

Living the Life

November 1972

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How often the beloved Master was heard to say: Should each one of the friends take upon himself to carry out, in all its integrity and implications, only one of the teachings of the Faith, with devotion, detachment, constancy and perseverance and exemplify it in all his deeds and pursuits of life, the world would become another world and the face of the earth would mirror forth the splendours of the Abhá Paradise. Consider what marvellous changes would be effected if the beloved of the Merciful conducted themselves, both in their individual and collective capacities, in accordance with the counsels and exhortations which have streamed from the Pen of Glory.

(From a letter dated 12 January 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of Persia
—translated from the Persian)

[1]

The wish of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that which attracts His good pleasure, and, indeed, His binding command, is that Bahá'ís, in all matters, even in small daily transactions and dealings with others, should act in accordance with the divine Teachings. He has commanded us not to be content with lowliness, humility and meekness, but rather to become manifestations of selflessness and utter nothingness. Of old, all have been exhorted to loyalty and fidelity, compassion and love; in this supreme Dispensation, the people of Bahá are called upon to sacrifice their very lives. Notice the extent to which the friends have been required in the Sacred Epistles and Tablets, as well as in our Beloved's Testament, to be righteous, well-wishing, forbearing, sanctified, pure, detached from all else save God, severed from the trappings of this world and adorned with the mantle of a goodly character and godly attributes.

First and foremost, one should use every possible means to purge one's heart and motives, otherwise, engaging in any form of enterprise would be futile. It is also essential to abstain from hypocrisy and blind imitation, inasmuch as their foul odour is soon detected by every man of understanding and wisdom. Moreover, the friends must observe the specific times for the remembrance of God, meditation, devotion and prayer, as it is highly unlikely, nay impossible, for any enterprise to prosper and develop when deprived of divine bestowals and confirmation. One can hardly imagine what a great influence genuine love, truthfulness and purity of motives exert on the souls of men. But these traits cannot be acquired by any believer unless he makes a daily effort to gain them....

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.

(From a letter dated 19 December 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the East—translated from the Persian)

[2]

The chosen ones of God ... should not look at the depraved condition of the society in which they live, nor at the evidences of moral degradation and frivolous conduct which the people around them display. They should not content themselves merely with relative distinction and excellence. Rather they should fix their gaze upon nobler heights by setting the counsels and exhortations of the Pen of Glory as their supreme goal. Then it will be readily realized how numerous are the

stages that still remain to be traversed and how far off the desired goal lies—a goal which is none other than exemplifying heavenly morals and virtues.

(From a letter dated 30 October 1924 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tīhrán—translated from the Persian) [3]

It is our duty and privilege to translate the love and devotion we have for our beloved Cause into deeds and actions that will be conducive to the highest good of mankind.

(From a postscript by Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 20 November 1924 written on his behalf to an individual believer) [4]

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.

(From a postscript by Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 30 January 1925 written on his behalf to an individual believer) [5]

The great thing is to “live the life”—to have our lives so saturated with the Divine teachings and the Bahá'í Spirit that people cannot fail to see a joy, a power, a love, a purity, a radiance, an efficiency in our character and work that will distinguish us from worldly-minded people and make people wonder what is the secret of this new life in us. We must become entirely selfless and devoted to God so that every day and every moment we seek to do only what God would have us do and in the way He would have us do it. If we do this sincerely then we shall have perfect unity and harmony with each other. Where there is want of harmony, there is lack of the true Bahá'í Spirit. Unless we can show this transformation in our lives, this new power, this mutual love and harmony, then the Bahá'í teachings are but a name to us.

(From a letter dated 14 February 1925 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [6]

If we Bahá'ís cannot attain to cordial unity among ourselves, then we fail to realize the main purpose for which the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh and the Beloved Master lived and suffered.

In order to achieve this cordial unity one of the first essentials insisted on by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá is that we resist the natural tendency to let our attention dwell on the faults and failings of others rather than on our own. Each of us is responsible for one life only, and that is our own. Each of us is immeasurably far from being “perfect as our heavenly father is perfect” and the task of perfecting our own life and character is one that requires all our attention, our will-power and energy. If we allow our attention and energy to be taken up in efforts to keep others right and remedy their faults, we are wasting precious time. We are like ploughmen each of whom has his team to manage and his plough to direct, and in order to keep his furrow straight he must keep his eye on his goal and concentrate on his own task. If he looks to this side and that to see how Tom and Harry are getting on and to criticize their ploughing, then his own furrow will assuredly become crooked.

