodoxy are sure to raise, or by the restrictive measures which political leaders may impose; undismayed by the smallness of their numbers and the multitude of their potential adversaries; armed with the efficacious weapons their own hands have slowly and laboriously forged in anticipation of this glorious and inevitable encounter with the organized forces of superstition,

of corruption, and of unbelief; placing their whole trust in the matchless potency of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, in the all-conquering power of His might and the infallibility of His glorious and oft-repeated promises, let them press forward...

25 June 1953, Citadel of Faith

- 27 The administrative problems which face you are divers and complex. The opposition which a nascent Faith must needs meet, particularly from the leaders of religious orthodoxy in the Islamic countries of the North, will, as the institutions of that Faith multiply, become more apparent and grow in severity.

2 July 1956, appended to a letter

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 28 For the history of the Cause, particularly in Persia, is a clear illustration of the truth that such persecutions invariably serve to strengthen the believers in their faith by stimulating the spiritual powers latent in their hearts, and by awakening in them a new and deeper consciousness of their duties and responsibilities towards the Faith. Indeed, the mere progress of the Cause, by provoking the hatreds and jealousies of peoples and nations, creates for itself such difficulties and obstacles as only its divine spirit can overcome. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has emphatically stated that the enmity and opposition of the world will increase in direct proportion to the extension and progress of the Faith. The greater the zeal of the believers and the more striking the effect of their achievements, the fiercer will be the opposition of the enemy.

20 January 1935

- 29 He is, indeed, fully alive to the difficulties which the friends, not only in your centre but all around the world, are daily encountering in their attempt to establish and perfect the administrative machinery of the Faith. These difficulties and obstacles, however, he considers to be inevitable, inherent as they are in the very process through which the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh is destined to develop and to eventually establish its ascendancy in the world. Not only are such difficulties inevitable, but they should be viewed, indeed, as constituting a God-given test whereby the friends can, and will assuredly, enrich and perfect the spiritual and moral energies latent in

them, and in this way help in establishing that Divine civilization promised to them by God.

Trials and sufferings, Bahá'u'lláh has repeatedly warned us in His Tablets, are even as the oil that feeds the lamp. The Cause cannot reveal its full splendour unless and until it encounters and successfully overcomes the very obstacles that every now and then stand in its way, and for some time appear to threaten its very foundations. Such obstacles, tests and trials are indeed blessings in disguise, and as such are bound to help in promoting the Faith.

31 July 1935

- 30 ...though he has been made truly grieved to learn of the continued and malignant opposition which the enemies of the Cause in ... and particularly the clerical element, are directing against the believers in that centre. He wishes you, however, to urge the friends not to feel in the least disheartened or discouraged, but to pursue with renewed determination, unity and vigour their sacred task of spreading and establishing the Faith, confident in the glorious future awaiting them. The greater the number of persecutions, and the more intense they become in character, the deeper their faith should be in the unique mission entrusted to them by Bahá'u'lláh, and the greater their zeal to help in hastening its complete fulfilment.

This Cause, as every Divine Cause, cannot be effectively established unless it encounters and valiantly triumphs over the forces of opposition with which it is assailed. The history of the Faith is in itself a sufficient proof of that. Trials and persecutions have always been, and will continue to be, the lot of the chosen ones of God. But these they should consider as blessings in disguise, as through them their faith will be quickened, purified and strengthened. Bahá'u'lláh compares such afflictive trials to the oil which feeds the lamp of the Cause of God.

The friends should, therefore, not assume an attitude of mere resignation in the face of persecutions. They should rather welcome them, and utilize them as [a] means for their own spiritual uplift and also for the promotion of the Cause. As the Faith grows stronger and attracts the serious attention and consideration of the world outside, the friends must expect a similar, if not a greater, increase in the forces of opposition which from every direction, both secular and religious, will be massed to undermine the very basis of its existence. The final outcome of such a struggle, which will be surely gigantic, is clear to us believers. A Faith born of God and guided by His Divine and all-pervasive spirit cannot but

finally triumph and firmly establish itself, no matter how persistent and insidious the forces with which it has to contend. The friends should be confident, and act with the utmost wisdom and moderation, and should particularly abstain from any provocative act. The future is surely theirs.

24 June 1936

- 31 His fears are rather for those friends who, due to their insufficient realization of the divine power that mysteriously operates in the Faith, are prone to look at such developments as constituting the death-knell of the Cause. In his communications to the ... friends during the last few weeks he has always stressed the fact, and he wishes you to do the same in all your conversations and correspondence with them, that the Cause is bound sooner or later to suffer from all kinds of attacks and persecutions, that these in fact constitute the life-blood of its institutions, and as such constitute an inseparable and intrinsic part of its development and growth. Trials and tribulations, as Bahá'u'lláh says, are the oil that feed the lamp of the Cause, and are indeed blessings in disguise. The friends should therefore be confident that all these attacks to which the Cause is now subjected in ... are a necessary part of the development of the Cause, and that their outcome would be beneficial to its best interests.

31 August 1937

- 32 Later on, when the very progress of the Cause on the one hand, and the corresponding decline in ecclesiastical organizations on the other, will inevitably incite Christian ecclesiastical leaders to vehemently oppose and undermine the Faith, the believers will then have a real chance to defend and vindicate the Cause.

25 May 1938

- 33 It seems both strange and pitiful that the Church and Clergy should always, in every age, be the most bitter opponents of the very Truth they are continually admonishing their followers to be prepared to receive! They have become so violently attached to the form that the substance itself eludes them!

However, such denunciations as those your minister made publicly against you and the Bahá'í Faith can do no harm to the Cause at all; on the contrary they only serve to spread its name abroad and mark it as an independent religion.

7 February 1945

- 34 It is too bad that some of the Friends have left the Faith due to the pressure of the Church leaders. Of course, it was inevitable that Church leaders would oppose us. The Master has predicted that this would occur; and likewise the very nature of events whereby the Faith grows and develops, taking members away from the Church, will cause a reaction of the Church against us. We must bear in mind that every attack from the religious leaders in the past has been a means for the development of the Faith itself because those who listen to the attacks can't help but be affected by the purity and sincerity of the Faith.
19 June 1957

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 35 The marvellous victories won in the name of Bahá'u'lláh ... and the triumphs increasingly being achieved by His dedicated and ardent lovers in every land, will no doubt serve to rouse the internal and external enemies of the Faith to fresh attempts to attack the Faith and dampen the enthusiasm of its supporters...

...the progressive unfoldment and onward march of the Faith of God are bound to raise up adversaries, indubitably foreshadowing the world-wide opposition which is to come, and unequivocally giving the assurance of ultimate victory.

We feel strongly that ... the time has come for them [the friends] to clearly grasp the inevitability of the critical contests which lie ahead, give you their full support in repelling with confidence and determination "the darts" which will be levelled against them by "their present enemies, as well as those whom Providence will, through His mysterious dispensations raise up from within or from without," and aid and enable the Faith of God to scale loftier heights, win more signal triumphs, and traverse more vital stages in its predestined course to complete victory and world-wide ascendancy.

26 November 1974

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 36 ...the Universal House of Justice instructs us to say that it is to be expected that books will be written against the Faith attempting to distort its teachings, to denigrate its accomplishments, to vilify its Founders and leaders and to destroy its very foundations. The friends should not be unduly exercised when these books appear and certainly no issue should be made of them.

30 March 1976

- 37 As your teaching and proclamation work progresses there is bound to be more and more confrontation with the older religious institutions in ... and it is the kind of staunchness evinced by ... which will bring respect to the Cause and attract the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh.

7 June 1981

- 38 In these days Bahá'ís can expect the flame of fanaticism to be kindled among the enemies of the Faith in Muslim countries. In meeting attacks the friends should learn to combine the spirit of steadfastness and courage with love and wisdom. They should avoid argument and conflict and conduct themselves in such manner that they do not provoke retaliation. This includes the use of discretion in their teaching activities.

22 August 1983

- 39 Given the rise in most parts of the world of religious bigotry and fundamentalism, it may be timely for your National Assembly to try to arm the Bahá'ís against such attacks as appear in this book,ⁱ which is so typical of the approach of Christian churches. Sooner or later, as you know, these churches will rise against the Cause.

You are therefore requested to consider asking a qualified person or group of persons to prepare suitable materials, perhaps for a booklet, which the friends may use in dealing with misrepresentations of the Bahá'í Teachings by Christians.

18 October 1984

i *A Guide to Cults and New Religions*, John Boykin.

“The resistless march of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh”ⁱ

From the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh

- 40 Say: Tribulation is a horizon unto My Revelation. The day star of grace shineth above it, and sheddeth a light which neither the clouds of men’s idle fancy nor the vain imaginations of the aggressor can obscure.

Follow thou the footsteps of thy Lord, and remember His servants even as He doth remember thee, undeterred by either the clamor of the heedless ones or the sword of the enemy ... Spread abroad the sweet savors of thy Lord, and hesitate not, though it be for less than a moment, in the service of His Cause. The day is approaching when the victory of thy Lord, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Bountiful, will be proclaimed.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, sec. 17

- 41 Behold how in this Dispensation the worthless and foolish have fondly imagined that by such instruments as massacre, plunder and banishment they can extinguish the Lamp which the Hand of Divine power hath lit, or eclipse the Day Star of everlasting splendor. How utterly unaware they seem to be of the truth that such adversity is the oil that feedeth the flame of this Lamp! Such is God’s transforming power. He changeth whatsoever He willeth; He verily hath power over all things...

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, sec. 29

- 42 Say: The fierce gales and whirlwinds of the world and its peoples can never shake the foundation upon which the rock-like stability of My chosen ones is based. Gracious God! What could have prompted these people to enslave and imprison the loved ones of Him Who is the Eternal Truth? ... The day, however, is approaching when the faithful will behold the Day Star of justice

i Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to America*

shining in its full splendor from the Day Spring of glory. Thus instructeth thee the Lord of all being in this, His grievous Prison.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. 162

- 43 With every fresh tribulation He manifested a fuller measure of Thy Cause, and exalted more highly Thy word.

Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, sec. 31

- 44 Should they attempt to conceal His light on the continent, He will assuredly rear His head in the midmost heart of the ocean and, raising His voice, proclaim: "I am the lifegiver of the world!" ... And if they cast Him into a darksome pit, they will find Him seated on earth's loftiest heights calling aloud to all mankind: "Lo, the Desire of the world is come in His majesty, His sovereignty, His transcendent dominion!" And if He be buried beneath the depths of the earth, His Spirit soaring to the apex of heaven shall peal the summons: "Behold ye the coming of the Glory; witness ye the Kingdom of God, the most Holy, the Gracious, the All-Powerful!"

Cited in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 45 At this moment We call to remembrance Our loved ones and bring them the joyous tidings of God's unfailing grace and of the things that have been provided for them in My lucid Book. Ye have tolerated the censure of the enemies for the sake of My love and have steadfastly endured in My Path the grievous cruelties which the ungodly have inflicted upon you. Unto this I Myself bear witness, and I am the All-Knowing. How vast the number of places that have been ennobled with your blood for the sake of God. How numerous the cities wherein the voice of your lamentation hath been raised and the wailing of your anguish uplifted. How many the prisons into which ye have been cast by the hosts of tyranny. Know ye of a certainty that He will render you victorious, will exalt you among the peoples of the world and will demonstrate your high rank before the gaze of all nations. Surely He will not suffer the reward of His favoured ones to be lost.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 46 Verily God rendereth His Cause victorious at one time through the aid of His enemies, and at another by virtue of the assistance of His chosen ones. Concerning those pure and blessed souls, Our Pen of Glory hath revealed that which excelleth the whole world, its treasures, and whatsoever existeth

therein. Erelong shall the heedless and the doers of wickedness be repaid for that which their hands have wrought.

From a Tablet

- 47 Whatsoever occurreth in the world of being is light for His loved ones and fire for the people of sedition and strife. Even if all the losses of the world were to be sustained by one of the friends of God, he would still profit thereby, whereas true loss would be borne by such as are wayward, ignorant and contemptuous. Although the authorⁱ of the following saying had intended it otherwise, yet We find it pertinent to the operation of God's immutable Will: "Even or odd, thou shalt win the wager." The friends of God shall win and profit under all conditions, and shall attain true wealth. In fire they remain cold, and from water they emerge dry. Their affairs are at variance with the affairs of men. Gain is their lot, whatever the deal. To this testifieth every wise one with a discerning eye, and every fair-minded one with a hearing ear.

From a Tablet

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

- 48 The friends of God are supported by the Kingdom on high and they win their victories through the massed armies of the most great guidance. Thus for them every difficulty will be made smooth, every problem will most easily be solved.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 221

- 49 Soon will the Western regions become as radiant as the horizons of the East, and the Sun of Truth shine forth with a refulgence that will cause the darkness of error to fade away and vanish. Great is the multitude who will rise up to oppose you, who will oppress you, heap blame upon you, rejoice at your misfortunes, account you people to be shunned, and visit injury upon you; yet shall your heavenly Father confer upon you such spiritual illumination that ye shall become even as the rays of the sun which, as they chase away the sombre clouds, break forth to flood the surface of the earth with light. It is incumbent upon you, whensoever these tests may overtake

i Sa'dí, Muşliḥu'd-Dín of Shíráz (d. 691 A.H./1292 A.D.), famed author of the *Gulistán* and other poetical works.

you, to stand firm, and to be patient and enduring. Instead of repaying like with like, ye should requite opposition with the utmost benevolence and loving-kindness, and on no account attach importance to cruelties and injuries, but rather regard them as the wanton acts of children. For ultimately the radiance of the Kingdom will overwhelm the darkness of the world of being, and the holy, exalted character of your aims will become unmistakably apparent. Nothing shall remain concealed: the olive oil, though stored within the deepest vault, shall one day burn in brightness from the lamp atop the beacon. The small shall be made great, and the powerless shall be given strength; they that are of tender age shall become the children of the Kingdom, and those that have gone astray shall be guided to their heavenly home.

From a Tablet

- 50 Thou hadst written concerning the growth in stature of the Cause of God in thy country. There is no doubt that the Faith of God will progress from day to day in that land, for it will be aided by the strengthening power of the Holy Spirit and the confirmation of the Word of God. Nor is there any doubt that members of the Christian clergy will rise up against it in implacable hostility, wishing to injure and oppress you, and seeking to assail you with doubts; for the spread of the Cause of God will lead to the waning of their fortunes—as the fortunes of the Pharisees had waned before them—and entail the loss of the dignity and standing that they now enjoy amongst men.

Reflect upon the time of Jesus and the deeds wrought by the Jewish divines and Pharisees. Such deeds will, in this day, be repeated at the hands of these Christian clergymen. Be not perturbed, however; be firm and constant, for it is certain that a company of souls shall, with infinite love, arise to enter into the Kingdom of God. These souls shall recompense you for the vexations, the humiliations, and disdain to which you are subjected by the clergy: to the injuries inflicted by these latter they shall respond with acts of kindness, until eventually, as the experience of former times hath shown, the children of the Kingdom shall gain the ascendancy, and victory shall be theirs. Rest ye confident of this.

From a Tablet

- 51 All who stand up in the cause of God will be persecuted and misunderstood. It hath ever been so, and will ever be. Let neither enemy nor friend disturb your composure, destroy your happiness, deter your accomplishment. Rely

wholly upon God. Then will persecution and slander make you the more radiant. The designs of your enemies will rebound upon them. They, not you, will suffer. Oppression is the wind that doth fan the fire of the Love of God. Welcome persecution and bitterness. A soldier may bear arms, but until he hath faced the enemy in battle he hath not earned his place in the king's army. Let nothing defeat you. God is your helper. God is invincible. Be firm in the Heavenly Covenant. Pray for strength. It will be given to you, no matter how difficult the conditions.

Star of the West, vol. 4, no. 5 (5 June 1913), p. 88—revised translation

- 52 And now, if you act in accordance with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, you may rest assured that you will be aided and confirmed. You will be rendered victorious in all that you undertake, and all the inhabitants of the earth will be unable to withstand you. You are conquerors, because the power of the Holy Spirit assisteth you. Above and beyond all physical and phenomenal forces, the Holy Spirit itself shall aid you.

Star of the West, vol. 8, no. 8 (1 August 1917), p. 103—revised translation

From the writings of Shoghi Effendi

- 53 If, in days to come, that landⁱ should be overtaken by diverse afflictions and calamities; if, to the rigours of the present times there should be added the outbreak of widespread civil upheavals; if the country's already dark horizons should become still gloomier and more foreboding, you should neither be filled with trepidation and despondency, nor allow yourselves to be deflected, though it be to the extent of a hair's breadth, from that sound and well-considered course that you have been following up till now—from continuing, in other words, your persistent, tireless, and unremitting labours to increase the number of the Bahá'í administrative institutions, to strengthen their foundations, to enhance the fair name that they enjoy, and to consolidate the respect and standing in which they are held. The release of this innocent and wronged community from the bonds of captivity, and its deliverance from the clutches of the enemy and oppressor, cannot but be accompanied by general commotions and disturbances; likewise the attainment by the people of Bahá to a position in which they will enjoy true honour, comfort and tranquillity must inevitably encounter the hostility

i Iran.

and resistance, the clamorous opposition and tumultuous protests of all those who harbour enmity and rancour towards them. If, therefore, the troubled waters of the sea of adversity should grow yet more turbulent, if the storm of tribulation should increase in vehemence and assail that sore-tried community from all six sides with fresh disasters, then know unhesitatingly and with unwavering conviction, that the hour of deliverance, the appointed time when the promises of old are to reach their glorious fulfilment, has drawn nigh, and that the means for the Greatest Name in that land have all been readied and prepared. Fixity of purpose and unfaltering resolution are the qualities that must needs be manifested by the people of Bahá'í if they are successfully to traverse these last remaining stages, and witness, at the highest levels, and in a manner that will fill them with astonishment, the realization of their profoundest hopes and of their most deeply cherished desires. Such is the way of God—"and no change canst thou find in the way of God".ⁱ

11 January 1928

- 54 ...it behooves us, while expectantly watching from a distance the moving spectacle of the struggling Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, to seek abiding solace and strength from the reflection that whatever befalls this Cause, however grievous and humiliating the visitations that from time to time may seem to afflict the organic life or interfere with the functions of the administrative machinery of the Bahá'í Faith, such calamities cannot but each eventually prove to be a blessing in disguise designed, by a Wisdom inscrutable to us all, to establish and consolidate the sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh on this earth.

1 January 1929, Bahá'í Administration

- 55 Numerous and powerful have been the forces that have schemed, both from within and from without, in lands both far and near, to quench its light and abolish its holy name. Some have apostatized from its principles, and betrayed ignominiously its cause. Others have hurled against it the fiercest anathemas which the embittered leaders of any ecclesiastical institution are able to pronounce. Still others have heaped upon it the afflictions and humiliations which sovereign authority can alone, in the plentitude of its power, inflict.

The utmost its avowed and secret enemies could hope to achieve was to retard its growth and obscure momentarily its purpose. What they

i Qur'án, 33:62 and 48:23.

actually accomplished was to purge and purify its life, to stir it to still greater depths, to galvanize its soul, to prune its institutions, and cement its unity. A schism, a permanent cleavage in the vast body of its adherents, they could never create.

They who betrayed its cause, its lukewarm and faint-hearted supporters, withered away and dropped as dead leaves, powerless to cloud its radiance or to imperil its structure. Its most implacable adversaries, they who assailed it from without, were hurled from power, and, in the most astonishing fashion, met their doom. Persia had been the first to repress and oppose it. Its monarchs had miserably fallen, their dynasty had collapsed, their name was execrated, the hierarchy that had been their ally and had propped their declining state, had been utterly discredited. Turkey, which had thrice banished its Founder and inflicted on Him cruel and life-long imprisonment, had passed through one of the severest ordeals and far-reaching revolutions that its history has recorded, had shrunk from one of the most powerful empires to a tiny Asiatic republic, its Sultanate obliterated, its dynasty overthrown, its Caliphate, the mightiest institution of Islám, abolished.

Meanwhile the Faith that had been the object of such monstrous betrayals, and the target for such woeful assaults, was going from strength to strength, was forging ahead, undaunted and undivided by the injuries it had received. In the midst of trials it had inspired its loyal followers with a resolution that no obstacle, however formidable, could undermine. It had lighted in their hearts a faith that no misfortune, however black, could quench. It had infused into their hearts a hope that no force, however determined, could shatter.

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

56 ...every apparent trial with which the unfathomable wisdom of the Almighty deems it necessary to afflict His chosen community serves only to demonstrate afresh its essential solidarity and to consolidate its inward strength...

For such demonstrations of the interpositions of an ever-watchful Providence they who stand identified with the Community of the Most Great Name must feel eternally grateful. From every fresh token of His unfailing blessing on the one hand, and of His visitation on the other, they cannot but derive immense hope and courage...

...Though small in numbers, and circumscribed as yet in your experiences, powers, and resources, yet the Force which energizes your mission

is limitless in its range and incalculable in its potency. Though the enemies which every acceleration in the progress of your mission must raise up be fierce, numerous, and unrelenting, yet the invisible Hosts which, if you persevere, must, as promised, rush forth to your aid, will, in the end, enable you to vanquish their hopes and annihilate their forces. Though the ultimate blessings that must crown the consummation of your mission be undoubted, and the Divine promises given you firm and irrevocable, yet the measure of the goodly reward which every one of you is to reap must depend on the extent to which your daily exertions will have contributed to the expansion of that mission and the hastening of its triumph.

25 December 1938, The Advent of Divine Justice

- 57 Dear friends! Manifold, various, and at times extremely perilous, have been the tragic crises which the blind hatred, the unbounded presumption, the incredible folly, the abject perfidy, the vaulting ambition of the enemy have intermittently engendered within the pale of the Faith. From some of its most powerful and renowned votaries, at the hands of its once trusted and ablest propagators, champions, and administrators, from the ranks of its most revered and highly-placed trustees whether as companions, amanuenses, or appointed lieutenants of the Herald of the Faith, of its Author, and of the Centre of His Covenant, from even those who were numbered among the kindred of the Manifestation, not excluding the brother, the sons and daughters of Bahá'u'lláh, and the nominee of the Báb Himself, a Faith, of such tender age, and enshrining so priceless a promise, has sustained blows as dire and treacherous as any recorded in the world's religious history.

From the record of its tumultuous history, almost every page of which portrays a fresh crisis, is laden with the description of a new calamity, recounts the tale of a base betrayal, and is stained with the account of unspeakable atrocities, there emerges, clear and incontrovertible, the supreme truth that with every fresh outbreak of hostility to the Faith, whether from within or from without, a corresponding measure of outpouring grace, sustaining its defenders and confounding its adversaries, has been providentially released, communicating a fresh impulse to the onward march of the Faith, while this impetus, in its turn, would, through its manifestations, provoke fresh hostility in quarters heretofore unaware of its challenging implications—this increased hostility being accompanied by a still more arresting revelation of Divine Power and a more abundant effusion of celestial grace, which, by enabling the upholders of

that Faith to register still more brilliant victories, would thereby generate issues of still more vital import and raise up still more formidable enemies against a Cause that cannot but in the end resolve those issues and crush the resistance of those enemies, through a still more glorious unfoldment of its inherent power.

The resistless march of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, viewed in this light, and propelled by the stimulating influences which the unwisdom of its enemies and the force latent within itself both engender, resolves itself into a series of rhythmic pulsations, precipitated, on the one hand, through the explosive outbursts of its foes, and the vibrations of Divine Power, on the other, which speed it, with ever-increasing momentum, along that predestined course traced for it by the Hand of the Almighty.

As opposition to the Faith, from whatever source it may spring, whatever form it may assume, however violent its outbursts, is admittedly the motive-power that galvanizes, on the one hand, the souls of its valiant defenders, and taps for them, on the other, fresh springs of that Divine and inexhaustible Energy, we who are called upon to represent, defend, and promote its interests, should, far from regarding any manifestation of hostility as an evidence of the weakening of the pillars of the Faith, acclaim it as both a God-sent gift and a God-sent opportunity which, if we remain undaunted, we can utilize for the furtherance of His Faith and the routing and complete elimination of its adversaries.

The Heroic Age of the Faith, born in anguish, nursed in adversity, and terminating in trials as woeful as those that greeted its birth, has been succeeded by that Formative Period which is to witness the gradual crystallization of those creative energies which the Faith has released, and the consequent emergence of that World Order for which those forces were made to operate.

Fierce and relentless will be the opposition which this crystallization and emergence must provoke. The alarm it must and will awaken, the envy it will certainly arouse, the misrepresentations to which it will remorselessly be subjected, the set-backs it must, sooner or later, sustain, the commotions to which it must eventually give rise, the fruits it must in the end garner, the blessings it must inevitably bestow and the glorious, the Golden Age it must irresistibly usher in, are just beginning to be faintly perceived, and will, as the old Order crumbles beneath the weight of so stupendous a Revelation, become increasingly apparent and arresting.

12 August 1941, This Decisive Hour, no. 85

58 We can discover a no less distinct gradation in the character of the opposition it has had to encounter ... an opposition which, now, through the rise of a divinely appointed Order in the Christian West, and its initial impact on civil and ecclesiastical institutions, bids fair to include among its supporters established governments and systems associated with the most ancient, the most deeply entrenched sacerdotal hierarchies in Christendom. We can, at the same time, recognize, through the haze of an ever-widening hostility, the progress, painful yet persistent, of certain communities within its pale through the stages of obscurity, of proscription, of emancipation, and of recognition—stages that must needs culminate in the course of succeeding centuries, in the establishment of the Faith, and the founding, in the plenitude of its power and authority, of the world-embracing Bahá'í Commonwealth...

Despite the blows leveled at its nascent strength, whether by the wielders of temporal and spiritual authority from without, or by black-hearted foes from within, the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh had, far from breaking or bending, gone from strength to strength, from victory to victory. Indeed its history, if read aright, may be said to resolve itself into a series of pulsations, of alternating crises and triumphs, leading it ever nearer to its divinely appointed destiny...

The tribulations attending the progressive unfoldment of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh have indeed been such as to exceed in gravity those from which the religions of the past have suffered. Unlike those religions, however, these tribulations have failed utterly to impair its unity, or to create, even temporarily, a breach in the ranks of its adherents. It has not only survived these ordeals, but has emerged, purified and inviolate, endowed with greater capacity to face and surmount any crisis which its resistless march may engender in the future...

Whatever may befall this infant Faith of God in future decades or in succeeding centuries, whatever the sorrows, dangers and tribulations which the next stage in its world-wide development may engender, from whatever quarter the assaults to be launched by its present or future adversaries may be unleashed against it, however great the reverses and setbacks it may suffer, we, who have been privileged to apprehend, to the degree our finite minds can fathom, the significance of these marvelous phenomena associated with its rise and establishment, can harbor no doubt that what it has already achieved in the first hundred years of its life provides sufficient guarantee that it will continue to forge ahead, captur-

ing loftier heights, tearing down every obstacle, opening up new horizons and winning still mightier victories until its glorious mission, stretching into the dim ranges of time that lie ahead, is totally fulfilled.

God Passes By, Foreword

- 59 Such reflections, far from engendering in our minds and hearts the slightest trace of perplexity, of discouragement or doubt, should reinforce the basis of our convictions, demonstrate to us the incorruptibility, the strange workings and the invincibility of a Faith which, despite the assaults which malignant and redoubtable enemies from the ranks of kings, princes and ecclesiastics have repeatedly launched against it, and the violent internal tests that have shaken it for more than a century, and the relative obscurity of its champions, and the unpropitiousness of the times and the perversity of the generations contemporaneous with its rise and growth, has gone from strength to strength, has preserved its unity and integrity, has diffused its light over five continents, reared the institutions of its Administrative Order and spread its ramifications to the four corners of the earth, and launched its systematic campaigns in both the Western and Eastern Hemispheres.

For such benefits, for such an arresting and majestic vindication of the undefeatable powers inherent in our precious Faith, we can but bow our heads in humility, awe and thanksgiving, renew our pledge of fealty to it, and, each covenanting in his own heart, resolve to prove faithful to that pledge, and persevere to the very end, until our earthly share of servitude to so transcendent and priceless a Cause has been totally and completely fulfilled.

15 June 1946, This Decisive Hour, no. 158

- 60 Indeed this fresh ordeal that has, in pursuance of the mysterious dispensations of Providence, afflicted the Faith, at this unexpected hour, far from dealing a fatal blow to its institutions or existence, should be regarded as a blessing in disguise, not a “calamity” but a “providence” of God, not a devastating flood but a “gentle rain” on a “green pasture,” a “wick” and “oil” unto the “lamp” of His Faith, a “nurture” for His Cause, “water for that which has been planted in the hearts of men,” a “crown set on the head” of His Messenger for this Day.ⁱ

i *The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, Arabic no. 51
Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

Whatever its outcome, this sudden commotion that has seized the Bahá'í world, that has revived the hopes and emboldened the host of the adversaries of the Faith intent on quenching its light and obliterating it from the face of the earth, has served as a trumpet call in the sounding of which the press of the world, the cries of its vociferous enemies, the public remonstrances of both men of good will and those in authority have joined, proclaiming far and wide its existence, publicizing its history, defending its verities, unveiling its truths, demonstrating the character of its institutions and advertising its aims and purposes...

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.

20 August 1955, Citadel of Faith

61 However severe their trials and disheartening the present situation may appear, they must remember that the Faith to which they owe allegiance has weathered, not so very long ago, storms of a far greater severity that seemed, at times, capable of engulfing and of obliterating its nascent institutions. The newly planted sapling of a divinely conceived Administrative Order, having driven deep its roots in German soil, bent momentarily under the hurricane which so violently swept over it, and no sooner had the tempest spent its force than it righted itself, and, growing with a fresh vigour, put forth branches and offshoots that now overshadow the entire land, and even stretch out as far as the heart of Austria.

The experience of so miraculous a recovery from so devastating an ordeal should, alone, prove sufficient to infuse an invigorating spirit into those who have been subjected to it, as well as into the new generation who are still close enough to those events to appreciate its extreme violence, such as will not only enable them to withstand onslaughts of still greater severity, but impel them, both young and old, men and women alike, to struggle, with redoubled vigour and deeper consecration, to meet the pressing and the manifold requirements of the present hour.

14 August 1957, appended to a letter, The Light of Divine Guidance, vol. 1

From letters on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 62 There is always an important difference between friends and tested friends. No matter how precious the first type may be, the future of the Cause rests upon the latter. Up to the present the German friends were considered as loving Bahá'ís; from now on they can be ranked as tested ones.

In every country where such difficulties arise, they generally end with added energy and more intensive service of the Cause.

4 April 1930, The Light of Divine Guidance, vol. 1

- 63 The friends ... should not feel bewildered, for they have the assurance of Bahá'u'lláh that whatever the nature and character of the forces of opposition facing His Cause, its eventual triumph is indubitably certain.

30 August 1937

- 64 Let them know, however, for a certainty that the onslaught of both the disbeliever and the oppressor will become a means of promulgating this Divine Cause, of proclaiming the Word of God and of consolidating the foundations of His holy Faith; and that its enemies will ultimately be completely overwhelmed, that the Cause of God will emerge victorious, and that His Word will reign supreme.

21 October 1946

- 65 He very deeply appreciates your Assembly's assurance of its abiding loyalty to him and to the Master's Will and Testament. As you can well imagine this disaffection of the Master's Family has been a very sad and heavy blow to him; but, although for many years he shielded them with his silence, in the end he was forced to speak out in order to protect the Faith. For a hundred years our beloved Cause has suffered from these internal afflictions, and the way the believers, generation after generation, have met this test with steadfast faith, loyalty and devotion, is one of the signs that this is the Cause of God, divinely protected through the Covenants of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master.

30 June 1949, The Light of Divine Guidance, vol. 1

- 66 He urges you not to be discouraged or depressed, but rest assured that Bahá'u'lláh will assist you. Every set-back this Cause receives is invariably

a means of ensuring a future victory, for God will never permit His Faith to be put out or uprooted.

26 January 1950

- 67 Although this may temporarily prove an embarrassment to your work, and a set-back, there is no doubt that it signalizes a step forward in the advance of the Faith; for we know that our beloved Faith must eventually clash with the entrenched orthodoxies of the past; and that this conflict cannot but lead to greater victories, and to ultimate emancipation, recognition and ascendancy.

8 April 1951

- 68 The Faith is moving at a tremendous rate, and with tremendous force at the present time. Certainly if it is suppressed in one place, the power of the Cause is such that it must rise with greater strength in another place; and thus the persecutions of the Persian Bahá'ís have caused the Faith to surge ahead in Africa. This certainly must be a solace to the suffering of the Bahá'ís of Persia.

26 September 1955

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 69 It should not be surmised that the events which have taken place in all corners of the globe, including the sacred land of Iran, have occurred as isolated incidents without any aim and purpose. According to the words of our beloved Guardian, "The invisible hand is at work and the convulsions taking place on earth are a prelude to the proclamation of the Cause of God". This is but one of the mysterious forces of this supreme Revelation which is causing the limbs of mankind to quake and those who are drunk with pride and negligence to be thunderstruck and shaken...

In such an afflicted time, when mankind is bewildered and the wisest of men are perplexed as to the remedy, the people of Bahá, who have confidence in His unfailing grace and divine guidance, are assured that each of these tormenting trials has a cause, a purpose, and a definite result, and all are essential instruments for the establishment of the immutable Will of God on earth. In other words, on the one hand humanity is struck by the scourge of His chastisement which will inevitably bring together the

scattered and vanquished tribes of the earth; and on the other, the weak few whom He has nurtured under the protection of His loving guidance are, in this Formative Age and period of transition, continuing to build amidst these tumultuous waves an impregnable stronghold which will be the sole remaining refuge for those lost multitudes. Therefore, the dear friends of God who have such a broad and clear vision before them are not perturbed by such events, nor are they panic-stricken by such thundering sounds, nor will they face such convulsions with fear and trepidation, nor will they be deterred, even for a moment, from fulfilling their sacred responsibilities.

10 February 1980

70 The inveterate enemies of the Faith imagine that their persecutions will disrupt the foundations of the Faith and tarnish its glory. Alas! Alas for their ignorance and folly! These acts of oppression, far from weakening the resolve of the friends, have always served to inflame their zeal and galvanize their beings. In the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “...they thought that violence and interference would cause extinction and silence and lead to suppression and oblivion; whereas interference in matters of conscience causes stability and firmness and attracts the attention of men’s sight and souls, which fact has received experimental proof many times and often.”

Every drop of blood shed by the valiant martyrs, every sigh heaved by the silent victims of oppression, every supplication for divine assistance offered by the faithful, has released, and will continue mysteriously to release, forces over which no antagonist of the Faith has any control, and which, as marshalled by an All-Watchful Providence, have served to noise abroad the name and fame of the Faith to the masses of humanity in all continents, millions of whom had previously been totally ignorant of the existence of the Faith or had but a superficial, and oft-times erroneous, understanding of its teachings and history.

The current persecution has resulted in bringing the name and character of our beloved Faith to the attention of the world as never before in its history. As a direct result of the protests sent by the world-wide community of the Most Great Name to the rulers in Iran, of the representations made to the media when those protests were ignored, of direct approach by Bahá’í institutions at national and international level to governments, communities of nations, international agencies and the United Nations itself, the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh has not only been given

sympathetic attention in the world's councils, but also its merits and violated rights have been discussed and resolutions of protest sent to the Iranian authorities by sovereign governments, singly and in unison. The world's leading newspapers, followed by the local press, have presented sympathetic accounts of the Faith to millions of readers, while television and radio stations are increasingly making the persecutions in Iran the subject of their programmes. Commercial publishing houses are beginning to commission books about the Faith...

Indeed, this new wave of persecution sweeping the Cradle of the Faith may well be seen as a blessing in disguise, a "providence" whose "calamity" is, as always, borne heroically by the beloved Persian community. It may be regarded as the latest move in God's Major Plan, another trumpet blast to awaken the heedless from their slumber and a golden opportunity offered to the Bahá'ís to demonstrate once again their unity and fellowship before the eyes of a declining and skeptical world, to proclaim with full force the Message of Bahá'u'lláh to high and low alike, to establish the reverence of our Faith for Islám and its Prophet, to assert the principles of non-interference in political activities and obedience to government which stand at the very core of our Faith, and to provide comfort and solace to the breasts of the serene sufferers and steadfast heroes in the forefront of a persecuted community...

26 January 1982

- 71 Shoghi Effendi perceived in the organic life of the Cause a dialectic of victory and crisis. The unprecedented triumphs, generated by the adamant steadfastness of the Iranian friends, will inevitably provoke opposition to test and increase our strength. Let every Bahá'í in the world be assured that whatever may befall this growing Faith of God is but incontrovertible evidence of the loving care with which the King of Glory and His martyred Herald, through the incomparable Centre of His Covenant and our beloved Guardian, are preparing His humble followers for ultimate and magnificent triumph...

2 January 1986

- 72 The opening of that Plan coincided with the recrudescence of savage persecution of the Bahá'í community in Iran, a deliberate effort to eliminate the Cause of God from the land of its birth. The heroic steadfastness of the Persian friends has been the mainspring of tremendous international

attention focussed on the Cause, eventually bringing it to the agenda of the General Assembly of the United Nations, and, together with world-wide publicity in all the media, accomplishing its emergence from the obscurity which characterized and sheltered the first period of its life. This dramatic process impelled the Universal House of Justice to address a Statement on Peace to the Peoples of the World and arrange for its delivery to Heads of State and the generality of the rulers.

Ridván 1986

“The security of our precious Faith”ⁱ

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 73 “Say: O people of God! Beware lest the powers of the earth alarm you, or the might of the nations weaken you, or the tumult of the people of discord deter you, or the exponents of earthly glory sadden you. Be ye as a mountain in the Cause of your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Glorious, the Unconstrained.” “Say: Beware, O people of Bahá, lest the strong ones of the earth rob you of your strength, or they who rule the world fill you with fear. Put your trust in God, and commit your affairs to His keeping. He, verily, will, through the power of truth, render you victorious, and He, verily, is powerful to do what He willeth, and in His grasp are the reins of omnipotent might.”

Cited in The Advent of Divine Justice

- 74 It is incumbent upon all men, each according to his ability, to refute the arguments of those that have attacked the Faith of God. Thus hath it been decreed by Him Who is the All-Powerful, the Almighty. He that wisheth to promote the Cause of the one true God, let him promote it through his pen and tongue, rather than have recourse to sword or violence ... If any man were to arise to defend, in his writings, the Cause of God against its assailants, such a man, however inconsiderable his share, shall be so honored in the world to come that the Concourse on high would envy his glory. No pen can depict the loftiness of his station, neither can any tongue describe its splendor. For whosoever standeth firm and steadfast in this holy, this glorious, and exalted Revelation, such power shall be given him as to enable him to face and withstand all that is in heaven and on earth. Of this God is Himself a witness.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. 154

i Shoghi Effendi, *Messages to the Bahá'í, World 1950–1957*

- 75 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. Blessed is the ruler who succoureth the captive, and the rich one who careth for the poor, and the just one who secureth from the wrong doer the rights of the downtrodden, and happy the trustee who observeth that which the Ordainer, the Ancient of Days hath prescribed unto him.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 76 And likewise, He saith: "Say to them that are of a fearful heart: be strong, fear not, behold your God."ⁱⁱ This blessed verse is a proof of the greatness of the Revelation, and of the greatness of the Cause, inasmuch as the blast of the trumpet must needs spread confusion throughout the world, and fear and trembling amongst all men. Well is it with him who hath been illumined with the light of trust and detachment. The tribulations of that Day will not hinder or alarm him. Thus hath the Tongue of Utterance spoken, as bidden by Him Who is the All-Merciful. He, verily, is the Strong, the All-Powerful, the All-Subduing, the Almighty...

Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

- 77 You should exhort all the friends to patience, to acquiescence, and to tranquillity, saying: O ye loved ones of God in that land! Ye are glorified in all the worlds of God because of your relationship to Him Who is the Eternal Truth, but in your lives on this earthly plane, which pass away as a fleeting moment, ye are afflicted with abasement. For the sake of the one true God, ye have been reviled and persecuted, ye have been imprisoned, and surrendered your lives in His path. Ye should not, however, by reason of the tyrannical acts of some heedless souls, transgress the limits of God's commandments by contending with anyone.

Whatever hath befallen you, hath been for the sake of God. This is the truth, and in this there is no doubt. You should, therefore, leave all your affairs in His Hands, place your trust in Him, and rely upon Him. He will assuredly not forsake you. In this, likewise, there is no doubt. No father will surrender his sons to devouring beasts; no shepherd will leave his flock to ravening wolves. He will most certainly do his utmost to protect his own.

ii Isaiah 35:4.

If, however, for a few days, in compliance with God's all-encompassing wisdom, outward affairs should run their course contrary to one's cherished desire, this is of no consequence and should not matter. Our intent is that all the friends should fix their gaze on the Supreme Horizon, and cling to that which hath been revealed in the Tablets. They should strictly avoid sedition, and refrain from treading the path of dissension and strife. They should champion their one true God, exalted be He, through the hosts of forbearance, of submission, of an upright character, of goodly deeds, and of the choicest and most refined words.

The Bahá'í World, vol. XVIII

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 78 O army of God! When calamity striketh, be ye patient and composed. However afflictive your sufferings may be, stay ye undisturbed, and with perfect confidence in the abounding grace of God, brave ye the tempest of tribulations and fiery ordeals.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 35

- 79 Wherefore must the loved ones of God, laboriously, with the waters of their striving, tend and nourish and foster this tree of hope. In whatsoever land they dwell, let them with a whole heart befriend and be companions to those who are either close to them, or far removed. Let them, with qualities like unto those of heaven, promote the institutions and the religion of God. Let them never lose heart, never be despondent, never feel afflicted. The more antagonism they meet, the more let them show their own good faith; the more torments and calamities they have to face, the more generously let them pass round the bounteous cup. Such is the spirit which will become the life of the world, such is the spreading light at its heart: and he who may be and do other than this is not worthy to serve at the Holy Threshold of the Lord.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 206

- 80 O ye beloved of the Lord! The greatest of all things is the protection of the True Faith of God, the preservation of His Law, the safeguarding of His Cause and service unto His Word...

...My supreme obligation, however, of necessity, prompteth me to guard and preserve the Cause of God. Thus, with the greatest regret, I counsel you saying: Guard ye the Cause of God, protect His law and have the utmost fear of discord.

Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

From the writings of Shoghi Effendi

- 81 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.

12 March 1923, Bahá'í Administration

- 82 As the Movement grows in prestige, fame and influence, as the ambitions, malice and ill-will of strangers and enemies correspondingly wax greater, it becomes increasingly important for every individual and Spiritual Assembly to be on their guard lest they fall innocent victims of the evil designs of the malevolent, the self-seeking and greedy.

Touching the publication of articles and pamphlets bearing on the controversial and political issues of the day, I desire to remind my dearly-beloved fellow-workers that at the present stage when the Cause is still in its infancy, any minute and detailed analysis by the friends of subjects that are in the forefront of general discussion would often be misconstrued in certain quarters and give rise to suspicions and misunderstandings that would react unfavorably on the Cause. They would tend to create a misconception of the real object, the true mission, and the fundamental character of the Bahá'í Faith. We should, while endeavoring to uphold loyally and expound conscientiously our social and moral principles in all their essence and purity, in all their bearings upon the divers phases of human society, insure that no direct reference or particular criticism in our exposition of the fundamentals of the Faith would tend to antagonize any existing institution, or help to identify a purely spiritual movement with the base clamorings and contentions of warring sects, factions and nations. We should strive in all our utterances to combine the discretion and noble reticence of the wise with the frankness and passionate loyalty of the ardent advocate of an inspiring Faith. While refusing to utter the word that would needlessly alienate or estrange any individual, govern-

ment or people, we should fearlessly and unhesitatingly uphold and assert in their entirety such truths the knowledge of which we believe is vitally and urgently needed for the good and betterment of mankind.

10 January 1926, Bahá'í Administration

- 83 We can prove ourselves worthy of our Cause only if in our individual conduct and corporate life we sedulously imitate the example of our beloved Master, Whom the terrors of tyranny, the storms of incessant abuse, the oppressiveness of humiliation, never caused to deviate a hair's breadth from the revealed Law of Bahá'u'lláh.

12 April 1927, Bahá'í Administration

- 84 Be moreover assured beyond all shadow of doubt that no matter how strenuously the enemies of God's Faith may exert themselves to extinguish its fire, they will but cause its flame to burn the more fiercely, its light to shine the more brightly, and its heat to grow the more intense. People of wisdom and discernment, who are closely but unobtrusively surveying the progress of the Faith, and are resolved to subject it to the most careful examination and research, will be neither shaken nor swayed by these absurd and baseless claims, these scurrilous publications and self-contradictory pronouncements. So far from being blinded by such propaganda to the verities of the Cause, they will rather be moved by it to pursue their investigations and inquiries with greater meticulousness and enthusiasm than before; to make themselves thoroughly familiar with the teachings, principles and aspirations of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh; and even, through the grace and guidance of an Almighty and Omniscient Lord, to arise in time of need for the defence and protection of the Cause; to put to rout the hosts of suspicion, doubt and misconception; to raze to its foundations the edifice of calumny and falsehood; and to demonstrate and establish, before the eyes of all the world, the sacred, exalted and indomitable reality of the resistless Faith of God. These various distressful occurrences, contrived and instigated by the enemies and ill-wishers of the Cause—their insidious rumours, their defamatory reports, their flagrant and unprincipled attacks—should be viewed as dispositions and instrumentalities of Providence, designed to hasten the advent of that promised day, that mighty and compelling victory, and that perspicuous triumph, which have been so clearly foretold in the scriptures, and so explicitly and emphatically set forth by the Pen of the Most High.

August 1927

- 85 The permanence and stability achieved by any association, group or nation is a result of—and dependent upon—the soundness and worth of the principles upon which it bases the running of its affairs and the direction of its activities. The guiding principles of the Bahá'ís are: honesty, love, charity and trustworthiness; the setting of the common good above private interest; and the practice of godliness, virtue and moderation. Ultimately, then, their preservation and happiness are assured. Whatever misfortunes they may encounter, wrought by the wiles of the schemer and ill-wisher, shall all pass away like waves, and hardship shall be succeeded by joy. The friends are under the protection of the resistless power and inscrutable providence of God. There is no doubt that every blessed soul who brings his life into harmony with this all-swaying power shall give lustre to his works and win an ample recompense. The actions of those who choose to set themselves against it should provoke not antipathy on our part, but prayers for their guidance. Such was the way of the Bahá'ís in days gone by, and so must it be, now and for always.

18 December 1928

- 86 Let them refrain from associating themselves, whether by word or by deed, with the political pursuits of their respective nations, with the policies of their governments and the schemes and programs of parties and factions. In such controversies they should assign no blame, take no side, further no design, and identify themselves with no system prejudicial to the best interests of that world-wide Fellowship which it is their aim to guard and foster. Let them beware lest they allow themselves to become the tools of unscrupulous politicians, or to be entrapped by the treacherous devices of the plotters and the perfidious among their countrymen. Let them so shape their lives and regulate their conduct that no charge of secrecy, of fraud, of bribery or of intimidation may, however ill-founded, be brought against them. Let them rise above all particularism and partisanship, above the vain disputes, the petty calculations, the transient passions that agitate the face, and engage the attention, of a changing world. It is their duty to strive to distinguish, as clearly as they possibly can, and if needed with the aid of their elected representatives, such posts and functions as are either diplomatic or political from those that are purely administrative in character, and which under no circumstances are affected by the changes and chances that political activities and party government, in every land, must necessarily involve. Let them affirm their unyielding determination

to stand, firmly and unreservedly, for the way of Bahá'u'lláh, to avoid the entanglements and bickerings inseparable from the pursuits of the politician, and to become worthy agencies of that Divine Polity which incarnates God's immutable Purpose for all men...

As the number of the Bahá'í communities in various parts of the world multiplies and their power, as a social force, becomes increasingly apparent, they will no doubt find themselves increasingly subjected to the pressure which men of authority and influence, in the political domain, will exercise in the hope of obtaining the support they require for the advancement of their aims. These communities will, moreover, feel a growing need of the goodwill and the assistance of their respective governments in their efforts to widen the scope, and to consolidate the foundations, of the institutions committed to their charge. Let them beware lest, in their eagerness to further the aims of their beloved Cause, they should be led unwittingly to bargain with their Faith, to compromise with their essential principles, or to sacrifice, in return for any material advantage which their institutions may derive, the integrity of their spiritual ideals. Let them proclaim that in whatever country they reside, and however advanced their institutions, or profound their desire to enforce the laws, and apply the principles, enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, they will, unhesitatingly, subordinate the operation of such laws and the application of such principles to the requirements and legal enactments of their respective governments. Theirs is not the purpose, while endeavoring to conduct and perfect the administrative affairs of their Faith, to violate, under any circumstances, the provisions of their country's constitution, much less to allow the machinery of their administration to supersede the government of their respective countries.

It should also be borne in mind that the very extension of the activities in which we are engaged, and the variety of the communities which labor under divers forms of government, so essentially different in their standards, policies, and methods, make it absolutely essential for all those who are the declared members of any one of these communities to avoid any action that might, by arousing the suspicion or exciting the antagonism of any one government, involve their brethren in fresh persecutions or complicate the nature of their task. How else, might I ask, could such a far-flung Faith, which transcends political and social boundaries, which includes within its pale so great a variety of races and nations, which will have to rely increasingly, as it forges ahead, on the goodwill and support of

the diversified and contending governments of the earth—how else could such a Faith succeed in preserving its unity, in safeguarding its interests, and in ensuring the steady and peaceful development of its institutions?

Such an attitude, however, is not dictated by considerations of selfish expediency, but is actuated, first and foremost, by the broad principle that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh will, under no circumstances, suffer themselves to be involved, whether as individuals or in their collective capacities, in matters that would entail the slightest departure from the fundamental verities and ideals of their Faith. Neither the charges which the uninformed and the malicious may be led to bring against them, nor the allurements of honors and rewards, will ever induce them to surrender their trust or to deviate from their path. Let their words proclaim, and their conduct testify, that they who follow Bahá'u'lláh, in whatever land they reside, are actuated by no selfish ambition, that they neither thirst for power, nor mind any wave of unpopularity, of distrust or criticism, which a strict adherence to their standards might provoke.

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

- 87 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 constantly reflected in the business dealings of all its members, in their domestic lives, in all manner of employment, and in any service they may, in the future, render their government or people. It must be exemplified in the conduct of all Bahá'í electors, when exercising their sacred rights and functions. It must characterize the attitude of every loyal believer towards nonacceptance of political posts, nonidentification with political parties, nonparticipation in political controversies, and nonmembership in political organizations and ecclesiastical institutions ... It must be demonstrated in the impartiality of every defender of the Faith against its enemies, in his fair-mindedness in recognizing any merits that enemy may possess, and in his honesty in discharging any obligations he may have towards him...

...No greater demonstration can be given to the peoples of both continents of the youthful vitality and the vibrant power animating the life, and the institutions of the nascent Faith of Bahá'u'lláh than an intelligent, persistent, and effective participation of the Bahá'í youth, of every race, nationality, and class, in both the teaching and administrative spheres of

Bahá'í activity. Through such a participation the critics and enemies of the Faith, watching with varying degrees of skepticism and resentment, the evolutionary processes of the Cause of God and its institutions, can best be convinced of the indubitable truth that such a Cause is intensely alive, is sound to its very core, and its destinies in safe keeping...

25 December 1938, The Advent of Divine Justice

- 88 Obstacles, varied and numerous, will no doubt arise to impede the onward march of this community [Australia]. Reverses may temporarily dim the radiance of its mission. The forces of religious orthodoxy may well, at a future date, be leagued against it. The exponents of theories and doctrines fundamentally opposed to its religious tenets and social principles may challenge its infant strength with persistence and severity. The Administrative Order—the Ark destined to preserve its integrity and carry it to safety—must without delay, without exception, claim the attention of the members of this community, its ideals must be continually cherished in their hearts, its purposes studied and kept constantly before their eyes, its requirements wholeheartedly met, its laws scrupulously upheld, its institutions unstintingly supported, its glorious mission noised abroad, and its spirit made the sole motivating purpose of their lives.

22 August 1949, appended to a letter,

Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, 1923–1957

- 89 The strife and bloodshed, with their attendant misery, sorrow and confusion, that have afflicted the entire subcontinent of India, in recent months, have caused me the gravest concern. The disorders, following in the wake of this great crisis in the life of its people, constitute a challenge which the community of the steadfast followers of Bahá'u'lláh in that land must resolutely face, and demonstrate in meeting it the quality of their faith, the depth of their devotion, the strength of their unity, the solidity of their institutions and the heroic character of their resolve. They must neither feel alarmed, nor falter or hesitate in the execution of their Plan. Shielded by the institutions which their hands have reared, abiding securely in the stronghold of their love for Bahá'u'lláh and their devotion to His Faith, pursuing with unrelaxing vigilance and singleness of purpose the course set by the Plan they themselves have inaugurated, heartened by the initial success already achieved since that Plan was set in motion, they, however much buffeted by present circumstances, and no matter how perilous the

path they now tread, must press forward, unafraid of persecution, scorn or calumny, towards the shining goals they have set themselves to attain.
24 October 1947, appended to a letter, Dawn of a New Day

90 RECENT EVENTS TRIUMPHANT CONSUMMATION SERIES HISTORIC ENTERPRISES SUCH AS CONSTRUCTION SUPERSTRUCTURE BĀB'S SEPULCHRE DEDICATION MOTHER TEMPLE WEST WORLD-WIDE CELEBRATIONS HOLY YEAR CONVOCAION FOUR INTERCONTINENTAL TEACHING CONFERENCES LAUNCHING TEN YEAR CRUSADE UNPRECEDENTED DISPERSAL ITS VALIANT PROSECUTORS FACE GLOBE EXTRAORDINARY PROGRESS AFRICAN PACIFIC CAMPAIGNS RISE ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER ARABIAN PENINSULA HEART ISLAMIC WORLD DISCOMFITURE POWERFUL ANTAGONISTS CRADLE FAITH ERECTION INTERNATIONAL ARCHIVES HERALDING ESTABLISHMENT SEAT WORLD ADMINISTRATIVE ORDER HOLY LAND SERVED INFLAME UNQUENCHABLE ANIMOSITY MUSLIM OPPONENTS RAISED UP NEW SET ADVERSARIES CHRISTIAN FOLD ROUSED INTERNAL ENEMIES OLD NEW COVENANT-BREAKERS FRESH ATTEMPTS ARREST MARCH CAUSE GOD MISREPRESENT ITS PURPOSE DISRUPT ITS ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS DAMPEN ZEAL SAP LOYALTY ITS SUPPORTERS.

EVIDENCES INCREASING HOSTILITY WITHOUT PERSISTENT MACHINATIONS WITHIN FORESHADOWING DIRE CONTEST DESTINED RANGE ARMY LIGHT FORCES DARKNESS BOTH SECULAR RELIGIOUS PREDICTED UNEQUIVOCAL LANGUAGE 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ NECESSITATE THIS CRUCIAL HOUR CLOSER ASSOCIATION HANDS FIVE CONTINENTS BODIES ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES NATIONAL BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITIES WORLD OVER JOINT INVESTIGATION NEFARIOUS ACTIVITIES INTERNAL ENEMIES ADOPTION WISE EFFECTIVE MEASURES COUNTERACT THEIR TREACHEROUS SCHEMES PROTECT MASS BELIEVERS ARREST SPREAD EVIL INFLUENCE.

CALL UPON HANDS NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES EACH CONTINENT SEPARATELY ESTABLISH HENCEFORTH DIRECT CONTACT DELIBERATE WHENEVER FEASIBLE AS FREQUENTLY POSSIBLE EXCHANGE REPORTS TO BE SUBMITTED TO THEIR RESPECTIVE AUXILIARY BOARDS NATIONAL COMMITTEES EXERCISE UNRELAXING VIGILANCE CARRY OUT UNFLINCHINGLY SACRED INESCAPABLE DUTIES.ⁱ SECURITY PRECIOUS FAITH PRESERVATION SPIRITUAL

i The Continental Boards of Counsellors ... are charged with specific functions relating to the protection and propagation of the Faith in the areas under their jurisdiction. They will operate in a manner similar to that set forth by the beloved Guardian for the Hands of the Cause in his communications outlining the responsibilities they are called upon to discharge in collaboration with National Spiritual Assemblies. We particularly draw your

HEALTH BAHÁ'Í COMMUNITIES VITALITY FAITH ITS INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS
 PROPER FUNCTIONING ITS LABORIOUSLY ERECTED INSTITUTIONS FRUIT-
 TION ITS WORLD-WIDE ENTERPRISES FULFILMENT ITS ULTIMATE DESTINY
 ALL DIRECTLY DEPENDENT BEFITTING DISCHARGE WEIGHTY RESPONSIBILI-
 TIES NOW RESTING MEMBERS THESE TWO INSTITUTIONS OCCUPYING WITH
 UNIVERSAL HOUSE JUSTICE NEXT INSTITUTION GUARDIANSHIP FOREMOST
 RANK DIVINELY ORDAINED ADMINISTRATIVE HIERARCHY WORLD ORDER
 BAHÁ'U'LLÁH.

4 June 1957, *Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957*

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 91 Undoubtedly, as the influence of God's Faith becomes more pervasive, the number of those who wish to obstruct its progress will also grow; new and increasingly formidable adversaries will come to the fore; and mischief-makers, appearing under various extraordinary guises, will seek surreptitiously to goad to action all those who harbour resentment or bear ill will towards this Cause, and will raise aloft the standards of sedition. Under these circumstances it is essential for the friends on the one hand to be alert and watchful, and on the other to arouse the vigilance and strengthen the allegiance of their fellow-believers, to guard the integrity of the Word of God, and to maintain harmony and unity amongst His loved ones. Herein lies the supreme duty of the friends of God, and the highest means by which they can render service to His Cause.

24 May 1927

- 92 In the face of such distressing conditions you should realize, more keenly than ever, your supreme obligation of protecting the body of the Cause from any further injuries and attacks, and of adhering scrupulously and intelligently to the spirit and the principles of the Administration.

12 July 1937

- 93 The matter of refuting attacks and criticisms directed against the Cause through the press is, he feels, one which devolves on the National Spiritual

attention to his message of June 4, 1957.

From a letter of the Universal House of Justice dated 24 June 1968 to a Continental Board of Counsellors

Assembly to consider. This body, whether directly or through the agency of its committees, should decide as to the advisability of answering any such attacks, and also should carefully examine and pass upon any statements which the friends wish to send to the press to this effect. Only through such supervision and control of all Bahá'í press activities can the friends hope to avoid confusion and misunderstanding in their own minds and in the mind of the general public whom they can reach through the press.

28 September 1928

- 94 It is incumbent upon the friends to confront these difficulties with constancy and firmness, thankfulness and patience, unity and solidarity; to endure with fortitude these consecutive disasters; to traverse successfully these last remaining stages in their destined course; and to become neither restive nor disheartened on account of the hardships and exertions, the injustice and oppression that they are constrained to undergo. Let them at all times keep in mind the following clear and solemn warning recorded by the pen of the Centre of the Covenant and, with a tranquil heart, a radiant spirit, a steadfast purpose and a high resolve, watchfully anticipate the unfoldment and fulfilment of the Master's utterance:

Beware the weeping of the wronged and orphaned children and the sighing of the victims of oppression, lest their tears should turn to floods and their breaths should turn to fire.

The violent disturbances, the afflictive trials and overwhelming dangers which now beset the froward band of ill-wishers, mischief-makers and oppressors from every stratum of society, whether in your own or neighbouring countries, and which have assailed their peoples, kings and subjects, governments and citizens alike on every hand, are the results of those grievous trespasses and violations wrought in that land by the hand of the tyrant and the aggressor. Now, after the passage of a century, the baleful outcome of those deeds has become apparent and their evil consequences revealed for all to see. The day is fast approaching when the hosts of hatred and iniquity will be called to answer for their deeds: ere long shall they be seized by the agents of the retributive anger of an All-Powerful and All-Compelling God.

In counselling the friends, and conveying condolences to the victims of this latest outrage, your Assembly should urge them to cleave now as never before to the firm cord of God's holy ordinances and teachings, never to deviate by so much as a hair's breadth from the Straight Path;

and to bide the advent of that day when it shall please Him to accomplish His foreordained decree. He, verily, is the Protector of the wronged ones, and He, verily, is the Succourer of all those who stand fast and firm.

2 July 1942

- 95 The Cause of God must be protected from the enemies of the Faith, and from those who sow seeds of doubt in the hearts of the believers, and the greatest of all protections is knowledge.

11 May 1948, The Light of Divine Guidance, vol. 1

- 96 ...the believers need to be deepened in their knowledge and appreciation of the Covenants of both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This is the stronghold of the faith of every Bahá'í, and that which enables him to withstand every test and the attacks of the enemies outside the Faith, and the far more dangerous, insidious, lukewarm people inside the Faith who have no real attachment to the Covenant, and consequently uphold the intellectual aspect of the Teachings while at the same time undermining the spiritual foundation upon which the whole Cause of God rests.

15 April 1949, The Light of Divine Guidance, vol. 2

- 97 Attacks by missionaries, and others, such as that by Elder, should most certainly be vigorously defended publicly by your Assembly and Local Assemblies as well.

18 August 1949

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 98 The need to protect the Faith from the attacks of its enemies is not generally appreciated by the friends because such attacks, particularly in the West, have so far been intermittent. However, we know that these attacks will increase and will become concerted and universal. The writings of our Faith 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 our beloved Faith pursues its onward march towards ultimate victory. Therefore, in the light of the warnings of Shoghi Effendi, 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, warn intelligently the friends of the opposition inevitably to come, explain how each crisis in God’s Faith has always proved to be a blessing in disguise, prepare them for the “dire contests” which are “destined to range the Army of Light against the forces of darkness”, and, when the influence of the enemies spreads and reaches their fold, the members of these Auxiliary Boards should be alert to their schemes to “dampen the zeal and sap the loyalty” of the believers and, by adopting “wise and effective measures”,ⁱ counteract these schemes and arrest the spread of their influence. Above all, the members of the Protection Boards should concentrate on deepening the friends’ knowledge of the Covenant and increasing their love and loyalty to it, on clearly and frankly answering, in conformity with the teachings, whatever questions may trouble any of the believers, on fostering the spiritual profundity and strength of their faith and certitude, and on promoting whatever will increase the spirit of loving unity in Bahá’í communities.

The primary tasks of the Propagation Boards, however, are to direct the believers’ attention to the goals of whatever plans have been placed before them, to stimulate and assist them to promote the teaching work in the fields of proclamation, expansion, consolidation and pioneering, to encourage contributions to the funds, and to act as standard-bearers of the teachers of the Faith, leading them to new achievements in the diffusion of God’s Message to their fellow human beings...

It should, furthermore, be remembered that these self-same functions are being carried out by the Assemblies, national and local, and their committees, which have at this time the great responsibility for actually executing the teaching plans and for administering, consolidating and protecting the Bahá’í communities. The Auxiliary Board members should thus watch carefully that their work reinforces and complements that of the administrative institutions.

10 October 1976

i *Messages to the Bahá’í World, 1950–1957*

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 99 One of the vital functions of the Protection Boards is the deepening of the friends' knowledge of the Covenant and increasing their love and loyalty to it, and fostering the spirit of love and unity within the Bahá'í community.

It is the duty of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies to refer to the Auxiliary Board members for protection matters which may involve not only possible Covenant-breaking, but also problems of disunity within the community, the removal of voting rights or any other matters in which you feel the guidance and advice of the Protection Boards may be helpful to the institutions of the Faith. The Auxiliary Board members of course keep the Continental Board of Counsellors informed and the Counsellors then take whatever steps they feel are called for.

You are free at any time to refer to the Continental Board of Counsellors and the Auxiliary Board members for protection any matters about which you are not clear involving the security of the Faith in your area and you will always find them willing to assist you in dealing with such problems.

1 October 1979

- 100 Hostility to the Faith is something all Bahá'ís can expect; how we react to it is of great importance. You are urged to avoid confrontation and dissension; these would tend to increase the antagonism. Maintain a dignified and friendly attitude and, in order to put forward well-founded reasoning where indicated, make a point of becoming better informed about issues affecting Christianity and the Bahá'í Faith.

12 September 1985

- 101 ...as the Faith becomes known, we can expect opposition and persecution. Nevertheless, in our presentations and relationships we should always try to build bridges so that our beautiful Teachings can be understood and accepted, and the power which they have to establish unity amongst men will be exemplified.

18 December 1985

Index

(Crisis & Victory)

A partial listing of some of the major themes addressed in the compilation is provided below. The numbers cited refer to the number of the individual extract included in the compilation.

ATTITUDES TOWARD THOSE WHO OPPOSE THE FAITH

9, 12, 23, 30, 36, 49, 50, 77, 79, 83, 87, 100

CRISIS

attitude toward 13, 15, 29, 31, 40, 47, 54, 57, 60, 63, 70, 71, 84

future 6, 12, 17, 19, 22, 23, 24, 49, 57, 58, 86, 98

inevitability of 1, 3, 6, 10, 13, 19, 29, 30, 34, 50, 88, 101

(in) past 2, 9, 11, 13, 50, 57, 58

purpose of 30, 31, 69

reasons for 5, 7, 8, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 27, 28, 35, 37, 57, 71, 90, 91

rhythmic pulsations 57, 58, 71

(in) West 10, 16, 20, 23, 49, 58

DIVINE ASSISTANCE

48, 51, 52, 56, 57, 65, 69, 73, 76, 85

NATURE OF ATTACKS

accusations, criticism 23, 49

articles and publications against the Faith 14, 36, 84

attacks on Institutions of the Faith 19, 23, 60

mental tests 16

misrepresentation 23, 84

physical 19, 49, 72

ridicule 13, 36

OPPONENTS OF THE FAITH

clerics, divines, religious movements and leaders 6, 11, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 26, 27, 32, 34, 37, 38, 50, 55, 58, 59, 97, 98

governments and political leaders 11, 20, 22, 26, 55, 58, 59, 98

nations and peoples 13, 19, 22

within the Faith 25, 55, 57, 58, 59, 65, 90, 98

OPPOSITION, ITS EFFECT

On the Faith

attracts Divine assistance 35, 37, 43, 57
consolidates and purifies the Community 55, 56, 57, 64, 84
constitutes temporary setback 57, 60, 66, 67, 68
demonstrations invincibility of the Community 59
ensures complete victory 19, 22, 30, 47, 49, 56, 57, 58, 84
establishes World Order 23, 58
promotes emergence from obscurity 72
promotes spread of Faith 9, 10, 14, 29, 33, 34, 44, 60, 61, 64, 70, 84
strengthens believers 28, 57, 62, 70, 84

On those who attack the Faith 23, 41, 56, 57, 60, 64, 84, 94

PROTECTION OF THE FAITH

80, 81, 82, 85, 86, 91, 92, 95, 96, 98

RESPONSE OF BELIEVERS TO OPPOSITION

avoid argumentation 38, 79, 86
avoid compromise 77, 86
care and prudence 8, 38, 91 consultation 8
deepening 95, 96
establish Administration 53, 79, 89
patience 49, 77, 78, 79
preparation of materials 39
refute arguments of opponents 74, 97, 100
steadfastness 11, 23, 25, 26, 49, 56, 70, 79, 89
unity 8, 91
uphold integrity of the Faith 20, 23, 53, 77, 82, 85, 86, 87, 88, 92

ROLE OF BAHÁ'Í INSTITUTIONS IN PROTECTION OF THE FAITH

39, 75, 81, 82, 90, 93, 94, 95, 98, 99

VICTORY OF THE FAITH

40, 42, 45, 46, 49, 50, 56, 59, 63, 71

THE IMPORTANCE OF
DEEPENING
OUR
KNOWLEDGE
AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE FAITH

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

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled 1983

Extracts

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 Recite ye the verses of God every morn and eventide. Whoso faileth to recite them hath not been faithful to the Covenant of God and His Testament, and whoso turneth away from these holy verses in this Day is of those who throughout eternity have turned away from God. Fear ye God, O My servants, one and all.

The Kitab-i-Aqdas, par. 149

- 2 Were any man to taste the sweetness of the words which the lips of the All-Merciful have willed to utter, he would, though the treasures of the earth be in his possession, renounce them one and all, that he might vindicate the truth of even one of His commandments, shining above the Dayspring of His bountiful care and loving-kindness.

Kitab-i-Aqdas, par. 3

- 3 Whoso hath inhaled the sweet fragrance of the All-Merciful, and recognized the Source of this utterance, will welcome with his own eyes the shafts of the enemy, that he may establish the truth of the laws of God amongst men. Well is it with him that hath turned thereunto, and apprehended the meaning of His decisive decree.

The Kitab-i-Aqdas, par. 7

- 4 Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths. Take heed that ye do not vacillate in your determination to embrace the truth of this Cause—a Cause through which the potentialities of the might of God have been revealed, and His sovereignty established. With faces beaming with joy, hasten ye unto Him. This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. Let him that seeketh, attain it; and as to

him that hath refused to seek it—verily, God is SelfSufficient, above any need of His creatures.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 182

- 5 Peruse ye every day the verses revealed by God. Blessed is the man who reciteth them and reflecteth upon them. He truly is of them with whom it shall be well.

From a Tablet

- 6 Gather ye together with the utmost joy and fellowship and recite the verses revealed by the merciful Lord. By so doing the doors to true knowledge will be opened to your inner beings, and ye will then feel your souls endowed with steadfastness and your hearts filled with radiant joy.

From a Tablet

- 7 Peruse My verses with joy and radiance. Verily they will attract you unto God and will enable you to detach yourselves from all else save Him. Thus have been admonished in God's Holy Writ and in this resplendent Tablet.

From a Tablet

- 8 Whoso hath searched the depths of the oceans that lie hid within these exalted words, and fathomed their import, can be said to have discovered a glimmer of the unspeakable glory with which this mighty, this sublime, and most holy Revelation hath been endowed.

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

- 9 Know thou that, according to what thy Lord, the Lord of all men, hath decreed in His Book, the favors vouchsafed by Him unto mankind have been, and will ever remain, limitless in their range. First and foremost among these favors, which the Almighty hath conferred upon man, is the gift of understanding. His purpose in conferring such a gift is none other except to enable His creature to know and recognize the one true God—exalted be His glory. This gift giveth man the power to discern the truth in all things, leadeth him to that which is right, and helpeth him to discover the secrets of creation.

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

- 10 It is incumbent upon every man of insight and understanding to strive to translate that which hath been written into reality and action...

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

- 11 From the exalted source, and out of the essence of His favor and bounty He hath entrusted every created thing with a sign of His knowledge, so that none of His creatures may be deprived of its share in expressing, each according to its capacity and rank, this knowledge. This sign is the mirror of His beauty in the world of creation. The greater the effort exerted for the refinement of this sublime and noble mirror, the more faithfully will it be made to reflect the glory of the names and attributes of God, and reveal the wonders of His signs and knowledge...

There can be no doubt whatever that, in consequence of the efforts which every man may consciously exert and as a result of the exertion of his own spiritual faculties, this mirror can be so cleansed from the dross of earthly defilements and purged from satanic fancies as to be able to draw nigh unto the meads of eternal holiness and attain the courts of everlasting fellowship.

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

- 12 Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men. Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul. Thus have the mysteries of the Revelation of God been decreed by virtue of the Will of Him Who is the Source of power and wisdom.

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

- 13 My servants! My holy, My divinely ordained Revelation may be likened unto an ocean in whose depths are concealed innumerable pearls of great price, of surpassing luster. It is the duty of every seeker to bestir himself and strive to attain the shores of this ocean, so that he may, in proportion to

the eagerness of his search and the efforts he hath exerted, partake of such benefits as have been pre-ordained in God's irrevocable and hidden Tablets.
Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. CLIII

- 14 My servants! Through the might of God and His power, and out of the treasury of His knowledge and wisdom, I have brought forth and revealed unto you the pearls that lay concealed in the depths of His everlasting ocean. I have summoned the Maids of Heaven to emerge from behind the veil of concealment, and have clothed them with these words of Mine—words of consummate power and wisdom. I have, moreover, with the hand of divine power, unsealed the choice wine of My Revelation, and have wafted its holy, its hidden, and musk-laden fragrance upon all created things. Who else but yourselves is to be blamed if ye choose to remain unendowed with so great an outpouring of God's transcendent and all-encompassing grace, with so bright a revelation of His resplendent mercy? ...

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

- 15 Were any man to ponder in his heart that which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed and to taste of its sweetness, he would, of a certainty, find himself emptied and delivered from his own desires, and utterly subservient to the Will of the Almighty. Happy is the man that hath attained so high a station, and hath not deprived himself of so bountiful a grace.

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

- 16 Now is the moment in which to cleanse thyself with the waters of detachment that have flowed out from the Supreme Pen, and to ponder, wholly for the sake of God, those things which, time and again, have been sent down or manifested, and then to strive, as much as lieth in thee, to quench, through the power of wisdom and the force of thy utterance, the fire of enmity and hatred which smouldereth in the hearts of the peoples of the world. The Divine Messengers have been sent down, and their Books were revealed, for the purpose of promoting the knowledge of God, and of furthering unity and fellowship amongst men.

Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

- 17 Know thou that he is truly learned who hath acknowledged My Revelation, and drunk from the Ocean of My knowledge, and soared in the atmosphere of My love, and cast away all else besides Me, and taken firm hold on that

which hath been sent down from the Kingdom of My wondrous utterance. He, verily, is even as an eye unto mankind, and as the spirit of life unto the body of all creation. Glorified be the All-Merciful Who hath enlightened him, and caused him to arise and serve His great and mighty Cause. Verily, such a man is blessed by the Concourse on high, and by them who dwell within the Tabernacle of Grandeur, who have quaffed My sealed Wine in My Name, the Omnipotent, the All-Powerful.

Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

- 18 Incline your ears to the words of this unlettered One, wherewith He summoneth you unto God, the Ever-Abiding. Better is this for you than all the treasures of the earth, could ye but comprehend it.

Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

- 19 With fixed and steady gaze, born of the unerring eye of God, scan for a while the horizon of divine knowledge, and contemplate those words of perfection which the Eternal hath revealed, that haply the mysteries of divine wisdom, hidden ere now beneath the veil of glory and treasured within the tabernacle of His grace, may be made manifest unto you.

The Kitab-i-Iqan

- 20 Inasmuch as it hath been clearly shown that only those who are initiated into the divine mysteries can comprehend the melodies uttered by the Bird of Heaven, it is therefore incumbent upon every one to seek enlightenment from the illumined in heart and from the Treasuries of divine mysteries regarding the intricacies of God's Faith and the abstruse allusions in the utterances of the Daysprings of Holiness. Thus will these mysteries be unraveled, not by the aid of acquired learning, but solely through the assistance of God and the outpourings of His grace. "Ask ye, therefore, of them that have the custody of the Scriptures, if ye know it not."ⁱ

The Kitab-i-Iqan

- 21 The understanding of His words and the comprehension of the utterances of the Birds of Heaven are in no wise dependent upon human learning. They depend solely upon purity of heart, chastity of soul, and freedom of spirit.

The Kitab-i-Iqan

i Qur'ān 16:43

- 22 O brother, we should open our eyes, meditate upon His Word, and seek the sheltering shadow of the Manifestations of God, that perchance we may be warned by the unmistakable counsels of the Book, and give heed to the admonitions recorded in the holy Tablets; that we may not cavil at the Revealer of the verses, that we may resign ourselves wholly to His Cause, and embrace wholeheartedly His law, that haply we may enter the court of His mercy, and dwell upon the shore of His grace. He, verily, is merciful, and forgiving towards His servants.

The Kitáb-i-Iqán

- 23 The wine of renunciation must needs be quaffed, the lofty heights of detachment must needs be attained, and the meditation referred to in the words “One hour’s reflection is preferable to seventy years of pious worship” must needs be observed, so that the secret of the wretched behaviour of the people might be discovered, those people who, despite the love and yearning for truth which they profess, curse the followers of Truth when once He hath been made manifest. To this truth the above-mentioned tradition beareth witness.

The Kitáb-i-Iqán

- 24 Meditate upon that which hath streamed forth from the heaven of the Will of thy Lord, He Who is the Source of all grace, that thou mayest grasp the intended meaning which is enshrined in the sacred depths of the Holy Writings.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Hikmat

- 25 The sanctified souls should ponder and meditate in their hearts regarding the methods of teaching. From the texts of the wondrous, heavenly Scriptures they should memorize phrases and passages bearing on various instances, so that in the course of their speech they may recite divine verses whenever the occasion demandeth it, inasmuch as these holy verses are the most potent elixir, the greatest and mightiest talisman. So potent is their influence that the hearer will have no cause for vacillation. I swear by My life! This Revelation is endowed with such a power that it will act as the lodestone for all nations and kindreds of the earth. Should one pause to meditate attentively he would recognize that no place is there, nor can there be, for anyone to flee to.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Síyyid-i-Mihdí-i-Dahají

- 26 Inspire then my soul, O my God, with Thy wondrous remembrance, that I may glorify Thy name. Number me not with them who read Thy words and fail to find Thy hidden gift which, as decreed by Thee, is contained therein, and which quickeneth the souls of Thy creatures and the hearts of Thy servants.

Prayers and Meditations, sec. LVI

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 27 And from amongst all creatures He hath singled out man, to grant him His most wondrous gift, and hath made him to attain the bounties of the Company on High. That most precious of gifts is attainment unto His unfailing guidance, that the inner reality of humankind should become as a niche to hold this lamp; and when the scattering splendours of this light do beat against the bright glass of the heart, the heart's purity maketh the beams to blaze out even stronger than before, and to shine in glory on the minds and souls of men.

The attainment of the most great guidance is dependent upon knowledge and wisdom, and on being informed as to the mysteries of the Holy Words. Wherefore must the loved ones of God, be they young or old, be they men or women, each one according to his capabilities, strive to acquire the various branches of knowledge, and to increase his understanding of the mysteries of the Holy Books, and his skill in marshalling the divine proofs and evidences.

Bahá'í Education (compilation)

- 28 When your hearts are wholly attracted to the one true God you will acquire divine knowledge, will become attentive to the proofs and testimonies and will commit to memory the glad-tidings concerning the Manifestations of the Beauty of the All-Merciful, as mentioned in the heavenly Scriptures. Then ye shall behold how wondrous are His confirmations and how gracious is His assistance.

From a Tablet

- 29 It is imperative to acquire the knowledge of divine proofs and evidences, and to acquaint oneself with convincing testimonies which demonstrate the revelation of God's resplendent Light. The study group thou didst organize

hath inspired much joy and happiness to the heart of `Abdu'lBahá. Thou must exert much effort and show forth perseverance and constancy that, God willing, through the reviving breaths of His mercy, souls may be so educated as to become like radiant candles shining in the assemblage of divine knowledge and understanding. This matter is highly important. It is binding on everyone and must be regarded as an obligation.

From a Tablet

- 30 In truth thou art now rendering a great service to the basic foundations of the Cause of God, inasmuch as the cornerstone of its structure is the promotion of His Faith, the awakening of the people, the diffusion of the divine teachings and the education of mankind, and all this dependeth on instructing the friends in the teaching work. I beseech God that within a short time thou mayest be able to acquaint the children of the Abhá Paradise with the divine mysteries and truths and to rend asunder the veils of idle imaginings, that each one of them become a fluent speaker and be able to guide many others to the Cause of God. Then will the outpourings of the heavenly bounties become manifest and the invisible hosts of the Kingdom, armed with conclusive proofs and evidences, will conquer the realms of the inner realities and domains of the hearts of men, even as a single seed developing into seven ears of grain.

From a Tablet

- 31 In this day there is nothing more important than the instruction and study of clear proofs and convincing, heavenly arguments, for therein lie the source of life and the path of salvation.

From a Tablet

- 32 The method of instruction you have devised, namely, to begin by proving the existence and oneness of God, the Lord of Eternity, then to establish the validity of the mission proclaimed by the prophets and messengers, and finally to explain the signs, the marvels and wonders of the universe, is highly acceptable and you should proceed accordingly. Confirmations from the Lord of Glory will assuredly be vouchsafed. Memorizing the texts of the holy Tablets, and of perspicuous words and statements is highly praiseworthy. You should exert the utmost endeavour in your efforts to educate, to expound, and to instruct.

From a Tablet

- 33 Whatever meeting is held to celebrate the memory of the Abhá Beauty and to listen to the recital of the divine utterances is indeed a rose garden of the Kingdom and that gathering is strengthened by the reviving breaths of holiness that waft from the unseen world, inasmuch as the outpourings of divine grace are the light of that gathering and the effulgent splendours of His mercy are made manifest. I beseech God that those radiant faces may be enabled to shine resplendent in the assemblage of the realm of holiness and that those enraptured beings may be gathered together in the heaven of His mercifulness, that they may chant the verses of praise and glorification in the Abhá Kingdom, raise the voice of jubilation in the realm on high and the cry of exultation and ecstasy in the Abhá Paradise.

From a Tablet

- 34 O beloved of `Abdu'l-Bahá! There is no doubt that thou art assiduously engaged in serving the Cause, giving eloquent talks at the meetings of the friends, and elucidating divine mysteries. These exertions will cause the outpourings of His invisible assistance to descend, and, as a magnet, will attract the divine bounties. I earnestly hope that through the vitalizing breath of the Holy Spirit thou mayest be strengthened day by day, and be empowered to deliver more eloquent addresses.

From a Tablet

- 35 ...the Báb hath said: "Should a tiny ant desire in this day to be possessed of such power as to be able to unravel the abstrusest and most bewildering passages of the Qur'án, its wish will no doubt be fulfilled, inasmuch as the mystery of eternal might vibrates within the innermost being of all created things." If so helpless a creature can be endowed with so subtle a capacity, how much more efficacious must be the power released through the liberal effusions of the grace of Bahá'u'lláh!

...Wherefore, O ye illumined youth, strive by night and by day to unravel the mysteries of the mind and spirit, and to grasp the secrets of the Day of God. Inform yourselves of the evidences that the Most Great Name hath dawned.

Compilation, Baha'i Education

- 36 If it were possible that in every city a few of the awakened ones, when opportunity is offered, could hold a meeting, and therein habitually present the proofs and arguments of God, this would do much to expand the

consciousness of man; provided, however, that the discourse be kept to this one theme.

Bahá'í Meetings, no. 16

- 37 It behoveth us one and all to recite day and night both the Persian and Arabic Hidden Words, to pray fervently and supplicate tearfully that we may be enabled to conduct ourselves in accordance with these divine counsels. These holy words have not been revealed to be heard but to be practiced.

From a Tablet

- 38 We should memorize the Hidden Words, follow the exhortations of the Incomparable Lord, and conduct ourselves in a manner which befiteth our servitude at the threshold of the One True God.

From a Tablet

- 39 Be assured in thyself that if thou dost conduct thyself in accordance with the Hidden Words revealed in Persian and in Arabic, thou shalt become a torch of fire of the love of God, an embodiment of humility, of lowliness, of evanescence and of selflessness.

From a Tablet

- 40 The Hidden Words is a treasury of divine mysteries. When thou ponderest its contents, the doors of the mysteries will open.

From a Tablet

- 41 Praise thou God that at last, through the divine teachings, thou hast obtained both sight and insight to the highest degree, and hast become firmly rooted in certitude and faith. It is my hope that others as well will achieve illumined eyes and hearing ears, and attain to everlasting life.