On no subject are the Bahá'í teachings more emphatic than on the necessity to abstain from faultfinding and backbiting while being ever eager to discover and root out our own faults and overcome our own failings.

If we profess loyalty to Bahá'u'lláh, to our Beloved Master and our dear Guardian, then we must show our love by obedience to these explicit teachings. Deeds not words are what they demand, and no amount of fervour in the use of expressions of loyalty and adulation will compensate for failure to live in the spirit of the teachings.

(From a letter dated 12 May 1925 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [7]

As to the question whether it is right to tell an untruth in order to save another, he feels that under no condition should we tell an untruth but at the same time try and help the person in a more legitimate manner. Of course it is not necessary to be too outspoken until the question is directly put to us.

(From a letter dated 21 December 1927 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [8]

We should not, however, forget that an essential characteristic of this world is hardship and tribulation and that it is by overcoming them that we achieve our moral and spiritual development. As the Master says, sorrow is like furrows, the deeper they go the more plentiful are the fruits we obtain.

(From a letter dated 5 November 1931 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [9]

In the Bayán the Báb says that every religion of the past was fit to become universal. The only reason why they failed to attain that mark was the incompetence of their followers. He then proceeds to give a definite promise that this would not be the fate of the revelation of “Him Whom God would make manifest”, that it will become universal and include all the people of the world. This shows that we will ultimately succeed. But could we not, through our shortcomings, failures to sacrifice and reluctance to concentrate our efforts in spreading the Cause, retard the realization of that ideal? And what would that mean? It shall mean that we will be held responsible before God, that the race will remain longer in its state of waywardness, that wars would not be so soon averted, that human suffering will last longer.

(From a letter dated 20 February 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [10]

Every day has certain needs. In those early days the Cause needed Martyrs, and people who would stand all sorts of torture and persecution in expressing their faith and spreading the message sent by God. Those days are, however, gone. The Cause at present does not need martyrs who would die for the faith, but servants who desire to teach and establish the Cause throughout the world. To live to teach in the present day is like being martyred in those early days. It is the spirit that moves us that counts, not the act through which that spirit expresses itself; and that spirit is to serve the Cause of God with our heart and soul.

(From a letter dated 3 August 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, quoted in *Bahá'í News*, no. 68, November 1932, p. 3) [11]

He sincerely hopes that, through these sacrifices, that edifice will be completed and become a focal centre for the spirit and teachings of the Cause in that land; that from it the light of guidance will spread and bring joy and hope to the heart of this depressed humanity.

If you study the history of Nabíl you will see how the Faith has been fed by the constant sacrifices of the friends. Under hardships, persecutions and constant worries has the Message of Bahá'u'lláh been established throughout the world.

(From a letter dated 30 November 1932 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [12]

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

(From a letter dated 26 February 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [13]

I need not tell you how grievously he deplores the fact that there are so many negative forces prevailing in Bahá'í gatherings and particularly in such an important meeting as the Convention. The oft-repeated words of the Master concerning unity and harmonious co-operation among the friends should be carefully and thoughtfully remembered now more than ever. Nothing is more contrary to the spirit of the Cause than discord and strife, which are the inevitable outcome of selfishness and greed. Pure detachment and selfless service, these should be the sole motives of every true believer. And unless each and every one of the friends succeeds in translating such qualities into living action, no hope of further progress can be entertained. It is now that unity of thought and action is most needed. It is now, when the Cause is entering a new phase of development, when its Administration is being gradually consolidated amid the welter and chaos of a tottering civilization, that the friends should present a united front to those forces of internal dissension, which, if not completely wiped out, will bring our work to inevitable destruction.

(From a letter dated 24 September 1933 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [14]

He, indeed, highly deplores the fact that the representatives of the highest administrative institution in your country have permitted such differences and misunderstandings to assume such a proportion, especially when the principles and laws of the Administration have been each and all clearly and emphatically stated by him in so many communications and ever since the passing of the Master. Such difficulties, if not checked immediately and vigorously, can do incalculable harm to the body of the Cause, and may retard not only the flow but also the effectiveness of its spirit in the world. If deeply and dispassionately examined the source of all these troubles and disputes is to be found invariably in feelings of egotism and selfishness. And unless these poisonous feelings are fully overcome there can be no hope for the effective working and progress of the administrative machinery of the Cause.