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

- 42 Read ye *The Hidden Words*, ponder the inner meanings thereof, act in accord therewith. Read, with close attention, the Tablets of Tarazát (Ornaments), Kalímát (Words of Paradise), Tajallíyyát (Effulgences), Ishráqát (Splendours), and Bishárát (Glad Tidings), and rise up as ye are bidden in the heavenly teachings. Thus may each one of you be even as a candle casting its light, the centre of attraction wherever people come together; and from you, as from a bed of flowers, may sweet scents be shed.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 17

- 43 Direct thine attention to the holy Tablets; read thou the Ishráqát, Tajallíyyát, the Words of Paradise, the Glad Tidings, the Tarazát, the Most Holy Book. Then wilt thou see that today these heavenly Teachings are the remedy for a sick and suffering world, and a healing balm for the sores on the body of mankind. They are the spirit of life, the ark of salvation, the magnet to draw down eternal glory, the dynamic power to motivate the inner self of man.
Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 29
- 44 We hear that the Tablets of Ishráqát (Splendours), Tarazát (Ornaments), Bishárát (Glad Tidings), Tajallíyyát (Effulgences), and Kalímát (Words of Paradise) have been translated and published in those regions. In these Tablets will ye have a model of how to be and how to live.
Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 37
- 45 Whatsoever gathering is arranged with the utmost love, and where those who attend are turning their faces toward the Kingdom of God, and where the discourse is of the Teachings of God, and the effect of which is to cause those present to advance—that gathering is the Lord's, and that festive table hath come down from heaven.
Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 47
- 46 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
- 47 O thou true friend! Read, in the school of God, the lessons of the spirit, and learn from love's Teacher the innermost truths. Seek out the secrets of Heaven, and tell of the overflowing grace and favour of God.
Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 72
- 48 There are certain pillars which have been established as the unshakeable supports of the Faith of God. The mightiest of these is learning and the use of the mind, the expansion of consciousness, and insight into the realities of the universe and the hidden mysteries of Almighty God.
Selections from the Writings of `Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 97

- 49 Thou didst ask as to acquiring knowledge: read thou the Books and Tablets of God, and the articles written to demonstrate the truth of this Faith. Included among them are the Íqán, which hath been translated into English, the works of Mírzá Abu'l-Fadl, and those of some others among the believers. In the days to come a great number of holy Tablets and other sacred writings will be translated, and thou shouldst read these as well. Likewise, ask thou of God that the magnet of His love should draw unto thee the knowledge of Him. Once a soul becometh holy in all things, purified, sanctified, the gates of the knowledge of God will open wide before his eyes.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 160

- 50 It is incumbent upon you to ponder in your hearts and meditate upon His words, and humbly to call upon Him, and to put away self in His heavenly Cause. These are the things that will make of you signs of guidance unto all mankind, and brilliant stars shining down from the all-highest horizon, and towering trees in the Abhá Paradise.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 199

- 51 O maid-servant of God! Chant the Words of God and, pondering over their meaning, transform them into actions! I ask God to cause thee to attain a high station in the Kingdom of Life forever and ever.

Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, vol. 1, p. 85

- 52 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

From the Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 53 Both before and after casting off this elemental frame, the human soul progresses in perfections but not in station. The progression of all created things culminates in perfect man, and no greater being than him exists: Man, having reached the human station, can progress only in perfections

and not in station, for there is no higher station to which he can find passage than that of a perfect man. He can progress solely within the human station, as human perfections are infinite. Thus, however learned a man may be, it is always possible to imagine one even more learned.

Some Answered Questions, sec. 64

- 54 The principles of the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh should be carefully studied, one by one, until they are realized and understood by mind and heart—so will you become strong followers of the light, truly spiritual, heavenly soldiers of God, acquiring and spreading the true civilization in Persia, in Europe, and in the whole world.

Paris Talks, sec. 4

- 55 The Spirit breathing through the Holy Scriptures is food for all who hunger. God Who has given the revelation to His Prophets will surely give of His abundance daily bread to all those who ask Him faithfully.

Paris Talks, sec. 16

- 56 God sent His Prophets into the world to teach and enlighten man, to explain to him the mystery of the Power of the Holy Spirit, to enable him to reflect the light, and so in his turn, to be the source of guidance to others. The Heavenly Books, the Bible, the Qur'án, and the other Holy Writings have been given by God as guides into the paths of Divine virtue, love, justice and peace.

Therefore I say unto you that ye should strive to follow the counsels of these Blessed Books, and so order your lives that ye may, following the examples set before you, become yourselves the saints of the Most High!

Paris Talks, sec. 18

- 57 Seek with all your hearts this Heavenly Light, so that you may be enabled to understand the realities, that you may know the secret things of God, that the hidden ways may be made plain before your eyes.

This light may be likened unto a mirror, and as a mirror reflects all that is before it, so this Light shows to the eyes of our spirits all that exists in God's Kingdom and causes the realities of things to be made visible. By the help of this effulgent Light all the spiritual interpretation of the Holy Writings has been made plain, the hidden things of God's Universe have become manifest, and we have been enabled to comprehend the Divine purposes for man.

I pray that God in His mercy may illumine your hearts and souls with His glorious Light, then shall each one of you shine as a radiant star in the dark places of the world.

Paris Talks, sec. 22

- 58 I counsel you that you study earnestly the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, so that, God helping you, you may in deed and truth become Bahá'ís.

Paris Talks, sec. 30

- 59 Bahá'u'lláh says there is a sign (from God) in every phenomenon: the sign of the intellect is contemplation and the sign of contemplation is silence, because it is impossible for a man to do two things at one time—he cannot both speak and meditate.

It is an axiomatic fact that while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit. In that state of mind you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed.

You cannot apply the name 'man' to any being void of this faculty of meditation; without it he would be a mere animal, lower than the beasts.

Through the faculty of meditation man attains to eternal life; through it he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit—the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and meditation.

The spirit of man is itself informed and strengthened during meditation; through it affairs of which man knew nothing are unfolded before his view. Through it he receives Divine inspiration, through it he receives heavenly food.

Meditation is the key for opening the doors of mysteries. In that state man abstracts himself: in that state man withdraws himself from all outside objects; in that subjective mood he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and can unfold the secrets of things-in-themselves.

Paris Talks, sec. 54

- 60 Praise be to God! you have heard the call of the Kingdom. Your eyes are opened; you have turned unto God. Your purpose is the good-pleasure of God, the understanding of the mysteries of the heart and investigation of the realities. Day and night you must strive that you may attain to the significances of the heavenly kingdom, perceive the signs of divinity, acquire certainty of knowledge and realize that this world has a creator, a vivifier,

a provider, an architect,—knowing this through proofs and evidences and not through susceptibilities,—nay, rather, through decisive arguments and real vision; that is to say, visualizing it as clearly as the outer eye beholds the sun. In this way may you behold the presence of God and attain to the knowledge of the holy, divine Manifestations.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, sec. 81

- 61 I have been informed that the purpose of your class meeting is to study the significances and mysteries of the Holy Scriptures and understand the meaning of the divine Testaments. It is a cause of great happiness to me that you are turning unto the Kingdom of God, that you desire to approach the presence of God and to become informed of the realities and precepts of God. It is my hope that you may put forth your most earnest endeavor to accomplish this end, that you may investigate and study the Holy Scriptures word by word so that you may attain knowledge of the mysteries hidden therein. Be not satisfied with words, but seek to understand the spiritual meanings hidden in the heart of the words.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, sec. 137

- 62 May your souls be illumined by the light of the Words of God, and may you become repositories of the mysteries of God, for no comfort is greater and no happiness is sweeter than spiritual comprehension of the divine teachings. If a man understands the real meaning of a poet's verses such as those of Shakespeare, he is pleased and rejoiced. How much greater his joy and pleasure when he perceives the reality of the Holy Scriptures and becomes informed of the mysteries of the Kingdom!

The Promulgation of Universal Peace, sec. 137

- 63 Divine things are too deep to be expressed by common words. The heavenly teachings are expressed in parable in order to be understood and preserved for ages to come. When the spiritually minded dive deeply into the ocean of their meaning they bring to the surface the pearls of their inner significance. There is no greater pleasure than to study God's Word with a spiritual mind.

'Abdu'l-Bahá in London

- 64 It is very good to memorize the logical points and proofs of the Holy Books. Those proofs and evidences which establish the fact that Bahá'u'lláh is the

fulfillment of the Promises of the Holy Books. These proofs ought to be collected and memorized. As soon as someone will ask you What are your proofs?-you may cry out at the top of your voice and say: "Here they are!"

Star of the West, vol. III, no.11 (27 Sept. 1912), p. 4

- 65 Live thou in accord with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Do not only read them. There is a vast difference between the soul who merely reads the words of Bahá'u'lláh and the one who tries to live them. Read thou the Hidden Words. Ponder over their meanings and embody the behests into thy life.

Star of the West, vol. VII, no.18 (7 Dec. 1917), p. 178

- 66 The cause of God is like unto a college. The believers are like unto the students. The college is founded for the sake of the acquirements of science, arts and literature. If the sciences are not achieved and the scholars are not educated the object of the college is not achieved. The students must show the results of their study in lives. Now the friends must so live and conduct themselves as to bring greater glory and results to the religion of God. To them the cause of God must be a dynamic force transforming the lives of men and not question of meetings, committees, futile discussions, unnecessary debate and political wire-pulling.

Star of the West, vol. VII, no.18 (7 Feb. 1917), p. 178

- 67 The first thing to do is to acquire a thirst for Spirituality, then Live the Life! Live the Life! Live the Life! The way to acquire this thirst is to meditate upon the future life. Study the Holy Words, read your Bible, read the Holy Books, especially study the Holy Utterances of Bahá'u'lláh; Prayer and Meditation, take much time for these two. Then will you know this Great Thirst, and then only can you begin to Live the Life!

Star of the West, vol. XIX, no.3 (Jun. 1928), p. 69

- 68 Knowledge is love, Study, listen to exhortations, think, try to understand the wisdom and greatness of God. The soil must be fertilized before the seed can be sown.

Star of the West, vol. XX, no.10 (Jan. 1930), p. 314

From letters by Shoghi Effendi

- 69 Praise be to God that the spirit of the Holy Writings and tablets which have been revealed in this wondrous Dispensation concerning matters of major or minor importance, whether essential or otherwise, related to the sciences and the arts, to natural philosophy, literature, politics or economics, have so permeated the world that since the inception of the world in the course of past Dispensations and bygone ages nothing like it has ever been seen or heard. Indeed if an avowed follower of Bahá'u'lláh were to immerse himself in, and fathom the depths of, the ocean of these heavenly teachings, and with utmost care and attention deduce from each of them the subtle mysteries and consummate wisdom that lie enshrined therein, such a person's life, materially, intellectually and spiritually, will be safe from toil and trouble, unaffected by setbacks and perils, or any sadness or despondency.

13 January 1923

- 70 Now surely, if ever, is the time for us, the chosen ones of Bahá'u'lláh and the bearers of His Message to the world, to endeavor by day and by night, to deepen, first and foremost, the Spirit of His Cause in our own individual lives, and then labor, and labor incessantly to exemplify in all our dealings with our fellow-men that noble Spirit of which His beloved Son 'Abdu'l-Bahá has been all the days of His life a true and unique exponent ... Let us, with a pure heart, with humility and earnestness, turn afresh to His counsels and exhortations, and seek from that Source of Celestial Potency all the guidance, the spirit, the power which we shall need for the fulfillment of our mission in this life.

12 March 1923, Bahá'í Administration

- 71 What you have undertaken to achieve, under the guidance and instruction of that valiant and indefatigable servant of the Abhá Threshold, my well beloved brother Dr. Bagdadi, is highly praiseworthy and of supreme importance. Never flinch in your great enterprise. Deepen your knowledge of the Cause. Strive to extend the sphere of your activities and seek to understand and promote the harmony that must exist between true science and Divine Revelation. I will never fail to pray for you. I have great hopes in the ultimate triumph of the task before you.

23 January 1924

- 72 If you read the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá with selflessness and care and concentrate upon them, you will discover truths unknown to you before and will obtain an insight into the problems that have baffled the great thinkers of the world. God in His essence can not be comprehended nor assume bodily form. We can only approach Him through the knowledge of His Manifestations. I pray that you may drink deep of the fountainhead of Their Sacred Teachings. I assure you of my prayers for your recovery and success.

30 January 1925

- 73 The Bahá'í youth must be taught how to teach the Cause of God. Their knowledge of the fundamentals of the Faith must be deepened and the standard of their education in science and literature enhanced. They must become thoroughly familiar with the language used and the example set by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His public addresses throughout the West. They must also be acquainted with those essential prerequisites of teaching as recorded in the Holy Books and Tablets.

9 June 1925

- 74 I strongly urge you to devote, while you are pursuing your studies, as much time as you possibly can to a thorough study of the history and teachings of our Beloved Cause. This is the prerequisite of a future successful career of service to the Bahá'í Faith in which I hope and pray you will distinguish yourself in the days to come.

18 May 1926

- 75 I will pray for you that you may be inspired to do whatever is His will and pleasure, that your vision may be clarified, your heart emptied of vain desire, and your mind purified from whatsoever hinders you from grasping the truths that underlie the Faith. Study the teachings profoundly that the light of Divine Guidance may illumine your path and remove every obstacle from your way.

26 April 1927

- 76 The youthful and eager workers for the Cause ... occupy a warm place in my heart. I will remember their hopes, their plans, their activities in my hours of prayer at the Holy Shrine. I urge them to study profoundly the revealed utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and the discourses of 'Abdu'lBahá and

not to rely unduly on the representation and interpretation of the Teachings given by Bahá'í speakers and teachers. May the Almighty sustain you and guide you in your work.

20 March 1929

- 77 Ours is the duty to ponder these things in our heart, to strive to widen our vision, and to deepen our comprehension of this Cause, and to arise, resolutely and unreservedly, to play our part, however small, in this greatest drama of the world's spiritual history.

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 78 I would strongly urge you to utilize, to the utmost possible extent, the wealth of authentic material gathered in Nabíl's stirring Narrative and to encourage the youth to master and to digest the facts recorded therein as a basis for their future work in the teaching field, and as a sustenance to their spiritual life and activities in the service of the Cause.

9 November 1932

- 79 I certainly advise you to concentrate next year on the Dawn-Breakers, as well as on the needs, the principles and the purpose of Bahá'í Administration. The Cause in your land is still in its formative period. It needs men and women of vision, of capacity and understanding. May your newly-established school render inestimable services in this as well as in other fields of activity. I will pray for your high endeavours from the depths of my heart. Rest assured and persevere.

25 September 1933

- 80 To strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation must, it is my unalterable conviction, remain the first obligation and the object of the constant endeavor of each one of its loyal adherents. 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. 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.

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 81 I grieve to learn of the situation which the disharmony of the believers has created. Emphasis should be laid by all members, and with increasing force and determination, upon the essentials of the Administrative Order as explained in the book entitled Bahá'í Administration. Whatever is not provided, should be referred to your national assembly. The decision of the majority must, under all circumstances be upheld and enforced. Persevere and never lose heart and courage.

9 May 1934

- 82 I would urge you to concentrate from now on upon the essentials of Bahá'í belief and the distinguishing features of the Administrative Order and endeavour to teach these truths to whomsoever may seem to you to be receptive. It would constitute a magnificent act of service in your long record of devoted endeavours on behalf of this glorious Cause.

31 July 1934

- 83 Those who participate in such a campaign, whether in an organizing capacity, or as workers to whose care the execution of the task itself has been committed, must, as an essential preliminary to the discharge of their duties, thoroughly familiarize themselves with the various aspects of the history and teachings of their Faith. In their efforts to achieve this purpose they must study for themselves, conscientiously and painstakingly, the literature of their Faith, delve into its teachings, assimilate its laws and principles, ponder its admonitions, tenets and purposes, commit to memory certain of its exhortations and prayers, master the essentials of its administration, and keep abreast of its current affairs and latest developments.

The Advent of Divine Justice

- 84 As the processed impelling a rapidly evolving Order on the highroad of its destiny multiply and gather momentum, attention should be increasingly directed to the vital need of ensuring, by every means possible, the deepening of the faith, the understanding and the spiritual life of the individuals who, as the privileged members of this community, are called upon to participate in this glorious unfoldment and are lending their assistance to this historic evolution. A profound study of the Faith which they have espoused, its history, its spiritual as well as administrative principles; a thorough understanding of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh and of the Will of 'Abdu'lBahá; a deeper realization of the implication of the claims advanced

by the Founders of the Faith; strict adherence to the laws and principles which They have established; a greater dedication to the fundamentals and verities enshrined in Their teachings—these constitute, I feel convinced, the urgent need of the members of this rapidly expanding community. For upon this spiritual foundation must depend the solidity of the institutions which they are now so painstakingly erecting. Every outward thrust into new fields, every multiplication of Bahá'í institutions, must be paralleled by a deeper thrust of the roots which sustain the spiritual life of the community and ensure its sound development. From this vital, this ever-present need attention must, at no time, be diverted; nor must it be, under any circumstances, neglected, or subordinated to the less vital and urgent task of ensuring the outer expansion of Bahá'í administrative institutions.

30 December 1948

- 85 ...the paramount duty of deepening the spiritual life of these newly fledged, these precious and highly esteemed co-workers, and of enlightening their minds regarding the essential verities enshrined in their Faith, its fundamental institutions, its history and genesis—the twin Covenants of Bahá'u'lláh and of `Abdu'l-Bahá, the present Administrative Order, the future World Order, the Laws of the Most Holy Book, the inseparable institutions of the Guardianship and of the Universal House of Justice, the salient events of the Heroic and Formative Ages of the Faith, and its relationship with the Dispensations that have preceded it, its attitude toward the social and political organizations by which it is surrounded—must continue to constitute the most vital aspect of the great spiritual Crusade launched by the champions of the Faith from among the peoples of their sister republics in the South.

18 August 1949, Citadel of Faith

- 86 The deepening and enrichment of the spiritual life of the individual believer, his increasing comprehension of the essential verities underlying his Faith, his training in its administrative processes, his understanding of the fundamentals of the Covenants established by the Author and the authorized Interpreter of its teachings should be made the supreme objectives of the national representatives responsible for the edification, the progress and consolidation of these communities.

1 March 1951

- 87 Nor must the elected representatives of this community neglect their supreme responsibility to safeguard the spiritual life of its members, to continually enrich that life by every means in their power, to deepen their grasp of the distinguishing features and the fundamental verities of the Bahá'í Faith, and to encourage and inspire them to reflect its spirit and precepts in their personal lives and conduct.

1 March 1951

- 88 As to 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

- 89 Above all, the utmost endeavour should be exerted by your Assembly to familiarize the newly enrolled believers with the fundamental and spiritual verities of the Faith, and with the origins, the aims and purposes, as well as the processes of a divinely appointed Administrative Order, to acquaint them more fully with the history of the Faith, to instill in them a deeper understanding of the Covenants of both Bahá'u'lláh and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, to enrich their spiritual life, to rouse them to a greater effort and a closer participation in both the teaching of the Faith and the administration of its activities, and to inspire them to make the necessary sacrifices for the furtherance of its vital interests. For as the body of avowed supporters of the Faith is enlarged, and the basis of the structure of its Administrative Order is broadened, and the fame of the rising community spreads far and wide, a parallel progress must be achieved, if the fruits already garnered are to endure, in the spiritual quickening of its members and the deepening of their inner life.

26 June 1956

- 90 ...a firmer grasp of the essential verities of the Faith; a more profound study of its history and a deeper understanding of the genesis, the significance, the workings, and the present status and achievements of its embryonic World

Order and of the Covenant to which it owes its birth and vitality—these remain the rock bottom requirements which alone can guarantee the opening, and hasten the advent, of that blissful era which every British Bahá'í heart so eagerly anticipates, and the glories of which can, at present, be but dimly discerned.

30 August 1957

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 91 The Sacred Books are full of allusions to this new dispensation. In the book of Iqán, Bahá'u'lláh gives the key-note and explains some of the outstanding passages hoping that the friends will continue to study the Sacred Books by themselves and unfold the mysteries found therein.

The people, failing to comprehend the meaning of the symbols and the truth of the Sacred Verses, thought them to be myths and unrealizable dreams. It is the duty of the friends who have been endowed by Bahá'u'lláh with the power of discernment to study these Sacred Books, ponder upon their passages and teach the disheartened people of the earth the treasures of knowledge they enclose.

11 March 1923

- 92 If the younger Bahá'í generation, in whom Shoghi Effendi has great hopes, take the pains of studying the Cause deeply and thoroughly, read its history, find its underlying principles and become both well informed and energetic, they surely can achieve a great deal. It is upon their shoulders that the Master has laid the tremendous work of teaching. They are the ones to raise the call of the Kingdom and arouse the people from slumber. If they fail the Cause is doomed to stagnation.

26 April 1923

- 93 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 careful lest we fall under this error and injure the Movement we do 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.

25 April 1926

- 94 Shoghi Effendi is especially delighted to know that the younger group are studying the Will and Testament as this document is indispensable for a complete understanding of the spirit, of the mission and of the future state of the Bahá'í Cause. It would be well to have a competent friend explain to them some of the passages.

28 February 1928

- 95 Shoghi Effendi is sure that the more you study the Cause and its teachings the more you will realize what a mission it has to give to this world at this time. Dr. Jowett of Balliol rightly said that this is the greatest light that has appeared in the world since Christianity, that the present generation is too near to it to appreciate its import, that only in the future its significance will become manifest. I do not believe that even the Bahá'ís can conceive the wonderful and fundamental change the tenets of this movement and the spirit of the teachings and the life of its Founders are going to make in the heart and mind of this generation and the future ones.

17 December 1928

- 96 He sincerely hopes that your group will daily increase in number and gradually begin to radiate its light of guidance to the neighbouring regions. Before that stage is reached, however, you should exert all your efforts upon deepening your knowledge of the teachings and literature of the Cause. The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master are like vast seas, the deeper you go into them, the more priceless treasures you will find. And it is only after acquiring those treasures that we can hope to share them with others.

4 March 1931

- 97 ...Shoghi Effendi hoped that you will exert all your efforts first in deepening your own knowledge of the teachings and then to strive to attract other people. You should form study classes and read the Important books that have been published especially the Iqán which contains the basic tenets of the Faith. The one who ponders over that book and grasps its full significance

will obtain a clear insight into the old scriptures and appreciate the true mission of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh.

27 March 1931

- 98 Being a Bahá'í you are certainly aware of the fact that Bahá'u'lláh considered education as one of the most fundamental factors of a true civilization. This education, however, in order to be adequate and fruitful, should be comprehensive in nature and should take into consideration not only the physical and ethical aspects. This should be the program of the Bahá'í youth all over the world.

9 July 1931

- 99 Concerning the course of study you may follow: Shoghi Effendi prefers you find that subject you like most and for which you are best fitted especially after consulting with your Mother. The Cause is such that we can serve it no matter what our profession may be. The only necessity is that we be spiritually minded and not be guided by purely material considerations. We should also not let our studies detain us from deepening our knowledge of the literature of the Cause.

9 November 1931

- 100 Shoghi Effendi feels that the real purpose of these Summer Schools is to deepen the knowledge of the friends. Lectures are very essential for they give a wonderful picture of the subject matter. But it is not sufficient to have a picture; the friends deepen their knowledge and this can be achieved if, together with the lectures, there are study classes and seminar work carried on by the same lecturer.

The world is undoubtedly facing a great crisis and the social, economic and political conditions are becoming daily more complex. Should the friends desire to take the lead in reforming the world, they should start by educating themselves and understand what the troubles and problems really are which baffle the mind of man. It in these Summer Schools that this should be provided for the friends.

27 January 1932

- 101 Besides the friends should arrange proper study classes and deepen their knowledge of the teachings. It is only through such thorough understanding of the literature of the Cause that you can appreciate the real message

that Bahá'u'lláh has brought to the world. Only then would you see how incomplete and futile is the work of the other societies and movements that at present exist in the world.

1 February 1932

- 102 Shoghi Effendi hopes that you will exert all your efforts to deepen your knowledge of the literature of the Movement, until you become fully acquainted with its spirit and tenets. Unless you do obtain such a firm hold you will never be able to teach others and render real service to the promulgation of the Faith. Of special importance is the Book of the Iqán which explains the attitude of the Cause towards the prophets of God and their mission in the history of society. Besides this there is Some Answered Questions of the Master and Dawn-Breakers of Nabíl. Every Bahá'í should master these books and be able to explain their contents to others. Besides their importance, they are interesting and most absorbing.

9 February 1932

- 103 Surely the ideal way of teaching is to prove our points by constant reference to the actual words of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master. This will save the Cause from being misinterpreted by individuals. It is what these divine Lights say that is truth and therefore should be the authorities of our statements. This, however, does not mean that our freedom of expression is limited. We can always find new ways of approach to that truth or explain or explain how they influence our life and condition. The more deep our studies the more we can understand the significance of the teachings.

In this Cause we cannot divorce the letter from the spirit of the words. As Bahá'u'lláh says we should take the outward significance and super-impose upon it the inner. Either without the other is wrong and defective.

16 February 1932

- 104 Another essential thing is that those who do embrace the Faith should be constantly urged to study the literature of the Cause. It is not sufficient that our numbers should increase, we want people whose faith stands on a rock and no trial can move. We want people who will in turn arise and carry the Message to other people and guide other souls.

13 April 1932

- 105 Shoghi Effendi undertook the translation of the Dawn-Breakers only after being convinced that its publication will arouse the friends to greater self-sacrifice and a more determined way of teaching. Otherwise he would not have devoted so much time to it.

Reading about the life and activities of those heroic souls is bound to influence our mode of living and of the importance we attach to our services in the Cause. Shoghi Effendi therefore hopes that the friends will read, nay rather study that book, and encourage their young people to do that as well...

It is also very important to hold study classes and go deep in the teachings. A great harm is done by starting to teach without being firmly grounded in the literature. "Little knowledge is dangerous" fully applies to the teaching work. The friends should read the Writings to be able to quote from the Tablets when discussing subjects pertaining to the Faith.

9 May 1932

- 106 He fully approves the idea of holding study classes, for the deeper the friends go in their understanding of the teachings the more firm and steadfast they will become and more unwavering in their support of the institutions of the Faith. Books such as the Iqán, Some Answered Questions and The Dawn-Breakers should be mastered by every Bahá'í. The first two books will reveal the significance of this divine revelation as well as the unity of all the Prophets of old. The last book will show how the Faith was ushered into the world and how its early adherents heroically faced martyrdom and suffering in their desire to establish the Cause throughout the world. Knowing the life of those heroes will create in us the urge to follow their footsteps and achieve the same.

9 June 1932

- 107 He sincerely hopes that every one of those individuals who expressed his desire to join the Movement will gradually become so confirmed that no amount of trials and tribulations will deter him from sharing in the work of spreading the Faith throughout the world.

Before undertaking such a task, however it is necessary that they should deepen their knowledge of the teachings. They should learn to study the words for themselves and both grasp their significance and also become imbued with their spirit. The hope of Shoghi Effendi is not only to increase the number of the friends but also to have truer and more understanding

Bahá'ís. The task of the teachers is to produce such efficient servants for our beloved Faith.

18 October 1932

- 108 The Master used to attach more importance to the learning by heart of the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh and the Báb. During His days it was a usual work of the children of the household to learn Tablets by heart...

19 October 1932

- 109 Books such as the Iqán, Some Answered Questions, the Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Nabíl's Narrative and Dr. Esslemont's book should be read and read over again by every soul who desires to serve the Movement or considers himself an active member of the group.

9 November 1932

- 110 Definite courses should be given along the different phases of the Bahá'í Faith and in a manner that will stimulate the students to proceed in their studies privately once they return home, for the period of a few days is not sufficient to learn everything. They have to be taught the habit of studying the Cause constantly, for the more we read the Words the more will the truth they contain be revealed to us.

24 November 1932

- 111 It is, however, very important that these new-comers should study the teachings and become thoroughly familiar with them, otherwise their faith will be established upon shifting sand and could be easily demolished. The words of Bahá'u'lláh and the Master, however, have a creative power and are sure to awaken in the reader the undying fire of the love of God.

17 February 1933

- 112 He does not ask us to follow Him blindly; as He says in one of His Tablets, God had endowed man with a mind to operate as a torchlight and guide him to truth. Read His words, consider His teachings, and measure their value in the light of contemporary problems and the truth will surely be revealed to you.

26 February 1933

- 113 Shoghi Effendi found great pleasure and spiritual upliftment while working on the translation of *Nabil's Narrative*. The life of those who figure in it is so stirring that every one who reads those accounts is bound to be affected and impelled to follow their footsteps of sacrifice in the path of the Faith. The Guardian believes, therefore, that it should be studied by the friends, especially the youth who need some inspiration to carry them through these troubled days.

11 March 1933

- 114 The second point which the Guardian wishes you to stress and to keep always in mind is the necessity for every local and active member of your committee to fully concentrate on the thorough study and understanding of the spiritual and administrative principles of the Faith, as a necessary step for active and fruitful teaching. You should first equip yourselves with the necessary amount of knowledge about the Cause and then, and only then, try to teach.

August 1933

- 115 Your thorough and continued study of the teachings, as expressed by your readiness to be in close and constant touch with all Bahá'í publications, is, indeed, remarkable. For besides deepening your knowledge of the basic tenets of the Faith and of keeping you in close contact with its administrative developments it gives you an opportunity to prepare yourself for the teaching of the Cause. To study and to teach, these are the twofold and sacred obligations of every responsible and active follower of the Faith.

13 August 1933

- 116 In these gloomy days, when the world is caught into the whirlpool of agnosticism and materialism, the Guardian is eagerly looking to such devoted and ardent believers like you, to arise and proclaim the Holy Word of God which is humanity's unique and most effective ark of salvation. Nothing short of that can save our civilization from falling into chaos and anarchy. It is, therefore, the sacred responsibility of every loyal follower of the Faith to fully realize the tremendous task he is called upon to fulfill, and to seek all those measures which can enable him to contribute his share, however modest, to the progress of the Cause. And it is evident that such a goal cannot be attained unless we are adequately imbued with the spirit and informed of the basic tenets and teachings of the Faith.

The Guardian would, therefore, strongly urge you to get increasingly familiar with the literature of the Cause, to study and investigate all its aspects, whether spiritual, social or administrative, so that you may, in a not distant future, be able to rank among the distinguished and outstanding teachers and exponents of the Movement.

10 September 1933

- 117 His brotherly advice to you, and to all loyal and ardent young believers like you, is that you should deepen your knowledge of the history and the tenets of the Faith, not merely by means of careful and thorough study, but also through active, whole-hearted and continued participation in all the activities, whether administrative or otherwise, of your community. The Bahá'í community life provides you with an indispensable laboratory where you can translate into living and constructive action, the principles which you imbibe from the teachings. By becoming a real part of that living organism you can catch the real spirit which runs throughout the Bahá'í teachings. To study the principles, and to try to live according to them, are, therefore, the two essential mediums through which you can insure the development and progress of your inner spiritual life and of your outer existence as well. May Bahá'u'lláh enable you to attain this high station, and may He keep the torch of faith forever burning in your hearts!

2 November 1933

- 118 These sources of disagreement and of difference are all due to the lack of thorough understanding, on the part of many of the believers, of the basic laws and principles of Bahá'í Administration. Despite our Guardian's repeated and emphatic instructions and recommendations that the friends should deepen their knowledge, through both study and practice, of all the administrative teachings of the Faith yet, some have, for some reason or another, neglected to do so. The result has been that they are working in the dark, not knowing where to look for guidance in all such matters.

11 November 1933

- 119 The Guardian...was gratified to learn of the progress of your academic studies, and of your future plans for the study and teaching of the Cause. The spirit which is moving and sustaining you in the service of the Faith is, indeed, remarkable, and through it you will undoubtedly be moved to render great and imperishable services to Cause of Bahá'u'lláh. The

university training which you are receiving at present will be of immense help to you in your efforts to present the Message in intellectual circles. In these days when people are so skeptical about religion and look with so much contempt towards religious organizations and movements, there seems to be more need than ever for our young Bahá'ís to be well-equipped intellectually, so that they may be in a position to present the Message in a befitting way, and in a manner that would convince every unbiased observer of the effectiveness and power of the teachings.

In view of that Shoghi Effendi would urge you to persevere in your studies, and trusts that as a result you will be greatly assisted in your teaching activities.

5 May 1934

- 120 The Guardian would strongly urge each and every member of the N.S.A. to carefully peruse, and to quietly ponder upon the outer meaning and upon the inner spirit as well, of all his communications on the subject of the origin, nature and present day functioning of the Administrative Order of the Faith. A compilation of these letters has been lately published in the States under the title Bahá'í Administration, and a complete knowledge of that book seems to be quite essential to the right handling of the administrative problems facing your N.S.A. at present.

May 1934

- 121 Shoghi Effendi was pleased to learn of the response which his last general communication ("The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh") addressed to the friends in the West has awakened in your community. It is his hope that the believers will, through their careful and continued study of this important communication acquire a new vision of the Cause, and will be stimulated to redouble their efforts for the expansion and consolidation of their work for the Faith.

11 May 1934

- 122 Shoghi Effendi wishes me to express his deepfelt appreciation of your intention to study the Qur'án. The knowledge of the revealed holy Book is, indeed, indispensable to every Bahá'í who wishes to adequately understand the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. And in view of that the Guardian has been invariably encouraging the friends to make as thorough a study of this Book as possible, particularly in their summer schools. Sale's translation

is the most scholarly we have, but Rodwell's version is more literary, and hence easier for reading.

23 November 1934

- 123 He feels, indeed, that the time has come for the German believers to acquire a thorough knowledge as well as a full understanding of such important Tablets as Bahá'u'lláh's "Book of My Covenant" and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament, both of which constitute the very bedrock upon which the entire administrative system of the Faith has been raised and established. As to the "Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh" it also constitutes an invaluable supplement to these aforementioned Tablets.

10 January 1935

- 124 Your emphasis on the study of the Administration, he feels, is most timely and of a vital practical importance, inasmuch as it serves to consolidate and direct towards a definite objective your general teaching work. Without the study and application of the Administration the teaching of the Cause becomes not only meaningless, but loses in effectiveness and in scope.

31 May 1935

- 125 With regard to the school's program for the next summer; the Guardian would certainly advise, and even urge the friends to make a thorough study of the Qur'án, as the knowledge of this Sacred Scripture is absolutely indispensable for every believer who wishes to adequately understand, and intelligently read the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Although there are very few persons among our Western Bahá'ís who are capable of handling such a course in a scholarly way yet, the mere lack of such competent teachers should encourage and stimulate the believers to get better acquainted with the Sacred Scriptures of Islám. In this way, there will gradually appear some distinguished Bahá'ís who will be so well versed in teachings of Islám as to be able to guide the believers in their study of that religion.

2 December 1935

- 126 The Guardian feels particularly appreciative of the emphasis your [National Youth] Committee has laid on the study of the Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, which book, he believes should be the continued guide and companion of every believer, specially those who are actively engaged in teaching the Cause.

It is his fervent hope that this book will kindle in the heart of all the friends a new light, whereby they will receive a fuller guidance and a greater measure of inspiration in their labours for the Cause.

28 January 1936

- 127 He is particularly pleased to realize that the book of Gleanings is of such a tremendous inspiration to the Bahá'í youth, and that they all are making a careful study of its contents with the view of preparing themselves for proper teaching work. His hope is that this volume will enable them to gain a fuller consciousness of their functions and responsibilities, and to arise and set the example before the rest of the believers, not only in the field of teaching, but in all the other fields of Bahá'í activity as well. He is ardently supplicating Bahá'u'lláh on your behalf, and on behalf of the whole body of young Bahá'ís throughout the States, and specially the National Youth Committee, that you may be given the inspiration, knowledge and guidance to press forward to efficient and loyal service.

2 February 1936

- 128 An effort should be made to raise the standard of studies, so as to provide the Bahá'í student with a thorough knowledge of the Cause that would enable him to expound it befittingly to the educated public.

8 November 1937

- 129 He has noted, in particular, with genuine satisfaction the recommendations issued by the National Youth Committee to the members of our Bahá'í youth to make a deeper study of the Master's Will and to ponder more carefully on its manifold and far-reaching implications. He hopes that the Regional Youth Conferences ... have devoted all the time necessary for the study and discussion of this all-important subject, and have given it the full emphasis it deserves. He will pray that the results obtained may be such as to give all the attendants a clear and wider vision of the tasks, responsibilities and obligations they will be called upon to discharge during this year, and a renewed stimulus to contribute their full share to the success and complete fulfillment of the Seven-Year Plan.

The Guardian would advise that in their studies of the Will and Testament the young believers should use the "Dispensation", which will undoubtedly help them considerably to grasp the full implications of that

sacred and historic Document which he has described as the “Charter of the New World Order”.

9 January 1939

- 130 It is his fervent hope and his heart’s ardent prayer that you may increasingly deepen in your faith, and steadily gain in your understanding and appreciation of the teachings, and display such earnestness and perseverance in your Bahá’í studies as to gradually acquire the full knowledge, training and experience necessary for active and effective service to the Faith in the future.

Although still young in age, you should endeavour from now, through close association with your fellow-believers, and through your faithful application to your Bahá’í studies, to prepare yourself for that day when you will be called upon, as a grown-up and responsible member of the Community, to take full part in the activities of the Cause, and thus prove yourself worthy of being a member of the world-wide Fellowship created by Bahá’u’lláh.

The Guardian was truly pleased to note that you have already started reading some Bahá’í books, and would specially advise you to endeavour to commit to memory certain passages from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, and in particular, some of His prayers. This training would undoubtedly be of tremendous help to you in your future studies of the Cause, and would also serve to considerably deepen and enrich your own spiritual life at present.

10 April 1939

- 131 Those standards of Bahá’í conduct, which he himself has set forth in his last general epistle, “The Advent of Divine Justice”, and which it should be the paramount duty of every loyal and conscientious believer to endeavour to uphold and promote, deserve serious study and meditation...

The principle and methods laid down by the Guardian in his “Advent of Divine Justice” on this vital subject of Bahá’í ethics, should indeed prove of invaluable inspiration and guidance to all the students and friends attending the Summer School classes, and thus prepare them to better appreciate the privileges, and more adequately discharge the responsibilities, of their citizenship in the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh.

20 May 1939

- 132 Surely, the believers, no matter how qualified they may be, whether as teachers or administrators, and however high their intellectual and spiritual merits, should never be looked upon as a standard whereby to evaluate and measure the divine authority and mission of the Faith. It is to the teachings themselves, and to the lives of the Founders of the Cause that the believers should look for their guidance and inspiration, and only by keeping strictly to such true attitude can they hope to establish their loyalty to Bahá'u'lláh upon an enduring and unassailable basis. You should take heart, therefore, and with unrelaxing vigilance and unremitting effort endeavour to play your full share in the gradual unfoldment of this Divine World Order.

23 August 1939

- 133 His advice to you is to continue deepening your knowledge and understanding of this Revelation, both by means of patient and thorough study of Bahá'í writings, and through active association with your fellow-believers and close participation in the activities of your local Bahá'í community.

12 February 1940

- 134 The responsibility of young believers is very great, as they must not only fit themselves to inherit the work of older Bahá'ís and carry on the affairs of the Cause in general, but the world which lies ahead of them—as promised by Bahá'u'lláh—will be a world chastened by its sufferings, ready to listen to His Divine Message at last; and consequently a very high character will be expected of the exponents of such a religion. To deepen their knowledge, to perfect themselves in the Bahá'í standards of virtue and upright conduct, should be the paramount duty of every young Bahá'í.

6 June 1941

- 135 You Bahá'í children and young people have both great privileges and great obligations ahead of you, for your generation will be the ones to help build up a new, better and more beautiful world after the dark years of this war are passed. You should prepare yourselves for this great task by trying to grasp the true meaning of the teachings and not just merely accepting them as something you are taught. They are like a wonderful new world of thought just beginning to be explored, and when we realize that Bahá'u'lláh has brought teachings and laws for a thousand years to come, we can readily see that each new generation may find some greater meaning in the writings than the ones gone before did.

14 October 1942

- 136 Regarding your question concerning your studies: as this is a purely personal matter that concerns your own future, the Guardian feels you should decide it yourself, in consultation with your parents. He urges you, however, to devote yourself as much as possible to studying and spreading the Bahá'í teachings, whatever your other occupations may be.

26 May 1943

- 137 The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also have a deep grasp of the teachings and their significance, and who can correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world. The Cause has the remedy for all the world's ills. The reason why more people don't accept it is because the Bahá'ís are not always capable of presenting it to them in a way that meets the immediate needs of their minds. Young Bahá'ís like yourself must prepare themselves to really bring the Message to their generation who needs it so desperately and who can understand the language it speaks so well.

He would advise you among other books to study the Talks of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as His method of approaching the mind of the public cannot be surpassed.

21 October 1943

- 138 The Guardian hopes that along with whatever other studies you take up, you will continually study the teachings and endeavour to acquire a profound knowledge of them. The importance of young Bahá'ís becoming thoroughly steeped in every branch of the teachings cannot be overemphasized, as they have great teaching tasks ahead of them to accomplish.

24 December 1943

- 139 Young men and women in the Faith must be deep and thoughtful scholars of its teachings, so that they can teach in a way that will convince people that all the problems facing them have a remedy. They must grasp the Administration, so that they can wisely and efficiently administer the ever-growing affairs of the Cause; and they must exemplify the Bahá'í way of living. All this is not easy—but the Guardian is always encouraged to see the spirit animating such young believers as yourself. He has high hopes of what your generation will accomplish.

12 May 1944

- 140 He feels that in your contact with the believers and in teaching new souls, you should help them obtain a full knowledge and understanding of the Covenant and the Will and Testament. This will strengthen them to meet every test, and to understand the nature of the spiritual disease which afflicts those who turn against the Institutions of the Faith. These are, indeed, times of testing and trial, for the whole world and for the believers, too.

15 August 1945

- 141 He quite agrees with you that the Bahá'ís need deepening in the teachings—a course of adult education would be excellent if it could be carried out and the friends would participate. The principles, administration and fundamentals of the Faith are well known, but the friends need greatly to study the more profound works which would give them spiritual maturity to a greater degree, unify their community life, and enable them to better exemplify the Bahá'í way of living; in other words, to “lead the life”.

24 August 1946

- 142 By promoting the vital interests of the Faith's institutions the Guardian means, amongst other things, that we should help our assemblies by electing wise and capable members, upholding their decisions, making suggestions for the work at Feasts, and consulting properly on the affairs of the Cause; contributing to the Fund; deepening our knowledge of the administrative order, etc.

18 March 1946

- 143 The Guardian feels that a sound knowledge of history, including religious history, and also social and economic subjects, is of great help in teaching the Cause to intelligent people; as to what subjects within the Faith you should concentrate on he feels that young Bahá'ís should gain a mastery of such books as the Gleanings, the Dawnbreakers, God Passes By, the Iqán, Some Answered Questions and the more important Tablets. All aspects of the Faith should be deeply studied...

4 May 1946

- 144 There is no objection to the friends memorizing prayers; on the contrary it is excellent for them to do so.

6 September 1946

- 145 Great risks remain ahead: not only must the work the Master, in His Mercy, gave to the North American friends to do, be accomplished, but a deeper spirit of love and unity must be cultivated by the believers within their own communities. The friends themselves are still in many ways spiritually immature; they must study the teachings more profoundly, and learn to function as truly mature souls in all their relationships, both within the Cause and with their fellow-men.

5 February 1947

- 146 He feels that many of the perplexities that arise in your mind could be dissipated if you always conceived of the teachings as one great whole with many facets. Truth may, in covering different subjects, appear to be contradictory, and yet it is all one if you carry the thought through to the end ... He hopes you will ... rest assured inwardly that for these things which sometimes seem difficult to understand there is usually a quite simple and reasonable explanation.

24 February 1947

- 147 By “verities of the Faith” he means the great teachings and fundamentals enshrined in our Bahá'í literature; these we can find by reading the books, studying under Bahá'í scholars at summer schools and in classes, and through the aid of study outlines.

19 April 1947

- 148 Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also), to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply. One might liken Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to a sphere; there are points poles apart, and in between the thoughts and doctrines that unite them.

5 July 1947

- 149 He is indeed pleased to know that the book of Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh has been out in time to enable the friends to read it during the Fast, and he has every hope that the perusal of such a precious volume

will help deepen, more than any other publication, the spirit of faith in the friends, and thus charge them with all the spiritual power they require for the accomplishment of their tremendous duties towards the Cause.

On behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Bahá'í News, no. 212, October 1948, p. 1

- 150 He feels that what the German Bahá'ís need—and must have—more than anything else in the world is a far deeper understanding of the Covenants of both Bahá'u'lláh and the Master. This is the rock-foundation without which no sound super-structure can be built. Neither the administration, nor the general teaching work of the Cause in Germany, will progress, or be able to accomplish anything, unless the believers are truly firm, deep, spiritually convinced Bahá'ís. An intellectual grasp of the teachings is purely superficial; with the first real test such believers are shaken from the bough! But once a Bahá'í has the profound conviction of the authority from God, vested in the Prophet, passed on to the Master, and by Him, to the Guardians, and which flows out through the assemblies and creates order based on obedience—once a Bahá'í has this, nothing can shake him.

11 April 1949

- 151 As he has cabled the N.S.A. a few days ago, he feels that the difficulties which have arisen ... are mainly due to the fact that the believers need to be deepened in their knowledge and appreciation of the Covenants of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This is the stronghold of the faith of every Bahá'í, and that which enables him to withstand every test and the attacks of the enemies outside the Faith, and the far more dangerous, insidious, lukewarm people inside the Faith who have no real attachment to the Covenant, and consequently uphold the intellectual aspect of the teachings while at the same time undermining the spiritual foundation upon which the whole Cause of God rests.

15 April 1949

- 152 It seems what we need now is a more profound and co-ordinated Bahá'í scholarship in order to attract such men as you are contacting. The world has—at least the thinking world—caught up by now with all the great and universal principles enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh over 70 years ago, and so of course it does not sound “new” to them. But we know that the deeper teachings, the capacity of His projected world order to re-create society,

are new and dynamic. It is these we must learn to present intelligently and enticingly to such men!

3 July 1949

- 153 If the Bahá'ís want to be really effective in teaching the Cause they need to be informed and able to discuss intelligently, intellectually, the present condition of the world and its problems. We need Bahá'í scholars, not only people far, far more deeply aware of what our teachings really are, but also well read and well educated people, capable of correlating our teachings to the current thoughts of the leaders of society.

We Bahá'ís should, in other words, arm our minds with knowledge in order to better demonstrate to, especially, the educated classes, the truths enshrined in our Faith.

5 July 1949

- 154 He was grieved to hear of some of the things you describe. It shows great spiritual immaturity on the part of some of the Bahá'ís and an astonishing lack of understanding and study of the teachings.

You must not make the great mistake of judging our Faith by one community which obviously needs to study and obey the Bahá'í teachings. Human frailties and peculiarities can be a great test. But the only way, or perhaps I should say the first and best way, to remedy such situations, is to oneself do what is right. One soul can be the cause of the spiritual illumination of a continent. Now that you have seen, and remedied, a great fault in your life, now that you see more clearly what is lacking in your own community, there is nothing to prevent you from arising and showing such an example, such a love and spirit of service, as to enkindle the hearts of your fellow Bahá'ís.

He urges you to study deeply the teachings, teach others, study with those Bahá'ís who are anxious to do so, the deeper teachings of our Faith, and through example, effort and prayer, bring about a change.

30 September 1949

- 155 Mature teachers are needed in so many places. Unfortunately there are not enough of them to go around and do all the work waiting to be done! That is why it is so important for the new European Bahá'ís, like yourself, to study deeply the teachings and qualify themselves to take over the work begun

by their American brothers and sisters, in order to release these pioneers for work in places where the need is greater.

Just one mature soul, with spiritual understanding and a profound knowledge of the Faith, can set a whole country ablaze—so great is the power of the Cause to work through a pure and selfless channel.

6 November 1949

- 156 ...whilst actively teaching, the friends must themselves be taught and deepened in the spirit of the Faith, which brings love and unity.

17 July 1951

- 157 He was very pleased to hear you do a lot of lecturing of the Cause; this very important field of service and one you should devote as much time as possible. The public must hear of the Faith, and new ways and means must be devised to bring it to their attention. He also urges you to study the teachings themselves deeper. Bahá'í scholarship is needed more than worldly scholarship, for one is spiritual and the other more or less transient. There is a real lack in the Cause of people who know the teachings thoroughly, especially their deeper truths, and who can consequently teach the souls properly and lay a permanent foundation, one that tests and trials will not shake down.

27 August 1951

- 158 When a person becomes a Bahá'í, what takes place is that the seed of the spirit starts to grow in the human soul. This seed must be watered by the outpourings of the Holy Spirit. These gifts of the spirit are received through prayer, meditation, study of the Holy Utterances and service to the Cause of God ... Naturally there will be periods of distress and difficulty, and even severe tests; but if that person turns firmly toward the divine Manifestation, studies carefully His spiritual teachings and receives the blessings of the Holy Spirit, he will find that in reality these tests and difficulties have been gifts of God to enable him to grow and develop.

6 October 1954

- 159 It is better to have one Bahá'í who understands the teachings and is wholeheartedly convinced of their truth, than a number of Bahá'ís who are not well aware of the Cause, and deep-rooted in the Covenant.

22 January 1955

- 160 He is very happy to have this opportunity of welcoming you into the service of our glorious Faith, and he urges you to quietly and steadily read the teachings, as in this way you will fit yourself to teach others, and also deepen your own understanding and lay a foundation in your own soul and character which no amount of tests and trials can change or destroy.
28 April 1955
- 161 Success will crown the efforts of the friends on the home front, when they meditate the teachings, pray fervently for divine confirmations for their work, study the teachings so they may carry their spirit to the seeker, and then act; an action. When these steps are followed, and the teaching work carried on sacrificially and with devoted enthusiasm, the Faith will spread rapidly.
26 March 1956
- 162 There is a desperate need for deepening the Bahá'ís themselves in their own faith. They do not study the teachings enough. They do not therefore either act as whole-heartedly as Bahá'ís as they should, or derive the spiritual strength from the Faith which studying, praying and meditating brings.
26 March 1956
- 163 Some of the younger believers, from letters and reports received here, seem to lack a firm grounding on such matters as the Will and Testament and the deeper spiritual teachings of the Faith. Whenever the grasp of these fundamentals is weak, the friends are almost sure to pay undue attention to secondary procedures, to quibble over details, to lose themselves in personalities, and to founder in a sea of unnecessary inharmony. This has nothing to do with their devotion, their loyalty, their zeal, their eagerness to serve. It is merely a question of not having received, perhaps through lack of sufficient teachers to carry on the all-important work of deepening the friends in their own faith, a strong enough education in the Covenant before the duties and responsibilities of the Administrative Order were thrust upon them.
26 June 1956
- 164 It is evident that one of the reasons that the work on the home front in America is so seriously lagging is that the Bahá'ís themselves, though undoubtedly devoted, loyal and conscientious, are not always very deeply

grounded in the spiritual fundamentals of their Faith. This produces maladjustment, so to speak, in the nature of their service to the Cause; and only through a deeper understanding of their Faith and the inner spiritual strength that this understanding brings will they be able to reinforce themselves to meet their tasks, to see the joy of discharging their duties and grasping their privileges.

19 July 1956

- 165 The friends need only read the Writings; the answers are all in them; we have no priests in this Faith to interpret or answer for us.

23 April 1957

- 166 It is not enough to bring people into the Faith, one must educate them and deepen their love for it and their knowledge of its teachings, and after they declare themselves. As the Bahá'ís are few in number, especially the active teachers, and there is a great deal of work to be done, the education of these new believers is often sadly neglected, and then results are seen such as the resignations you have had recently. In this respect, the Summer Schools can be of the greatest help the friends, new and old Bahá'ís alike, for in them they can study, and enjoy the feeling of Bahá'í companionship which is, alas, usually lacking in their home communities, owing to the smallness of their numbers.

18 July 1957

EXCELLENCE IN ALL THINGS

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

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

Extracts

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 ...Say: Beware, O people of Bahá, lest ye walk in the ways of them whose words differ from their deeds. Strive that ye may be enabled to manifest to the peoples of the earth the signs of God, and to mirror forth His commandments. Let your acts be a guide unto all mankind, for the professions of most men, be they high or low, differ from their conduct. It is through your deeds that ye can distinguish yourselves from others. Through them the brightness of your light can be shed upon the whole earth. Happy is the man that heedeth My counsel, and keepeth the precepts prescribed by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

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

- 2 ...Let each morn be better than its eve and each morrow richer than its yesterday. Man's merit lieth in service and virtue and not in the pageantry of wealth and riches ... Guard against idleness and sloth, and cling unto that which profiteth mankind, whether young or old, whether high or low...

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh, Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat

- 3 The companions of God, are, in this day, the lump that must leaven the peoples of the world. They must show forth such trustworthiness, such truthfulness and perseverance, such deeds and character that all mankind may profit by their example.

Cited in The Advent of Divine Justice

- 4 Tell him, no one in this world can claim any relationship to Me except those who, in all their deeds and in their conduct, follow My example, in such wise that all the peoples of the earth would be powerless to prevent them from doing and saying that which is meet and seemly.

Cited in God Passes By

- 5 Strain every nerve to acquire both inner and outer perfections, for the fruit of the human tree hath ever been and will ever be perfections both within and without. It is not desirable that a man be left without knowledge or skills, for he is then but a barren tree. Then, so much as capacity and capability allow, ye needs must deck the tree of being with fruits such as knowledge, wisdom, spiritual perception and eloquent speech.

It is incumbent upon the children to exert themselves to the utmost in acquiring the art of reading and writing ... Writing skills that will provide for urgent needs will be enough for some; and then it is better and more fitting that they should spend their time in studying those branches of knowledge which are of use.

As for what the Supreme Pen hath previously set down, the reason is that in every art and skill, God loveth the highest perfection.

Additional Tablets and Extracts from Tablets Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 6 From amongst all mankind hath He chosen you, and your eyes have been opened to the light of guidance and your ears attuned to the music of the Company above; and blessed by abounding grace, your hearts and souls have been born into new life. Thank ye and praise ye God that the hand of infinite bestowals hath set upon your heads this gem-studded crown, this crown whose lustrous jewels will forever flash and sparkle down all the reaches of time.

To thank Him for this, make ye a mighty effort, and choose for yourselves a noble goal. Through the power of faith, obey ye the teachings of God, and let all your actions conform to His laws...

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 17

- 7 O army of God! Through the protection and help vouchsafed by the Blessed Beauty—may my life be a sacrifice to His loved ones—ye must conduct yourselves in such a manner that ye may stand out distinguished and brilliant as the sun among other souls. Should any one of you enter a city, he should become a centre of attraction by reason of his sincerity, his faithfulness and love, his honesty and fidelity, his truthfulness and loving-kindness towards all the peoples of the world, so that the people of that city may cry out and say: "This man is unquestionably a Bahá'í, for his manners, his behaviour,

his conduct, his morals, his nature, and disposition reflect the attributes of the Bahá'ís." Not until ye attain this station can ye be said to have been faithful to the Covenant and Testament of God...

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 35

- 8 O true companions! All humankind are as children in a school, and the Dawning-Points of Light, the Sources of divine revelation, are the teachers, wondrous and without peer. In the school of realities they educate these sons and daughters, according to teachings from God, and foster them in the bosom of grace, so that they may develop along every line, show forth the excellent gifts and blessings of the Lord, and combine human perfections; that they may advance in all aspects of human endeavour, whether outward or inward, hidden or visible, material or spiritual, until they make of this mortal world a widespread mirror, to reflect that other world which dieth not.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 102

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

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 102

- 10 ...They must be constantly encouraged and made eager to gain all the summits of human accomplishment, so that from their earliest years they will be taught to have high aims, to conduct themselves well, to be chaste, pure, and undefiled, and will learn to be of powerful resolve and firm of purpose in all things...

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 110

- 11 It is incumbent upon Bahá'í children to surpass other children in the acquisition of sciences and arts, for they have been cradled in the grace of God.

Whatever other children learn in a year, let Bahá'í children learn in a month. The heart of 'Abdu'l-Bahá longeth, in its love, to find that Bahá'í young people, each and all, are known throughout the world for their intellectual attainments. There is no question but that they will exert all their efforts, their energies, their sense of pride, to acquire the sciences and arts.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 119

- 12 The instruction of these children is even as the work of a loving gardener who tendeth his young plants in the flowering fields of the All-Glorious. There is no doubt that it will yield the desired results; especially is this true of instruction as to Bahá'í obligations and Bahá'í conduct, for the little children must needs be made aware in their very heart and soul that "Bahá'í" is not just a name but a truth. Every child must be trained in the things of the spirit, so that he may embody all the virtues and become a source of glory to the Cause of God. Otherwise, the mere word "Bahá'í", if it yield no fruit, will come to nothing.

Strive then to the best of thine ability to let these children know that a Bahá'í is one who embodyeth all the perfections, that he must shine out like a lighted taper—not be darkness upon darkness and yet bear the name "Bahá'í".

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 123

- 13 It behoveth the craftsmen of the world at each moment to offer a thousand tokens of gratitude at the Sacred Threshold, and to exert their highest endeavour and diligently pursue their professions so that their efforts may produce that which will manifest the greatest beauty and perfection before the eyes of all men.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 127

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

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

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

- 15 Let God's beloved, each and every one, be the essence of purity, the very life of holiness, so that in every country they may become famed for their sanctity, independence of spirit, and meekness. Let them be cheered by draughts from the eternal cup of love for God, and make merry as they drink from the wine-vaults of Heaven. Let them behold the Blessed Beauty, and feel the flame and rapture of that meeting, and be struck dumb with awe and wonder. This is the station of the sincere; this is the way of the loyal; this is the brightness that shineth on the faces of those nigh unto God.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 174

- 16 Now amidst all the peoples of the world must the beloved arise, with a heart even as the day-star, a strong inward urge, a shining brow, a musk-scented breath, a tongue speaking ever of God, an exposition crystal-clear, a high resolve, a power born of heaven, a spiritual character, a confirmation nothing short of the divine. Let them one and all become as a splendour on the horizon of heaven, and in the skies of the world a dazzling star. Let them be fruitful trees in the celestial bowers, sweet-scented blooms in the divine gardens; let them be verses of perfection on the page of the universe, words of oneness in the Book of Life. This is the first age, and the early beginnings of the dispensation of the Most Great Light, wherefore, within this century, virtues must be acquired, goodly qualities must be perfected within this span of time. In these very days the Abhá Paradise must pitch its pavilions on the plains of the world. The lights of reality must now be revealed, and the secrets of God's bestowals must now be made known, and now must the olden grace shine forth and this world change into the pleasure-ground of heaven, the garden of God. And out of pure hearts, and through heavenly bounties, all the perfections, qualities and attributes of the divine must now be made manifest.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 193

- 17 ...I beg of Him to bestow His confirmations upon those loved ones, dwellers in that pure and holy land, and to grant them successful outcomes in all things: that in their character, their behaviour, their words, their way of life, in all they are and do, He will make them to achieve distinction among

men; that He will gather them into the world community, their hearts filled with ecstasy and fervour and yearning love, with knowledge and certitude, with steadfastness and unity, their faces beauteous and bright.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 207

- 18 ...they should exemplify in every aspect of their lives those attributes and virtues that are born of God and should arise to distinguish themselves by their goodly behaviour. They should justify their claim to be Bahá'ís by deeds and not by name. He is a true Bahá'í who strives by day and by night to progress and advance along the path of human endeavor, whose most cherished desire is so to live and act as to enrich and illuminate the world, whose source of inspiration is the essence of Divine virtue, whose aim in life is so to conduct himself as to be the cause of infinite progress. Only when he attains unto such perfect gifts can it be said of him that he is a true Bahá'í. For in this holy Dispensation, the crowning glory of bygone ages and cycles, true Faith is no mere acknowledgement of the Unity of God, but rather the living of a life that will manifest all the perfections and virtues implied in such belief..

Bahá'í Year Book [The Bahá'í World], vol. 1, p. 12

- 19 So, O beloved of God, endeavor with your hearts and souls, that ye may be qualified with the morals and attributes of the Blessed Perfection, and partake of the bounties of His sanctity; that ye may become signs of unity and standards of oneness, discover the essence of singleness and sing harmonies and lays in this divine garden, in merciful melodies; that ye may become as thankful birds, and sing a song in the rose-garden of existence which may astonish minds and senses; that ye may hoist a standard on the apex of the universe which may flutter in the winds of favor, and plant a tree in the field of the visible world which may bring forth fruits of the utmost delicacy and freshness.

Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, vol. 2, p. 374

- 20 O ye friends of God! Show ye an endeavor that all the nations and communities of the world, even the enemies, put their trust, assurance and hope in you; that if a person falls into errors for a hundred-thousand times he may yet turn his face to you, hopeful that you will forgive his sins; for he must not become hopeless, neither grieved nor despondent. This is the conduct and the manner of the people of Baha'. This is the foundation of the most

high pathway! Ye should conform your conduct and manners with the advices of Abdul-Baha.

Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, vol. 2, p. 436

- 21 Then know thou that, verily, the people of Baha' must needs be distinguished from others in all respects, until they become the lamps of the True One among the creatures and the stars of guidance shining from the Supreme Concourse.

Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas, vol. 3, p. 682

- 22 The most vital duty, in this day, is to purify your characters, to correct your manners, and improve your conduct. The beloved of the Merciful must show forth such character and conduct among His creatures, that the fragrance of their holiness may be shed upon the whole world, and may quicken the dead, inasmuch as the purpose of the Manifestation of God and the dawning of the limitless lights of the Invisible is to educate the souls of men, and refine the character of every living man—so that blessed individuals, who have freed themselves from the murk of the animal world, shall rise up with those qualities which are the adornings of the reality of man...

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 2

- 23 At this time, likewise, I most urgently request the friends of God to make every effort, as much as lieth within their competence, along these lines. The harder they strive to widen the scope of their knowledge, the better and more gratifying will be the result. Let the loved ones of God, whether young or old, whether male or female, each according to his capabilities, bestir themselves and spare no efforts to acquire the various current branches of knowledge, both spiritual and secular, and of the arts. Whensoever they gather in their meetings let their conversation be confined to learned subjects and to information on the knowledge of the day.

If they do thus, they will flood the world with the Manifest Light, and change this dusty earth into gardens of the Realm of Glory.

It is clear that learning is the greatest bestowal of God; that knowledge and the acquirement thereof is a blessing from Heaven. Thus is it incumbent upon the friends of God to exert such an effort and strive with such eagerness to promote divine knowledge, culture and the sciences, that ere long those who are schoolchildren today will become the most

erudite of all the fraternity of the wise. This is a service rendered unto God Himself, and it is one of His inescapable commandments.

From a Tablet

- 24 ...O loving friends! Exert every effort to acquire the various branches of knowledge and true understanding. Strain every nerve to achieve both material and spiritual accomplishments.

From a Tablet

- 25 Encourage the children from their earliest years to master every kind of learning, and make them eager to become skilled in every art—the aim being that through the favouring grace of God, the heart of each one may become even as a mirror disclosing the secrets of the universe, penetrating the innermost reality of all things; and that each may earn world-wide fame in all branches of knowledge, science and the arts.

From a Tablet

- 26 ...Utilize every means to make this School a garden of the All-Merciful, from which the lights of learning will cast their beams, and wherein the children, whether Bahá'í or other, will be educated to such a degree as to become God's gifts to man, and the pride of the human race. Let them make the greatest progress in the shortest span of time, let them open wide their eyes and uncover the inner realities of all things, become proficient in every art and skill, and learn to comprehend the secrets of all things even as they are—this faculty being one of the clearly evident effects of servitude to the Holy Threshold.

From a Tablet

From the Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 27 I give you my advice, and it is this: Train these children with divine exhortations. From their childhood instill in their hearts the love of God so they may manifest in their lives the fear of God and have confidence in the bestowals of God. Teach them to free themselves from human imperfections and to acquire the divine perfections latent in the heart of man. The life of man is useful if he attains the perfections of man. If he becomes the center of the imperfections of the world of humanity, death is better than life, and

nonexistence better than existence. Therefore, make ye an effort in order that these children may be rightly trained and educated and that each one of them may attain perfection in the world of humanity. Know ye the value of these children, for they are all my children.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 28 I desire distinction for you. The Bahá'ís must be distinguished from others of humanity. But this distinction must not depend upon wealth—that they should become more affluent than other people. I do not desire for you financial distinction. It is not an ordinary distinction I desire; not scientific, commercial, industrial distinction. For you I desire spiritual distinction—that is, you must become eminent and distinguished in morals. In the love of God you must become distinguished from all else. You must become distinguished for loving humanity, for unity and accord, for love and justice. In brief, you must become distinguished in all the virtues of the human world—for faithfulness and sincerity, for justice and fidelity, for firmness and steadfastness, for philanthropic deeds and service to the human world, for love toward every human being, for unity and accord with all people, for removing prejudices and promoting international peace. Finally, you must become distinguished for heavenly illumination and for acquiring the bestowals of God. I desire this distinction for you. This must be the point of distinction among you.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 29 Therefore I say that man must travel in the way of God. Day by day he must endeavor to become better, his belief must increase and become firmer, his good qualities and his turning to God must be greater, the fire of his love must flame more brightly; then day by day he will make progress, for to stop advancing is the means of going back. The bird when he flies soars ever higher and higher, for as soon as he stops flying he will come down. Every day, in the morning when arising you should compare today with yesterday and see in what condition you are. If you see your belief is stronger and your heart more occupied with God and your love increased and your freedom from the world greater then thank God and ask for the increase of these qualities. You must begin to pray and repent for all that you have done which is wrong and you must implore and ask for help and assistance that you may become better than yesterday so that you may continue to make progress.

Star of the West, vol. 8, no. 6 (24 June 1917), p. 68

- 30 You must become the shining candles of moral precepts and spiritual ideals and be the means of the illumination of others. Clothe your bodies with the robes of virtues. Characterize yourselves with the characteristics of the people of divine morality. Shun all manner of vices as you shun a poisonous snake or a leper. Let the corps of professors and the students be impressed with the purity and holiness of your lives so that they may take you as paragons of worthiness, examples of nobility of nature, observers of the moral laws, holding in subordination the lower element by the higher spirit, the conquerors of self and the masters of wholesome, vital forces in all the avenues of life. Strive always to be at the head of your classes through hard study and true merit. Be always in a prayerful state and appreciate the value of everything. Entertain high ideals and stimulate your intellectual and constructive forces.

Star of the West, vol. 9, no. 9 (20 August 1918), p. 98

- 31 I hope that while you are studying in this college you may so excel all other students in the various branches of knowledge taught therein that all of them may testify that the Bahá'í students have another power, are inspired with another effort, are imbued with a nobler ambition, are stimulated by higher motives and make wider and deeper exertions than others. If you do not surpass the others, then what distinction will there remain for you? Therefore, you must strive to be superior to them, so that everyone may bear testimony to this fact...

Star of the West, vol. 9, no. 9 (20 August 1918), pp. 98–99

- 32 ...I hope that through the favor and bounty of the Blessed Beauty, his holiness the Báb, and the ineffable blessings which hallow this holy shrine,ⁱ the confirmations of the Kingdom of Abha may encircle you, and that you may be characterized with the shining qualities and brilliant attributes of the Bahá'í life. May your morality become more defined day by day! May your faith and assurance be increased day by day! May your attraction to the Kingdom of Abha be intensified day by day! May your attainment in sciences and arts become more universal day by day! Perchance, God willing, you may become perfect and accomplished from every standpoint and be the means of the enlightenment of Persia.

Star of the West, vol. 9, no. 9 (20 August 1918), pp. 99–100

i The students were visiting the tomb of the Báb.

From letters by Shoghi Effendi

- 33 One thing would lessen appreciably the heavy burden that weighs upon my heart and mind and that is the extent to which the Bahá'ís conform in their private life and character to the high code established by Bahá'u'lláh. It is an infinitely high standard and anything short of it will in the eyes of those who really count prove piteously negligible and utterly futile.

12 October 1924

- 34 Let every believer, desirous to witness the swift and healthy progress of the Cause of God, realize the twofold nature of his task. Let him first turn his eyes inwardly and search his own heart and satisfy himself that in his relations with his fellow-believers, irrespective of colour and class, he is proving himself increasingly loyal to the spirit of his beloved Faith. Assured and content that he is exerting his utmost in a conscious effort to approach nearer every day the lofty station to which his gracious Master summons him, let him turn to his second task, and, with befitting confidence and vigour, assail the devastating power of those forces which in his own heart he has already succeeded in subduing. Fully alive to the unfailing efficacy of the power of Bahá'u'lláh, and armed with the essential weapons of wise restraint and inflexible resolve, let him wage a constant fight against the inherited tendencies, the corruptive instincts, the fluctuating fashions, the false pretences of the society in which he lives and moves.

12 April 1927, Bahá'í Administration

- 35 We can prove ourselves worthy of our Cause only if in our individual conduct and corporate life we sedulously imitate the example of our beloved Master, Whom the terrors of tyranny, the storms of incessant abuse, the oppressiveness of humiliation, never caused to deviate a hair's breadth from the revealed Law of Bahá'u'lláh.

Such is the path of servitude, such is the way of holiness He chose to tread to the very end of His life. Nothing short of the strictest adherence to His glorious example can safely steer our course amid the pitfalls of this perilous age, and lead us on to fulfil our high destiny.

12 April 1927, Bahá'í Administration

- 36 In philanthropic enterprises and acts of charity, in promotion of the general welfare and furtherance of the public good including that of every group without any exceptions whatever, let the beloved of God attract the favourable attention of all, and lead all the rest.

January 1929

- 37 The work in which you are engaged is dear and near to my heart and constitutes one of the most vital aspects of the manifold activities of our beloved Faith. The highest standards of purity, of integrity, of detachment and sacrifice must be maintained by the members of your group in order to enable you to play a decisive part in the spread and consolidation of the Faith. A tremendous responsibility has been laid upon you, and nothing short of a pure, a virtuous, an active and truly exemplary life can enable you to fulfil your high destiny.

6 September 1934, appended to a letter

- 38 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 constantly reflected in the business dealings of all its members, in their domestic lives, in all manner of employment, and in any service they may, in the future, render their government or people. It must be exemplified in the conduct of all Bahá'í electors, when exercising their sacred rights and functions. It must characterize the attitude of every loyal believer towards nonacceptance of political posts, nonidentification with political parties, nonparticipation in political controversies, and nonmembership in political organizations and ecclesiastical institutions. It must reveal itself in the uncompromising adherence of all, whether young or old, to the clearly enunciated and fundamental principles laid down by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His addresses, and to the laws and ordinances revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in His Most Holy Book. It must be demonstrated in the impartiality of every defender of the Faith against its enemies, in his fair-mindedness in recognizing any merits that enemy may possess, and in his honesty in discharging any obligations he may have towards him. It must constitute the brightest ornament of the life, the pursuits, the exertions, and the utterances of every Bahá'í teacher, whether laboring at home or abroad, whether in the front ranks of the teaching force, or occupying a less active and responsible position. It must be made the hallmark of

that numerically small, yet intensely dynamic and highly responsible body of the elected national representatives of every Bahá'í community, which constitutes the sustaining pillar, and the sole instrument for the election, in every community, of that Universal House whose very name and title, as ordained by Bahá'u'lláh, symbolizes that rectitude of conduct which is its highest mission to safeguard and enforce.

25 December 1938, The Advent of Divine Justice

- 39 A chaste and holy life must be made the controlling principle in the behavior and conduct of all Bahá'ís, both in their social relations with the members of their own community, and in their contact with the world at large. It must adorn and reinforce the ceaseless labors and meritorious exertions of those whose enviable position is to propagate the Message, and to administer the affairs, of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. It must be upheld, in all its integrity and implications, in every phase of the life of those who fill the ranks of that Faith, whether in their homes, their travels, their clubs, their societies, their entertainments, their schools, and their universities. It must be accorded special consideration in the conduct of the social activities of every Bahá'í summer school and any other occasions on which Bahá'í community life is organized and fostered. It must be closely and continually identified with the mission of the Bahá'í youth, both as an element in the life of the Bahá'í community, and as a factor in the future progress and orientation of the youth of their own country.

25 December 1938, The Advent of Divine Justice

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 40 The responsibility of young believers is very great, as they must not only fit themselves to inherit the work of the older Bahá'ís and carry on the affairs of the Cause in general, but the world which lies ahead of them—as promised by Bahá'u'lláh—will be a world chastened by its sufferings, ready to listen to His Divine Message at last; and consequently a very high character will be expected of the exponents of such a religion. To deepen their knowledge, to perfect themselves in the Bahá'í standards of virtue and upright conduct, should be the paramount duty of every young Bahá'í.

6 June 1941, Dawn of a New Day, pp. 179–80

- 41 The Guardian was delighted to hear of your youth group. The children who are trained in the world-embracing teachings of Bahá'u'lláh cannot but grow up to be a truly new race of men. He hopes these young people will prepare themselves for the great task which will face them in the future, that of helping to rebuild the world with the aid and inspiration of the Bahá'í teachings.

25 December 1941

- 42 If we could perceive the true reality of things we would see that the greatest of all battles raging in the world today is the spiritual battle. If the believers like yourself, young and eager and full of life, desire to win laurels for true and undying heroism, then let them join in the spiritual battle—whatever their physical occupation may be—which involves the very soul of man. The hardest and the noblest task in the world today is to be a *true* Bahá'í; this requires that we defeat not only the current evils prevailing all over the world, but the weaknesses, attachments to the past, prejudices, and selfishnesses that may be inherited and acquired within our own characters; that we give forth a shining and incorruptible example to our fellow-men.

5 April 1942

- 43 He hopes that you will develop into Bahá'ís in character as well as in belief. The whole purpose of Bahá'u'lláh is that we should become a new kind of people, people who are upright, kind, intelligent, truthful, and honest and who live according to His great laws laid down for this new epoch in man's development. To call ourselves Bahá'ís is not enough, our inmost being must become ennobled and enlightened through living a Bahá'í life.

25 August 1944

- 44 Indeed if the friends could seek, and exert themselves, to become 100 per cent Bahá'ís they would see how greatly their influence over others would be increased, and how rapidly the Cause would spread. The world is seeking not a compromise but the embodiment of a high and shining ideal. The more the friends live up to our teachings in every aspect of their lives, in their homes, in business, in their social relationships, the greater will be the attraction they exercise over the hearts of others.

23 January 1945

- 45 The believers, as we all know, should endeavour to set such an example in their personal lives and conduct that others will feel impelled to embrace a Faith which reforms human character. However, unfortunately, not everyone achieves easily and rapidly the victory over self. What every believer, new or old, should realize is that the Cause *has* the spiritual power to re-create us if we make the effort to let that power influence us, and the greatest help in this respect is prayer. We must supplicate Bahá'u'lláh to assist us to overcome the failings in our own characters, and also exert our own will-power in mastering ourselves.

27 January 1945

- 46 His constant hope is that the believers will conduct themselves, individually and in their Bahá'í Community life, in such a manner as to attract the attention of others to the Cause. The world is not only starving for lofty principles and ideals, it is, above all, starving for a shining example which the Bahá'ís can and must provide.

22 February 1945

- 47 ...the young Bahá'ís in every city should make a point of keeping in touch with local youth activities and clubs, and endeavouring to make their views known to as many young people in as many ways as possible. Above all they should set a high example to them; chastity, politeness, friendliness, hospitality, joyous optimism about the ultimate future happiness and well-being of mankind, should distinguish them and win over to them the love and admiration of their fellow youth. The thing which is most conspicuously lacking in modern life is a high standard of conduct and good character; the young Bahá'ís must demonstrate both, if they hope to seriously win over to the Faith members of their own generation, so sorely disillusioned and so contaminated by the laxity war gives rise to.

20 October 1945

- 48 We must be patient with each other's shortcomings, and always strive to create love and unity among the believers, who, after all, are still immature in many ways and far from perfect. The Faith itself is the great thing, and the Bahá'ís must strive to become ever more perfect instruments for Bahá'u'lláh to use and to accomplish His purpose through.

26 May 1946

- 49 The Guardian has urged, over and over again, the paramount necessity for Bahá'í Youth to exemplify the Teachings, most particularly the *moral* aspect of them. If they are not distinguished for their high conduct they cannot expect other young people to take the Cause very seriously.

6 September 1946

- 50 He feels that the youth, in particular, must constantly and determinedly strive to exemplify a Bahá'í life. In the world around us we see moral decay, promiscuity, indecency, vulgarity, bad manners—the Bahá'í young people must be the opposite of these things, and, by their chastity, their uprightness, their decency, their consideration and good manners, attract others, old and young, to the Faith. The world is tired of words; it wants example, and it is up to the Bahá'í youth to furnish it.

19 September 1946

- 51 ...The eyes of the people of the world are beginning to be focused on us; and, as humanity's plight goes from bad to worse, we will be watched ever more intently by non-Bahá'ís, to see whether we do uphold our own institutions whole-heartedly; whether we are the people of the new creation or not; whether we live up to our beliefs, principles and laws in deed as well as word. We cannot be too careful. We cannot be too exemplary.

5 August 1955, Unfolding Destiny, p. 350

FAMILY LIFE

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

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled March 2008

Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. Their concerns are in order, they enjoy comfort and tranquillity, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honour, as day succeedeth day.

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Preservation of the Bond between Husband and Wife

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 And when He desired to manifest grace and beneficence to men, and set the world in order, He revealed observances and created laws; among them He established the law of marriage, made it as a fortress for well-being and salvation, and enjoined it upon us in that which was sent down out of the heaven of sanctity in His Most Holy Book.

Bahá'í Prayers

- 2 ...Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 63

- 3 All should know, and in this regard attain the splendours of the sun of certitude, and be illumined thereby: Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God. The Dawning-Place of the Light of God sheddeth its radiance upon all with the same effulgence. Verily God created women for men, and men for women. The most beloved of people before God are the most steadfast and those who have surpassed others in their love for God, exalted be His glory...

From a Tablet

- 4 The beginning of magnanimity is when man expendeth his wealth on himself, on his family and on the poor among his brethren in his Faith.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

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

- 5 Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart. Each must, however, exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever. Their purpose must be this: to become loving companions and comrades and at one with each other for time and eternity...

The true marriage of Bahá'ís is this, that husband and wife should be united both physically and spiritually, that they may ever improve the spiritual life of each other, and may enjoy everlasting unity throughout all the worlds of God. This is Bahá'í marriage.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 86

- 6 Marriage, among the mass of the people, is a physical bond, and this union can only be temporary, since it is foredoomed to a physical separation at the close.

Among the people of Bahá, however, marriage must be a union of the body and of the spirit as well, for here both husband and wife are aglow with the same wine, both are enamoured of the same matchless Face, both live and move through the same spirit, both are illumined by the same glory. This connection between them is a spiritual one, hence it is a bond that will abide forever. Likewise do they enjoy strong and lasting ties in the physical world as well, for if the marriage is based both on the spirit and the body, that union is a true one, hence it will endure. If, however, the bond is physical and nothing more, it is sure to be only temporary, and must inexorably end in separation.

When, therefore, the people of Bahá undertake to marry, the union must be a true relationship, a spiritual coming together as well as a physical one, so that throughout every phase of life, and in all the worlds of God, their union will endure; for this real oneness is a gleaming out of the love of God.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 84

- 7 O ye two believers in God! The Lord, peerless is He, hath made woman and man to abide with each other in the closest companionship, and to be

even as a single soul. They are two helpmates, two intimate friends, who should be concerned about the welfare of each other.

If they live thus, they will pass through this world with perfect contentment, bliss, and peace of heart, and become the object of divine grace and favour in the Kingdom of heaven. But if they do other than this, they will live out their lives in great bitterness, longing at every moment for death, and will be shamefaced in the heavenly realm.

Strive, then, to abide, heart and soul, with each other as two doves in the nest, for this is to be blessed in both worlds.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 92

- 8 In short, the foundation of the Kingdom of God is based upon harmony and love, oneness, relationship and union, not upon differences, especially between husband and wife. If one of these two becomes the cause of divorce, that one will unquestionably fall into great difficulties, will become the victim of formidable calamities and experience deep remorse.

From a Tablet

- 9 It is highly important for man to raise a family. So long as he is young, because of youthful self-complacency, he does not realize its significance, but this will be a source of regret when he grows old ... In this glorious Cause the life of a married couple should resemble the life of the angels in heaven—a life full of joy and spiritual delight, a life of unity and concord, a friendship both mental and physical. The home should be orderly and well-organized. Their ideas and thoughts should be like the rays of the sun of truth and the radiance of the brilliant stars in the heavens. Even as two birds they should warble melodies upon the branches of the tree of fellowship and harmony. They should always be elated with joy and gladness and be a source of happiness to the hearts of others. They should set an example to their fellow-men, manifest a true and sincere love towards each other and educate their children in such a manner as to blazon the fame and glory of their family.

From the Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 10 In marriage the more distant the blood-relationship the better, for such distance in family ties between husband and wife provideth the basis for the well-being of humanity and is conducive to fellowship among mankind.

From a Tablet

- 11 God's wisdom hath decreed that partners to a marriage should be of distant origins. That is, the further removed the relationship between husband and wife is, the stronger, the more beautiful and the healthier will their offspring be.

From a Tablet

- 12 Surely, all must today be called to love, to unity and to kindness; to integrity, to friendship, to fellowship and to divine worship. I hope that thou and thy dear husband may continue to serve in all spirit and fragrance and that in this world ye may remain two radiant candles and from the eternal horizon ye may glisten like unto two shining stars.

From a Tablet

- 13 As to thy respected husband: it is incumbent upon thee to treat him with great kindness, to consider his wishes and be conciliatory with him at all times, till he seeth that because thou hast directed thyself toward the Kingdom of God, thy tenderness for him and thy love for God have but increased, as well as thy concern for his wishes under all conditions.

I beg of the Almighty to keep thee firmly established in His love, and ever shedding abroad the sweet breaths of holiness in all those regions.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 91

- 14 O maidservant of God! Thy letter hath arrived. Thy dear husband wisheth to complete his education and thou art eager to go to Africa. Now, ye must consult with each other, confer with the utmost love, agree upon a sound decision, and be fully united, for husband and wife must be even as one person, that they may succeed in every matter.

From a Tablet

- 15 You have asked whether a husband would be able to prevent his wife from embracing the divine light or a wife dissuade her husband from gaining entry into the Kingdom of God. In truth neither of them could prevent the other from entering into the Kingdom, unless the husband hath an excessive attachment to the wife or the wife to the husband. Indeed when either of the two worshippeth the other to the exclusion of God, then each could prevent the other from seeking admittance into His Kingdom.

From a Tablet

From letters on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 16 It is sad and distressing that ... husbands and wives have not always seen eye to eye.

In all such cases, I believe, our departed Master urged the utmost care and consideration on the part of those Bahá'í believers whose husbands were not in sympathy with their work. He thought that they ought to be won by love perhaps more than argument, but it would be very unfortunate if he objected to her work for the Faith, over and above all that she is to give to her family.

20 March 1928

- 17 When such difference of opinion and belief occurs between husband and wife it is very unfortunate for undoubtedly it detracts from that spiritual bond which is the stronghold of the family bond, especially in times of difficulty. The way, however, that it could be remedied is not by acting in such wise as to alienate the other party. One of the objects of the Cause is actually to bring about a closer bond in the homes. In all such cases, therefore, the Master used to advise obedience to the wishes of the other party and prayer. Pray that your husband may gradually see the light and at the same time so act as to draw him nearer rather than prejudice him. Once that harmony is secured then you will be able to serve unhampered.

15 July 1928

- 18 Shoghi Effendi trusts that ... your wife will be able to devote a little more time to her family, but he also hopes that you will be able to assist her in obtaining the time and opportunity to serve a Cause that is so dear and near to her heart and in which her services are much appreciated.

19 June 1931

- 19 In regard to your question concerning the nature and character of Bahá'í marriage: As you have rightly stated, such a marriage is conditioned upon the full approval of all four parents. Also your statement to the effect that the principle of the oneness of mankind prevents any true Bahá'í from regarding race itself as a bar to union is in complete accord with the Teachings of the Faith on this point. For both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá never disapproved of the idea of interracial marriage, nor discouraged it. The

Bahá'í Teachings, indeed, by their very nature transcend all limitations imposed by race, and as such cannot and should never be identified with any particular school of racial philosophy.