(From a letter dated 9 May 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [15]

While he would urge you to courageously meet and overcome the many obstacles that stand in your way, he would at the same time advise you that in case of failure and no matter what befalls you, you should remain radiantly content at, and entirely submissive to, the Divine will. Our afflictions, tests and trials are sometimes blessings in disguise, as they teach us to have more faith and confidence in God, and bring us nearer to Him.

(From a letter dated 28 April 1936 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [16]

Has not Bahá'u'lláh assured us that sufferings and privations are blessings in disguise, that through them our inner spiritual forces become stimulated, purified and ennobled? Remain, therefore, confident that your material hardships will, far from hindering your activities for the Cause, impart to your heart a powerful impetus to better serve and promote its interests.

(From a letter dated 22 November 1936 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [17]

Personal effort is indeed a vital prerequisite to the recognition and acceptance of the Cause of God. No matter how strong the measure of Divine grace, unless supplemented by personal, sustained and intelligent effort it cannot become fully effective and be of any real and abiding advantage.

(From a letter dated 27 February 1938 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [18]

Such hindrances, no matter how severe and insuperable they may at first seem, can and should be effectively overcome through the combined and sustained power of prayer and of determined and continued effort. For have not Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá both repeatedly assured us that the Divine and unseen hosts of victory will ever reinforce and strengthen those who valiantly and confidently labour in their name? This assurance should indeed enable you to overcome any feeling of unworthiness, of incapacity to serve, and any inner or outer limitations which threaten to handicap your labours for the Cause. You should therefore arise, and with a heart filled with joy and confidence endeavour to contribute any share that is in your power toward the wider diffusion and greater consolidation of our beloved Faith.

Whatever the particular field of service you may choose, whether teaching or administrative, the essential is for you to persevere, and not to allow any consciousness of your limitations to dampen your zeal, much less to deter you from serving joyously and actively.

(From a letter dated 6 February 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [19]

The greater your trials and sufferings, the stronger should wax your attachment and devotion to the Cause. For only through repeated tribulations and trials does God test His servants, and these they should therefore view as blessings in disguise, and as opportunities whereby they can acquire a fuller consciousness of the Divine Will and Purpose.

(From a letter dated 23 February 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers) [20]

The course on character building to be given by Miss Flora Hottes, the Guardian feels, is particularly important and should be given due emphasis and studied carefully and thoroughly, especially by the young believers in attendance at the school. These 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, and should constitute the main central theme of this year's programme at all the three Bahá'í Summer Schools in the States.

(From a letter dated 20 May 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [21]

You have complained of the unsatisfactory conditions prevailing in the ... Bahá'í Community; the Guardian is well aware of the situation of the Cause there, but is confident that whatever the nature of the obstacles that confront the Faith they will be eventually overcome. You should, under no circumstances, feel discouraged, and allow such difficulties, even though they may have resulted from the misconduct, or the lack of capacity and vision of certain members of the Community, to make you waver in your faith and basic loyalty to the Cause. 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 [a] 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.

(From a letter dated 23 August 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [22]

These, indeed, are the days when heroism is needed on the part of the believers. Self-sacrifice, courage, indomitable hope and confidence are the characteristics they should show forth, because these very attributes cannot but fix the attention of the public and lead them to enquire what, in a world so hopelessly chaotic and bewildered, leads these people to be so assured, so confident, so full of devotion? Increasingly, as time goes by, the characteristics of the Bahá'ís will be that which captures the attention of their fellow-citizens. They must show their aloofness from the hatreds and recriminations which are tearing at the heart of humanity, and demonstrate by deed and word their profound belief in the future peaceful unification of the entire human race.

(From a letter dated 26 October 1941 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [23]

We must always look ahead and seek to accomplish in the future what we may have failed to do in the past. Failures, tests, and trials, if we use them correctly, can become the means of purifying our spirits, strengthening our characters, and enable us to rise to greater heights of service.

(From a letter dated 14 December 1941 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [24]

Regarding the points you refer to in your letter: the complete and entire elimination of the ego would imply perfection—which man can never completely attain—but the ego can and should be ever-increasingly subordinated to the enlightened soul of man. This is what spiritual progress implies.

(From a letter dated 14 December 1941 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [25]

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.

He would advise you to leave your friend ... to herself for the time being, and pray for her. As she does not at the moment wish your help you can only help her inwardly.

You have rendered the Cause many valuable services, and are still doing so, and this should be your greatest consolation....