27 January 1935

- 20 The Bahá'í standard of sex morality is thus very high, but it is by no means unreasonably rigid. While free love is condemned, yet marriage is considered as a holy act which every human being should be encouraged, though not forced, to perform. The sex instinct, like all other human instincts, is not necessarily evil. It is a power which, if properly directed, can bring joy and satisfaction to the individual. If misused or abused it brings of course incalculable harm not only to the individual but also to the society in which he lives. While the Bahá'ís condemn asceticism and all extreme forms of self-mortification they at the same time view with disfavour the current theories of sex ethics which cannot but bring ruin to human society.

29 May 1935

- 21 For Bahá'u'lláh explicitly reveals in His Book of Laws that the very purpose of marriage is the procreation of children who, when grown up, will be able to know God and to recognize and observe His Commandments and Laws as revealed through His Messengers. Marriage is thus, according to the Bahá'í Teachings, primarily a social and moral act. It has a purpose which transcends the immediate personal needs and interests of the parents.

14 October 1935

- 22 As regards your husband's attitude towards the Cause: unfriendly though that may be you should always hope that, through conciliatory and friendly means, and with wise, tactful and patient effort, you can gradually succeed in winning his sympathy for the Faith. Under no circumstances should you try to dictate and impose upon him by force your personal religious convictions. Neither should you allow his opposition to the Cause to seriously hinder your activities for its spread ... You should act patiently, tactfully and with confidence that your efforts are being guided and reinforced by Bahá'u'lláh.

23 July 1937

- 23 But while the Guardian fully approves of your wish to dedicate your whole life to the service of the Cause, he also feels the necessity of drawing your

attention to the fact that in case you get married it would be your duty as a Bahá'í wife not to neglect your home duties, which indeed form a close and vital part of your general Bahá'í work. Family considerations should of course be subordinated to the collective interests and welfare of the Cause. But they should be given their due importance, if a Bahá'í wishes to lead a normal, well-balanced and constructive life. The loyalties facing a Bahá'í are not equally binding and important, but this does not necessarily make them irreconcilable.

23 November 1937

- 24 Briefly stated the Bahá'í conception of sex is based on the belief that chastity should be strictly practised by both sexes, not only because it is in itself highly commendable ethically, but also due to its being the only way to a happy and successful marital life. Sex relationships of any form outside marriage are not permissible therefore, and whoso violates this rule will not only be responsible to God, but will incur the necessary punishment from society.

The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse, but condemns its illegitimate and improper expression such as free love, companionate marriage and others, all of which it considers positively harmful to man and to the society in which he lives. The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this very purpose that the institution of marriage has been established. The Bahá'ís do not believe in the suppression of the sex impulse but in its regulation and control.

5 September 1938

- 25 The institution of marriage, as established by Bahá'u'lláh, while giving due importance to the physical aspect of marital union, considers it as subordinate to the moral and spiritual purposes and functions with which it has been invested by an all-wise and loving Providence. Only when these different values are given each their due importance, and only on the basis of the subordination of the physical to the moral, and the carnal to the spiritual, can such excesses and laxity in marital relations as our decadent age is so sadly witnessing be avoided, and family life be restored to its original purity, and fulfil the true function for which it has been instituted by God.

8 May 1939

- 26 The question you raise as to the place in one's life that a deep bond of love with someone we meet other than our husband or wife can have is easily defined in view of the teachings. Chastity implies both before and after marriage an unsullied, chaste sex life. Before marriage absolutely chaste, after marriage absolutely faithful to one's chosen companion. Faithful in all sexual acts, faithful in word and in deed...

...Outside of their normal, legitimate married life they should seek to establish bonds of comradeship and love which are eternal and founded on the spiritual life of man, not on his physical life. This is one of the many fields in which it is incumbent on the Bahá'ís to set the example and lead the way to a true human standard of life, when the soul of man is exalted and his body but the tool for his enlightened spirit. Needless to say this does not preclude the living of a perfectly normal sex life in its legitimate channel of marriage.

28 September 1941

- 27 He is very sorry to hear of the difficulties that have arisen between you and your husband regarding the education of your children. In all cases where Bahá'ís marry non-Bahá'ís, especially of another Faith, they should have some understanding beforehand about the children's future religious training; when this has not been done, and if the parents cannot agree, the Bahá'í should turn to his Assembly for advice.

8 September 1947

- 28 He feels very strongly that Bahá'ís, if possible, more especially Bahá'ís who serve the Cause as actively and conspicuously as you and your family do, should set the newer believers and the young Bahá'ís a high example in every way. As Bahá'u'lláh was so very much against divorce (even though He permits it) and considered marriage a most sacred responsibility, believers should do everything in their power to preserve the marriages they have contracted, and to make of them exemplary unions, governed by the noblest motives.

19 October 1947

- 29 Marriage problems are often very involved and subtle, and we Bahá'ís, being enlightened and progressive people, should not hesitate, if it seems necessary or desirable, to turn to science for help in such matters. If you and your husband talked over your problems—together or separately—with a

good physician you might find that you can cure your own husband, or at least try to do so. It is a great pity that two believers, united in this glorious Cause, and blessed with a family, should not be able to live together really harmoniously, and he feels you should take constructive action and not allow the situation to get worse. When the shadow of separation hangs over a husband and wife they should leave no stone unturned in their effort to avert its becoming a reality.

5 July 1949

- 30 He advises you to, at least for a period of time, try and placate your husband by devoting yourself to him, being loving and patient. Perhaps in this way you can soften his opposition towards the Faith. However, he has no right to try and make you give it up. The relation of the individual soul towards its Creator is a purely personal and sacred one, and no one has a right to dictate in such matters.

17 February 1950

From letters by the Universal House of Justiceⁱ

- 31 A passage from a Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá ... stated “Hold thy husband dear and always show forth an amiable temper towards him, no matter how ill-tempered he may be...”ⁱⁱ

In response to a question about this statement, the following clarification was provided in a Secretariat letter of 12 April 1990:

It is clear that no husband should subject his wife to abuse of any kind, whether emotional, mental or physical. Such a reprehensible action would be the very antithesis of the relationship of mutual respect and equality enjoined by the Bahá’í writings—a relationship governed by the principles of consultation and devoid of the use of any form of abuse, including force, to compel obedience to one’s will. When a Bahá’í wife

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

ii The text of the Tablet reads as follows:

Hold thy husband dear and always show forth an amiable temper towards him, no matter how ill-tempered he may be. Even if thy loving-kindness maketh him more bitter, manifest thou more kindliness, more tenderness, be more loving and tolerate his annoying and offensive behaviour.

finds herself in such a situation and feels it cannot be resolved through consultation with her husband, she could well turn to the Local Spiritual Assembly for advice and guidance, and might also find it highly advantageous to seek the assistance of competent professional counsellors. If the husband is also a Bahá'í, the Local Spiritual Assembly can bring to his attention the need to avoid abusive behaviour and can, if necessary, take firmer measures to compel him to conform to the admonitions of the teachings.

20 March 2002

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 32 Bahá'u'lláh came to bring unity to the world, and a fundamental unity is that of the family. Therefore, we must believe that the Faith is intended to strengthen the family, not weaken it. For example, service to the Cause should not produce neglect of the family. It is important for you to arrange your time so that your family life is harmonious and your household receives the attention it requires.

Bahá'u'lláh also stressed the importance of consultation. We should not think this worthwhile method of seeking solutions is confined to the administrative institutions of the Cause. Family consultation employing full and frank discussion, and animated by awareness of the need for moderation and balance, can be the panacea for domestic conflict. Wives should not attempt to dominate their husbands, nor husbands their wives.

1 August 1978

- 33 The Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá ... which you refer to in the first paragraph of your letter is only an exhortation, not an injunction.ⁱ Moreover, it was

i The believer enquired about the reference to the statement concerning a wife's "obedience to and consideration for her husband" in the text of the following Tablet revealed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

O Handmaids of the All-Sufficing God!

Exert yourselves, that haply ye may be enabled to acquire such virtues as shall honour and distinguish you amongst all women. Of a surety, there is no greater pride and glory for a woman than to be a handmaid in God's Court of Grandeur; and the qualities that shall merit her this station are an alert and wakeful heart; a firm conviction of the unity of God, the Peerless; a heartfelt love for all His maidservants; spotless purity and chastity; obedience to and consideration for her husband; attention to the education and nurturing of her children; composure, calmness, dignity and self-possession; diligence

revealed in honour of some Bahá'í women in Iran who must have written to 'Abdu'l-Bahá seeking guidance with regard to a specific situation. Unfortunately, the circumstances attending the revelation of the Tablet are not known, because the incoming letter or request has not come to light. The quotation should, therefore, be regarded as an exhortation which was revealed to address a specific situation. This quotation, like many others, has been included in the compilation to provide the friends with the available Writings on different aspects of family life.

The translation has been checked, and there is no doubt that the text given in English is correct.

As you say, the principle of the equality of men and women is unequivocal. The Writings on the subject are clear and unambiguous. The House of Justice has specified time and again that there are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other. Exactly under what circumstances such deference should take place, is a matter for each couple to determine. If, God forbid, they fail to agree, and their disagreement leads to estrangement, they should seek counsel from those they trust and in whose sincerity and sound judgement they have confidence, in order to preserve and strengthen their ties as a united family.

It is the hope of the House of Justice that the above explanation will help in alleviating your perplexities with regard to the rights of the husband and the wife in a family. However, you may wish to refer to the recently released compilation on women for further insights.

2 October 1986

- 34 As you know, the principle of the oneness of mankind is described in the Bahá'í Writings as the pivot round which all the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve. It has widespread implications which affect and remould all dimensions of human activity. It calls for a fundamental change in the manner in which people relate to each other, and the eradication of those age-old practices which deny the intrinsic human right of every individual to be treated with consideration and respect.

Within the family setting, the rights of all members must be respected. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated:

in praising God, and worshipping Him both night and day; constancy and firmness in His holy Covenant; and the utmost ardour, enthusiasm, and attachment to His Cause. I pray God that each and every one of these bestowals may be conferred upon you.

The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved...

The use of force by the physically strong against the weak, as a means of imposing one's will and fulfilling one's desires, is a flagrant transgression of the Bahá'í Teachings. There can be no justification for anyone compelling another, through the use of force or through the threat of violence, to do that to which the other person is not inclined. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written, "O ye lovers of God! In this, the cycle of Almighty God, violence and force, constraint and oppression, are one and all condemned." Let those who, driven by their passions or by their inability to exercise discipline in the control of their anger, might be tempted to inflict violence on another human being be mindful of the condemnation of such disgraceful behaviour by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Among the signs of moral downfall in the declining social order are the high incidence of violence within the family, the increase in degrading and cruel treatment of spouses and children, and the spread of sexual abuse. It is essential that the members of the community of the Greatest Name take utmost care not to be drawn into acceptance of such practices because of their prevalence. They must be ever mindful of their obligation to exemplify a new way of life distinguished by its respect for the dignity and rights of all people, by its exalted moral tone, and by its freedom from oppression and from all forms of abuse.

Consultation has been ordained by Bahá'u'lláh as the means by which agreement is to be reached and a collective course of action defined. It is applicable to the marriage partners and within the family, and indeed, in all areas where believers participate in mutual decision making. It requires all participants to express their opinions with absolute freedom and without apprehension that they will be censured or their views belittled; these prerequisites for success are unattainable if the fear of violence or abuse is present.

A number of your questions pertain to the treatment of women, and are best considered in light of the principle of the equality of the sexes which is set forth in the Bahá'í Teachings. This principle is far more than

the enunciation of admirable ideals; it has profound implications in all aspects of human relations and must be an integral element of Bahá'í domestic and community life. The application of this principle gives rise to changes in habits and practices which have prevailed for many centuries. An example of this is found in the response provided on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a question whether the traditional practice whereby the man proposes marriage to the woman is altered by the Bahá'í Teachings to permit the woman to issue a marriage proposal to the man; the response is, "The Guardian wishes to state that there is absolute equality between the two, and that no distinction or preference is permitted..." With the passage of time, during which Bahá'í men and women endeavour to apply more fully the principle of the equality of the sexes, will come a deeper understanding of the far-reaching ramifications of this vital principle. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated, "Until the reality of equality between man and woman is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible."

The Universal House of Justice has in recent years urged that encouragement be given to Bahá'í women and girls to participate in greater measure in the social, spiritual and administrative activities of their communities, and has appealed to Bahá'í women to arise and demonstrate the importance of their role in all fields of service to the Faith.

For a man to use force to impose his will on a woman is a serious transgression of the Bahá'í Teachings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that:

The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy.

Bahá'í men have the opportunity to demonstrate to the world around them a new approach to the relationship between the sexes, where aggression and the use of force are eliminated and replaced by cooperation and consultation. The Universal House of Justice has pointed out in response to questions addressed to it that, in a marriage relationship, neither husband nor wife should ever unjustly dominate the other, and that there are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other, if agreement cannot be reached through consultation; each couple

should determine exactly under what circumstances such deference is to take place.

From the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh Himself has come the following statement on the subject of the treatment of women:

The friends of God must be adorned with the ornament of justice, equity, kindness and love. As they do not allow themselves to be the object of cruelty and transgression, in like manner they should not allow such tyranny to visit the handmaidens of God. He, verily, speaketh the truth and commandeth that which benefiteth His servants and handmaidens. He is the Protector of all in this world and the next.

No Bahá'í husband should ever beat his wife, or subject her to any form of cruel treatment; to do so would be an unacceptable abuse of the marriage relationship and contrary to the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh.

The lack of spiritual values in society leads to a debasement of the attitudes which should govern the relationship between the sexes, with women being treated as no more than objects for sexual gratification and being denied the respect and courtesy to which all human beings are entitled. Bahá'u'lláh has warned: "They that follow their lusts and corrupt inclinations have erred and dissipated their efforts. They, indeed, are of the lost." Believers might well ponder the exalted standard of conduct to which they are encouraged to aspire in the statement of Bahá'u'lláh concerning His "true follower", that: "And if he met the fairest and most comely of women, he would not feel his heart seduced by the least shadow of desire for her beauty. Such an one, indeed, is the creation of spotless chastity. Thus instructeth you the Pen of the Ancient of Days, as bidden by your Lord, the Almighty, the All-Bountiful."

One of the most heinous of sexual offences is the crime of rape. When a believer is a victim, she is entitled to the loving aid and support of the members of her community, and she is free to initiate action against the perpetrator under the law of the land should she wish to do so. If she becomes pregnant as a consequence of this assault, no pressure should be brought upon her by the Bahá'í institutions to marry. As to whether she should continue or terminate the pregnancy, it is for her to decide on the course of action she should follow, taking into consideration medical and other relevant factors, and in the light of the Bahá'í Teachings. If she gives birth to a child as a result of the rape, it is left to her discretion whether to seek financial support for the maintenance of the child from

the father; however, his claim to any parental rights would, under Bahá'í law, be called into question, in view of the circumstances.

The Guardian has clarified, in letters written on his behalf, that "The Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse," and that "The proper use of the sex instinct is the natural right of every individual, and it is precisely for this very purpose that the institution of marriage has been established." In this aspect of the marital relationship, as in all others, mutual consideration and respect should apply. If a Bahá'í woman suffers abuse or is subjected to rape by her husband, she has the right to turn to the Spiritual Assembly for assistance and counsel, or to seek legal protection. Such abuse would gravely jeopardize the continuation of the marriage, and could well lead to a condition of irreconcilable antipathy.

24 January 1993

- 35 In ... responding to a believer who sought a deeper understanding on the reference to the father being regarded as head of the family, a letter written on behalf of the House of Justice stated:

As you point out in your letter, the Universal House of Justice has stated that, by inference from a number of responsibilities placed upon him, the father can be regarded as the "head" of the family. However, this term does not have the same meaning as that used generally. Rather, a new meaning should be sought in the light of the principle of the equality between men and women, and of statements of the Universal House of Justice that neither husband nor wife should ever unjustly dominate the other. The House of Justice has stated previously, in response to a question from a believer, that use of the term "head" "does not confer superiority upon the husband, nor does it give him special rights to undermine the rights of the other members of the family". It has also stated that if agreement cannot be reached following loving consultation, "there are times ... when a wife should defer to her husband, and times when a husband should defer to his wife, but neither should ever unjustly dominate the other"; this is in marked contrast to the conventional usage of the term "head" with which is associated, frequently, the unfettered right of making decisions when agreement cannot be reached between husband and wife.

15 July 1993

- 36 Preservation of unity between a married couple is of utmost importance, and if it is going to be undermined by service to the Cause, a solution must be found to remedy the situation.

In other words, whatever path you choose should be one that both serves the interests of the Faith and at the same time facilitates the strengthening of your marital union. You will note from the following excerpt from a letter written on behalf of the beloved Guardian that the friends are never encouraged to use serving the Faith as a reason to neglect their families:

Surely Shoghi Effendi would like to see you and the other friends give their whole time and energy to the Cause, for we are in great need for competent workers, but the home is an institution that Bahá'u'lláh has come to strengthen and not to weaken. Many unfortunate things have happened in Bahá'í homes just for neglecting this point. Serve the Cause but also remember your duties towards your home. It is for you to find the balance and see that neither makes you neglect the other.

18 April 1994

- 37 ...It is useful to note that the marital relationship is one that requires in many instances a profound adjustment in behaviour on the part of each partner. Because the intimacy of the relationship exposes the best and the worst in their characters, both partners are engaged in a balancing act, so to speak. Some couples are able to achieve at the outset and to maintain a high degree of harmony throughout their marriage. Many others find they must struggle for some time to attain such harmony. While it is true that the personal rights of each party to a marriage must be upheld by the other, the relationship of one to the other, it must be borne in mind, is not based solely on a legalistic premise. Love is its very foundation. This being the case, a purely litigious reaction to the misdeeds of a partner is not appropriate.

2 January 1996

- 38 The issue you have raised is of vital importance to Bahá'í couples striving to address the various needs and opportunities with which they are confronted in present-day society.ⁱ As in so many other aspects of daily life, the resolution of this issue must be sought through the comprehension and application of the Teachings of the Faith. The believers should clearly

i The believer enquired about the decisions to be made by marriage partners when both husband and wife are pursuing career opportunities which appear to be leading them along divergent paths.

understand and remain untroubled by the fact that the resulting solutions may well not be regarded as adequate by those not blessed with the bounty of acceptance of the Promised One and who are enmeshed in patterns of thought which are alien to the Bahá'í Teachings despite widespread acceptance of such patterns by the generality of humankind.

Central to the consideration of this matter must be the purpose in life of all faithful followers of Bahá'u'lláh: to know and worship God. This involves service to one's fellow human beings and in the advancement of the Cause of God. In pursuing this purpose, they should strive to develop their talents and faculties to whatever extent is possible by exploring the avenues before them.

It is inevitable, because of the limitations of this earthly plane, that believers will, in many instances, find themselves deprived of the opportunity to develop their talents to the fullest. This may be due to lack of economic resources or educational facilities, or to the necessity of meeting other obligations and fulfilling other duties, such as the freely chosen responsibilities associated with marriage and parenthood. In some circumstances it may be the result of a conscious decision to make sacrifices for the sake of the Cause, as when a pioneer undertakes to serve in a post which lacks the facilities for the development of his or her special skills and talents. However, such deprivations and limitations do not carry with them the implication that the Bahá'ís concerned are unable to fulfil their fundamental, divinely ordained purpose; they are simply elements of the universal challenge to evaluate and balance the many calls on one's time and effort in this life.

There is no one universally applicable response to the questions you have raised about the decisions to be made by marriage partners when both husband and wife are pursuing career opportunities which appear to be leading them along divergent paths, since circumstances vary so widely. Each couple should rely on the process of Bahá'í consultation to determine what is the best course of action. In so doing they might well consider the following factors, among others:

- the sense of equality which should inform consultation between husband and wife;

The Universal House of Justice has stated previously, in response to questions, that loving consultation should be the keynote of the

marriage relationship. If agreement cannot be reached, there are times when either the husband or the wife should defer to the wishes of the other; exactly under what circumstances such deference should take place is a matter for each couple to decide.

- the strong emphasis placed in the Bahá'í Writings on the preservation of the marriage bond and the strengthening of the unity between the marriage partners;
- the concept of a Bahá'í family, in which the mother is the first educator of the children, and the husband takes primary responsibility for the financial support of his family;

As has been stated elsewhere by the House of Justice, this by no means implies that these functions are inflexibly fixed and cannot be changed and adjusted to suit particular family situations.

- various special circumstances which might arise, such as job prospects during a period of widespread unemployment, unusual opportunities or abilities which one marriage partner may have, or pressing needs of the Cause which a sacrificial response may be called for.

The success of such consultation will doubtless be influenced by the prayerful attitude with which it is approached, the mutual respect of the parties for each other, their earnest desire to devise a solution which will preserve unity and harmony for themselves and the other members of their family, and their willingness to make compromises and adjustments within the context of equality.

As society evolves in the decades and centuries ahead under the transforming influence of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, it will surely experience fundamental changes which will facilitate the social application of the Bahá'í Teachings, and will ease the difficulties faced by couples seeking to fulfil their ardent desire to serve the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh through their professional activities.

26 June 1996

Parent-Child Relationships and Responsibilities

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 39 It is the bounden duty of parents to rear their children to be staunch in faith, the reason being that a child who removeth himself from the religion of God will not act in such a way as to win the good pleasure of his parents and his Lord. For every praiseworthy deed is born out of the light of religion, and lacking this supreme bestowal the child will not turn away from any evil, nor will he draw nigh unto any good.

From a Tablet

- 40 And in another Tablet, these exalted words have been revealed: O Muḥammad! The Ancient of Days hath turned His countenance towards thee, making mention of thee, and exhorting the people of God to educate their children. Should a father neglect this most weighty commandment ... he shall forfeit rights of fatherhood, and be accounted guilty before God. Well is it with him who imprinteth on his heart the admonitions of the Lord, and steadfastly cleaveth unto them. God, in truth, enjoineeth on His servants what shall assist and profit them, and enable them to draw nigh unto Him. He is the Ordainer, the Everlasting.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, no. 105

- 41 The fruits that best befit the tree of human life are trustworthiness and godliness, truthfulness and sincerity; but greater than all, after recognition of the unity of God, praised and glorified be He, is regard for the rights that are due to one's parents. This teaching hath been mentioned in all the Books of God, and reaffirmed by the Most Exalted Pen. Consider that which the Merciful Lord hath revealed in the Qur'án, exalted are His words: "Worship ye God, join with Him no peer or likeness; and show forth kindness and charity towards your parents..." Observe how loving-kindness

to one's parents hath been linked to recognition of the one true God! Happy they who are endued with true wisdom and understanding, who see and perceive, who read and understand, and who observe that which God hath revealed in the Holy Books of old, and in this incomparable and wondrous Tablet.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Questions and Answers, no. 106

- 42 The Pen of Glory counselleth everyone regarding the instruction and education of children. Behold that which the Will of God hath revealed upon Our arrival in the Prison City and recorded in the Most Holy Book.ⁱ Unto every father hath been enjoined the instruction of his son and daughter in the art of reading and writing and in all that hath been laid down in the Holy Tablet. He that putteth away that which is commanded unto him, the Trustees are then to take from him that which is required for their instruction, if he be wealthy, and if not the matter devolveth upon the House of Justice.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 43 That which is of paramount importance for the children, that which must precede all else, is to teach them the oneness of God and the laws of God. For lacking this, the fear of God cannot be inculcated, and lacking the fear of God an infinity of odious and abominable actions will spring up, and sentiments will be uttered that transgress all bounds...

The parents must exert every effort to rear their offspring to be religious, for should the children not attain this greatest of adornments, they will not obey their parents, which in a certain sense means that they will not obey God. Indeed, such children will show no consideration to anyone, and will do exactly as they please.

From a Tablet

- 44 Say, O My people! Show honour to your parents and pay homage to them. This will cause blessings to descend upon you from the clouds of the bounty of your Lord, the Exalted, the Great.

From a Tablet

- 45 One of the distinguishing characteristics of this most great Dispensation is that the kin of such as have recognized and embraced the truth of this

i The Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

Revelation and have, in the glory of His name, the Sovereign Lord, quaffed the choice, sealed wine from the chalice of the love of the one true God, will, upon their death, if they are outwardly non-believers, be graciously invested with divine forgiveness and partake of the ocean of His Mercy.

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

From a Tablet

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

- 46 O ye my two beloved children! The news of your union, as soon as it reached me, imparted infinite joy and gratitude. Praise be to God, those two faithful birds have sought shelter in one nest. I beseech God that He may enable them to raise an honoured family, for the importance of marriage lieth in the bringing up of a richly blessed family, so that with entire gladness they may, even as candles, illuminate the world. For the enlightenment of the world dependeth upon the existence of man. If man did not exist in this world, it would have been like a tree without fruit. My hope is that you both may become even as one tree, and may, through the outpourings of the cloud of loving-kindness, acquire freshness and charm, and may blossom and yield fruit, so that your line may eternally endure.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 88

- 47 Were there no educator, all souls would remain savage, and were it not for the teacher, the children would be ignorant creatures.

It is for this reason that, in this new cycle, education and training are recorded in the Book of God as obligatory and not voluntary. That is, it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son, to nurse them from the breast of knowledge and to rear them in the bosom of sciences and arts. Should they neglect this matter, they shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 98

- 48 Ye should consider the question of goodly character as of the first importance. It is incumbent upon every father and mother to counsel their children over a long period, and guide them unto those things which lead to everlasting honour.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 108

- 49 Let the mothers consider that whatever concerneth the education of children is of the first importance. Let them put forth every effort in this regard, for when the bough is green and tender it will grow in whatever way ye train it. Therefore is it incumbent upon the mothers to rear their little ones even as a gardener tendeth his young plants. Let them strive by day and by night to establish within their children faith and certitude, the fear of God, the love of the Beloved of the worlds, and all good qualities and traits. Whensoever a mother seeth that her child hath done well, let her praise and applaud him and cheer his heart; and if the slightest undesirable trait should manifest itself, let her counsel the child and punish him, and use means based on reason, even a slight verbal chastisement should this be necessary. It is not, however, permissible to strike a child, or vilify him, for the child's character will be totally perverted if he be subjected to blows or verbal abuse.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 95

- 50 While the children are yet in their infancy feed them from the breast of heavenly grace, foster them in the cradle of all excellence, rear them in the embrace of bounty. Give them the advantage of every useful kind of knowledge. Let them share in every new and rare and wondrous craft and art. Bring them up to work and strive, and accustom them to hardship. Teach them to dedicate their lives to matters of great import, and inspire them to undertake studies that will benefit mankind.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 102

- 51 If thou wouldst show kindness and consideration to thy parents so that they may feel generally pleased, this would also please Me, for parents must be highly respected and it is essential that they should feel contented, provided they deter thee not from gaining access to the Threshold of the Almighty, nor keep thee back from walking in the way of the Kingdom. Indeed it behoveth them to encourage and spur thee on in this direction.

From a Tablet

- 52 Likewise, parents endure the greatest toil and trouble for their children, and often, by the time the latter have reached the age of maturity, the former have hastened to the world beyond. Rarely do the mother and father enjoy in this world the rewards of all the pain and trouble they have endured for their children. The children must therefore, in return for this pain and trouble, make charitable contributions and perform good works in their name, and implore pardon and forgiveness for their souls. You should therefore, in return for the love and kindness of your father, give to the poor in his name and, with the utmost lowliness and fervour, pray for God's pardon and forgiveness and seek His infinite mercy.

Some Answered Questions, sec. 62

- 53 Regarding thy question about consultation of a father with his son, or a son with his father, in matters of trade and commerce, consultation is one of the fundamental elements of the foundation of the Law of God. Such consultation is assuredly acceptable, whether between father and son, or with others. There is nothing better than this. Man must consult in all things for this will lead him to the depths of each problem and enable him to find the right solution.

From a Tablet

- 54 O dear one of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! Be the son of thy father and be the fruit of that tree. Be a son that hath been born of his soul and heart and not only of water and clay. A real son is such a one as hath branched from the spiritual part of man. I ask God that thou mayest be at all times confirmed and strengthened.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 117

- 55 The father must always endeavour to educate his son and to acquaint him with the heavenly teachings. He must give him advice and exhort him at all times, teach him praiseworthy conduct and character, enable him to receive training at school and to be instructed in such arts and sciences as are deemed useful and necessary. In brief, let him instil into his mind the virtues and perfections of the world of humanity. Above all he should continually call to his mind the remembrance of God so that his throbbing veins and arteries may pulsate with the love of God.

The son, on the other hand, must show forth the utmost obedience towards his father, and should conduct himself as a humble and a lowly

servant. Day and night he should seek diligently to ensure the comfort and welfare of his loving father and to secure his good pleasure. He must forgo his own rest and enjoyment and constantly strive to bring gladness to the hearts of his father and mother, that thereby he may attain the good pleasure of the Almighty and be graciously aided by the hosts of the unseen.

From a Tablet

- 56 Among the safeguards of the Holy Faith is the training of children, and this is among the weightiest of principles in all the Divine Teachings. Thus from the very beginning mothers must rear their infants in the cradle of good morals—for it is the mothers who are the first educators—so that, when the child cometh to maturity, he will prove to be endowed with all the virtues and qualities that are worthy of praise.

And further, according to the Divine commandments, every child must learn reading and writing, and acquire such branches of knowledge as are useful and necessary, as well as learning an art or skill. The utmost care must be devoted to these matters; any neglect of them, any failure to act on them, is not permissible.

Observe how many penal institutions, houses of detention and places of torture are made ready to receive the sons of men, the purpose being to prevent them, by punitive measures, from committing terrible crimes—whereas this very torment and punishment only increaseth depravity, and by such means the desired aim cannot be properly achieved.

Therefore must the individual be trained from his infancy in such a way that he will never undertake to commit a crime, will, rather, direct all his energies to the acquisition of excellence, and will look upon the very commission of an evil deed as in itself the harshest of all punishments, considering the sinful act itself to be far more grievous than any prison sentence. For it is possible so to train the individual that, although crime may not be completely done away with, still it will become very rare.

The purport is this, that to train the character of humankind is one of the weightiest commandments of God, and the influence of such training is the same as that which the sun exerteth over tree and fruit. Children must be most carefully watched over, protected and trained; in such consisteth true parenthood and parental mercy.

Otherwise, the children will turn into weeds growing wild, and become the cursed, Infernal Tree,ⁱ knowing not right from wrong, distinguishing not the highest of human qualities from all that is mean and vile; they will be brought up in vainglory, and will be hated of the Forgiving Lord.

Wherefore doth every child, new-risen in the garden of Heavenly love, require the utmost training and care.

From a Tablet

From letters on Behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 57 It is surely a very unfortunate case when the parents and children differ on some grave issues of life such as marriage, but the best way is not to flout each other's opinion nor to discuss it in a charged atmosphere but rather try to settle it in an amicable way.

Bahá'u'lláh definitely says that the consent of the parents should be obtained before the marriage is sanctioned and that undoubtedly has great wisdom. It will at least detain young people from marrying without considering the subject thoroughly. It is in conformity with this teaching of the Cause that Shoghi Effendi cabled that the consent of your parents should be obtained.

29 May 1929

- 58 The Guardian was also made very happy to know that you have been blessed with a child whose presence, he feels certain, will contribute to the greater well-being and happiness of you both, and to the further enrichment of your Bahá'í family life. He will pray that under your loving care and guidance this dear child may grow in body, as well as in spirit, and receive such a training as will enable him, later on, to whole-heartedly embrace and serve the Cause. This is indeed your most sacred obligation as Bahá'í parents, and upon the manner and degree of its fulfilment will assuredly depend the success and happiness of your family life.

21 July 1938

- 59 As regards your savings: the Guardian would advise you to act with moderation, and while he would certainly approve of your desire to contribute generously to the Cause, he would urge you at the same time to take into

i The Zaqqúm, Qur'án 37:62, 44:43.

consideration your duties and responsibilities towards your parents, who, as you state, are in need of your financial assistance.

10 November 1939

- 60 The task of bringing up a Bahá'í child, as emphasized time and again in Bahá'í writings, is the chief responsibility of the mother, whose unique privilege is indeed to create in her home such conditions as would be most conducive to both his material and spiritual welfare and advancement. The training which a child first receives through his mother constitutes the strongest foundation for his future development, and it should therefore be the paramount concern of your wife ... to endeavour from now imparting to her new-born son such spiritual training as would enable him later on to fully assume and adequately discharge all the responsibilities and duties of Bahá'í life.

16 November 1939

- 61 With reference to the question of the training of children:ⁱ given the emphasis placed by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the necessity for the parents to train their children while still in their tender age, it would seem preferable that they should receive their first training at home at the hand of their mother, rather than be sent to a nursery. Should circumstances, however, compel a Bahá'í mother to adopt the latter course there can be no objection.

13 November 1940

- 62 The question of the training and education of children in case one of the parents is a non-Bahá'í is one which solely concerns the parents themselves, who should decide about it the way they find best and most conducive to the maintenance of the unity of their family, and to the future welfare of their children. Once the child comes of age, however, he should be given

i The incoming letter to the Guardian states:

Another question, regarding the education of children, has arisen. A few of us who are expecting babies are anticipating placing our older children (2½ to 3 years) in ... Nursery School which is an excellent school, known throughout the country for its fine child guidance methods, since we felt we would be inadequate parents for a number of months, and because there are no playmates of these children's ages in our vicinity. The great objection seems to be that, according to the Writings, the mother is the most important teacher until the child is 6 or 7 years old. Naturally, we wish to do what is best and would appreciate your help.

full freedom to choose his religion, irrespective of the wishes and desires of his parents.

14 December 1940

- 63 Deep as are family ties, we must always remember that the spiritual ties are far deeper; they are everlasting and survive death, whereas physical ties, unless supported by spiritual bonds, are confined to this life. You should do all in your power, through prayer and example, to open the eyes of your family to the Bahá'í Faith, but do not grieve too much over their actions. Turn to your Bahá'í brothers and sisters who are living with you in the light of the Kingdom.

Indeed the believers have not yet fully learned to draw on each other's love for strength and consolation in time of need. The Cause of God is endowed with tremendous powers, and the reason the believers do not gain more from it is because they have not learned to fully draw on these mighty forces of love and strength and harmony generated by the Faith.

8 May 1942

- 64 Regarding the Guardian's statement that pioneering is conditioned upon the consent of parents and that it would be necessary for them to concur, you have asked whether this ruling applies equally to children who are of age and those who are not. The Guardian's reply is that the ruling applies only to those who have not yet come of age.

18 January 1943

- 65 Bahá'u'lláh has clearly stated the consent of all living parents is required for a Bahá'í marriage. This applies whether the parents are Bahá'ís or non-Bahá'ís, divorced for years or not. This great law He has laid down to strengthen the social fabric, to knit closer the ties of the home, to place a certain gratitude and respect in the hearts of children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator. We Bahá'ís must realize that in present-day society the exact opposite process is taking place: young people care less and less for their parents' wishes, divorce is considered a natural right, and obtained on the flimsiest and most unwarrantable and shabby pretexts. People separated from each other, especially if one of them has had full custody of the children, are only too willing to belittle the importance of the partner in marriage also responsible as a parent for bringing those children into this

world. The Bahá'ís must, through rigid adherence to the Bahá'í laws and teachings, combat these corrosive forces which are so rapidly destroying home life and the beauty of family relationships, and tearing down the moral structure of society.

25 October 1947

- 66 Up to the age of fifteen years, children are under the direction of their parents. At the age of fifteen, they may declare their Faith as a conviction, and be registered as Bahá'í youth, whether the parents are Bahá'ís or not. Children under the age of fifteen, of Bahá'í parents, who wish to attend meetings and associate with the friends as Bahá'ís may do so. If non-Bahá'í parents permit a child of less than fifteen to attend Bahá'í meetings, and in fact, to be a Bahá'í, this is likewise permissible.

23 July 1954

- 67 If the condition of the health of your parents is such that your presence is really needed, then you should not leave them. If, however, there is some other relative who could care for them, then you could help with the work in ... and aid the friends in establishing the Faith on a solid foundation there.

28 October 1955

From letters by the Universal House of Justiceⁱ

- 68 Although the mother's part in the bringing up of the children is very great indeed, we feel that it is crucial not to underestimate the importance of the responsibility that the Writings place upon the father in this area. There is a current tendency for fathers to leave the education of children to their mothers to an entirely unjustifiable degree, and we would not wish the impression to be given that the Bahá'í teachings confirm such an attitude.

28 February 1989

- 69 Our children need to be nurtured spiritually and to be integrated into the life of the Cause. They should not be left to drift in a world so laden with moral dangers. In the current state of society, children face a cruel fate. Millions and millions in country after country are dislocated socially.

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

Children find themselves alienated by parents and other adults whether they live in conditions of wealth or poverty. This alienation has its roots in a selfishness that is born of materialism that is at the core of the godlessness seizing the hearts of people everywhere. The social dislocation of children in our time is a sure mark of a society in decline; this condition is not, however, confined to any race, class, nation or economic condition—it cuts across them all. It grieves our hearts to realize that in so many parts of the world children are employed as soldiers, exploited as labourers, sold into virtual slavery, forced into prostitution, made the objects of pornography, abandoned by parents centred on their own desires, and subjected to other forms of victimization too numerous to mention. Many such horrors are inflicted by the parents themselves upon their own children. The spiritual and psychological damage defies estimation. Our worldwide community cannot escape the consequences of these conditions. This realization should spur us all to urgent and sustained effort in the interests of children and the future...

Children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in them are the promise and guarantee of the future. They bear the seeds of the character of future society which is largely shaped by what the adults constituting the community do or fail to do with respect to children. They are a trust no community can neglect with impunity. An all-embracing love of children, the manner of treating them, the quality of the attention shown them, the spirit of adult behaviour toward them—these are all among the vital aspects of the requisite attitude. Love demands discipline, the courage to accustom children to hardship, not to indulge their whims or leave them entirely to their own devices. An atmosphere needs to be maintained in which children feel that they belong to the community and share in its purpose. They must lovingly but insistently be guided to live up to Bahá'í standards, to study and teach the Cause in ways that are suited to their circumstances...

And now we wish to address a few words to parents, who bear the primary responsibility for the upbringing of their children. We appeal to them to give constant attention to the spiritual education of their children. Some parents appear to think that this is the exclusive responsibility of the community; others believe that in order to preserve the independence of children to investigate truth, the Faith should not be taught to them. Still others feel inadequate to take on such a task. None of this is correct. The beloved Master has said that “it is enjoined upon the father and mother, as

a duty, to strive with all effort to train the daughter and the son,” adding that, “should they neglect this matter, they shall be held responsible and worthy of reproach in the presence of the stern Lord.” Independent of the level of their education, parents are in a critical position to shape the spiritual development of their children. They should not ever underestimate their capacity to mould their children’s moral character. For they exercise indispensable influence through the home environment they consciously create by their love of God, their striving to adhere to His laws, their spirit of service to His Cause, their lack of fanaticism, and their freedom from the corrosive effects of backbiting. Every parent who is a believer in the Blessed Beauty has the responsibility to conduct herself or himself in such a way as to elicit the spontaneous obedience to parents to which the Teachings attach so high a value. Of course, in addition to the efforts made at home, the parents should support Bahá’í children’s classes provided by the community. It must be borne in mind, too, that children live in a world that informs them of harsh realities through direct experience with the horrors already described or through the unavoidable outpourings of the mass media. Many of them are thereby forced to mature prematurely, and among these are those who look for standards and discipline by which to guide their lives. Against this gloomy backdrop of a decadent society, Bahá’í children should shine as the emblems of a better future.

Riḍván 2000

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

70 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 23 June 1977 in which you express the ardent desire of yourself and your husband to see your children grow as active supporters of the Faith, and you ask whether, in view of the responsibilities of Bahá’í parents in the pioneering field, the seeming sufferings the children bear as the result of their parents’ commitments in service to the Cause will somehow be compensated. We have been asked by the Universal House of Justice to convey to you the following points.

In considering this problem it is important to bear in mind the reality of the unity of the family, and the children’s part in its activities...

It should also be realized that a child, from early life, is a conscious and thinking soul, a member of his family with his own duties towards it, and

is able to make his own sacrifices for the Faith in many ways. It is suggested that the children should be made to feel that they are given the privilege and opportunity of participating in the decisions as to the services their parents are able to offer, thus making their own conscious decision to accept those services with consequence for their own lives. Indeed, the children can be led to realize that it is the earnest wish of their parents to undertake such services with their children's whole-hearted support.

23 August 1977

- 71 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter mailed 19 February 1982 in which you express your ardent desire to fulfil your responsibilities as a mother to guide your children aright and enable them to become firm supporters of the Cause of the Blessed Beauty. We are asked to convey to you the following points...

The House of Justice shares your concern that children from homes of devoted Bahá'í parents have left the Faith. Unfortunately there have been cases where parents have served the Cause to the detriment of the children and the family unit...

There are many hints in the writings concerning the guidance which parents should give their children. Perhaps you have studied *A Compilation on Bahá'í Education*...

This compilation contains many references to the importance of family unity. If children are raised in homes where the family is happy and united, where thoughts and actions are directed to spiritual matters and the progress of the Cause, there is every reason to believe that the children will acquire heavenly qualities and become defenders of His Faith.

It is hoped that the above will offer assistance and reassurance and enable you to approach the duties of motherhood with joy and confidence. In parenthood, as in so many fields of endeavour, we can but do our best, aware that we shall inevitably fall short of the perfect standards towards which we strive, but confident that God will support those who labour in the path of His Faith, will answer our prayers and will make good our deficiencies.

29 March 1982

- 72 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 14 September 1982 concerning the role of Local Spiritual Assemblies in guiding parents

and children in standards of behaviour for children at community gatherings, such as Nineteen Day Feasts and Bahá'í Holy Day observances.

...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

- 73 No detailed elaboration has been found in the Writings of the points covered in the statement by 'Abdu'l-Bahá which you quoted in your letter; the statement must be perceived in the total context of the Tablet from which it was excerpted.ⁱ It gives emphasis to the requisites for the training of the young from their earliest years to enable them to meet the challenges of adult life and to contribute towards maintaining the norms of a balanced, progressive society; and it underscores the serious consequences that may be normally expected if due attention is not given to such requisites. In a society wholly regulated by the laws and ordinances brought by Bahá'u'lláh it will be easier to appreciate the framework in which these requisites will produce their maximum effect.

'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement, it should be noted, refers to attempts made by others. It does not refer to the individual's own efforts to learn and

i The statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá is as follows: "It is extremely difficult to teach the individual and refine his character once puberty is passed." See *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, paragraph 111.7.

refine his own character. Fortunately, there exist the repeated promises in our sacred writings of the dispensations of God's mercy which are accessible to errant souls, and we have proof from the lives of the heroes of the Faith, as well as from those of ordinary people, of the power of one's faith in God to change behaviour. As you know, a principal purpose for the coming of the Manifestation is to transform the character of individuals and, through them, the character of society as a whole. Thus He lays down laws and ordinances which enable such a broad change to occur; the ideal end is achieved gradually through individual struggle, trial and error, and, above all, steadfast faith in God.

4 June 1984

- 74 With regard to your question whether mothers should work outside the home, it is helpful to consider the matter from the perspective of the concept of a Bahá'í family. This concept is based on the principle that the man has primary responsibility for the financial support of the family, and the woman is the chief and primary educator of the children. This by no means implies that these functions are inflexibly fixed and cannot be changed and adjusted to suit particular family situations, nor does it mean that the place of the woman is confined to the home. Rather, while primary responsibility is assigned, it is anticipated that fathers would play a significant role in the education of the children and women could also be breadwinners. As you rightly indicated, 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged women to "participate fully and equally in the affairs of the world".

In relation to your specific queries, the decision concerning the amount of time a mother may spend in working outside the home depends on circumstances existing within the home, which may vary from time to time. Family consultation will help to provide the answers. As to the question whether courses of professional training will in future be more flexible, the House of Justice points out that future conditions will dictate such matters.

9 August 1984

- 75 The seeker to whom you refer seems to have misconstrued the Bahá'í teachings about the responsibility of the parents for the education of their children. The father certainly has a very important role to play. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself, Bahá'u'lláh revealed:

Unto every father hath been enjoined the instruction of his son and daughter in the art of reading and writing and in all that hath been laid down in the Holy Tablet ... He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My glory, My loving-kindness, My mercy, that have compassed the world.

The great importance attached to the mother's role derives from the fact that she is the first educator of the child. Her attitude, her prayers, even what she eats and her physical condition have a great influence on the child when it is still in the womb. When the child is born, it is she who has been endowed by God with the milk which is the first food designed for it, and it is intended that, if possible, she should be with the baby to train and nurture it in its earliest days and months. This does not mean that the father does not also love, pray for, and care for his baby, but as he has the primary responsibility of providing for the family, his time to be with his child is usually limited, while the mother is usually closely associated with the baby during this intensely formative time when it is growing and developing faster than it ever will again during the whole of its life. As the child grows older and more independent, the relative nature of its relationship with its mother and father modifies and the father can play a greater role.

It may be helpful to stress to your seeker that the Bahá'í principle of the equality of men and women is clearly stated in the teachings, and the fact that there is diversity of function between them in certain areas does not negate this principle.

23 August 1984

- 76 The House of Justice recognizes full well the suffering that many women go through as single mothers, taking the entire responsibility for raising and supporting their children. The purpose of the Bahá'í Faith is to effect a fundamental transformation in the whole basis of human society, which will involve the spiritualization of mankind, the achievement of unity in human relationships and the acceptance of such vital principles as that of the equality of men and women; as a result, the stability of marriage will be enhanced, and there will be a drastic decrease in the conditions giving rise to marriage breakdowns. To attain this objective speedily, the Bahá'í community must continue to attract the spiritual powers indispensable

for its success; this requires strict adherence to the principles set out in the Bahá'í teachings, with confidence that the wisdom underlying these teachings will gradually become apparent to the generality of mankind.

11 January 1988

- 77 The issues you have raisedⁱ are best considered in the light of the Bahá'í teachings concerning family relationships. There should be a spirit of mutual respect and consideration between parents and children, in which the children turn to their parents for advice and direction, and the parents train and nurture their offspring. The fruit of this relationship is that the children grow into adulthood with their powers of discrimination and judgement refined, so that they can steer the course of their lives in a manner most conducive to their welfare.

Within the framework of this mutual respect, the parents are called upon to show wisdom and discretion when their offspring are developing friendships which might ultimately lead to marriage. They should consider carefully the circumstances under which advice should be given, and conditions under which their intervention would be construed as interference.

For their part, the offspring should recognize that their parents are deeply interested in their welfare, and that the views of the parents warrant respect and careful consideration.

As you know, the initial choice of marriage partner is made by the two individuals directly involved, and the consent of all living parents is then sought, and is required for the marriage to take place.

In this matter, as in all aspects of human relations, consultation is of great value in resolving misunderstandings and in clarifying what is the best course of behaviour in the light of the Bahá'í teachings.

25 July 1988

- 78 Teaching the Cause is undoubtedly the most meritorious of all deeds, and the friends are doubly blessed when they combine teaching with pioneering. Attending to the needs of the family is also of paramount spiritual importance, and it is not permissible to ignore the development of the family so as to serve the Faith in a particular way. Teaching the Faith and meeting the needs of the family must both be regarded as high on the scale of service to God, but the particular circumstances of a family determine the degree to

i Concerning parental consent.

which each must be dealt with. It is inevitable that the children of pioneers are called upon to share the sacrifices of their parents when they move to a foreign field, just as the children of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá shared Their sacrifices. But it should not be forgotten that the children also partake of the spiritual blessings and rewards of pioneering.

8 February 1990

- 79 You have raised several questions about the treatment of children. It is clear from the Bahá'í Writings that a vital component of the education of children is the exercise of discipline. Shoghi Effendi has stated, in a letter written on his behalf about the education of children, that:

Discipline of some sort, whether physical, moral or intellectual is indeed indispensable, and no training can be said to be complete and fruitful if it disregards this element. The child when born is far from being perfect. It is not only helpless, but actually is imperfect, and even is naturally inclined towards evil. He should be trained, his natural inclinations harmonized, adjusted and controlled, and if necessary suppressed or regulated, so as to ensure his healthy physical and moral development. Bahá'í parents cannot simply adopt an attitude of non-resistance towards their children, particularly those who are unruly and violent by nature. It is not even sufficient that they should pray on their behalf. Rather they should endeavour to inculcate, gently and patiently, into their youthful minds such principles of moral conduct and initiate them into the principles and teachings of the Cause with such tactful and loving care as would enable them to become "true sons of God" and develop into loyal and intelligent citizens of His Kingdom...

While the physical discipline of children is an acceptable part of their education and training, such actions are to be carried out "gently and patiently" and with "loving care", far removed from the anger and violence with which children are beaten and abused in some parts of the world. To treat children in such an abhorrent manner is a denial of their human rights, and a betrayal of the trust which the weak should have in the strong in a Bahá'í community.

It is difficult to imagine a more reprehensible perversion of human conduct than the sexual abuse of children, which finds its most debased form in incest. At a time in the fortunes of humanity when, in the words of the Guardian, "The perversion of human nature, the degradation of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions,

reveal themselves ... in their worst and most revolting aspects,” and when “the voice of human conscience is stilled,” when “the sense of decency and shame is obscured,” the Bahá’í institutions must be uncompromising and vigilant in their commitment to the protection of the children entrusted to their care, and must not allow either threats or appeals to expediency to divert them from their duty. A parent who is aware that the marriage partner is subjecting a child to such sexual abuse should not remain silent, but must take all necessary measures, with the assistance of the Spiritual Assembly or civil authorities if necessary, to bring about an immediate cessation of such grossly immoral behaviour, and to promote healing and therapy.

Bahá’u’lláh has placed great emphasis on the duties of parents toward their children, and He has urged children to have gratitude in their hearts for their parents, whose good pleasure they should strive to win as a means of pleasing God Himself. However, He has indicated that under certain circumstances, the parents could be deprived of the right of parenthood as a consequence of their actions. The Universal House of Justice has the right to legislate on this matter. It has decided for the present that all cases should be referred to it in which the conduct or character of a parent appears to render him unworthy of having such parental rights as that of giving consent to marriage. Such questions could arise, for example, when a parent has committed incest, or when the child was conceived as a consequence of rape, and also when a parent consciously fails to protect the child from flagrant sexual abuse.

24 January 1993

- 80 ...Although Bahá’í children do not automatically inherit the Faith of their parents, the parents are responsible for the upbringing and spiritual welfare of their children. Bahá’í parents must therefore strive to convey to their children from their earliest days an awareness of God and love for Him, and must endeavour to guide the children into wholehearted obedience to the exhortations, ordinances and laws of Bahá’u’lláh. Among these is the recognition of and love for all the Manifestations of God, association with the followers of all religions, friendship towards all human beings, and the importance of the independent investigation of truth. It is natural, therefore, to regard the children of Bahá’ís as Bahá’í unless there is a reason to conclude the contrary. With such a basis of knowledge and understanding each child will be better equipped to think clearly and judge for himself

as to what course he should follow upon reaching the age of maturity or in his adult life.

26 January 1994

- 81 There are many passages in the Sacred Writings that emphasize the importance of family unity, and the great responsibility that children have toward their parents and parents toward their children. In this regard, Bahá'ís are indeed called to be obedient to their parents...

One of the most important principles of the Faith, however, is the principle of moderation in all things. Even virtues, if they are carried to excess and are not balanced by other, complementary virtues, can cause untold harm. For example, a child should not be expected to obey a parent's instruction to commit a sin. There is a danger, furthermore, in aggrandizing any single law in isolation either from the fundamental principles that underlie it or from other laws. As explained by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the unity of the family is of critical importance, but must be balanced against the rights of each member of the family:

According to the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh the family, being a human unit, must be educated according to the rules of sanctity. All the virtues must be taught the family. The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered, and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved, yet the unity of the family must be sustained. The injury of one shall be considered the injury of all; the comfort of each, the comfort of all; the honour of one, the honour of all.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace Another fundamental principle that should influence a Bahá'í's understanding of and approach to the requirement to be obedient to parents is the exhortation to consult in all things. According to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, consultation is, in fact, "one of the fundamental elements of the foundation of the Law of God." If, through consultation, a child and parent can deepen their understanding of each other's viewpoint and achieve unity of thought and purpose, then conflicts over obedience can be avoided.

With respect to your discussion of the relationship between obedience to parents on the one hand and individual self-expression, freedom, and spiritual growth on the other, the House of Justice suggests an alternative understanding for your consideration. Although individual persons are responsible for their own actions and spiritual development, individuals do not exist in isolation, but as parts of families and communities. Deciding to forgo one's personal wishes in deference to one's parents—or to the institutions of the Faith, civil authorities, or the law for that matter—represents an expression of free will, not a curtailment of it. By choosing to obey, a child can contribute to unity of the family and thereby further the Cause of God.

24 September 1997

Enhancing Family Life

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 82 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 the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá' and other scriptures. Verily He is the All-Hearing, the Answerer, He Who perceiveth all things.

From a Tablet

- 83 The beginning of magnanimity is when man expendeth his wealth on himself, on his family and on the poor among his brethren in his Faith.

The essence of wealth is love for Me; whoso loveth Me is the possessor of all things, and he that loveth Me not is indeed of the poor and needy. This is that which the Finger of Glory and Splendour hath revealed.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 84 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 Ḥuqúqu'lláh. If the people attain the privilege of paying the Ḥuqúq, 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.

From a Tablet

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

- 85 I beseech God to graciously make of thy home a centre for the diffusion of the light of divine guidance, for the dissemination of the Words of God and for enkindling at all times the fire of love in the hearts of His faithful servants and maidservants. Know thou of a certainty that every house wherein the anthem of praise is raised to the Realm of Glory in celebration of the Name of God is indeed a heavenly home, and one of the gardens of delight in the Paradise of God.

From a Tablet

- 86 If love and agreement are manifest in a single family, that family will advance, become illumined and spiritual; but if enmity and hatred exist within it, destruction and dispersion are inevitable.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 87 Compare the nations of the world to the members of a family. A family is a nation in miniature. Simply enlarge the circle of the household, and you have the nation. Enlarge the circle of nations, and you have all humanity. The conditions surrounding the family surround the nation. The happenings in the family are the happenings in the life of the nation. Would it add to the progress and advancement of a family if dissensions should arise among its members, all fighting, pillaging each other, jealous and revengeful of injury, seeking selfish advantage? Nay, this would be the cause of the effacement of progress and advancement. So it is in the great family of nations, for nations are but an aggregate of families. Therefore, as strife and dissension destroy a family and prevent its progress, so nations are destroyed and advancement hindered.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 88 Treat all thy friends and relatives, even strangers, with a spirit of utmost love and kindness.

From a Tablet

- 89 Be thou not unhappy; the tempest of sorrow shall pass; regret will not last; disappointment will vanish; the fire of the love of God will become enkindled, and the thorns and briars of sadness and despondency will be consumed! Be thou happy; rest thou assured upon the favours of Bahá, so that uncertainty and hesitation may become non-existent and the invisible outpourings descend upon the arena of being! ...

If the friends and relatives are keeping themselves at a distance from thee, be thou not sad, for God is near to thee. Associate thou, as much as thou canst, with the relatives and strangers; display thou loving kindness; show thou forth the utmost patience and resignation. The more they oppose thee, shower thou upon them the greater justice and equity; the more they show hatred and opposition toward thee, challenge thou them with great truthfulness, friendship and reconciliation.

Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas, vol. 3, pp. 557-558

- 90 O ye kind brothers who tread the path of God! Render thanks to Him that ye have combined both physical and spiritual brotherhood, that your inner reality hath become even as the outer, and that your outer reality hath come to express the inner. The sweetness of this brotherhood regaleth the soul and the savour of this kinship delighteth the heart. Praise ye God that, even as thankful birds, ye have built your nests in His gardens. And so will ye nestle together hereafter, in the rose-garden of the All-Merciful in the Abhá Kingdom, upon the branches of the divine Lote-Tree. For ye are birds of the meadow of guidance and the nightingales of the bower of bounty. What a stupendous grace, what a mighty bestowal is this! Render thanks, then, unto God for this abounding grace and glorious attainment.

From a Tablet

- 91 Diffuse the glad-tidings of the Kingdom far and wide to the ears, promulgate the Word of God, and put into practice the advices and covenants of God; that is, arise ye with such qualities and attributes that ye may continually bestow life to the body of the world, and nurse the infants of the universe up to the station of maturity and perfection. Enkindle with all your might in every meeting the light of the love of God, gladden and cheer every heart with the utmost loving-kindness, show forth your love to the strangers just as you show forth to your relations. If a soul is seeking to quarrel, ask ye for reconciliation; if he blame ye, praise [him]; if he give you a deadly poison, bestow ye an all-healing antidote; if he createth death,

administer ye eternal life; if he becometh a thorn, change ye into roses and hyacinths. Perchance, through such deeds and words, this darkened world will become illuminated, this terrestrial universe will become transformed into a heavenly realm, and this satanic prison become a divine court; warfare and bloodshed be annihilated, and love and faithfulness hoist the tent of unity upon the apex of the world.

Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas, vol. 3, pp. 503-504

- 92 Every imperfect soul is self-centred and thinketh only of his own good. But as his thoughts expand a little he will begin to think of the welfare and comfort of his family. If his ideas still more widen, his concern will be the felicity of his fellow citizens; and if still they widen, he will be thinking of the glory of his land and of his race. But when ideas and views reach the utmost degree of expansion and attain the stage of perfection, then will he be interested in the exaltation of humankind. He will then be the well-wisher of all men and the seeker of the weal and prosperity of all lands. This is indicative of perfection.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 34

- 93 O Lord! In this Most Great Dispensation Thou dost accept the intercession of children in behalf of their parents. This is one of the special infinite bestowals of this Dispensation. Therefore, O Thou kind Lord, accept the request of this Thy servant at the threshold of Thy singleness and submerge his father in the ocean of Thy grace, because this son hath arisen to render Thee service and is exerting effort at all times in the pathway of Thy love. Verily, Thou art the Giver, the Forgiver and the Kind!

Bahá'í Prayers

- 94 O handmaids of the Merciful! Render ye thanks unto the Ancient Beauty that ye have been raised up and gathered together in this mightiest of centuries, this most illumined of ages. As befitting thanks for such a bounty, stand ye staunch and strong in the Covenant and, following the precepts of God and the holy Law, suckle your children from their infancy with the milk of a universal education, and rear them so that from their earliest days, within their inmost heart, their very nature, a way of life will be firmly established that will conform to the divine Teachings in all things.

For mothers are the first educators, the first mentors; and truly it is the mothers who determine the happiness, the future greatness, the courte-

ous ways and learning and judgement, the understanding and the faith of their little ones.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 96

- 95 O thou who hast newly blossomed in the bower of God's love! Render thanks unto Him that thou hast come into being from the seed of His loved ones, hast been nursed at the breast of His love and art being reared in the bosom of His knowledge. It is my ardent wish that thou mayest nurture the hopes of thy mother and thy father, grow cypress-tall in the garden of their earnest desires, become the sweet and tender fruit of the tree of their aspirations, engage in service to the Word of God, and bring honour and glory to His Cause.

From a Tablet

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 96 A truly Bahá'í home is a true fortress upon which the Cause can rely while planning its campaigns. If ... and ... love each other and would like to marry, Shoghi Effendi does not wish them to think that by doing so they are depriving themselves of the privilege of service; in fact such a union will enhance their ability to serve. There is nothing more beautiful than to have young Bahá'ís marry and found truly Bahá'í homes, the type Bahá'u'lláh wishes them to be.

6 November 1932

- 97 He was deeply grieved to learn of your family difficulties, of your troubles and anxieties, and he would like you not to lose heart, to be patient and confident in the unfailing guidance and help of the Almighty. We have all our petty material obstacles in this life. We cannot totally get rid of them. The best thing to do, after all our efforts have failed to deliver us, is to concentrate on that which can alone bring real happiness and peace to our heart. And you should be thankful to God for having enabled you to recognize and accept His Faith. For this is, assuredly, the only source of joy and consolation you can have in your moments of suffering. Is there anything more worthwhile to work for than the teaching of the Message? This is the Guardian's advice to you. He wishes you to forget, as far as you can, your material difficulties and to fully concentrate on the study and the spread of the Teachings. You have the interest, the zeal, the devotion

and the ability that are required, and it would be a pity if you should fail to make full use of these remarkable qualities.

4 October 1933

- 98 The Guardian wishes me specially to urge you to remain patient and confident, and above all to show your husband the utmost kindness and love, in return for all the opposition and hatred you receive from him. A conciliatory and friendly attitude in such cases is not only the duty of every Bahá'í but is also the most effective way of winning for the Cause the sympathy and admiration of its former foes and enemies. Love is, indeed, a most potent elixir that can transform the vilest and meanest of people into heavenly souls. May your example serve to further confirm the truth of this beautiful teaching of our Faith.

6 December 1935

- 99 The Guardian's message to you is that you should constantly strive to mirror forth in your private lives, and also in your social relationships, the beauty, purity and regenerative power of the Message of Bahá'u'lláh. The Bahá'í youth of today should be an example to the youth of the world, and should therefore live up to the highest standards of conduct. Nothing short of such a close, united and concrete adherence to the ideals and teachings of the Faith by every young Bahá'í man and woman can impress and attract to it the serious attention and consideration of the world outside.

17 March 1937

- 100 The condition you have described prevailing in your family, particularly as it is so seriously affecting your brothers and sisters, is certainly most sad, but while there are certain elements in the situation which you feel powerless to overcome, you should not give up every hope of ameliorating your condition, no matter how gradually. A purely passive attitude can only result in causing you fresh disappointments. You should therefore take courage, and as much as your means and circumstances permit confidently and persistently endeavour to remedy your family condition.

20 February 1940

- 101 He was sorry to hear that ... is in an unhappy state of mind. She should certainly not grieve if she finds that her family are not receptive to the Teachings—for not every soul is spiritually enlightened. Indeed, many members of the families of the Prophets Themselves have remained

unconverted even in face of the example and persuasion of the Manifestation of God; therefore, the friends should not be distressed by such things but rather leave the future of those they love in the hand of God, and by their services and devotion to the Faith, win the right to plead for their ultimate spiritual rebirth.

9 March 1942

- 102 A marriage between two souls, alive to the Message of God in this day, dedicated to the service of His Cause, working for the good of humanity, can be a potent force in the lives of others and an example and inspiration to other Bahá'ís, as well as to non-believers.

4 August 1943

- 103 The Guardian deeply regrets the hostile attitude of some members of your family towards the Cause you have arisen to serve, and he feels that you should do everything in your power to avoid antagonizing them—short, of course, of giving up your Faith and becoming inactive in it.

As you cannot induce them to be interested in it, the best thing to do is what the Master always advised in such cases: leave them to themselves, and pray for them. The Guardian, you may be sure, will also pray for their illumination. Many people have, after bitterly opposing the Faith, been eventually won over by the patience, love, tact and prayers of their Bahá'í relative or friend.

14 October 1943

- 104 He feels you should by all means show your husband the greatest love and sympathy; if we are ever in any doubt as to how we should conduct ourselves as Bahá'ís we should think of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and study His life and ask ourselves what would He have done, for He is our perfect example in every way. And you know how tender He was, and how His affection and kindness shone like sunlight on everyone.

Your husband and your child have a right to your love, and give you a wonderful opportunity of demonstrating your faith in the Cause.

Also you should pray to Bahá'u'lláh to help unite you with your husband and make your home a true and happy home.

9 March 1946

- 105 He feels, in regard to your family problems, that you should take these matters up with your Assembly, if you desire advice; one of the duties of

these Assemblies is to advise and aid the friends, and it is your privilege to turn to your Assembly.

10 April 1947

- 106 The Guardian has long felt that the ... Bahá'ís are not, in some cases, living up to the ideal of marriage set forth by Bahá'u'lláh. They are prone to being influenced by the current light and selfish attitude of the people towards the marriage bond. Consequently when he sees you are successfully living up to the Bahá'í standard, putting your best into it and preserving this sacred tie you have with your husband, he is very happy indeed. He hopes you will be in a position to be an example to others. For he disapproves of the way some Bahá'ís, in the name of serving the Cause, disencumber themselves of their husbands, or go and get new ones!

2 April 1950

- 107 The Guardian will pray that your mother may become a Bahá'í, and very actively serve the Cause of God. It should be borne in mind that by your leading a consecrated Bahá'í life, your mother will be affected perhaps as much or more than by reading and studying. When one sees the effect of the Bahá'í Teachings on another person's life, that very often has a very great effect.

12 July 1952

- 108 The fulfilment of our personal ambitions in life is very seldom what brings us happiness. On the contrary, it usually arouses an entire group of new ambitions. On the other hand, when we immerse ourselves in our duties both as human beings, to our families and our associates, and as Bahá'ís toward the Cause of God and serving it to the best of our ability in the circumstances in which we find ourselves, we begin to know what happiness means.

23 May 1956

- 109 The Guardian will pray for you, your children, and your dear husband. Now that you all are united in the Faith of God, and work happily together, surely the divine benedictions will reach you, and the confirmations of the Holy Spirit bless your work. The magnet which attracts the Holy Spirit is service in the Cause of God, and particularly teaching His glorious Faith. The Guardian will pray that each and every member of your family will be

a brilliant star in the firmament of God's good pleasure. Study of the Word, Meditation on its divine import, prayer, and then action are necessary. And then, perseverance in action. If these steps are followed, one will develop spiritually, and be victorious in service to the Cause of God.

5 June 1956

- 110 You should create in your home with your family such a spirit of Bahá'í love as will bring your wife truly into the Faith and attract your children to it ... To have harmony in the home is the most important thing for your children.

15 August 1957

From letters by the Universal House of Justice

- 111 Among the more salient objectives to be attained by the Local Spiritual Assembly in its process of development to full maturity are to act as a loving shepherd to the Bahá'í flock, promote unity and concord among the friends, direct the teaching work, protect the Cause of God, arrange for Feasts, Anniversaries and regular meetings of the community, familiarize the Bahá'ís with its plans, invite the community to offer its recommendations, promote the welfare of youth and children, and participate, as circumstances permit, in humanitarian activities. In its relationship to the individual believer, the Assembly should continuously invite and encourage him to study the Faith, to deliver its glorious message, to live in accordance with its teachings, to contribute freely and regularly to the Fund, to participate in community activities, and to seek refuge in the Assembly for advice and help, when needed.

30 July 1972

- 112 As you well know, Bahá'u'lláh has stated: "Huqúqu'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." 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 Huqúqu'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

- 113 The proper education of children is of vital importance to the progress of mankind, and the heart and essential foundation of all education is spiritual and moral training. When we teach our fellow-men the truths and way of life of the Bahá'í Faith we have to struggle against barriers of indifference, materialism, superstition and a multitude of erroneous preconceptions; but in our new-born children we are presented with pure souls, untarnished by the world. As they grow they will face countless tests and difficulties. From their earliest moments we have the duty to train them, both spiritually and materially, in the way that God has shown, and thus, as they come to adulthood, they can become champions of His Cause and spiritual and moral giants among mankind, equipped to meet all tests, and will be, indeed, "stars of the heaven of understanding", "soft-flowing waters upon which must depend the very life of all men."

31 August 1976

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 114 Noting that you and your husband have consulted about your family problems with your Spiritual Assembly but did not receive any advice, and also discussed your situation with a family counsellor without success, the House of Justice feels it most essential for your husband and you to understand that marriage can be a source of well-being, conveying a sense of security and spiritual happiness. However, it is not something that just happens. For marriage to become a haven of contentment it requires the cooperation of the marriage partners themselves, and the assistance of their families.

24 June 1979

115 The Bahá'í concept of the role of women in society is unique. In contrast to the present tendency to devalue motherhood, the Faith affirms that this function is highly responsible and is of vital importance to the sound development of the new generation and thus, to the creation and maintenance of an ever-advancing civilization. The assignment of the primary responsibility for education of children to the mother derives directly from the fact that she is bearer of the baby. Her attitude, her prayers, even what she eats and her physical condition have a great influence on the child when it is still in the womb...

However, the Bahá'í Teachings do not call for women to be confined to the home and do not require them to be occupied solely with their domestic functions. Some indication of the role envisaged for women in the Bahá'í Dispensation is provided in the statements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that "women must advance and fulfil their mission in all departments of life, becoming equal to men", and that

In the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh, women are advancing side by side with men. There is no area or instance where they will lag behind: they have equal rights with men, and will enter, in the future, into all branches of the administration of society. Such will be their elevation that, in every area of endeavour, they will occupy the highest levels in the human world. Rest thou assured. Look not upon their present state. In future, the world of womankind will shine with lustrous brilliance, for such is the will and purpose of Bahá'u'lláh.

4 August 1992

116 ...The Teachings of the Faith are quite clear on the necessity for attention to the education of children and the fostering of family life. The problem to which you have called attention arises when believers are confronted with insistent calls for assistance in the promotion of the Faith, in the administrative activities of the Bahá'í community, and in the consolidation work. Their challenge is to decide how to respond to these calls without neglect of their responsibilities to children and other family members, having regard to the limitations of time, energy and resources with which all Bahá'ís are confronted.

There is no single correct approach to meeting this challenge, since individual circumstances vary so greatly. However, it is clear that Bahá'ís should strive for balance, in which the legitimate needs of children and

family are considered, together with the needs of the external Bahá'í community and its growth. As the family develops, a conscious effort should be made to draw all of its members into the work of the Faith in such manner that the children identify with it and do not resent the involvement of the parents; this should come about through a process of encouragement and nurturing, and the motivation of the family members sustained through family consultation.

20 September 1992

- 117 Your questions all pertain to the vital issue of the Bahá'í education of children. The House of Justice regards it as being of the utmost importance that Bahá'í parents strive to assist their children to make a sustained and systematic study of the Teachings, to spiritualize their lives, and to form their characters in accordance with the standards of Bahá'u'lláh. Success in the fulfilment of these vital duties on the part of the parents will lessen the danger of their children's being caught up in the destructive forces which are a distinguishing feature of a declining social order sorely in need of regeneration, and of their being deprived of the healing grace of Bahá'u'lláh.

2 July 1995

- 118 Protecting children from the immoral influences of present-day society stands as one of the mighty challenges facing Bahá'í parents. Your expression of concern about the effect which media, especially television programmes, has on children, has been sympathetically noted. As you well know, there is no practical way children can be shielded entirely from the moral problems of the society in which they are growing up. It therefore devolves upon parents to do all they can to ensure that their children receive spiritual education from their earliest years, both through Bahá'í classes sponsored by institutions of the Faith and through the moral instruction and example they receive at home. The published compilation on Bahá'í education offers many useful guidelines.

Since it is impossible for Bahá'í children to avoid exposure to unsavoury behaviour, it becomes important that the encounters that children may have with such behaviour through the media and in daily life be used wisely by parents as a means of guiding and assisting them to appreciate the practical as well as spiritual importance of being different. The extent

to which you seek to reduce your child's exposure to such influences is left to your best judgement in the light of the Teachings.

4 September 2001

- 119 The House of Justice is moved to learn of your love for the Blessed Beauty and your ardent desire to serve His Cause and win His good pleasure. There are many ways in which one can serve, and each person has to choose what he or she can do best within his or her possibilities and limits. Opportunities to serve the Cause do not necessarily exclude the possibility of rendering assistance to one's family. It is important to note that every aspect of a person's life is an element of service to Bahá'u'lláh: the love and respect one has for one's parents; the pursuit of one's education; the nurturing of good health; the acquisition of a trade or profession; one's behaviour toward others and the upholding of a high moral standard; one's marriage and the rearing of one's children; one's activities in teaching the Faith and in building up the strength of the Bahá'í community; and, of course, one's daily prayer and study of the Writings.

22 September 2002

- 120 Regarding the question of whether you must seek the consent of your parents to marry, there are certain rare circumstances which can render this requirement inoperable in the case of one or both of the parents: if the parent has died; if he or she is certifiably insane and thus unable to give a legal decision; if he or she is untraceable; if he or she has disowned or officially relinquished responsibility for the child; if he or she has seriously abused the child. Cases of the last two types cover such a wide range of situations that they usually have to be referred to the House of Justice for consideration on a case-by-case basis.

19 December 2006

- 121 You are concerned about the application of this principleⁱ in relation to the training of children and youth and ask whether it would be acceptable for your child to choose not to be a Bahá'í. A way of understanding the purpose of independent investigation of truth in this context is to recognize the fairness of leaving individuals free to decide for themselves on the basis of their own enquiry and inner conviction what they will believe and of

i The independent investigation of truth.

not imposing on them any obligation to accept automatically what their parents or others believe. It means, too, that the mature individual must take responsibility for deciding to what system of belief he will commit himself. Children who have been reared in the knowledge of the Faith by Bahá'í parents will know from the very character of the instruction they have received that they must exercise that responsibility personally for themselves. This point is made clear in Shoghi Effendi's advice, as conveyed in a letter written on his behalf to a National Spiritual Assembly: "Once the child comes of age ... he should be given full freedom to choose his religion, irrespective of the wishes and desires of his parents."

Nonetheless, children need moral training from an early age to enable them at least to develop well in their social interaction with others. A common core of moral instruction can be found in all revealed scriptures, and it is appropriate, indeed necessary, for Bahá'í parents to abide by their own principles in guiding their children towards becoming spiritual beings and decent, upstanding members of society. Bahá'u'lláh has, after all, given each of His followers the duty to teach His Cause, describing it as the most meritorious of all deeds. It would truly be strange if, knowing this, a Bahá'í mother were to keep from her child what she is teaching to everyone else about the latest Revelation from God. Moreover, He has bidden parents to offer their children spiritual instruction from an early age, but to do so in a manner that does not conduce to fanaticism.

Left entirely on their own to find their way through life, children encounter dim prospects, as the deplorable situation with young people in present-day society so glaringly demonstrates. Among the things to be inculcated in children so as to prepare them for the future is the virtue of justice, which underscores the importance of one's seeing with one's own eyes and for one's own self—the importance, in other words, of independent investigation. Without some form of training or orientation one cannot investigate truth. This is so for a scientist who would hardly be able to discover material reality without preparation by some form of training. The open attitude of the Faith to learning should encourage confidence in the friends that they are being endowed with the ability to develop searching minds. The more they study the Teachings the more is this ability awakened and increased.

31 July 2007

FIRE & LIGHT

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

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled 1986

Fire and Light was first published in 1986 by the Universal House of Justice in *The Bahá'í World, Volume XVIII*, 1979–1983, pp. 9–38. The selections from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi that appear in that volume are drawn from *Nár va Núr* (Fire and Light), a compilation prepared by the Universal House of Justice for the Bahá'ís of Iran and published in 1982 by Bahá'í Verlag, the Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Germany.

Fire and Light includes those selections in *Nár va Núr* that have been translated into English, as well as two selections—extracts #11 and #30—that are not included in *Nár va Núr*. The translations of all but extract #11 were prepared by Mr. Habib Taherzadeh, with the assistance of a Committee at the Bahá'í World Centre.

Extracts

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 All praise be to God, Who, from every drop of blood shed by His chosen ones, hath brought forth a vast creation whose number none but Himself can reckon. He hath raised them to be the embodiments of His love and the manifestations of His tender affection. It is they who are the hands of His Cause amongst men. It is they who have rendered aid unto God in every age and have arisen to promote that which He hath purposed, in such wise that the majesty of the kings and their dreadful might have failed to affright them, nor have they been hindered from following the path of truth by the clash of arms and the furious clamour of battalions. They have raised their triumphal cry amidst all that dwell in the heavens and on the earth, summoning everyone unto the Lord of all mankind, Him Who is the Ruler of this world and of the next, the God of the throne on high and of the earth below.

- 2 *He is God, blessed and exalted is He*

All praise be unto the Almighty, the Sanctified—glorified be His power—Who hath ordained that the tyranny of the unjust and the violence of the oppressors should become the means whereby the true lovers draw nigh unto the glorious habitation of the Best-Beloved and the sincere among His servants attain the Paradise of communion with Him Who is the Desire of all men, and that sufferings and tribulations should serve as the instrument whereby His Word of command is spread abroad and the standards of His praise are unfurled in all regions.

How great is His transcendent power, how immensely exalted His all-embracing Will, inasmuch as He produceth light from fire and joy from sorrow.

They that are sunk in heedlessness fondly imagine that massacre and crucifixion cause the fire of the Word of God to be extinguished, and regard martyrdom as a devastating injury. They are utterly oblivious of

the truth that through such afflictions the Cause of God is exalted, its fame is blazoned far and wide, and the martyrs themselves are enabled to attain the boundless retreats of nearness unto God. Immeasurably exalted is the Lord of Wisdom Who doeth that which He willeth and ordaineth whatsoever He pleaseth.

3 *In the name of the loving Friend*

O mother! Grieve not over the loss of thy son; rather pride thyself therein. Indeed, this is an occasion for gladness and rejoicing, not for despondency and sorrow.

I swear by the Day-Star of the morn of Truth that thy son hath attained a station such as no pen can depict, nor words adequately describe. His habitation is the realm on high, his associates and companions are sanctified and detached souls, and his sustenance the imperishable and hidden blessings of the Lord. In truth, were that lofty and glorious station to be revealed to an extent smaller than a needle's eye before the eyes of them that dwell on earth, they would, one and all, be so filled with joy and ecstasy as to be consumed thereby. Therefore think not that he hath perished. Indeed, he will endure in the heavenly kingdom as long as God Himself endureth. And this calleth for gratitude, not grieving. When he findeth that thou art happy, he becometh more cheerful, but when he perceiveth that thou art disconsolate, this provoketh anguish in his heart.

Busy thyself in the remembrance of God, and unloose thy tongue in celebrating His praise with utmost joy and radiance. God, the Exalted, the True, is with thee. He is kinder than a father and more compassionate than a son.

Call thou to mind the episode of the land of ʿIráq,ⁱ when a mother sent forth her son who laid down his life in the path of the Beloved. This Day is the king of days. It behoveth thee to show forth such deeds as will distinguish thee from the women of a bygone age. Such beseemeth the servants and maidservants of God. Be thou resigned to His good-pleasure and seek communion with Him.

At this moment the entire company of the Concourse on high are engaged in extolling the virtues of thy son and in acclaiming his attributes. If thou couldst hear, thou wouldst, in thy longing, wing thy flight unto God, the Incomparable, the All-Informed. The day is not far distant

when all the dwellers of the earth will magnify his praise and seek blessings from his dust. Verily, incalculable is the bounty of thy Lord. Seize thy chance and be of them that endure with patience.

- 4 Nothing hath ever happened, nor will happen, without a cause or effect. Reflect a while and consider how vast the number of the people that have perished, how numerous the cities and towns that have been reduced to dust and now appear as a level plain. Such is their plight now, and only God knoweth the future and that which will come to pass.

Think not that in this turmoil the friends of God have perished by the sword of the oppressors. I swear by the Day-Star of the Kingdom of truth that any of the loved ones of God that hath quaffed the cup of martyrdom during that episode hath ascended unto the realms above and doth abide securely beneath the canopy of the tender mercy of God. Indeed, if those sublime stations were unveiled before the gaze of men, even to the extent of a needle's eye, everyone would raise his voice and exclaim, "Would that I had been with him!" And if any of the friends hath suffered a material loss, such a loss is and will always be a perfect gain. The people of Bahá enjoy utmost benefits, at all times. If at some time or other, according to the dictates of God's inscrutable wisdom, one should incur a certain loss, let this not cause distress. Surely God will glorify it into a gift of inestimable gain. Verily, He is the Lord of Truth, the Powerful, the Knowing, the Wise.

- 5 Ye should exhort all the friends to patience, to acquiescence, and to tranquillity, saying: O ye loved ones of God in that land! Ye are glorified in all the worlds of God because of your relationship to Him Who is the Eternal Truth, but in your lives on this earthly plane, which pass away as a fleeting moment, ye are afflicted with abasement. For the sake of the one true God, ye have been reviled and persecuted, ye have been imprisoned and surrendered your lives in His path. Ye should not, however, by reason of the tyrannical acts of some heedless souls, transgress the limits of God's commandments by contending with anyone.

Whatever hath befallen you hath been for the sake of God. This is the truth, and in this there is no doubt. Ye should, therefore, leave all your affairs in His Hands, place your trust in Him, and rely upon Him. He will assuredly not forsake you. In this, likewise, there is no doubt. No father will surrender his sons to devouring beasts; no shepherd will leave his flock to ravening wolves. He will most certainly do his utmost to protect his own.

If, however, for a few days, in compliance with God's all-encompassing wisdom, outward affairs should run their course contrary to one's cherished desire, this is of no consequence and should not matter. Our intent is that all the friends should fix their gaze on the Supreme Horizon and cling to that which hath been revealed in the Tablets. They should strictly avoid sedition and refrain from treading the path of dissension and strife. They should champion their one true God, exalted be He, through the hosts of forbearance, of submission, of an upright character, of goodly deeds, and of the choicest and most refined words.

- 6 They that yearn for the abode of the Beloved, they that circle round the sanctuary of the Desired One, are not apprehensive of trials and adversities, nor do they flee away from that which is ordained by God. They receive their portion from the ocean of resignation and drink their fill from the soft-flowing stream of His mercy. They would not surrender the good-pleasure of the Friend in exchange for the kingdom of both worlds, nor would they barter that which the Well-Beloved hath decreed in return for dominion over the realms of the infinite. They would eagerly drink the venom of woe as if it were the water of life, and would drain deadly poison to its bitter dregs just as a sweet and life-giving draught. In the arid wastes of desolation they are stirred with enthusiasm through the remembrance of the Friend, and in the dreary wilds of adversity they are eager and impatient to offer themselves as a sacrifice. Unhesitatingly have they renounced their lives and directed their steps towards the abode of the Best-Beloved. They have closed their eyes to the world and fixed their gaze upon the beauteous countenance of the Friend, cherishing no desire but the presence of the loved One and seeking no attainment save reunion with Him. They fly with the feathers of trust in God, and soar with the wings of adherence unto His Will. In their estimation a blood-shedding blade is more desirable than finest silk and a piercing dart more acceptable than mother's milk.

High-spirited souls by the myriad are deemed necessary in this path,

To lay down a hundred lives with every fleeting breath.

It behoveth us to kiss the hand of the would-be assassin and to set out, dancing, on our way to the habitation of the Friend. How indescribably pleasant is that hour, how immeasurably sweet that moment when the

inmost spirit is intent upon sacrificing itself, when the tabernacle of fidelity is hastening to attain the heights of self-surrender! With necks laid bare, we yearn for the stroke of the ruthless sword wielded by the hand of the Beloved. With breasts aglow with light, we eagerly await the dart of His decree. Contemptuous of name, we have detached ourselves from all else but Him; we shall not run away, we shall not endeavour to repel the stranger, we pray for calamity that thereby we may soar unto the sublime heights of the spirit, seek shelter beneath the shade of the tree of reunion, attain the highest stations of love, and drink our fill from the wondrous wine of everlasting communion with Him. Surely we will not forfeit this imperishable dominion, nor will we forgo this incomparable blessing. If hidden beneath the dust, we shall rear our heads from the bosom of the tender mercy of the Lord of mankind. No trial can suppress these companions, no mortal feet can traverse this journey, nor can any veil obscure this countenance.

Yea, it is clear and evident that in view of the multitudes of internal and external opponents who have raised the standards of opposition, who have girded the loins of endeavour to eliminate these poor creatures, it standeth to reason that one should turn away from them and flee from this land, nay, from the face of the earth. However, through the loving-kindness of God and by the aid of His invisible confirmations, we are as radiant as the sun and as shining as the moon. We are established upon the throne of tranquillity and seated upon the couch of fortitude. Of what importance is the shipwreck to the fish of the spirit? What doth a soul celestial care if the physical frame is destroyed? Indeed, this body is for it a prison, and the ship but a place of confinement to the fish. What else but a nightingale can understand a Nightingale's melody, and who else but the intimate friend can recognize the familiar voice of the Friend?