(From a letter dated 8 May 1942 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [26]

The friends must be patient with each other and must realize that the Cause is still in its infancy and its institutions are not yet functioning perfectly. The greater the patience, the loving understanding and the forbearance the believers show towards each other and their shortcomings, the greater will be the progress of the whole Bahá'í Community at large.

(From a letter dated 27 February 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [27]

We must realize our imperfection and not permit ourselves to get too upset over the unfortunate things which occur, sometimes in Conventions, sometimes in Assemblies or on Committees, etc. Such things are essentially superficial and in time will be outgrown.

(From a letter dated 17 March 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [28]

Not all of us are capable of serving in the same way, but the one way every Bahá'í can spread the Faith is by example. This moves the hearts of people far more deeply than words ever can.

The love we show others, the hospitality and understanding, the willingness to help them, these are the very best advertisements of the Faith. They will want to hear about it when they see these things in our lives.

(From a letter dated 14 October 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [29]

He was very pleased to hear that the Convention was so well attended, and the believers enthusiastic and united. One of the most paramount needs of the Cause in ... is that the friends should unite, should become really keenly conscious of the fact that they are one spiritual family, held together by bonds more sacred and eternal than those physical ties which make people of the same family. If the friends will forget all personal differences and open their hearts to a great love for each other for the sake of Bahá'u'lláh, they will find that their powers are vastly increased; they will attract the heart of the public, and will witness a rapid growth of the Holy Faith in The National Spiritual Assembly should do all in its power to foster unity among the believers, and to educate them in the Administration as this is the channel through which their community life must flow, and which, when properly understood and practised, will enable the work of the Cause to go ahead by leaps and bounds.

(From a letter dated 26 October 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma) [30]

Ultimately all the battle of life is within the individual. No amount of organization can solve the inner problems or produce or prevent, as the case may be, victory or failure at a crucial moment. In such times as these particularly, individuals are torn by great forces at large in the world, and we see some weak ones suddenly become miraculously strong, and strong ones fail—we can only try, through loving advice, as your Committee has done, to bring about the act on the part of the believer which will be for the highest good of the Cause. Because obviously something bad for the Cause cannot be the highest good of the individual Bahá'í.

(From a letter dated 17 December 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [31]

The thing the world needs today is the Bahá'í spirit. People are craving for love, for a high standard to look up to, as well as for solutions to their many grave problems. The Bahá'ís should shower on those whom they meet the warm and living spirit of the Cause, and this, combined with teaching, cannot but attract the sincere truth-seekers to the Faith.

(From a letter dated 18 December 1943 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [32]

Regarding your question about the need for greater unity among the friends there is no doubt that this is so, and the Guardian feels that one of the chief instruments for promoting it is to teach the Bahá'ís themselves, in classes and through precepts, that love of God, and consequently of men, is the essential foundation of every religion, our own included. A greater degree of love will produce a greater unity, because it enables people to bear with each other, to be patient and forgiving.

(From a letter dated 7 July 1944 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, quoted in *Bahá'í News*, no. 173, February 1945, p. 3) [33]

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.

(From a letter dated 25 August 1944 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Louhelen School Youth Session, U.S.A.) [34]

So many misunderstandings arise from the passionate attachment of the friends to the Faith and also their immaturity. We must therefore be very patient and loving with each other and try to establish unity in the Bahá'í family. The differences ... which you describe in your letter he feels are caused by the above and not by enmity to the Faith or insincerity.

(From a letter dated 17 October 1944 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [35]

He was very happy to hear from you, and to learn that Green Acre this year was pervaded with a love and harmony that was instrumental in confirming many new souls in the Faith. This love amongst the believers is the magnet which will, above all else, attract the hearts and bring new souls into the Cause. Because obviously the teachings—however wonderful—cannot change the world unless the Spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's love is mirrored in the Bahá'í Communities.

(From a letter dated 27 October 1944 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [36]

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.

He is pleased to see you have naturally, with conviction and good will towards all, been mingling with and teaching the coloured people. When the Bahá'ís live up to their teachings as they should, although it may arouse the opposition of some it will arouse still more the admiration of fair-minded people.

(From a letter dated 23 January 1945 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [37]

Indeed when we see the increasing darkness in the world today we can fully realize that unless the Message of Bahá'u'lláh reaches into the hearts of men and transforms them, there can be no peace and no spiritual progress in the future.

His constant hope is that the believers will conduct themselves, individually and in their Bahá'í Community life, in such a manner as to attract the attention of others to the Cause. The world is not only starving for lofty principles and ideals, it is, above all, starving for a shining example which the Bahá'ís can and must provide.