- 7 The majesty and glory of the Cause are as great as its trials and afflictions are intense. However, trials and afflictions are scarce noticed in this day, inasmuch as the heaven of divine bounty is uplifted and the ocean of His loving-kindness is manifest. If on the one hand cups of bitter woe and suffering are seen, on the other He Who is the Abhá Beauty is proffering, with His Own hand that hath turned white, the chalice of everlasting life. Though the croaking of the raven is loud, the river of His choice wine is streaming forth.

In one of the Tablets the following utterances were sent down by the Revealer of Verses—glorified and exalted be His Words: “Say, O ye chosen

of the one true God! Let not the censure of the froward, nor the denunciations uttered by them that have repudiated His Cause, grieve you, inasmuch as such acts of opposition have, from time immemorial, served as clear proofs of the truth of Him Who is the True One—magnified be His glory. Therefore, should ye hear an unseemly word from an ignorant, foolish, or negligent soul, be assured that it can never do harm, for the day is not far distant when such persons, and whatsoever pertaineth unto them, will have passed away, whereas ye yourselves have been honoured in this day to drink your fill from the living waters of the holy utterances revealed by the All-Merciful and to hearken unto the words ‘Ye are of My company.’ Thereupon one of the favoured angels that are nigh unto God and circle round His throne uttered this supplication: ‘O my Lord and my Master! O my Desired One and my Best-Beloved! O Thou who art the Beloved of all that are in the heavens and on the earth! I beseech Thee to grant, from the ocean of Thy bounty and the Day-Star of Thy heavenly grace, that I may be cursed, reviled, and denounced a myriad times for the sake of Thy love, that these ears of mine may but once be blessed by hearing Thy sweet words “Verily thou art of the people of Bahá.”’

“Most of the people of the earth have turned away from the one true God and failed to take their portion from the ocean of divine knowledge. They have ascribed, and will continue to ascribe, unto Him that which hath caused the inmates of the all-highest Paradise as well as the Prophets and Messengers of God to weep sore and wail. This is not the first divine Revelation that hath been manifested in the world. They that are the chosen ones of God should at all times and under all conditions dedicate themselves assiduously to the service of His Cause. Rúmíⁱ—upon him be the mercy of God—saith: ‘The moon sheddeth light while the dog howl-eth.’ It behoveth everyone to have the utmost regard for the reformation of the world and for that which beseemeth man’s sublime station. However, should the continued existence of any one be detrimental to the interests of the Cause of God, the Almighty will undoubtedly lay hold on him as He hath in the past. No one hath fathomed, nor can fathom, His transcendent wisdom.”

- 8 A praise exalted above every conception that pen and ink can portray beseemeth the sublime, the ever-blessed court of the Well-Beloved, Who hath initiated the people of Bahá into the school of adversity and directed

i Jalálu'd-Dín Rúmí (A.D. 1207–1273), Persian Šúfí poet.

their steps towards the realm of immortality. Glorified, immensely glorified is the omnipotent Lord, Who hath made blood a means to cause the trees of the exalted Paradise to grow and burst forth, and Who hath ordained that trials and afflictions, though bitter and agonizing, should prove sweeter than sugar to the taste of His loved ones. So strong are the bonds of love for this Well-Beloved that adversities and tribulations have been and will ever be powerless to deflect His ardent lovers from treading His Path.

I swear by Him Who is Our Beloved and your Beloved, that if one's life be not offered up in His path, it would not be worth even as much as a mustard seed, and if one's inmost being be not laid down at His feet, it would appear more abject and insignificant than a pebble. However, none but the divine Assayers are able to recognize this gem. In truth, when bereft of vision, what advantage would one gain by entering into the all-highest Paradise? If destitute of hearing, what can one perceive by drawing close unto the celestial Tree of Blessedness? The Assayers of these priceless gems are such souls unto whom the following tribute is paid: "They that speak not till He hath spoken and act according to His commandment."ⁱⁱ Likewise He saith: "They whom neither merchandise nor traffic beguile from the remembrance of the Almighty."ⁱⁱⁱ

Is it fondly imagined that death shall not overtake every one? Nay, by God! "Every soul shall taste of death."^{iv} Such being the case, it would certainly be far better and more fitting if this mortal life were offered up in the path of the Beloved, and sacrificed for the sake of Him Who is the ultimate Desire of all men. Nay, I beg forgiveness of God for this assertion, inasmuch as this sacrifice would be a myriad times more preferable and fitting. Even for this assertion, I once again implore pardon of God.

I earnestly hope and pray that the one true God—magnified be His glory—may graciously brighten the eyes of all men with the collyrium of His knowledge, that they may be enabled to discern with both their inner and outer eyes that which the victims of evil passions and corrupt desires are debarred from seeing and recognizing.

Salutation and praise rest upon them that have not been kept back by any transitory thing whatever, nor been alarmed by the violent commotions provoked by the people of the earth—such people as are immersed in the pursuit of earthly vanities and have been deluded by the gay livery

ii Qur'án 21:27.

iii Qur'án 24:37.

iv Qur'án 3:184.

of the world in such wise that they have cast the Cause of God behind their backs. The day is fast approaching when He will have rolled up their domain and spread out a new one in its stead. Verily, He is the One, the Peerless, the Powerful, the Invincible, the Almighty.

- 9 If occasionally, in accordance with the exigencies of God's consummate wisdom, an untoward incident should befall the friends, it would undoubtedly serve as a means whereby divine gifts and heaven-sent bounties will be vouchsafed unto them. Ponder thou upon the tragic episode that hath transpired in the land of Yá.ⁱ I swear by My life, every single event associated therewith hath led to the exaltation of the Word of God and the advancement of His Cause. Indeed, whatsoever doth happen during the days of the Manifestation of God, though to outward seeming it is but grievous abasement, there lieth concealed within it incalculable glory and honour; and though it appeareth as dire torment, in reality a myriad blessings are enshrined therein.

If those that have erred grievously were aware of the hidden mysteries of martyrdom, they would in no wise commit such deeds. However, God hath caused them to be tongue-tied and bereft of sight, with their minds and power of perception reduced to naught, in such wise that they deem a priceless benefit a grievous loss. With their own hands they help the Cause of God, though they themselves are wholly unconscious of it. Verily God rendereth His Cause victorious at one time through the aid of His enemies, and at another by virtue of the assistance of His chosen ones. Concerning those pure and blessed souls, Our Pen of Glory hath revealed that which excelleth the whole world, its treasures, and whatsoever existeth therein. Erelong shall the heedless and the doers of wickedness be repaid for that which their hands have wrought.

- 10 The people of the world have grievously erred, for they fondly imagine that they can exterminate the Cause of God, that they would be able to extinguish His effulgent light and put out His heavenly lamps. Vain indeed are their imaginings. I swear by the righteousness of God that the more they endeavour to quench His Light, the brighter will it shine, and the more they strive to smother its flame, the fiercer will it burn. God's invincible Will far transcendeth their devices, and His Purpose is supreme above all human desires, inasmuch as all that is in the heavens and all that is on the

i Yazd.

earth have been called into being through a single holy breeze—the Word of His command—wafted from His presence, and all shall be brought to naught through but one letter of His. From time immemorial He hath been established upon the seat of His sovereignty, and through eternity will He continue to occupy the inaccessible heights of His glory. Every created thing is impotent before the evidences of His invincible might, and all beings fade into utter nothingness when confronted with the revelation of His awesome majesty.

The eyes of His loved ones have always wept sore, while His enemies have rejoiced and made merry by reason of their heedlessness. However, that weeping was followed by a myriad blessings and this jubilation by grievous retribution. Erelong the fruits of these two shall appear from the tree of His irrevocable Decree. Therefore how justifiably proud must be the eye which is worthy of shedding tears, and how great the felicity of the neck that is fit to be ensnared in the noose of the Friend.

- 11 O God, my God! Thou seest Thy loved ones turning their hearts to Thee, and holding fast unto the cord of Thine ordinances and laws. I beseech Thee by the waves of the sea of Thine utterance, and by Him through Whom Thou didst adorn the heavens of Thy might, to graciously protect them by the aid of Thy hosts.

O God! Thou beholdest Thy lovers in Írán in the clutches of hate and enmity. I beg of Thee, by Thy mercy which hath preceded the contingent world, to raise up from the earth those who will be moved to aid and protect them, and to preserve their rights and the restitution due to them by those who broke Thy Covenant and Testament, and perpetrated such acts as made the inmates of the cities of Thy justice and equity to lament. Thou art, verily, the All-Powerful, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

From the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- 12 O Lord! These pure souls have ascended unto the realms on high. They have proved themselves nimble and sprightly in Thy service. They rid themselves of all, drew nigh unto Thee, and reached the Fountainhead of eternal life. They have now taken their flight from this world on the wings of longing and have attained Thy kingdom of glory. Gladden Thou their hearts in the world of the unseen and let them abide beneath the shadow

of the tree of hope. Bestow upon them Thine infinite mercy and grant them Thy boundless pardon. Make them the signs of Thy forgiveness and the manifestations of Thy forbearance and bounty. Verily, Thou art the Bestower, the Loving, the One Who forgiveth the sins of men.

- 13 O Lord! These stainless souls grew contemptuous of the world of dust and have ascended unto Thy kingdom. From this dreary world they have winged their flight unto the realm of resplendent glory. Weary and dejected, they languished in this puny nest, eagerly waiting to set out for their celestial habitation. They moved swiftly and sped forth on their flight until they attained unto Thee. O Forgiving One! Grant them Thy forgiveness. O All-Loving One! Bestow upon them Thy tender care. O All-Sufficing One! Give them Thy bounty and be their comforter and companion. Thou art the Pardoner, the Resplendent, the Bestower, the Lord of Strength.

- 14 O forgiving Lord! These birds that sang Thy praise left their mortal remains buried in desolate tombs, and ascended with the wings of their spirits unto the Frequented Fane. They freed themselves from the pitfalls of this world of dust, so that they might partake of immortal life in the realms above, might seek shelter beneath the shadow of the tree of hope and abide in a nest upon the twigs of eternity in the Abhá Paradise, the Kingdom on high, singing hymns of glory and praise in wondrous accents and sweet melodies.

O Thou kind Lord! These souls are the birds of Thy meadows, the nightingales of Thy rose-garden. Let them dwell within the orchard of Thy forgiveness and grant them access to the concourse wherein Thine eternal glory shineth resplendent, wherein Thy divine beauty is unveiled and perpetual communion with Thee is assured. Enable them to live eternally and to endure forevermore.

Thou art the Forgiving, the Bountiful, the All-Loving.

- 15 O Thou kind Lord! From the horizon of detachment Thou hast manifested souls that, even as the shining moon, shed radiance upon the realm of heart and soul, rid themselves from the attributes of the world of existence, and hastened forth unto the kingdom of immortality. With a drop from the ocean of Thy loving-kindness Thou didst oft-times moisten the gardens of their hearts until they gained incomparable freshness and beauty. The holy fragrance of Thy Divine Unity was diffused far and wide, shedding

its sweet savours over the entire world, causing the regions of the earth to be redolent with perfume.

Raise up then, O Spirit of purity, souls who, like those sanctified beings, will become free and pure, will adorn the world of being with a new raiment and a wondrous robe, will seek no one else but Thee, tread no path except the path of Thy good-pleasure, and speak of naught but the mysteries of Thy Cause.

O Thou kind Lord! Grant that this youth may attain unto that which is the highest aspiration of the holy ones. Endow him with the wings of Thy strengthening grace—wings of detachment and divine aid—that he may soar thereby into the atmosphere of Thy tender mercy, be able to partake of Thy celestial bestowals, and may become a sign of divine guidance and a standard of the Concourse on high. Thou art the Potent, the Powerful, the Seeing, the Hearing.

16 *He is God*

O remnants of the martyrs in the path of God! Your letters have been received, and despite the lack of a moment's spare time they were perused with the utmost attention. Since it is impossible to answer each letter separately, I am writing you collectively, and this ye will surely excuse.

Indeed, as a result of the outrages perpetrated by the wicked, the attacks of the rapacious beasts, and the onslaught of the ravening wolves, those blessed souls have endured woeful tribulations and have borne dire sufferings and distressing calamities, each of which calleth for weeping and wailing, for sighing and lamentation. Were eyes to shed tears of blood, they would afford no consolation. By reason of these tragic events 'Abdu'l-Bahá is assailed by despondency and anguish and is beset by bitter sadness and grief.

However, when we ponder carefully it will be observed that these unceasing trials and afflictions, these successive ordeals, though they break one's back, crush one's strength, and exhaust one's endurance, are among the greatest gifts of God, the Ever-Living, the All-Powerful, for He thereby accepteth the self-sacrifice which certain souls are prompted to make in His path, enabling them to attire their heads with the glorious crown of martyrdom and to establish themselves upon the throne of everlasting sovereignty. Such hath ever been the qualification of them that enjoy near access unto God, such are the attributes of the pure in heart.

This life will surely pass away like unto a fleeting shadow, and the gay trappings of this earthly existence will soon be rolled up. The cup of bitter death will be borne round, and the fire of anguish and despair will be set ablaze. The foundation of human life will crumble, and this clamorous outcry and tumult will be hushed to silence and stillness. Rejoicings will cease and pleasures will come to an end. The souls will set out empty-handed on their journey to the next world, compassed by intense grief and anguish. Of the contemplations of bygone days, of the former life of comfort, joy, and power not a single vestige will be left. Utter perdition will prevail and everyone's grievous loss and deprivation will be laid bare.

However, such faithful friends as have laid down their lives as martyrs will be stirred by the waves of the ocean of ecstasy. They will be filled with joy and radiance through the revelation of heavenly glad-tidings, will receive divine confirmations of loving-kindness, and will be sustained by the wondrous blessings of the peerless Lord in such wise that they will be moved to say: "Praise be unto God that during our lifetime in this mortal world we became the target of darts in the path of God and were exposed to the dire peril of arrows and spears. Every day a shaft of cruelty was hurled at us, and every moment we drank our fill from the draught of affliction, till eventually we hastened forth to the field of martyrdom for the sake of His love, and offered up our hearts and souls in the path of the All-Merciful."

Indeed, at that moment such souls will rejoice with exceeding gladness and will be so carried away by the joyful tidings of God that they will wing their flight to the heaven of eternal glory with the utmost ecstasy, exultation, and spiritual blissfulness. It is our ardent hope, now, that We too may partake of a drop from this celestial cup and may receive a portion from this life-giving draught. Verily, my Lord will vouchsafe His special favours unto whomsoever He pleaseth. No God is there but Him, the All-Bountiful, the Most Generous.

Now praise be to God that the remnants of the families of the martyrs stand like a mighty structure—firm, steadfast, and immovable. Before the eyes of the peoples of East and West they have proved themselves to be wholly self-sacrificing, eager to rush forth to the field of martyrdom, denizens of the kingdom of His love, seated upon the throne of eternal glory, knights of the arena of sacrifice, and rulers of the realm of renunciation and constancy.

Therefore ye should not be sad or sorrowful, nor be oppressed with grief and despondency. Rather it behoveth you to render Him thanksgiving for being the survivors of those illustrious souls, the remnants of them that are favoured at the Threshold of the Almighty. In truth, these calamities and sufferings are a glorious diadem whose glittering gems will shed lustre upon ages and centuries to come.

17 *He is the All-Glorious*

O ye friends of God! O ye favoured ones at the Threshold of the One Who transcendeth all limitations! That distinguished martyr, like unto a lucky star, shineth from the dawning-place of Divine Unity luminous, resplendent, and unmistakable, though mortal eyes are debarred from beholding him. With his face beaming with light, with a luminous brow and enthralling beauty, he is calling aloud from the summit of the heaven of glory, saying: "O my friends! O honoured ones! I quaffed the cup that brimmeth over with the consummate bounty of God and tasted the sweetness of the Abhá Kingdom even from the edge of the sword. I have divested myself of my worn-out garments and raised up my banner in the realm of glory. From the world of dust till the heights of the heavens I spurred on the charger of martyrdom and from this luminous horizon I call out and say: 'O my loved ones! The portals of His most great favour are flung open, and the hearts of the people of Bahá are dilated with joy. The chalice of His bounty is being borne round, and the sweet melodies of the birds of the all-highest Paradise reach every receptive ear. The reviving breeze wafting from the garden of the Abhá Kingdom is laden with perfume, and everyone who hath suffered long is granted intimate communion within the retreats of the Lord of Truth. From the Threshold of the Almighty, the All-Wise, His summons hath gone forth unto all men, and from the realm of the Concourse on high the voice of glad-tidings: "Happy are ye!" is continually raised."

Know ye the excellence of this gracious favour, and esteem the value of this precious gift. The outpourings of the mercy of God are copious like unto a boundless ocean, and the manifold blessings of the Abhá Beauty are shed abroad even as the radiance of the shining moon. Were ye to know how great is the revelation of this bounty, how plenteous the gifts that have been vouchsafed, I swear by the ravishing beauty of the Abhá Beloved and by the soul-stirring smile of that peerless Charmer of hearts, that ye would dance with delight in your eagerness to lay down your lives

and would leap with joy as ye hasten to the field of sacrifice. Ye would raise with one hand the brimful cup of self-sacrifice, and with the other the laurel of the supreme bounty successfully won. Thus, in the arena of renunciation, while uttering the triumphal cry "Great is our blessedness! Great is our blessedness! Happy are we! Happy are we!" ye will attain the desire of your hearts, the most glorious martyrdom.

O ye friends of my heart and soul! Slumber not for a moment; relax not, nor linger for an instant. In a spirit of exceeding joy and gladness, with unswerving constancy in the Covenant and the Testament of the ever-forgiving Lord and in anticipation of attaining His luminous horizon, make the greatest effort to diffuse His sweet savours and bend your energies to promote His Cause. Be ye heralds of the Covenant and bearers of the glad-tidings of His Testament. Receive your portion from the breast of His grace, and with high resolve exert your utmost endeavour. Be set aglow with the fire of the love of God, and raise the anthem of jubilation with the full enthusiasm of your heart and soul, so that ye may become intimately familiar with His Call and be initiated into divine knowledge and wisdom.

This world is the empire of the spiritual sovereignty of the Abhá Beauty, and this realm is the seat where the mighty throne of the Kingdom of the Exalted Oneⁱ is established. Its effulgent sun, its shining moon never set; its brilliant stars never fade; its bright horizon is never overcast. Its oceans surge and its birds soar in the heights. Its streams are living waters, soft-flowing rivers of immortality. Its trees are saplings planted in the orchard of the Lord of Glory. Its dominion is the immensity of the realm of the placeless, and its territory the domain of the heart. Its abiding joy is attainment unto the presence of the ever-forgiving Lord. Its sustenance is the liberal bounty that His adored Beauty hath bestowed. Its chalice is the cup tempered at the camphor fountain, its designation the Expanse of Eternal Life, a life that transcendeth the limitations of countless ages.

O my friends! This is the Call of the Covenant. This is the Dispensation of the Well-Beloved of all mankind. This is the gift that the Day-Star of the world hath graciously given. This is the revelation of His incorruptible grace, the manifestation of His perpetual assistance, the evidence of the power that is born of God and the potency of the bestowals proffered by the All-Merciful. What else do ye want? What else do ye expect? Which

i The Báb.

path do ye tread? Be quick, be quick, O companions! Make haste, make haste, O ye loved ones!

And upon you be His glory!

- 18 O remnants of those effulgent lights! O children of those tabernacles of holiness! O remembrances of those resplendent spirits!

Although your distinguished fathers surrendered their souls in the field of glorious martyrdom, hastened away from the abyss of this sordid world of dust unto the lofty heights of the Abhá Kingdom, and raised the banner of the most great bounty among the Concourse on high, ye have not been left behind, forsaken and lonely. Although your fathers have ascended unto the realms above, Almighty God, more affectionate than a father, is ever present. Indeed, could ye but know how dear ye are in the presence of your true and heavenly Father, ye would stretch forth your wings and take your flight.

And upon ye, O loved ones of God, be His glory!

- 19 *He is the All-Glorious*

O offshoot of him who in a transport of delight drank of the chalice of martyrdom in the path of God! That essence of being is so graciously confirmed in this day, with boundless grace and favour at the court of the sovereign Lord of the seen and the unseen, that the embodiments of spiritual majesty and the exponents of true glory are eagerly yearning to render service unto him. Although to outward seeming he was put to a shameful death, in reality he is established upon the throne of unfading exaltation. The day is approaching when kings will seek blessing from his dust and all heads will bow down in his honour, the day when all men will express humility at the revelation of the majesty and grandeur with which the martyrs are invested and all faces will be downcast before the indomitable power of their testimony. If such is what will take place in this visible world, then imagine what it will be in the spiritual realms of God, so exalted above the comprehension of all beings.

- 20 O thou who art seeking the good-pleasure of the Lord of Glory! I have no time to spare. I am completely absorbed in thinking of, in meditating upon and in lamenting for those distinguished martyrs—may my life be offered up as a sacrifice for them.

On the one hand this grievous calamity hath, like unto a dagger, inflicted upon me so profound an injury that no salve can soothe, nor can any balm assuage, while on the other the scene of sacrifice is seen bedecked with such splendid pageantry, such marvellous festivity that the holy ecstasy of its wine seizeth forevermore the minds of those that are godly and spiritual. Moreover, the Concourse on high and the dwellers in the Abhá Kingdom are now expounding the mystery of sacrifice, the main purport of all heavenly Scriptures. Therefore this hath to some degree relieved my grief. In short, the day is approaching when the meads of the Cause of God, having been watered with blood, will have put forth roses and lilies in such profusion that East and West will become fragrant and North and South perfumed. Peace be upon you!

21 *He is God*

O ye who have been wronged in the path of God! The loved ones of the Almighty have always been exposed to the dire oppression and tyranny of the people of iniquity, and His chosen ones have continually suffered woeful cruelties at the hand of the perfidious. The friends of God have always quaffed the cup of adversity proffered by the hand of the immortal Cupbearer. They have been made targets for the darts and spears of the curses, accusations, and reviling that the rebellious and the wicked hurled at them, and have been persecuted and ill-treated by their opponents among the people of the world. Indeed, these tribulations are the very draught with which the Well-Beloved of the world was inebriated, and these calamities are but the effulgent light whereby the luminous brow of the Day-Star of the world was illumined.

Therefore think not that this fierce opposition and cruelty hath brought humiliation and abasement upon you. Nay, I swear by God, besides Whom there is none other God, they redound to imperishable glory and unfading bounty. Indeed, this persecution is a cooling draught and these trials a source of delight. This poison is but sugar and this venom the essence of sweetness. This stab in the breast is a soothing balm to heart and soul and this bitter medicine a healing remedy. One's sense of taste must be unimpaired to perceive its sweetness and to savour its relish. Otherwise, to a bilious patient sugar and honey taste more bitter than venom, and to the diabetic a sweet drink is more harmful than deadly poison.

Meanwhile, O ye loved ones of God, let not these sufferings grieve you, nor let your hearts be sore with sorrow. Erelong will all take pride in them and seek distinction and glory in both worlds. One will say: "In one period I endured hardships by reason of my faith and certitude in the one true God and was recompensed with certain bounties." Another will state: "Because of the love I cherished for the Best Beloved of the world, I once quaffed a deadly poison like unto a cup of eternal life, and since then I have received His perpetual grace." Yet another will exclaim: "In the path of servitude at the Threshold of the Almighty I was cast into prison and gained boundless favours in return." Another will declare: "As a result of the illumination I received from the Day-Star of ethereal glory I was made captive and held fast in chains and stocks, for which exceptional rewards were lavished on me." Another will say: "My heart was set ablaze with the fire of His love in such wise that I hastened to the field of sacrifice and kissed the edge of the sword." Another will state: "The blessed body of my illustrious father was hacked to pieces in the arena of sacrifice for the sake of my glorious Lord." Another will say: "My honoured grandfather was inebriated with the cup of martyrdom which the Cup-Bearer of God's eternal Covenant proffered unto him, and he became the recipient of manifold favours and bestowals." Still another will exclaim: "Our blessed household was ruined in the path of the Adored One." And still another will exclaim: "Our innocent ancestors were made homeless for having promoted the Word of God." In short, everyone, well pleased, jubilant, and leaping with joy will recount these events at length and will glory in them before the other peoples and kindreds of the earth. Then it will become unmistakably clear and manifest, even to outward seeming, what a great bounty, what a supreme blessing these afflictions and trials in the path of the Blessed Perfection had truly been.

Therefore it behoveth you, O loved ones of God, to raise up your hands in thanksgiving unto the Threshold of the peerless One and say: O one and only God, O matchless Creator! Praised and glorified art Thou for having placed this splendid crown upon the brow of these helpless ones, and this mantle of eternal glory on the shoulders of these indigent ones. The rays of Thy sanctity fell upon bodies of clay, and the lights of the world of eternity shone forth. A flame of Thy bestowal from the enkindled fire appeared and gave the hearts eternal life. Thanks be to Thee for this blessing and this bestowal and this bounty with which Thou hast distinguished these helpless ones. Thou art the Generous, the Merciful, and the All-Loving.

- 22 O thou who art resigned to His irrevocable Decree! Render thanks unto God for having attained so sublime a station. Thou art treading the path of His good-pleasure; thou hast surrendered thyself unreservedly to that which is ordained and destined by Him; thou hast placed thy whole trust in Him and manifested unswerving constancy and fortitude in the face of this grievous calamity. Thus indeed doth it beseem the loved ones of God to conduct themselves, so that when they are beset by hardships or hemmed in by dire affliction they may be able to comfort others and impart consolation unto them, their faces may glow with the light of radiant acquiescence, and they may deliver to the flames the veil of moaning, sighing, and lamentation, inasmuch as resort to sadness and grief in the midst of tribulation is but an indication of lack of assurance and certitude.

In truth, were man to attain the stage of certitude in his spiritual development, no affliction could ever depress his spirits, though he would undoubtedly be influenced by reason of his human susceptibilities. Nevertheless, man's inner being will be so revived by the breeze of divinely ordained woes and trials that the dust of wailing and lamentation will entirely subside and the light of submissive resignation unto His Will shall shine forth like unto a radiant morn.

And upon thee be greetings and praise.

- 23 *He is the All-Glorious*

O ye who are inebriated with the draught of His Covenant! It is time to pass beyond the desolate wilds of remoteness, so that ye may reach the retreats of the Beloved, drink your fill from the wine of the bestowals of the All-Merciful, hold a heavenly festival, deck forth the stage for a spiritual celebration, and, to the strains of harp and lute and the melodies of the Concourse on high and the songsters in the meads of holiness, break into sweet lays and wondrous tunes in praise and glorification of the Abhá Beauty.

O ye friends of God! Let not the cavils of the foolish grieve you nor the tribulation of this world dismay you. Indeed, the motivating impulse whereby the sweet savours of God are diffused throughout the world is none but the suffering that befalleth His loved ones and the dire troubles that constantly touch His chosen ones.

Consider a while: the greater the affliction they suffered, the higher was raised the banner of devotion and faithfulness; and the more griev-

ous the trials they endured, the more abundant were the outpourings of grace from the Abhá Beauty. For it is during the darksome night that the radiance of light is conspicuous and the illumination of the lamp most perceptible. Therefore enlightened faces when exposed to dire hardships shine forth with the utmost radiance and brightness, and the hearts of His chosen ones when held in chains and fetters are filled with exceeding joy, gladness, and ecstasy.

In the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá' the Exalted Oneⁱ addresseth the Abhá Beauty in these words: "O Thou our great and omnipotent Master! I have sacrificed myself wholly for Thee and have yearned for naught but martyrdom in Thy path." Ponder ye carefully. The highest aspiration cherished by Him Who is the Leader of the righteous and the Day-Star of divine splendour was to lay down His life for the sake of the One Who doeth whatsoever He willeth. Thus it is clear and manifest what should be the supreme aspiration and longing of the loved ones of God.

And upon ye be greetings and praise!

24 *He is God*

O servants of the one true God! O handmaids of the Merciful!

From the outset love was rebellious and bloodthirsty, So as to put every stranger to flight.

One of the requisites of true love is willingness to bear every suffering and tribulation that hath occurred in the past or may occur in the future. Hence a passionate lover is always stained with blood, and he that yearneth to meet the Beloved a constant wanderer. How well is it said:

The worldly wise who garner the ears of grain are unaware of Laylí's secret,

For unto none was accorded the great glory but Majnún—he who set the whole harvest afire.

Thus throughout all ages and centuries the righteous have been made a target to the darts of adversity and have fallen victim to the swords of

i The Báb.

oppression. At one time they quaffed the cup of dire ordeal, at another they tasted the venom of bitter woe. Not for a moment did they enjoy rest and comfort, nor did they repose for a fleeting breath upon the couch of tranquillity. Rather did they endure agonizing torment and patiently carry the burden of hardship that every oppressor was wont to impose upon them. Having been consigned to dungeons and prisons, they severed themselves from the world and all its peoples.

In this way most of the favoured ones of God offered up their lives as martyrs in the field of sacrifice. He Who is the resplendent Morn of divine guidance, the Exalted One,ⁱ sank below the horizon of sacrifice. Quddús sought companionship with the Beloved through glorious martyrdom. Mullá Ĥusayn opened a new gate to the field of martyrdom. Vaĥíd distinguished himself as a peerless figure in the arena of sacrifice. Zanjáníⁱⁱ offered up his life as a martyr upon the plain of tribulation. The King of Martyrs hastened forth to the place of sacrifice. The Beloved of Martyrs was enraptured with ineffable gladness when he offered up his life for the sake of God. Ashraf attained the heights of honour as he unflinchingly set his face towards the arena of sacrifice. Badí', as he breathed his last, exclaimed: "Magnified be my Lord, the Most Glorious!" The martyrs of the land of Yáⁱⁱⁱ drank their fill with relish from the draught of glorious martyrdom, and the martyrs of Shíráz laid down their lives in the arena of ardent love to the tune of sweet and wondrous melodies. Those massacred in the land of Nayríz were inebriated with the brimful cup of sacrifice, and the martyrs of Tabríz were seized with ecstatic joy and unleashed new energies in the field of sacrifice. Those who renounced their lives in Mázindarán exclaimed: "O Lord! Destine for us this cup that brimmeth over with the choice wine"; while the martyrs of Işfahán laid down their lives with utmost joy and radiance.

In brief, there is not a spike whose tip is not tinged with the blood of the martyrs, nor is there a place not dyed crimson with the blood of His ardent lovers. The purpose is to enable you to know that one of the tenets of those that thirst after Him, and the highest aspiration of such as long to behold His face, is to endure hardship, to submit to trials and martyrdom in the path of the Lord of grace. Therefore it behoveth you to render thanks unto God for the bounty of having drunk your fill from this draught and

i The Báb.

ii Ĥujjat.

iii Yazd.

for having tasted deadly poison in the path of the Best-Beloved. Indeed, far from being a poison, this is pure honey and sugar; and far from being bitter in taste, this is the essence of sweetness.

O how eager am I to bear affliction in the path of God! O what a great joy to suffer hardship for His love! O how blessed the man who tasteth the bitterness of woe, and how well is it with him who is swept into the ocean of tribulation in his eagerness to attain the presence of God! It behoveth you to offer thanksgiving at every moment, inasmuch as ye became the target of atrocities in the path of divine guidance and were exposed to grievous oppressions for the sake of the love ye cherish for the Almighty.

In truth, those that are guided solely by their reason would be unable to perceive the sweetness of this cup, but the ardent lovers will be overjoyed and enraptured by the holy ecstasy which this wondrous draught doth produce. Every discerning observer who hath gazed upon the countenance of that graceful Beloved was prompted to lay down his life as a martyr, and every receptive ear which had hearkened unto that celestial melody suffered its listener to become so enraptured with joy as to offer up himself without hesitation as a sacrifice. The moth which is animated by love will burn its wings as it flitteth round the lamp of God, and the phoenix of tender affection will be set ablaze by the fire of ardent desire. No unfamiliar bird can partake of the heat of this Fire, nor can the fowls that dwell upon the dust plunge forth into this heavenly Ocean. However, praise be unto God, ye are the leviathans of this ocean, the birds of this pasture, the moths of this lamp, the nightingales of this meadow.

And upon you rest the glory of the Most Glorious!

25 *He is God*

O faithful friends in the Abhá Beauty! By reason of the oppression and atrocities that have befallen those two souls whom the people of the world have wronged, ye have raised the cry of lamentation and grieving and have wept and sighed bitterly. This is meet and right, for those two gazelles of the meadow of oneness were held fast in the talons of ferocious beasts, and those two nightingales of the rose-garden of divine unity were gripped in the claws of depraved ravens.

There is no doubt that as a result of those dire woes and sufferings the hearts of the friends of God have been set aflame like unto a candle and they bemoan their grief with tearful eyes. I swear by God, besides

Whom there is none other God, were ye to scrutinize carefully, ye would observe that every tree, every rock or clod of earth hath wept sore over this grievous injustice and hostility, and is wasted away by reason of this world-consuming fire.

Indeed, those wronged ones had never hurt the feelings of even a moth, nor had they ever put forth the hand of molestation towards a helpless ant. They were innocent of any crime and sought no refuge except the threshold of the Ever-Living, Self-Subsisting Lord. They had committed no error save that of having shaken off their slumber, and had incurred no guilt but that of becoming captive to His musk-laden tresses. Their grave offence was to display a glimpse of the beauty of the heavenly Peacock. To do this they spread out the plumage of sanctity and intoned sweet melodies even as the warbling of a nightingale. This was the only guilt they had committed; their faithfulness was regarded as a crime, and their sincerity as deceit. Yet notwithstanding their manifold expressions of love and fellowship, the ravening wolves attacked those two radiant, Joseph-like beings and ripped open not only their shirts but their breasts. Indeed, so vehement was their hatred and rancour that they unhesitatingly shed their sacred blood. Erelong will God punish those wicked-doers, both in this world and hereafter, for that which they have wrought, and will bring dire humiliation upon them in this life and in the next. Verily, God is the Avenger, the Almighty.

As to those blessed souls, they will, even as the doves of holiness, wing their flight unto the Concourse on high and in the meads of the Abhá Kingdom will burst into melodious songs, whose strains of sanctity will exhilarate every attentive ear, and whose wondrous accents will be heard at all times by the people of abiding faithfulness. What gift is there greater than this? What blessing is mightier than shedding these few drops of blood in the path of the peerless Lord? What felicity is more meritorious than the bounty of being aided by the mystery of sacrifice to consecrate themselves to the love of the Abhá Beauty? May my life be offered up for those two martyrs; may my whole being be sacrificed for their sake; may my heart be laid down as a ransom for them. Verily, this is a supreme favour, this is a most glorious felicity.

And upon you be salutation and praise.

- 26 In these days when the wicked have created violent disturbances and the opponents have bestirred themselves, they have, in every region, stretched

forth the hand of aggression and raised the banner of injustice and animosity. In every locality they have launched attacks against the oppressed.

As is currently known, this grievous assault hath assumed nationwide proportions. In Işfahán they aroused a great commotion, in Rasht the foundations of the city were shaken, and in Qazvín they committed manifest atrocities. Indeed, throughout the country agitation is aroused through vehement hostility and dust is stirred up by a raging tempest of hate.

And all this notwithstanding that everyone is fully aware that the friends of God are those whom the people of the world have oppressed and who are the well-wishers of all kindreds and nations. They tread the path of righteousness and seek to foster amity and fellowship with all mankind. They are contemptuous of their own selves and inebriated with the wine of the love of the Almighty. They are sincere and steadfast, shining and radiant. They speak forth, they are competent. They defend the helpless and are a refuge to the fugitive, an asylum to the poor, a haven for the distressed, a remedy for the afflicted, and a balm to the wounds of the needy. They eagerly seek to live in perfect peace with the warlike and quarrelsome tribes, and to those who oppose them they show forth composure, serenity, and kindness.

Be not saddened and grieved by reason of the atrocities the enemies have perpetrated. The day is fast approaching when the light of love will have dispelled the darkness of animosity and the splendours of the sun of truth will have driven away the gloomy night. This spirit of heavenly fellowship, this uprightness of the friends of God will promote the well-being and tranquillity of all mankind. Warring factions will become peaceful, opposing kindreds friendly, hostile peoples reconciled, and aggressive nations united. This is the imperishable glory of the human world. This is the supreme illumination in the kingdom of the Lord of Mercy.

27 *He is the All-Glorious*

O ye wronged captives! The divines in that land have put forth the hand of aggression and have surpassed in cruelty the Pharaohs who executed their victims upon the stake, and the people of Nimrod, Thamúd, and 'Ad. They have closed the eye of justice, and with the darts of tyranny have pierced the hearts of the oppressed. They have set on fire the harvest of the wronged ones, and deemed it expedient to inflict upon them every cruelty,

molestation, and torture, that perchance by so doing the divinely kindled fire might be extinguished, the seething and roaring of the ocean of God's bounty subside, the outpourings of the clouds of His loving-kindness be stopped, the meteor of heavenly guidance be hindered from shedding its radiance upon those regions, the reviving breezes of divine blessing which blow from the direction of His tender mercy be withheld, the fragrance of the rose of His gracious providence no longer be diffused from the garden of divine unity, the light of its brilliant orb be obscured, and the secrets of the manifestation of heavenly bestowals be forgotten.

Alas! Alas! Those divines are unaware that the waves of the ocean of glory will surge high and the pervasive power of the Cause of God will acquire unprecedented glory. Its orb will shine resplendent and the effulgent light of its meteor will permeate the world. Its spark will develop into a flame, its luminous star into a sun, and its drop into a downpour and a flood. Its grain will grow into a harvest, its glittering gem will sparkle in every gathering, its fame will be noised abroad, and the anthem of its glorification will reach the highest heavens.

As to these servants and homeless ones, we were so inebriated with our fill from the draught of the love of God that we yearned to drink deep of that wine of God's Covenant. Thus, chalice in hand, dancing and leaping with joy, we hastened into the arena of sacrifice. We offered supplications begging for adversity. We exposed our breasts as a target for the shafts of oppression and with the whole affection of our hearts and souls we welcomed the sword of injustice.

This body is the abode of ills and this darkened self a cage to every warbling bird. One's corporeal frame shall become dust and a target to dreadful darts. Therefore if it were offered up in the field of sacrifice for the sake of God, no favour or blessing could be greater than this. Earthly possessions will certainly be lost, and what hath been accumulated will be dispersed; excessive riches will be cast adrift, and the flush of fortune will wither away and fade into nothingness; immense treasures will be squandered, and the wealth gathered up by the wind will eventually be blown away by the wind. Hence, better is it for one's riches to be pillaged and plundered in the path of God than be a booty of the changes and chances of the world.

As to lofty buildings, imposing mansions, and magnificent palaces: Every inhabited and flourishing place will become desolate and every mighty edifice reduced to ruin. Therefore, how much better it is for these

habitations which are more fragile than a spider's web to be wrecked and ruined for the love of the sovereign Lord of the Kingdom. For if a house of clay be destroyed, there will be reared in its stead a glorious mansion within the soul-uplifting immensity of the realms above. If one's home and dwelling-place be laid waste in this transitory dust-heap, one will be provided with a matchless and incomparable nest within the rose-garden of eternity.

Thus all that is related to the loved ones of God—their former glory, their present services, the grievous sufferings they have borne—all will, even as carving on slabs of emerald, be recorded on the scrolls of the Abhá Kingdom, and therefrom will they shed their radiance upon all the worlds of God. Then when that light sheddeth its rays upon the tongues of the world of existence, it giveth rise to expressions of praise and glorification; when directed towards human hearts, it evoketh the memory of noble traits, deeds, and virtues; when reflected upon the pages of the world, it becometh the object of the verse “and give me a good name among posterity”;ⁱ it illumineth the surface of the earth; it is made manifest in the form of consecrated spots and sacred Shrines.

28 *He is God*

O servant of Bahá! It behoveth thee to render thanks unto the threshold of the Lord of Oneness for the afflictions that have befallen thee, inasmuch as the adversities that are borne in the path of the one true God are but the revelations of His tender mercy, and any such tribulation is the essence of His bounty.

This life is like unto vapour in a desert, and the existence of every thing is as a mere illusion, evanescent and bound to extinction. That which endureth is the spiritual reality: it is the shining essence; it is life eternal; it is undisturbed felicity, unfading and perpetual, flourishing and plenteous. The revolution of cycles is powerless to ravage it, nor can the succession of ages and centuries molest it. Therefore, this divinely ordained reality, this heavenly sign must needs be preserved.

And the amazing thing is this, that the most effective means whereby this light of truth is safeguarded and protected is the onslaught of the enemies, grievous ordeals, and manifold hardships. The globe of this lamp is the tempestuous winds, and the safety of this ship lieth in the violence of tumultuous waves.

i Qur'án 26:84.

Therefore one must show forth gratitude in the face of Job-like afflictions and must evince joy and pleasure at the unyielding cruelty of evil-doers, inasmuch as such tribulations lead to immortality and serve as the supreme factor to attract His consummate blessings and infinite bestowals.

And upon thee be the glory of the Most Glorious.

29 *He is God*

O spiritual friends and loved ones of the All-Merciful! In every age believers are many but the tested are few. Render ye praise unto God, ye that are tested believers, that ye have been subjected to every kind of trial and ordeal in the path of the supreme Lord. In the fire of ordeals, your faces have flushed aglow like unto pure gold, and amidst the flames of cruelty and oppression which the wicked had kindled, ye suffered yourselves to be consumed while remaining all the time patient. Thus ye have initiated every believer into the ways of steadfastness and fortitude. You showed them the meaning of forbearance, of constancy, and of sacrifice, and what leadeth to dismay and distress. This indeed is a token of the gracious providence of God and a sign of the infinite favours vouchsafed by the Abhá Beauty, Who hath singled out the friends of that region to bear grievous sufferings in the path of His love. Outwardly they are fire, but inwardly light and an evidence of His glory. Ye have been examples of the verses "Let them that are men of action follow in their footsteps"ⁱ and "For this let the striving strive."ⁱⁱ

In short, the day is approaching when the gay trappings of this earthly life will have been rolled up and the sorry plight and adversity of the people of iniquity will have waxed more grievous than those experienced by the oppressed. The inmates of palaces will have been subjected to the confinement of graves, and such as occupy the seats of honour will have fallen upon the dust of misery and abasement.

However, those who have offered up their lives as martyrs will shine resplendent even as a candle, and the effulgent glory of the friends of God will shed its radiance from the horizon of eternity like unto a brilliant star. Behold how wondrous is the bounty whereunto ye have attained. Ye have followed the example set by Him Whom the world hath wronged. Like unto the Day-Star of the world ye have outwardly suffered an eclipse

i Qur'án 37:61.

ii Qur'án 83:26.

by reason of the injustice the people of malice have wrought. However, far from an eclipse, this is naught but splendour; far from concealment, this is naught but the defeat of the legions. Erelong ye shall behold the shining light of the one true God shedding its radiance upon the whole world, while the heedless ones find themselves in the darkness of extinction.

In the estimation of the loved ones of God, abasement is exaltation itself, and affliction leadeth to faithfulness. Earthly glory and comfort are but a mirage of illusion, while in the realm of the spirit heavenly gifts are everlasting and imperishable. The lights in the nether world may be bright, but they are put out at the break of dawn, whereas the stars that shine in the heaven of the love of God will sparkle continually throughout ages and centuries. Such is everlasting glory, such is infinite bounty, such is life eternal, and such is boundless grace.

And upon you rest salutation and praise.

- 30 The legions of the world cannot withstand this mighty Army. Its weapons are divine knowledge and assurance, and its sword is its world-encircling light. Physical powers are capable of resisting earthly armies but are impotent before the onslaught of the hosts of heaven. Thousands of times this hath been tried and proven. The wicked people of *T̤h̤ amūd* who manifested fierce hostility towards *Ṣāliḥ* were unable to withstand His indomitable power. Likewise, the tribes of 'Ad perpetrated revolting outrages, but the spiritual sword of *Hūd* remained unsheathed and the divinely kindled light proved unquenchable. Although the clash of the arms of the wretched *Nimrod* reached the ears of all peoples, he failed to suppress the glory of Abraham. The misguided Copts marshalled their troops against Moses, yet could not engage Him in battle. The Jews who gainsaid God's Cause aroused violent commotion, regarded the Beauty of the Promised Oneⁱⁱⁱ as a fire no longer bright, stirred up fierce opposition, and launched a campaign of attacks and aggression against Him, but in the end their opposition proved of no avail. The leaders of *Ḥijāz* inflicted grievous ordeals and atrocities upon the Prince of Mecca,^{iv} tormented and injured Him as much as it lay in their power, until their assaults grew so vehement that the Lord of the righteous migrated unto Medina, where He proclaimed the Word of God. Later, various kindreds and peoples leagued themselves together, waged tribal war, and encircled that focal Centre of

iii Jesus.

iv Muḥammad.

Light from every direction, but failed to subdue Him. This is but a brief account of past experiences.

Nevertheless, it is highly deplorable that subsequent generations, wholly unaware of this outstanding truth, still seek to oppose the Beauty of the Promised One with utter heedlessness. They have armed themselves with a myriad darts of iniquity and swords of transgression and are engaged in unrelenting attacks. Ere long will they realize the grievous mistake they have committed.

They seek to compress the unlimited ocean; they try to stop forthwith the wondrous outpourings of the vernal showers. But alas for them! The reviving breeze that bloweth from the direction of the Abhá Kingdom cannot be halted, and the musk-laden fragrance of faithfulness that wafteth from the rose-garden of the All-Glorious can never be arrested.

During the ministry of Christ, the Cause of God did not pass beyond the regions of Jerusalem. Whatever else was achieved came afterwards. Likewise, in the days of the Prince of Mecca—may the souls of the favoured ones of God be offered up for His sake—the reputation of His sublime Faith was confined to the boundaries of Hijáz. However, the fame of this glorious Cause reached the East and the West during the lifetime of the Blessed Beauty, and Tablets were revealed for the crowned heads of the world.

This blameworthy people have already heard and learned how the wicked grievously failed in their opposition towards the Prince of the righteous, yet they are still heedless. This blessed, this mighty Cause which hath stirred the whole earth to its foundation cannot be restrained by the hostility that these bands of weaklings have unleashed. Ere long will they find themselves in manifest loss.

31 May my life be offered up for the dust of these martyrs; may my entire being be a sacrifice for the blood of the chosen ones of God, them who enjoy near access to His exalted Threshold, who are attracted to the summit of transcendent glory and established upon the seat of truth in the all-glorious Kingdom.

O ye who have suffered martyrdom! O trustees of His Revelation! O distinguished men of virtue! O illustrious and noble ones! May mine inmost reality, my spirit, my entire being, and whatsoever God hath bestowed upon me through His bounty and grace be laid down as a sacrifice for you.

I bear witness that ye are the radiant stars, the gleaming meteors, the resplendent full moons, the brilliant orbs in this wondrous Revelation. Well is it with you, O birds that warble in the gardens of divine unity; blessed are ye, O lions that roar in the forests of detachment; happy are ye, O leviathans that swim in the waters of His oneness. Verily, ye are the signs of divine guidance, ye are the banners that flutter in the field of sacrifice.

I beseech God to bless me, through the breezes of holiness wafted from that glorious centre of sacrifice, and to quicken me with the reviving breath of heavenly communion blowing from that blessed region.

I beg you to intercede on my behalf in the presence of the ever-living, sovereign Lord that He may graciously suffer me to quaff my fill from the choice sealed wine, may grant me a portion from the unbounded felicity that ye enjoy, and may exhilarate my heart by giving me to drink from your chalice which is tempered at the camphor fountain. Verily, my Lord is merciful and forgiving. By bestowing the bounty of sacrifice in this realm of existence, He aideth whomsoever He willeth with whatsoever He pleaseth.

And upon you rest the glory of the Most Glorious!

From the Letters of Shoghi Effendi

- 32 If, in days to come, that landⁱ should be overtaken by diverse afflictions and calamities; if, to the rigours of the present times, there should be added the outbreak of widespread civil upheavals; if the country's already dark horizons should become still gloomier and more foreboding, you should neither be filled with trepidation and despondency, nor allow yourselves to be deflected, though it be to the extent of a hair's breadth, from that sound and well-considered course that you have been following up till now—from continuing, in other words, your persistent, tireless, and unremitting labours to increase the number of the Bahá'í administrative institutions, to strengthen their foundations, to enhance the fair name that they enjoy, and to consolidate the respect and standing in which they are held. The release of this innocent and wronged community from the bonds of captivity, and its deliverance from the clutches of the enemy and oppressor, cannot but be accompanied by general commotions and disturbances; likewise, the

i Írán.

attainment by the people of Bahá to a position in which they will enjoy true honour, comfort, and tranquillity must inevitably encounter the hostility and resistance, the clamorous opposition and tumultuous protests of all those who harbour enmity and rancour towards them. If, therefore, the troubled waters of the sea of adversity should grow yet more turbulent, if the storm of tribulation should increase in vehemence and assail that sore-tried community from all six sides with fresh disasters, then know unhesitatingly, and with unwavering conviction, that the hour of deliverance, the appointed time when the promises of old are to reach their glorious fulfilment, has drawn nigh, and that the means for the accomplishment of supreme and overwhelming victory by the hard-pressed followers of the Greatest Name in that land have all been readied and prepared. Fixity of purpose and unfaltering resolution are the qualities that must needs be manifested by the people of Bahá if they are successfully to traverse these last remaining stages, and witness, at the highest levels, and in a manner that will fill them with astonishment, the realization of their profoundest hopes and of their most deeply cherished desires. Such is the way of God—"and no change canst thou find in the way of God".ⁱ

- 33 In this stern battle of life the members of this oppressed community,ⁱⁱ aided by the power of the Kingdom and fortified by heavenly determination, by divinely imparted hopes and by glad-tidings from on high, are standing ready and alert to face any commotion or calamity. Unrelenting tribulations and increasing obstacles shall not make them flinch, nor cause them dismay or grief. They know with full certitude that as the horizons of the world grow darker, as its agitation becomes more severe and the prevailing chaos and confusion more widespread, the dawn of the Promised Day will correspondingly draw nearer, and the means for the splendours of His light to be shed abroad will be more readily provided.

However, the fulfilment of glad-tidings, so glorious and heart-uplifting, must needs be heralded by awesome and distressing events, inasmuch as the realization of these irrevocable and divinely ordained promises depends on the awakening and stirring of the conscience of the entire human race, while this cannot be achieved save through the occurrence of unnumbered afflictions, manifold convulsions, and growing adversities. And it is precisely for this reason that the people of Bahá are nourished

i Qur'án 33:62.

ii Tíhrán.

from the draught of certitude and are alive and active through the spirit of hope. They strive diligently, are alert and watchful, steadfast and vigilant. With heart and soul they exert their efforts. They will not allow the pressure of calamities gradually to impair the foundation of the Cause of God or vitiate the essence of its divinely revealed principles, nor will they permit the wickedness and the prevalence of crime to nullify or eclipse the radiance of the cardinal laws of their Faith, or the aggressive hands of the opponents and the machinations of the ungodly to inflict harm upon this holy Revelation, or the confused theories and ideologies that prevail in these days to create the least deviation from the straight path of God...

- 34 O grief-stricken and self-sacrificing souls! The Hand of Providence has ordained that those innocent victims of tyranny should once again be oppressed in the clutches of the wrong-doers, and the Will of God, the Ever-Living, the Almighty, has purposed that manifold tribulations and adversities should, like a torrential flood, descend successively upon that wronged community. In these years of dire stress our Lord, the All-Wise, has, as a preliminary measure for the fulfilment of His gracious pledge and in conformity with His undeviating principle, kindled a raging fire of trials in that country. Be not sorely grieved or dismayed. This is an effective means, preordained and irrevocable, which has been provided by the Causer of causes, through the operation of His immutable Will, and the exercise of His unquestionable power, and in the face of the machinations of every malicious opponent, so that the glory of His Cause may presently be unveiled before the assemblage of man and, in the days to come, His Faith may be rendered victorious and become securely established in that blessed land.

Let nothing frustrate or discourage you. Immerse yourselves in the study of the Holy Tablets. "I testify before God," Bahá'u'lláh asserts, "to the greatness, the inconceivable greatness of this Revelation. Again and again have We, in most of our Tablets, borne witness to this truth, that mankind may be roused from its heedlessness." In another connection this utterance has been revealed: "How great, how very great is this Cause. The day is fast approaching when its stupendous glory will have been made manifest and evident."

This heavenly Faith cannot be compared to the transitory things of the world of existence, nor can it be identified with or likened to physical and earthly forces. Its tabernacle has been raised through dire oppression,

its advancement and promulgation depend upon spiritual and mysterious agencies, and factors that are awesome, alarming and totally unexpected. The Tongue of the Ancient of Days, the Comforter of the people of the world, says: "Naught hath been ordained by the finger of His decree for His loved ones except that which is profitable unto them. We beseech Him to graciously enable them to show forth patience and fortitude that haply trials and ordeals might not deflect them from the path of God, the Almighty, the All-Knowing."

Through the insults and indignities suffered by the well-assured and faithful maidservants of God, portals of everlasting honour will be flung open before the face of the women in Persia, nay everywhere in the world, and as a result of the beatings, torture, and cruelties inflicted upon the newly converted Bahá'í youth, a new spirit of liveliness and freshness will stream forth through the veins and arteries of the temple of the Cause of God. The lamentation of the disconsolate who have been made homeless as a result of this grievous event will reach the ears of the spiritually minded in the West, and its powerful repercussions will release a fresh energy in the world of existence, will forge new spiritual ties and lay bare the essence of this heavenly Revelation before the eyes of all men, be they friends or strangers.

Although the sufferings that have befallen the friends during the past few years were not as frequent, as grievous and widespread as the successive waves of afflictions that have been let loose in recent months, yet notwithstanding this and as a direct consequence of the pangs of anguish and devastating sorrow that have crushed the souls of the friends in Persia, the cherished Cause of God has blossomed forth astonishingly and is advancing with a fresh momentum throughout the five continents of the globe.

While Persia remains heedless and unaware and its sorely tried friends are beset by grievous repressions and cruelties, the hosts of life, the bearers of the divine Message of salvation, are moving far and wide over the extensive territories of the free world, and bending their energies to capture the citadels of men's hearts. The motivating impulse, the driving power which is responsible for the successful achievements of these sanctified beings is derived from the heat and flame and the influence released through the relentless persecutions and ordeals which the pure-hearted friends in Persia are enduring. Wherefore has the Master said: "When the

light of God is ignited in the East it will shed illumination upon the West and its evidences will become visible both in the North and in the South.”

O spiritual brethren! Although the horizons of that country are dark, and manifold hardships and tribulations are continuous and unremitting; although the foundations of that realm are sorely shaken, and the minds of its people in a state of confusion; although there is no peace or protection for the righteous, and the unbelievers are relentless in their hatred and animosity, this anguish and distress, this abasement and ignorance will not endure, nor will this cruelty, captivity, agitation, and disturbance persist. The day is fast approaching when God will have manifested from this horizon such light and power as will cause the sun to be darkened, will obliterate every trace of them that have turned away disdainfully from God, and will illumine the faces of the sincere.

It well beseems you to direct your eager gaze to the glad-tidings that have been revealed by the Pen of the Most High and to let the shining prophecies that are contained in His Most Holy Book and in other Tablets illumine your expectant eyes. Can one imagine a pronouncement sweeter, an utterance and promise more perfect, more appropriate, and more glorious than these conclusive verses that have streamed forth from the repository of the Abhá Pen? Exalted is His Word: “Let nothing grieve thee, O land of Tā,ⁱ for God hath chosen thee to be the source of the joy of all mankind. He shall, if it be His Will ... gather together the flock of God which the wolves have scattered ... The eye of His loving-kindness shall everlastingly be directed towards thee. The day is approaching when thy agitation will have been transmuted into peace and quiet calm.” Moreover, the following significant and soul-stirring words have been set down by the pen of the Centre of the Covenant: “Erelong will it be witnessed that the government of the native land of the Blessed Perfection will become the most honoured government of this world, and Írán will become the most prosperous of all lands. This indeed is a token of God’s bountiful favour, and verily in this is there a lesson unto every beholder.”

Such God-given promises and sublime glad-tidings that the Pen of the Most High and the divinely aided and inspired fingers of the Centre of the Covenant have inscribed will, according to the following blessed verse, be unquestionably fulfilled. How enthralling is His Word: “Whatsoever hath streamed forth from the Pen of the Most High hath either already occurred or shall assuredly come to pass. Not a single letter thereof will

i Tihrán.

remain unrealized, for verily the fair-minded shall behold it established upon the throne of fulfilment."

However, the essential thing is patience, fortitude, courage, and audacity. The day is approaching when that country will have turned into a blissful paradise, when the wronged ones of Persia will have become the pride of the world and the leaders of mankind. And this is a promise that will not be belied.

- 35 O followers of the beloved Cause of Bahá'u'lláh! Regard not the smallness of your numbers, nor be depressed and discontented by reason of the harm and injury that you sustain at the hands of friend or foe. Let not the vilifications, the whisperings and idle remarks of the foolish and the short-sighted grieve you, nor the vast array of the multitude of assailants frighten or alarm you.

These tribulations have time and again been foretold by our peerless Master. The prophetic warnings that our supreme Lord has uttered clearly foreshadow the onslaught of the hosts of affliction. Have you not heard what has flowed from the tongue of the Comforter of mankind in this connection? He says: "Say: Tribulation is as water for that which We have planted in human hearts. The day is approaching when out of it will have grown such fruit that every seed thereof will proclaim: Verily, no God is there but Him, the Almighty, the All-Knowing." And likewise He has said: "Through adversity have We fostered the growth of the Faith of God in bygone ages. Erelong wilt thou witness this Cause shining resplendent above the horizon of glory, invested with majesty and power." And also He affirms: "God hath made tribulation as the crown wherewith the head of Bahá is attired. The time is at hand when its radiance will have enveloped the whole world. By My life! Such tribulations as are sustained in the path of God, the Fashioner of all created things, are as cherished by Me as eyes are cherished by men, nay even more! Unto this thy Lord, the Mighty, the Unconstrained, beareth witness."

O apostles of Bahá'u'lláh! How pitiful if we, who are recognized as the bearers of His glorious Name, and related to such an omnipotent Lord, should, in moments of adversity, fail to scrupulously follow the noble example set by Him Who stands peerless in His long-suffering. Happy the one who until his last breath has tasted the venom of woe at the hand of the faithless, and blessed the heart that for the sake of promoting and proclaiming His Cause does not allow himself a moment's rest. Such is

the disposition of the pure in heart, such is the method of them that enjoy near access to God, such is the way of the true strivers after God, such befits the hosts that are under the guidance of God, such is the means whereby undoubted triumph and victory will be achieved for the Cause of God.

O people of Bahá! Lift up your voices and hail men of wisdom with glad-tidings. Call aloud between earth and heaven, exclaiming: O people of the world and workers of injustice and iniquity! Rest assured that we, the followers of the Abhá Beauty, have paid for our Faith with our life-blood, and have tasted the sweetness of sacrifice in the path of His love. Our trust in Him sustains our lives, enabling us to be detached from aught else but Him. We shall promote His Cause to the last breath and offer praise and gratitude at all times for the tribulations He ordains.

O people of the earth! Know you with absolute certainty, and let every wavering and hesitant soul be apprised and take warning, that whatsoever has explicitly been revealed by the All-Glorious Pen will eventually become clear and evident, even as the sun in its noon-tide glory. In this snow-white Spot, and in other lands, the immutable Will of Him Who has stretched out the earth and raised up the heavens shall be fulfilled, the cherished desire of longing hearts will emerge from behind a myriad veils into the realm of existence, and the highest aspiration of the people of Bahá will be fully, perfectly, and conclusively realised. This is that which our Lord has promised us both openly and privily, and indeed this is a promise that will not prove untrue. Therefore it beseems you to arise and exclaim: "O concourse of the earth! Die in your wrath. Erelong will the standard of His Faith be hoisted in every city, shedding radiance upon all regions."

36 *He is God*

O mighty Lord! Thou seest what hath befallen Thy helpless lovers in this darkest of long nights; Thou knowest how, in all these years of separation from Thy Beauty, the confidants of Thy mysteries have ever been acquainted with burning grief.

O Powerful Master! Suffer not Thy wayfarers to be abased and brought low; succour this handful of feeble creatures with the potency of Thy might. Exalt Thy loved ones before the assemblage of man, and grant them strength. Allow those broken-winged beings to raise their heads and

glory in the fulfilment of their hopes, that we in these brief days of life may gaze with our physical eyes on the elevation and exaltation of Thy Faith, and soar up to Thee with gladdened souls and blissful hearts.

Thou knowest that, since Thine ascension, we seek no name or fame, that in this swiftly passing world we wish henceforth no joy, no delight, and no good fortune.

Then keep Thy word, and exhilarate once more the lives of these, Thy sick at heart. Bring light to our expectant eyes, balm to our stricken breasts. Lead Thou the caravans of the city of Thy love swiftly to their intended goal. Draw those who sorrow after Thee into the high court of reunion with Thee. For in this world below we ask for nothing but the triumph of Thy Cause. And within the precincts of Thy boundless mercy we hope for nothing but Thy presence.

Thou art the Witness, the Haven, the Refuge; Thou art He Who rendereth victorious this band of the innocent.

37 The assaults, onslaughts, and attacks perpetrated by the people of arrogance and malice do not and will not endure. They shall, one and all, be dispelled at the appointed time, and no trace of them will be left behind. What will remain, and the influence thereof endure, are the wrongs suffered by the loved ones of God, the audacity they have evinced, the undaunted spirit manifested by the defenders of the Faith of the All-Merciful, their bonds of unity and harmony, and their tenacious adherence and undeviating allegiance to the institutions of the Cause of God in that land.

At present the state of affairs is in turmoil, tribulations are manifold, and the authorities have launched attacks from every direction. However, the invisible Hand of God is at work, and the wrathful Avenger is watching over the oppressed community of the righteous and the pious. Things that were hidden will be revealed, and realities that were unknown will become clear and evident. The innocence of those long-suffering and sanctified beings will definitely be proved and established, and every act of injustice, of iniquity and malice wrought by the evil-doers will be laid bare. The day-star of glory, as is prophesied, will shine forth from that land with such radiance that all men, high or low, of the rulers or the ruled, friend or foe, whether far or near, will be astonished and bewildered.

Now is the time for steadfastness. Now is the ripe moment for the stalwart warriors and champions to show forth courage and to demonstrate their heroism in the arena of service, until such time as God will exalt His

Cause, will remove the distress and anxiety of His friends and trusted servants, and glorify those who were brought low among His creatures, to make them spiritual leaders among men, and to make them God's heirs.

- 38 The shedding of innocent blood in that blessed land will produce marvellous results, and from it far-reaching consequences will ensue in the course of time. The fierce storm of woes and calamities and the incessant waves of unnumbered trials and incalculable hardships which in recent days have encompassed that small group from all sides are but the first glimmer, the dawning twilight heralding the advent of the new age that has been foretold in the past.

This gloomy night which has lasted for a number of years has plunged every part and region of that country into darkness. The darker the night will turn, and the more intense and dreadful its convulsions and commotions become, the nearer will be the appointed time when the bright morn of deliverance will dawn; when the day-star of felicity and emancipation will shine; when the light of the glory, power, and independence of the Faith of God will radiate with extraordinary brilliance; when the fall and collapse, the destruction and ruin of the people of malice and iniquity in that land will become apparent and conspicuous.

The hosts of Bahá, the concourse of the sore-oppressed ones in that afflicted country, should all know with absolute certainty that the Cause of God is great, and its strengthening grace quickens every mouldering bone; its heavenly confirmations are ever present and its adversaries on the offensive, launching their attacks from all sides. On the one hand they are seized with perturbation and alarm at the sight of the quaking of the foundations of their own structure, and its breakdown and collapse, while on the other hand they are amazed and bewildered at the people of Bahá, and their high degree of tranquillity and firmness, and their long-suffering and unshakable patience.

This is the day for steadfastness. Now is the time for defence and bravery, so that the evil ones who are lying in wait may be disconcerted, defeated, and put to flight, and the prophecies irrevocably decreed by God may be fulfilled without delay.

- 39 Agitations, trials, woes, afflictions, and torture, arson, expulsion, plunder, beating, vilification, captivity, banishment, imprisonment, destruction of life—none of these could hinder the advancement of this beloved Cause;

none could weaken the high resolve of its followers and champions in any part of the world; none could damage or disrupt the structure of its New Order; none could create a cleavage, a division, a schism, or any form of sectarianism in the ranks of its embattled hosts. Nay, rather, were one to observe with a discerning eye, it would become clear and evident that commotion in itself—the very succession of calamities, upheavals, and hardships, and the recurrence of trials, adversities, and sufferings—have lent an impetus to the power latent in the Cause and reinforced its compelling force and pervasive influence.

Indeed, as a result of the onrushing tempests of tribulation and the raging hurricanes of tests and trials, the Faith's scope of operation has been enlarged, its pillars have been raised to loftier heights, its foundation has become more secure, its glory more resplendent, the spread of its influence more rapid, its ascendancy and dominion more conspicuous and evident.

Every blow that the hands of the wrongdoer have inflicted upon the community of the followers of the Cause of God from without has proved to be the means of a fresh victory and triumph for the Faith, and every agitation provoked from within through the intrigues and plottings of perfidious traitors has led to a remarkable success for the Cause and to the revelation of its wondrous glory...

These momentous events, these startling and awesome happenings that have transpired during the past hundred years, confirm the truth of this most perfect, this consummate and enthralling utterance that has proceeded from the repository of the all-glorious Pen—exalted is His saying and blessed His Word: "From time immemorial have We reared the celestial Trees of divine Revelation with the waters of opposition and the shedding of blood, could ye but perceive it." Likewise He says: "By the righteousness of God! This divine Tree will develop by means of the waters of your opposition, yet ye understand not and remain heedless." Moreover He affirms: "Through affliction hath His Cause been promoted and His praise glorified." In another connection this blessed verse has been revealed: "Should they attempt to conceal its light on the continent it will assuredly rear its head in the midmost heart of the ocean and, raising its voice, proclaim: 'I am the life-giver of the world!'"

The amazing history of this glorious century will conclusively demonstrate to every opponent of the Cause throughout the world that violent upheavals have strengthened the root of this heavenly Tree, severe trials and hardships have reinforced the foundation of the divine Edifice. Dire

abasement became a vesture of glory, while adversity and tribulation were oil which fed the flame of the lamp of God's Revelation. Fierce attacks and violence produced steadfastness and constancy, and persecution and privation created interest and led to conversion and proclamation. Torment, repression, and subjugation were means whereby the light of the ascendancy and triumph of this beloved Cause were eventually diffused far and wide. Convulsions and commotions served in the long run to purify and strengthen the body of the Cause of God, while the clamour of the prattler, the uproar of the deceitful, the tumult of the froward were instrumental in raising high the melody of the Kingdom. The rending and tearing of veils caused such realities and mysteries as were latent in the inmost essence of God's Revelation to be uncovered and brought to light. Wherefore has the all-glorious Pen revealed: "Through their injustice we praised the Cause of God, and the anthem of praise, glorifying the Name of thy Lord, was broadcast in all countries. Through their rejection the truth was recognized, and as a result of their cruelties the luminary of justice hath shone forth. Ponder a while, O men of understanding, that ye might perceive." Likewise He states: "At one time He exalted His Cause by the hand of the people of tyranny, and at another by the hand of His chosen servants—they unto whom the heedless ones appear as but a handful of dust, they who declare that which the Pen of the Most High hath proclaimed from the horizon of glory."

- 40 Consider what momentous glad-tidings the all-glorious Pen has announced in the Holy Tablets, what explicit promises His exalted and irrevocable Pen has revealed. In the *Súratu'l-Haykal* these gem-like words are recorded: "He will, erelong, out of the Bosom of Power, draw forth the Hands of Ascendancy and Might—Hands who will arise to win victory for this Youth and who will purge mankind from the defilement of the outcast and the ungodly. These Hands will gird up their loins to champion the Faith of God, and will, in My name, the Self-Subsistent, the Mighty, subdue the peoples and kindreds of the earth. They will enter the cities and will inspire with fear the hearts of all their inhabitants. Such are the evidences of the might of God, how fearful, how vehement is His might!"ⁱ And likewise these luminous verses are inscribed in this holy *Súrih*: "The day is approaching when God will have raised up, through Thee, such invincible Hands, such indomitable Helpers, who will emerge from behind the veils, will render

i Translated by Shoghi Effendi, in *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

victorious the All-Merciful One amidst all the peoples of the world, and will burst forth into such a cry as will leave its mark in all hearts. Thus hath it been decreed in the inscribed Tablet. And they will appear with such power that all the dwellers of the earth will be seized with fear and every one will be sorely shaken."

Moreover He has written: "Erelong will the Call be raised in every city and thou shalt find the people fearful and dismayed by virtue of the awful ascendancy of God's Revelation. Thus hath it been irrevocably ordained in His Holy Scriptures." And also He declares: "Soon will the cry 'Yea, yea, here am I, here am I' be heard from every land. For there hath never been, nor can there ever be, any other refuge to fly to for anyone."ⁱ And again He says: "The day is fast approaching when God will have manifested from this horizon such light and power as will cause the sun to be darkened, will obliterate every trace of them that have turned away disdainfully from God, and will illumine the faces of the sincere." And likewise He has revealed: "Erelong ye shall witness all men believing in His cause and weeping sore over the good things that have escaped them during His days. Verily He is the Expounder, the All-Knowing."

And He also states: "Soon will the unbelievers behold the banners of victory and will hear the name of God proclaimed from every direction. On that day will they say: 'Truly we do believe in God.' Say: God well knoweth what is hidden in the breasts of all men." And again He has written: "Erelong will the faithful behold the standards of divine manifestation unfurled in all regions." And likewise He declares: "I swear by the Most Great Book that God's Revelation shall gain ascendancy and encompass the whole world."

Moreover, the following resplendent words which have flowed from the Pen of the Centre of the Covenant amply confirm that which the all-glorious Pen of Bahá'u'lláh has revealed: "Despair not of the manifestations of the divine Spirit. Erelong, by the leave of God, the veil will be removed from the face of His Cause, this effulgent light will shed its radiance upon all countries, the signs of His oneness will be spread abroad, and the banners bearing the emblems of your glorious Lord will float above the lofty mansion." And again He affirms: "The day will soon come when the light of divine unity will have so permeated the East and the West that no man dare any longer ignore it."ⁱⁱ

i Translated by Shoghi Effendi, in *The Advent of Divine Justice*.

ii Translated by Shoghi Effendi, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*.

LIGHT MERCY

MENTAL HEALTH AND
TESTS & DIFFICULTIES

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

Prepared by the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Australia
Compiled September 2021

Mental Health

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

41 O BEFRIENDED STRANGER!

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

The Hidden Words, Persian, no. 32

- 42 Know thou that the soul of man is exalted above, and is independent of all infirmities of body or mind. That a sick person showeth signs of weakness is due to the hindrances that interpose themselves between his soul and his body, for the soul itself remaineth unaffected by any bodily ailments. Consider the light of the lamp. Though an external object may interfere with its radiance, the light itself continueth to shine with undiminished power. In like manner, every malady afflicting the body of man is an impediment that preventeth the soul from manifesting its inherent might and power. When it leaveth the body, however, it will evince such ascendancy, and reveal such influence as no force on earth can equal. Every pure, every refined and sanctified soul will be endowed with tremendous power, and shall rejoice with exceeding gladness.

Consider the lamp which is hidden under a bushel. Though its light be shining, yet its radiance is concealed from men. Likewise, consider the sun which hath been obscured by the clouds. Observe how its splendor appeareth to have diminished, when in reality the source of that light hath remained unchanged. The soul of man should be likened unto this sun, and all things on earth should be regarded as his body. So long as no external impediment interveneth between them, the body will, in its entirety, continue to reflect the light of the soul, and to be sustained by its power. As soon as, however, a veil interposeth itself between them, the brightness of that light seemeth to lessen.

Consider again the sun when it is completely hidden behind the clouds. Though the earth is still illumined with its light, yet the measure of light which it receiveth is considerably reduced. Not until the clouds have dispersed, can the sun shine again in the plenitude of its glory. Neither the presence of the cloud nor its absence can, in any way, affect the inherent splendor of the sun. The soul of man is the sun by which his body is illumined, and from which it draweth its sustenance, and should be so regarded.

Consider, moreover, how the fruit, ere it is formed, lieth potentially within the tree. Were the tree to be cut into pieces, no sign nor any part of the fruit, however small, could be detected. When it appeareth, however, it manifesteth itself, as thou hast observed, in its wondrous beauty and glorious perfection. Certain fruits, indeed, attain their fullest development only after being severed from the tree.

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

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

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

Illnesses which occur by reason of physical causes should be treated by doctors with medical remedies; those which are due to spiritual causes disappear through spiritual means. Thus an illness caused by affliction, fear, nervous impressions, will be healed more effectively by spiritual rather than by physical treatment. Hence, both kinds of treatment should be followed; they are not contradictory. Therefore thou shouldst also accept physical remedies inasmuch as these too have come from the mercy and favor of God, Who hath revealed and made manifest medical science so that His servants may profit from this kind of treatment also. Thou shouldst give equal attention to spiritual treatments, for they produce marvelous effects.

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

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

- 44 O thou who art turning thy face towards God! Close thine eyes to all things else, and open them to the realm of the All-Glorious. Ask whatsoever thou wishest of Him alone; seek whatsoever thou seekest from Him alone. With a look He granteth a hundred thousand hopes, with a glance He healeth a hundred thousand incurable ills, with a nod He layeth balm on every wound, with a glimpse He freeth the hearts from the shackles of grief. He doeth as He doeth, and what recourse have we? He carrieth out His Will, He ordaineth what He pleaseth. Then better for thee to bow down thy head in submission, and put thy trust in the All-Merciful Lord.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Baha, sec. 22

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 45 It is very hard to be subject to any illness, particularly a mental one. However we must always remember these illnesses have nothing to do with our spirit or our inner relation to God. It is a great pity that as yet so little is really known of the mind, its workings and the illnesses that afflict it; no doubt, as the world becomes more spiritually minded and scientists understand the true nature of man, more humane and permanent cures for mental diseases will be found.

12 April 1948

- 46 There are a great many as you know mental diseases and troubles at present, and the one thing Bahá'ís must not do is take a defeatist attitude toward them. The power in the Faith is such that it can sustain us on a much higher level in spite of whatever our ailments might be than other people who are denied it. This however does not mean that we should ignore medical opinion and treatment. On the contrary, we should do our best to procure the opinion of specialists and competent doctors.

12 January 1957

From letters on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

- 47 The Universal House of Justice suggests that through daily prayer, and specially by observing the daily obligatory prayers, through study of the Writings, through active participation in teaching efforts and in the activities of the community, and through constant effort to sacrifice for the Faith you love so well, you will provide a spiritual counterpart to the professional help you will receive from the experts. You should also endeavour to engage in some useful occupation, or train yourself to have such an occupation, as work is itself another means at our disposal, in accordance with our Teachings, to draw nearer to God, and to better grasp His purpose for us in this world.

6 April 1976

- 48 ...mental illness is not spiritual, although its effects may indeed hinder and be a burden in one's striving toward spiritual progress. In a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to a believer there is this further passage:

Such hindrances [i.e. illness and outer difficulties], no matter how severe and insuperable they may at first seem, can and should be effectively overcome through the combined and sustained power of prayer and of determined and continued effort.

That effort can include the counsel of wise and experienced physicians, including psychiatrists. Working for the Faith, serving others who may need you, and giving of yourself can aid you in your struggle to overcome your sufferings. One helpful activity is, of course, striving to teach the Cause in spite of personal feelings of shortcomings, thus allowing the healing words of the Cause to flood your mind with their grace and positive power.

15 June 1982

- 49 Your inquiries into matters of mental health are timely, for of all medical science studies, remedies for disorders of the brain and mind are possibly the most important for mankind. In a letter written on behalf of the beloved Guardian, which refers to Freudian methods, it is stated that "psychiatric treatment ... is still a growing rather than a perfected science," hence requires contemporary disciplined study. In another letter he provides

guidance by suggesting that, despite the many mental diseases and troubles of the present day, the power in the Faith is such that it can sustain Bahá'ís, whatever their ailments may be, on a much higher level than is given to others who are denied its healing grace.

8 July 1986

- 50 It is certainly very difficult to bear an illness like the one you describe, but you can be sure that, as with all the difficulties of life, this one, too, will present an opportunity for much spiritual growth and for the garnering of many blessings both for you and for your near ones. The important thing is to bear in mind that there is really nothing to fear since, according to the Teachings, the soul is exalted above the ills of the body, however unpleasant they may be. These emotional or mental illnesses, as they are often called, seem in part to stem from a certain imbalance in the elements of the body, an imbalance which medical science is only just beginning to understand. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says that the soul is like the sun and the ills of the body like clouds. The latter can keep the rays of the sun from being visible to us, but they can never have an influence on the refulgence of the sun itself.

30 June 1993

Tests and Difficulties

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

51 O SON OF MAN!

For everything there is a sign. The sign of love is fortitude under My decree and patience under My trials.

The Hidden Words, Arabic, no. 48

52 O SON OF MAN!

If adversity befall thee not in My path, how canst thou walk in the ways of them that are content with My pleasure? If trials afflict thee not in thy longing to meet Me, how wilt thou attain the light in thy love for My beauty?

The Hidden Words, Arabic, no. 50

53 O SON OF MAN!

My calamity is My providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, but inwardly it is light and mercy. Hasten thereunto that thou mayest become an eternal light and an immortal spirit. This is My command unto thee, do thou observe it.

The Hidden Words, Arabic, no. 51

54 Whatever hath befallen you hath been for the sake of God. This is the truth, and in this there is no doubt. Ye should, therefore, leave all your affairs in His Hands, place your trust in Him, and rely upon Him. He will assuredly not forsake you. In this, likewise, there is no doubt. No father will surrender his sons to devouring beasts; no shepherd will leave his flock to ravening wolves. He will most certainly do his utmost to protect his own.

If, however, for a few days, in compliance with God's all-encompassing wisdom, outward affairs should run their course contrary to one's cherished desire, this is of no consequence and should not matter. Our intent is that all the friends should fix their gaze on the Supreme Horizon and cling to that which hath been revealed in the Tablets. They should strictly avoid

sedition and refrain from treading the path of dissension and strife. They should champion their one true God, exalted be He, through the hosts of forbearance, of submission, of an upright character, of goodly deeds, and of the choicest and most refined words.

From a Tablet

- 55 Beseech ye the one true God to grant that ye may taste the savor of such deeds as are performed in His path, and partake of the sweetness of such humility and submissiveness as are shown for His sake. Forget your own selves, and turn your eyes towards your neighbor. Bend your energies to whatever may foster the education of men. Nothing is, or can ever be, hidden from God. If ye follow in His way, His incalculable and imperishable blessings will be showered upon you. This is the luminous Tablet, whose verses have streamed from the moving Pen of Him Who is the Lord of all worlds. Ponder it in your hearts, and be ye of them that observe its precepts.

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

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

- 56 Again, is there any deed in the world that would be nobler than service to the common good? Is there any greater blessing conceivable for a man, than that he should become the cause of the education, the development, the prosperity and honor of his fellow-creatures?

No, by the Lord God! The highest righteousness of all is for blessed souls to take hold of the hands of the helpless and deliver them out of their ignorance and abasement and poverty, and with pure motives, and only for the sake of God, to arise and energetically devote themselves to the service of the masses, forgetting their own worldly advantage and working only to serve the general good. "They prefer them before themselves, though poverty be their own lot." "The best of men are those who serve the people; the worst of men are those who harm the people."

The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 57 Happy the soul that shall forget his own good, and like the chosen ones of God, vie with his fellows in service to the good of all; until, strengthened by the blessings and perpetual confirmations of God, he shall be empowered to raise this mighty nation up to its ancient pinnacles of glory, and restore

this withered land to sweet new life, and as a spiritual springtime, array those trees which are the lives of men with the fresh leaves, the blossoms and fruits of consecrated joy.

The Secret of Divine Civilization

- 58 Question: "Does the soul progress more through sorrow or through the joy in this world?"

'Abdu'l-Bahá: "The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering.

The more the ground is ploughed the better the seed will grow, the better the harvest will be. Just as the plough furrows the earth deeply, purifying it of weeds and thistles, so suffering and tribulation free man from the petty affairs of this worldly life until he arrives at a state of complete detachment. His attitude in this world will be that of divine happiness. Man is, so to speak, unripe: the heat of the fire of suffering will mature him. Look back to the times past and you will find that the greatest men have suffered most."

Question: "He who through suffering has attained development, should he fear happiness?"

'Abdu'l-Bahá: "Through suffering he will attain to an eternal happiness which nothing can take from him. The apostles of Christ suffered: they attained eternal happiness."

Question: "Then it is impossible to attain happiness without suffering?"

'Abdu'l-Bahá: "To attain eternal happiness one must suffer. He who has reached the state of self-sacrifice has true joy. Temporal joy will vanish."

Paris Talks, no. 57

- 59 Is it, then, possible to be saved from the trials of God? No, verily. There is a great wisdom therein of which no one is aware save the wise and knowing. Were it not for tests, genuine gold could not be distinguished from the counterfeit. Were it not for tests, the courageous could not be known from the coward. Were it not for tests, the people of faithfulness could not be known from those of selfishness. Were it not for tests, the intellects and

faculties of the scholars in the great colleges would not be developed. Were it not for tests, the sparkling gems could not be known from worthless pebbles. Were it not for tests, the fisherman could not be distinguished from Annas and Caiaphas who were amid glory (worldly dignity).

Were it not for tests the face of Mary, the Magdalene, would not glisten with the light of firmness and certainty unto all the horizons. These are some of the mysteries of tests which we have unfolded unto thee that thou mayest become cognizant of the mysteries of God in every cycle. Verily, I pray God to illumine the faces as pure gold in the fire of tests.

Star of the West, vol. 8, no. 19, pp. 238–239

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 60 As to your question concerning the meaning of physical suffering and its relation to mental and spiritual healing: Physical pain is a necessary accompaniment of all human existence, and as such is unavoidable. As long as there will be life on earth, there will be also suffering, in various forms and degrees. But suffering, although an inescapable reality, can nevertheless be utilized as a means for the attainment of happiness. This is the interpretation given to it by all the Prophets and saints, who, in the midst of severe tests and trials, felt happy and joyous and experienced what is best and holiest in life. Suffering is both a reminder and a guide. It stimulates us to better adapt ourselves to our environmental conditions, and thus leads the way to self-improvement. In every suffering one can find a meaning and a wisdom. But it is not always easy to find the secret of that wisdom. It is sometimes only when all our suffering has passed that we become aware of its usefulness. What man considers to be evil turns often to be a cause of infinite blessings. And this is due to his desire to know more than he can. God's wisdom is, indeed, inscrutable to us all, and it is no use pushing too far trying to discover that which shall always remain a mystery to our mind.

29 May 1935

- 61 We must not only be patient with others, infinitely patient, but also with our own poor selves, remembering that even the Prophets of God sometimes got tired and cried out in despair! ...

He urges you to persevere and add up your accomplishments, rather than to dwell on the dark side of things. Everyone's life has both a dark and bright side. The Master said: turn your back to the darkness and your face to Me.

22 October 1949

- 62 Peace of mind is gained by the centering of the spiritual consciousness on the Prophet of God; therefore you should study the spiritual teachings, and receive the water of life from the Holy Utterances. Then by translating these high ideals into action, your entire character will be changed, and your mind will not only find peace, but your entire being will find joy and enthusiasm.