(From a letter dated 22 February 1945 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [38]

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. He is very glad to see you are stressing this and aiding the friends to realize its supreme importance.

(From a letter dated 25 April 1945 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [39]

Regarding the matter of ... and the inharmony that seems to exist among certain of the friends in ...: when Bahá'ís permit the dark forces of the world to enter into their own relationships within the Faith they gravely jeopardize its progress; it is the paramount duty of the believers, the Local Assemblies, and particularly the National Spiritual Assembly to foster harmony, understanding and love amongst the friends. All should be ready and willing to set aside every personal sense of grievance—justified or unjustified—for the good of the Cause, because the people will never embrace it until they see in its community life mirrored what is so conspicuously lacking in the world: love and unity.

(From a letter dated 13 May 1945 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand) [40]

Most important of all is that love and unity should prevail in the Bahá'í Community, as this is what people are most longing for in the present dark state of the world. Words without the living example will never be sufficient to breathe hope into the hearts of a disillusioned and often cynical generation.

(From a letter dated 20 October 1945 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [41]

Since you have turned to him for guidance, he will very frankly give you his opinion.

He feels that the present inharmony prevailing amongst you ... is very detrimental to the advancement of the Cause, and can only lead to disruption and the chilling of the interest of new believers. You ... should forget about your personal grievances, and unite for the protection of the Faith which he well knows you are all loyally devoted to and ready to sacrifice for.

Perhaps the greatest test Bahá'ís are ever subjected to is from each other; but for the sake of the Master they should be ever ready to overlook each other's mistakes, apologize for harsh words they have uttered, forgive and forget. He strongly recommends to you this course of action.

Also he feels that you and ... should not remain away from the meetings and Feasts in ...; you have now got an enthusiastic group of young Bahá'ís in ..., and you should show them a strong example of Bahá'í discipline and the unity which can and must prevail amongst the Community of the Most Great Name.

(From a letter dated 18 December 1945 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [42]

You ask about “spiritual indigestion”: Bahá’ís should seek to be many-sided, normal and well balanced, mentally and spiritually. We must not give the impression of being fanatics, but at the same time we must live up to our principles.

(From a postscript by Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 12 March 1946 written on his behalf to an individual believer) [43]

You may be sure he will pray for the unity of the ... believers, as this is of paramount importance, and upon it depends the development of the Cause there, and the success of every teaching effort. The thing the friends need—everywhere—is a greater love for each other, and this can be acquired by greater love for Bahá’u’lláh; for if we love Him deeply enough, we will never allow personal feelings and opinions to hold His Cause back; we will be willing to sacrifice ourselves to each other for the sake of the Faith, and be, as the Master said, one soul in many bodies.

(From a letter dated 5 September 1946 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [44]

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.

(From a letter dated 6 September 1946 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [45]

The fact that you had a course on “Bahá’í character” pleased him very much, as he considers one of the greatest obligations of your generation of believers is to live a Bahá’í life; you must demonstrate, by your high moral standards, your courtesy, your integrity and nobility, that our Faith is not one of words but truly changes the heart and conduct of its adherents.

(From a letter dated 19 September 1946 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Louhelen School Junior Youth Session, U.S.A.) [46]

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.

(From a letter dated 19 September 1946 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to Green Acre Summer School) [47]

The friends must, at all times, bear in mind that they are, in a way, like soldiers under attack. The world is at present in an exceedingly dark condition spiritually; hatred and prejudice, of every sort, are literally tearing it to pieces. We, on the other hand, are the custodians of the opposite forces, the forces of love, of unity, of peace and integration, and we must constantly be on our guard, whether as individuals or as an Assembly or Community, lest through us these destructive, negative forces enter into our midst. In other words we must beware lest the darkness of society become reflected in our acts and attitudes, perhaps all unconsciously. Love for each other, the deep sense that we are a new organism, the dawn-breakers of a New World Order, must constantly animate our Bahá’í lives, and we must pray to be protected from the contamination of society which is so diseased with prejudice.

(From a letter dated 5 February 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Atlanta, Georgia) [48]

The Cause in ... is growing very rapidly, and the more it spreads the more the attention of the public will be fixed upon it. This imposes a heavy responsibility on the believers, as they must show forth such a spirit of love and unity among themselves as will attract the hearts of others and encourage them to enter the Faith in large numbers. We must always remember that the Teachings are perfect, and that the only reason more of our fellow men have not as yet embraced them is because we Bahá'ís, the world over, are ourselves not yet as selfless and radiant mirrors of Bahá'u'lláh's Truth as we should and could be! We must constantly strive to better exemplify His Teachings.

(From a letter dated 18 February 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [49]

We must concentrate on perfecting our characters as individual Bahá'ís, and on maturing our still embryonic, and as yet improperly understood, World Order; on spreading the Message according to the provisions of the Divine Plan; and on building a tightly knit world-wide Bahá'í Community. We are relatively few in numbers, and have such a precious, unique and responsible task to carry out. We must concentrate our full forces upon it.

(From a letter dated 9 May 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada) [50]

Regarding ...'s appeal: the Guardian feels the best course of action in this matter is to ask both of the believers concerned to forgive and forget the entire matter. He does not want the friends to form the habit of taking up a kind of Bahá'í litigation against each other. Their duties to humanity are too sacred and urgent in these days, when the Cause is struggling to spread and assert its independence, for them to spend their precious time, and his precious time, in this way. Ask them, therefore, to unite, forget the past, and serve as never before.

(From a letter dated 22 July 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand) [51]

Regarding the questions you asked: self has really two meanings, or is used in two senses, in the Bahá'í writings; one is self, the identity of the individual created by God. This is the self mentioned in such passages as "he hath known God who hath known himself", etc. The other self is the ego, the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a monster of selfishness, brutality, lust and so on. It is this self we must struggle against, or this side of our natures, in order to strengthen and free the spirit within us and help it to attain perfection.

Self-sacrifice means to subordinate this lower nature and its desires to the more godly and noble side of our selves. Ultimately, in its highest sense, self-sacrifice means to give our will and our all to God to do with as He pleases. Then He purifies and glorifies our true self until it becomes a shining and wonderful reality.

(From a letter dated 10 December 1947 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [52]

It is the quality of devotion and self-sacrifice that brings rewards in the service of this Faith rather than means, ability or financial backing.

(From a letter dated 11 May 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand) [53]

We must never dwell too much on the attitudes and feelings of our fellow-believers towards us. What is most important is to foster love and harmony and ignore any rebuffs we may receive; in this way the weaknesses of human nature and the peculiarity or attitude of any particular person is not magnified, but pales into insignificance in comparison with our joint service to the Faith we all love.

(From a letter dated 19 September 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [54]

It is often difficult for us to do things because they are so very different from what we are used to, not because the thing itself is particularly difficult. With you, and indeed most Bahá'ís, who are now, as adults, accepting this glorious Faith, no doubt some of the ordinances, like fasting and daily prayer, are hard to understand and obey at first. But we must always think that these things are given to all men for a thousand years to come. For Bahá'í children who see these things practised in the home, they will be as natural and necessary a thing as going to church on Sunday was to the more pious generation of Christians. Bahá'u'lláh would not have given us these things if they would not greatly benefit us, and, like children who are sensible enough to realize their father is wise and does what is good for them, we must accept to obey these ordinances even though at first we may not see any need for them. As we obey them we will gradually come to see in ourselves the benefits they confer.

(From a letter dated 16 March 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [55]

... as we suffer these misfortunes we must remember that the Prophets of God Themselves were not immune from these things which men suffer: They knew sorrow, illness and pain too. They rose above these things through Their spirits, and that is what we must try and do too, when afflicted. The troubles of this world pass, and what we have left is what we have made of our souls; so it is to this we must look—to becoming more spiritual, drawing nearer to God, no matter what our human minds and bodies go through.

(From a letter dated 5 August 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [56]

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. To live up to our Faith's moral teachings is a task far harder than to live up to those noble principles the Moral Re-Armament inculcates, fine and encompassing as they are! Every other word of Bahá'u'lláh's and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's writings is a preachment on moral and ethical conduct; all else is the form, the chalice, into which the pure spirit must be poured; without the spirit and the action which must demonstrate it, it is a lifeless form.

He judges, from what you say, that the friends have not or at least many of them have not, been properly taught in the beginning.

There is certainly no objection to stressing the "four standards" of the Moral Re-Armament—though any teaching of our precious Faith would go much more deeply into these subjects and add more to them.

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.

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 own 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.

(From a letter dated 30 September 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [57]

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.