15 October 1952

TO SET THE WORLD IN ORDER:
BUILDING AND PRESERVING STRONG
MARRIAGES

A Compilation of Extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh,
the Báb and 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Letters of Shoghi Effendi,
and the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled August 2023

The Cause of Unity

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 And then the voice of the Divine Lote-Tree sounded, calling aloud and saying: "Praise be unto God Who hath ordained marriage to be a portal for the appearance of the manifestations of His Name, the All-Merciful, and adorned by its means the cities of His mention and praise." Verily, it is the key to the perpetuation of life for the peoples of the world, and the inscrutable instrument for the fulfilment of their destiny. Through it the water of life hath streamed forth unto the people of certitude. Praised be God, Who hath made marriage a means for propagating His Cause amongst His servants and proclaiming His Word throughout the world ...

All loving-kindness is Thine, O Thou Who art the Object of the adoration of all humankind, inasmuch as Thou hast ordained marriage to be a cause of unity amongst Thy creatures and of the exaltation of Thy Word amidst Thy people. Through its agency, Thou hast bound together the hearts and revealed the manifestations of Thy Name, the Best-Beloved. By its means, the hidden mysteries have been disclosed from behind the mount of Thy power, and earth and heaven have been illumined with the light of Thy loving-kindness.

From a Tablet translated from the Arabic

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

- 2 Marriage, among the mass of the people, is a physical bond, and this union can only be temporary, since it is foredoomed to a physical separation at the close.

Among the people of Bahá, however, marriage must be a union of the body and of the spirit as well, for here both husband and wife are aglow with the same wine, both are enamoured of the same matchless Face, both live and move through the same spirit, both are illumined by the same glory. This connection between them is a spiritual one, hence it is a bond that will abide forever. Likewise do they enjoy strong and lasting ties in the physical world as well, for if the marriage is based both on the spirit and the body, that union is a true one, hence it will endure. If, however, the bond is physical and nothing more, it is sure to be only temporary, and must inexorably end in separation.

When, therefore, the people of Bahá undertake to marry, the union must be a true relationship, a spiritual coming together as well as a physical one, so that throughout every phase of life, and in all the worlds of God, their union will endure; for this real oneness is a gleaming out of the love of God.

In the same way, 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.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, section 84

- 3 Bahá'í marriage is the commitment of the two parties one to the other, and their mutual attachment of mind and heart. Each must, however, exercise the utmost care to become thoroughly acquainted with the character of the other, that the binding covenant between them may be a tie that will endure forever. Their purpose must be this: to become loving companions and comrades and at one with each other for time and eternity ...

The true marriage of Bahá'ís is this, that husband and wife should be united both physically and spiritually, that they may ever improve the spiritual life

of each other, and may enjoy everlasting unity throughout all the worlds of God. This is Bahá'í marriage.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, section 86

- 4 With all humility, prayers of supplication have been offered at the Holy Threshold, that this marriage may be a harbinger of joy to the friends, that it may be a loving bond for all eternity, and yield everlasting benefits and fruits.

From separation doth every kind of hurt and harm proceed, but the union of created things doth ever yield most laudable results. From the pairing of even the smallest particles in the world of being are the grace and bounty of God made manifest; and the higher the degree, the more momentous is the union. "Glory be to Him Who hath created all the pairs, of such things as earth produceth, and out of men themselves, and of things beyond their ken."ⁱ And above all other unions is that between human beings, especially when it cometh to pass in the love of God. Thus is the primal oneness made to appear; thus is laid the foundation of love in the spirit. It is certain that such a marriage as yours will cause the bestowals of God to be revealed. Wherefore do we offer you felicitations and call down blessings upon you and beg of the Blessed Beauty, through His aid and favour, to make that wedding feast a joy to all and adorn it with the harmony of Heaven.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, section 87

- 5 O ye two believers in God! The Lord, peerless is He, hath made woman and man to abide with each other in the closest companionship, and to be even as a single soul. They are two helpmates, two intimate friends, who should be concerned about the welfare of each other.

If they live thus, they will pass through this world with perfect contentment, bliss, and peace of heart, and become the object of divine grace and favour in the Kingdom of heaven. But if they do other than this, they will live out their lives in great bitterness, longing at every moment for death, and will be shamefaced in the heavenly realm.

i Qur'án 36:36, and cf. 51:49.

Strive, then, to abide, heart and soul, with each other as two doves in the nest, for this is to be blessed in both worlds.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, section 92

6 He is God.

All praise be unto God, Who hath created realities that are paired through the mutual encounter of the divine names and attributes, that are comprised of both existence and essence, and that derive their grace from states that are opposite yet compatible and from facing mirrors that form complementary reflections. “Glory be to Him Who hath created all the pairs, of such things as the earth produceth, and of themselves, and of things beyond their ken”,ⁱ and hath made the human reality to be a wellspring of blessings and a fountainhead of abundant increase in the world of being. The inner realities of all things proceeded from the encounter of the most excellent names, and the contest of the most exalted attributes. They married, assembled, gathered, harmonized, united, and attained unto completion and perfection—whereupon, within the essences of the realities derived therefrom, the effulgence of primal oneness shone resplendent.

Within these mysteries lieth an inscrutable wisdom—a wisdom through which God’s laws and ordinances have been revealed in the Sacred Scriptures. Unto God belongeth supreme authority, irrefutable proofs, all-swaying sovereignty, consummate might, and all-encompassing powers of attraction.

Blessing and praise rest upon that Reality that joineth together the spiritual realities and subtle particulars of the universe—that mighty Bridge, that all-bountiful Link, that Confluence of the two seas and Meeting-Place of the two shores, that Day-Star of the “two Easts” and Light of the “two Wests”ⁱⁱ—upon that Blessed Tree and its branches, its leaves, its blossoms, and its fruits, and upon all those who have sought shelter within its shade and taken refuge beneath its outspread boughs.

Verily, the All-Merciful One shed His splendour upon the Sinai of creation with a light that gleamed, flashed, and beamed upon the dawning-places

i Qur’án 36:36.

ii Cf. Qur’án 55:17.

of the souls and the horizons of the world. Thereupon did all potentialities and their recipients, and all existences and essences, unite and join together in affection, intimacy, and mutual attraction. Through this union, the sign of Divine Oneness appeared, the standard of His Singleness was hoisted, all multiplicity disappeared, all selfishness vanished into nothingness, and every dividing boundary did fade away.

And so that this primal oneness may be expressed and this spiritual harmony be manifested, He, through His consummate wisdom and all-encompassing mercy, prescribed matrimony and ordained it to be a means of salvation and well-being, that it might be a symbol of that divine bond and a sign of that spiritual harmony, heavenly bounty, and celestial favour.

Rejoice, then, O people of Bahá, at this loving harmony that your Lord hath ordained for you from the realms above, and this unity that hath been established upon pillars of divine guidance. From it hath sprung the harmony that hath formed between this blessed leaf and this exalted bough, and the union that hath appeared between this noble fruit and this wondrous branch.

Wherefore, beseech ye God to make this marriage blessed, prosperous, loving, and happy, to gladden and vivify by it their two hearts, and to raise up, through them, souls who will walk steadfastly in the Cause of the Lord, who will diffuse the sweet savours of holiness throughout the East and the West, will illumine the world with the light of divine knowledge, will perfume all regions with the fragrances of divine mysteries, and will adorn the world of being with the hidden secrets of servitude to Him Who is its Creator and Supreme Ordainer. Praise be unto God, both at the beginning of this union and at its culmination.

From a Tablet translated from the Arabic

- 7 Regarding the question of marriage, know thou that the command of marriage is eternal. It will never be changed or altered. This creation is divine, and it is not possible for that which is created by God to be changed or altered.

From a Tablet translated from the Persian

- 8 It has been ordained in this Dispensation that unity and love should increase day by day between husband and wife, so that they become one soul, one spirit and one body. I hope that God's purpose will be manifested in the utmost perfection between you.

From a Tablet translated from the Persian

- 9 Praise be unto Him Who, through His effulgent grace, created the Primal Origin of existence and made It the centre of the seat of glory. From this human Temple, He hath caused to emanate all the tribes, kindreds, and nations of the earth. Whereupon He created all things—whether plants or animals or intelligent and rational beings—in joyous, connected pairs, in order that they might flourish, multiply, and worship their Lord with radiant devotion, treading the path of guidance with heart and soul. Amongst the believers, He hath ordained this binding covenant to be a sign of Divine Unity and the highest means for attaining physical and spiritual union. He hath matched His servants and chosen ones with luminous maidservants and heavenly leaves ... He hath bound together their hearts and made them even as a single soul, that they may, at all times and under all conditions, live in harmony, affection, unity, and concord.

From a Tablet translated from the Arabic

- 10 O maidservant of God! Praise be unto God that thy loving husband hath entered beneath the shade of the Blessed Tree, and hath received the light of divine guidance from the heavenly sun and luminous moon. He is an agreeable companion and a true friend. Therefore, thou shouldst act in such a manner that he may enjoy the utmost happiness, felicity, and delight and may be wholeheartedly pleased and gladdened. I shall pray for you and hope that, through the bounties and blessings of the Almighty, ye may live in a state of utmost harmony and love. Upon thee be the glory of the Most Glorious.

From a Tablet translated from the Persian

- 11 Endeavour that the black and the white may gather in one meeting place, and with the utmost love, fraternally associate with each other, so that quarrel and strife may vanish from among the white and the black. Thou must even endeavour that they intermarry. There is no greater means to bring about affection between the white and the black than the influence of

the Word of God. Likewise marriage between these two races will wholly destroy and eradicate the root of enmity.

From a Tablet translated from the Persian

From letters by Shoghi Effendi

- 12 What the Bahá'ís must do is not commit adultery if they are married, and refrain from sexual intimacy before marriage. It is not a sin in the Bahá'í Faith if you do not marry, but marriage is recommended to the believers by Bahá'u'lláh.

There is no teaching in the Bahá'í Faith that “soul mates” exist. What is meant is that marriage should lead to a profound friendship of spirit, which will endure in the next world, where there is no sex, and no giving and taking in marriage; just the way we should establish with our parents, our children, our brothers and sisters and friends a deep spiritual bond which will be everlasting, and not merely physical bonds of human relationship.

4 December 1954, to an individual believer

Creating Families that Illuminate the World

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 13 Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 63

- 14 And when He desired to manifest grace and beneficence to men, and to set the world in order, He revealed observances and created laws; among them He established the law of marriage, made it as a fortress for well-being and salvation, and enjoined it upon us in that which was sent down out of the heaven of sanctity in His Most Holy Book. He saith, great is His glory: “Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves.”

Bahá'í Prayers

- 15 God testifieth that there is none other God but Him, Who is potent to do whatsoever He willeth. He ruleth over His dominion as He pleaseth. This is a Day wherein the All-Merciful hath enjoined matrimony upon the people that through it may appear those who will lift up their voices and make mention of God, the Lord of the seen and of the unseen, the Lord of the Mighty Throne ...

Glory be upon thee and upon the handmaiden with whom We have favoured thee. Render ye thanks unto God, and say: “Magnified art Thou, O Lord of the World! All praise be unto Thee, O Thou Who art the glory of such as have recognized Thee!”

From a Tablet translated from the Arabic

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

- 16 O ye my two beloved children! The news of your union, as soon as it reached me, imparted infinite joy and gratitude. Praise be to God, those two faithful birds have sought shelter in one nest. I beseech God that He may enable them to raise an honoured family, for the importance of marriage lieth in the bringing up of a richly blessed family, so that with entire gladness they may, even as candles, illuminate the world. For the enlightenment of the world dependeth upon the existence of man. If man did not exist in this world, it would have been like a tree without fruit. My hope is that you both may become even as one tree, and may, through the outpourings of the cloud of loving-kindness, acquire freshness and charm, and may blossom and yield fruit, so that your line may eternally endure.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, par. 88

- 17 O ye two birds of the celestial gardens! Render thanks unto God that ye were graciously enabled to enter into matrimony with one another and wish to establish a blessed family. I too supplicate the realm of the All-Glorious that those two intimate doves may be made to warble sweet melodies in the heaven of His bounty, so that upon the twigs of the Tree of Life they may sing, in the most wondrous tones, hymns of praise and glory to the Lord of Hosts, in order that all who hearken thereunto may be moved and filled with joy and ecstasy, may be stirred by the breezes of God's loving-kindness, may seek eternal life, and may long for spiritual rebirth. Upon you both be the glory of the Most Glorious.

From a Tablet translated from the Persian

- 18 It is my fervent hope that, through the bestowals of the Blessed Beauty, this marriage may bring about joy and radiance, and may gladden and cheer the friends—and that through it, a Bahá'í family may shine forth in the realm of existence, the descendants of which will become manifestations of divine grace and bounty in the ages and centuries to come.

From a Tablet translated from the Persian

- 19 I beseech God to graciously make of thy home a centre for the diffusion of the light of divine guidance, for the dissemination of the Words of God and for enkindling at all times the fire of love in the hearts of His faithful

servants and maidservants. Know thou of a certainty that every house wherein the anthem of praise is raised to the Realm of Glory in celebration of the Name of God is indeed a heavenly home, and one of the gardens of delight in the Paradise of God.

From a Tablet translated from the Arabic

- 20 I convey my greetings and felicitations on the occasion of thy marriage. May it be blessed and joyous, and may it lead to the continuation of thy lineage forevermore. Every marriage founded upon the utmost steadfastness in the love of God will assuredly become a source of great blessings. Therefore, I beseech God that this marriage may be conducive to happiness and this union may lead to the appearance of divine bestowals. Upon thee be greetings and praise.

From a Tablet translated from the Persian

- 21 After marriage thou shouldst, God willing, together with thy revered husband diffuse the sweet savours of God so that the confirmations of the Lord of Hosts may continually descend upon you. Through whatever region ye may pass, shed ye the divine bestowals like unto the vernal showers, and render the lands green and verdant thereby. Upon thee be the glory of the Most Glorious.

From a Tablet translated from the Persian

- 22 The hearts were cheered by your marriage on a blessed and happy day in this glorious age. In the estimation of true believers, there is no doubt whatsoever that this marriage is auspicious and blessed, inasmuch as ye have both sought shelter beneath the Tree of Life, have entered the Ark of Salvation, and have, through the confirmations of the Lord of tokens and signs, been attracted by the sweet savours of the garden of heaven. How blessed is this marriage! How noble is this fellowship and union! Be ye as a pair of doves that nest on the loftiest branches of the Tree of Life within the Paradise of the All-Merciful and warble, in the night season and at the break of dawn, the most wondrous songs in praise of their Lord, the Unconstrained. Verily, I beseech God to ordain for you every good, to quicken you with a pure and goodly life, to assist you to undertake righteous deeds, and to bestow blessings upon your loved ones and your kindred.

From a Tablet translated from the Arabic

- 23 It is highly important for man to raise a family. So long as he is young, because of youthful self-complacency, he does not realize its significance, but this will be a source of regret when he grows old ... In this glorious Cause the life of a married couple should resemble the life of the angels in heaven—a life full of joy and spiritual delight, a life of unity and concord, a friendship both mental and physical. The home should be orderly and well-organized. Their ideas and thoughts should be like the rays of the sun of truth and the radiance of the brilliant stars in the heavens. Even as two birds they should warble melodies upon the branches of the tree of fellowship and harmony. They should always be elated with joy and gladness and be a source of happiness to the hearts of others. They should set an example to their fellow-men, manifest a true and sincere love towards each other and educate their children in such a manner as to blazon the fame and glory of their family.

Utterances translated from the Persian

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 24 A truly Bahá'í home is a true fortress upon which the Cause can rely while planning its campaigns. If ... and ... love each other and would like to marry, Shoghi Effendi does not wish them to think that by doing so they are depriving themselves of the privilege of service; in fact such a union will enhance their ability to serve. There is nothing more beautiful than to have young Bahá'ís marry and found truly Bahá'í homes, the type Bahá'u'lláh wishes them to be. Please give them both the Guardian's loving greetings.

6 November 1932, to an individual believer

- 25 He hastens to wish you both every happiness in your forthcoming marriage, and he hopes that it will not only be a blessing to you both, but to the Faith as well.

A marriage between two souls, alive to the Message of God in this day, dedicated to the service of His Cause, working for the good of humanity, can be a potent force in the lives of others and an example and inspiration to other Bahá'ís, as well as to non-believers.

Regarding your question of whether Bahá'ís should consider it their duty to have children: As Bahá'u'lláh has stated that the fundamental purpose of marriage is to bring other souls into this world, to serve God and love Him, the Guardian does not believe that you should be unwilling to undertake this responsibility and privilege, even if it should, temporarily at least, interfere with the tempo of your Bahá'í activities.

4 August 1943, to two believers

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

- 26 You may be assured that in the Bahá'í Teachings, family unity goes far beyond the married couple themselves, and is of critical importance. In the Bahá'í Faith marriage is regarded as both a spiritual and a social institution which affects not only the couple and their children, but also the parents, grandparents, grandchildren and other collateral relations. Indeed, it affects (or, in a healthy society, should affect) all other community associations that surround it.

10 July 1996, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 27 If the wider society perceives the Bahá'ís as people who are becoming spiritually transformed and who are distinguished by their admirable conduct, and their stable marriage and family life in which children are being brought up with good character and a spiritual orientation, seekers will be attracted magnetically to the Faith and the teaching work will be invigorated.

7 July 1999, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly

- 28 Independent of the level of their education, parents are in a critical position to shape the spiritual development of their children. They should not ever underestimate their capacity to mold their children's moral character. For they exercise indispensable influence through the home environment they consciously create by their love of God, their striving to adhere to His laws, their spirit of service to His Cause, their lack of fanaticism, and their freedom from the corrosive effects of backbiting.

Riḍván 2000 message, to the Bahá'ís of the World

- 29 ... the friends, in the many aspects of their individual and collective lives, will need to become ever more shining examples of the change they champion. In the context of the framework for action guiding their efforts for the progress of the Cause, the believers can attend to, among other matters, enhancing the foundations of family life, that vital institution which is the basic unit of society ... In all of this, the friends should be able to determine wisely which aspects of their culture are in conformity with the Teachings and should be advanced and which ones are not, and should be set aside. Important, too, is their ability to contribute to the material and social progress of their communities while being careful to steer away from the pitfalls of partisan politics and all its polemics. As the lofty ideals of the Faith become more and more manifest in individuals, families, and communities, the believers will foster a gathering of momentum that moves the people of the region closer to that true prosperity which Bahá'u'lláh has purposed.

9 July 2015, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly

- 30 This generation of youth will form families that secure the foundations of flourishing communities. Through their growing love for Bahá'u'lláh and their personal commitment to the standard to which He summons them will their children imbibe the love of God, “commingled with their mother’s milk”, and always seek the shelter of His divine law.

29 December 2015, to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors

The Ideal Milieu for Learning the Principles of Consultation

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 31 All should know, and in this regard attain the splendours of the sun of certitude, and be illumined thereby: Women and men have been and will always be equal in the sight of God. The Dawning-Place of the Light of God sheddeth its radiance upon all with the same effulgence. Verily God created women for men, and men for women. The most beloved of people before God are the most steadfast and those who have surpassed others in their love for God, exalted be His glory ...

The friends of God must be adorned with the ornament of justice, equity, kindness and love. As they do not allow themselves to be the object of cruelty and transgression, in like manner they should not allow such tyranny to visit the handmaidens of God. He, verily, speaketh the truth and commandeth that which benefiteth His servants and handmaidens. He is the Protector of all in this world and the next.

From a Tablet translated from the Arabic and Persian

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

- 32 In any group, however loving the consultation, there are nevertheless points on which, from time to time, agreement cannot be reached. In a Spiritual Assembly this dilemma is resolved by a majority vote. There can, however, be no majority where only two parties are involved, as in the case of a husband and wife. There are, therefore, times when a wife should defer to her husband, and times when a husband should defer to his wife, but neither should ever unjustly dominate the other.

28 December 1980, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly

- 33 You have asked ... for specific rules of conduct to govern the relationships of husbands and wives. This the House of Justice does not wish to do, and it feels that there is already adequate guidance included in the compilation on this subject;ⁱ for example the principle that the rights of each and all in the family unit must be upheld, and the advice that loving consultation should be the keynote, that all matters should be settled in harmony and love, and that there are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other. Exactly under what circumstances such deference should take place is a matter for each couple to determine. If, God forbid, they fail to agree, and their disagreement leads to estrangement, they should seek counsel from those they trust and in whose sincerity and sound judgement they have confidence, in order to preserve and strengthen their ties as a united family.

16 May 1982, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 34 The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 7 December 1984 expressing the views of your husband concerning the authority that he feels the Writings have bestowed upon the husband in a marriage, and has asked us to convey the following on its behalf.

The guidelines on the subject which have been made available to the friends emphasize that the rights of each and all in the family unit must be upheld, that loving consultation should be the keynote, that all matters should be settled in harmony and love, and that there are times when the husband or the wife should defer to the wishes of the other. Exactly under what circumstances such deference should take place is a matter for each couple to determine.

2 January 1985, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 35 The work patterns of both men and women may well change in the future to permit both to participate more readily in professional activity without neglect of family life.

11 January 1988, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 36 As you know, the principle of the oneness of mankind is described in the Bahá'í Writings as the pivot round which all the Teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve. It has widespread implications which affect and remould all

i The "Family Life" compilation, revised 2008, is available on the Bahá'í Reference Library.

dimensions of human activity. It calls for a fundamental change in the manner in which people relate to each other, and the eradication of those age-old practices which deny the intrinsic human right of every individual to be treated with consideration and respect.

Within the family setting, the rights of all members must be respected. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated:

The integrity of the family bond must be constantly considered and the rights of the individual members must not be transgressed. The rights of the son, the father, the mother—none of them must be transgressed, none of them must be arbitrary. Just as the son has certain obligations to his father, the father, likewise, has certain obligations to his son. The mother, the sister and other members of the household have their certain prerogatives. All these rights and prerogatives must be conserved ...

The use of force by the physically strong against the weak, as a means of imposing one's will and fulfilling one's desires, is a flagrant transgression of the Bahá'í Teachings. There can be no justification for anyone compelling another, through the use of force or through the threat of violence, to do that to which the other person is not inclined. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has written, "O ye lovers of God! In this, the cycle of Almighty God, violence and force, constraint and oppression, are one and all condemned." Let those who, driven by their passions or by their inability to exercise discipline in the control of their anger, might be tempted to inflict violence on another human being be mindful of the condemnation of such disgraceful behaviour by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Among the signs of moral downfall in the declining social order are the high incidence of violence within the family, the increase in degrading and cruel treatment of spouses and children, and the spread of sexual abuse. It is essential that the members of the community of the Greatest Name take utmost care not to be drawn into acceptance of such practices because of their prevalence. They must be ever mindful of their obligation to exemplify a new way of life distinguished by its respect for the dignity and rights of all people, by its exalted moral tone, and by its freedom from oppression and from all forms of abuse.

Consultation has been ordained by Bahá'u'lláh as the means by which agreement is to be reached and a collective course of action defined. It is applicable to the marriage partners and within the family, and indeed, in all areas where believers participate in mutual decision making. It requires all participants to express their opinions with absolute freedom and without apprehension that they will be censured or their views belittled; these prerequisites for success are unattainable if the fear of violence or abuse is present.

A number of your questions pertain to the treatment of women, and are best considered in light of the principle of the equality of the sexes which is set forth in the Bahá'í Teachings. This principle is far more than the enunciation of admirable ideals; it has profound implications in all aspects of human relations and must be an integral element of Bahá'í domestic and community life. The application of this principle gives rise to changes in habits and practices which have prevailed for many centuries. An example of this is found in the response provided on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a question whether the traditional practice whereby the man proposes marriage to the woman is altered by the Bahá'í Teachings to permit the woman to issue a marriage proposal to the man; the response is, "The Guardian wishes to state that there is absolute equality between the two, and that no distinction or preference is permitted ..." With the passage of time, during which Bahá'í men and women endeavour to apply more fully the principle of the equality of the sexes, will come a deeper understanding of the far-reaching ramifications of this vital principle. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated, "Until the reality of equality between man and woman is fully established and attained, the highest social development of mankind is not possible." ...

For a man to use force to impose his will on a woman is a serious transgression of the Bahá'í Teachings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has stated that:

The world in the past has been ruled by force, and man has dominated over woman by reason of his more forceful and aggressive qualities both of body and mind. But the balance is already shifting; force is losing its dominance, and mental alertness, intuition, and the spiritual qualities of love and service, in which woman is strong, are gaining ascendancy.

Bahá'í men have the opportunity to demonstrate to the world around them a new approach to the relationship between the sexes, where aggression and the use of force are eliminated and replaced by cooperation and consultation. The Universal House of Justice has pointed out in response to questions addressed to it that, in a marriage relationship, neither husband nor wife should ever unjustly dominate the other, and that there are times when the husband and the wife should defer to the wishes of the other, if agreement cannot be reached through consultation; each couple should determine exactly under what circumstances such deference is to take place.

24 January 1993, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 37 The issue you have raised is of vital importance to Bahá'í couples striving to address the various needs and opportunities with which they are confronted in present-day society. As in so many other aspects of daily life, the resolution of this issue must be sought through the comprehension and application of the Teachings of the Faith. The believers should clearly understand and remain untroubled by the fact that the resulting solutions may well not be regarded as adequate by those not blessed with the bounty of acceptance of the Promised One and who are enmeshed in patterns of thought which are alien to the Bahá'í Teachings despite widespread acceptance of such patterns by the generality of humankind.

Central to the consideration of this matter must be the purpose in life of all faithful followers of Bahá'u'lláh: to know and worship God. This involves service to one's fellow human beings and in the advancement of the Cause of God. In pursuing this purpose, they should strive to develop their talents and faculties to whatever extent is possible by exploring the avenues before them.

It is inevitable, because of the limitations of this earthly plane, that believers will, in many instances, find themselves deprived of the opportunity to develop their talents to the fullest. This may be due to lack of economic resources or educational facilities, or to the necessity of meeting other obligations and fulfilling other duties, such as the freely chosen responsibilities associated with marriage and parenthood. In some circumstances it may be the result of a conscious decision to make sacrifices for the sake of the Cause, as when a pioneer undertakes to serve in a post which lacks the facilities for the development of his or her special skills and talents. However,

such deprivations and limitations do not carry with them the implication that the Bahá'ís concerned are unable to fulfil their fundamental, divinely ordained purpose; they are simply elements of the universal challenge to evaluate and balance the many calls on one's time and effort in this life.

There is no one universally applicable response to the questions you have raised about the decisions to be made by marriage partners when both husband and wife are pursuing career opportunities which appear to be leading them along divergent paths, since circumstances vary so widely. Each couple should rely on the process of Bahá'í consultation to determine what is the best course of action. In so doing they might well consider the following factors, among others:

- the sense of equality which should inform consultation between husband and wife;

The Universal House of Justice has stated previously, in response to questions, that loving consultation should be the keynote of the marriage relationship. If agreement cannot be reached, there are times when either the husband or the wife should defer to the wishes of the other; exactly under what circumstances such deference should take place is a matter for each couple to decide.

- the strong emphasis placed in the Bahá'í Writings on the preservation of the marriage bond and the strengthening of the unity between the marriage partners;
- the concept of a Bahá'í family, in which the mother is the first educator of the children, and the husband takes primary responsibility for the financial support of his family;

As has been stated elsewhere by the House of Justice, this by no means implies that these functions are inflexibly fixed and cannot be changed and adjusted to suit particular family situations.

- various special circumstances which might arise, such as job prospects during a period of widespread unemployment, unusual opportunities or

abilities which one marriage partner may have, or pressing needs of the Cause which a sacrificial response may be called for.

The success of such consultation will doubtless be influenced by the prayerful attitude with which it is approached, the mutual respect of the parties for each other, their earnest desire to devise a solution which will preserve unity and harmony for themselves and the other members of their family, and their willingness to make compromises and adjustments within the context of equality.

As society evolves in the decades and centuries ahead under the transforming influence of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, it will surely experience fundamental changes which will facilitate the social application of the Bahá'í Teachings, and will ease the difficulties faced by couples seeking to fulfil their ardent desire to serve the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh through their professional activities.

26 June 1996, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 38 Among the signs of moral decay in the present social order is the weakening of the spiritual ties that bind the family. Failure within the household to acknowledge the equality of the sexes and to respect the rights of children gives rise to a culture that belittles women and children, condones the imposition of a single will upon others, and opens the way for aggression and violence—first in the family, then at school and work, and eventually in the streets and in society at large. Under such circumstances, the family environment, potentially the ideal milieu for learning the principles of consultation and collective decision making, serves to perpetuate tyranny and oppression in society.

24 November 2009, to the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith

- 39 Just as the appearance of the rational soul in this realm of existence is made possible through the complex association of countless cells, whose organization in tissues and organs allows for the realization of distinctive capacities, so can civilization be seen as the outcome of a set of interactions among closely integrated, diverse components which have transcended the narrow purpose of tending to their own existence. And just as the viability of every cell and every organ is contingent upon the health of the body as

a whole, so should the prosperity of every individual, every family, every people be sought in the well-being of the entire human race ...

If the web of relationships alluded to above is to take shape and give rise to a pattern of life distinguished by adherence to the principle of the oneness of humankind, certain foundational concepts must be carefully examined. Most notable among them is the conception of power ... Associated with power in this sense are words such as “release”, “encourage”, “channel”, “guide” and “enable”. Power is not a finite entity which is to be “seized” and “jealously guarded”; it constitutes a limitless capacity to transform that resides in the human race as a body.

2 March 2013, to the Bahá'ís of Iran

Addressing Challenges

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 40 It hath been laid down in the Bayán that marriage is dependent upon the consent of both parties. Desiring to establish love, unity and harmony amidst Our servants, We have conditioned it, once the couple's wish is known, upon the permission of their parents, lest enmity and rancor should arise amongst them. And in this We have yet other purposes. Thus hath Our commandment been ordained.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 65

- 41 Truly, the Lord loveth union and harmony and abhorreth separation and divorce.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 70

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

- 42 Grieve thou not, and sorrow not. Place thy whole trust in God, and hold fast unto the hem of the Almighty. God be praised, thus far hath it been well, and so shall it be again. Verily, thy Lord is the Gracious, the All-Merciful. Strive to the utmost not to separate from the daughter of ... for the one true God desireth harmony, while discord is contrary to His good-pleasure. He desireth union, not division, and wisheth for connection, not separation. The most favourable of all conditions is harmony and love. However, if this is in no wise possible, and complete aversion hath arisen, then separation is permissible. Strive, therefore, with all thy might, for unity, not division.

From a Tablet translated from the Persian

- 43 O thou dear handmaid of God! Render thanks unto God that the means of reconciliation and fellowship with thine esteemed spouse have been established. The news of thy return to Mr ... hath made me exceedingly

happy, for in the sight of God naught is more beloved than harmony and concord, while nothing is more abhorrent than estrangement and separation. Praised be God that love and harmony have been re-established between you. I was deeply gladdened.

From a Tablet translated from the Persian

- 44 Formerly in Persia divorce was very easily obtained. Among the people of the past Dispensation a trifling matter would cause divorce. However, as the light of the Kingdom shone forth, souls were quickened by the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh, then they totally eschewed divorce. In Persia now divorce doth not take place among the friends, unless a compelling reason existeth which maketh harmony impossible. Under such rare circumstances some cases of divorce take place.

Now the friends in America must live and conduct themselves in this way. They must strictly refrain from divorce unless something ariseth which compelleth them to separate because of their aversion for each other, in that case with the knowledge of the Spiritual Assembly they may decide to separate. They must then be patient and wait one complete year. If during this year, harmony is not re-established between them, then their divorce may be realized. It should not happen that upon the occurrence of a slight friction or displeasure between husband and wife, the husband would think of union with some other woman, or, God forbid, the wife also think of another husband. This is contrary to the standard of heavenly value and true chastity. The friends of God must so live and conduct themselves, and evince such excellence of character and conduct, as to make others astonished. The love between husband and wife must not be purely physical, nay, rather, it must be spiritual and heavenly. These two souls should be considered as one soul. How difficult it would be to divide a single soul! Nay, great would be the difficulty!

In short, the foundation of the Kingdom of God is based upon harmony and love, oneness, relationship and union, not upon differences, especially between husband and wife. If one of these two becometh the cause of divorce, that one will unquestionably fall into great difficulties, will become the victim of formidable calamities and experience deep remorse.

From a Tablet translated from the Persian

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 45 Divorce is, according to the Aqdas, permissible. But it is discouraged. Both the husband and wife have equal right to ask for divorce, and whenever either of them feels it absolutely essential to do so. Divorce becomes valid even if one of the parties refuses to accept it, and after one year of separation, during which period the husband is under the obligation of providing for his wife and children.

6 July 1935, to an individual believer

- 46 The Guardian has received your letter ... and has learned with deep concern of your family difficulties and troubles. He wishes me to assure you of his fervent prayers on your behalf and on behalf of your dear ones at home, that you may be guided and assisted from on High to compose your differences and to restore complete harmony and fellowship in your midst. While he would urge you to make any sacrifice in order to bring about unity in your family, he wishes you not to feel discouraged if your endeavours do not yield any immediate fruit. You should do your part with absolute faith that in doing so you are fulfilling your duty as a Bahá'í. The rest is assuredly in God's hand.

23 July 1937, to an individual believer

- 47 The Guardian is in receipt of your letter ... and has learned with deep concern of the state of disharmony existing between you and your husband.

While he wishes me to assure you that he will pray for the solution of your domestic troubles, he would urge you to endeavour, by every means in your power, to compose your differences, and not to allow them to reach such proportions as to lead to your complete and final separation from your husband.

For while, according to the Bahá'í law, divorce is permissible, yet it is highly discouraged, and should be resorted to only when every effort to prevent it has proved to be vain and ineffective.

It is for you, and for Mr ... as well, to ponder carefully over the spiritual implications which any act of divorce on either part would involve, and,

strengthened by the power of faith and confident in the blessings which strict adherence to the principles and laws of Bahá'u'lláh is bound to confer upon every one of His faithful followers, to make a fresh resolve to solve your common difficulties and to restore the harmony, peace and happiness of your family life.

11 September 1938, to an individual believer

- 48 The situation facing you is admittedly difficult and delicate, but no less grave and indeed vital are the responsibilities which it entails and which, as a faithful and loyal believer, you should conscientiously and thoroughly assume.ⁱ The Guardian, therefore, while fully alive to the special circumstances of your case, and however profound his sympathy may be for you in this challenging issue with which you are so sadly faced, cannot, in view of the emphatic injunctions contained in the Teachings, either sanction your demand to contract a second marriage while your first wife is still alive and is united with you in the sacred bonds of matrimony, or even suggest or approve that you divorce her just in order to be permitted to marry a new one.

For the Bahá'í Teachings do not only preclude the possibility of bigamy, but also, while permitting divorce, consider it a reprehensible act, which should be resorted to only in exceptional circumstances, and when grave issues are involved, transcending such considerations as physical attraction or sexual compatibility and harmony. The institution of marriage, as established by Bahá'u'lláh, while giving due importance to the physical aspect of marital union, considers it as subordinate to the moral and spiritual purposes and functions with which it has been invested by an all-wise and loving Providence. Only when these different values are given each their due importance, and only on the basis of the subordination of the physical to the moral, and the carnal to the spiritual, can such excesses and laxity in marital relations as our decadent age is so sadly witnessing be avoided, and family life be restored to its original purity, and fulfil the true function for which it has been instituted by God.

i A believer who, having married his first wife out of compassion, now wished to be permitted to marry a woman with whom he had fallen in love, saying that his wife was agreeable to his taking this second wife.

The Guardian will most fervently pray that, inspired and guided by such a divine standard, and strengthened by Bahá'u'lláh's unfailing assistance and confirmations, you may be able to satisfactorily adjust your relations with the persons concerned, and thus reach the one right solution to this assuredly challenging problem of your life.

8 May 1939, to an individual believer

- 49 ... he indeed feels rejoiced at the happy news of the settlement of your domestic differences with Mrs ... and particularly to know that you have jointly undertaken a most successful teaching tour ... This bond of common service to the Cause which is so closely uniting your hearts and has proved such an effective solution of your personal problems, he hopes, and indeed will fervently pray, will be further cemented by the passing of years and through your increased and joint participation in the teaching work ...

16 December 1940, to an individual believer

- 50 Bahá'u'lláh has laid great emphasis on the sanctity of marriage, and the believers should exert their utmost to create harmony in their homes and a situation which at least is not bad for their children. But if, after prayer and self-sacrificing effort, this proves quite impossible, then they may resort to divorce.

The Guardian will pray for you and your husband that the way may open for you to find a better relationship, and that he may cease to be so violently opposed to the Cause.

He would suggest that in any action separating you from your husband you take into consideration the feelings of your children as well. He will also pray for them, that they may grow up firm in the Faith.

10 November 1943, to an individual believer

- 51 He feels that you and your wife should do everything in your power to produce a harmonious relationship between you and avoid divorce by all means, if possible. The Bahá'í attitude is that marriage is a very serious and sacred relationship and divorce a last resort to be avoided if humanly possible.

10 August 1945, to an individual believer

- 52 He was very sorry to hear that you and your husband are still so unhappy together. It is always a source of sorrow in life when married people cannot get on well together, but the Guardian feels that you and your husband, in contemplating divorce, should think of the future of your children and how this major step on your part will influence their lives and happiness.

If you feel the need of advice and consultation he suggests you consult your Local Assembly; your fellow Bahá'ís will surely do all they can to counsel and help you, protect your interests and those of the Cause.

16 November 1945, to an individual believer

- 53 The Guardian has the impression that your husband is a fine man, and he is very pleased to hear you two are arranging to be reunited. He feels very strongly that Bahá'ís, if possible, more especially Bahá'ís who serve the Cause as actively and conspicuously as you and your family do, should set the newer believers and the young Bahá'ís a high example in every way. As Bahá'u'lláh was so very much against divorce (even though He permits it) and considered marriage a most sacred responsibility, believers should do everything in their power to preserve the marriages they have contracted, and to make of them exemplary unions, governed by the noblest motives.

19 October 1947, to an individual believer

- 54 Bahá'u'lláh has clearly stated the consent of all living parents is required for a Bahá'í marriage. This applies whether the parents are Bahá'ís or non-Bahá'ís, divorced for years or not. This great law He has laid down to strengthen the social fabric, to knit closer the ties of the home, to place a certain gratitude and respect in the hearts of children for those who have given them life and sent their souls out on the eternal journey towards their Creator. We Bahá'ís must realize that in present-day society the exact opposite process is taking place: young people care less and less for their parents' wishes, divorce is considered a natural right, and obtained on the flimsiest and most unwarrantable and shabby pretexts. People separated from each other, especially if one of them has had full custody of the children, are only too willing to belittle the importance of the partner in marriage also responsible as a parent for bringing those children into this world. The Bahá'ís must, through rigid adherence to the Bahá'í laws and teachings, combat these corrosive forces which are so rapidly destroying

home life and the beauty of family relationships, and tearing down the moral structure of society.

25 October 1947, to a National Spiritual Assembly

- 55 There is no doubt about it that the believers in America, probably unconsciously influenced by the extremely lax morals prevalent and the flippant attitude towards divorce which seems to be increasingly prevailing, do not take divorce seriously enough and do not seem to grasp the fact that although Bahá'u'lláh has permitted it, He has only permitted it as a last resort and strongly condemns it.

The presence of children, as a factor in divorce, cannot be ignored, for surely it places an even greater weight of moral responsibility on the man and wife in considering such a step. Divorce under such circumstances no longer just concerns them and their desires and feelings but also concerns the children's entire future and their own attitude towards marriage.

As to whether you and Mr ... should now divorce: this is a matter which so intimately concerns you both, your children, and your future that he does not feel he can do more than point out to you what he has stated above. The decision must rest with you both.

19 December 1947, to an individual believer

- 56 Divorce should be avoided most strictly by the believers, and only under rare and urgent circumstances be resorted to. Modern society is criminally lax as to the sacred nature of marriage, and the believers must combat this trend assiduously.

5 January 1948, to an individual believer

- 57 It is a great pity that two believers, united in this glorious Cause, and blessed with a family, should not be able to live together really harmoniously, and he feels you should take constructive action and not allow the situation to get worse. When the shadow of separation hangs over a husband and wife they should leave no stone unturned in their effort to avert its becoming a reality.

He urges you both to devote more of your time to teaching the Cause and to pray together that Bahá'u'lláh may give you a real and lasting love for each other.

5 July 1949, to an individual believer

- 58 He was very sorry to hear that you are contemplating separation from your husband. As you no doubt know, Bahá'u'lláh considers the marriage bond very sacred; and only under very exceptional and unbearable circumstances is divorce advisable for Bahá'ís.

The Guardian does not tell you that you must not divorce your husband; but he does urge you to consider prayerfully, not only because you are a believer and anxious to obey the laws of God, but also for the sake of the happiness of your children, whether it is not possible for you to rise above the limitations you have felt in your marriage hitherto, and make a go of it together.

We often feel that our happiness lies in a certain direction; and yet, if we have to pay too heavy a price for it in the end we may discover that we have not really purchased either freedom or happiness, but just some new situation of frustration and disillusion.

5 April 1951, to an individual believer

- 59 He feels that you should by all means make every effort to hold your marriage together, especially for the sake of your children, who, like all children of divorced parents, cannot but suffer from conflicting loyalties, for they are deprived of the blessing of a father and mother in one home, to look after their interests and love them jointly.

Now that you realize that your husband is ill, you should be able to reconcile yourself to the difficulties you have faced with him emotionally, and not take an unforgiving attitude, however much you may suffer.

We know that Bahá'u'lláh has very strongly frowned upon divorce; and it is really incumbent upon the Bahá'ís to make almost a superhuman effort not to allow a Bahá'í marriage to be dissolved.

6 March 1953, to an individual believer

- 60 He has been very sorry to hear that your marriage seems to have failed utterly. I need not tell you as a Bahá'í that every effort should be made by any Bahá'í to salvage their marriage for the sake of God, rather than for their own sake. In the case of pioneers, it is even more important, because they are before the public eye. However, in such matters it is neither befitting nor right that the Guardian should bring pressure on individuals. He can only appeal to you and ... to try again; but if you cannot rise to this test, that is naturally a personal matter.

13 January 1956, to an individual believer

- 61 Wherever there is a Bahá'í family, those concerned should by all means do all they can to preserve it, because divorce is strongly condemned in the Teachings, whereas harmony, unity and love are held up as the highest ideals in human relationships. This must always apply to the Bahá'ís, whether they are serving in the pioneering field or not.

9 November 1956, to a National Spiritual Assembly

- 62 If antipathy or resentment develop on the part of either the husband or the wife, divorce is permissible, only after the lapse of one full year.

"Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas", in The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, item IV.C.2.b.

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

- 63 In considering the problems that you and your wife are experiencing, the House of Justice points out that the unity of your family should take priority over any other consideration. Bahá'u'lláh came to bring unity to the world, and a fundamental unity is that of the family. Therefore, we must believe that the Faith is intended to strengthen the family, not weaken it. For example, service to the Cause should not produce neglect of the family. It is important for you to arrange your time so that your family life is harmonious and your household receives the attention it requires.

Bahá'u'lláh also stressed the importance of consultation. We should not think this worthwhile method of seeking solutions is confined to the administrative institutions of the Cause. Family consultation employing full and frank discussion, and animated by awareness of the need for

moderation and balance, can be the panacea for domestic conflict. Wives should not attempt to dominate their husbands, nor husbands their wives.

1 August 1978, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 64 There are a number of Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá addressed to Bahá’ís who had husbands who did not accept the Faith, and in them He encourages the Bahá’í to be patient and understanding and to increase her love and consideration for the husband. This does not mean, of course, that the Bahá’í should in any way renounce her faith, but it may mean a modification of the amount or nature of her Bahá’í activities to ensure that family responsibilities are fully attended to. Quite often a non-Bahá’í husband, although not accepting the Faith, has sufficient affection for his wife and respect for the Faith to assume extra responsibilities in the home so that his wife will have more time for her Bahá’í activities, but she should not insist that he do this, and should always bear in mind that fostering the unity of her family is in itself a Bahá’í duty. The same principles, of course, apply to a husband whose wife is not a Bahá’í.

25 January 1979, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly

- 65 Your letter ... describing the difficulties confronting your family distressed the Universal House of Justice and we are requested to convey the following to you.

Noting that you and your husband have consulted about your family problems with your Spiritual Assembly but did not receive any advice, and also discussed your situation with a family counsellor without success, the House of Justice feels it most essential for your husband and you to understand that marriage can be a source of well-being, conveying a sense of security and spiritual happiness. However, it is not something that just happens. For marriage to become a haven of contentment it requires the cooperation of the marriage partners themselves, and the assistance of their families. You mention your concern over your oldest daughter. It is suggested that you include her and perhaps your younger children in family consultations.

24 June 1979, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 66 Irreconcilable antipathy arising between the parties to a marriage is not merely a lack of love for one's spouse but an antipathy which cannot be resolved. It is for the Spiritual Assembly to decide whether this condition exists before it sets the date for the beginning of the year of waiting, and this it may do on the application of one of the parties. It is not affected by the other party's not wishing to apply for a divorce.

The date for the beginning of the year of waiting having been fixed, it is the obligation of the parties to make every effort to reconcile their differences and to try to preserve the marriage. The Spiritual Assembly has the obligation to offer them every assistance in this regard ...

Obviously, seeking the assistance of one's Spiritual Assembly is a part of the Bahá'í divorce procedure, and the parties concerned should consult with the Assembly about their problems. It is within the discretion of the parties, or either of them, to also avail themselves of professional marriage counsellors.

12 July 1979, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 67 Your letter of ... to the Universal House of Justice makes clear that you are seeking to re-establish your marriage through study of the Writings and through various modes of consultation and assistance. We are asked to convey its advice on this vital subject of reconciliation of partners in marriage in the context of understanding yourself and your relationship to others.

You are urged to persevere in your studies, in your prayers for resolution of your problems, and in your meditation which may provide guidance and confidence, inasmuch as the understanding of self and of relationships to others are contained in the writings and in the example of the Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Neither you nor your husband should hesitate to continue consulting professional marriage counsellors, individually and together if possible, and also to take advantage of the supportive counselling which can come from wise and mature friends. Non-Bahá'í counselling can be useful but it is usually necessary to temper it with Bahá'í insight.

You ask how to deal with anger. The House of Justice suggests that you call to mind the admonitions found in our Writings on the need to overlook the shortcomings of others; to forgive and conceal their misdeeds, not to expose their bad qualities, but to search for and affirm their praiseworthy ones, and to endeavor to be always forbearing, patient, and merciful. Such passages as the following extracts from letters written on behalf of the beloved Guardian will be helpful:

“There are qualities in everyone which we can appreciate and admire, and for which we can love them; and perhaps, if you determine to think only of these qualities which your husband possesses, this will help to improve the situation ... You should turn your thoughts away from the things which upset you, and constantly pray to Bahá’u’lláh to help you. Then you will find how that pure love, enkindled by God, which burns in the soul when we read and study the Teachings, will warm and heal, more than anything else.”

“... Each of us is responsible for one life only, and that is our own. Each of us is immeasurably far from being ‘perfect as our heavenly father is perfect’ and the task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will-power and energy ...”

17 July 1979, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 68 Concerning the definition of the term “aversion” in relation to Bahá’í divorce law, the Universal House of Justice points out that there are no specific “grounds” for Bahá’í divorce such as there are in some codes of civil law. Bahá’í law permits divorce but, as both Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá have made very clear, divorce is abhorred. Thus, from the point of view of the individual believer he should do all he can to refrain from divorce. Bahá’ís should be profoundly aware of the sanctity of marriage and should strive to make their marriages an eternal bond of unity and harmony. This requires effort and sacrifice and wisdom and self-abnegation. A Bahá’í should consider the possibility of divorce only if the situation is intolerable and he or she has a strong aversion to being married to the other partner. This is the standard held up to the individual. It is not a law, but an exhortation. It is a goal to which we should strive.

From the point of view of the Spiritual Assembly, however, the matter is somewhat different. The Spiritual Assembly should always be concerned that the believers in its community are being deepened in their understanding of the Bahá'í concept of marriage, especially the young people, so that the very thought of divorce will be abhorrent to them. When an application for divorce is made to a Spiritual Assembly, its first thought and action should be to reconcile the couple and to ensure that they know the Bahá'í teachings on the matter. God willing, the Assembly will be successful and no year of waiting need be started. However, if the Assembly finds that it is unable to persuade the party concerned to withdraw the application for divorce, it must conclude that, from its point of view, there appears to be an irreconcilable antipathy, and it has no alternative to setting the date for the beginning of the year of waiting. During the year the couple have the responsibility of attempting to reconcile their differences, and the Assembly has the duty to help them and encourage them. But if the year of waiting comes to an end without reconciliation the Bahá'í divorce must be granted as at the date of the granting of the civil divorce if this has not already taken place.

It can be seen, therefore, that “aversion” is not a specific legal term that needs to be defined. Indeed a number of other terms are used in describing the situation that can lead to divorce in Bahá'í law, such as “antipathy”, “resentment”, “estrangement”, “impossibility of establishing harmony” and “irreconcilability”. The texts, however, point out that divorce is strongly condemned, should be viewed as “a last resort” when “rare and urgent circumstances” exist, and that the partner who is the “cause of divorce” will “unquestionably” become the “victim of formidable calamities”.

3 November 1982, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 69 The House of Justice advises you to continue the strenuous efforts you are making to overcome the difficulties in your marriage. It is pleased to note that you and your husband have turned to the Local Spiritual Assembly for guidance and have sought help from a Bahá'í who is a marriage counsellor. Such endeavours, when combined with a strong and determined effort, improve greatly the prospects that your marriage can be maintained. However, it must also be borne in mind that the fact that Bahá'u'lláh has permitted divorce is, no doubt, an indication that in certain circumstances

it is unavoidable. If your earnest efforts to maintain your marriage do not yield the desired result, you should not be distraught.

28 April 1989, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 70 The House of Justice is distressed to learn that you and your husband are continuing to experience marital difficulties. It has frequently advised believers in such situations to turn to the Spiritual Assemblies for advice and counsel, and to follow this advice in their efforts to preserve the unity of their marital relationship. It has been found useful in many instances to also seek the assistance of competent professional marriage counsellors, who can provide useful insights and guidance in the use of constructive measures to bring about a greater degree of unity.

17 July 1989, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 71 There have been many instances in which a couple has, through a consecrated and determined effort, aided by the power of prayer and the advice of experts, succeeded in overcoming seemingly insuperable obstacles to their reconciliation and in reconstructing a strong foundation for their marriage. There are also innumerable examples of individuals who have been able to effect drastic and enduring changes in their behavior, through drawing on the spiritual powers available by the bounty of God.

6 August 1989, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 72 ... the stress laid in the statements of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá on love and harmony as the hallmark of marriage, and in view of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's exhortation that each member of the family must uphold the rights of the others, makes it clear that violence in the family is contrary to the spirit of the Faith and a practice to be condemned.

It is clear that no husband should subject his wife to abuse of any kind, whether emotional, mental or physical. Such a reprehensible action would be the very antithesis of the relationship of mutual respect and equality enjoined by the Bahá'í writings—a relationship governed by the principles of consultation and devoid of the use of any form of abuse, including force, to compel obedience to one's will. When a Bahá'í wife finds herself in such a situation and feels it cannot be resolved through consultation with her husband, she could well turn to the Local Spiritual Assembly for advice and guidance, and might also find it highly advantageous to seek the assistance

of competent professional counsellors. If the husband is also a Bahá'í, the Local Spiritual Assembly can bring to his attention the need to avoid abusive behaviour and can, if necessary, take firmer measures to compel him to conform to the admonitions of the teachings.

There is no obligation on a wife, who is being subjected to beating by her husband, to continue living with him; she has the freedom to leave him and live in a separate domicile if she feels it necessary to do so.

12 April 1990, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly

- 73 The House of Justice was saddened to learn about the difficulties you are experiencing in your marriage. It is indeed disheartening to have someone you love become disenchanted with the Faith which you hold so dear. In these circumstances you are advised to consult with your wife to try to establish guidelines that will promote mutual respect for the other's beliefs and ideas, and come to some agreement so that the attitudes and behaviour of each one will not impinge on the other's rights to differing opinions. The marital relationship should not be burdened by one partner's undue expectations in regard to the other, based on beliefs and desires which that other partner does not share. Although sharing of faith is naturally desirable, it sometimes does not occur, and in such circumstances, even greater care and understanding are required to maintain a healthy marriage relationship.

To resign from the Cause would be a dissimulation of faith since you still believe in Bahá'u'lláh; therefore it could have no positive effect on your marriage. To make a compromise of such magnitude would be morally wrong, and rob you not only of your self-respect but also the ultimate respect of your wife. You are strongly urged not to allow her present antagonism to erode your own beliefs nor to lead to an adversarial position toward her. It should still be quite possible for you to maintain a loving and caring relationship with your wife while always keeping intact the integrity of your own belief and your relationship with Bahá'u'lláh. As you rely on prayer and the study of the Holy Writings, you will grow in strength and become better equipped to handle any criticism which may be leveled against you or the Faith.

The fact that your ... children are Bahá'ís should be a source of great comfort to you and also a reason for supreme gratitude to Bahá'u'lláh. He

has blessed your life and theirs by granting you the privilege of recognition, and your response in this present difficulty may well be a means of showing the steadfastness of your love for Him. Your challenge is to find that path of service to the Faith which will still preserve the unity of your marriage. You can certainly continue your devotional obligations of prayer and reading of the Holy Writings, you can give to the Fund, participate to the degree possible in the life of the Bahá'í community, and teach the Faith. You are encouraged to exert every effort to reach some agreement with your wife as to the range of activities for each of you which is acceptable as you pursue your respective commitments and interests.

1 January 1993, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 74 Beyond any professional assistance available to you is, of course, the assistance of God and that assistance one receives from the Faith through prayer, teaching, regular study of the Writings, obeying the ordinances of the Faith, and steadfast perseverance in upholding His Covenant.

27 April 1993, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 75 Bahá'u'lláh has ordained the family to be a fundamental institution for the organization of society, and has encouraged the believers to build strong and healthy families. This task is not an easy one, and presents a particular type of difficulty when the spouses are of two different religions.

It is the view of the House of Justice that, when differences arise between parents regarding the religious education of children, husband and wife must respect each other's right to educate the children in their respective religions. You mention in your letter that your husband has said that having parents of different religions is confusing for children. This is undoubtedly true but it is a challenge to both parents to gain a deeper understanding of the oneness of all God's revelations. Whether or not the non-Bahá'í partner is willing to make this effort, the Bahá'í partner cannot in good conscience surrender the obligation of sharing the Faith with his or her child. He or she is also enjoined to allow an equal right to the non-Bahá'í spouse. Since you and your husband knew of each other's beliefs before marrying, and as you are both reasonable persons, the House of Justice does not see any reason why such an arrangement should not work.

Your letter suggests that your husband hopes that you will convert to Islam, and it also indicates your own desire that he recognize Bahá'u'lláh. While these attitudes are understandable, they should never become an impediment to the unity of your marriage. Your husband may never come to recognize Bahá'u'lláh. You, for your part, can never deny Him. This should not prevent the two of you from having a good and happy family life. The House of Justice hopes that you will show great love to your husband, that you will pray fervently for him, and that you will be the best of helpmates. If he wishes to be Muslim, you should help him to be an exemplary Muslim. The House of Justice feels that such an attitude will greatly facilitate the ongoing consultations which you need to have with your husband on the topic of your son's religious education.

15 November 1993, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 76 The question, "Does God ever want divorce?" is one which ought perhaps to be framed differently, since the key point to consider in such cases is not so much a matter of whether God would ever "want" divorce as the practical issue of when it is appropriate for a married couple, or one of the parties to a marriage, to decide to separate. The answer cannot be dispensed simply, because it depends on a variety of factors that need to be considered in the context of a particular, concrete situation.

25 October 1995, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 77 For the couple themselves, the year of waiting provides a possibility for each party patiently and independently to assess their situation at a distance removed from the aggravating interferences of close proximity and to devise the measures of a fresh approach towards mending the strained relationship. There have been many instances in which a couple has, through a consecrated and determined effort, aided by the power of prayer and the advice of experts, succeeded in overcoming seemingly insuperable obstacles to their reconciliation and in reconstructing a strong foundation for their marriage. There are also innumerable examples of individuals who have been able to effect drastic and enduring changes in their behaviour, through drawing on the spiritual powers available by the bounty of God ...

It is clear then that, in the Bahá'í Faith, divorce is strongly discouraged and should be resorted to only when a prolonged effort to effect reconciliation has been unsuccessful. However, it should also be noted that the fact that

Bahá'u'lláh has permitted divorce is, no doubt, an indication that in certain circumstances it is unavoidable. In other words, it is permissible when an irreconcilable antipathy exists between the two parties to a marriage.

2 September 1996, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 78 The House of Justice deeply sympathizes with you in the difficulties which you have described in your letter, stemming from your husband's history of family violence and drug use. It noted with approval that you have sought professional psychological assistance to address this matter, and is hopeful that your husband will persevere in his efforts to achieve healing and to modify his destructive behaviour. In addition, you are encouraged to approach the local Bahá'í institutions, such as your Local Spiritual Assembly, Auxiliary Board member and/or National Spiritual Assembly, for spiritual support and guidance.

The courage and love with which you have acknowledged this painful situation and are striving to assist your husband are warmly commended. The House of Justice is concerned by your statement that your husband has been mistreating you and that there may be danger of physical violence. It is evident from the Bahá'í teachings that no husband should subject his wife to abuse of any kind, and that such reprehensible action is the antithesis of the relationship of mutual respect and equality enjoined in the Writings—a relationship governed by the principles of consultation and devoid of the use of force to compel obedience to one's will. While a Bahá'í is enjoined to be patient and forbearing, one is not obliged to remain indefinitely in a situation where one is being subjected to abuse. Thus, it may be advisable to seek practical guidance as to what measures you could take to protect yourself from harm if the situation were to deteriorate markedly. The House of Justice deeply hopes it will not come to this, and that you and your dear husband will find the means to repair the foundation of your marriage to establish a framework of cordial unity.

16 April 1998, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 79 The House of Justice is of the opinion that unhappiness in marriage and in the family is a symptom of a whole range of shortcomings in the way of life followed by most people at this time—shortcomings which are reflected to too great a degree within the Bahá'í community. Paying more attention, and devoting more time, to the choice of a spouse is but one aspect of the

solution. Bahá'ís need to study more deeply and carry out more faithfully all the guidance for life and behaviour which is contained in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh—including those teachings which relate especially to marriage and the family.

18 January 1999, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 80 The Bahá'í teachings on the sacredness of the marriage bond and the importance of family unity are clear, and your desire to uphold this principle through your perseverance and dedication to your marriage is praiseworthy. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us, a husband and wife should be "... two helpmates, two intimate friends, who should be concerned about the welfare of each other." Therefore, if your husband is willing to be chaste and faithful in his conduct, the House of Justice encourages you to support and assist him in his efforts to be obedient to the laws of Bahá'u'lláh and committed to his family. The following extract from a letter written on behalf of the beloved Guardian may be helpful.

There are qualities in everyone which we can appreciate and admire, and for which we can love them; and perhaps, if you determine to think only of these qualities which your husband possesses, this will help to improve the situation ... You should turn your thoughts away from the things which upset you, and constantly pray to Bahá'u'lláh to help you. Then you will find how that pure love, enkindled by God, which burns in the soul when we read and study the Teachings, will warm and heal, more than anything else.

However, providing assistance and encouragement to your husband should not entail compromising your dignity or integrity as a Bahá'í and a partner in the marriage. Further, it is important to remember that while you can try to help your husband, in the end it is he who is responsible for his own spiritual development.

29 September 1999, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 81 The depth of the concern you express—and the distress your present situation is causing you—are both readily understandable in the light of the great importance that the Bahá'í teachings attach to the relationship that Bahá'í partners must seek to establish in their marriage. You are doubtless familiar with the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on this subject:

The true marriage of Bahá'ís is this, that husband and wife should be united both physically and spiritually, that they may ever improve the spiritual life of each other, and may enjoy everlasting unity throughout all the worlds of God.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 86

Inevitably, the struggle to attain so great a goal poses comparable challenges to the patterns of habit and attitude that individuals bring into their married life. In this respect, your personal situation, while intensely painful for you in many of its specifics, is not intrinsically different from that of the rest of humanity. The intimacy of the marriage relationship—and the inescapable demand for self-sacrifice that this relationship always entails—has exposed to you various of your inner weaknesses that would very likely have come to light in no other way. The fact that these shortcomings endanger the most precious tie that can bind one human being to another makes the experience all the more intense.

This very development, however, can be a great blessing, if you are able to see it in this way and respond accordingly. As nothing else in your life has been able to do, the crisis you describe has the capacity to tap the roots of motivation for fundamental change. This is, more often than not, the means that God employs to open us to His Will. In the words of the Master:

To the sincere ones, tests are as a gift from God, the Exalted, for a heroic person hasteneth, with the utmost joy and gladness, to the tests of a violent battlefield ... Likewise, the pure gold shineth radiantly in the fire of test ... This test is just as thou hast written: it removeth the rust of egotism from the mirror of the heart until the Sun of Truth may shine therein. For, no veil is greater than egotism and no matter how thin that covering may be, yet it will finally veil man entirely and prevent him from receiving a portion from the eternal bounty.

Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, volume III, pp. 722–3

The House of Justice urges that, for the time being, you lay all of your entirely understandable concerns about the future of your marriage in the hands of Bahá'u'lláh, detaching yourself as fully as possible from the immediate focus of your concern, so that you can turn your attention wholeheartedly to the opportunity now presented to you to nurture those undeveloped

qualities within you whose mature expression the circumstances of your life so urgently call for. You will want to advise your wife of the decision you have made and seek her own prayers for your confirmation in it.

You are indeed blessed to have come to the point in your life where you are able candidly to admit to yourself your failings. Having done so, it will be equally important that you do not dwell on your shortcomings themselves since, as Bahá'u'lláh makes clear, “abasement” is in no way conducive to spiritual growth. Your attention and your prayers should be resolutely concentrated on the power of Bahá'u'lláh to help you find new ways to respond to life.

4 September 2000, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 82 It is clear from the problems you have described that there is a need for sympathetic communication between you and your husband. This can be achieved through love and respect for each other and patient understanding. Our Bahá'í teachings concerning marriage also underscore the importance of tenderness between husband and wife. Consultation provides a means through which these qualities can be practiced to great advantage, and it is hoped that you will find a way to engage in such consultation with your husband.

6 May 2001, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 83 There is no objection to a couple being separated for a period of time without asking for the year of patience to be set.

31 July 2002, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 84 Differences of attitude often arise in a marriage and have to be worked out if the marriage is to flourish. This is so whether the partners are of the same or different religions.

4 October 2004, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 85 It is clearly evident from the Bahá'í Teachings that no husband should subject his wife to abuse of any kind, whether emotional, mental or physical. Such a reprehensible action would be the very antithesis of the relationship of mutual respect and equality enjoined by the Bahá'í Writings—a relationship governed by the principles of consultation and devoid of the use of any form of abuse, including force, to compel obedience to one's will.

Whether or not you should divorce your husband depends entirely on your own feelings and judgment in the matter. While the Teachings condemn divorce and urge the preservation of marriage, they do acknowledge the necessity of divorce in extreme circumstances. A believer should consider the possibility of divorce only if the situation is intolerable and he or she has a strong aversion to being married to the other partner.

11 November 2004, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 86 Your desire to consult with your Local Spiritual Assembly in an effort to find a solution to your marital problems reflects your willingness to take advantage of the divine arrangement ordained by Bahá'u'lláh for attending to matters affecting the life of members of His community. However, if your wife is opposed to this action, and you are unable through appeals to her to change her mind, it may be best to attempt to find another approach towards finding a resolution to these difficulties. Perhaps there are wise believers in the community whose judgment she may trust and she would be agreeable to join you in consulting with one or two of these individuals; or she may prefer that you see a professional counsellor with expertise in dealing with marital issues.

In situations of this kind, it is often very challenging for partners to consult with each other, but it is unhealthy for both if serious conflicts are left unresolved. See whether you can, after prayer and meditation, attempt again to convey to your wife the deep need you feel for a fuller consultation on your issues, and seek her suggestion as to how she feels an approach to a solution should be made, and attempt to win her agreement that you consult with a suitable person, one she may well be able to recommend.

14 November 2004, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 87 Your letter raises questions about remaining married when a couple is unable to have children and about divorce and marriage to another spouse for the purpose of having a family. In response to questions raised by other believers who found themselves unable to have children, the House of Justice has pointed out that the teachings of our Faith indicate that a Bahá'í couple should be willing and open to the possibility of having children; nevertheless, it is recognized that not all couples are physically able to have children. It must be kept in mind that procreation, though the primary purpose, is not the sole purpose of marriage, and a couple

unable to have children of their own should not feel any guilt of failure, for they can find fulfilment in their lives through other avenues of service to God and humanity and through the enduring unity they establish in their marital relationship.

The House of Justice points out that one cannot fathom the wisdom of God. Many times that which the heart desires proves not to be in one's best interests, and many times that which appears as an unbearable test proves in time to be a path to great happiness.

You should also bear in mind that, in the teachings of the Faith, adopting a child is held to be a highly meritorious act. The passages provided below from the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi affirm this principle.

He that bringeth up his son or the son of another, it is as though he hath brought up a son of Mine; upon him rest My glory, My loving-kindness, My mercy, that have compassed the world.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 48

It was a pleasure to Shoghi Effendi to receive your letter of May 26th and to hear about your adopted children. This is a truly Bahá'í act especially as it was often lauded both by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and the Guardian trusts that they will grow to become Bahá'í workers, and thus repay your kind generosity.

20 June 1931 to an individual

27 December 2005, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 88 It is also pleasing to note from your letter that both of you have turned to your Local Spiritual Assembly for support and counsel, and you are urged to follow the sound advice that has been offered to you. We must be ever mindful that only through immersion in the ocean of the utterances of the Blessed Beauty and the daily struggle to translate His teachings into reality can we come to a greater understanding of God's will for us and achieve our purpose in life. Forbearance, patience, perseverance, mature

consultation and love will assist you both in addressing the challenges that arise in your marriage.

16 April 2006, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 89 Although the breakdown of a marriage relationship may sometimes be precipitated by one single action, it is often the result of a series of events over an extended period which erode the trust and confidence between the marriage partners. Hence one must exercise caution and restraint in seeking to identify the cause of divorce or to assign responsibility for it exclusively to one of the parties. Rather the effort should more productively be expended on ensuring that the necessary endeavour is made to see whether reconciliation can be effected. Should that not be possible, one should be aware that, in the Bahá'í teachings, divorce is permissible and provisions are made for it.

22 December 2006, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 90 The Universal House of Justice has received your email message ... inquiring whether the Bahá'í Writings indicate a believer should rise above a situation of adultery in order to save his or her marriage. We have been asked to convey the following.

To date, nothing has been found in the Writings of the Central Figures of the Faith or letters written by or on behalf of Shoghi Effendi that specifically addresses the question you have raised. However, as you are probably aware, under Bahá'í law, divorce is permissible if antipathy or resentment develop on the part of either the husband or the wife. In this connection, the House of Justice has explained that there are “a large number of possible causes for such an attitude to occur between a married couple, among which is included adultery by one of the marriage partners. It is also possible that, if adultery occurs, a combination of remorse on the part of the marriage partner involved and forgiveness and magnanimity on the part of the other partner could result in a condition in which the marriage could be preserved and divorce avoided.”

7 December 2016, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 91 As to your broader request for guidance regarding how Bahá'í married couples may deal with sexual problems, you are encouraged to consider the following perspectives and principles. One of the outcomes of the rising

tide of materialism and consequent reorientation of society, over more than a century, has been a destructive emphasis on sexuality. Sexuality has become a preoccupation, pervading commerce, media, the arts, and popular culture, influencing disciplines such as medicine, psychology, and education, and reducing the human being to an object. It is no longer merely a part of life but has become the defining element of a person's identity. Thus, our civilization has exalted sex and sexuality to a level of importance far beyond its proper place in our lives. Sex has also been wrenched out of its proper context. On the one hand, our current culture suffuses every aspect of our lives with sex, but on the other, it isolates the sex act from its natural corollaries of marital life and the bearing and rearing of children.

You are aware that the Bahá'í Faith recognizes the value of the sex impulse and holds that the institution of marriage has been established as the channel of its rightful expression. In letters written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi made the following statements: "The sex instinct, like all other human instincts, is not necessarily evil. It is a power which, if properly directed, can bring joy and satisfaction to the individual." Further, the Bahá'í standard "does not preclude the living of a perfectly normal sex life in its legitimate channel of marriage." With regard to the importance that should be placed on the physical aspect of marriage in comparison to its moral and spiritual aspects, a letter written on behalf of the Guardian stated:

The institution of marriage, as established by Bahá'u'lláh, while giving due importance to the physical aspect of marital union, considers it as subordinate to the moral and spiritual purposes and functions with which it has been invested by an all-wise and loving Providence. Only when these different values are given each their due importance, and only on the basis of the subordination of the physical to the moral, and the carnal to the spiritual, can such excesses and laxity in marital relations as our decadent age is so sadly witnessing be avoided, and family life be restored to its original purity, and fulfil the true function for which it has been instituted by God.

Bahá'ís are, understandably, influenced by the forces of society, including contemporary beliefs about sexual practices. As believers come to more deeply understand the principles that have been set forth in the Bahá'í teachings, they will be able to obtain a more balanced and healthier view

of sexual relations within marriage. That itself will help Bahá'í married couples to avoid or to resolve many difficulties in a world with an exaggerated emphasis on, and distorted view of, sex. Of course, a number of sexual problems can well have medical aspects, and in such cases recourse should certainly be had to the best medical assistance. Moreover, a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi explained: "Sex is a very individual matter," and "some people are more passionate by nature than others".

17 April 2017, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

- 92 The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter ... requesting guidance and prayers in relation to your marriage, which you describe has been affected by your husband's substance abuse problem ...

As to the question of whether a breach of Bahá'í law leading to the breakdown of a marriage justifies divorce, in the Bahá'í writings there are no specific grounds for divorce such as there are in some codes of civil law. A Bahá'í is expected to make a supreme effort to preserve a marriage, but divorce is permitted in Bahá'í law, and in certain situations it may be the only solution. A believer should consider the possibility of divorce only if the situation is intolerable and he or she has a strong aversion to being married to the other partner. Whether your situation is one in which you feel you are justified in applying for divorce is a decision only you can make in light of prayerful consideration of the factors involved.

6 December 2017, on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer

Prayers

93 Praised be God, Who hath adorned the heaven of love with the stars of unity and harmony, and hath ordained that in the world of being marriage be the chief instrument for the realization of that which He hath purposed for the peoples and kindreds of the earth. Verily, He hath raised up regions and countries, and hath revealed the arts and sciences, and whatsoever ye witness today or have heard from His learned servants in the past. Exalted be the Lord of Names, He Who hath enjoined marriage as a comfort unto His servants and His people, and as a means for their peace and tranquillity in His dominion. Thus hath it been revealed from the heaven of His sanctity in His Most Holy Book, as well as in His Books and Scriptures in former times and more recently. Verily, potent is He to accomplish His purpose, and He is the One, the Incomparable, the Unconstrained ...

O Lord! I beseech Thee by the gentle winds of the dawn of Thy Manifestation, through which Thou hast vivified all created things, and by the outpourings of Thy grace, and by the pearls of the ocean of Thy knowledge and wisdom, to assist him who hath turned unto Thee and through whom Thou hast manifested Thy grace and Thy loving-kindness, and whom Thou hast, as a token of Thy bounty and a sign of Thy grace, favoured with one of Thy maidservants who hath been engaged in serving Thee for a number of years. O Lord, bind them together in Thy name, through which Thou hast subdued the hearts and attracted the souls. Verily, potent art

Thou to do as Thou desirest, and in Thy grasp are held the reins of all that are in heaven and on earth. Praised be Thou, O Lord of the worlds and the Desire of all them that have recognized Thee!

Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet translated from the Arabic

94 He is God!

O peerless Lord! In Thine almighty wisdom Thou hast enjoined marriage upon the peoples, that the generations of men may succeed one another in this contingent world, and that ever, so long as the world shall last, they may busy themselves at the Threshold of Thy oneness with servitude and worship, with salutation, adoration and praise. "I have not created spirits and men, but that they should worship me."ⁱ Wherefore, wed Thou in the heaven of Thy mercy these two birds of the nest of Thy love, and make them the means of attracting perpetual grace; that from the union of these two seas of love a wave of tenderness may surge and cast the pearls of pure and goodly issue on the shore of life. "He hath let loose the two seas, that they meet each other: Between them is a barrier which they overpass not. Which then of the bounties of your Lord will ye deny? From each He bringeth up greater and lesser pearls."ⁱⁱ

O Thou kind Lord! Make Thou this marriage to bring forth coral and pearls. Thou art verily the All-Powerful, the Most Great, the Ever-Forgiving.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’í Prayers

- 95 O my Lord, O my Lord! These two bright orbs are wedded in Thy love, conjoined in servitude to Thy Holy Threshold, united in ministering to Thy Cause. Make Thou this marriage to be as threading lights of Thine abounding grace, O my Lord, the All-Merciful, and luminous rays of Thy bestowals, O Thou the Beneficent, the Ever-Giving, that there may branch out from this great tree boughs that will grow green and flourishing through the gifts that rain down from Thy clouds of grace.

Verily Thou art the Generous, verily Thou art the Almighty, verily Thou art the Compassionate, the All-Merciful.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, sec. 87

- 96 O God, my God! Join in accord these two souls and set firm their feet in eternal love and everlasting union, in order that each of them may be unto the other a bestowal of Thy grace, a token of Thy loving-kindness, and an outpouring from Thy Kingdom of bounty. Bestow upon them pure

i Qur’án 51:56.

ii Qur’án 55:19–22.

and goodly offspring who shall stand firm in servitude unto Thee, remain constant in Thy worship, yearn for Thy Kingdom, and be filled with inspiration by Thy Great Announcement. Verily Thou art the Most Bountiful, and verily Thou art the Merciful, the Compassionate.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet translated from the Arabic

- 97 Praise be unto God Who hath adorned the human reality with manifest signs of divine love, and hath illumined all existent beings with the light of attraction, in such wise that they have become harmonized, interconnected, and mutually attracted through the power of heaven. Verily, union, assemblage, marriage, intermingling, association, and integration are the cause of life for all beings, whereas dissolution, separation, dissociation, divorce, and division lead to the death and destruction of created things. God hath created no being but that its existence doth depend upon the association, composition, and intermingling of simple, primal elements—whereas all that God hath decreed of death, destruction, and extinction occurreth by way of the dissolution, separation, dispersion, and dissociation of the principal constituent parts. Whensoever the natures and elements are gathered, joined, paired, and intermingled, a living being or composite entity is formed, fashioned, and brought into existence. And whensoever they dissociate, separate, and disperse, then that being shall deteriorate, decline, and fall from its station of existence within creation.

Thus, God hath made harmony the cause of life, and discord the cause of death, and hath ordained that coupling, union, and mutual attraction between the hearts of the servants and maidservants through the bond of matrimony be the cause of joy and prosperity of both body and soul. “Glory be to Him Who hath created all the pairs, of such things as the earth produceth, and of themselves, and of things beyond their ken.”ⁱ This, verily, is an evidence of His tender mercy, bounty, and grace unto His devoted servants.

We beseech God to make this marriage to be a cause of felicity, advancement, honour, glory, upliftment, and freedom, so that from this servant and handmaiden there may issue forth many souls who will worship God, bow down in adoration before Him, be devoted and sincere in their faith, and

i Qur'án 36:36.

arise to render service to Him and to the world of humanity. He, verily, is the Beneficent, the All-Merciful.

O God, my God! Bless Thou the two parties to this marriage, this Thy servant and this Thy handmaiden, both of whom believe in Thy oneness, testify to Thy unity, and are attracted to Thy Kingdom. Ordain for them every good and make their marriage to be a cause of loftiness, honour, perfection, light, and mercy for evermore. Verily, Thou art the All-Bountiful, the Compassionate, and Thou art He Who is loving and kind to His handmaidens and servants.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet translated from the Arabic

- 98 O my Lord and my Hope! Thou hast, through Thy consummate wisdom, enjoined harmony upon Thy creation and prescribed companionship unto the virtuous amongst Thy servants. Thou hast created all things as joined pairs so that through such union Thy purpose may be realized, and through such bonding, joy and gladness may appear. Thou hast, through Thy grace and bounty, conjoined the hearts and souls, so that countenances may shine, even as lamps, with the light of Thy love, and joyful nuptials may occur at every morn and eventide ...

Lord! Make these two souls even as one body, one soul, and one heart, intermingling even as water and wine, and as honey and pure milk. Ordain Thou for their offspring every blessing. Advance their station and cause them to be as two luminous signs shining forth from the horizon of love and affection. Verily, Thou art the Unifier, the Supreme Ordainer, the Source of all love, the Most Generous, the Compassionate.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet translated from the Arabic

- 99 Grant, O my Lord, that this marriage may be auspicious, joyous, blessed, and praiseworthy. Strengthen Thou the union and increase the harmony between these two souls, that they may live together in the utmost tranquillity and delight, and may establish a devoted family that believeth in Thee and in Thy signs. Verily, Thou art the All-Bountiful. Verily, Thou art the Almighty, the Omnipotent, the Most Powerful.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet translated from the Arabic

- 100 He is the All-Glorious.

O ye two closely knit and enlightened birds! Praise ye God that in the divine garden, upon the tree of hope, ye have sought shelter within the same nest and are engaged together in extolling and sanctifying the incomparable Lord. Wherefore, lift up the voice of the spirit and sing ye this song of glorification and praise:

O Lord! We are but feeble birds, yet we abide within the shelter of Thy protection. We are lowly fowls dwelling upon the dust, but we seek Thy mighty abode. Broken-winged are we, yet do we yearn to soar unto Thy sublime summits and Thy retreats of celestial glory. Wherefore, bestow upon us Thy favour and grant us Thy strength, that we may acquire wings of felicity, may take flight in this limitless space, and become intimates of Thy Kingdom of Glory. Grant Thou that, through the union of these two unrestrained birds, a flock of the meadows of truth may emerge and soar within the lands of divine unity. Upon you be greetings and praise.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet translated from the Persian

101 He is the All-Glorious.

O my God, O my God! This is Thy servant whom Thou hast caused to be related to Thy heavenly Tree and to be born beneath the shade of Thy oneness. Thou didst suckle him at the breast of Thy loving-kindness, and reared him within the embrace of Thy care. Thou didst guide him unto the right path until, through Thy grace and bounty, he attained unto maturity within the shelter of Thy protection. Thou didst lead him to walk in the straight and undeviating Path, cleaving steadfastly unto Thy sure Handle and mighty Cord, in order that he might seek Thy good-pleasure, be content with Thy decree, turn unto Thy heaven, speak forth Thy praise, and manifest the qualities of the favoured and the sincere amongst Thy servants.

Thou hast now favoured him with one of Thy handmaidens and hast wed him to her through Thine endless bounties. Lord, she was an orphan who was nurtured beneath the shade of Thy mercy and reared within the bosom of Thy favours and bestowals. She attained unto maturity within the protective embrace of Thy Covenant and was safeguarded under the watchful eye of Thy loving-kindness and mercy.

O Lord! Unite these two souls through Thy grace, and bind their hearts together through Thy bounty, that they may become even as a single body, a single soul, and a single being, untarnished by antipathy or estrangement, and waxing greater in fidelity and purity with each passing day. Graciously assist them in their servitude to Thy great and sacred Threshold, and vouchsafe unto them Thy blessings and favours. Protect them from every distress and tribulation, from every sickness and sorrow. Thou art, in truth, the All-Bountiful, the Almighty, the Bestower. Verily, Thou art the Most Gracious, the All-Merciful, Whose help is implored by all.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet translated from the Arabic

- 102 O my Lord and my Hope! This Thy servant hath, in obedience to Thy bidding and in fulfilment of Thy laws, wed one of Thy handmaidens in order that they may establish upon Thine earth a family that shall remember Thee amongst Thy creatures, call out in Thy name amidst Thy people, and become distinguished throughout the world for its relationship to Thee and its reliance upon Thee. O Lord! Grant that this marriage may be prosperous, blessed, pleasing, and happy, and make it a cause of harmony and fellowship for evermore. Thou, verily, aidest whomsoever Thou willest. Thou art, in truth, the Most Powerful, the Almighty, the Omnipotent.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet translated from the Arabic

- 103 O Lord, make Thou this marriage to be blessed, prosperous, and happy. Bind these two souls together, and gladden Thou every eye with the fruits that shall come forth from this auspicious occasion. Shelter them both within the sanctuary of Thy care and protection, and guard them with the watchful eye of Thy loving-kindness. Cause them to become signs of Thy remembrance amidst Thy creatures, and lamps of Thy knowledge within the glass of Thy bountiful favour.

O Lord! They are feeble; strengthen them through Thy power. They are lowly; exalt them through Thy might. They are supplicating Thee at the door of Thy oneness and entreating Thee at the threshold of Thy tender mercy. Verily, Thou art the All-Powerful, the All-Mighty, the Bounteous, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet translated from the Arabic

- 104 O Lord! Grant that this marriage may be blessed and happy. Send down Thy mercy upon them both in order that from them may issue forth noble children who shall turn unto Thy Kingdom of beauty, glorify Thee in their hearts and with their tongues in the world of being, and unravel the mysteries Thou hast deposited in the hearts and souls. Thou, in truth, art the One Who uniteth, bindeth, and joineth together the human race. Thou, verily, art the Bestower, the Compassionate, the Beneficent.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet translated from the Arabic

- 105 O Lord, make Thou this marriage to become a cause of heavenly blessings and a means of enkindlement with the fire of Thy love in the eternal Kingdom. Vouchsafe Thy grace in order that both may be favoured at Thy Holy Threshold and remain firm in Thy love, may advance spiritually with every passing day, and may become two resplendent signs of faith and certitude amongst the people.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet translated from the Persian

MUSIC

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

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled March 1972, revised June 1996

Extracts

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men...
Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 2 We have made it lawful for you to listen to music and singing. Take heed, however, lest listening thereto should cause you to overstep the bounds of propriety and dignity. Let your joy be the joy born of My Most Great Name, a Name that bringeth rapture to the heart, and filleth with ecstasy the minds of all who have drawn nigh unto God. We, verily, have made music as a ladder for your souls, a means whereby they may be lifted up unto the realm on high; make it not, therefore, as wings to self and passion. Truly, We are loath to see you numbered with the foolish.
The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 51

- 3 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.

They who recite the verses of the All-Merciful in the most melodious of tones will perceive in them that with which the sovereignty of earth and heaven can never be compared. From them they will inhale the divine fragrance of My worlds—worlds which today none can discern save those who have been endowed with vision through this sublime, this beauteous Revelation. Say: These verses draw hearts that are pure unto those spiritu-

al worlds that can neither be expressed in words nor intimated by allusion.
Blessed be those who hearken.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 115

- 4 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

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 5 This wonderful age has rent asunder the veils of superstition and has condemned the prejudice of the people of the East.

Among some of the nations of the Orient, music and harmony was not approved of, but the Manifested Light, Bahá'u'lláh, in this glorious period has revealed in Holy Tablets that singing and music are the spiritual food of the hearts and souls. In this dispensation, music is one of the arts that is highly approved and is considered to be the cause of the exaltation of sad and desponding hearts.

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

Bahá'í World Faith: Selected Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 6 Thank thou God that thou art instructed in music and melody, singing with pleasant voice the glorification and praise of the Eternal, the Living. I pray to God that thou mayest employ this talent in prayer and supplication, in order that the souls may become quickened, the hearts may become attracted and all may become inflamed with the fire of the love of God!

Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas, vol. 3

- 7 ...although sound is but the vibrations of the air which affect the tympanum of the ear, and vibrations of the air are but an accident among the accidents which depend upon the air, consider how much marvelous notes or a charming song influence the spirits! A wonderful song giveth wings to the spirit and filleth the heart with exaltation...

Bahá'í World Faith

- 8 The utmost joy was attained, for—praise be to God!—the friends of the Merciful passed some time on that day joyous and singing in the land of the Mashrak-el-Azcar and enjoyed commemorating the Lord of the verses with the greatest joy...

I am hopeful that, during the coming Rizwan, a great feast shall be held in the land of the Mashrak-el-Azcar, a spiritual celebration prepared and the melodies of the violin and the mandolin and hymns in praise and glorification of the Lord of Hosts make all the audience joyous and ecstatic.

Tablets of Abdul Baha Abbas, vol. 1

- 9 O maid-servant of God! Sing with beautiful melodies in the meetings of the maid-servants, praising and glorifying thy Supreme Lord.

Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas, vol. 1

- 10 O thou attracted one of the Kingdom! Complete thou the study of the art of music and sacrifice thyself more or less to the Lord of the Kingdom.

Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas, vol. 3

- 11 ...a musical and melodious voice imparteth life to an attracted heart, but lureth toward lust those souls who are engulfed in passion and desire.

The Divine Art of Living

- 12 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

From the Utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 13 What a wonderful meeting this is! These are the children of the Kingdom. The song we have just listened to was very beautiful in melody and words. The art of music is divine and effective. It is the food of the soul and spirit. Through the power and charm of music the spirit of man is uplifted. It has wonderful sway and effect in the hearts of children, for their hearts are pure, and melodies have great influence in them. The latent talents with which the hearts of these children are endowed will find expression through the medium of music. Therefore, you must exert yourselves to make them proficient; teach them to sing with excellence and effect. It is incumbent upon each child to know something of music, for without knowledge of this art the melodies of instrument and voice cannot be rightly enjoyed. Likewise, it is necessary that the schools teach it in order that the souls and hearts of the pupils may become vivified and exhilarated and their lives be brightened with enjoyment.

The Promulgation of Universal Peace

- 14 Music is one of the important arts. It has a great effect upon the human spirit. Musical melodies are a certain something which prove to be accidental upon etheric vibrations, for voice is nothing but the expression of vibrations, which, reaching the tympanum, affect the nerves of hearing. Musical melodies are, therefore, those peculiar effects produced by, or from, vibration. However, they have the keenest effect upon the spirit. In sooth, although music is a material affair, yet its tremendous effect is spiritual, and its greatest attachment is to the realm of the spirit. If a person desires to deliver a discourse, it will prove more effectual after musical melodies. The ancient Greeks, as well as Persian philosophers, were in the habit of delivering their discourses in the following manner:—First, playing a few musical melodies, and when their audience attained a certain receptivity thereby they would leave their instruments at once and begin their discourse. Among the most renowned musicians of Persia was one named Barbod, who, whenever a great question had been pleaded for at the

court of the King, and the Ministry had failed to persuade the King, they would at once refer the matter to Barbod, whereupon he would go with his instrument to the court and play the most appropriate and touching music, the end being at once attained, because the King was immediately affected by the touching musical melodies, certain feelings of generosity would swell up in his heart, and he would give way. You may try this: If you have a great desire and wish to attain your end, try to do so on a large audience after a great solo has been rendered, but it must be on an audience on which music is effective, for there are some people who are like stones, and music cannot affect stones.

Music is an important means to the education and development of humanity, but the only true way is through the Teachings of God. Music is like this glass, which is perfectly pure and polished. It is precisely like this pure chalice before us, and the Teachings of God, the utterances of God, are like the water. When the glass or chalice is absolutely pure and clear, and the water is perfectly fresh and limpid, then it will confer Life; wherefore, the Teachings of God, whether they be in the form of anthems or communes or prayers, when they are melodiously sung, are most impressive.

It was for this reason that His Holiness David sang the psalms in the Holy of Holies at Jerusalem with sweet melodies. In this Cause the art of music is of paramount importance. The Blessed Perfection, when He first came to the barracks (Acca) repeated this statement: "If among the immediate followers there had been those who could have played some musical instrument, i.e., flute or harp, or could have sung, it would have charmed every one." In short, musical melodies form an important role in the associations, or outward and inward characteristics, or qualities of man, for it is the inspirer or motive power of both the material and spiritual susceptibilities. What a motive power it is in all feelings of love! When man is attached to the Love of God, music has a great effect upon him.

Table Talk, Acca, July 1909, quoted in Herald of the South (January 13, 1933), pp. 2-3

- 15 Voice is the vibration of the air, and is like the waves of the sea. The voice is produced through the instrumentality of the lips, throat, teeth, tongue, etc. These cause a wave in the air, and this wave reaches the nerve of the ear, which is thereby affected. This is the voice...

There are two kinds of voices. One when the complete instrument is perfect, then the emission of sound is perfect. The second is when the

instrument is imperfect, it affects the voice in such a way that it is far from pleasing. What we have just said refers to the voice itself.

It is natural for the heart and spirit to take pleasure and enjoyment in all things that show forth symmetry, harmony, and perfection. For instance: a beautiful house, a well designed garden, a symmetrical line, a graceful motion, a well written book, pleasing garments—in fact, all things that have in themselves grace or beauty are pleasing to the heart and spirit—therefore, it is most certain that a true voice causes deep pleasure.

What is music? It is a combination of harmonious sounds. What is poetry? It is a symmetrical collection of words. Therefore, they are pleasing through harmony and rhythm. Poetry is much more effective and complete than prose. It stirs more deeply, for it is of a finer composition.

A fine voice when joined to beautiful music causes a great effect, for both are desirable and pleasing. All these have in themselves an organization, and are constructed on natural law. Therefore, they correspond to the order of existence like something which would fit into a mold. A true voice fits into the mold of nature. When it is so, this affects the nerves, and they affect the heart and spirit.

In the world of existence physical things have a connection with spiritual realities. One of these things is the voice, which connects itself with the spirit; and the spirit can be uplifted by this means—for though it is a physical thing, it is one of the material, natural organizations—therefore, it is effective.

All forms when understood aright gladden the spirit. Melodies are like water. The voice is like a goblet. The pure water in a pure glass is pleasing. Therefore, it is acceptable. But even though the water be pure, if it be in a goblet which is not so, this receptacle will make it unacceptable. Therefore, a faulty voice even though the music be good, is unpleasing.

In short: melodies, though they are material, are connected with the spiritual, therefore, they produce a great effect. A certain kind of melody makes the spirit happy, another kind makes it sad, another excites it to action.

All these feelings can be caused by voice and music, for through the nerves it moves and stirs the spirit. Even over animals, music has an effect. For example: When they wish to take a camel over a desert road, they attach to him some bells, or they play upon a flute, and this sound prevents him from realizing the fatigue of the journey; his nerves are

affected, but he does not have an increase of thought, he feels nothing but physical sensation...

Whatever is in the heart of man, melody moves and awakens. If a heart full of good feelings and a pure voice are joined together, a great effect is produced. For instance: if there be love in the heart, through melody, it will increase until its intensity can scarcely be borne; but if bad thoughts are in the heart, such as hatred, it will increase and multiply. For instance: the music used in war awakens the desire for bloodshed. The meaning is that melody causes whatever feeling is in the heart to increase.

Some feelings occur accidentally and some have a foundation. For example: some people are naturally kind, but they may be accidentally upset by a wave of anger. But if they hear music, the true nature will reassert itself. Music really awakens the real, natural nature, the individual essence.

With whatever purpose you listen to music, that purpose will be increased. For instance: there will be a concert given for the poor and unfortunate, and if you go there thinking of the aim, the music will increase your compassion and generosity. This is the reason why music is used in war. And so it is with all the things that cause the excitation of the nerves.

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

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 16 With regard to singing some of the hymns written by Mrs ... he thinks that it would be a splendid idea and when Mrs. Lua Getsinger was living with the Master's family, she often sang them and tried to teach them to the small children in the family.

22 March 1928

- 17 He thinks that it would especially be beautiful to see little children singing them in groups...

22 March 1928

- 18 The Guardian values the hymns that you are so beautifully composing. They certainly contain the realities of the Faith, and will indeed help you to

give the Message to the young ones. It is the music which assists us to affect the human spirit; it is an important means which helps us to communicate with the soul. The Guardian hopes that through this assistance you will give the Message to the people, and will attract their hearts.

15 November 1932

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

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

17 March 1935

- 20 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.

7 April 1935

- 21 Although now is only the very beginning of Bahá'í art, yet the friends who feel they are gifted in such matters should endeavour to develop and cultivate their gifts and through their works to reflect, however inadequately, the Divine Spirit which Bahá'u'lláh has breathed into the world.

4 November 1937

- 22 Music, as one of the arts, is a natural cultural development, and the Guardian does not feel that there should be any cultivation of "Bahá'í Music" any more than we are trying to develop a Bahá'í school of painting or writing. The believers are free to paint, write and compose as their talents guide them. If music is written, incorporating the sacred writings,

the friends are free to make use of it, but it should never be considered a requirement at Bahá'í meetings to have such music. The further away the friends keep from any set forms, the better, for they must realize that the Cause is absolutely universal, and what might seem a beautiful addition to their mode of celebrating a Feast, etc., would perhaps fall on the ears of people of another country as unpleasant sounds—and vice versa. As long as they have music for its own sake it is all right, but they should not consider it Bahá'í music.

20 July 1946

- 23 Instrumental music may be used at the Bahá'í Feasts.

20 August 1956

- 24 As regards producing a book of Bahá'í songs, your understanding that there is no cultural expression which could be called Bahá'í at this time (distinctive music, literature, art, architecture, etc., being the flower of the civilization and not coming at the beginning of a new Revelation), is correct. However, that does not mean that we haven't Bahá'í songs, in other words, songs written by Bahá'ís on Bahá'í subjects...

21 September 1957

- 25 You should try and work out the questions about songs with the Reviewing Committee or the National Spiritual Assembly. A Bahá'í can write songs, mentioning the Faith. This is not "Bahá'í Music", but music in which the Faith is mentioned. This is probably what the National Spiritual Assembly meant.

24 October 1957

THE IMPORTANCE OF
OBLIGATORY
PRAYER &
FASTING

A compilation of extracts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh
and the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

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

The Universal House of Justice, in reviewing the further applicability of the laws of Bahá'u'lláh in the course of the past four years, determined that it is imperative for all Bahá'ís “to deepen their awareness of the blessings conferred by the laws which directly foster the devotional life of the individual and, thus, of the community.” Among these laws are obligatory prayer and fasting which have been characterized by the Blessed Beauty as “two wings to man's life.”

This present selection of newly authorized translations has been drawn from the vast ocean of the original Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It is intended to further enhance the believers' insight into the far-reaching significance of these two great laws.

May 2000

Extracts

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 We, verily, have set forth all things in Our Book, as a token of grace unto those who have believed in God, the Almighty, the Protector, the Self-Subsisting. And We have ordained obligatory prayer and fasting so that all may by these means draw nigh unto God, the Most Powerful, the Well-Beloved. We have written down these two laws and expounded every irrevocable decree. We have forbidden men from following whatsoever might cause them to stray from the Truth, and have commanded them to observe that which will draw them nearer unto Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Loving. Say: Observe ye the commandments of God for love of His beauty, and be not of those who follow in the ways of the abject and foolish.
- 2 All praise be unto God, Who hath revealed the law of obligatory prayer as a reminder to His servants, and enjoined on them the Fast that those possessed of means may become apprised of the woes and sufferings of the destitute.
- 3 One who performeth neither good deeds nor acts of worship is like unto a tree which beareth no fruit, and an action which leaveth no trace. Whosoever experienceth the holy ecstasy of worship will refuse to barter such an act or any praise of God for all that existeth in the world. Fasting and obligatory prayer are as two wings to man's life. Blessed be the one who soareth with their aid in the heaven of the love of God, the Lord of all worlds.
- 4 Cling firmly to obligatory prayer and fasting. Verily, the religion of God is like unto heaven; fasting is its sun, and obligatory prayer is its moon. In truth, they are the pillars of religion whereby the righteous are distinguished from those who transgress His commandments. We entreat God, exalted and glorified be He, that He may graciously enable all to observe that which He hath revealed in His Ancient Book.

- 5 Know thou that religion is as heaven; and fasting and obligatory prayer are its sun and its moon. We entreat God, exalted and glorified be He, to graciously aid everyone who acteth according to His will and good-pleasure.
- 6 Be not neglectful of obligatory prayer and fasting. He who faileth to observe them hath not been nor will ever be acceptable in the sight of God. Follow ye wisdom under all conditions. He, verily, hath bidden all to observe that which hath been and will be of profit to them. He, in truth, is the All-Sufficing, the Most High.
- 7 As for obligatory prayer, it hath been sent down by the Pen of the Most High in such wise that it setteth ablaze the hearts and captivateth the souls and minds of men.
- 8 Concerning obligatory prayer, it hath been revealed in such wise that whosoever reciteth it, even one time, with a detached heart, will find himself wholly severed from the world.
- 9 O My brother! How great, how very great, can the law of obligatory prayer be, when, through His mercy and loving kindness, one is enabled to observe it. When a man commenceth the recitation of the Obligatory Prayer, he should see himself severed from all created things and regard himself as utter nothingness before the will and purpose of God, in such wise that he seeth naught but Him in the world of being. This is the station of God's well-favored ones and those who are wholly devoted to Him. Should one perform the Obligatory Prayer in this manner, he will be accounted by God and the Concourse on high among those who have truly offered the prayer.
- 10 One of the deeds in obedience to the law is obligatory prayer. He Who is the Bearer of divine mysteries hath called it the ladder of ascent. He saith: "Obligatory prayer is a ladder of ascent for the believer."ⁱ Within it are hidden and concealed a myriad effects and benefits. Indeed, they are beyond computation. How great would be a man's indolence and his injustice to himself if he were to abandon this ladder of ascent and attach himself to earthly treasures. It is our hope that we may be assisted to perform pure and acceptable deeds. We beseech God, exalted and glorified be He, to confirm us in that which He desireth and pleaseth and in that which will

i A tradition attributed to the Imám 'Alí

draw us nigh unto Him. Verily, He is the Almighty, the All-Powerful, He Who is wont to answer the prayers of all men.

- 11 Of the new Obligatory Prayers that were later revealed, the long Obligatory Prayer should be said at those times when one feeleth himself in a prayerful mood. In truth, it hath been revealed in such wise that if it be recited to a rock, that rock would stir and speak forth; and if it be recited to a mountain, that mountain would move and flow. Well is it with the one who reciteth it and fulfilleth God's precepts. Whichever prayer is read will suffice.
- 12 We beseech God to assist His people that they may observe the most great and exalted Fast, which is to protect one's eye from beholding whatever is forbidden and to withhold one's self from food, drink and whatever is not of Him. We pray God to confirm His loved ones that they may succeed in accomplishing that which they have been commanded in this Day.
- 13 Praise be unto Him Who hath revealed laws in accordance with His good-pleasure. Verily, He is sovereign over whatsoever He wisheth. O My friends! Act ye in accordance with what ye have been commanded in the Book. Fasting hath been decreed for you in the month of 'Alá. Fast ye for the sake of your Lord, the Mighty, the Most High. Restrain yourselves from sunrise to sunset. Thus doth the Beloved of mankind instruct you as bidden by God, the All-Powerful, the Unconstrained. It is not for anyone to exceed the limits laid down by God and His law, nor should anyone follow his own idle imaginings. Well is it with the one who fulfilleth My decrees for the love of My Beauty, and woe to the one who neglecteth the Dayspring of Command in the days of his Lord, the Almighty, the Omnipotent.
- 14 This is one of the nights of the Fast, and during it the Tongue of Grandeur and Glory proclaimed: There is no God beside Me, the Omnipotent Protector, the Self-Subsisting. We, verily, have commanded all to observe the Fast in these days as a bounty on Our part, but the people remain unaware, except for those who have attained unto the purpose of God as revealed in His laws and have comprehended His wisdom that pervadeth all things visible and invisible. Say: By God! His Law is a fortress unto you, could ye but understand. Verily, He hath no purpose therein save to benefit the souls of His servants, but, alas, the generality of mankind remain heedless thereof. Cling ye to the cord of God's laws, and follow not those

who have turned away from the Book, for verily they have opposed God, the Mighty, the Beloved.

- 15 These are the days of the Fast. Blessed is the one who through the heat generated by the Fast increaseth his love, and who, with joy and radiance, ariseth to perform worthy deeds. Verily, He guideth whomsoever He willeth to the straight path.
- 16 Even though outwardly the Fast is difficult and toilsome, yet inwardly it is bounty and tranquillity. Purification and training are conditioned and dependent only on such rigorous exercises as are in accord with the Book of God and sanctioned by Divine law, not those which the deluded have inflicted upon the people. Whatsoever God hath revealed is beloved of the soul. We beseech Him that He may graciously assist us to do that which is pleasing and acceptable unto Him.
- 17 Verily, I say, fasting is the supreme remedy and the most great healing for the disease of self and passion.
- 18 All praise be to the one true God Who hath assisted His loved ones to observe the Fast and hath aided them to fulfill that which hath been decreed in the Book. In truth, ceaseless praise and gratitude are due unto Him for having graciously confirmed His loved ones to perform that which is the cause of the exaltation of His Word. If a man possessed ten thousand lives and offered them all to establish the truth of God's laws and commandments, he would still be beholden unto Him, since whatsoever proceedeth from His irresistible decree serveth solely to benefit His friends and loved ones.
- 19 There are various stages and stations for the Fast and innumerable effects and benefits are concealed therein. Well is it with those who have attained unto them.
- 20 In clear cases of weakness, illness, or injury the law of the Fast is not binding. This injunction is in conformity with the precepts of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. Well is it with them who act accordingly.

- 21 The law of the Fast is ordained for those who are sound and healthy; as to those who are ill or debilitated, this law hath never been nor is now applicable.

From the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- 22 Obligatory prayer and fasting are among the most great ordinances of this holy Dispensation.
- 23 In the realm of worship, fasting and obligatory prayer constitute the two mightiest pillars of God’s holy Law. Neglecting them is in no wise permitted, and falling short in their performance is of a certainty not acceptable. In the Tablet of Visitation He saith: “I beseech God, by Thee and by them whose faces have been illumined with the splendors of the light of Thy countenance, and who, for love of Thee, have observed all whereunto they were bidden.”ⁱ He declareth that observance of the commands of God deriveth from love for the beauty of the Best-Beloved. The seeker, when immersed in the ocean of the love of God, will be moved by intense longing and will arise to carry out the laws of God. Thus, it is impossible that a heart which containeth the fragrance of God’s love should yet fail to worship Him, except under conditions when such an action would agitate the enemies and stir up dissension and mischief. Otherwise, a lover of the Abhá Beauty will assuredly and continually demonstrate perseverance in the worship of the Lord.
- 24 The laws of God regarding fasting and obligatory prayer are absolutely incumbent upon His servants. Therefore, they must turn their faces to the Point of Adoration of the celestial Concourse, hold fast to the most sublime Station, and pray and supplicate that they may be freed from the doubts of misinterpretation. This is the way of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This is the religion of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This is the path of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Whoever cherisheth the love of Bahá, let him choose this straight path. Whoever abandoneth this path, verily, he is of them who are shut out as by a veil from Him. Shouldst thou observe any soul who is in doubt about this commandment or who misinterpreteth it, but hath no secret motive or defiance in what he doeth,

i “I beseech God ... were bidden,” translated by Shoghi Effendi; see *Prayers and Meditations* by Bahá’u’lláh, CLXXX

be friendly towards him, and with the utmost cordiality and through kind speech, endeavor to turn him from the path of such interpretation towards the plain meaning of the verses of God.

- 25 The laws of God, such as fasting, obligatory prayer and the like, as well as His counsels regarding virtues, good deeds and proper conduct, must be carried out everywhere to the extent possible, unless some insurmountable obstacle or some great danger presents itself or it runneth counter to the dictates of wisdom. For indolence and laxity hinder the outpourings of love from the clouds of divine mercy, and people will thus remain deprived.
- 26 O ye loved ones of God! Out of gratitude for firmness in the eternal Covenant arise to serve the threshold of the omnipotent Lord, observe obligatory prayer and fasting, and spend your time in diffusing the sweet savors of God and in spreading the Divine verses. Tear asunder the veils, remove the obstacles, proffer the life-giving waters, and point out the path of salvation. This is what 'Abdu'l-Bahá admonisheth you every morn and eve.
- 27 O thou daughter of the Kingdom! The Obligatory Prayers are binding inasmuch as they are conducive to humility and submissiveness, to setting one's face towards God and expressing devotion to Him. Through such prayer man holdeth communion with God, seeketh to draw near unto Him, converseth with the true Beloved of his heart, and attaineth spiritual stations.
- 28 O thou spiritual friend! Thou hast asked about the wisdom of obligatory prayer. Know thou that such prayer is mandatory and binding. Man under no pretext whatsoever is excused from observing the prayer unless he is incapable of performing it or some great obstacle interveneth. The wisdom of obligatory prayer is this: That it causeth a connection between the servant and the True One, because at that time man with all his heart and soul turneth his face towards the Almighty, seeking His association and desiring His love and companionship. For a lover, there is no greater pleasure than to converse with his beloved, and for a seeker, there is no greater bounty than intimacy with the object of his desire. It is the greatest longing of every soul who is attracted to the Kingdom of God to find time to turn with entire devotion to his Beloved, so as to seek His bounty and blessing and immerse

himself in the ocean of communion, entreaty and supplication. Moreover, obligatory prayer and fasting produce awareness and awakening in man, and are conducive to his protection and preservation from tests.

29 Strengthen thou the foundation of the Faith of God, and worship the Almighty. Be constant in offering obligatory prayer, and be mindful of fasting. Day and night devote thyself to prayer, supplication and entreaty, especially at the prescribed times.

30 The Obligatory Prayers have been set down by the Pen of the Most High and have been mentioned in the Persian “Questions and Answers”, which supplementeth the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. They are clearly binding, and without a doubt everyone must perform one of these three prayers...

Through worship man becometh spiritual, his heart is attracted, and his soul and inner being attain such tenderness and exhilaration that the Obligatory Prayer instilleth new life in him. This is why in the Tablet of Visitation it hath been revealed: “I beseech God, by Thee and by them whose faces have been illumined with the splendors of the light of Thy countenance, and who, for love of Thee, have observed all whereunto they were bidden.”ⁱ It is clear then that love of the beauty of the All-Merciful impelleth one to the worship of Almighty God.

31 O thou servant of God! Each morn God’s infinite grace confirmeth the ardent and tearful invocations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Accordingly, let every awakened soul obtain, to the extent of its capacity, a portion of this spiritual grace. This can be achieved by fervently offering unto God prayers and supplications at every dawn and observing the law of obligatory prayer. Thus may his nostrils delight in the sweet savors wafting from the garden of the bounty of God, his soul attain new life, and his reality mirror forth the effulgences of the All-Merciful.

32 Obligatory prayer causeth the heart to become attentive to the Divine kingdom. One is alone with God, converseth with Him, and acquireth bounties. Likewise, if one performeth the Obligatory Prayer with his heart in a state of utmost purity, he will obtain the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, and this will entirely obliterate love of self. I hope that thou wilt

i “I beseech God ... were bidden,” translated by Shoghi Effendi; see *Prayers and Meditations* by Bahá’u’lláh, CLXXX

persevere in the recitation of the Obligatory Prayer, and thus will come to witness the power of entreaty and supplication.

- 33 Thou hast written concerning obligatory prayer. Such prayer is binding and mandatory for everyone. Most certainly guide all to its observance, because it is like unto a ladder for the souls, a lamp unto the hearts of the righteous, and the water of life from the garden of paradise. It is a clear duty prescribed by the All-Merciful, in the observance of which it is in no wise permissible to be dilatory or neglectful.
- 34 Obligatory prayer and supplication cause man to reach the kingdom of mystery, and the worship of the Supreme One. They bestow nearness unto His threshold. There is a pleasure in offering prayers that transcendeth all other pleasures, and there is a sweetness in chanting and singing the verses of God which is the greatest desire of all the believers, men and women alike. While reciting the Obligatory Prayer, one converseth intimately and shareth secrets with the true Beloved. No pleasure is greater than this, if one proceedeth with a detached soul, with tears overflowing, with a trusting heart and an eager spirit. Every joy is earthly save this one, the sweetness of which is divine.
- 35 Obligatory prayer is the very foundation of the Cause of God. Through it joy and vitality infuse the heart. Even if every grief should surround Me, as soon as I engage in conversing with God in obligatory prayer, all My sorrows disappear and I attain joy and gladness. A condition descendeth upon Me which I am unable to describe or express. Whenever, with full awareness and humility, we undertake to perform the Obligatory Prayer before God, and recite it with heartfelt tenderness, we shall taste such sweetness as to endow all existence with eternal life.
- 36 Observe the Obligatory Prayer which is available to thee so that the gate of bounty may be opened and utmost spirituality attained; great signs will be witnessed and the spiritual ascent will be realized.
- 37 Persevere in the use of the Obligatory Prayer and early morning supplications, so that day by day thine awareness may increase, and, through the power of the knowledge of God, thou mayest rend asunder the veil of error of the people of doubt and lead them to His unfailing guidance. In

every assembly, like unto a candle, thou shouldst give forth the light of Divine knowledge.

- 38 Recite the Obligatory Prayer and supplications as much as thou art able, so that day by day thou mayest attain to increased firmness and steadfastness and find greater joy and gladness. Thus the circle of divine knowledge will grow wider, and the fire of the love of God will burn brighter within thee.
- 39 Obligatory prayers and supplications are the very water of life. They are the cause of existence, of the refinement of souls, and of their attainment to the utmost joy. Exercise the greatest care in this regard, and encourage others to recite the Obligatory Prayers and supplications.
- 40 O thou servant of the True Lord! Obligatory prayer and other supplications are essential to servitude unto Him Who is the All-Sufficing ... When the Obligatory Prayers and other prayers are joined together and follow each other, worship attaineth its perfection. It can be seen that these two are spiritual companions and are like one soul in two bodies. May God assist you all to thrive in love and fellowship.
- 41 When saying the Obligatory Prayer, one must turn towards the Holy Reality of Bahá'u'lláh, that Reality which encompasseth all things.
- 42 As to the Obligatory Prayer, it hath a Qiblih that is fixed, specified, holy and blessed. I ask God that He may open the gate of the knowledge of this station to thine heart so that thou mayest apprehend whatever is necessary and proper, garner spiritual bounties from the heaven of the All-Merciful, obtain the effulgences of knowledge from the Sun of Reality, and become a manifestation of inspiration from the Unseen and a source of glad-tidings from the All-Merciful.
- 43 With regard to the Obligatory Prayer, this should be said individually, but it is not dependent on a private spot.
- 44 O servant of the holy threshold! Thou hast asked about those prayers that are beyond what is prescribed, those that are recommended, invocations, and devotions honored by tradition. In this Dispensation that which hath been expressly prescribed is obligatory. But individual worship, invocations,

supererogatory prayers, and specially recommended prayers are not binding. Nonetheless, the saying of any prayer individually after the Obligatory Prayers is well-pleasing and acceptable, but no particular ones have been singled out.

- 45 Ordinances which are obligatory and decrees that are binding are those that have issued forth from the Supreme Pen or are issued by a decision of the Universal House of Justice. For we are the commanded, not the commander. We are the ones upon whom duties are imposed, not the ones who impose duties. This is the reality of the law of God and the foundation of the religion of God. As for devotions and invocations, whoever wisheth may, after the Obligatory Prayers, recite other supplications of the Blessed Perfection.
- 46 Thou hast written about the Fast. This is a most weighty matter and thou shouldst exert thine utmost in its observance. It is a fundamental of the Divine law, and one of the pillars of the religion of God.
- 47 Well is it with you, as you have followed the Law of God and arisen to observe the Fast during these blessed days, for this physical fast is a symbol of the spiritual fast. This Fast leadeth to the cleansing of the soul from all selfish desires, the acquisition of spiritual attributes, attraction to the breezes of the All-Merciful, and enkindlement with the fire of divine love.
- 48 Fasting is the cause of the elevation of one's spiritual station.

Prayers by Bahá'u'lláh for the Fast

49 This is, O my God, the first of the days on which Thou hast bidden Thy loved ones to observe the Fast. I ask of Thee by Thy Self and by him who hath fasted out of love for Thee and for Thy good-pleasure—and not out of self and desire, nor out of fear of Thy wrath—and by Thy most excellent names and august attributes, to purify Thy servants from the love of aught except Thee and to draw them nigh unto the Dawning-Place of the lights of Thy countenance and the Seat of the throne of Thy oneness. Illumine their hearts, O my God, with the light of Thy knowledge and brighten their faces with the rays of the Daystar that shineth from the horizon of Thy Will. Potent art Thou to do what pleaseth Thee. No God is there but Thee, the All-Glorious, Whose help is implored by all men.

Assist them, O my God, to render Thee victorious and to exalt Thy Word. Suffer them, then, to become as hands of Thy Cause amongst Thy servants, and make them to be revealers of Thy religion and Thy signs amongst mankind, in such wise that the whole world may be filled with Thy remembrance and praise and with Thy proofs and evidences. Thou art, verily, the All-Bounteous, the Most Exalted, the Powerful, the Mighty, and the Merciful.

50 In the Name of Him Who hath been promised in the Books of God, the All-Knowing, the All-Informed! The days of fasting have arrived wherein those servants who circle round Thy throne and have attained Thy presence have fasted. Say: O God of names and creator of heaven and earth! I beg of Thee by Thy Name, the All-Glorious, to accept the fast of those who have fasted for love of Thee and for the sake of Thy good-pleasure and have carried out what Thou hast bidden them in Thy Books and Tablets. I beseech Thee by them to assist me in the promotion of Thy Cause and to make me steadfast in Thy love, that my footsteps may not slip on account of the clamor of Thy creatures. Verily, Thou art powerful over whatsoever Thou willest. No God is there but Thee, the Quickener, the All-Powerful, the Most Bountiful, the Ancient of Days.

- 51 Praise be unto Thee, O Lord my God! We have observed the Fast in conformity with Thy bidding and break it now through Thy love and Thy good-pleasure. Deign to accept, O my God, the deeds that we have performed in Thy path wholly for the sake of Thy beauty with our faces set towards Thy Cause, free from aught else but Thee. Bestow, then, Thy forgiveness upon us, upon our forefathers, and upon all such as have believed in Thee and in Thy mighty signs in this most great, this most glorious Revelation. Potent art Thou to do what Thou choosest. Thou art, verily, the Most Exalted, the Almighty, the Unconstrained.
- 52 O my God and my Master! Thou seest me among Thy creatures who have rebelled and transgressed against Thee. Every time I invite them unto the ocean of Thy knowledge, their repudiation of Thy Cause increaseth and their rejection of the Dawning-Place of Thy Will waxeth greater. I beg of Thee, O my God, by those who have fasted for love of Thee and have quaffed the living waters of submission from the hands of Thy bounty, to ordain for Thy loved ones, who under the blaze of the orb of Thy trials have clung to the cord of patience, all the good Thou hast reckoned in Thy Books and Thy Tablets. Write down, then, for such as have been afflicted with adversities for Thy sake, the reward of those who have suffered martyrdom in the path of Thy good-pleasure. Send down, moreover, upon them, O Lord, that which will rejoice their hearts, solace their eyes, and exhilarate their souls. Thou art, verily, the Most Powerful, the Most Exalted, the Help in Peril, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.
- 53 Praised be Thou, O God, my God! These are the days whereon Thou hast enjoined Thy chosen ones, Thy loved ones and Thy servants to observe the Fast, which Thou hast made a light unto the people of Thy kingdom, even as Thou didst make obligatory prayer a ladder of ascent unto those who acknowledge Thy unity. I beg of Thee, O my God, by these two mighty pillars, which Thou hast ordained as a glory and honor for all mankind, to keep Thy religion safe from the mischief of the ungodly and the plotting of every wicked doer. O Lord, conceal not the light which Thou hast revealed through Thy strength and Thine omnipotence. Assist, then, those who truly believe in Thee with the hosts of the seen and the unseen by Thy command and Thy sovereignty. No God is there but Thee, the Almighty, the Most Powerful.

54 Exalted art Thou, O Lord my God! I beseech Thee by those whom Thou hast bidden to observe the Fast for the sake of Thy love and good-pleasure, who have demonstrated their allegiance to Thy law and followed Thy verses and precepts, and who have broken their fast while enjoying near access to Thee and beholding Thy countenance. By Thy glory! Since they are turning to the court of Thy good-pleasure, all their days are days of fasting. Were the mouth of Thy will to address them saying: "Observe, for My beauty's sake, the fast, O people, and set no limit to its duration," I swear by the majesty of Thy glory, that every one of them will faithfully observe it, will abstain from whatsoever will violate Thy law, and will continue to do so until they yield up their souls unto Thee,ⁱ for they have tasted the sweetness of Thy call, and become inebriated with Thy remembrance and praise and with the words proceeding from the lips of Thy command.

I beseech Thee, O Lord, by Thyself, the Exalted, the Most High, and by Thy Latter Manifestation through Whom the kingdom of names and the dominion of attributes have been convulsed, and the inhabitants of earth and heaven became intoxicated, and all who dwell in the realms of Revelation and creation trembled except such as have fasted from all that is repugnant to Thy good-pleasure and restrained themselves from turning toward aught besides Thee, to include us among them and to write down our names on the Tablet whereon Thou hast inscribed their names. O God, through the wonders of Thy might and the tokens of Thy sovereignty and grandeur, Thou didst send forth their names from out of the sea of Thy names, and didst create their inner essences out of the substance of Thy love, and their inmost beings from the spirit of Thy Cause. Theirs is a reunion not succeeded by separation, a nearness that knoweth no remoteness, and a perpetuity that hath no end. Verily, these are servants who ever recount Thee, who eternally circle round Thee, and who circumambulate the sanctuary of Thy presence and the Kaaba of reunion with Thee. Thou hast ordained, O my God, no distinction between them and Thee, except that when they beheld the lights of Thy countenance, they set their faces towards Thee, and prostrated themselves before Thy beauty, submissive to Thy greatness and severed from all things besides Thee.

We have fasted this day, O my Lord, by Thy command and Thy bidding in accordance with what Thou hast revealed in Thy perspicuous Book. We have withheld our souls from passion and from whatsoever Thou abhorrest

i "Observe, for My Beauty's sake' ... souls unto Thee," translated by Shoghi Effendi; see *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, CLX

until the day drew to an end and the time arrived to break the Fast. Wherefore, I implore Thee, O Desire of the hearts of ardent lovers and Beloved of the souls of them who are endued with understanding, O Rapture of the breasts of them that yearn after Thee and Object of the desire of them that seek Thee, to cause us to soar in the atmosphere of Thy nearness and the heaven of Thy presence, and to accept from us what we have performed in the pathway of Thy love and good-pleasure. Write down our names, then, among those who have acknowledged Thy oneness and confessed to Thy singleness and who have humbled themselves before the evidences of Thy majesty and the tokens of Thy grandeur, those who have taken refuge in Thy nearness and sought shelter in Thee, who have expended their lives in their eagerness to meet Thee and attain the court of Thy presence, and who have cast the world behind their backs for love of Thee and severed every tie with aught save Thee in their eagerness to draw nigh unto Thee. These are servants whose hearts melt in ardent desire for Thy beauty at the mention of Thy Name, and whose eyes overflow with tears in their longing to find Thee and enter the precincts of Thy court.

This is, O my Lord, my tongue which testifieth to Thy unity and peerlessness, mine eye which beholdeth the seat of Thy generosity and manifold bounties, and mine ear which is ready to hearken unto Thy summons and Thine utterance, for I am assured, O my God, that Thou hast decreed the words proceeding out of the mouth of Thy will to be inexhaustible, and unto them the ears which Thou hast sanctified to hear Thy words and verses are at all times hearkening. And these are my hands, O my Lord, uplifted toward the heaven of Thy favor and tender mercy. Wilt Thou, then, turn away this poor one who hath taken to himself no beloved except Thee, no bestower beside Thee, nor king other than Thee, no shelter save beneath the shadow of Thy mercy, and no refuge but before Thy gate, which Thou hast opened unto all who dwell in Thy heaven and on Thine earth? Nay, by Thy glory! I am he whose confidence in Thy loving kindness will remain undaunted even though Thou wert to afflict me with torments for the duration of Thy dominion; and should anyone ask me about Thee, every limb of my body would proclaim: "He is beloved in His acts and obeyed in His decree, merciful in His nature and compassionate to His creatures!"

Thy might beareth me witness, O Well-Beloved of the hearts of them that yearn after Thee, wert Thou to turn me away from Thy door and abandon me to the swords of the tyrants amongst Thy servants and to the

rods of the ungodly amongst Thy creatures, and should someone ask me about Thee, every hair of my body would still declare: "He is, in truth, the Best Beloved of the worlds; He is the Most Bountiful; He is the Ever-Abiding! He draweth me nigh whilst distancing me from Himself; He granteth me His sanctuary whilst debarring me from His presence. None found I more merciful than He, by Whom I have become independent of all else but Him and have been raised up above aught besides Himself."

Well is it with the one, O my God, who hath been so enriched by Thee as to be made independent of the kingdoms of earth and heaven. Rich is the one who hath held fast to the cord of Thy wealth, is submissive before Thy face, and for whom Thou art sufficient above all things. Poor is the one who hath dispensed with Thee, waxed proud before Thee, turned away from Thy presence, and disbelieved in Thy signs. Suffer me, then, O my God and my Beloved, to be numbered with those whom the breezes of Thy will move as they list, not with those whom the wind of self and passion stirreth and directeth as it pleaseth. No God is there but Thee, the Almighty, the Exalted, the Most Bountiful.

All glory be to Thee, O my God, for Thou hast graciously enabled me to fast during this month which Thou hast related to Thy Name, the Most Exalted, and called 'Alá (Loftiness). Thou hast commanded that Thy servants and Thy people should fast therein and seek thereby to draw nearer unto Thee. The days and months of the year have culminated with the Fast, even as the first month began with Thy Name, Bahá, that all might testify that Thou art the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden, and be well assured that the glory of all names is conferred only through the glory of Thy Cause and the word expounded by Thy will and revealed through Thy purpose. Thou hast ordained that this month be a remembrance and honor from Thee, and a sign of Thy presence amongst them, that they may not forget Thy grandeur and Thy majesty, Thy sovereignty and Thy glory, and may be well assured that from time immemorial Thou hast ever been and wilt ever be Ruler over the entire creation. Nothing created in the heavens or on the earth can hinder Thee in Thy governance, nor can anyone in the realms of Revelation and creation prevent Thee from fulfilling Thy purpose.

I implore Thee, O my God, by Thy name whereby all the kindreds of the earth have wailed, except such as Thou hast safeguarded with Thine unerring protection and sheltered beneath the shadow of Thy transcendent mercy, to make us so firm in Thy Cause and steadfast in Thy love

that were Thy servants to rise up against Thee and Thy people turn away from Thee, and no one would remain on earth to invoke Thy name or set his face toward the sanctuary of communion with Thee and the Kaaba of Thy sanctity, I would still arise singly and alone to render Thy Cause victorious, to exalt Thy word, to proclaim Thy sovereignty, and to celebrate the praise of Thine august Self. And this, O Lord, even though each time I venture to extol Thee by any name, I am filled with perplexity, for I am fully aware that all of Thine exalted attributes and all of the most excellent names which I associate with Thee and by which in Thy holy presence I supplicate Thee, reflect naught but the measure of mine own understanding, inasmuch as whenever I have regarded a name to be laudable, I have associated it with Thyself.

Immeasurably exalted is Thy true state above the description or knowledge of anyone besides Thee, and sanctified art Thou from the glorification of Thy creatures and the praise of Thy servants in their attempts to ascend unto Thee. Whatsoever appeareth from Thy servants is limited by the limitations of their own selves and is created by their own idle fancies and imaginings.

Alas, alas, O my Beloved, for mine inability to befittingly praise Thee and for my shortcomings during Thy days! If I acclaim Thee, O my God, as Him Who knoweth all things, I readily perceive that shouldst Thou point to a mute rock with a single finger of Thy will, Thou wouldst enable it to unfold the knowledge of all past and future ages; and if I extol Thee as the All-Powerful, I find that one word issuing from the mouth of Thy purpose is sufficient to convulse the heavens and the earth.

Thy glory beareth me witness, O Beloved of all that recognize Thee, should any learned one fail to confess his ignorance before the revelations of Thy knowledge, he would be accounted the most ignorant of Thy people; and should any mighty one refuse to admit his weakness before the evidences of Thy power, he would be considered the weakest and the most heedless of Thy creatures. Given my knowledge and certainty that this is so, how can I extol Thee or describe and praise Thee? Wherefore, knowing my weakness, I have hastened toward the shelter of Thy strength; and realizing my poverty, I have sought refuge under the shadow of Thy wealth; and recognizing my powerlessness, I have arisen to stand before the tabernacle of Thy power and might. Wilt thou cast away this poor one after he hath taken no one but Thee as his succorer, or turn away this stranger after he hath found no one but Thee to be his true beloved?

Thou knowest all that is in me, O Lord, but I know not what is in Thee. Have mercy then upon me through Thy loving providence and inspire me with that which shall give peace to my heart during Thy days and tranquillity to my soul through the revelations of Thy sacred presence. All created things have been illumined with the splendors of the lights of Thy countenance, O Lord, and the dwellers of earth and heaven are shining resplendently on account of the manifestations of Thine incomparable majesty, in such wise that I behold nothing without first beholding within it the revelation of Thyself, a revelation which is hidden from the sight of those among Thy servants who lie fast asleep.

Deprive me not, O my Lord, of Thy grace which hath encompassed all the realms of existence, whether visible or invisible. Wilt Thou stay far removed, O my God, after Thou hast invited all mankind to return and draw nigh unto Thee, and urged them to hold fast to Thy cord? Wilt Thou cast me out, O my Beloved, even when Thou hast promised in Thine incorruptible Book and in Thy wondrous verses to gather all those who yearn after Thee within the pavilion of Thy gracious providence, and those who desire Thee under the shadow of Thy bountiful favor, and those who search for Thee under the canopy of Thy mercy and loving-kindness?

I swear by Thy might, O my God, that my lamentations have constrained my Pen, and, verily, the cry of my heart hath seized the reins from my hands. At whatever time I reassure myself and gladden my soul with the wonders of Thy mercy, the tokens of Thy gracious providence, and the evidences of Thy generosity, I tremble before the manifestations of Thy justice and the signs of Thy wrath. I recognize that Thou art known by these two names and described by these two attributes, yet Thou carest not whether Thou art invoked by Thy name the Ever-Forgiving, or Thy name the Wrathful. By Thy glory, were it not for my knowledge that Thy mercy surpasseth all things, the limbs of my body would have ceased to exist, my reality been extinguished and my inner being reduced to utter nothingness. But when I behold that Thy grace encompasseth all things and Thy mercy embraceth the entire creation, my soul and my inmost being become well assured.

Alas, alas, O my God, for the things that have escaped me during Thy days, and again alas, alas, O Desire of my heart, for what I have left undone in service and obedience to Thee during these days the likes of which the eyes of Thy chosen ones and trusted ones have never witnessed! I entreat Thee, O my Lord, by Thy Self and by the Manifestation of Thy Cause Who

is seated upon the throne of Thy mercy, to confirm me in Thy service and good-pleasure. Guard me, then, from those who have turned away from Thee and disbelieved in Thy verses, who have denied Thy truth, resisted Thine evidences, and violated Thy Covenant and testament.

All praise, O Lord my God, be unto Him Who is the Manifestation of Thine Essence, the Dayspring of Thy oneness, the Mine of Thy knowledge, the Source of Thy Revelation, the Repository of Thine inspiration, the Seat of Thy sovereignty, and the Dawning-Place of Thy Divinity—He Who is the Primal Point, the Most Exalted Countenance, the Ancient Root, and the Quickener of nations; and glory be upon him who was the first to believe in Himⁱ and in His verses, whom Thou didst make a throne for the ascendancy of Thy most sublime Word, a focal-point for the manifestation of Thy most excellent names, a dayspring of the radiance of the Sun of Thy providence, a dawning-place for the appearance of Thy names and attributes, and a treasury of the pearls of Thy wisdom and Thy commandments. And all honor be upon himⁱⁱ who was the last to come unto Him, whose arrival was like His arrival, and Thy manifestation in himⁱⁱⁱ like Thy manifestation in Him^{iv}, except that he was illumined with the lights of His face and prostrated himself before Him and testified to his servitude unto Him; and glory be upon those who were martyred in His path and who offered up their lives for love of His beauty.

We testify, O my God, that these are servants who have believed in Thee and in Thy signs, who have sought the sanctuary of Thy presence and turned toward Thy countenance, who have directed their faces toward the court of Thy nearness and walked in the path of Thy good-pleasure, who have worshipped Thee according to Thy desire and detached themselves from all but Thee. O Lord, confer upon their spirits and their bodies at all times a share of the wonders of Thine all-encompassing mercy. Thou art, verily, powerful to do as Thou pleaseth. No God is there save Thee, the Almighty, the All-Glorious, Whose help is implored by all men.

I beseech Thee, O Lord, by Him and by them, and by Him Whom Thou hast established on the throne of Thy Faith and caused to overshadow all the dwellers of earth and heaven, to purify us from our transgressions, to ordain for us a seat of truth in Thy presence and to cause us to associate

i Mullá Husayn

ii Quddús

iii Idem

iv The Báb

with those whom the adversities of the world and its misfortunes have not hindered from turning toward Thee. Thou art, verily, the All-Powerful, the Most Exalted, the Protector, the Ever-Forgiving, the Most Merciful.

THE
POWER
OF
DIVINE
ASSISTANCE

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

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled August 1981, revised July 1990

Extracts

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 Be not dismayed, O peoples of the world, when the day star of My beauty is set, and the heaven of My tabernacle is concealed from your eyes. Arise to further My Cause, and to exalt My Word amongst men. We are with you at all times, and shall strengthen you through the power of truth. We are truly almighty. Whoso hath recognized Me, will arise and serve Me with such determination that the powers of earth and heaven shall be unable to defeat his purpose.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 38

- 2 Let not your hearts be perturbed, O people, when the glory of My Presence is withdrawn, and the ocean of My utterance is stilled. In My presence amongst you there is a wisdom, and in My absence there is yet another, inscrutable to all but God, the Incomparable, the All-Knowing. Verily, We behold you from Our realm of glory, and shall aid whosoever will arise for the triumph of Our Cause with the hosts of the Concourse on high and a company of Our favoured angels.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 53

- 3 Dost thou believe thou hast the power to frustrate His Will, to hinder Him from executing His judgement, or to deter Him from exercising His sovereignty? Pretendest thou that aught in the heavens or in the earth can resist His Faith? No, by Him Who is the Eternal Truth! Nothing whatsoever in the whole of creation can thwart His Purpose...

Know thou, moreover, that He it is Who hath, by His own behest, created all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth. How can, then, the thing that hath been created at His bidding prevail against Him?...

The Summons of the Lord of Hosts

- 4 By the righteousness of God! Whoso openeth his lips in this Day and maketh mention of the name of his Lord, the hosts of Divine inspiration shall descend upon him from the heaven of My name, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. On him shall also descend the Concourse on high, each bearing aloft a chalice of pure light. Thus hath it been foreordained in the realm of God's Revelation, by the behest of Him Who is the All-Glorious, the Most Powerful.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 5 They that have forsaken their country for the purpose of teaching Our Cause—these shall the Faithful Spirit strengthen through its power. A company of Our chosen angels shall go forth with them, as bidden by Him Who is the Almighty, the All-Wise. How great the blessedness that awaiteth him that hath attained the honor of serving the Almighty! ...

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 6 Great is the blessedness of him who hath in this Day cast away the things current amongst men and hath clung unto that which is ordained by God, the Lord of Names and the Fashioner of all created things, He Who is come from the heaven of eternity through the power of the Most Great Name, invested with so invincible an authority that all the powers of the earth are unable to withstand Him. Unto this beareth witness the Mother Book, calling from the Most Sublime Station.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 7 This is the most great, the most joyful tidings imparted by the Pen of this Wronged One to mankind. Wherefore fear ye, O My well-beloved ones? Who is it that can dismay you? A touch of moisture sufficeth to dissolve the hardened clay out of which this perverse generation is moulded. The mere act of your gathering together is enough to scatter the forces of these vain and worthless people.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 8 The source of courage and power is the promotion of the Word of God, and steadfastness in His Love.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 9 He, verily, will aid everyone that aideth Him, and will remember everyone that remembereth Him. To this beareth witness this Tablet that hath shed

the splendor of the loving-kindness of your Lord, the All-Glorious, the All-Compelling...

Cited in The Advent of Divine Justice

- 10 Every single letter proceeding from Our mouth is endowed with such regenerative power as to enable it to bring into existence a new creation—a creation the magnitude of which is inscrutable to all save God. He verily hath knowledge of all things...

Cited in The Advent of Divine Justice

- 11 It is in Our power, should We wish it, to enable a speck of floating dust to generate, in less than the twinkling of an eye, suns of infinite, of unimaginable splendour, to cause a dewdrop to develop into vast and numberless oceans, to infuse into every letter such a force as to empower it to unfold all the knowledge of past and future ages...

The Summons of the Lord of Hosts

- 12 We are possessed of such power which, if brought to light, will transmute the most deadly of poisons into a panacea of unfailing efficacy.

Cited in The Advent of Divine Justice

- 13 Say: Beware, O people of Bahá, lest the strong ones of the earth rob you of your strength, or they who rule the world fill you with fear. Put your trust in God, and commit your affairs to His keeping. He, verily, will, through the power of truth, render you victorious, and He, verily, is powerful to do what He willeth, and in His grasp are the reins of omnipotent might...

Cited in The Advent of Divine Justice

- 14 By the righteousness of God, should a man, all alone, arise in the name of Bahá and put on the armor of His love, him will the Almighty cause to be victorious, though the forces of earth and heaven be arrayed against him...

Cited in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 15 By God besides Whom is none other God! Should any one arise for the triumph of our Cause, him will God render victorious though tens of thousands of enemies be leagued against him. And if his love for Me wax stronger, God will establish his ascendancy over all the powers of earth and heaven. Thus have We breathed the spirit of power into all regions.

Cited in The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

From the Writings and Utterances of the Báb

- 16 Rid thou thyself of all attachments to aught except God, enrich thyself in God by dispensing with all else besides Him, and recite this prayer:

Say: God sufficeth all things above all things, and nothing in the heavens or in the earth or in whatever lieth between them but God, thy Lord, sufficeth. Verily, He is in Himself the Knower, the Sustainer, the Omnipotent.

Regard not the all-sufficing power of God as an idle fancy. It is that genuine faith which thou cherishest for the Manifestation of God in every Dispensation. It is such faith which sufficeth above all the things that exist on the earth, whereas no created thing on earth besides faith would suffice thee. If thou art not a believer, the Tree of divine Truth would condemn thee to extinction. If thou art a believer, thy faith shall be sufficient for thee above all things that exist on earth, even though thou possess nothing.

Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 17 Say, verily any one follower of this Faith can, by the leave of God, prevail over all who dwell in heaven and earth and in whatever lieth between them; for indeed this is, beyond the shadow of a doubt, the one true Faith. Therefore fear ye not, neither be ye grieved.

Say, God hath, according to that which is revealed in the Book, taken upon Himself the task of ensuring the ascendancy of any one of the followers of the Truth, over and above one hundred other souls, and the supremacy of one hundred believers over one thousand non-believers and the domination of one thousand of the faithful over all the peoples and kindreds of the earth; inasmuch as God calleth into being whatsoever He willeth by virtue of His behest. Verily He is potent over all things.

Say, the power of God is in the hearts of those who believe in the unity of God and bear witness that no God is there but Him, while the hearts of them that associate partners with God are impotent, devoid of life on this earth, for assuredly they are dead.

Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 18 When the Day-Star of Bahá will shine resplendent above the horizon of eternity it is incumbent upon you to present yourselves before His Throne...

Ye have, one and all, been called into being to seek His presence and to attain that exalted and glorious station. Indeed, He will send down from the heaven of His mercy that which will benefit you, and whatever is graciously vouchsafed by Him shall enable you to dispense with all mankind ... Indeed if it be His Will He can assuredly bring about the resurrection of all created things through a word from Himself. He is, in truth, over and above all this, the All-Powerful, the Almighty, the Omnipotent.

Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 19 Hallowed be the Lord in Whose hand is the source of dominion. He createth whatsoever He willeth by His Word of command 'Be', and it is. His hath been the power of authority heretofore and it shall remain His hereafter. He maketh victorious whomsoever He pleaseth, through the potency of His behest. He is in truth the Powerful, the Almighty. Unto Him pertaineth all glory and majesty in the kingdoms of Revelation and Creation and whatever lieth between them. Verily He is the Potent, the All-Glorious. From everlasting He hath been the Source of indomitable strength and shall remain so unto everlasting. He is indeed the Lord of might and power. All the kingdoms of heaven and earth and whatever is between them are God's, and His power is supreme over all things. All the treasures of earth and heaven and everything between them are His, and His protection extendeth over all things. He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and whatever lieth between them and He truly is a witness over all things. He is the Lord of Reckoning for all that dwell in the heavens and on earth and whatever lieth between them, and truly God is swift to reckon. He setteth the measure assigned to all who are in the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them. Verily He is the Supreme Protector. He holdeth in His grasp the keys of heaven and earth and of everything between them. At His Own pleasure doth He bestow gifts, through the power of His command. Indeed His grace encompasseth all and He is the All-Knowing.

Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 20 Glorified art Thou, O God, Thou art the Creator of the heavens and the earth and that which lieth between them. Thou art the sovereign Lord, the Most Holy, the Almighty, the All-Wise. Magnified be Thy Name, O God, send down upon them who have believed in God and in His signs a

mighty succour from Thy presence such as to enable them to prevail over the generality of mankind.

Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 21 Praised art Thou, O Lord! At Thy behest Thou dost render victorious whomsoever Thou wilt, through the hosts of heaven and earth and whatsoever existeth between them. Thou art the Sovereign, the Eternal Truth, the Lord of invincible might.

Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 22 O Lord! Assist those who have renounced all else but Thee, and grant them a mighty victory. Send down upon them, O Lord, the concourse of the angels in heaven and earth and all that is between, to aid Thy servants, to succour and strengthen them, to enable them to achieve success, to sustain them, to invest them with glory, to confer upon them honour and exaltation, to enrich them and to make them triumphant with a wondrous triumph.

Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 23 Send forth, O God, such hosts as would render Thy faithful servants victorious. Thou dost fashion the created things through the power of Thy decree as Thou pleatest. Thou art in truth the Sovereign, the Creator, the All-Wise.

Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 24 Heed not your weaknesses and frailty; fix your gaze upon the invincible power of the Lord, your God, the Almighty. Has He not, in past days, caused Abraham, in spite of His seeming helplessness, to triumph over the forces of Nimrod? Has He not enabled Moses, whose staff was His only companion, to vanquish Pharaoh and his hosts? Has He not established the ascendancy of Jesus, poor and lowly as He was in the eyes of men, over the combined forces of the Jewish people? Has He not subjected the barbarous and militant tribes of Arabia to the holy and transforming discipline of Muḥammad, His Prophet? Arise in His name, put your trust wholly in Him, and be assured of ultimate victory.

The Dawn-Breakers

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

- 25 These souls are the armies of God and the conquerors of the East and the West. Should one of them turn his face toward some direction and summon the people to the Kingdom of God, all the ideal forces and lordly confirmations will rush to his support and reinforcement. He will behold all the doors open and all the strong fortifications and impregnable castles razed to the ground. Singly and alone he will attack the armies of the world, defeat the right and left wings of the hosts of all the countries, break through the lines of the legions of all the nations and carry his attack to the very center of the powers of the earth. This is the meaning of the Hosts of God.

Tablets of the Divine Plan

- 26 If in this day a soul shall act according to the precepts and the counsels of God, he will serve as a divine physician to mankind, and like the trump of Isráfíl,ⁱ he will call the dead of this contingent world to life; for the confirmations of the Abhá Realm are never interrupted, and such a virtuous soul hath, to befriend him, the unfailing help of the Company on high. Thus shall a sorry gnat become an eagle in the fulness of his strength, and a feeble sparrow change to a royal falcon in the heights of ancient glory.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 27 Know thou of a certainty that thy Lord will come to thine aid with a company of the Concourse on high and hosts of the Abhá Kingdom. These will mount the attack, and will furiously assail the forces of the ignorant, the blind...

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 28 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

i Believed to be the angel appointed to sound the trumpet on the Day of Resurrection to raise the dead at the bidding of the Lord.

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

- 29 He will come to your aid with invisible hosts, and support you with armies of inspiration from the Concourse above; He will send unto you sweet perfumes from the highest Paradise, and waft over you the pure breathings that blow from the rose gardens of the Company on high. He will breathe into your hearts the spirit of life, cause you to enter the Ark of salvation, and reveal unto you His clear tokens and signs. Verily is this abounding grace. Verily is this the victory that none can deny.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 30 Rest ye assured that if a soul ariseth in the utmost perseverance and raiseth the Call of the Kingdom and resolutely promulgateth the Covenant, be he an insignificant ant he shall be enabled to drive away the formidable elephant from the arena, and if he be a feeble moth he shall cut to pieces the plumage of the rapacious vulture.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 31 The confirmations of Him Who is the Ever-Forgiving have wrapped every clime in light, the armies of the Company on high are rushing forward to do battle at the side of the friends of the Lord and carry the day...

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 32 All praise and thanksgiving be unto the Blessed Beauty, for calling into action the armies of His Abhá Kingdom, and sending forth to us His never-interrupted aid, dependable as the rising stars...

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 33 Whensoever holy souls, drawing on the powers of heaven, shall arise with such qualities of the spirit, and march in unison, rank on rank, every one of those souls will be even as one thousand, and the surging waves of that mighty ocean will be even as the battalions of the Concourse on high...

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 34 It is clear that in this day, confirmations from the unseen world are encompassing all those who deliver the divine Message. Should the work

of teaching lapse, these confirmations would be entirely cut off, since it is impossible for the loved ones of God to receive assistance unless they teach.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 35 O ye servants of the Sacred Threshold! The triumphant hosts of the Celestial Concourse, arrayed and marshalled in the Realms above, stand ready and expectant to assist and assure victory to that valiant horseman who with confidence spurs on his charger into the arena of service. Well is it with that fearless warrior, who armed with the power of true Knowledge, hastens unto the field, disperses the armies of ignorance, and scatters the hosts of error, who holds aloft the Standard of Divine Guidance, and sounds the Clarion of Victory. By the righteousness of the Lord! He hath achieved a glorious triumph and obtained the true victory.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

- 36 Be not grieved at the smallness of your number and thank God for the power of your spirits. He shall assist you with such a confirmation whereat minds will be astonished and souls will be amazed.

Tablets of Abdul Baha Abbas, vol. 1

- 37 Be ye assured with the greatest assurance that, verily, God will help those who are firm in His Covenant in every matter, through His confirmation and favor, the lights of which will shine forth unto the east of the earth, as well as the west thereof. He will make them the signs of guidance among the creation and as shining and glittering stars from all horizons.

Tablets of Abdul Baha Abbas, vol. 1

- 38 Arise with every power to assist the Covenant of God and serve in His vineyard. Be confident that a confirmation will be granted unto you and a success on His part is given unto you. Verily, He shall support you by the angels of His holiness and reinforce you with the breaths of the Spirit that ye may mount the Ark of Safety, set forth the evident signs, impart the spirit of life, declare the essence of His commands and precepts, guide the sheep who are straying from the fold in all directions, and give the blessings. Ye have to use every effort in your power and strive earnestly and wisely in this new century. By God, verily the Lord of Hosts is your support, the angels of heaven your assistance, the Holy Spirit your companion and the Center of the Covenant your helper. Be not idle, but active and fear not...

Tablets of Abdul Baha Abbas, vol. 1

- 39 By the Lord of the Kingdom! If one arise to promote the Word of God with a pure heart, overflowing with the love of God and severed from the world, the Lord of Hosts will assist him with such a power as will penetrate the core of the existent beings.

Tablets of Abdul Baha Abbas, vol. 2

- 40 Your Lord hath assuredly promised His servants who are firm and steadfast to render them victorious at all times, to exalt their word, propagate their power, diffuse their lights, strengthen their hearts, elevate their banners, assist their hosts, brighten their stars, increase the abundance of the showers of mercy upon them, and enable the brave lions (or teachers to conquer.

Hasten, hasten, O ye firm believers! Hasten, hasten, O ye steadfast! Abandon the heedless, set aside every ignorant, take hold of the strong rope, be firm in this Great Cause, draw light from this Evident Light, be patient and be steadfast in this wise Religion! Ye shall see the hosts of inspiration descending successively from the Supreme World, the procession of attraction falling incessantly from the heights of heaven, the abundance of the Kingdom of El-ABHÁ outpouring continually and the teachings of God penetrating with the utmost power, while the heedless are indeed in evident loss.

Tablets of Abdul Baha Abbas, vol. 2

- 41 Today, any soul who looseneth his tongue in the delivery of Truth and is engaged in the diffusion of the fragrances of God, he shall undoubtedly be assisted and confirmed by the Holy Spirit and can resist the attacks of all the people of the world, [for the] power of the Realm of Might shall prevail. That is why thou seest that, although the disciples of Christ were physically weak and apparently vanquished by the persecution of every king, yet in the end were victorious over all and brought them under their protection.

Tablets of Abdul Baha Abbas, vol. 3

- 42 Should anyone in this day attach his heart to the Kingdom, release himself from all else save God and become attracted to the fragrances of holiness, the army of the Kingdom of ABHÁ will help him and the angels of the Supreme Concourse will assist him.

Tablets of Abdul Baha Abbas, vol. 3

- 43 Remember not your own limitations; the help of God will come to you. Forget yourself. God's help will surely come!

When you call on the Mercy of God waiting to reinforce you, your strength will be tenfold.

Look at me: I am so feeble, yet I have had the strength given me to come amongst you: a poor servant of God, who has been enabled to give you this message! I shall not be with you long! One must never consider one's own feebleness, it is the strength of the Holy Spirit of Love, which gives the power to teach. The thought of our own weakness could only bring despair. We must look higher than all earthly thoughts; detach ourselves from every material idea, crave for the things of the spirit; fix our eyes on the everlasting bountiful Mercy of the Almighty, who will fill our souls with the gladness of joyful service to His command 'Love One Another'.

Paris Talks

- 44 How great, how very great is the Cause; how very fierce the onslaught of all the peoples and kindreds of the earth! Erelong shall the clamor of the multitude throughout Africa, throughout America, the cry of the European and of the Turk, the groaning of India and China be heard from far and near. One and all they shall arise with all their power to resist His Cause. Then shall the Knights of the Lord, assisted by grace from on high, strengthened by faith, aided by the power of understanding and reinforced by the legions of the Covenant, arise and make manifest the truth of the verse: 'Behold the confusion that hath befallen the tribes of the defeated!'ⁱ

Cited in Bahá'í Administration

- 45 The Báb hath said: "Should a tiny ant desire, in this day, to be possessed of such power as to be able to unravel the abstrusest and most bewildering passages of the Qur'án, its wish will no doubt be fulfilled, inasmuch as the mystery of eternal might vibrates within the innermost being of all created things." If so helpless a creature can be endowed with so subtle a capacity, how much more efficacious must be the power released through the liberal effusions of the grace of Bahá'u'lláh!

Cited in The Advent of Divine Justice

- 46 The Kingdom of God is possessed of limitless potency. Audacious must be the army of life if the confirming aid of that Kingdom is to be repeatedly

i Qur'án 38:11.

vouchsafed unto it ... Vast is the arena, and the time ripe to spur on the charger within it. Now is the time to reveal the force of one's strength, the stoutness of one's heart and the might of one's soul.

Cited in This Decisive Hour

- 47 And now you, if you act in accordance with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, may rest assured that you will be aided and confirmed. In all affairs which you undertake, you shall be rendered victorious, and all the inhabitants of the earth cannot withstand you. You are the conquerors, because the power of the Holy Spirit is your assistant. Above and over physical forces, phenomenal forces, the Holy Spirit itself shall aid you.

Star of the West, vol. 8, no. 8

- 48 Be ye valiant and fearless! Day by day add to your spiritual victories. Be ye not disturbed by the constant assaults of the enemies. Attack ye like unto the roaring lions. Have no thought of yourselves, for the invisible armies of the Kingdom are fighting on your side. Enter ye the battlefield with the Confirmations of the Holy Spirit. Know ye of a certainty that the powers of the Kingdom of Abhá are with you. The hosts of the heaven of Truth are with you. The cool breezes of the Paradise of Abhá are wafting over your heated brows. Not for a moment are ye alone. Not for a second are ye left to yourselves. The Beauty of Abhá is with you. The Glorious God is with you. The King of Kings is with you.

Star of the West, vol. 13, no. 5

From letters by Shoghi Effendi

- 49 Difficult and delicate though be our task, the sustaining power of Bahá'u'lláh and of His Divine guidance will assuredly assist us if we follow steadfastly in His way, and strive to uphold the integrity of His laws. The light of His redeeming grace, which no earthly power can obscure, will, if we persevere, illuminate our path, as we steer our course amid the snares and pitfalls of a troubled age, and will enable us to discharge our duties in a manner that would redound to the glory and the honour of His blessed Name.

The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

- 50 “Peter,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has testified, “according to the history of the Church, was also incapable of keeping count of the days of the week. Whenever he decided to go fishing, he would tie up his weekly food into seven parcels, and every day he would eat one of them, and when he had reached the seventh, he would know that the Sabbath had arrived, and thereupon would observe it.” If the Son of Man was capable of infusing into apparently so crude and helpless an instrument such potency as to cause, in the words of Bahá’u’lláh, “the mysteries of wisdom and of utterance to flow out of his mouth,” and to exalt him above the rest of His disciples, and render him fit to become His successor and the founder of His Church, how much more can the Father, Who is Bahá’u’lláh, empower the most puny and insignificant among His followers to achieve, for the execution of His purpose, such wonders as would dwarf the mightiest achievements of even the first apostle of Jesus Christ!

The Advent of Divine Justice

- 51 The field is indeed so immense, the period so critical, the Cause so great, the workers so few, the time so short, the privilege so priceless, that no follower of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, worthy to bear His name, can afford a moment’s hesitation. That God-born Force, irresistible in its sweeping power, incalculable in its potency, unpredictable in its course, mysterious in its workings, and awe-inspiring in its manifestations—a Force which, as the Báb has written, “vibrates within the innermost being of all created things,” and which, according to Bahá’u’lláh, has through its “vibrating influence,” “upset the equilibrium of the world and revolutionized its ordered life”—such a Force, acting even as a two-edged sword, is, under our very eyes, sundering, on the one hand, the age-old ties which for centuries have held together the fabric of civilized society, and is unloosing, on the other, the bonds that still fetter the infant and as yet unemancipated Faith of Bahá’u’lláh.

The Advent of Divine Justice

- 52 There is no time to lose. There is no room left for vacillation. Multitudes hunger for the Bread of Life. The stage is set. The firm and irrevocable Promise is given. God’s own Plan has been set in motion. It is gathering momentum with every passing day. The powers of heaven and earth mysteriously assist in its execution. Such an opportunity is irreplaceable. Let

the doubter arise, and himself verify the truth of such assertions. To try, to persevere, is to ensure ultimate and complete victory.

This Decisive Hour

- 53 Faced with such a challenge, a community that has scaled thus far such peaks of enduring achievement can neither falter nor recoil. Confident in its destiny, reliant on its God-given power, fortified by the consciousness of its past victories, galvanized into action at the sight of a slowly disrupting civilization, it will—I can have no doubt—continue to fulfil unflinchingly the immediate requirements of its task, assured that with every step it takes and with each stage it traverses, a fresh revelation of Divine light and strength will guide and propel it forward until it consummates, in the fullness of time and in the plenitude of its power, the Plan inseparably bound up with its shining destiny.

This Decisive Hour

- 54 The field, in all its vastness and fertility, is wide open and near at hand. The harvest is ripe. The hour is overdue. The signal has been given. The spiritual forces mysteriously released are already operating with increasing momentum, unchallenged and unchecked. Victory, speedy and unquestioned, is assured to whomsoever will arise and respond to this second, this urgent and vital call.

This Decisive Hour

- 55 The vastness of the field, the smallness of your numbers, the indifference of the masses, must neither discourage nor appal you. You should at all times fix your gaze on the promise of Bahá'u'lláh, put your whole trust in His creative Word, recall the past and manifold evidences of His all-encompassing and resistless power, and arise to become worthy and exemplary recipients of His all-sustaining grace and blessings.

29 June 1941, to the National Spiritual Assembly of India

- 56 If the friends, individually and collectively, play their part and exert their utmost the abundant blessings of Bahá'u'lláh will be fully vouchsafed, and the triumph of the Plan will mark a glorious chapter in the history of the Faith.

18 December 1945

57 ...FORCES MYSTERIOUSLY RELEASED DESIGNED DIRECT OPERATION
STIMULATE PROCESSES ENSURE CONSUMMATION SECOND STAGE DIVINE
PLAN INCONCEIVABLY POTENT. FULL RAPID USE THESE FORCES BY ORGANIZED
COMMUNITY ALIVE SUBLIMITY MISSION IMPERATIVE, MANIFOLD AGENCIES
LOCAL REGIONAL NATIONAL INTERCONTINENTAL DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE
PROSECUTION PLAN NOW CALLED UPON ACHIEVE RESPECTIVE SPHERES
... SUCCESSES SO CONSPICUOUS AS SHALL IMMEASURABLY FORTIFY HOPES
WINNING STIPULATED TIME TOTAL DECISIVE VICTORY...

This Decisive Hour

58 The invisible hosts of the Kingdom are ready and eager to rush forth to the
assistance of such as will have the courage to weigh the issues involved and
to take the decision commensurate with these issues.

6 September 1949, appended to a letter

59 Time is short. Opportunities, though multiplying with every passing hour,
will not recur, some for yet another century, others never again. However
severe the challenge, however multiple the tasks, however short the time,
however sombre the world outlook, however limited the material resources
of a hard-pressed adolescent community, the untapped sources of celestial
strength from which it can draw are measureless in their potencies, and will
unhesitatingly pour forth their energizing influences if the necessary daily
effort be made and the required sacrifices be willingly accepted.

Citadel of Faith

60 The invisible battalions of the Concourse on high are mustered, in serried
ranks, ready to rush their reinforcements to the aid of the vanguard of
Bahá'u'lláh's crusaders in the hour of their greatest need...

Citadel of Faith

61 LORD HOSTS KING OF KINGS PLEDGED UNFAILING AID EVERY CRUSADER
BATTLING HIS CAUSE. INVISIBLE BATTALIONS MUSTERED RANK UPON RANK
READY POUR FORTH REINFORCEMENTS FROM ON HIGH.

Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957

62 Putting on the armour of His love, firmly buckling on the shield of His
mighty Covenant, mounted on the steed of steadfastness, holding aloft the
lance of the Word of the Lord of Hosts, and with unquestioning reliance on

His promises as the best provision for their journey, let them set their faces towards those fields that still remain unexplored and direct their steps to those goals that are as yet unattained, assured that He Who has led them to achieve such triumphs, and to store up such prizes in His Kingdom, will continue to assist them in enriching their spiritual birthright to a degree that no finite mind can imagine or human heart perceive.

Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950–1957

- 63 Delicate and strenuous though the task may be, however arduous and prolonged the effort required, whatsoever the nature of the perils and pitfalls that beset the path of whoever arises to revive the fortunes of a Faith struggling against the rising forces of materialism, nationalism, secularism, racialism and ecclesiasticism, the all-conquering potency of the grace of God, vouchsafed through the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, will, undoubtedly, mysteriously and surprisingly, enable whosoever arises to champion His Cause to win complete and total victory.

Citadel of Faith

- 64 ...the sustaining grace promised to all those who will arise, with single-mindedness, courage, dedication and high resolve, to aid in the attainment of these noble objectives, is of such potency that no earthly power can resist the ultimate fulfilment of so glorious a task, or even delay its eventual fruition.

27 June 1957, appended to a letter

- 65 The Founder of their Faith Himself will not fail to reward them, in His own Kingdom, and in accordance with His Wisdom and bounty, for their share in the furtherance of the interests of His world-encompassing Order, and to exalt them amidst the company of His immortal saints and heroes dwelling in the Abhá Kingdom.

2 July 1957, appended to a letter

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

66 Perhaps the reason why you have not accomplished so much in the field of teaching is the extent you looked upon your own weaknesses and inabilities to spread the message. Bahá'u'lláh and the Master have both urged us repeatedly to disregard our own handicaps and lay our whole reliance upon God. He will come to our help if we only arise and become an active channel for God's grace. Do you think it is the teachers who make converts and change human hearts? No, surely not. They are only pure souls who take the first step, and then let the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh move them and make use of them. If any one of them should even for a second consider his achievements as due to his own capacities, his work is ended and his fall starts. This is in fact the reason why so many competent souls have after wonderful services suddenly found themselves absolutely impotent and perhaps thrown aside by the Spirit of the Cause as useless souls. The criterion is the extent to which we are ready to have the will of God operate through us.

Stop being conscious of your frailties, therefore; have a perfect reliance upon God; let your heart burn with the desire to serve His mission and proclaim His call; and you will observe how eloquence and the power to change human hearts will come as a matter of course.

Shoghi Effendi will surely pray for your success if you should arise and start to teach. In fact the mere act of arising will win for you God's help and blessings.

31 March 1932

67 You should never look at your own limitations, much less allow them to deter you from promoting the Message. For the believers, whether capable or not, whether poor or rich, and whether influential or obscure, are after all but mere channels through which God carries His message to mankind. They are instruments whereby He communicates His will to His people. The friends, therefore, must cease looking at their own deficiencies in a way that would kill in them the spirit of initiative and of service. They should have confidence in the divine assistance promised to them by Bahá'u'lláh, and strengthened and revived by such an assurance they should continue to toil till the very end of their lives.

18 March 1934

- 68 The invisible hosts of the Kingdom are ready to extend to you all the assistance you need, and through them you will no doubt succeed in removing every obstacle in your way, and in fulfilling this most cherished desire of your heart. Bahá'u'lláh has given us promise that should we persevere in our efforts and repose all our confidence in Him the doors of success will be widely open before us.

22 September 1936

- 69 The harder you strive to attain your goal, the greater will be the confirmations of Bahá'u'lláh, and the more certain you can feel to attain success. Be cheerful, therefore, and exert yourself with full faith and confidence. For Bahá'u'lláh has promised His Divine assistance to everyone who arises with a pure and detached heart to spread His holy Word, even though he may be bereft of every human knowledge and capacity, and notwithstanding the forces of darkness and of opposition which may be arrayed against him. The goal is clear, the path safe and certain, and the assurances of Bahá'u'lláh as to the eventual success of our efforts quite emphatic. Let us keep firm, and whole-heartedly carry on the great work which He has entrusted into our hands.

3 February 1937

- 70 The Bahá'í teacher must be all confidence. Therein lies his strength and the secret of his success. Though single-handed, and no matter how great the apathy of the people around you may be, you should have faith that the hosts of the Kingdom are on your side, and that through their help you are bound to overcome the forces of darkness that are facing the Cause of God. Persevere, be happy and confident, therefore.

30 June 1937

- 71 ...he would advise you to persevere in the task you have set your heart to accomplish, confident that through Divine assistance you will be able, sooner or later, to attain your goal. Reliance on God is indeed the strongest and safest weapon which the Bahá'í teacher can carry. For by its means no earthly power can remain unconquered, and no obstacle become insuperable.

27 March 1938

72 Smallness of numbers, lack of skilled teachers, and modesty of means should not discourage or deter them. They must remember the glorious history of the Cause, which, both East and West, was established by dedicated souls who, for the most part, were neither rich, famous, nor well educated, but whose devotion, zeal and self-sacrifice overcame every obstacle and won miraculous victories for the Faith of God ... Let them dedicate themselves—young and old, men and women alike—and go forth and settle in new districts, travel, and teach in spite of lack of experience, and be assured that Bahá'u'lláh has promised to aid all those who arise in His Name. His strength will sustain them; their own weakness is unimportant.

29 June 1941

73 Bahá'u'lláh has said that God will assist all those who arise in His service. The more you labour for His Faith, the more He will aid and bless you.

23 November 1941

74 If the friends always waited until they were fully qualified to do any particular task, the work of the Cause would be almost at a standstill! But the very act of striving to serve, however unworthy one may feel, attracts the blessings of God and enables one to become more fitted for the task.

4 May 1942

75 When once a few bold, self-sacrificing individuals have arisen to serve, their example will no doubt encourage other timid, would-be pioneers to follow in their footsteps. The history of our Faith is full of records of the remarkable things achieved by really very simple, insignificant individuals, who became veritable beacons and towers of strength through having placed their trust in God, having arisen to proclaim His Message...

27 March 1945

76 Once the friends start out to win the goals set in their Plan, they will find the Divine confirmations sustaining them and hastening its consummation...

9 August 1945

77 It shows that wherever and whenever the friends arise to serve, the mysterious power latent in this Divine Cause rushes in to bless and reinforce their labours far beyond their fondest hopes.

18 February 1947

- 78 Each one of us, if we look into our failures, is sure to feel unworthy and despondent, and this feeling only frustrates our constructive efforts and wastes time. The thing for us to focus on is the glory of the Cause and the Power of Bahá'u'lláh which can make of a mere drop a surging sea!

13 October 1947

- 79 ...when we put our trust in Him, Bahá'u'lláh solves our problems and opens the way.

12 October 1949

- 80 Just one mature soul, with spiritual understanding and a profound knowledge of the Faith, can set a whole country ablaze—so great is the power of the Cause to work through a pure and selfless channel.

6 November 1949

- 81 At all times we must look at the greatness of the Cause, and remember that Bahá'u'lláh will assist all who arise in His service. When we look at ourselves, we are sure to feel discouraged by our shortcomings and insignificance!

12 December 1950

- 82 Today, as never before, the magnet which attracts the blessings from on high is teaching the Faith of God. The Hosts of Heaven are poised between heaven and earth, just waiting, and patiently, for the Bahá'í to step forth, with pure devotion and consecration, to teach the Cause of God, so they may rush to his aid and assistance. It is the Guardian's prayer that the friends may treble their efforts, as the time is short—alas, the workers too few. Let those who wish to achieve immortality step forth and raise the divine call. They will be astonished at the spiritual victories they will gain.

28 March 1953

- 83 The Hosts of the Supreme Concourse are in martial array, poised between earth and heaven ready to rush to the assistance of those who arise to teach the Faith. If one seeks the confirmations of the Holy Spirit, one can find them in rich abundance in the teaching field. The world is seeking as never before, and if the friends will arise with new determination, fully consecrated to the noble task ahead of them, victory after victory will be won for the glorious Faith of God.

2 February 1956

- 84 The Friends must realize the power of the Holy Spirit which is manifest and quickening them at this time through the appearance of Bahá'u'lláh. There is no force of heaven or earth which can affect them if they place themselves wholly under the influence of the Holy Spirit and under Its guidance...

11 August 1957

PRAYER *&* DEVOTIONAL LIFE

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

Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice
Compiled February 2019

The Power of Prayer

- 1 I beseech Thee ... to make of my prayer a fire that will burn away the veils which have shut me out from Thy beauty, and a light that will lead me unto the ocean of Thy Presence.

Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh, sec. CLXXXIII

- 2 Every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God is endowed with such potency as can instill new life into every human frame, if ye be of them that comprehend this truth.

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

- 3 Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men. Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul. Thus have the mysteries of the Revelation of God been decreed by virtue of the Will of Him Who is the Source of power and wisdom.

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

- 4 If thou desirest eternal life, inhale the heavenly fragrance; and if thou seekest life everlasting, abide beneath the shelter of the Word of God.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 5 The Word of God may be likened to the life-giving breezes of the divine springtime. When chanted in spiritual tones, it bestoweth the breath of life and granteth true salvation. It bringeth forth a garden of roses from the pure soil, and wafteth its musk-laden fragrance throughout the world.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 6 Shouldst thou recite any of the revealed prayers, and seek assistance from God with thy face turned towards Him, and implore Him with devotion and fervour, thy need will be answered.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 7 ...He, Who has entrusted them with such a great mission to the world, is waiting and patiently waiting for them that labour in His Divine Vineyard to turn their hearts in prayer and supplication to the Almighty and seek that aid and guidance that can alone enable them to carry out His Divine Plan for this world.

7 January 1923, Shoghi Effendi

- 8 If you read the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá with selflessness and care and concentrate upon them, you will discover truths unknown to you before and will obtain an insight into the problems that have baffled the great thinkers of the world.

30 January 1925, appended to a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 9 The Guardian wishes you, therefore, to pray, and to supplicate the Almighty that He may give you a fuller measure of His grace; that through it your spiritual energies may be quickened and that you may become more imbued with that spirit which must needs animate, sustain and strengthen every sincere and true follower of the Faith.

13 March 1934, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 10 He wishes again to assure you he will pray for your spiritual advancement in the Holy Shrines. The power of God can entirely transmute our characters and make of us beings entirely unlike our previous selves. Through prayer and supplication, obedience to the divine laws Bahá'u'lláh has revealed, and ever-increasing service to His Faith, we can change ourselves.

22 November 1941, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 11 The believers, as we all know, should endeavour to set such an example in their personal lives and conduct that others will feel impelled to embrace a Faith which reforms human character. However, unfortunately, not everyone achieves easily and rapidly the victory over self. What every believer, new or old, should realize is that the Cause has the spiritual power to re-create us if we make the effort to let that power influence us, and the

greatest help in this respect is prayer. We must supplicate Bahá'u'lláh to assist us to overcome the failings in our own characters, and also exert our own will-power in mastering ourselves.

27 January 1945, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 12 He suggests that you all hold special prayers that God may send to you receptive souls to teach. Prayer unlocks doors that otherwise seem unopenable!
28 June 1945, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 13 He suggests that you daily pray to Bahá'u'lláh to let you meet a soul receptive to His Message. The power of prayer is very great, and attracts the Divine confirmations.
30 September 1951, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 14 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 depends 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.
18 December 2014, Universal House of Justice

Communion with God

- 15 Recite ye the verses of God every morn and eventide. Whoso faileth to recite them hath not been faithful to the Covenant of God and His Testament, and whoso turneth away from these holy verses in this Day is of those who throughout eternity have turned away from God. Fear ye God, O My servants, one and all. Pride not yourselves on much reading of the verses or on a multitude of pious acts by night and day; for were a man to read a single verse with joy and radiance it would be better for him than to read with lassitude all the Holy Books of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Read ye the sacred verses in such measure that ye be not overcome by languor and despondency. Lay not upon your souls that which will weary them and weigh them down, but rather what will lighten and uplift them, so that they may soar on the wings of the Divine verses towards the Dawning-place of His manifest signs; this will draw you nearer to God, did ye but comprehend.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 149

- 16 Purge Thou mine ear, O my Lord, that I may hearken unto the verses sent down unto Thee, and illuminate my heart with the light of Thy knowledge, and loose my tongue that it may make mention of Thee and sing Thy praise. By Thy might, O my God! My soul is wedded to none beside Thee, and my heart seeketh none except Thine own Self.

Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh

- 17 Occupy thyself in remembrance of the Beauty of Him Who is the Unconstrained at early morn, and seek communion with Him at the hour of dawn. O 'Alí! Remembrance of Me is a healing medicine to the souls and a light to the hearts of men.

Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet

- 18 I render Thee thanks, O Thou Who hast lighted Thy fire within my soul, and cast the beams of Thy light into my heart, that Thou hast taught Thy servants how to make mention of Thee, and revealed unto them the ways

whereby they can supplicate Thee, through Thy most holy and exalted tongue, and Thy most august and precious speech. But for Thy leave, who is there that could venture to express Thy might and Thy grandeur; and were it not for Thine instruction, who is the man that could discover the ways of Thy pleasure in the kingdom of Thy creation?

Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh

- 19 Make my prayer, O my Lord, a fountain of living waters whereby I may live as long as Thy sovereignty endureth, and may make mention of Thee in every world of Thy worlds.

Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh

- 20 O Son of Light! Forget all save Me and commune with My spirit. This is of the essence of My command, therefore turn unto it.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words, Arabic no. 16

- 21 O Son of Glory! Be swift in the path of holiness, and enter the heaven of communion with Me. Cleanse thy heart with the burnish of the spirit, and hasten to the court of the Most High.

Bahá'u'lláh, The Hidden Words, Persian no. 8

- 22 Glory be unto Thee, Thou art exalted above the description of anyone save Thyself, since it is beyond human conception to befittingly magnify Thy virtues or to comprehend the inmost reality of Thine Essence. Far be it from Thy glory that Thy creatures should describe Thee or that anyone besides Thyself should ever know Thee. I have known Thee, O my God, by reason of Thy making Thyself known unto me, for hadst Thou not revealed Thyself unto me, I would not have known Thee. I worship Thee by virtue of Thy summoning me unto Thee, for had it not been for Thy summons I would not have worshiped Thee.

The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 23 Remembrance of God is like the rain and dew which bestow freshness and grace on flowers and hyacinths, revive them and cause them to acquire fragrance, redolence and renewed charm. "And thou hast seen the earth dried up and barren: but when We send down the rain upon it, it stirreth and swelleth, and groweth every kind of luxuriant herb."ⁱ Strive thou, then,

i Qur'án 22:5

to praise and glorify God by night and by day, that thou mayest attain infinite freshness and beauty.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 24 It behoveth the servant to pray to and seek assistance from God, and to supplicate and implore His aid. Such becometh the rank of servitude, and the Lord will decree whatsoever He desireth, in accordance with His consummate wisdom.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 25 Praise be to God, thy heart is engaged in the commemoration of God, thy soul is gladdened by the glad tidings of God and thou art absorbed in prayer. The state of prayer is the best of conditions, for man is then associating with God. Prayer verily bestoweth life, particularly when offered in private and at times, such as midnight, when freed from daily cares.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, no. 172

- 26 We must strive to attain to that condition by being separated from all things and from the people of the world and by turning to God alone. It will take some effort on the part of man to attain to that condition, but he must work for it, strive for it. We can attain to it by thinking and caring less for material things and more for the spiritual. The further we go from the one, the nearer we are to the other. The choice is ours.

Our spiritual perception, our inward sight must be opened, so that we can see the signs and traces of God's spirit in everything. Everything can reflect to us the light of the Spirit.

*Report of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words as quoted in J. E. Esslemont,
Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*

- 27 Know thou, verily, it is becoming in a weak one to supplicate to the Strong One, and it behooveth a seeker of bounty to beseech the Glorious Bountiful One. When one supplicates to his Lord, turns to Him and seeks bounty from His Ocean, this supplication brings light to his heart, illumination to his sight, life to his soul and exaltation to his being.

*Report of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words as quoted in J. E. Esslemont,
Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*

- 28 In the highest prayer, men pray only for the love of God, not because they fear Him or hell, or hope for bounty or heaven ... When a man falls in love with a human being, it is impossible for him to keep from mentioning the name of his beloved. How much more difficult is it to keep from mentioning the Name of God when one has come to love Him ... The spiritual man finds no delight in anything save in commemoration of God.

*Report of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words as quoted in J. E. Esslemont,
Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*

- 29 When we turn to God with our whole heart and invoke His Name, a spiritual connection is established through which we become a channel of divine influence.

19 October 1925, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

The Spirit and Form of Prayer

- 30 The most acceptable prayer is the one offered with the utmost spirituality and radiance; its prolongation hath not been and is not beloved by God. The more detached and the purer the prayer, the more acceptable is it in the presence of God.

The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 31 The reason why privacy hath been enjoined in moments of devotion is this, that thou mayest give thy best attention to the remembrance of God, that thy heart may at all times be animated with His Spirit, and not be shut out as by a veil from thy Best Beloved. Let not thy tongue pay lip service in praise of God while thy heart be not attuned to the exalted Summit of Glory, and the Focal Point of communion. Thus if haply thou dost live in the Day of Resurrection, the mirror of thy heart will be set towards Him Who is the Day-Star of Truth; and no sooner will His light shine forth than the splendour thereof shall forthwith be reflected in thy heart. For He is the Source of all goodness, and unto Him revert all things. But if He appeareth while thou hast turned unto thyself in meditation, this shall not profit thee, unless thou shalt mention His Name by words He hath revealed. For in the forthcoming Revelation it is He Who is the Remembrance of God, whereas the devotions which thou art offering at present have been prescribed by the Point of the Bayán, while He Who will shine resplendent in the Day of Resurrection is the Revelation of the inner reality enshrined in the Point of the Bayán—a Revelation more potent, immeasurably more potent, than the one which hath preceded it.

The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 32 As for devotions other than obligatory prayer, if these be chanted jointly and with a pleasant and affecting melody, this would be most acceptable.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 33 The simplicity characterizing the offering of Bahá'í prayers, whether obligatory or otherwise, should be maintained. Rigidity and rituals should be strictly avoided.

30 October 1936, appended to a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 34 'Abdu'l-Bahá once said: "The worshipper must pray with a detached spirit, unconditional surrender of the will, concentrated attention and spiritual fervour ... Automatic, formal prayers which do not touch the core of the heart are of no avail."

19 October 1925, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 35 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 rulings 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, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 36 Daily prayers—with the exception of the specific obligatory prayers such as the "Namáz"ⁱ—can be recited in any fashion or manner which the believer chooses. Uniformity in the case of such prayers should under no circumstances be imposed upon the friends. The worshipper should be left entirely free to pray as he wishes.

6 July 1935, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 37 With regard to your spiritual experiences, the Guardian has been very interested to share them. He would, however, urge you to always use and read, during your hours of meditation and prayer, the words revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master.

6 December 1935, written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

i The Persian word Namáz denotes the daily Obligatory Prayers.

- 38 The true worshipper, while praying, should endeavour not so much to ask God to fulfil his wishes and desires, but rather to adjust these and make them conform to the Divine Will. Only through such an attitude can one derive that feeling of inner peace and contentment which the power of prayer alone can confer.

26 October 1938, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 39 He feels more emphasis should be laid on the importance and power of prayer, including the use of The Greatest Name, but not over-emphasizing it. It is the spirit behind the words which is really important.

16 March 1946, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 40 The daily prayers are to be said each one for himself, aloud or silent makes no difference. There is no congregational prayer except that for the dead. We read healing and other prayers in our meetings, but the daily prayer is a personal obligation, so someone else reading it is not quite the same thing as saying it for yourself.

31 January 1949, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 41 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.

18 December 2014, Universal House of Justice

The Role of Meditation

- 42 Do thou meditate on that which We have revealed unto thee, that thou mayest discover the purpose of God, thy Lord, and the Lord of all worlds. In these words the mysteries of Divine Wisdom have been treasured.

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

- 43 Bahá'u'lláh says there is a sign (from God) in every phenomenon: the sign of the intellect is contemplation and the sign of contemplation is silence, because it is impossible for a man to do two things at one time—he cannot both speak and meditate.

It is an axiomatic fact that while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit. In that state of mind you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed.

You cannot apply the name “man” to any being void of this faculty of meditation; without it he would be a mere animal, lower than the beasts.

Through the faculty of meditation man attains to eternal life; through it he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit—the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and meditation.

The spirit of man is itself informed and strengthened during meditation; through it affairs of which man knew nothing are unfolded before his view. Through it he receives Divine inspiration, through it he receives heavenly food.

Meditation is the key for opening the doors of mysteries. In that state man abstracts himself: in that state man withdraws himself from all outside objects; in that subjective mood he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and can unfold the secrets of things-in-themselves. To illustrate this, think of man as endowed with two kinds of sight; when the power of insight is being used the outward power of vision does not see.

This faculty of meditation frees man from the animal nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with God.

This faculty brings forth from the invisible plane the sciences and arts. Through the meditative faculty inventions are made possible, colossal

undertakings are carried out; through it governments can run smoothly. Through this faculty man enters into the very Kingdom of God.

Nevertheless some thoughts are useless to man; they are like waves moving in the sea without result. But if the faculty of meditation is bathed in the inner light and characterized with divine attributes, the results will be confirmed.

The meditative faculty is akin to the mirror; if you put it before earthly objects it will reflect them. Therefore if the spirit of man is contemplating earthly subjects he will be informed of these.

But if you turn the mirror of your spirits heavenwards, the heavenly constellations and the rays of the Sun of Reality will be reflected in your hearts, and the virtues of the Kingdom will be obtained.

Therefore let us keep this faculty rightly directed—turning it to the heavenly Sun and not to earthly objects—so that we may discover the secrets of the Kingdom, and comprehend the allegories of the Bible and the mysteries of the spirit.

May we indeed become mirrors reflecting the heavenly realities, and may we become so pure as to reflect the stars of heaven.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks

- 44 ...of course the Bahá'ís can and should meditate upon the significances of the writings, and endeavour to grasp their meaning to the uttermost. There can be no possible objection to this. However, certain things are, by their very nature, a mystery to us, at least in our present stage of development.

14 January 1942, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 45 There are no set forms of meditation prescribed in the teachings, no plan, as such, for inner development. The friends are urged—nay enjoined—to pray, and they also should meditate, but the manner of doing the latter is left entirely to the individual...

The inspiration received through meditation is of a nature that one cannot measure or determine. God can inspire into our minds things that we had no previous knowledge of, if He desires to do so.

25 January 1943, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 46 Through meditation the doors of deeper knowledge and inspiration may be opened. Naturally, if one meditates as a Bahá'í he is connected with the Source; if a man believing in God meditates he is tuning in to the power

and mercy of God; but we cannot say that any inspiration which a person, not knowing Bahá'u'lláh, or not believing in God, receives is merely from his own ego. Meditation is very important, and the Guardian sees no reason why the friends should not be taught to meditate, but they should guard against superstitious or foolish ideas creeping into it.

19 November 1945, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 47 He thinks it would be wiser for the Bahá'ís to use the Meditations given by Bahá'u'lláh, and not any set form of meditation recommended by someone else; but the believers must be left free in these details and allowed to have personal latitude in finding their own level of communion with God.

27 January 1952, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Prayer, Meditation and Action

- 48 Therefore strive that your actions day by day may be beautiful prayers. Turn towards God, and seek always to do that which is right and noble. Enrich the poor, raise the fallen, comfort the sorrowful, bring healing to the sick, reassure the fearful, rescue the oppressed, bring hope to the hopeless, shelter the destitute!

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Paris Talks

- 49 O maid-servant of God! Chant the Words of God and, pondering over their meaning, transform them into actions! I ask God to cause thee to attain a high station in the Kingdom of Life forever and ever.

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

- 50 Prayer and meditation are very important factors in deepening the spiritual life of the individual, but with them must go also action and example, as these are the tangible results of the former. Both are essential.

15 May 1944, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 51 The Master said guidance was when the doors opened after we tried. We can pray, ask to do God's will only, try hard, and then if we find our plan is not working out, assume it is not the right one, at least for the moment.

29 October 1952, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 52 When a person becomes a Bahá'í, actually what takes place is that the seed of the spirit starts to grow in the human soul. This seed must be watered by the outpourings of the Holy Spirit. These gifts of the spirit are received through prayer, meditation, study of the Holy Utterances and service to the Cause of God. The fact of the matter is that service in the Cause is like the plough which ploughs the physical soil when seeds are sown. It is necessary that the soil be ploughed up, so that it can be enriched, and thus cause a stronger growth of the seed. In exactly the same way the evolution of the spirit takes place through ploughing up the soil of the heart so that it is a

constant reflection of the Holy Spirit. In this way the human spirit grows and develops by leaps and bounds.

6 October 1954, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 53 The friends ... should turn to God for guidance in prayer and meditation, should study the Teachings of the Faith and then arise and act. Prayer and meditation, and study, without action, are of no value, and action must be reinforced by these other things, which strengthen the soul and nourish the mind.

30 May 1956, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 54 The beloved Guardian has stressed over and over again, that to effectively teach the Faith, the individual must study deeply the Divine Word, imbibe its life-giving waters, and feast upon its glorious teachings. He should then meditate on the import of the Word, and finding its spiritual depths, pray for guidance and assistance. But most important, after prayer is action. After one has prayed and meditated, he must arise, relying fully on the guidance and confirmation of Bahá'u'lláh, to teach His Faith. Perseverance in action is essential, just as wisdom and audacity are necessary for effective teaching. The individual must sacrifice all things to this great goal, and then the victories will be won.

30 May 1956, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 55 Teaching is the source of Divine Confirmation. It is not sufficient to pray diligently for guidance, but this prayer must be followed by meditation as to the best methods of action and then action itself. Even if the action should not immediately produce results, or perhaps not be entirely correct, that does not make so much difference, because prayers can only be answered through action and if someone's action is wrong, God can use that method of showing the pathway which is right. Therefore you and the other members of the ... Assembly must arise and diligently teach the Cause. You will find that you will be guided and confirmed in this work.

22 August 1957, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Obligatory Prayer

- 56 As for thy mention of the Obligatory Prayer: in truth, anyone who readeth this with absolute sincerity will attract all created things, and confer new life upon the world of being. This servant beseecheth his Lord to assist His loved ones in that which will deliver them from this world's vicissitudes, its preoccupations, its frustrations, and its darkness, and will adorn them with that which shall under all conditions draw them nigh unto Him. He, verily, is the All-Possessing, the Most High.ⁱ

Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet

- 57 The obligatory prayers are binding inasmuch as they are conducive to humility and submissiveness, to setting one's face towards God and expressing devotion to Him. Through such prayer man holdeth communion with God, seeketh to draw near unto Him, converseth with the true Beloved of his heart, and attaineth spiritual stations.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 58 Know thou that in every word and movement of the obligatory prayer there are allusions, mysteries and a wisdom that man is unable to comprehend, and letters and scrolls cannot contain.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 59 In regard to the question which you have been asked by the London Assembly to submit to the Guardian concerning the recital of "Munájáts":ⁱⁱ He wishes me first to draw your attention to the fact that there is a fundamental difference between "Namáz" and "Munáját". While the former, being specifically ordained by Bahá'u'lláh, is obligatory and must, in accordance

i This Tablet was revealed in the voice of Bahá'u'lláh's amanuensis, Mírzá Áqá Ján, surnamed Khádím'u'lláh (Servant of God). Out of respect, the Bahá'ís, rather than addressing Bahá'u'lláh directly, would write to Mírzá Áqá Ján. The reply would be in the form of a letter from Mírzá Áqá Ján quoting words of Bahá'u'lláh, but would, in fact, be dictated in its entirety by Bahá'u'lláh. All parts of such Tablets, even those which ostensibly are the words of Mírzá Áqá Ján himself, are Sacred Scripture revealed by Bahá'u'lláh.

ii The Persian word *Munáját* denotes prayer.

with His definite instructions given in the Aqdas, be recited privately, the latter is neither compulsory nor is there any prescribed way for its recital. But although the friends are thus left free to follow their own inclination when reading the “Munáját” they should take the utmost care that any manner they practise should not acquire too rigid a character, and thus develop into an institution.

This is a point which the friends should always bear in mind, lest they deviate from the clear path indicated by the Teachings.

25 October 1934, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 60 ...the obligatory prayers are by their very nature of greater effectiveness and are endowed with a greater power than the non-obligatory ones, and as such are essential.

4 January 1936, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 61 The instructions that accompany these prayers, such as the washing of hands and face, of bowing down and of raising one's hands, have been definitely ordained by Bahá'u'lláh, and as such should be entirely and confidently carried out by the believers, and particularly by the Bahá'í youth, on whose shoulders has been laid the chief responsibility of vindicating the truth and preserving the integrity of the laws and ordinances of the Faith.

The daily obligatory prayers are three in number. The shortest one consists of a single verse which has to be recited once every twenty-four hours and at midday. The medium, which begins with the words, “The Lord is witness that there is none other God but He,” has to be recited three times a day, in the morning, at noon and in the evening. This prayer is accompanied by certain physical acts and gestures. The long prayer, which is the most elaborate of the three, has to be recited only once in every twenty-four hours, and at any time one feels inclined to do so.

The believer is entirely free to choose any one of these three prayers, but is under the obligation of reciting one of them, and in accordance with any specific directions with which it may be accompanied.

10 January 1936, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 62 You had asked about performing obligatory prayers in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. He told me to write: “Obligatory prayer is not forbidden in the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, but the friends have not been and are not required to perform it in the Temple. Congregational prayer is prohibited,

save in the Prayer for the Dead. Designating the place and determining the conditions for the recital of obligatory prayers in the *Mashriqu'l-Adhikár* are secondary matters to be referred to the Spiritual Assembly of that city."

30 January 1937, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 63 The Guardian particularly appreciates the fact that you have been faithfully observing Bahá'u'lláh's injunction regarding the recital of the daily obligatory prayers, and have thereby set such a high example before your Bahá'í fellow-youth. These daily prayers have been endowed with a special potency which only those who regularly recite them can adequately appreciate. The friends should therefore endeavour to make daily use of these prayers, whatever the peculiar circumstances and conditions of their life.

23 February 1939, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 64 With reference to your question regarding the three daily obligatory prayers: the Bahá'í worshipper is not required to recite them all each day, but has to choose one, and should also strictly conform to any instructions revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in connection with its recital, such as the raising of hands, various genuflections, etc. Those who for some reason or other, especially when physically unable to observe these regulations owing to illness or some bodily defect, cannot conform to these instructions should preferably choose the short prayer, which is exceedingly simple.

7 December 1939, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 65 He would advise you to only use the short midday Obligatory Prayer. This has no genuflections and only requires that when saying it the believer turn his face towards 'Akká where Bahá'u'lláh is buried. This is a physical symbol of an inner reality, just as the plant stretches out to the sunlight—from which it receives life and growth—so we turn our hearts to the Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh, when we pray; and we turn our faces, during this short prayer, to where His dust lies on this earth as a symbol of the inner act.

Bahá'u'lláh has reduced all ritual and form to an absolute minimum in His Faith. The few forms that there are—like those associated with the two longer obligatory daily prayers—are only symbols of the inner attitude. There is a wisdom in them, and a great blessing, but we cannot force ourselves to understand or feel these things, that is why He gave us also the very short and simple prayer, for those who did not feel the desire to perform the acts associated with the other two.

24 June 1949, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 66 As regards the questions about the proper use of the Long Obligatory Prayer: All the writings of the Faith may be read and should be read for the instruction and inspiration of the friends. This includes the specific prayers. If a believer is physically incapable of performing the genuflexions accompanying one of the prayers, and yet he longs to say it as an obligatory prayer, then he may do so. By physically incapable is meant a real physical incapacity which a physician would attest as genuine.
17 February 1955, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 67 We have determined, therefore, that it is imperative for all the believers to deepen their awareness of the blessings conferred by the laws which directly foster the devotional life of the individual and, thus, of the community. The essentials of these laws are known to all Bahá'ís, but acquiring greater insight into their significance must include carrying out all the divinely revealed aspects of their observance. These are the laws which pertain to obligatory prayer, fasting and recitation of the Greatest Name ninety-five times a day.

Bahá'u'lláh asserts: "One who performeth neither good deeds nor acts of worship is like unto a tree which beareth no fruit, and an action which leaveth no trace. Whosoever experienceth the holy ecstasy of worship will refuse to barter such an act or any praise of God for all that existeth in the world. Fasting and obligatory prayer are as two wings to man's life. Blessed be the one who soareth with their aid in the heaven of the love of God, the Lord of all worlds."

28 December 1999, Universal House of Justice

The Devotional Character of the Community

- 68 Gather ye together with the utmost joy and fellowship and recite the verses revealed by the merciful Lord. By so doing the doors to true knowledge will be opened to your inner beings, and ye will then feel your souls endowed with steadfastness and your hearts filled with radiant joy.

Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet

- 69 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.

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

- 70 Praised be God, ye two have demonstrated the truth of your words by your deeds, and have won the confirmations of the Lord God. Every day at first light, ye gather the Bahá'í children together and teach them the communes and prayers. This is a most praiseworthy act, and bringeth joy to the children's hearts: that they should, at every morn, turn their faces toward the Kingdom and make mention of the Lord and praise His Name, and in the sweetest of voices, chant and recite.

These children are even as young plants, and teaching them the prayers is as letting the rain pour down upon them, that they may wax tender and fresh, and the soft breezes of the love of God may blow over them, making them to tremble with joy.

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

- 71 Indeed, the chief reason for the evils now rampant in society is a lack of spirituality. The materialistic civilization of our age has so much absorbed the energy and interest of mankind, that people in general no longer feel the

necessity of raising themselves above the forces and conditions of their daily material existence. There is not sufficient demand for things that we should call spiritual to differentiate them from the needs and requirements of our physical existence. The universal crisis affecting mankind is, therefore, essentially spiritual in its causes. The spirit of the age, taken on the whole, is irreligious. Man's outlook upon life is too crude and materialistic to enable him to elevate himself into the higher realms of the spirit.

It is this condition, so sadly morbid, into which society has fallen, that religion seeks to improve and transform. For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling that unites man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer. And this is the reason why Bahá'u'lláh has so much stressed the importance of worship. It is not sufficient for a believer to merely accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality, which he can acquire chiefly by the means of prayer. The Bahá'í Faith, like all other Divine religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man that has first to be fed. And this spiritual nourishment prayer can best provide. Laws and institutions, as viewed by Bahá'u'lláh, can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed. Otherwise religion will degenerate into a mere organization, and become a dead thing.

The believers, particularly the young ones, should therefore fully realize the necessity of praying. For prayer is absolutely indispensable to their inner spiritual development, and this, already stated, is the very foundation and purpose of the Religion of God.

8 December 1935, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 72 ...the flourishing of the community, especially at the local level, demands a significant enhancement in patterns of behavior ... 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.

Ridván 1996, Universal House of Justice

- 73 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* ... [T]he 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.

28 December 1999, Universal House of Justice

- 74 Thousands upon thousands, embracing the diversity of the entire human family, are engaged in systematic study of the Creative Word in an environment that is at once serious and uplifting. As they strive to apply through a process of action, reflection and consultation the insights thus gained, they see their capacity to serve the Cause rise to new levels. Responding to the inmost longing of every heart to commune with its Maker, they carry out acts of collective worship in diverse settings, uniting with others in prayer, awakening spiritual susceptibilities, and shaping a pattern of life distinguished for its devotional character.

Riḍván 2008, Universal House of Justice

- 75 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 ... 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, Universal House of Justice

- 76 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, Universal House of Justice

Further Considerations

Prayers and Healing

- 77 During thy supplications to God and thy reciting, “Thy Name is my healing,” consider how thine heart is cheered, thy soul delighted by the spirit of the love of God, and thy mind attracted to the Kingdom of God! By these attractions one’s ability and capacity increase. When the vessel is enlarged the water increases, and when the thirst grows the bounty of the cloud becomes agreeable to the taste of man. This is the mystery of supplication and the wisdom of stating one’s wants.

Report of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words as quoted in J. E. Esslemont, Bahá’u’lláh and the New Era

- 78 O handmaid of God! Prayers are granted through the universal Manifestations of God. Nevertheless, where the wish is to obtain material things, even where the heedless are concerned, if they supplicate, humbly imploring God’s help—even their prayer hath an effect...

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

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

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

- 79 Spirit has influence; prayer has spiritual effect. Therefore, we pray, “O God! Heal this sick one!” Perchance God will answer. Does it matter who prays? God will answer the prayer of every servant if that prayer is urgent. His mercy is vast, illimitable. He answers the prayers of all His servants. He answers the prayer of this plant. The plant prays potentially, “O God!

Send me rain!” God answers the prayer, and the plant grows. God will answer anyone.

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

- 80 Ultimately it is God’s will destined for us that will be established, but we are assured that prayer for the sick is efficacious and is often answered. It may take time, but we should have faith.

8 November 1931, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 81 He is delighted to hear you are now fully recovered and again active in your important work for the Cause. However, you should not neglect your health, but consider it the means which enables you to serve. It—the body—is like a horse which carries the personality and spirit, and as such should be well cared for so it can do its work! You should certainly safeguard your nerves, and force yourself to take time, and not only for prayer and meditation, but for real rest and relaxation. We don’t have to pray and meditate for hours in order to be spiritual.

23 November 1947, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 82 The Guardian is happy to learn that the prayers of the friends had such a beneficial effect on the healing of Mr ... Prayer is a ladder on which the soul ascends into Heaven. It is the link with the spiritual realms, and if used with true dedication, brings the spiritual forces to the aid and assistance of the believers in this world.

28 March 1953, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

The Importance of Memorization

- 83 We should memorize the Hidden Words, follow the exhortations of the Incomparable Lord, and conduct ourselves in a manner which befiteth our servitude at the threshold of the one true God.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 84 When your hearts are wholly attracted to the one true God you will acquire divine knowledge, will become attentive to the proofs and testimonies and will commit to memory the glad-tidings concerning the Manifestation of the Beauty of the All-Merciful, as mentioned in the heavenly Scriptures.

Then ye shall behold how wondrous are His confirmations and how gracious is His assistance.

'Abdu'l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 85 The Guardian was truly pleased to note that you have already started reading some Bahá'í books, and would specially advise you to endeavour to commit to memory certain passages from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, and in particular, some of His prayers. This training would undoubtedly be of tremendous help to you in your future studies of the Cause, and would also serve to considerably deepen and enrich your own spiritual life at present.
10 April 1939, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

The Object of Our Devotion

- 86 While praying it would be better to turn one's thoughts to the Manifestation as He continues, in the other world, to be our means of contact with the Almighty. We can, however, pray directly to God Himself.
27 April 1937, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 87 You have asked whether our prayers go beyond Bahá'u'lláh: it all depends whether we pray to Him directly or through Him to God. We may do both, and also can pray directly to God, but our prayers would certainly be more effective and illuminating if they are addressed to Him through His Manifestation, Bahá'u'lláh.

Under no circumstances, however, can we, while repeating the prayers, insert the name Bahá'u'lláh where the word "God" is used. This would be tantamount to a blasphemy.

14 October 1937, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 88 In regard to your question: we must not be rigid about praying; there is not a set of rules governing it; the main thing is we must start out with the right concept of God, the Manifestation, the Master, the Guardian—we can turn, in thought, to any one of them when we pray. For instance you can ask Bahá'u'lláh for something, or, thinking of Him, ask God for it. The same is true of the Master or the Guardian. You can turn in thought to either of them and then ask their intercession, or pray direct to God. As long as you

don't confuse their stations, and make them all equal, it does not matter much how you orient your thoughts.

24 July 1946, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 89 If you find you need to visualize someone when you pray, think of the Master. Through Him you can address Bahá'u'lláh. Gradually try to think of the qualities of the Manifestation, and in that way a mental form will fade out, for after all the body is not the thing, His Spirit is there and is the essential, everlasting element.

31 January 1949, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 90 ...the Spirit of God reaches us through the Souls of the Manifestations. We must learn to commune with Their Souls and this is what the martyrs seemed to have done, and what brought them such ecstasy of joy that life became nothing. This is the true mysticism, and the secret, inner meaning of life, which humanity has at present drifted so far from.

28 July 1950, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 91 As regards your question: Bahá'u'lláh is, of course, not God and not the Creator; but through Him we can know God, and because of this position of Divine Intermediary, in a sense, He is all (or the other Prophets) we can ever know of that Infinite Essence which is God. Therefore, we address ourselves in prayer and thought to Him, or through Him to that Infinite Essence behind and beyond Him.

4 June 1951, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 92 We must not pray to the Guardian as to God; whoever we turn to when we pray, we must have the correct concept of the station of that person: Bahá'u'lláh as the Supreme Manifestation of God, the Master as the Perfect Man, the Centre of the Covenant, the Guardian as his functions are defined in the Master's Will. The friends need only read the Writings; the answers are all in them; we have no priests in this Faith to interpret or answer for us.

23 April 1957, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

Additional Passages

- 93 Number him, then, O my God, with such as have allowed nothing whatever to deter them from beholding Thy beauty, or from meditating on the wondrous evidences of Thine everlasting handiwork, that he may have fellowship with none except Thee, and turn to naught save Thyself, and discover in whatever hath been created by Thee in the kingdoms of earth and heaven nothing but Thy wondrous Beauty and the revelation of the splendors of Thy face, and be so immersed beneath the billowing oceans of Thine overruling providence and the surging seas of Thy holy unity, that he will forget every mention except the mention of Thy transcendent oneness, and banish from his soul the traces of all evil suggestions, O Thou in Whose hands are the kingdoms of all names and attributes!

Bahá'u'lláh, Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh

- 94 Teach ye your children so that they may peruse the divine verses every morn and eve. God hath prescribed unto every father to educate his children, both boys and girls, in the sciences and in morals, and in crafts and professions.

Bahá'u'lláh, from a Tablet

- 95 Worship thou God in such wise that if thy worship lead thee to the fire, no alteration in thine adoration would be produced, and so likewise if thy recompense should be paradise. Thus and thus alone should be the worship which befitteth the one True God. Shouldst thou worship Him because of fear, this would be unseemly in the sanctified Court of His presence, and could not be regarded as an act by thee dedicated to the Oneness of His Being. Or if thy gaze should be on paradise, and thou shouldst worship Him while cherishing such a hope, thou wouldst make God's creation a partner with Him, notwithstanding the fact that paradise is desired by men.

The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 96 It is seemly that the servant should, after each prayer, supplicate God to bestow mercy and forgiveness upon his parents. Thereupon God's call will be raised: "Thousand upon thousand of what thou hast asked for

thy parents shall be thy recompense!” Blessed is he who remembereth his parents when communing with God. There is, verily, no God but Him, the Mighty, the Well-Beloved.

The Báb, Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 97 O Lord! In this Most Great Dispensation Thou dost accept the intercession of children in behalf of their parents. This is one of the special infinite bestowals of this Dispensation. Therefore, O Thou kind Lord, accept the request of this Thy servant at the threshold of Thy singleness and submerge his father in the ocean of Thy grace, because this son hath arisen to render Thee service and is exerting effort at all times in the pathway of Thy love. Verily, Thou art the Giver, the Forgiver and the Kind!

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in Bahá’í Prayers

- 98 Thou hast asked about material means and prayer. Prayer is like the spirit and material means are like the human hand. The spirit operateth through the instrumentality of the hand. Although the one true God is the All-Provider, it is the earth which is the means to supply sustenance. “The heaven hath sustenance for you”ⁱ but when sustenance is decreed it becometh available, whatever the means may be. When man refuseth to use material means, he is like a thirsty one who seeketh to quench his thirst through means other than water or other liquids. The Almighty Lord is the provider of water, and its maker, and hath decreed that it be used to quench man’s thirst, but its use is dependent upon His Will. If it should not be in conformity with His Will, man is afflicted with a thirst which the oceans cannot quench.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá, from a Tablet

- 99 With regard to your question as to the value of intuition as a source of guidance for the individual: implicit faith in our intuitive powers is unwise, but through daily prayer and sustained effort one can discover, though not always and fully, God’s will intuitively. Under no circumstances, however, can a person be absolutely certain that he is recognizing God’s will, through the exercise of his intuition. It often happens that the latter results in completely misrepresenting the truth, and thus becomes a source of error rather than of guidance.

29 October 1938, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

i Qur’án 51:22

100 ...the Guardian feels that it would be better for either the mothers of Bahá'í children, or some Committee your Assembly might delegate the task to, to choose excerpts from the Sacred Words to be used by the child rather than just something made up. Of course prayer can be purely spontaneous, but many of the sentences and thoughts combined in Bahá'í writings of a devotional nature are easy to grasp, and the revealed Word is endowed with a power of its own.

8 August 1942, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

101 The need is very great, everywhere in the world, in and outside the Faith, for a true spiritual awareness to pervade and motivate people's lives. No amount of administrative procedure or adherence to rules can take the place of this soul-characteristic, this spirituality which is the essence of man.

25 April 1945, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

102 ...as the Cause embraces members of all races and religions we should be careful not to introduce into it the customs of our previous beliefs. Bahá'u'lláh has given us the obligatory prayers, also prayers before sleeping, for travellers, etc. We should not introduce a new set of prayers He has not specified, when He has given us already so many, for so many occasions.

27 September 1947, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

103 He suggests that, in addition to your usual teaching work there, you make a special point of praying ardently not only for success in general, but that God may send to you the souls that are ready. There are such souls in every city, but to find them and make the right contact is not easy.

18 March 1950, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

104 Regarding your question about prayer and the fact that some of our problems are not solved through prayer, we must always realize that life brings to us many situations, some of which are tests sent from God to train our characters, some of which are accidental because we live in the world of nature and are subject to the accidents of death, disease, etc., and some of which we bring on ourselves by folly, selfishness or some other weak human trait.

It is not correct to say that because a loved one dies, or is not cured of a disease, or a problem is not solved, that God did not answer our prayer, or that we did not pray to Him in a way to receive a favourable answer.

Maybe what we prayed for was not the Will of God or was the result of an accident and it produced an irrevocable conclusion like death or disease or bankruptcy etc.

As you say, sometimes the Bahá'ís believe that they are carrying out the Will of God and yet we see that the results are very bad; we must therefore assume that they were deluding themselves into believing that their decision and course of action was according to His Will. What it all amounts to is this, that we should supplicate God, but always with the reservation that we prefer His Will to ours. We should also live up to the Laws of His Teachings, for the more we do this, the more we are exemplary believers, the more sure we will be of receiving a greater degree of His guidance.

18 March 1951, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 105 The Guardian will pray for the quickening of your souls, the unfolding of the divine mysteries, and the blessings of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit that gives new life, and this can today be found in rich abundance, in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. His Words and Teachings are the Water of Life, and the sustenance of spiritual growth. Therefore you should study the Word carefully, meditate on its import and, having been touched by its spirit, associate your mind and heart with its atmosphere, then the way will become clear, and the doors be opened.

11 June 1956, on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

THE IMPORTANCE OF
PRAYER
MEDITATION
AND THE DEVOTIONAL ATTITUDE

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

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

Extracts

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths. Take heed that ye do not vacillate in your determination to embrace the truth of this Cause—a Cause through which the potentialities of the might of God have been revealed, and His sovereignty established. With faces beaming with joy, hasten ye unto Him. This is the changeless Faith of God, eternal in the past, eternal in the future. Let him that seeketh, attain it; and as to him that hath refused to seek it—verily, God is Self-Sufficient, above any need of His creatures.

The Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 182

- 2 Recite ye the verses of God every morn and eventide. Whoso faileth to recite them hath not been faithful to the Covenant of God and His Testament, and whoso turneth away from these holy verses in this Day is of those who throughout eternity have turned away from God. Fear ye God, O My servants, one and all. Pride not yourselves on much reading of the verses or on a multitude of pious acts by night and day; for were a man to read a single verse with joy and radiance it would be better for him than to read with lassitude all the Holy Books of God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting. Read ye the sacred verses in such measure that ye be not overcome by languor and despondency. Lay not upon your souls that which will weary them and weigh them down, but rather what will lighten and uplift them, so that they may soar on the wings of the Divine verses towards the Dawning-place of His manifest signs; this will draw you nearer to God, did ye but comprehend.

Kitáb-i-Aqdas, par. 149

- 3 The wine of renunciation must needs be quaffed, the lofty heights of detachment must needs be attained, and the meditation referred to in the

words “One hour’s reflection is preferable to seventy years of pious worship” must needs be observed, so that the secret of the wretched behaviour of the people might be discovered, those people who, despite the love and yearning for truth which they profess, curse the followers of Truth when once He hath been made manifest...

Kitáb-i-Íqán

- 4 In like manner, those words that have streamed forth from the source of power and descended from the heaven of glory are innumerable and beyond the ordinary comprehension of man. To them that are possessed of true understanding and insight the Súrah of Húd surely sufficeth. Ponder a while those holy words in your heart, and, with utter detachment, strive to grasp their meaning...

Kitáb-i-Íqán

- 5 O brother, we should open our eyes, meditate upon His Word, and seek the sheltering shadow of the Manifestations of God, that perchance we may be warned by the unmistakable counsels of the Book, and give heed to the admonitions recorded in the holy Tablets; that we may not cavil at the Revealer of the verses, that we may resign ourselves wholly to His Cause, and embrace wholeheartedly His law, that haply we may enter the court of His mercy, and dwell upon the shore of His grace. He, verily, is merciful, and forgiving towards His servants.

Kitáb-i-Íqán

- 6 O SON OF GLORY!

Be swift in the path of holiness, and enter the heaven of communion with Me. Cleanse thy heart with the burnish of the spirit, and hasten to the court of the Most High.

The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh, Persian no. 8

- 7 Say: Deliver your souls, O people, from the bondage of self, and purify them from all attachment to anything besides Me. Remembrance of Me cleanseth all things from defilement, could ye but perceive it. Say: Were all created things to be entirely divested of the veil of worldly vanity and desire, the Hand of God would in this Day clothe them, one and all, with the robe “He doeth whatsoever He willeth in the kingdom of creation,” that thereby the sign of His sovereignty might be manifested in all things.

Exalted then be He, the Sovereign Lord of all, the Almighty, the Supreme Protector, the All-Glorious, the Most Powerful.

Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men. Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul. Thus have the mysteries of the Revelation of God been decreed by virtue of the Will of Him Who is the Source of power and wisdom.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. 136

- 8 O Salmán! All that the sages and mystics have said or written have never exceeded, nor can they ever hope to exceed, the limitations to which man's finite mind hath been strictly subjected. To whatever heights the mind of the most exalted of men may soar, however great the depths which the detached and understanding heart can penetrate, such mind and heart can never transcend that which is the creature of their own conceptions and the product of their own thoughts. The meditations of the profoundest thinker, the devotions of the holiest of saints, the highest expressions of praise from either human pen or tongue, are but a reflection of that which hath been created within themselves, through the revelation of the Lord, their God. Whoever pondereth this truth in his heart will readily admit that there are certain limits which no human being can possibly transgress. Every attempt which, from the beginning that hath no beginning, hath been made to visualize and know God is limited by the exigencies of His own creation—a creation which He, through the operation of His own Will and for the purposes of none other but His own Self, hath called into being. Immeasurably exalted is He above the strivings of human mind to grasp His Essence, or of human tongue to describe His mystery...

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. 148

- 9 Do thou meditate on that which We have revealed unto thee, that thou mayest discover the purpose of God, thy Lord, and the Lord of all worlds. In these words the mysteries of Divine Wisdom have been treasured...

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. 79

- 10 Were any man to ponder in his heart that which the Pen of the Most High hath revealed and to taste of its sweetness, he would, of a certainty, find himself emptied and delivered from his own desires, and utterly subservient to the Will of the Almighty. Happy is the man that hath attained so high a station, and hath not deprived himself of so bountiful a grace.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. 163

- 11 Occupy thyself in remembrance of the Beauty of Him Who is the Unconstrained at early morn, and seek communion with Him at the hour of dawn. O 'Alí! Remembrance of Me is a healing medicine to the souls and a light to the hearts of men.

From a Tablet

From the Writings of the Báb

- 12 It is seemly that the servant should, after each prayer, supplicate God to bestow mercy and forgiveness upon his parents. Thereupon God's call will be raised: 'Thousand upon thousand of what thou hast asked for thy parents shall be thy recompense!' Blessed is he who remembereth his parents when communing with God. There is, verily, no God but Him, the Mighty, the Well-Beloved.

Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 13 The reason why privacy hath been enjoined in moments of devotion is this, that thou mayest give thy best attention to the remembrance of God, that thy heart may at all times be animated with His Spirit, and not be shut out as by a veil from thy Best Beloved. Let not thy tongue pay lip service in praise of God while thy heart be not attuned to the exalted Summit of Glory, and the Focal Point of communion. Thus if haply thou dost live in the Day of Resurrection, the mirror of thy heart will be set towards Him Who is the Day-Star of Truth; and no sooner will His light shine forth than the splendour thereof shall forthwith be reflected in thy heart. For He is the

Source of all goodness, and unto Him revert all things. But if He appeareth while thou hast turned unto thyself in meditation, this shall not profit thee, unless thou shalt mention His Name by words He hath revealed. For in the forthcoming Revelation it is He Who is the Remembrance of God, whereas the devotions which thou art offering at present have been prescribed by the Point of the Bayán, while He Who will shine resplendent in the Day of Resurrection is the Revelation of the inner reality enshrined in the Point of the Bayán—a Revelation more potent, immeasurably more potent, than the one which hath preceded it.

Selections from the Writings of the Báb

- 14 Worship thou God in such wise that if thy worship lead thee to the fire, no alteration in thine adoration would be produced, and so likewise if thy recompense should be paradise. Thus and thus alone should be the worship which befitteth the one True God. Shouldst thou worship Him because of fear, this would be unseemly in the sanctified Court of His presence, and could not be regarded as an act by thee dedicated to the Oneness of His Being. Or if thy gaze should be on paradise, and thou shouldst worship Him while cherishing such a hope, thou wouldst make God's creation a partner with Him, notwithstanding the fact that paradise is desired by men.

Fire and paradise both bow down and prostrate themselves before God. That which is worthy of His Essence is to worship Him for His sake, without fear of fire, or hope of paradise.

Although when true worship is offered, the worshipper is delivered from the fire, and entereth the paradise of God's good-pleasure, yet such should not be the motive of his act. However, God's favour and grace ever flow in accordance with the exigencies of His inscrutable wisdom.

The most acceptable prayer is the one offered with the utmost spirituality and radiance; its prolongation hath not been and is not beloved by God. The more detached and the purer the prayer, the more acceptable is it in the presence of God.

Selections from the Writings of the Báb

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

- 15 O thou who hast bowed thyself down in prayer before the Kingdom of God! Blessed art thou, for the beauty of the divine Countenance hath enraptured thy heart, and the light of inner wisdom hath filled it full, and within it shineth the brightness of the Kingdom. Know thou that God is with thee under all conditions, and that He guardeth thee from the changes and chances of this world and hath made thee a handmaid in His mighty vineyard...

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 91

- 16 Praise be to God, thy heart is engaged in the commemoration of God, thy soul is gladdened by the glad tidings of God and thou art absorbed in prayer. The state of prayer is the best of conditions, for man is then associating with God. Prayer verily bestoweth life, particularly when offered in private and at times, such as midnight, when freed from daily cares.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 172

- 17 Thou hast asked about places of worship and the underlying reason therefore. 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

- 18 Praised be God, ye two have demonstrated the truth of your words by your deeds, and have won the confirmations of the Lord God. Every day at first light, ye gather the Bahá'í children together and teach them the communes and prayers. This is a most praiseworthy act, and bringeth joy to the children's hearts: that they should, at every morn, turn their faces toward the Kingdom and make mention of the Lord and praise His Name, and in the sweetest of voices, chant and recite.

These children are even as young plants, and teaching them the prayers is as letting the rain pour down upon them, that they may wax tender and fresh, and the soft breezes of the love of God may blow over them, making them to tremble with joy.

Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, sec. 115

- 19 O handmaid of God! Prayers are granted through the universal Manifestations of God. Nevertheless, where the wish is to obtain material things, even where the heedless are concerned, if they supplicate, humbly imploring God's help—even their prayer hath an effect...

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

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

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

- 20 Beseech thou from God's infinite grace whatsoever thou desirest. But wert thou to heed my advice thou wouldst desire naught save entrance into the Abhá Kingdom, and seek naught save the bounties of the Beauty of the All-Glorious, may my life be sacrificed for His loved ones. This is my exhortation to thee.

From a Tablet

- 21 Thou hast asked about material means and prayer. Prayer is like the spirit and material means are like the human hand. The spirit operateth through the instrumentality of the hand. Although the one true God is the All-Provider, it is the earth which is the means to supply sustenance. "The heaven hath sustenance for you"ⁱ but when sustenance is decreed it becometh available, whatever the means may be. When man refuseth to use material means, he is like a thirsty one who seeketh to quench his thirst through means other than water or other liquids. The Almighty Lord is the provider of water, and its maker, and hath decreed that it be used to quench man's thirst, but its use is dependent upon His Will. If it should not be in conformity with His Will, man is afflicted with a thirst which the oceans cannot quench.

From a Tablet

- 22 The obligatory prayers are binding inasmuch as they are conducive to humility and submissiveness, to setting one's face towards God and expressing

i Qur'án 51:22

devotion to Him. Through such prayer man holdeth communion with God, seeketh to draw near unto Him, converseth with the true Beloved of his heart, and attaineth spiritual stations.

From a Tablet

- 23 Remembrance of God is like the rain and dew which bestow freshness and grace on flowers and hyacinths, revive them and cause them to acquire fragrance, redolence and renewed charm. "And thou hast seen the earth dried up and barren: but when We send down the rain upon it, it stirreth and swelleth, and groweth every kind of luxuriant herb."ⁱ Strive thou, then, to praise and glorify God by night and by day, that thou mayest attain infinite freshness and beauty.

From a Tablet

- 24 It behoveth the servant to pray to and seek assistance from God, and to supplicate and implore His aid. Such becometh the rank of servitude, and the Lord will decree whatsoever He desireth, in accordance with His consummate wisdom.

From a Tablet

- 25 O Lord! In this Most Great Dispensation Thou dost accept the intercession of children in behalf of their parents. This is one of the special infinite bestowals of this Dispensation. Therefore, O Thou kind Lord, accept the request of this Thy servant at the threshold of Thy singleness and submerge his father in the ocean of Thy grace, because this son hath arisen to render Thee service and is exerting effort at all times in the pathway of Thy love. Verily, Thou art the Giver, the Forgiver and the Kind!

From a Tablet

- 26 Know thou that in every word and movement of the obligatory prayer there are allusions, mysteries and a wisdom that man is unable to comprehend, and letters and scrolls cannot contain.

From a Tablet

i Qur'án 107:5

- 27 O maid-servant of God! Chant the Words of God and, pondering over their meaning, transform them into actions! I ask God to cause thee to attain a high station in the Kingdom of Life forever and ever.

Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas, vol. 1, p. 85

- 28 Therefore, know thou that the True One possesseth invisible worlds which human meditation is unable to comprehend and the intellect of man hath no power to imagine. When thou wilt purify and clarify thy spiritual nostrils from every worldly moisture, then thou wilt inhale the holy fragrances diffusing from the merciful gardens of these worlds.

Bahá'í World Faith, p. 393

- 29 When man allows the spirit, through his soul, to enlighten his understanding, then does he contain all Creation...

But on the other hand, when man does not open his mind and heart to the blessing of the spirit, but turns his soul towards the material side, towards the bodily part of his nature, then is he fallen from his high place and he becomes inferior to the inhabitants of the lower animal kingdom...

Paris Talks

- 30 Bahá'u'lláh says there is a sign (from God) in every phenomenon: the sign of the intellect is contemplation and the sign of contemplation is silence, because it is impossible for a man to do two things at one time—he cannot both speak and meditate.

It is an axiomatic fact that while you meditate you are speaking with your own spirit. In that state of mind you put certain questions to your spirit and the spirit answers: the light breaks forth and the reality is revealed.

You cannot apply the name 'man' to any being void of this faculty of meditation; without it he would be a mere animal, lower than the beasts.

Through the faculty of meditation man attains to eternal life; through it he receives the breath of the Holy Spirit—the bestowal of the Spirit is given in reflection and meditation.

The spirit of man is itself informed and strengthened during meditation; through it affairs of which man knew nothing are unfolded before his view. Through it he receives Divine inspiration, through it he receives heavenly food.

Meditation is the key for opening the doors of mysteries. In that state man abstracts himself: in that state man withdraws himself from all outside objects; in that subjective mood he is immersed in the ocean of spiritual life and can unfold the secrets of things-in-themselves. To illustrate this, think of man as endowed with two kinds of sight; when the power of insight is being used the outward power of vision does not see.

This faculty of meditation frees man from the animal nature, discerns the reality of things, puts man in touch with God.

This faculty brings forth from the invisible plane the sciences and arts. Through the meditative faculty inventions are made possible, colossal undertakings are carried out; through it governments can run smoothly. Through this faculty man enters into the very Kingdom of God.

Nevertheless some thoughts are useless to man; they are like waves moving in the sea without result. But if the faculty of meditation is bathed in the inner light and characterized with divine attributes, the results will be confirmed.

The meditative faculty is akin to the mirror; if you put it before earthly objects it will reflect them. Therefore if the spirit of man is contemplating earthly subjects he will be informed of these.

But if you turn the mirror of your spirits heavenwards, the heavenly constellations and the rays of the Sun of Reality will be reflected in your hearts, and the virtues of the Kingdom will be obtained.

Therefore let us keep this faculty rightly directed—turning it to the heavenly Sun and not to earthly objects—so that we may discover the secrets of the Kingdom, and comprehend the allegories of the Bible and the mysteries of the spirit.

May we indeed become mirrors reflecting the heavenly realities, and may we become so pure as to reflect the stars of heaven.

Paris Talks

- 31 Know thou, verily, it is becoming in a weak one to supplicate to the Strong One, and it behooveth a seeker of bounty to beseech the Glorious Bountiful One. When one supplicates to his Lord, turns to Him and seeks bounty from His Ocean, this supplication brings light to his heart, illumination to his sight, life to his soul and exaltation to his being.

During thy supplications to God and thy reciting, “Thy Name is my healing,” consider how thine heart is cheered, thy soul delighted by the spirit of the love of God, and thy mind attracted to the Kingdom of God!

By these attractions one's ability and capacity increase. When the vessel is enlarged the water increases, and when the thirst grows the bounty of the cloud becomes agreeable to the taste of man. This is the mystery of supplication and the wisdom of stating one's wants.

*Report of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words as quoted in J. E. Esslemont,
Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*

- 32 We must strive to attain to that condition by being separated from all things and from the people of the world and by turning to God alone. It will take some effort on the part of man to attain to that condition, but he must work for it, strive for it. We can attain to it by thinking and caring less for material things and more for the spiritual. The further we go from the one, the nearer we are to the other. The choice is ours.

Our spiritual perception, our inward sight must be opened, so that we can see the signs and traces of God's spirit in everything. Everything can reflect to us the light of the Spirit.

*Report of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words as quoted in J. E. Esslemont,
Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*

- 33 If one friend feels love for another, he will wish to say so. Though he knows that the friend is aware that he loves him, he will still wish to say so ... God knows the wishes of all hearts. But the impulse to prayer is a natural one, springing from man's love to God.

Prayer need not be in words, but rather in thought and attitude. But if this love and this desire are lacking, it is useless to try to force them. Words without love mean nothing. If a person talks to you as an unpleasant duty, with no love or pleasure in his meeting with you, do you wish to converse with him?

*Report of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words as quoted in J. E. Esslemont,
Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*

- 34 In the highest prayer, men pray only for the love of God, not because they fear Him or hell, or hope for bounty or heaven ... When a man falls in love with a human being, it is impossible for him to keep from mentioning the name of his beloved. How much more difficult is it to keep from mentioning the Name of God when one has come to love Him ... The spiritual man finds no delight in anything save in commemoration of God.

*Report of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's words as quoted in J.E. Esslemont,
Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*

From the writings of Shoghi Effendi

- 35 The simplicity characterizing the offering of Bahá'í prayers, whether obligatory or otherwise, should be maintained. Rigidity and rituals should be strictly avoided.

30 October 1936, appended to a letter

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 36 The Guardian wishes you, therefore, to pray, and to supplicate the Almighty that He may give you a fuller measure of His grace; that through it your spiritual energies may be quickened and that you may become more imbued with that spirit which must needs animate, sustain and strengthen every sincere and true follower of the Faith.

13 March 1934

- 37 Concerning the directions given by Bahá'u'lláh for the recital of certain prayers, Shoghi Effendi wishes me to inform you that these regulations—which by the way are very few and simple—are of a great spiritual help to the individual believer, in that they help him to fully concentrate when praying and meditating. Their significance is thus purely spiritual.

5 November 1934

- 38 In prayer the believers can turn their consciousness toward the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, provided that in doing so they have a clear and correct understanding of His station as a Manifestation of God.

15 November 1935

- 39 With regard to your spiritual experiences, the Guardian has been very interested to share them. He would, however, urge you to always use and read, during your hours of meditation and prayer, the words revealed by Bahá'u'lláh and the Master.

6 December 1935

- 40 The problem with which you are faced is one which concerns and seriously puzzles many of our present-day youth. How to attain spirituality is, indeed,

a question to which every young man and woman must sooner or later try to find a satisfactory answer. It is precisely because no such satisfactory reply has been given or found, that modern youth finds itself bewildered, and is being consequently carried away by the materialistic forces that are so powerfully undermining the foundation of man's moral and spiritual life.

Indeed, the chief reason for the evils now rampant in society is a lack of spirituality. The materialistic civilization of our age has so much absorbed the energy and interest of mankind, that people in general no longer feel the necessity of raising themselves above the forces and conditions of their daily material existence. There is not sufficient demand for things that we should call spiritual to differentiate them from the needs and requirements of our physical existence. The universal crisis affecting mankind is, therefore, essentially spiritual in its causes. The spirit of the age, taken on the whole, is irreligious. Man's outlook upon life is too crude and materialistic to enable him to elevate himself into the higher realms of the spirit.

It is this condition, so sadly morbid, into which society has fallen, that religion seeks to improve and transform. For the core of religious faith is that mystic feeling that unites man with God. This state of spiritual communion can be brought about and maintained by means of meditation and prayer. And this is the reason why Bahá'u'lláh has so much stressed the importance of worship. It is not sufficient for a believer to merely accept and observe the teachings. He should, in addition, cultivate the sense of spirituality, which he can acquire chiefly by the means of prayer. The Bahá'í Faith, like all other Divine religions, is thus fundamentally mystic in character. Its chief goal is the development of the individual and society, through the acquisition of spiritual virtues and powers. It is the soul of man that has first to be fed. And this spiritual nourishment prayer can best provide. Laws and institutions, as viewed by Bahá'u'lláh, can become really effective only when our inner spiritual life has been perfected and transformed. Otherwise religion will degenerate into a mere organization, and become a dead thing.

The believers, particularly the young ones, should therefore fully realize the necessity of praying. For prayer is absolutely indispensable to their inner spiritual development, and this, already stated, is the very foundation and purpose of the Religion of God.

8 December 1935, Bahá'í News 102 (August 1936), p. 3,

- 41 ...the obligatory prayers are by their very nature of greater effectiveness and are endowed with a greater power than the non-obligatory ones, and as such are essential.

4 January 1936

- 42 While praying it would be better to turn one's thoughts to the Manifestation as He continues, in the other world, to be our means of contact with the Almighty. We can, however, pray directly to God Himself.

27 April 1937

- 43 You have asked whether our prayers go beyond Bahá'u'lláh: it all depends whether we pray to Him directly or through Him to God. We may do both, and also can pray directly to God, but our prayers would certainly be more effective and illuminating if they are addressed to Him through His Manifestation, Bahá'u'lláh.

14 October 1937

- 44 The Guardian wishes me to assure you that he sees no objection to the friends coming together for meditation and prayer. Such a communion helps in fostering fellowship among the believers, and as such is highly commendable.

20 November 1937

- 45 ...was a matter of deepest ... to the Guardian to hear of the news of the formation in Honolulu of a Morning Class of prayer and meditation conducted by dear Mrs ... in her home, inasmuch as he feels the absolute necessity for the friends to make now a special effort to cultivate the devotional side of their Bahá'í life in preparation for a more intensified and successful service, particularly in the teaching field.

1 May 1938

- 46 Although you seem to feel that your prayers have not so far been answered, and do no longer have any hope that your material conditions will ameliorate, the Guardian wishes you nevertheless not to allow such disappointments to undermine your faith in the power of prayer, but rather to continue entreating the Almighty to enable you to discover the great wisdom which may be hidden behind all these sufferings. For are not our sufferings often blessings in disguise, through which God wishes to test

the sincerity and depth of our faith, and thereby make us firmer in His Cause? ...

The true worshipper, while praying, should endeavour not so much to ask God to fulfil his wishes and desires, but rather to adjust these and make them conform to the Divine Will. Only through such an attitude can one derive that feeling of inner peace and contentment which the power of prayer alone can confer.

26 October 1938

- 47 You should rest assured that your strict adherence to the laws and observances enjoined by Bahá'u'lláh is the one power that can effectively guide and enable you to overcome the tests and trials of your life, and help you to continually grow and develop spiritually.

The Guardian particularly appreciates the fact that you have been faithfully observing Bahá'u'lláh's injunction regarding the recital of the daily obligatory prayers, and have thereby set such a high example before your Bahá'í fellow-youth. These daily prayers have been endowed with a special potency which only those who regularly recite them can adequately appreciate. The friends should therefore endeavour to make daily use of these prayers, whatever the peculiar circumstances and conditions of their life.

23 February 1939

- 48 He wishes again to assure you he will pray for your spiritual advancement in the Holy Shrines. The power of God can entirely transmute our characters and make of us beings entirely unlike our previous selves. Through prayer and supplication, obedience to the divine laws Bahá'u'lláh has revealed, and ever-increasing service to His Faith, we can change ourselves.

22 November 1941

- 49 There are no set forms of meditation prescribed in the teachings, no plan, as such, for inner development. The friends are urged—nay enjoined—to pray, and they also should meditate, but the manner of doing the latter is left entirely to the individual...

The inspiration received through meditation is of a nature that one cannot measure or determine. God can inspire into our minds things that we had no previous knowledge of, if He desires to do so.

25 January 1943

- 50 Prayer and meditation are very important factors in deepening the spiritual life of the individual, but with them must go also action and example, as these are the tangible results of the former. Both are essential.

15 May 1944

- 51 The believers, as we all know, should endeavour to set such an example in their personal lives and conduct that others will feel impelled to embrace a Faith which reforms human character. However, unfortunately, not everyone achieves easily and rapidly the victory over self. What every believer, new or old, should realize is that the Cause *has* the spiritual power to re-create us if we make the effort to let that power influence us, and the greatest help in this respect is prayer. We must supplicate Bahá'u'lláh to assist us to overcome the failings in our own characters, and also exert our own will-power in mastering ourselves.

27 January 1945

- 52 Through meditation the doors of deeper knowledge and inspiration may be opened. Naturally, if one meditates as a Bahá'í he is connected with the Source; if a man believing in God meditates he is tuning in to the power and mercy of God; but we cannot say that any inspiration which a person, not knowing Bahá'u'lláh, or not believing in God, receives is merely from his own ego. Meditation is very important, and the Guardian sees no reason why the friends should not be taught to meditate, but they should guard against superstitious or foolish ideas creeping into it.

19 November 1945

- 53 He feels more emphasis should be laid on the importance and power of prayer, including the use of The Greatest Name, but not over-emphasizing it. It is the spirit behind the words which is really important.

16 March 1946

- 54 In regard to your question: we must not be rigid about praying; there is not a set of rules governing it; the main thing is we must start out with the right concept of God, the Manifestation, the Master, the Guardian—we can turn, in thought, to any one of them when we pray. For instance you can ask Bahá'u'lláh for something, or, thinking of Him, ask God for it. The same is true of the Master or the Guardian. You can turn in thought to either of them and then ask their intercession, or pray direct to God. As long as you

don't confuse their stations, and make them all equal, it does not matter much how you orient your thoughts.

24 July 1946

- 55 He is delighted to hear you are now fully recovered and again active in your important work for the Cause. However, you should not neglect your health, but consider it the means which enables you to serve. It—the body—is like a horse which carries the personality and spirit, and as such should be well cared for so it can do its work! You should certainly safeguard your nerves, and force yourself to take time, and not only for prayer and meditation, but for real rest and relaxation. We don't have to pray and meditate for hours in order to be spiritual.

23 November 1947

- 56 I might add that he does not believe any radiations of thought or healing, from any group, are going to bring peace. Prayer, no doubt, will help the world, but what it needs is to accept Bahá'u'lláh's system so as to build up the World Order on a new foundation, a divine foundation!

8 June 1948

- 57 If you find you need to visualize someone when you pray, think of the Master. Through Him you can address Bahá'u'lláh. Gradually try to think of the qualities of the Manifestation, and in that way a mental form will fade out, for after all the body is not the thing, His Spirit is there and is the essential, everlasting element.

31 January 1949

- 58 He would advise you to only use the short midday Obligatory Prayer. This has no genuflections and only requires that when saying it the believer turn his face towards 'Akká where Bahá'u'lláh is buried. This is a physical symbol of an inner reality, just as the plant stretches out to the sunlight—from which it receives life and growth—so we turn our hearts to the Manifestation of God, Bahá'u'lláh, when we pray; and we turn our faces, during this short prayer, to where His dust lies on this earth as a symbol of the inner act...

Bahá'u'lláh has reduced all ritual and form to an absolute minimum in His Faith. The few forms that there are—like those associated with the two longer obligatory daily prayers—are only symbols of the inner attitude. There is a wisdom in them, and a great blessing, but we cannot

force ourselves to understand or feel these things, that is why He gave us also the very short and simple prayer, for those who did not feel the desire to perform the acts associated with the other two.

24 June 1949

- 59 He suggests that you daily pray to Bahá'u'lláh to let you meet a soul receptive to His Message. The power of prayer is very great, and attracts the Divine confirmations. He, also, will pray for your teaching work there.

30 September 1951

- 60 He thinks it would be wiser for the Bahá'ís to use the Meditations given by Bahá'u'lláh, and not any set form of meditation recommended by someone else; but the believers must be left free in these details and allowed to have personal latitude in finding their own level of communion with God.

27 January 1952

ISSUES RELATED TO THE
STUDY
OF THE
BAHÁ'Í
FAITH

A compilation of extracts from communications by and on behalf
of the Universal House of Justice

Prepared by the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada
Compiled April 1999

7 April 1999

Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

In May of 1998, *Bahá'í Canada* reproduced a collection of letters which the Universal House of Justice had written to various individuals on the subject of the academic study of the Bahá'í Faith. Copies of this compilation were subsequently mailed by the Canadian National Spiritual Assembly to its sister Assemblies. The reprint has now been made generally available in booklet form by the United States Bahá'í Publishing Trust. The House of Justice has asked us to forward you a copy of the latter publication with the following comments.

As a number of the friends are aware, a campaign of internal opposition to the Teachings is currently being carried on through the use of the Internet, a communications system that now reaches virtually every part of the world. Differing from attacks familiar in the past, it seeks to recast the entire Faith into a sociopolitical ideology alien to Bahá'u'lláh's intent. In the place of the institutional authority established by His Covenant, it promotes a kind of interpretive authority which those behind it attribute to the views of persons technically trained in Middle East studies.

Early in 1996, the deliberate nature of the plan was revealed in an accidental posting to an Internet list which Bahá'í subscribers had believed was dedicated to scholarly exploration of the Cause. Some of the people responsible resigned from the Faith when Counselors pointed out to them the direction their activities were taking. A small number of others continue to promote the campaign within the Bahá'í community.

In the past, in situations of a somewhat similar nature, the patience and compassion shown by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian helped various believers who had been misled by ill-intentioned persons to eventually free themselves from such entanglements. In this same spirit of forbearance the Universal House of Justice has intervened in the current situation only to the extent that has been unavoidable, trusting to the good sense and the goodwill of the believers involved to awaken to the spiritual dangers to which they are exposing themselves. Nevertheless, certain Counselors and National Spiritual Assemblies are monitoring the problem closely, and the friends can be confident that whatever further steps are needed to protect the integrity of the Cause will be taken.

As passages in the enclosed reprint make clear, this campaign of internal opposition—while purporting to accept the legitimacy of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice as twin successors of Bahá'u'lláh and the Center of His Covenant—attempts to cast doubt on the nature and scope of the authority conferred on them in the Writings. When other Bahá'ís have pointed out that such arguments contradict explicit statements of the Master, persons behind the scheme have responded by calling into question the soundness of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's own judgment and perspective. Gradually, these arguments have exposed the view of those involved that Bahá'u'lláh Himself was not the voice of God to our age but merely a particularly enlightened moral philosopher, one whose primary concern was to reform existing society.

By itself, such opposition would likely stand little chance of influencing reasonably informed Bahá'ís. As one of the letters in the enclosed reprint (20 July 1997) points out, the scheme relies for effect, therefore, on exploiting the confusion created in modern thought by the reigning doctrines of materialism. Although the reality of God's continuous relationship with His creation and His intervention in human life and history are the very essence of the teachings of the Founders of the revealed religions, dogmatic materialism today insists that even the nature of religion itself can be adequately understood only through the use of an academic methodology designed to ignore the truths that make religion what it is.

In general, the strategy being pursued has been to avoid direct attacks on the Faith's Central Figures. The effort, rather, has been to sow the seeds

of doubt among believers about the Faith's teachings and institutions by appealing to unexamined prejudices that Bahá'ís may have unconsciously absorbed from non-Bahá'í society. In defiance of the clear interpretation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian, for example, Bahá'u'lláh's limiting of membership on the Universal House of Justice to men is misrepresented as merely a "temporary measure" subject to eventual revision if sufficient pressure is brought to bear. Similarly, Shoghi Effendi's explanation of Bahá'u'lláh's vision of the future Bahá'í World Commonwealth that will unite spiritual and civil authority is dismissed in favor of the assertion that the modern political concept of "separation of church and state" is somehow one that Bahá'u'lláh intended as a basic principle of the World Order He has founded. Particularly subtle is an attempt to suggest that the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár should evolve into a seat of quasi-doctrinal authority, parallel to and essentially independent of the Local House of Justice, which would permit various interests to insinuate themselves into the direction of the life processes of the Cause.

Typically, when misrepresentations of the kind described are challenged, the reaction of those behind the campaign has been to claim that their civil rights are being threatened, an assertion that is of course meaningless in the light of the purely voluntary nature of Bahá'í membership. Much emphasis is placed by them also on academic freedom, their view of which proves, on examination, to be merely freedom on their part to pervert scholarly discourse to the promotion of their own ideological agenda, while seeking to exclude from discussion features of the Bahá'í Faith that are central to the Writings of its Founders.

The effect of continued exposure to such insincerity about matters vital to humanity's well-being is spiritually corrosive. When we encounter minds that are closed and hearts that are darkened by evident malice, Bahá'u'lláh urges that we leave such persons to God and turn our attention to the opportunities which multiply daily for the promotion of the truths which He teaches. In words written at the direction of the Guardian, regarding a situation similar to, though much less serious than, the present one, "...the friends should be advised to just leave these people alone, for their influence can be nothing but negative and destructive..."

The enclosed material is being sent to your Assembly less out of concern over the immediate situation, which is being systematically addressed, than because of longer-term considerations to which it lends perspective. What we are currently seeing, in a relatively primitive form, is the emergence of a new kind of internal opposition to Bahá'u'lláh's Mission. While it will no doubt assume other features as time passes, it is a kind of opposition that takes aim directly at Bahá'u'lláh's assertion of the spiritual nature of reality and of humanity's dependence on the interventions of Divine Revelation.

Developments of the kind described will come as no surprise to friends who are familiar with the Guardian's description of the successive waves of "crisis" and "victory" that have marked the history of the Faith ever since its inception. It is precisely this cyclical process, Shoghi Effendi says, that has propelled the steady unfoldment of Bahá'u'lláh's intent, testing our commitment to His Teachings, purifying His community, and releasing a greater measure of the capacities latent in His Revelation. That resistance to Bahá'u'lláh should now be emerging in yet a new guise is itself a tribute to the gathering strength of the Cause, offering the friends everywhere new opportunities for the deepening of their faith and the energizing of their work.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith

Introduction

The letters in this booklet were written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice over the past few years to believers who, conscious of the high importance Bahá'u'lláh attaches to the pursuit of knowledge and the use of reason, had raised various questions regarding the scholarly study of the Faith. Most of the inquirers whose letters elicited the responses published here were academics, concerned to understand more deeply the relationship between the truths of Revelation and the demands of science for rigorous and detached examination of documentary and other evidence.

Among the several subjects discussed is the need for a scholarly paradigm and methodologies capable of coming to grips with spiritual, moral, and cultural phenomena whose influences on the historical process are becoming increasingly appreciated in scientific discourse. Attention is also given to the implications for Bahá'í studies of the development and spread of the new information technologies anticipated by Shoghi Effendi more than sixty years ago. Particularly instructive are passages in one of the letters that discuss the formation of personal conscience and the moral responsibility of a scholar to serve the cause of truth.

Bahá'í scholars are reminded, too, of the need to be conscious of the culturally determined basis of certain features of the present-day academic milieu, and are urged to avoid entangling scholarship with unacknowledged ideological agendas that undermine its credibility. In the absence of such restraints, it is pointed out, students of Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings may be tempted to approach His Writings in isolation from the System which He designed for their implementation and which He made integral to His Message.

10 December 1992

The House of Justice understands that there are certain Bahá'í scholars, such as yourself, who experience difficulties with the policy of review, but it finds the cause of the difficulties to lie in areas that are different from those you identify. It would point to the following as being the principal roots of the problem:

- 1 Too narrow and limited understanding of the Faith and its Teachings on the part of certain Bahá'í scholars. There has been a tendency to specialize in certain narrow areas and neglect the wider understanding of the Teachings which would not only enrich their souls but illuminate their perception of the specific areas of their study.
- 2 An attitude to the Faith and the Administrative Order which is strongly coloured by an assumption that the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh is similar to other religions and organizations, is afflicted by the attitudes which have too often characterized them, and is motivated by unethical considerations. The institutions of the Cause are regarded with the same suspicion as the traditional "establishment". This produces a failure to understand, let alone accept, the points which the Universal House of Justice itself is striving to convey.
- 3 An assumption that only a person equipped with conventional academic training is capable of an unbiased attitude and of truly understanding the points at issue, leading to disdain of questions raised by "unqualified" individuals.
- 4 Failure to use the appeal processes of the Cause by scholars who are faced with what they regard as improper and unjustified questioning of their writings by Bahá'í reviewing committees. It is natural that, in the present stage of the development of the Cause, the members of reviewing committees will, from time to time, err in their views or be unreasonably obtuse. Such errors and attitudes should be overcome through discussion between the author and the members of the committee. If this does not lead to a satisfactory outcome, the author can appeal to

the National Spiritual Assembly itself and, if even that does not solve the matter, to the Universal House of Justice.

- 5 The above attitudes, in turn, lead to an inability on the part of those scholars to describe the review process to their non-Bahá'í colleagues in terms that would not be unacceptable in an academic environment.

Your suggestion that an “imprimatur” system such as used by the Roman Catholic Church would be preferable to the present system of review was considered by the House of Justice, and it has asked us to explain to you the problems that this would present.

First of all, it would convey to the reader the false impression that the attitude of the Faith was similar to that of the Roman Catholic Church, summoning up visions of an “index” of prohibited reading, and all the other associations which you can undoubtedly imagine for yourself.

Secondly, it would give force to the erroneous concept that there are two kinds of Bahá'í literature: books which present the “official” view and those which are the free personal opinions of individual Bahá'ís, thus obscuring the essential Bahá'í differentiation between the Writings of the Báb and Bahá'u'lláh, those of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the letters of the Guardian and the decisions of the Universal House of Justice, which are authoritative, on the one hand, and all other writings by Bahá'ís on the other, which have no authority at all apart from their own internal reasonableness. That a book has passed review in no way guarantees its correctness; it is merely an assurance by the National Spiritual Assembly concerned that, in its view, the book does not seriously distort the Faith or its Teachings.

Thirdly, it would obscure the important fact that the process of review in the Bahá'í Faith is temporary, being limited to this stage of its development when books published by Bahá'ís could seriously mislead the public if they too gravely distort its message.

Your proposal that a National Spiritual Assembly which detected major inaccuracies in an article published by a Bahá'í in an academic journal could have the Research Department “write a letter to the concerned journal pointing out and listing these inaccuracies, giving the requisite

textual evidence in footnotes”, that journal editors would be “quite willing to entertain such correspondence” and that it would be found that Bahá'í scholars would be “grateful for chance to discuss such issues freely” introduces a new kind of discrimination and interference. Bahá'í institutions very seldom write to journals to correct their statements about the Faith; not only do they not wish to promote public disputes with those who write about the Cause, but the correction of such errors is seldom worth the time and effort necessary. In the coming years there will be numerous non-Bahá'ís, ranging from those who are bitter enemies of the Cause to those who are its warm advocates, publishing articles about it. There is no way in which Bahá'í institutions could write corrections of the multitudinous errors that will be published; how, then, would they be justified in writing to correct only the errors perpetrated by Bahá'í authors?

The House of Justice suggests that you consider the following steps through which the scholars of the Faith can overcome the problems which some of them perceive as presented by review of their publications.

- Let them accept unreservedly that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was right in instituting the temporary system of review, and that the decisions of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice to not yet eliminate the system are in accordance with the Divine Will.
- Let them recognize the fundamental difference between errors propagated by Bahá'ís from those issuing from non-Bahá'í sources. The review system is not an attempt to prevent errors or attacks on the Faith from being published; it is an attempt to prevent Bahá'ís from promulgating them in their published writings.
- Let them strive to understand the wisdom of this policy and its true nature, and to present it in its proper light to their fellow-academics...
- Let Bahá'í scholars look upon their fellow Bahá'ís with trust and affection, not with disdain as to their qualifications and suspicion as to their motives. Let them regard them as devoted Bahá'ís striving to perform a service which the policies of the Faith require of them. And let them not hesitate to discuss openly with such reviewers the points which they raise. If it appears that a National Spiritual Assembly does

not permit such open discussion, let them appeal to the Universal House of Justice for clarification of the situation. It is well understood by the Universal House of Justice that in some cases the process of review works inefficiently and with problems. These deficiencies could be overcome if the scholars themselves would collaborate with the process and openly raise questions about its functioning, rather than fostering an atmosphere of antagonism and mutual mistrust.

- If the question of review is raised by non-Bahá'í academics, let the Bahá'í academics say that in this early stage in the development of the Faith this is a species of peer review which they welcome, since it is primarily among their fellow-Bahá'ís that they would find at this time those who would have sufficiently wide and deep understanding of the Faith and its Teachings to raise issues of importance which they would want to consider before publication. Of course, to be able to say this with sincerity, the scholars must have been able to accept the other steps mentioned above.

You cite the case of Bahá'ís in other fields of expertise, such as Bahá'í physicians who, you say, “may pursue their professions as Bahá'ís with no prospect of interference by Bahá'í institutions”. This is hardly the case. All Bahá'ís are subject to Bahá'í law and Bahá'í standards. It would clearly be unacceptable for a Bahá'í doctor to advocate abortion as a method of birth control and set up a clinic for that purpose, or for a Bahá'í psychiatrist to publicly advocate sexual intercourse before marriage.

Bahá'u'lláh was addressing all of us when He wrote: “Were any man to taste the sweetness of the words which the lips of the All-Merciful have willed to utter, he would, though the treasures of the earth be in his possession, renounce them one and all, that he might vindicate the truth of even one of His commandments, shining above the Dayspring of His bountiful care and loving-kindness” and “Whoso hath inhaled the sweet fragrance of the All-Merciful, and recognized the Source of this utterance, will welcome with his own eyes the shafts of the enemy, that he may establish the truth of the laws of God amongst men.”

Finally, the House of Justice wishes us to say that it fully agrees with your statement that it is important for the Faith to attract intellectuals and,

indeed, all people of capacity in any field. Bahá'ís who themselves are intellectuals can contribute signally to this process, but not by ignoring the basic standards of faith and conduct that apply to all believers or by depicting the Bahá'í administration as a bureaucratic hindrance to freedom of thought and expression.

5 October 1993

With regard to the current policy of advance review, all Bahá'ís, whatever their professions, are challenged to reflect on the implications of our common struggle to achieve Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for the human race, including the use of our intellectual resources to gain deeper understanding of that Revelation and to apply its principles. In pursuing this course that has been set for it so explicitly and emphatically by its Founder, the Bahá'í community acts through the institutions that He has provided.

Scholarly endeavors are not an activity apart from this organic process, answering to standards and operating on authority outside it. The House of Justice believes that part of the difficulty that some Bahá'í academics are having with the question of prepublication review may arise from the fact that, in their scholarly work, such believers do not see themselves as full participants in this process, free to act with the spiritual autonomy they exercise in other aspects of their lives. What the Bahá'í community is engaged in bringing into visible expression is a new creation. In this, the Cause has urgent need of the unfettered and wholehearted assistance of its scholars. The House of Justice has sought to point out that, as in every other field of Bahá'í endeavor, there are certain conditions under which this assistance may be rendered, conditions implicit in the nature of the process and made explicit in the Divine Text.

These requirements are of course not reflected in the standards currently prevailing in Western academic institutions. Rather, both Bahá'í institutions and Bahá'í scholars are called on to exert a very great effort, of heart, mind, and will, in order to forge the new models of scholarly activity and guidance that Bahá'u'lláh's work requires. The House of Justice believes that you will serve the interests of the Faith best if you will direct your thoughts to this end. Merely to reiterate the conventions and requirements

of systems which, whether academic, political, social, or economic, have been shown not to have adequate answers to the anarchy now engulfing human society, or any willingness to come to grips with the implications of their impotence, is of little practical help. We do a grave disservice to both ourselves and the Faith when we simply submit to the authority of academic practices that appeal for their claim of objectivity to theories which themselves are being increasingly called into question by major thinkers. While non-Bahá'í academics may slip carelessly into regarding the institutions founded by Bahá'u'lláh as simply another form of "religious establishment" and avoid serious examination of the truths of His Revelation in this fashion, it is clearly impossible for anyone who is a Bahá'í to follow them down this empty track.

The House of Justice is aware that the continuation of the policy of review can cast a shadow on the good name of the Faith in the eyes of certain non-Bahá'í academics. In an environment where publication is vital to advancement and recognition, any requirement that delays or inhibits this activity must be a matter of grave consideration, not only by the individual scholar but by the governing institutions of the community that eagerly watches his rise and counts anxiously on his effective assistance. But is that not precisely the kind of spiritual dilemma being faced by many Bahá'ís in their efforts to serve Bahá'u'lláh's purpose? On many occasions, in developing lands particularly, believers of capacity have had to forgo opportunities for promising political careers, careers whose value they could easily have justified on the basis of public service, because such a choice was not in conformity with Bahá'u'lláh's teaching and purpose. There are, likewise, many examples of believers who have had to set aside both a professional life and legitimate family concerns in order to pioneer in inhospitable regions of the globe.

It is apparent that the crisis of contemporary civilization is impelling thinkers in many lands to explore new scholarly methodologies capable of coming to grips with spiritual, moral, cultural, and social phenomena not hitherto encountered. No segment of humanity is so well equipped as the Bahá'í community to take a leading role in this effort. As a body of people who are being steadily freed by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh from the "gravitational pull", so to speak, of the cultures in which their habits of mind have been formed, the community already has a unique approach to the exploration of reality. This approach needs to be sharply honed as an

ever more effective instrument of social transformation. The devising of the new scholarly paradigm called for by this circumstance offers a priceless opportunity of service and achievement to those Bahá'ís who enjoy the dual gifts of spiritual faith and intellectual faculties trained in the best that contemporary society has to offer.

The Universal House of Justice can only invite Bahá'í scholars, as it invites all other believers, to respond to this historic challenge, in whatever way and to whatever extent each person considers possible. It is confident that, in Bahá'í scholarship as in all other areas of Bahá'í service, the essential resources will gradually be forthcoming and the required models of research and study will be refined through the process of consultation. It is this achievement, the House of Justice believes, that in the long run will best protect the reputation of the Cause from whatever immediate misunderstandings and criticisms it may encounter. Indeed it is greatly encouraged by the response that Bahá'í scholars in many fields are already making.

5 October 1993

You may be confident that the House of Justice is sympathetic to the need of Bahá'í scholars for ever-increasing access to important Bahá'í archival sources such as the original texts of historical documents like *The Dawn-Breakers*. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how these servants of the Cause, whose contributions to its advancement and the protection of its interests are vital, will otherwise be able to discharge their role. Nor is it necessary to urge on the House of Justice the importance to the interests of the Faith of a general spirit of openness about its scriptural and historical sources.

At present, the World Centre lacks the human resources, physical space, and research facilities necessary to respond adequately to this need. All of us look forward eagerly to the day when the Centre for the Study of the Texts will have come into existence in the building on the Arc designed for it and now under construction, and will be in a position to assemble the archival and research facilities which the Cause urgently requires. We are sure that if you will respond in this perspective to inquiries about access to Bahá'í primary sources you will be able largely to relieve the kinds of doubts which you describe having encountered.

To propose, as some have done, that the best course in the meantime is simply to open the World Centre's archives to visiting Bahá'í scholars who possess appropriate credentials is not realistic. Were the Archives, the Library, and the Research Department to divert energy and attention to the reception of the many researchers who would feel a legitimate right to come, their priority tasks in vital support of the work of the House of Justice, including preservation, classification, translation, annotation, and publication, would suffer to a degree that is not acceptable at this stage in the growth of the Cause. As is so often the case in many fields of research, scholars interested in work on the Faith will have to exercise a measure of patience.

19 October 1993

The House of Justice suggests that the issues raised in your letter might best be considered in light of the statements in the Bahá'í Writings which disclose the relationship between the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and the knowledge which is acquired as a result of scholarly endeavours. Bahá'u'lláh asserts that:

Unveiled and unconcealed, this Wronged One hath, at all times, proclaimed before the face of all the peoples of the world that which will serve as the key for unlocking the doors of sciences, of arts, of knowledge, of well-being, of prosperity and wealth...

It is evident that the Bahá'í Writings illuminate all areas of human endeavour and all academic disciplines. Those who have been privileged to recognize the station of Bahá'u'lláh have the bounty of access to a Revelation which casts light upon all aspects of thought and inquiry, and are enjoined to use the understanding which they obtain from their immersion in the Holy Writings to advance the interests of the Faith.

Those believers with the capacity and opportunity to do so have repeatedly been encouraged in their pursuit of academic studies by which they are not only equipped to render much-needed services to the Faith, but are also provided with the means to acquire a profound insight into the meaning and the implications of the Bahá'í Teachings. They discover also that the

perceptions gained from a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh clarify the subjects of their academic inquiry.

It is useful to review a number of statements written by Shoghi Effendi on this subject. To a believer who had completed advanced academic studies in a subject related to the Teachings the Guardian stated, in a letter written on his behalf:

It is hoped that all the Bahá'í students will follow the noble example you have set before them and will, henceforth, be led to investigate and analyse the principles of the Faith and to correlate them with the modern aspects of philosophy and science. Every intelligent and thoughtful young Bahá'í should always approach the Cause in this way, for therein lies the very essence of the principle of independent investigation of truth.

When he was informed of the enrolment of a scientist in the Faith, the response set out in the letter written on his behalf was:

We need very much the sound, sane, element of thinking which a scientifically trained mind has to offer. When such intellectual powers are linked to deep faith a tremendous teaching potential is created...

His secretary wrote, on another occasion, that:

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings. What he wants the Bahá'ís to do is to study more, not to study less. The more general knowledge, scientific and otherwise, they possess, the better. Likewise he is constantly urging them to really study the Bahá'í teachings more deeply.

In the simultaneous endeavour to pursue their studies and to delve deeply into the Bahá'í Teachings, believers are enjoined to maintain a keen awareness that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the standard of truth against which all other views and conclusions are to be measured. They are urged

to be modest about their accomplishments, and to bear in mind always the statement of Bahá'u'lláh that:

The heart must needs therefore be cleansed from the idle sayings of men, and sanctified from every earthly affection, so that it may discover the hidden meaning of divine inspiration, and become the treasury of the mysteries of divine knowledge.