(From a letter dated 25 October 1949 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [58]

However, he feels very strongly that if ... is in the state your letter would seem to indicate it is certainly conducting its affairs in the wrong way. This does not mean the Assembly, it means everyone. For where is Bahá'í love? Where is putting unity and harmony first? Where is the willingness to sacrifice one's personal feelings and opinions to achieve love and harmony? What makes the Bahá'ís think that when they sacrifice the spiritual laws the administrative laws are going to work?...

He urges you to exert your utmost to get the ... Bahá'ís to put aside such obnoxious terms as "radical", "conservative", "progressive", "enemies of the Cause", "squelching the teachings", etc. If they paused for one moment to think for what purpose the Báb and the Martyrs gave their lives, and Bahá'u'lláh and the Master accepted so much suffering, they would never let such definitions and accusations cross their lips when speaking of each other. As long as the friends quarrel amongst themselves their efforts will not be blessed for they are disobeying God.

(From a letter dated 24 February 1950 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [59]

There are two kinds of Bahá'ís, one might say: those whose religion is Bahá'í and those who live for the Faith. Needless to say, if one can belong to the latter category, if one can be in the vanguard of heroes, martyrs and saints, it is more praiseworthy in the sight of God.

(From a letter dated 16 April 1950 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [60]

... we must reach a spiritual plane where God comes first and great human passions are unable to turn us away from Him. All the time we see people who either through the force of hate or the passionate attachment they have to another person, sacrifice principle or bar themselves from the Path of God...

We must love God, and in this state, a general love for all men becomes possible. We cannot love each human being for himself, but our feeling towards humanity should be motivated by our love for the Father Who created all men.

(From a letter dated 4 October 1950 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [61]

He urges you to do all you can to promote unity and love amongst the members of the community there, as this seems to be their greatest need.

So often young communities, in their desire to administer the Cause, lose sight of the fact that these spiritual relationships are far more important and fundamental than the rules and regulations which must govern the conduct of community affairs.

(From a letter dated 4 October 1950 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [62]

The greatest need it seems everywhere inside the Cause is to impress upon the friends the need for love among them. There is a tendency to mix up the functions of the Administration and try to apply it in individual relationships, which is abortive, because the Assembly is a nascent House of Justice and is supposed to administer, according to the Teachings, the affairs of the community. But individuals toward each other are governed by love, unity, forgiveness and a sin-covering eye. Once the friends grasp this they will get along much better, but they keep playing Spiritual Assembly to each other and expect the Assembly to behave like an individual....

(From a letter dated 5 October 1950 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, quoted in *Bahá'í News*, no. 241, March 1951, p. 2) [63]

When criticism and harsh words arise within a Bahá'í community, there is no remedy except to put the past behind one, and persuade all concerned to turn over a new leaf, and for the sake of God and His Faith refrain from mentioning the subjects which have led to misunderstanding and inharmony. The more the friends argue back and forth and maintain, each side, that their point of view is the right one, the worse the whole situation becomes.

When we see the condition the world is in today, we must surely forget these utterly insignificant internal disturbances, and rush, unitedly, to the rescue of humanity. You should urge your fellow-Bahá'ís to take this point of view, and to support you in a strong effort to suppress every critical thought and every harsh word, in order to let the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh flow into the entire community, and unite it in His love and in His service.

(From a letter dated 16 February 1951 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [64]

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

(From a letter dated 12 July 1952 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [65]

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.

(From a letter dated 20 October 1953 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [66]

This challenge, so severe and insistent, and yet so glorious, faces no doubt primarily the individual believer on whom, in the last resort, depends the fate of the entire community. He it is who constitutes the warp and woof on which the quality and pattern of the whole fabric must depend. He it is who acts as one of the countless links in the mighty chain that now girdles the globe. He it is who serves as one of the multitude of bricks which support the structure and ensure the stability of the administrative edifice now being raised in every part of the world. Without his support, at once whole-hearted, continuous and generous, every measure adopted, and every plan formulated, by the Body which acts as the national representative of the community to which he belongs is foredoomed to failure. The World Centre of the Faith itself is paralysed if such a support on the part of the rank and file of the community is denied it. The Author of the Divine Plan Himself is impeded in His purpose if the proper instruments for the execution of His design are lacking. The sustaining strength of Bahá'u'lláh Himself, the Founder of the Faith, will be withheld from every and each individual who fails in the long run to arise and play his part.