At this early stage in the development of the Faith, it would not be useful to propound a highly restrictive definition of the term "Bahá'í scholarship". In a letter written on behalf of the House of Justice to an Association for Bahá'í Studies recently, it is stated that:

The House of Justice advises you not to attempt to define too narrowly the form that Bahá'í scholarship should take, or the approach that scholars should adopt. Rather should you strive to develop within your Association respect for a wide range of approaches and endeavours. No doubt there will be some Bahá'ís who will wish to work in isolation, while others will desire consultation and collaboration with those having similar interests. Your aim should be to promote an atmosphere of mutual respect and tolerance within which will be included scholars whose principal interest is in theological issues as well as those scholars whose interests lie in relating the insights provided by the Bahá'í teachings to contemporary thought in the arts and sciences.

A similar diversity should characterize the endeavours pursued by Bahá'í scholars, accommodating their interests and skills as well as the needs of the Faith. The course of world events, the development of new trends of thought and the extension of the teaching work all tend to highlight attractive and beneficial areas to which Bahá'í scholars might well direct their attention. Likewise, the expansion of the activities of the Bahá'í International Community in its relationship with United Nations agencies and other international bodies creates attractive opportunities for scholars to make a direct and highly valued contribution to the enhancement of the prestige of the Faith and to its proclamation within an influential and receptive stratum of society. As the Bahá'í community continues to emerge inexorably from obscurity, it will be confronted by enemies, from both within and without, whose aim will

be to malign and misrepresent its principles, so that its admirers might be disillusioned and the faith of its adherents might be shaken; Bahá'í scholars have a vital role to play in the defence of the Faith through their contribution to anticipatory measures and their response to defamatory accusations levelled against the Faith.

Thus, there should be room within the scope of Bahá'í scholarship to accommodate not only those who are interested in theological issues and in the historical origins of the Faith, but also those who are interested in relating the Bahá'í Teachings to their field of academic or professional interest, as well as those believers who may lack formal academic qualifications but who have, through their perceptive study of the Teachings, acquired insights which are of interest to others.

Since you have raised the question of whether physics is more than tangentially related to Bahá'í issues, you might consider the following comments of a well-known scientific thinker, who is not a Bahá'í, about the correlation between the Bahá'í Teachings and recent developments in the physical sciences:

In our times we can only survive, and our civilization can only flower, if we reorient the conventional wisdom and achieve the new insights which have been proclaimed by the Bahá'í Faith and which are now also supported by the latest discoveries of the empirical sciences.

Bahá'ís proclaim that the most important condition that can bring about peace is unity—the unity of families, of nations, and of the great currents of thought and inquiry that we denote science and religion. Maturity, in turn, is a prerequisite for such unity. This is evolutionary thinking, and its validity is shown by the new theories which emerge from nonequilibrium thermodynamics, dynamical systems theory, cybernetics, and the related sciences of complexity. They are supported by detailed empirical investigations in such fields as physical cosmology, paleobiological macroevolutionary theory, and new trends in historiography.

The House of Justice wishes to avoid use of the terms “Bahá'í scholarship” and “Bahá'í scholars” in an exclusive sense, which would effectively

establish a demarcation between those admitted into this category and those denied entrance to it. It is clear that such terms are relative, and that what is a worthy scholarly endeavour by a Bahá'í, when compared to the activities of those with whom he is in contact, may well be regarded as of vastly lesser significance when measured against the accomplishments of the outstanding scholars which the Faith has produced. The House of Justice seeks the creation of a Bahá'í community in which the members encourage each other, where there is respect for accomplishment, and a common realization that every one is, in his or her own way, seeking to acquire a deeper understanding of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh and to contribute to the advancement of the Faith.

19 May 1995

The opportunity which electronic communication technology provides for more speedy and thorough consultation among the friends is highly significant. Without doubt, it represents another manifestation of a development eagerly anticipated by the Guardian when he foresaw the creation of “a mechanism of world intercommunication ... embracing the whole planet, freed from national hindrances and restrictions, and functioning with marvellous swiftness and perfect regularity”.

As you well appreciate, the extent to which such technology advances the work of the Faith depends, of course, on the manner in which it is used. As a medium for Bahá'ís to exchange views, it imposes on participants the same requirements of moderation, candour, and courtesy as would be the case in any other discussion. Likewise, those involved should avoid belittling the views of one another. In this regard, the House of Justice has noted your understandable repugnance at an apparent temptation to use misleading and invidious labels like “traditionalists” and “liberals”, which divide the Bahá'í community. To the extent that this divisive habit of mind may persist in the Bahá'í community, it is obviously a carry-over from non-Bahá'í society and a manifestation of an immature conception of life. If Bahá'ís were to persist in this mode of thinking, it would bring to naught even the most worthwhile intellectual endeavour, as has so conspicuously been the case with societies of the past.

Most important of all, as with any exploration by Bahá'ís of the beliefs and practices of their Faith, electronic discussion will serve the interests of the Cause and its members only as it is conducted within the framework of the Bahá'í Teachings and the truths they enshrine. To attempt to discuss the Cause of God apart from or with disdain for the authoritative guidance inherent in these Teachings would clearly be a logical contradiction. To take the first point mentioned in your letter, it is obvious that seeking to impose limits on the universality of the authority of God's Manifestation would lead to the frustration of serious scholarly work and generate disharmony within an effort whose success depends precisely upon a spirit of unity and mutual trust. The standard is the one made clear by Bahá'u'lláh Himself:

The essence of belief in Divine unity consisteth in regarding Him Who is the Manifestation of God and Him Who is the invisible, the inaccessible, the unknowable Essence as one and the same. By this is meant that whatsoever pertaineth to the former, all His acts and doings, whatever He ordaineth or forbiddeth, should be considered, in all their aspects, and under all circumstances, and without any reservation, as identical with the Will of God Himself.

With regard to the harmony of science and religion, the Writings of the Central Figures and the commentaries of the Guardian make abundantly clear that the task of humanity, including the Bahá'í community that serves as the "leaven" within it, is to create a global civilization which embodies both the spiritual and material dimensions of existence. The nature and scope of such a civilization are still beyond anything the present generation can conceive. The prosecution of this vast enterprise will depend on a progressive interaction between the truths and principles of religion and the discoveries and insights of scientific inquiry. This entails living with ambiguities as a natural and inescapable feature of the process of exploring reality. It also requires us not to limit science to any particular school of thought or methodological approach postulated in the course of its development. The challenge facing Bahá'í thinkers is to provide responsible leadership in this endeavour, since it is they who have both the priceless insights of the Revelation and the advantages conferred by scientific investigation.

The ease and relative impersonality of the electronic medium require in some ways an even higher level of self-discipline than is the case in situations where a spirit of unity is reinforced by the opportunity for direct personal contact and social interaction. In the pursuit of such a spirit of unity, Bahá'ís will, without doubt, wish to assist the consultative processes by sharing and discussing relevant Bahá'í texts. This will itself have the further effect of drawing attention back to the framework of Bahá'í belief.

14 March 1996

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.

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.

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.

Collateral with His summons to the pursuit of knowledge, Bahá'u'lláh has abolished entirely that feature of all past religions by which a special caste of persons such as the Christian priesthood or the Islamic 'ulamá

came to exercise authority over the religious understanding and practice of their fellow believers. In a letter written in Persian on his behalf to the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Istanbul, the Guardian is at some pains to underline the importance of this marked departure from past religious history:

But praise be to God that the Pen of Glory has done away with the unyielding and dictatorial views of the learned and the wise, dismissed the assertions of individuals as an authoritative criterion, even though they were recognized as the most accomplished and learned among men, and ordained that all matters be referred to authorized centres and specified assemblies.

The Bahá'í Dispensation is described in the words of its Founder as “a day that shall not be followed by night”. Through His Covenant, Bahá'u'lláh has provided an unfailing source of divine guidance that will endure throughout the Dispensation. Authority to administer the affairs of the community and to ensure both the integrity of the Word of God and the promotion of the Faith's message is conferred upon the Administrative Order to which the Covenant has given birth. It is solely by the process of free election or by unsought appointment that the members of the institutions of this Order are assigned to their positions in it. There is no profession in either the teaching of the Faith or its administration for which one can train or to which a believer can properly aspire. Cautionary words of Bahá'u'lláh are particularly relevant:

Ever since the seeking of preference and distinction came into play, the world has been laid waste. It has become desolate...

Indeed, man is noble, inasmuch as each one is a repository of the sign of God. Nevertheless, to regard oneself as superior in knowledge, learning or virtue, or to exalt oneself or seek preference is a grievous transgression.

The 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.

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.

2 July 1996

The purpose of this letter is not to enter into a detailed examination of the activities and statements of the friends to whom you refer, or to discuss the responses they have received over the years from institutions of the Faith. Rather, the House of Justice wishes to relate this situation to certain aspects of Bahá'í belief, in the hope that thereby it may enable you to find answers to some of the questions which preoccupy your mind.

At the very core of the aims of the Faith are the establishment of justice and unity in the world, the removal of prejudice and enmity from among all people, the awakening of compassion and understanding in the hearts of all men and women, and the raising of all souls to a new level of spirituality and behavior through the vitalizing influence of divine Revelation. The course set forth by Bahá'u'lláh for the attainment of these aims is the double task of simultaneously building an ideal society and perfecting the behavior of individuals. For this dual and reciprocal transformation He has not only revealed laws, principles and truths attuned to the needs of this age, but has established the very nucleus and pattern of those institutions which are to evolve into the structure of the divinely purposed world society.

Central to your perception of the statements made by the believers about whom you are concerned are their assertions that they are entirely obedient to the spirit of the Covenant and the institutions of the Faith; that they are merely voicing their disagreement with certain decisions and policies made by these institutions; are protesting against what they perceive to be unjust or improper actions by some people who occupy prominent administrative positions; and are suggesting modifications to Bahá'í procedures to prevent such perceived abuses of authority. These assertions, however, overlook certain important Bahá'í principles which provide the methods and channels for the voicing of such grievances or disagreements, and which are designed to lead to resolution of problems while preserving the unity of the community.

Over many years, a few believers in the United States, instead of confining their protests against what they saw as abuses of authority by Bahá'í bodies to the channels and agencies which are plentifully provided for such a purpose, have been publicly and privily assailing the institutions of the Cause and generalizing specific accusations of injustice to such an extent as to accuse the entire system of corruption, not only in practice but also in form and theory. One outcome of this continuing stream of negative criticism has been the gradual conversion of unverified accusations into accepted "facts" in the minds of some of their hearers.

Through such activities, and the mutual support that they give to one another, these friends have increasingly assumed the appearance of a dissident group of Bahá'ís who are attempting to arouse widespread disaffection in

the community and thereby to bring about changes in the structure and principles of Bahá'í administration, making it accord more closely with their personal notions. Such an activity is closely analogous to the pursuit of a partisan political program, an activity which is accepted and even admired in most societies, but is entirely antithetical to the spirit of the Bahá'í Faith. It promotes an atmosphere of contention, and Bahá'u'lláh has expressly stated: "Conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book."

The laws, commandments, injunctions and exhortations we have all agreed to obey and follow as Bahá'ís include a clearly defined approach to decision-making and to the implementation of decisions. You are, undoubtedly, well familiar with the various aspects of this approach, which is built on the conviction that the path of unity is the only path that can lead to the civilization envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh. So strong is the emphasis on unity that, for example, once a decision has been made by an Assembly, everyone is expected to support that decision wholeheartedly, relying confidently on 'Abdu'l-Bahá's assurance that, even if the decision is wrong, "as it is in unity the truth will be revealed and the wrong made right". This principle of unity is supplemented by other, related guidelines covering such issues as how criticism can be expressed, how the wrongdoing of members of the community is to be corrected, how the principle of justice is to be applied and appeals admitted, and how the integrity of individuals, the institutions and the Cause is to be upheld.

In adhering to such teachings Bahá'ís recognize that individuals do not become wholly virtuous on accepting the Faith. It takes time for them to grow spiritually out of their personal imperfections and out of the structural and behavioral assumptions of the societies in which they have been raised, which color their view of the world. The institutions of the Cause, which the believers have been raising in obedience to the law of Bahá'u'lláh, in accordance with the pattern set forth by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the expositions of Shoghi Effendi, and under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, are still in their embryonic stage and not infrequently fall short of the ideal for which they are striving. There is also the possibility of certain individuals' misusing the positions of authority to which they are elected or appointed within the structure of the Administrative Order. Again and again Shoghi Effendi, in his letters, called upon the Bahá'ís to be patient

and forbearing, both with one another and with their Assemblies, but in serious cases of malfunctioning by either institutions or individuals, neither the Guardian nor the Universal House of Justice has hesitated to take remedial action. Bahá'í Administration has provisions to cope with such human frailties and is designed to enable the believers to build Bahá'u'lláh's new World Order in the midst of their imperfections, but without conflicts which would destroy the entire edifice.

One of the tasks of the Universal House of Justice, in addition to enacting legislation, resolving difficult problems, elucidating obscure matters, settling differences, administering the worldwide affairs of the Cause and directing the course of the implementation of the Divine Plan, is to protect the individual believers and the body of the Cause from the deleterious effects of malfunctioning institutions and unwise or malicious individuals. Most of the time these defects, whether in the behavior of individuals or institutions, are of a relatively minor nature and can be dealt with by the Local and National Assemblies or by the Counsellors with the members of the Auxiliary Boards and their assistants. However, at times the situation becomes far more grave and the World Centre is compelled to intervene.

You are most directly concerned with the situation in the United States. The letter of 19 May 1994 does, indeed, address certain aspects of the functioning of your National Spiritual Assembly—it was, after all, written in response to the National Assembly's request for guidance—but that is merely one of the issues before the American Bahá'í community. If you study that letter carefully you will see that it calls for a range of improvements in the actions of the individual believers and the entire community. Indeed it develops points touched on in the letter of 29 December 1988 which urges the believers to rethink accepted theories of the functioning of society.

Sadly, efforts made by the institutions and some of their fellow believers to explain these issues seem to have been dismissed by the friends previously referred to. A few politely acknowledged the communications of the House of Justice, but then continued on their way, ignoring the fundamental points which had been made. A few have openly opposed the House of Justice's guidance. The rhetoric has become far removed from a pure concern to uphold justice and the rights of individuals within the community; it has

developed into the fomentation of contention about some of the most fundamental beliefs of the Faith and an attack on the basis of the Covenant which, alone, is the ultimate guarantee that the Faith will remain true to its divine origin throughout the centuries.

The point at issue has thus become that of whether believers should be permitted to continue indefinitely to undermine the faith of their fellow Bahá'ís, stir up agitation within the community, and publicly assail the theory as well as the practice of Bahá'u'lláh's Administrative Order.

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas Bahá'u'lláh states: "We approve of liberty in certain circumstances, and refuse to sanction it in others." One area in which liberty is limited in the Bahá'í community is that governing methods and channels for the expression of criticism. In this connection, we enclose a brief compilation of excerpts from letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to individual believers.ⁱ From this guidance, the following principles can be clearly derived:

- The importance of unity as both the goal of Bahá'u'lláh's Message and the means for its establishment. Bahá'u'lláh "has not only advocated certain principles, but has also provided a mechanism whereby that ideal can be established and perpetuated", adherence to both of which by the friends is essential for "the realization of His goal of world unity".
- Bahá'ís are "fully entitled to address criticisms to their Assemblies" and offer their recommendations. When Bahá'ís have addressed their criticisms, suggestions and advice to their Assemblies, including their views "about policies or individual members of elected bodies", they must "whole-heartedly accept the advice or decision of the Assembly".
- There is a clear distinction between, on the one hand, the prohibition of backbiting, which would include adverse comments about individuals or institutions made to other individuals privately or publicly, and, on the other hand, the encouragement to unburden oneself of one's concerns to a Spiritual Assembly, Local or National (or now, also, to confide in a Counsellor or Auxiliary Board member). Thus, although one of the

i The compilation referred to is not provided here because the indented paragraphs which follow give the essential passages conveying the advice of the beloved Guardian.

principal functions of the Nineteen Day Feast is to provide a forum for “open and constructive criticism and deliberation regarding the state of affairs within the local Bahá'í community”, complaints about the actions of an individual member of an Assembly should be made directly and confidentially to the Assembly itself, not made to other individuals or even raised at a Nineteen Day Feast.

- While constructive criticism is encouraged, destructive criticism, such as the pattern of “continually challenging and criticizing the decisions” of the Assemblies, prevents the rapid growth of the Faith and repels those who are yet outside the community. Indeed “all criticisms and discussions of a negative character which may result in undermining the authority of the Assembly as a body should be strictly avoided. For otherwise the order of the Cause itself will be endangered, and confusion and discord will reign in the community.” “Vicious criticism is indeed a calamity”, the root of which is “lack of faith in the system of Bahá'u'lláh” and failure to follow the “Bahá'í laws in voting, in electing, in serving, and in abiding by Assembly decisions”.

The questions of how criticism is expressed and acted upon in the Bahá'í community, and how the Spiritual Assemblies administer justice in regard to individual believers, are but elements of far greater concepts and should become second nature in the social discourse of Bahá'ís. The Bahá'í community is an association of individuals who have voluntarily come together, on recognizing Bahá'u'lláh's claim to be the Manifestation of God for this age, to establish certain patterns of personal and social behavior and to build the institutions that are to promote these patterns. There are numerous individuals who share the ideals of the Faith and draw inspiration from its Teachings, while disagreeing with certain of its features, but those who actually enter the Bahá'í community have accepted, by their own free will, to follow the Teachings in their entirety, understanding that, if doubts and disagreements arise in the process of translating the Teachings into practice, the final arbiter is, by the explicit authority of the Revealed Text, the Universal House of Justice.

It is the ardent prayer of the Universal House of Justice that any friends who find themselves at odds in this endeavor will have confidence in the guidance it provides for them, will renew their study of the Teachings and,

for the sake of Bahá'u'lláh, strengthen their love for one another. As the beloved Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf to an individual believer on 25 October 1949: "Without the spirit of real love for Bahá'u'lláh, for His Faith and its Institutions, and the believers for each other, the Cause can never really bring in large numbers of people. For it is not preaching and rules the world wants, but love and action." The worldwide undertakings on which the Cause of God is embarked are far too significant, the need of the peoples of the world for the Message of Bahá'u'lláh far too urgent, the perils facing mankind far too grave, the progress of events far too swift, to permit His followers to squander their time and efforts in fruitless contention. Now, if ever, is the time for love among the friends, for unity of understanding and endeavor, for self-sacrifice and service by Bahá'ís in every part of the world.

The House of Justice understands and appreciates your concern for the proper functioning of the Bahá'í community. It urges you to contemplate the issues you have raised in the light of the Teachings themselves, and not to weigh them with the standards of other philosophies or of any civil system, the fundamental assumptions of which differ in many respects from those of Bahá'u'lláh's divinely conceived Order.

3 June 1997

The questions you pose, arising out of an email conversation between yourself and one of the other contributors to the discussion group in which you participate, are of fundamental importance, and the House of Justice warmly appreciates the spirit of your enquiry.

The issues raised seem to resolve themselves into two points: the first being whether or not the Universal House of Justice has the authority to make authoritative interpretations; the second is whether anyone has the right to challenge the authority or actions of the Universal House of Justice. When these issues are approached with an understanding of the unity underlying all the Teachings, clarification results. Should the seeker, however, be influenced by a spirit of mistrust and conflict, then unending problems appear.

The above points have both been covered in three letters written by the Universal House of Justice on 9 March 1965, 27 May 1966 and 7 December 1969. Unfortunately it seems that many of the friends have not studied these letters deeply or understood their implications. 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".

In its letter of 9 March 1965, the House of Justice has stated: "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 friends will come to understand what this difference is by observing how the House of Justice functions and by turning to it for explanations when necessary.

As you recognize, the authority of the Universal House of Justice is unchallengeable. This is stated in numerous places in the Writings. In the same passage of the Will and Testament quoted above, 'Abdu'l-Bahá goes on to say of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice: "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."

Furthermore, at the very end of the Will and Testament, in warning against the danger of Covenant-breaking, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote: "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." In this context, He continues: "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 Centre of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error."

It is natural that the friends would discuss such matters among themselves, as you and your correspondent have been doing on your Internet discussion group; how otherwise are they to deepen their understanding of the Teachings? But they should recognize that the resolution of differences of opinion on such fundamental questions is not to be found by continued discussion, but in referring to the Universal House of Justice itself, as you have done. Prolonged, unresolved, public discussion of these fundamental questions can do nothing but breed confusion and dissension.

Some people have put forward the thesis that in place of the Guardian's function of authoritative interpretation, a check on the Universal House of Justice should be set up, either in the form of the general opinion of the mass of the believers, or in the form of a body of learned Bahá'ís—preferably those with academic qualifications. The former is in direct contradiction to the Guardian's statement that the members of the Universal House of Justice are not "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", he writes, "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." As to the latter alternative: this would constitute usurpation of a function of the Guardian.

Scholarship has a high rank in the Cause of God, and the Universal House of Justice continually consults the views of scholars and experts in the course of its work. However, as you appreciate, scholars and experts have no authority over the Institutions of the Cause. In a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, on 14 March 1927, to the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Istanbul, it is pointed out how, in the past, it was certain individuals who “accounted themselves as superior in knowledge and elevated in position” who caused division, and that it was those “who pretended to be the most distinguished of all” who “always proved themselves to be the source of contention.” “But praise be to God” he continued, “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. Even so, no assembly has been invested with the absolute authority to deal with such general matters as affect the interests of nations. Nay, rather, He has brought all the assemblies together under the shadow of the one House of Justice, one divinely-appointed Centre, so that there would be only one Centre and all the rest integrated into a single body, revolving around one expressly-designated Pivot, thus making them all proof against schism and division.”

Comments have been made in recent times, implying the existence of two categories of believers, designated “administrators” and “academics”. The House of Justice feels that it is important to recognize the unsoundness of such a concept. In the nature of Bahá'í administration, there is no class of believers who serve as “administrators”. Individual Bahá'ís are either elected or appointed to positions of administrative service; they come from every field of endeavour, including academia. There is, moreover, a natural flow of individuals into and out of administrative posts. The same applies to the occupants of those institutions of the Administrative Order which are referred to as being of the “learned” in the Faith. Clearly there are some Bahá'ís who are “academics” and some who are not, but “academics” in no way constitute a recognized group in relation to the structure of the Cause.

There remains the question concerning the authority for the duties and responsibilities outlined for the Universal House of Justice in its constitution. These provisions are a codification of explicit statements found in the sacred texts and the writings of Shoghi Effendi.

The House of Justice assures you of its prayers in the Holy Shrines that your efforts to assist the friends to overcome misunderstandings and to clarify their vision of the Faith will be blessed with divine confirmations.

20 July 1997

The candour with which you have expressed your views is much appreciated, as is the earnestness of your desire to see the Bahá'í community overcome a situation which is unhealthy in itself and risks creating misunderstanding in segments of the academic community. The House of Justice is, of course, aware that problems have arisen in this area, and it welcomes the opportunity to acquaint you with its thinking and perspectives. Having considered these, you should feel encouraged to respond with any related suggestions you think might assist in relieving the stresses you perceive.

The House of Justice believes that it will be helpful to set the problem in the context of the current intellectual and spiritual crisis afflicting society at large. Scholarly training and professional experience will have sensitized you to the implications for the study of religion of certain assumptions about human nature and the processes of civilization that a purely materialistic interpretation of reality has imposed on scholarly activity of every kind, at least in the Western world. A related paradigm for the study of religion has gradually consolidated itself in the prevailing academic culture during the course of the present century. It insists that all spiritual and moral phenomena must be understood through the application of a scholarly apparatus devised to explore existence in a way that ignores the issues of God's continuous relationship with His creation and His intervention in human life and history. Yet, from a Bahá'í point of view, it is precisely this intervention that is the central theme of the Teachings of the Founders of the revealed religions ostensibly being studied.

As a result of this insistence, opinions that should have remained matters of learned speculation have tended to assume the character of dogma. Equally regrettable is an intolerant attitude toward other perceptions of reality, which too often characterizes the expression of these opinions. In the context of historical circumstance, this development is understandable. The rigid intolerance exhibited in the past by much of organized religion,

together with the domination of scholarship long exercised by theological elites, could not but arouse strong negative reactions. From a Bahá'í point of view, however, bigotry is retrograde and unacceptable in whatever form it chooses to present itself.

Such conditions would not normally be a matter for comment; they represent only a few among the host of less than encouraging circumstances in which the Cause must carry out its work. Devotion to learning has been an integral feature of Bahá'í life and belief from the beginning. It ensures that the community will not be deterred by shortcomings in any of the traditions of scholarship from according these traditions the full respect they merit or from seeking to benefit to the utmost from such endeavours.

Problems will arise, rather, if an attempt is made to impose, on the Bahá'í community's own study of the Revelation, materialistic methodologies and attitudes antithetical to its very nature. The Faith is not the possession of any among us, but belongs to Bahá'u'lláh. Through the Covenant, which is a distinguishing feature of His Revelation, He has specified in unmistakable terms the means by which He wills to preserve the integrity of His message and to guide the implementation of His prescriptions for humankind. If one accepts the Bahá'í Teachings, one cannot, in good conscience, claim to be studying the Faith while ignoring the centrality of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant to all aspects of the religion He has established.

It is in this context that the House of Justice believes that the concerns expressed in your letter must be addressed. There may well be Bahá'ís who, whatever their educational background, have not yet fully resolved for themselves the fundamental issues touched on in the foregoing. Where this happens, an individual risks finding himself or herself at odds not only with the institutions of the Cause, including the Universal House of Justice itself, but with the clear interpretations of the Teachings by the Master and the Guardian. In such cases, Counsellors and Spiritual Assemblies will certainly do all they can to help. Knowledgeable believers like yourself can also be of great assistance, but belief, for Bahá'ís, is a matter of personal conscience. Should a person conclude that he or she cannot persist in a commitment to the Cause, such a decision is respected by the Bahá'í community.

It is not out of a desire to take issue with the views you have expressed, but rather in an attempt to respond frankly to your concerns, that the House of Justice has asked us to convey its comments on a number of points where its perceptions differ from those you have presented. These relate chiefly to the behaviour of a very small group of Bahá'ís who, rejecting all efforts of the administrative institutions to counsel and appeal to them, have aggressively sought to promote their misconceptions of the Teachings among their fellow believers. These efforts extend back many years, harnessing to their purpose a wide range of Bahá'í activities and associations, most recently Internet lists.

Such activities have not been limited to interference with the administration of the affairs of the Bahá'í community, although they have, as you note, included such interference. A far greater problem has been the persistent effort to arouse doubts about the integrity of the Teachings, as interpreted for us by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian, to undermine the authority of the Faith's institutions, and to alter the essential nature of Bahá'u'lláh's message. Seizing on apparently unwise interventions on the part of a few Bahá'ís of rigid mind-set, this campaign has boldly sought to exclude from consideration the implications of the Covenant for the discussions taking place.

These efforts have been accompanied by a deliberate attempt to misrepresent the institutions of the Faith as repressive of learning and to introduce into a Bahá'í discourse a fevered debate on individual rights, borrowed from the political environment. You can yourself testify that not only are Bahá'ís urged to uphold the principle of unfettered search after truth, but they have also been encouraged from the time of the Faith's inception to pursue knowledge in all its forms and to excel in such attainments. If one is sincere in a concern for the Bahá'í community's intellectual advancement, one will not compromise scholarship by entangling it in private, ideological objectives which undermine its influence.

You will want also to take into careful account the fact that the individuals seeking to generate these controversies, although vociferous, are in no way representative of the opinions of the great majority of Bahá'ís with academic and other scholarly qualifications. Indeed, a sad feature of discussions on one or two Internet lists, which has been brought to the attention of the

House of Justice, has been the number of academically well-qualified believers who have eventually been driven to give up an interchange of ideas that could have been extremely fruitful by what they perceived as merely the relentless pursuit of a partisan agenda.

The House of Justice urges you to reflect deeply on the reasons why those pursuing this agenda seek by every means possible to represent their actions as a disinterested search for knowledge and themselves as victims of authoritarianism. The principle which should guide our efforts to share the fruits of Bahá'í scholarship has been made clear for all of us in this passage from Bahá'u'lláh's Writings:

Thou hast written that one of the friends hath composed a treatise. This was mentioned in the Holy Presence, and this is what was revealed in response: Great care should be exercised that whatever is written in these days doth not cause dissension, and invite the objection of the people. Whatever the friends of the one true God say in these days is listened to by the people of the world. It hath been revealed in the Lawḥ-i-Ḥikmat: "The unbelievers have inclined their ears towards us in order to hear that which might enable them to cavil against God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting." Whatever is written should not transgress the bounds of tact and wisdom, and in the words used there should lie hid the property of milk, so that the children of the world may be nurtured therewith, and attain maturity. We have said in the past that one word hath the influence of spring and causeth hearts to become fresh and verdant, while another is like unto blight which causeth the blossoms and flowers to wither. God grant that authors among the friends will write in such a way as would be acceptable to fair-minded souls, and not lead to cavilling by the people.

From a Tablet translated from Persian and Arabic

Not surprisingly, the abuse of Internet discussions on the Faith and its Teachings has had the effect of greatly distressing friends who became aware of it. That the response has included, as your letter suggests, a degree of intemperate criticism, inappropriate comment and unjust accusation is lamentable, but also not surprising, for contentiousness begets contention. You should be confident that the House of Justice will not permit a climate of intolerance to prosper in the Bahá'í community, no matter from what cause it arises. Further, the House of Justice will continue to encourage use

of the greatly expanded opportunities for the discussion of Bahá'í concepts and ideals, which Internet communication so marvellously provides.

Finally, it is no doubt helpful to keep in mind that Bahá'ís who are trained in various academic disciplines do not constitute a discrete body within the community. While the Bahá'í institutions benefit on an ongoing basis from the advice of believers in many fields of specialization, there is obviously no group of academics who can claim to speak on behalf of Bahá'í scholars generally. Scholarly qualifications enable individuals to make greatly valued contributions to the work of the Cause, but do not set those possessing them apart from the general body of the believers. The House of Justice feels confident that, with patience, self-discipline, and unity of faith, Bahá'í academics will be able to contribute to a gradual forging of the more integrative paradigms of scholarship for which thoughtful minds in the international community are increasingly calling.

8 February 1998

Your email of ... covers a number of issues, the first of which relates to methods followed in researching, understanding and writing about historical events, and the elements of these methods which the House of Justice regards as being influenced by materialism. The purpose of scholarship in such fields should obviously be the ascertainment of truth, and Bahá'í scholars should, of course, observe the highest standards of honesty, integrity and truthfulness. Moreover, the House of Justice accepts that many scholarly methods have been developed which are soundly based and of enduring validity. It nevertheless questions some presumptions of certain current academic methods because it sees these producing a distorted picture of reality.

The training of some scholars in fields such as religion and history seems to have restricted their vision and blinded them to the culturally determined basis of elements of the approach they have learned. It causes them to exclude from consideration factors which, from a Bahá'í point of view, are of fundamental importance. Truth in such fields cannot be found if the evidence of Revelation is systematically excluded and if discourse is limited by a basically deterministic view of the world.

Some of the protagonists in the discussions on the Internet have implied that the only way to attain a true understanding of historical events and of the purport of the sacred and historical records of the Cause of God is through the rigid application of methods narrowly defined in a materialistic framework. They have even gone so far as to stigmatize whoever proposes a variation of these methods as wishing to obscure the truth rather than unveil it.

The House of Justice recognizes that, at the other extreme, there are Bahá'ís who, imbued by what they conceive to be loyalty to Bahá'u'lláh, cling to blind acceptance of what they understand to be a statement of the Sacred Text. This shortcoming demonstrates an equally serious failure to grasp the profundity of the Bahá'í principle of the harmony of faith and reason. The danger of such an attitude is that it exalts personal understanding of some part of the Revelation over the whole, leads to illogical and internally inconsistent applications of the Sacred Text, and provides fuel to those who would mistakenly characterize loyalty to the Covenant as “fundamentalism”.

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

Beyond contention, moreover, is the condition in which a person is so immovably attached to one erroneous viewpoint that his insistence upon it amounts to an effort to change the essential character of the Faith. This kind of behaviour, if permitted to continue unchecked, could produce disruption in the Bahá'í community, giving birth to countless sects as it has done in previous Dispensations. The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh prevents this. The Faith defines elements of a code of conduct, and it is ultimately the responsibility of the Universal House of Justice, in watching over the security of the Cause and upholding the integrity of its Teachings, to require the friends to adhere to standards thus defined.

The Universal House of Justice does not see itself obliged to prescribe a new scientific methodology for Bahá'í academics who make study of the Faith, its teachings and history the subject of their professional activities. Rather has it concentrated on drawing the attention of these friends to the inadequacy of certain approaches from a Bahá'í point of view, urging them to apply to their work the concept which they accept as Bahá'ís: that the Manifestation of God is of a higher realm and has a perception far above that of any human being. He has the task of raising humankind to a new level of knowledge and behaviour. In this, His understanding transcends the traditions and concepts of the society in which He appears. As Bahá'u'lláh Himself writes in the Hidden Words:

O Son of Beauty! By My spirit and by My favour! By My mercy and by My beauty! All that I have revealed unto thee with the tongue of power, and have written for thee with the pen of might, hath been in accordance with thy capacity and understanding, not with My state and the melody of My voice.

Although, in conveying His Revelation, the Manifestation uses the language and culture of the country into which He is born, He is not confined to using terminology with the same connotations as those given to it by His predecessors or contemporaries; He delivers His message in a form which His audience, both immediate and in centuries to come, is capable of grasping. It is for Bahá'í scholars to elaborate, over a period of time, methodologies which will enable them to perform their work with this understanding. This is a challenging task, but not one which should be beyond the scope of Bahá'ís who are learned in the Teachings as well as competent in their scientific disciplines.

This brings us to the specific points raised in your email of 17 November 1997. As you well understand, not only the right but also the responsibility of each believer to explore truth for himself or herself are fundamental to the Bahá'í teachings. This principle is an integral feature of the coming of age of humankind, inseparable from the social transformation to which Bahá'u'lláh is calling the peoples of the world. It is as relevant to specifically scholarly activity as it is to the rest of spiritual and intellectual life. Every human being is ultimately responsible to God for the use which he or she makes of these possibilities; conscience is never to be coerced, whether by other individuals or institutions.

Conscience, however, is not an unchangeable absolute. One dictionary definition, although not covering all the usages of the term, presents the common understanding of the word “conscience” as “the sense of right and wrong as regards things for which one is responsible; the faculty or principle which pronounces upon the moral quality of one’s actions or motives, approving the right and condemning the wrong”.

The functioning of one’s conscience, then, depends upon one’s understanding of right and wrong; the conscience of one person may be established upon a disinterested striving after truth and justice, while that of another may rest on an unthinking predisposition to act in accordance with that pattern of standards, principles and prohibitions which is a product of his social environment. Conscience, therefore, can serve either as a bulwark of an upright character or can represent an accumulation of prejudices learned from one’s forebears or absorbed from a limited social code.

A Bahá’í recognizes that one aspect of his spiritual and intellectual growth is to foster the development of his conscience in the light of divine Revelation—a Revelation which, in addition to providing a wealth of spiritual and ethical principles, exhorts man “to free himself from idle fancy and imitation, discern with the eye of oneness His glorious handiwork, and look into all things with a searching eye”. This process of development, therefore, involves a clear-sighted examination of the conditions of the world with both heart and mind. A Bahá’í will understand that an upright life is based upon observance of certain principles which stem from Divine Revelation and which he recognizes as essential for the well-being of both the individual and society. In order to uphold such principles, he knows that, in certain cases, the voluntary submission of the promptings of his own personal conscience to the decision of the majority is a conscientious requirement, as in wholeheartedly accepting the majority decision of an Assembly at the outcome of consultation.

In the discussion of wisdom in your email of 21 September 1997, you observe that maybe “Bahá’í academics all too often have not recognized that to a great extent failure to exercise wisdom represents a failure of love.” The House of Justice agrees that the exercise of wisdom calls for a measure of love and the development of a sensitive conscience. These, in turn, involve not only devotion to a high standard of uprightness, but also consideration of the effects of one’s words and actions.

A Bahá'í's duty to pursue an unfettered search after truth should lead him to understand the Teachings as an organic, logically coherent whole, should cause him to examine his own ideas and motives, and should enable him to see that adherence to the Covenant, to which he is a party, is not blind imitation but conscious choice, freely made and freely followed.

In many of His utterances, 'Abdu'l-Bahá extols governments which uphold freedom of conscience for their citizens. As can be seen from the context, these statements refer to the freedom to follow the religion of one's choice. In the original of a passage to which you refer in your email of ..., He gives the following analysis of freedom.

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

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

The third freedom is that which is born of obedience to the laws and ordinances of the Almighty. This is the freedom of the human world, where man severs his affections from all things. When he does so, he becomes immune to all hardship and sorrow. Wealth or material power will not deflect him from moderation and fairness, neither will poverty or need inhibit him from showing forth happiness and tranquillity. The more the conscience of man develops, the more will his heart be free and his soul attain unto happiness. In the religion of God, there is freedom of thought because God, alone, controls the human conscience, but this freedom should not go beyond courtesy. In the religion of God, there is no freedom of action outside the law of God. Man may not transgress this law, even though no harm is inflicted on one's neighbour. This is because the purpose of Divine law is the education of all—others as well

as oneself—and, in the sight of God, the harm done to one individual or to his neighbour is the same and is reprehensible in both cases. Hearts must possess the fear of God. Man should endeavour to avoid that which is abhorrent unto God. Therefore, the freedom that the laws of Europe offer to the individual does not exist in the law of God. Freedom of thought should not transgress the bounds of courtesy, and actions, likewise, should be governed by the fear of God and the desire to seek His good pleasure.

Education of the individual Bahá'í in the Divine law is one of the duties of Spiritual Assemblies. In a letter to a National Assembly on 1 March 1951, Shoghi Effendi wrote:

The deepening and enrichment of the spiritual life of the individual believer, his increasing comprehension of the essential verities underlying this Faith, his training in its administrative processes, his understanding of the fundamentals of the Covenants established by its Author and the authorized Interpreter of its teachings, should be made the supreme objectives of the national representatives responsible for the edification, the progress and consolidation of these communities.

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

With regard to the accusation that to make such distinctions borders on restriction of the freedom of speech, one should accept that civil society has long recognized that utterance can metamorphose into behaviour, and has taken steps to protect itself and its citizens against such behaviour when it becomes socially destructive. Laws against sedition and hate-mongering are examples that come readily to mind.

It will surely be clear to you from the above comments that the categories of “issues of doctrinal heresy which must therefore be suppressed” and “the imposition of orthodoxy on the Bahá'í community”, to which you refer, are concepts essentially drawn from the study of Christianity and are inapplicable to the far more complex interrelationships and principles established by the Bahá'í Faith.

It is important for all those Bahá'ís who are engaged in the academic study of the Bahá'í Faith to address the theoretical problems which undoubtedly exist, while refusing to be distracted by insidious and unscholarly attacks and calumnies which may periodically be injected into their discussions by the ill-intentioned. Discussion with those who sincerely raise problematic issues, whether they be Bahá'ís or not, and whether—if the latter—they disagree with Bahá'í teachings, can be beneficial and enlightening. However, to continue dialogue with those who have shown a fixed antagonism to the Faith, and have demonstrated their imperviousness to any ideas other than their own, is usually fruitless and, for the Bahá'ís who take part, can be burdensome and even spiritually corrosive.

The problem which aroused the concern of the House of Justice, and has been the subject of a number of communications, was the systematic corruption of Bahá'í discourse in certain of the Internet discussion groups, a design which became increasingly apparent to many of the Bahá'í participants and whose first victim, if it were to succeed, would be Bahá'í scholarship itself. The element which exacerbated a dispute which had been simmering during the past two decades and erupted on the Internet was the participation of some persons who, while nominally Bahá'ís, cherished their own programmes and designed to make use of the Bahá'í Cause for the advancement of these programmes. To this end they strove to change the essential characteristics of that Cause. This behaviour has been abundantly confirmed by statements made and actions taken by certain of the involved individuals since they withdrew from the Bahá'í community. They sought to use the language, the occasions and the credibility of scholarly activity to lend a counterfeit authority to a private enterprise which was essentially ideological in nature and self-motivated in origin. Even if their original aims were idealistic in nature—no matter how ill-informed and erroneous in concept—they had evolved in practice into an assault on the Covenant which Bahá'u'lláh has created as a stronghold

within which His Cause would evolve as He intends. The purpose of some of those responsible would seem to be that, by diminishing the station of Bahá'u'lláh—a disservice done to previous Manifestations by people similarly inclined—by casting doubt on the authority conferred on 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice, and by calling into question the integrity of Bahá'í administrative processes, they would be able to persuade a number of unwary followers that the Bahá'í Faith is in fact not a Divine Revelation but a kind of socio-political system being manipulated by ambitious individuals.

Your own familiarity with these same persons' behaviour will have provided you with ample illustration of the violence being done by their public and private statements to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, which they profess to honour, and to the cause of scholarship, which they profess to serve. We cannot separate method from spirit and character. In *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá gives the standard for the "spiritually learned" whom He describes as "skilled physicians for the ailing body of the world" and "the sure antidote to the poison that has corrupted human society":

For every thing, however, God has created a sign and symbol, and established standards and tests by which it may be known. The spiritually learned must be characterized by both inward and outward perfections; they must possess a good character, an enlightened nature, a pure intent, as well as intellectual power, brilliance and discernment, intuition, discretion and foresight, temperance, reverence, and a heartfelt fear of God. For an unlit candle, however great in diameter and tall, is no better than a barren palm tree or a pile of dead wood.

TRUST- WORTHINESS

A CARDINAL VIRTUE

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

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

Extracts

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

- 1 O people! The goodliest vesture in the sight of God in this day is trustworthiness. All bounty and honour shall be the portion of the soul that arrayeth itself with this greatest of adornments.

From a Tablet

- 2 Regard thou faith as a tree. Its fruits, leaves, boughs and branches are, and have ever been, trustworthiness, truthfulness, uprightness and forbearance.

From a Tablet

- 3 The virtues and attributes pertaining unto God are all evident and manifest, and have been mentioned and described in all the heavenly Books. Among them are trustworthiness, truthfulness, purity of heart while communing with God, forbearance, resignation to whatever the Almighty hath decreed, contentment with the things His Will hath provided, patience, nay, thankfulness in the midst of tribulation, and complete reliance, in all circumstances, upon Him. These rank, according to the estimate of God, among the highest and most laudable of all acts. All other acts are, and will ever remain, secondary and subordinate unto them...

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. 134

- 4 Beautify your tongues, O people, with truthfulness, and adorn your souls with the ornament of honesty. Beware, O people, that ye deal not treacherously with any one. Be ye the trustees of God amongst His creatures, and the emblems of His generosity amidst His people. They that follow their lusts and corrupt inclinations, have erred and dissipated their efforts. They, indeed, are of the lost...

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. 136

- 5 The purpose of the one true God in manifesting Himself is to summon all mankind to truthfulness and sincerity, to piety and trustworthiness, to resignation and submissiveness to the Will of God, to forbearance and kindness, to uprightness and wisdom. His object is to array every man with the mantle of a saintly character, and to adorn him with the ornament of holy and goodly deeds.

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. 137

- 6 Say: Let truthfulness and courtesy be your adorning. Suffer not yourselves to be deprived of the robe of forbearance and justice, that the sweet savours of holiness may be wafted from your hearts upon all created things. Say: Beware, O people of Bahá, lest ye walk in the ways of them whose words differ from their deeds. Strive that ye may be enabled to manifest to the peoples of the earth the signs of God, and to mirror forth His commandments...

Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, sec. 139

- 7 We ask God, exalted be His glory, to confirm each one of the friends in that land in the acquisition of such praiseworthy characteristics as shall conduce to the spread of justice and equity among the peoples of the world. The first, the fundamental purpose underlying creation hath ever been, and will continue to be, none other than the appearance of trustworthiness and godliness, of sincerity and goodwill amongst mankind, for these qualities are the cause of peace, security and tranquillity. Blessed are those who possess such virtues.

From a Tablet

- 8 I beseech Thee, O my God, by all the transcendent glory of Thy Name, to clothe Thy loved ones in the robe of justice and to illumine their beings with the light of trustworthiness. Thou art the One Who hath power to do as He pleaseth and Who holdeth within His grasp the reins of all things, visible and invisible.

From a Tablet

- 9 Say: O people of God! Adorn your temples with the adornment of trustworthiness and piety. Help, then, your Lord with the hosts of goodly deeds and a praiseworthy character...

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 10 One day of days We repaired unto Our Green Island. Upon Our arrival, We beheld its streams flowing, and its trees luxuriant, and the sunlight playing in their midst. Turning Our face to the right, We beheld what the pen is powerless to describe; nor can it set forth that which the eye of the Lord of Mankind witnessed in that most sanctified, that most sublime, that blest, and most exalted Spot. Turning, then, to the left We gazed on one of the Beauties of the Most Sublime Paradise, standing on a pillar of light, and calling aloud saying: 'O inmates of earth and heaven! Behold ye My beauty, and My radiance, and My revelation, and My effulgence. By God, the True One! I am Trustworthiness and the revelation thereof, and the beauty thereof. I will recompense whosoever will cleave unto Me, and recognize My rank and station, and hold fast unto My hem. I am the most great ornament of the people of Bahá, and the vesture of glory unto all who are in the kingdom of creation. I am the supreme instrument for the prosperity of the world, and the horizon of assurance unto all beings.' Thus have We sent down for thee that which will draw men nigh unto the Lord of creation.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 11 The fourth Ṭaráz concerneth trustworthiness. Verily it is the door of security for all that dwell on earth and a token of glory on the part of the All-Merciful. He who partaketh thereof hath indeed partaken of the treasures of wealth and prosperity. Trustworthiness is the greatest portal leading unto the tranquillity and security of the people. In truth the stability of every affair hath depended and doth depend upon it. All the domains of power, of grandeur and of wealth are illumined by its light.

Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh

- 12 Were a man in this day to adorn himself with the raiment of trustworthiness it were better for him in the sight of God than that he should journey on foot towards the holy court and be blessed with meeting the Adored One and standing before His Seat of Glory. Trustworthiness is as a stronghold to the city of humanity, and as eyes to the human temple. Whosoever remaineth deprived thereof shall, before His Throne, be reckoned as one bereft of vision.

From a Tablet

- 13 We call to remembrance every one of the friends and exhort them to have regard to trustworthiness, which is a charge that God hath entrusted to

the safe-keeping of His servants; to righteousness, which He hath made to be a citadel of strength for His well-favoured ones and faithful, humble servants; and to whatever virtues shall conduce to their dignity and honour among all peoples.

From a Tablet

- 14 O ye friends of God in His cities and His loved ones in His lands! This Wronged One enjoineeth on you honesty and piety. Blessed the city that shineth by their light. Through them man is exalted, and the door of security is unlocked before the face of all creation. Happy the man that cleaveth fast unto them, and recognizeth their virtue, and woe betide him that denieth their station.

Epistle to the Son of the Wolf

- 15 Be ye God's manifestations of trustworthiness in every land. So perfectly should ye mirror forth this quality that even were ye to travel through cities heaped with gold, your gaze would not for a single moment be seduced by its allure. This is the standard required of you, O assemblage of true believers. Assist ye your gracious Lord by your deeds so that in all the worlds of God His servants may perceive from you the sweet savours of the one true God.

From a Tablet

- 16 He is the true servant of God who, in this day, were he to pass through cities of silver and gold, would not deign to look upon them, and whose heart would remain pure and undefiled from whatever things can be seen in this world, be they its goods or its treasures. I swear by the Sun of Truth! The breath of such a man is endowed with potency, and his words with attraction...

Cited in The Advent of Divine Justice

- 17 Say: O bearer of My Name! Upon thee be My glory and My loving-kindness. Thou hast ever been adorned with the fair robe of trustworthiness and piety. These twin qualities are as two companions for thee in whom thou mayest find solace. They are as two sentinels who shall stand watch over thee, and two guardians that shall, by God's leave, keep thee from harm.

From a Tablet

- 18 Cleave ye to the hem of the raiment of virtue and keep fast hold of the cord of piety and trustworthiness. Have regard to the good of the world and not to your own selfish desires. O peoples of God! Ye are the shepherds of the world. Keep ye your flocks unbesmirched by the mire of evil passion and desire, and adorn each one with the ornament of the fear of God. This is the firm command that hath issued forth in this day from the pen of the Ever-Abiding. I swear by the righteousness of God! The sword of upright conduct and a goodly character is sharper than blades of steel.

From a Tablet

- 19 We ask God graciously to grant that all may evince such fairness of character, such goodness of deed and kindness of word as will meet with His good pleasure. It hath been decreed that the citadels of men's hearts should be subdued through the hosts of a noble character and praiseworthy deeds. Contention, discord, strife and sedition have all been forbidden in the Book of God. Beseech the Lord that He deprive not His dominions of the effulgent light of the sun of trustworthiness, nor deny them the radiance of the Day-Star of truthfulness or the splendour of the orb of justice and equity. Trustworthiness and piety are even as two luminaries shining resplendent above the horizon of the heaven of the Tablet in which are inscribed the ordinances of God. Well is it with them that have discerned them, and woe betide the heedless!

From a Tablet

- 20 We have counselled all people, in the most clear and eloquent language, to adorn their characters with trustworthiness and godliness, and with such qualities as are conducive to the elevation of man's station in the world of being. This Wronged One testifieth that the purpose for which mortal men have, from utter nothingness, stepped into the realm of being, is that they may work for the betterment of the world and live together in concord and harmony. Dissension and strife have always been, and shall remain, rejected by God. The Books, the Scriptures and Holy Writings of previous ages have all proclaimed the joyful tidings that the purpose underlying this most mighty Revelation is none other than the rehabilitation of the world and its nations; that perchance the power of utterance may prevail over the power of arms, and the world's affairs be administered through the

potency of love. We ask God, the True One, to invest all with the mantle of trustworthiness, for that is the world's comeliest garment.

From a Tablet

- 21 Cleave thou to the fear of God and to whatsoever hath been revealed in His Book: thus biddeth thee He Who is the Word of Truth and the Knower of things unseen. Say: trustworthiness is the sun of the heaven of My commandments, truthfulness is its moon, and praiseworthy attributes are its stars. Yet the people, for the most part, understand not.

From a Tablet

- 22 We send Our greetings to the faithful followers of the one true God, who have tasted of the sweet waters of loving-kindness and directed their gaze toward the Realm of Glory. We enjoin upon them all to conduct themselves with trustworthiness and rectitude and to lead chaste and virtuous lives.

Obeloved friends! Whoever adorneth his character with such virtues will be reckoned among the true servants of God, and his name will be commemorated by the Concurrence on High; but he who depriveth himself thereof shall not be accounted of their number. Strive diligently to acquire such goodly qualities and traits of character as will be the cause of everlasting salvation. Make not the fruits of the tree of trustworthiness targets for the stones of treachery, nor rend its boughs asunder with the instruments of tyranny and oppression. Truthfulness and sincerity have always been the ornament of a man's character, and so they shall ever be.

O friends! Let not the deceptive glamour of this fleeting world—to whose impermanence all things attest—cut you off from God's enduring bestowals, nor deprive you from partaking of the spiritual sustenance that He hath sent down from the heaven of His bounty. Keep your gaze centred on Him Who is the Sovereign Word of Truth: place your whole reliance upon Him, and beg of Him to destine for you what is meet and fitting. Resign your affairs into the hands of God, the Lord of creation. Call ye to mind the people of former ages: whither are they sped, the prideful and vainglorious, the workers of iniquity and unrighteousness? Where are their hoards of treasure, their palaces, citadels and thrones? Reflect upon those bygone days, and the vicissitudes of which they tell, and be ye admonished thereby. The prayer of this Wronged One is that God may assist all to do what shall meet with His favour and acceptance.

From a Tablet

- 23 Thou art most dear to Us; and, as We love thee, so love We all in whom may be perceived the goodly adornments of trustworthiness and uprightness, and such qualities of virtue and integrity as have been enjoined upon men in the Book of God, the Lord of the Mighty Throne. Happy the lot of the soul that hath perceived the fragrant breaths of divine utterance, and given ear to what hath been revealed by God, the Omniscient, the All-Informed. God hath, verily, willed that His Cause should be assisted by the hosts of goodly deeds and a righteous character. Blessed, then, be the man that apprehendeth this truth and acteth conformably; and woe betide those who ignore or deny it!

From a Tablet

- 24 We send our greetings to the friends and exhort them to conduct themselves with rectitude, trustworthiness, piety, virtue and loving-kindness—with all those qualities, in fine, that will serve to bring forth man's true station in the world of being. He Who is the Eternal Truth, exalted be His glory, hath ever loved faithfulness. Well is it with him who adorneth his temple with its raiment, and is honoured by this greatest of distinctions.

From a Tablet

- 25 Trustworthiness, wisdom and honesty are, of a truth, God's beauteous adornments for His creatures. These fair garments are a befitting vesture for every temple. Happy are those that comprehend, and well is it with them that acquire such virtues.

From a Tablet

- 26 Cleave ye at all times to the cord of trustworthiness and hold fast the hem of the garment of truthfulness: thus biddeth you He Who is the Truthful, the Trusted One. God is my witness, trustworthiness is a light that shineth refulgently from the heavens, and leadeth to the exaltation of the Cause of God, the Omnipotent, the Incomparable, the All-Praised. Whoso hath remained faithful to the Covenant hath been steadfast in his adherence to trustworthiness, whilst those who have repudiated it have erred grievously.

From a Tablet

- 27 It behoveth ye all so to adorn your inner and outer beings that, robed in trustworthiness, girt with righteousness and arrayed in truthfulness and

rectitude, ye may become a means for the exaltation of the Cause and the education of the human race.

From a Tablet

- 28 The companions of God are, in this day, the lump that must leaven the peoples of the world. They must show forth such trustworthiness, such truthfulness and perseverance, such deeds and character that all mankind may profit by their example...

Cited in The Advent of Divine Justice

- 29 They who dwell within the Tabernacle of God, and are established upon the seats of everlasting glory, will refuse, though they be dying of hunger, to stretch their hands, and seize unlawfully the property of their neighbour, however vile and worthless he may be. The purpose of the one true God in manifesting Himself is to summon all mankind to truthfulness and sincerity, to piety and trustworthiness, to resignation and submissiveness to the will of God, to forbearance and kindness, to uprightness and wisdom. His object is to array every man with the mantle of a saintly character, and to adorn him with the ornament of holy and goodly deeds...

Cited in The Advent of Divine Justice

- 30 O My loved ones! We charge you to conduct yourselves with trustworthiness and rectitude, that through you the attributes of your Lord may be manifested to His servants and the evidences of His exalted holiness may appear in every land. He is, verily, the Ordainer, the Ancient of Days.

From a Tablet

- 31 I counsel you, O friends of God, to comport yourselves with the utmost trustworthiness in your dealings with my servants and people. By its aid shall the Cause of God be promoted throughout the world and its exalted sanctity become manifest to all creation. Be ye the repositories of the trust of all men. Thus have We commanded them in the Tablets. Thy Lord is, verily, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

From a Tablet

- 32 O friends of God in every land! This Wronged One adjureth you by the Best-Beloved of the world, Who is calling aloud in the Kingdom of Utterance, that ye deal not faithlessly with the substance of your fellow men. Be ye the

trustees of God in His dominions and the embodiments of truthfulness throughout His realms. Blessed the man that heedeth the counsels of God and observeth His precepts.

From a Tablet

- 33 We have enjoined upon all to become engaged in some trade or profession, and have accounted such occupation to be an act of worship. Before all else, however, thou shouldst receive, as a sign of God's acceptance, the mantle of trustworthiness from the hands of divine favour; for trustworthiness is the chief means of attracting confirmation and prosperity. We entreat God to make of it a radiant and mercifully showering rain-cloud that shall bring success and blessings to thy affairs. He of a truth is the All-Bountiful, the Gracious.

From a Tablet

- 34 Commerce is as a heaven, whose sun is trustworthiness and whose moon is truthfulness. The most precious of all things in the estimation of Him Who is the Sovereign Truth is trustworthiness: thus hath it been recorded in the sacred Scroll of God. Entreat ye the one true God to enable all mankind to attain to this most noble and lofty station.

From a Tablet

- 35 In connection with the demands for payment of which thou hast written in thy letter, it is manifestly clear that anyone who hath the ability to settle his debts, and yet neglecteth to do so, hath not acted in accordance with the good pleasure of the one true God. Those who incur debts should strive to settle them with all diligence and application. God's binding commandments with respect to trustworthiness, uprightness and the honouring of rights have been recorded in clear and perspicuous language in all the sacred Books, Tablets, Scriptures and holy Writings. Well is it with him whom the fleeting vanities of the world have not deprived of a lasting adornment, and whom avarice and negligence have not shut out from the illumination of the sun of trustworthiness. These matters, however, depend on the existence of ability, for the making of a demand is contingent upon ability to meet it. By the Lord of the Book, the former is not permissible in the absence of the latter. To this testifieth the Verse: "Respite thy debtor till he findeth means to pay."ⁱ

From a Tablet

i Qur'ān 2:280

- 36 In most of Our Tablets We have counselled the servants of God to be trustworthy and righteous, just and fair-minded. We have commanded them to eschew iniquity and evil and bidden them practise piety and the fear of God. The heedless, however, have been led only into ever-increasing loss. Truly, had God's creatures but conformed their actions to the will and pleasure of God, exalted be His glory, the whole earth would by now be seen as a single country, a blessed land of beauty and light.

From a Tablet

- 37 Say: desist from wickedness and transgression, and lay hold on trustworthiness and piety, candour and sincerity. This is the commandment of God, the Lord of the Judgement Day. He Whom the world hath wronged speaketh not through the promptings of worldly desire, but in accordance with what hath been revealed in the Book of God, the Ordainer, the Ancient of Days. Righteousness of character is the means whereby the high stations attainable by man in the world of being may be made evident: to this testify God's honoured servants, whom the evil whisperings of the people have not deterred from arising to render service to their Lord, the King of the Mighty Throne.

From a Tablet

38

Be thou of the people of hellfire,
but be not a hypocrite.

Be thou an unbeliever,
but be not a plotter.

Make thy home in taverns,
but tread not the path
of the mischief-maker.

Fear thou God,
but not the priest.

Give to the executioner thy head,
but not thy heart.

Let thine abode be under the stone,
but seek not the shelter of the cleric.

Thus doth the Holy Reed intone its melodies, and the Nightingale of Paradise warble its song, so that He may infuse life eternal into the mortal frames of men, impart to the temples of dust the essence of the Holy Spirit and the heavenly Light, and draw the transient world, through the potency of a single word, unto the Everlasting Kingdom.

From a Tablet

From the Utterances of the Báb

- 39 One day the Báb asked that some honey be purchased for Him. The price at which it had been bought seemed to Him exorbitant. He refused it and said: “Honey of a superior quality could no doubt have been purchased at a lower price. I who am your example have been a merchant by profession. It behoves you in all your transactions to follow in My way. You must neither defraud your neighbour nor allow him to defraud you. Such was the way of your Master. The shrewdest and ablest of men were unable to deceive Him, nor did He on His part choose to act ungenerously towards the meanest and most helpless of creatures.” He insisted that the attendant who had made that purchase should return and bring back to Him a honey superior in quality and cheaper in price.

Cited in The Dawn-Breakers

From the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- 40 Truthfulness is the foundation of all human virtues. Without truthfulness progress and success, in all the worlds of God, are impossible for any soul. When this holy attribute is established in man, all the divine qualities will also be acquired.

Cited in The Advent of Divine Justice

- 41 O Šádiq!ⁱ Truthfulness, uprightness and integrity are the attributes of the righteous and the hallmarks of the pure. Truthfulness is the goodliest of

i The name “Šádiq” means literally “truthful” or “sincere”

qualities as it comprehendeth all other virtues. A truthful person will be protected from all moral afflictions, will shrink from every evil deed, and be preserved from every wicked act, inasmuch as all vices and misdeeds are the very antithesis of truthfulness, and a truthful man will hold them all in utter abhorrence.

From a Tablet

- 42 O pure soul! Follow thou in the footsteps of the truthful and tread the way of the righteous, so that, through truthfulness, thou mayest come to occupy a Seat of Truth,ⁱ and, through righteousness, thou mayest attain to abiding honour. If the sum of all sins were to be weighed in the balance, falsehood would, on its own, countervail them; nay, its evils would even outweigh them and its detriment prove greater. It were better for thee that thou shouldst be a blasphemer and tell the truth than that thou shouldst mouth the formulas of faith and yet be a liar. These clear words are addressed as an admonition to the peoples of the world. Render thanks unto God that it is through thee that this counsel hath been addressed to all mankind.

From a Tablet

- 43 O army of God! Through the protection and help vouchsafed by the Blessed Beauty—may my life be a sacrifice to His loved ones—ye must conduct yourselves in such a manner that ye may stand out distinguished and brilliant as the sun among other souls. Should any one of you enter a city, he should become a centre of attraction by reason of his sincerity, his faithfulness and love, his honesty and fidelity, his truthfulness and loving-kindness towards all the peoples of the world, so that the people of that city may cry out and say: ‘This man is unquestionably a Bahá’í, for his manners, his behaviour, his conduct, his morals, his nature, and disposition reflect the attributes of the Bahá’ís.’ Not until ye attain this station can ye be said to have been faithful to the Covenant and Testament of God. For He hath, through irrefutable Texts, entered into a binding Covenant with us all, requiring us to act in accordance with His sacred instructions and counsels.

Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, sec. 35

- 44 ...we, and the friends of God, should on no account slacken our efforts to be loyal, sincere and men of good will. We should at all times manifest our truthfulness and sincerity, nay rather, we must be constant in our

i Qur’án, 54:55

faithfulness and trustworthiness, and occupy ourselves in offering prayers for the good of all.

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

- 45 The primary characteristic of true believers is trustworthiness whereas the primary characteristic of the rebellious is faithlessness.

From a Tablet

- 46 If a man were to perform every good work, yet fail in the least scruple to be entirely trustworthy and honest, his good works would become as dry tinder and his failure as a soul-consuming fire. If, on the other hand, he should fall short in all his affairs, yet act with trustworthiness and honesty, all his defects would ultimately be righted, all injuries remedied, and all infirmities healed. Our meaning is that, in the sight of God, trustworthiness is the bedrock of His Faith and the foundation of all virtues and perfections. A man deprived of this quality is destitute of everything. What shall faith and piety avail if trustworthiness be lacking? Of what consequence can they be? What benefit or advantage can they confer? Wherefore 'Abdu'l-Bahá counseleth the friends—nay, rather, fervently imploreth them—so vigilantly to guard the sanctity of the Cause of God and preserve their own dignity as individuals that all nations shall come to know and honour them for their trustworthiness and integrity. They can render no greater service than this today. To act otherwise would be to take an axe to the root of the Cause of God—we take refuge with God from this heinous transgression and pray that He will protect His loved ones from committing so flagrant a wrong.

From a Tablet

- 47 You have written on the question of how the friends should proceed in their business dealings with one another. This is a question of the greatest importance and a matter that deserveth the liveliest concern. In relations of this kind, the friends of God should act with the utmost trustworthiness and integrity. To be remiss in this area would be to turn one's face away from the counsels of the Blessed Beauty and the holy precepts of God. If a man in his own home doth not treat his relations and friends with entire trustworthiness and integrity, his dealings with the outside world—no matter how much trustworthiness and honesty he may bring to them—will prove barren and unproductive. First one should order one's own domestic

affairs, then attend to one's business with the public. One should certainly not argue that the friends need not be treated with undue care, or that it is unnecessary for them to attach too great importance to the practice of trustworthiness in their dealings with one another, but that it is in their relations with strangers that correct behaviour is essential. Talk like this is sheer fantasy and will lead to detriment and loss. Blessed be the soul that shineth with the light of trustworthiness among the people and becometh a sign of perfection amidst all men.

From a Tablet

- 48 Since the orderly running of your association dependeth upon the devotion, integrity, fair-mindedness and sanctity of purpose manifested by the friends of God, they should show forth in their management of its affairs such purity, nobility and far-sighted wisdom that they will become a model for other societies, and all people may be edified and enlightened by their example. In this way the Bahá'ís will become known to all as people who are dependable and honest, virtuous and enlightened, pure and refined; who are industrious and high-principled, liberal-minded and promoters of freedom; whose concern is to serve the common good, not to advance their own interests, and whose aim is to further the welfare and prosperity of the people, not to foster their own well-being.

From a Tablet

- 49 Your criterion should be to pursue your commercial activities with such fairness and equity as to be a cause of guidance to others. The friends of God should, through the instrumentality of their business, lead the people to God's path, and make them so astonished as to exclaim: "How great is their truthfulness, how high their trustworthiness, and how true is their good will!"

From a Tablet

- 50 Every business company should be established on divine principles. Its foundations should be trustworthiness, piety and truthfulness in order to protect the rights of the people.

From a Tablet

- 51 Commerce, agriculture and industry should not, in truth, be a bar to service of the one true God. Indeed, such occupations are most potent instruments

and clear proofs for the manifestation of the evidences of one's piety, of one's trustworthiness and of the virtues of the All-Merciful Lord.

From a Tablet

- 52 Ye who are the sincere well-wishers of the state, who are the dutiful and compliant subjects of the government, should occupy yourselves in constant service. Anyone who entereth the employ of the government should show forth in all his deeds and actions the highest degree of rectitude and honesty, of temperance and self-discipline, of purity and sanctity, of justice and equity. If, God forbid, he should be guilty of the least breach of trust, or approach his duties in a slack or desultory fashion, or extort so much as a farthing from the populace, or seek to further his own selfish interests and personal gain—then it is certain that he shall be deprived of the outpourings of God's grace.

From a Tablet

- 53 In discharging the functions of the office to which thou hast been appointed, thy conduct and actions should attest to the highest standard of trustworthiness and honesty, to a degree of sincerity that is altogether above suspicion, and to an integrity that is immune to the promptings of self-interest. Thus shall all know that the Bahá'ís are the embodiments of probity, and the very essence of spotless virtue. If they accept office, their motive is to render service to the whole of humanity, not to seek their own self-interest; and their object is to vindicate the cause of truth, not to give themselves over to self-indulgence and base ingratitude.

From a Tablet

- 54 As for those who are engaged in government service, they should perform their duties with the utmost fidelity, trustworthiness, rectitude, uprightness, integrity and high-mindedness. Let them not tarnish their good repute by pursuing personal interests, nor, for the sake of transient worldly benefits, make themselves objects of public odium and outcasts of the Threshold of Grandeur.

From a Tablet

- 55 Those persons who are selected to serve the public, or are appointed to administrative positions, should perform their duties in a spirit of true servitude and ready compliance. That is to say, they should be distinguished

by their goodly disposition and virtuous character, content themselves with their allotted remuneration, and act with trustworthiness in all their doings. They should keep themselves aloof from unworthy motives, and be far removed above covetous designs; for rectitude, probity and righteousness are among the most potent means for attracting the grace of God and securing both the prosperity of the country and the welfare of the people. Glory and honour for man are not to be found in fortunes and riches, least of all in those which have been unlawfully amassed through extortion, embezzlement and corruption practised at the expense of an exploited populace. Supreme honour, nobility and greatness in the human world, and true felicity in this life and the life to come—all consist in equity and uprightness, sanctity and detachment. If a man would seek distinction, he should suffice himself with a frugal provision, seek to better the lot of the poor of the realm, choose the way of justice and fair-mindedness, and tread the path of high-spirited service. Such a one, needy though he be, shall win imperishable riches and attain unto everlasting honour.

From a Tablet

- 56 If any of the friends should enter into the service of the government, they should make their occupation a means of drawing nearer to the divine Threshold: they should act with probity and uprightness, rigorously shun all forms of venality and corruption, and content themselves with the salaries they are receiving, taking pride, rather, in the degree of sagacity, competence and judgement that they can bring to their work. If a person content himself with a single loaf of bread, and perform his duties with as much justice and fair-mindedness as lieth within his power, he will be the prince of mortals, and the most praiseworthy of men. Noble and distinguished will he be, despite his empty purse! Pre-eminent will he rank among the free, although his garb be old and worn! For man, praise and glory reside in virtuous and noble qualities; honour and distinction in nearness to the divine Threshold. The world's wealth is, by contrast, the stuff of illusion.ⁱ Those who lust after it are the followers of evil and, ere long, they shall be plunged into confusion and despair. Which is better—that a man should be thus, or that he should comport himself with consecration and sanctity of purpose and stand out conspicuously for his integrity,

i Cf. Qur'án, 3:185 and 57:20

uprightness and honesty? Nay, such qualities are better than the riches of Korah,ⁱⁱ and dearer than all the treasures of existence.

From a Tablet

- 57 If one of the friends ... be appointed to a high administrative office, he should strive diligently to perform the duties committed to his charge with perfect honesty, integrity, sincerity, rectitude and uprightness. If, however, he abuse his position through corrupt or mercenary behaviour, he will be held in detestation at the Threshold of Grandeur and incur the wrath of the Abhá Beauty—nay, he shall be forsaken by the one true God and all who adore Him. So far from acting thus, he should content himself with his salary and allowances, seek out the way of righteousness, and dedicate his life to the service of state and people. Such must be the conduct and bearing of the Bahá'ís. Whoso transgresseth these bounds shall fall at length into manifest loss.

From a Tablet

- 58 Those souls who are employed in government departments should approach their duties with entire detachment, integrity and independence of spirit, and with complete consecration and sanctity of purpose. Content with the wages they are receiving, they should see that they do not stain their fair character through acts of bribery and fraud. Were one of the friends in this day to misappropriate so much as a single penny, the sacred mantle of God's Cause would become sullied by his action and the shame of it would attach to the whole community. Heaven forbid! Nay, rather, the government and people should come to repose such trust in the Bahá'ís as to wish to commit all affairs of state throughout the provinces into the chaste, pure hands of God's well-beloved.

From a Tablet

- 59 All government employees, whether of high or low rank, should, with perfect integrity, probity and rectitude, content themselves with the modest stipends and allowances that are theirs. They should keep their hands unsullied and preserve their fair name from blemish ... If a man deal

ii Name synonymous with great wealth, mentioned (in the form 'Qárún') in the Qur'an, 28:76

faithlessly with a just government he shall have dealt faithlessly with God; and if he render it faithful service he shall have rendered that service to God.

From a Tablet

- 60 Let them perform their services with complete sanctity and detachment, and on no account defile themselves by receiving bribes, harbouring unseemly motives, or engaging in noxious practices. Let them be content with their wages, and seek distinction in truthfulness, straightforwardness, and the pursuit of virtue and excellence; for vanity in riches is worthy of none but the base, and pride in possessions beseemeth only the foolish. To attain to true glory and honour, man should exercise justice and equity, forbear to act in an oppressive manner, render service to his government, and work for the good of his fellow-citizens. Were he to seek after aught else but this he would indeed be in manifest loss.

From a Tablet

- 61 How foolish and ignorant must a man be, how base his nature, and how vile the clay of which he is fashioned, if he would defile himself with the contamination of bribery, corruption and perfidy towards the state! Truly, the vermin of the earth are to be preferred to such people!

From a Tablet

- 62 If it should happen that one of the friends be called upon to serve his country and people in some capacity, he should apply himself to his work with heart and soul, and discharge his duties with perfect honesty, trustworthiness and godliness.

From a Tablet

From letters by Shoghi Effendi

- 63 These are the days for rendering the divine Cause victorious and effective aid! The victory of God's Faith is dependent upon teaching; and teaching is conditional upon righteous actions and goodly deeds and conduct. The foundation-stone of a life lived in the way of God is the pursuit of moral excellence and the acquisition of a character endowed with qualities that are well-pleasing in His sight. The Bahá'ís should adorn themselves with this holy raiment; with this mighty sword they should conquer the citadels

of men's hearts. People have grown weary and impatient of rhetoric and discourse, of preaching and sermonizing. In this day, the one thing that can deliver the world from its travail and attract the hearts of its peoples is deeds, not words; example, not precept; saintly virtues, not statements and charters issued by governments and nations on socio-political affairs. In all matters, great or small, word must be the complement of deed, and deed the companion of word: each must supplement, support and reinforce the other. It is in this respect that the Bahá'ís must seek distinction over other peoples and nations, whom the Pen of the Most High has epitomized in the following words: "Their words are the pride of the world, and their deeds are the shame of the nations."

8 December 1923

- 64 The employment that the Bahá'ís accept, the tasks and duties that they perform, should be of a kind whose benefits accrue to the nation as a whole and not such as are a means of profit to a small circle of high officials and a few select individuals. Further, the beloved friends and members of the Assemblies should, in the manifold circumstances of their lives and in all their multifarious dealings and pursuits, by their deeds, their bearing and demeanour, seek to demonstrate to their fellow-countrymen the excellence of this sacred Cause, to vindicate its truth, and give living testimony to its potency and the sublimity of its spirit. It is thus that the friends should proceed, not confining themselves to the delivery of the message, to explanations, expositions and elucidations. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Chief Interpreter of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, has written:

Wherefore it is incumbent upon all Bahá'ís to ponder this very delicate and vital matter in their hearts, that, unlike other religions, they may not content themselves with the noise, the clamour, the hollowness of religious doctrine. Nay, rather, they should exemplify in every aspect of their lives those attributes and virtues that are born of God and should arise to distinguish themselves by their goodly behaviour. They should justify their claim to be Bahá'ís by deeds and not by name. He is a true Bahá'í who strives by day and by night to progress and advance along the path of human endeavour, whose most cherished desire is so to live and act as to enrich and illuminate the world, whose source of inspiration is the essence of divine virtue, whose aim in life is so to conduct himself as to be the cause of infinite progress. Only when he

attains unto such perfect gifts can it be said of him that he is a true Bahá'í. For in this holy Dispensation, the crowning glory of bygone ages and cycles, true faith is no mere acknowledgement of the unity of God, but rather the living of a life that will manifest all the perfections and virtues implied in such belief.ⁱ

See how firm and strongly-worded is this statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's, and how demanding its requirements! Notwithstanding, it is only when the Bahá'is are able fully and befittingly to distinguish their characters by the adornment of these divine virtues that they will appear before the eyes of the world in a worthy and appropriate manner and that the name of Bahá'u'lláh will set the universe ablaze.

30 October 1924

- 65 Nothing but the abundance of our actions, nothing but the purity of our lives and the integrity of our character, can in the last resort establish our claim that the Bahá'í spirit is in this day the sole agency that can translate a long-cherished ideal into an enduring achievement.

24 November 1924, Bahá'í Administration

- 66 This is the day for excellence of character and conduct. We should all adorn ourselves with these ornaments of the Kingdom while still in this world of being, so that we may render fit service to the Threshold of the Most Merciful.

24 November 1924, appended to a letter

- 67 The responsibilities of the members of the Spiritual Assemblies that are engaged in teaching the Cause of God in Eastern lands have been clearly laid down in the holy Texts.

These bid them to work towards the improvement of morals and the spread of learning; to strive to eradicate ignorance and unenlightenment, eliminate prejudice, and reinforce the foundation of true faith in people's hearts and minds; to seek to develop self-reliance and avoidance of blind imitation; to aim to enhance the efficient management of their affairs, and observe purity and refinement in all circumstances; to show their commitment to truthfulness and honesty, and their ability to conduct themselves with frankness, courage and resolution.

i Translated by Shoghi Effendi, *The Bahá'í World*, vol. 2, 1926–1928, p. xvi

They similarly enjoin them to lend their support to agricultural and industrial development, to consolidate the foundations of mutual assistance and cooperation, to promote the emancipation and advancement of women and support the compulsory education of both sexes, to encourage application of the principles of consultation among all classes, and to adhere in all dealings to a standard of scrupulous integrity.

They further impress upon them the virtue of trustworthiness and godliness, of purity of motive, kindness of heart, and detachment from the fetters of this material world. They call upon them so to sanctify themselves that they will rise above the corrupt and evil influences that exercise so powerful a sway over the Western world, and charge them to abide by the counsel of moderation at all times and under all conditions. They urge them to make detailed inquiry into the various branches of contemporary learning—arts and sciences alike—and to concentrate their attention on serving the general interests of the people; to deepen themselves by attentive study of the sacred Texts, and to apply the divine guidance they contain to the circumstances, needs and conditions of society today; to refrain from entering into the tangled affairs of political parties and to have neither concern for, nor involvement in, the controversies of politicians, the wranglings of theologians or any of the ailing social theories current amongst men.

They finally exhort them to be sincerely obedient, in both thought and word, to the laws duly enacted by the government of the realm, and to distance themselves from the methods, concepts and illgrounded arguments of extreme traditionalists and modernists alike; to accord honour, veneration and respect to—and endorse the efforts of—exponents of the arts and sciences, and to esteem and revere those who are possessed of extensive knowledge and scholarly erudition; to uphold the right of freedom of conscience; and to abstain from criticizing and disparaging the manners, customs and beliefs of other individuals, peoples and nations.

These are among the most pressing requirements for the nations of the East. These are the basic, the binding, the inescapable responsibilities of the trustees of the Merciful, the representatives of the Bahá'í communities, the members of the Spiritual Assemblies.

30 January 1926

- 68 The people of Bahá, under the jurisdiction of whatsoever state or government they may be residing, should conduct themselves with honesty and sincerity, trustworthiness and rectitude. They should concern themselves with men's hearts, and hold themselves aloof from the fluctuations and limitations of the contingent world. They are neither thirsty for prominence, nor acquisitive of power; they are neither adepts at dissimulation and hypocrisy, nor are they seekers after wealth and influence; they neither crave for the pomp and circumstance of high office, nor do they lust after the glory of titles and ranks. They are averse to affectation and ostentation, and shrink from the use of coercive force; they have closed their eyes to all but God, and set their hearts on the firm and incontrovertible promises of their Lord; they have severed the bonds of earthly expectations and attachments, and connected their lives to the One Peerless Beloved. Oblivious to themselves, they have occupied their energies in working towards the good of society; and, steadfastly adhering to the sound and wholesome principles of God's Faith, they have turned their backs on the morbid imaginings, the incoherent theories, and pernicious ideas of the victims of caprice and folly. While vigilantly refusing to accept political posts, they should whole-heartedly welcome the chance to assume administrative positions; for the primary purpose of the people of Bahá is to advance the interests and promote the welfare of the nation, not to further the devious ends and designs of the profligate and shameless. Such is the method of the Bahá'ís; such is the conduct of all spiritually illumined souls; and aught else is manifest error.

February 1927

- 69 In their homes ... in the daily contact of business transactions ... the community of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh should satisfy themselves that in the eyes of the world at large and in the sight of their vigilant Master they are the living witnesses of those truths which He fondly cherished and tirelessly championed to the very end of His days...

12 April 1927, Bahá'í Administration

- 70 Let them so shape their lives and regulate their conduct that no charge of secrecy, of fraud, of bribery or of intimidation may, however ill-founded, be brought against them.

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

- 71 It [rectitude of conduct] must be constantly reflected in the business dealings of all its members, in their domestic lives, in all manner of employment, and in any service they may, in the future, render their government or people...
 25 December 1938, *The Advent of Divine Justice*

From letters on behalf of Shoghi Effendi

- 72 The permanence and stability achieved by any association, group or nation is a result of—and dependent upon—the soundness and worth of the principles upon which it bases the running of its affairs and the direction of its activities. The guiding principles of the Bahá'ís are: honesty, love, charity and trustworthiness; the setting of the common good above private interest; and the practice of godliness, virtue and moderation. Ultimately, then, their preservation and happiness are assured. Whatever misfortunes they may encounter, wrought by the wiles of the schemer and ill-wisher, shall all pass away like waves, and hardship shall be succeeded by joy. The friends are under the protection of the resistless power and inscrutable providence of God. There is no doubt that every blessed soul who brings his life into harmony with this all-swaying power shall give lustre to his works and win an ample recompense. The actions of those who choose to set themselves against it should provoke not antipathy on our part, but prayers for their guidance. Such was the way of the Bahá'ís in days gone by, and so must it be, now and for always.

18 December 1925

- 73 The Pen of the Most High has recorded: “Fear of God is the greatest commander that can render the Cause of God victorious, and the hosts which best befit this commander have ever been and are an upright character and pure and goodly deeds.”ⁱ The people of Bahá should, then, lead their lives and conduct their affairs with the highest degree of sanctity and godliness, and uncompromisingly repudiate and dissociate themselves from the disreputable practices, the deplorable modes and customs prevalent among the people of the West. Piety and devotion should be the object of all who would be accounted lovers of this Cause, and the adornment of every righteous soul; otherwise, slowly but surely, the illumination conferred on the innermost reality of men's hearts by the virtues of the human world

i From the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd, *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*.

will flicker and fade and die away, to be overwhelmed by the engulfing darkness of vice and depravity. Courtesy and dignity are what bring nobility and standing to a man; whereas frivolity and facetiousness, ribaldry and effrontery will lead to his abasement, degradation and humiliation. The Bahá'ís should, indeed must, seek to distinguish themselves in all things, for what difference else would there be between them and others? Any action, therefore, that is calculated to detract from the dignity of man's station must be steadfastly avoided and shunned.

21 January 1928

- 74 You brought up the question of showing forth honesty and trustworthiness when engaged in the service of the state. These are qualities that must distinguish all the activities of the friends, and the acquisition of which is a religious duty incumbent on every believer. That some of the leaders whom they serve may be unappreciative of their efforts, or fail correctly to value their services, should give no cause for surprise. The reason for such conduct is the remoteness of such men from the True Source of justice, equity and fair-mindedness. We should keep our vision centred on God, not on the doings of His creatures. Every spotless action, every sincere intent of ours will win the commendation of the True One, will be exalted and magnified by Him, and requited with a bounteous recompense.

8 March 1948

- 75 It is with deep concern indeed that he has learned of the difficulties you have encountered in your business, and he was particularly grieved to hear of the bitter competition you are meeting from some Persians in New York, who seem determined to ruin and force you out of business, despite the fact that you have shown them kindness, and refused to deal with them harshly. Though the Guardian would advise that you continue keeping such a true Bahá'í attitude of forbearance, he wishes you at the same time not to give way, and not to allow any threat on their part to discourage or demoralize you. However unethical the methods they may employ, it should be your firm conviction that such malicious devices cannot in the long run succeed, and that the most effective way of counteracting them is for you to maintain unreservedly the one true standard of business conduct inculcated in the Teachings.

31 October 1938

- 76 May I, in closing, also express his satisfaction at the improvement in Mr. ... business conditions. He will continue to pray that the high standard of integrity he has so well maintained in his business transactions may not only serve to draw upon him the confirmations and blessings of God, but in addition prove an effective means for the attraction of many souls to the Faith.

4 November 1940

- 77 As for your comment that the Faith has a need for selfless, love-intoxicated followers, for people of outstanding spiritual endowments, for powerful, eloquent speakers and for men of material resources and talents to vindicate the truth of our beloved Cause, the Guardian instructed me to write:

“What is needed is excellence of character and conduct, and compliance with the laws revealed by Bahá’u’lláh—these are the magnets that attract divine confirmation, and the means of establishing the validity and uniqueness of the Cause of the All-Glorious.”

He further bade me write:

“The removal of imperfections is a gradual process. Constant advice and admonition are necessary so that, step by step, the community may make good the various deficiencies that beset it and run its affairs on a planned and orderly basis.”

12 January 1946

- 78 The Guardian feels that your attitude towards the corrupt practice of accepting commissions from fellow physicians and pharmacists is most admirable. The more upright and noble the Bahá’ís are in their conduct, the more they will impress the public with the spiritual vitality of the Faith they believe in.

20 October 1953

- 79 He feels you should both consider the competent running of your business not only a moral obligation to any creditors outstanding, but also the wise and proper thing to do.

6 June 1954