(From a postscript by Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 20 June 1954 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States) [67]

In a letter dated 6 October 1954 written on his behalf to an individual believer, Shoghi Effendi provided the following guidance:

When a person becomes a Bahá'í, actually what takes place is that the seed of the spirit starts to grow in the human soul. This seed must be watered by the outpourings of the Holy Spirit. These gifts of the spirit are received through prayer, meditation, study of the Holy Utterances and service to the Cause of God. The fact of the matter is that service in the Cause is like the plough which ploughs the physical soil when seeds are sown. It is necessary that the soil be ploughed up, so that it can be enriched, and thus cause a stronger growth of the seed. In exactly the same way the evolution of the spirit takes place through ploughing up the soil of the heart so that it is a constant reflection of the Holy Spirit. In this way the human spirit grows and develops by leaps and bounds.

Naturally there will be periods of distress and difficulty, and even severe tests; but if that person turns firmly 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 the gifts of God to enable him to grow and develop.

Thus you might look upon your own difficulties in the path of service. They are the means of your spirit growing and developing. You will suddenly find that you have conquered many of the problems which upset you, and then you will wonder why they should have troubled you at all. An individual must center his whole heart and mind on service to the Cause, in accordance with the high standards set by Bahá'u'lláh. When this is done, the Hosts of the Supreme Concourse will come to the assistance of the individual, and every difficulty and trial will gradually be overcome.

You are encouraged to water "the seed of the spirit" planted in your soul through the spiritual practices identified in the above extract. These include regular study of the Bahá'í Scriptures. Through such immersion in the Sacred Texts, you will discover answers to the questions you have posed as well as others that will surely arise in the future.

(From a letter dated 19 January 2021 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer) [68]

The road is stony, and there are many tests; but as you say, if the friends will learn to live according to Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, they will discover that they work indeed in mysterious and forceful ways; and that there is always help at hand, that obstacles are overcome, and that success is assured in the end.

(From a letter dated 23 April 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [69]

The individual alone must assess its character, consult his conscience, prayerfully consider all its aspects, manfully struggle against the natural inertia that weighs him down in his effort to arise, shed, heroically and irrevocably, the trivial and superfluous attachments which hold him back, empty himself of every thought that may tend to obstruct his path, mix, in obedience to the counsels of the Author of his Faith, and in imitation of the One Who is its true Exemplar, with men and women, in all walks of life, seek to touch their hearts through the distinction which characterizes his thoughts, his words and his acts, and win them over, tactfully, lovingly, prayerfully and persistently, to the Faith he himself has espoused.

(From a postscript by Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 19 July 1956 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States) [70]

He was very sorry to learn of the inharmony amongst the friends there; and he feels that the only wise course of action is for all the believers to devote themselves to teaching the Faith and co-operating with their National Body.

Often these trials and tests which all Bahá'í communities inevitably pass through seem terrible, at the moment, but in retrospect we understand that they were due to the frailty of human nature, to misunderstandings, and to the growing pains which every Bahá'í community must experience.

(From a letter dated 25 November 1956 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer) [71]

He is very happy to see that you have put into practice one of the most encouraging precepts of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which He said that we should try and make every stumbling-block a stepping-stone to progress. In the course of your past lives you have all stumbled very gravely; but, far from being embittered or defeated by this experience, you are determined to make it a means of purifying your natures, improving your characters, and enabling you to become better citizens in the future. This is truly pleasing in the eyes of God.

(From a letter dated 26 March 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of Kitalya Farm Prison) [72]

... the Bahá'ís must, in view of the condition of the world today, stand forth firmly and courageously as followers of Bahá'u'lláh, obeying His Laws, and seeking to build His World Order. Through compromise we will never be able to establish our Faith or win others' hearts to it. This involves often great personal sacrifice, but we know that, when we do the right thing, God gives us the strength to carry it out, and we attract His blessing. We learn at such times that our calamity is indeed a blessing.

(From a letter dated 5 May 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to two believers) [73]

It is not enough for the friends to make the excuse that their best teachers and their exemplary believers have arisen and answered the call to pioneer. A "best teacher" and an "exemplary believer" is ultimately neither more nor less than an ordinary Bahá'í who has consecrated himself to the work of the Faith, deepened his knowledge and understanding of its Teachings, placed his confidence in Bahá'u'lláh, and arisen to serve Him to the best of his ability. This door is one which we are assured will open before the face of every follower of the Faith who knocks hard enough, so to speak. When the will and the desire are strong enough, the means will be found and the way opened either to do more work locally, to go to a new goal town within the United States, or to enter the foreign pioneer field...

Not only must your Body provide the encouragement and leadership required, and stimulate the friends to arise and play their part, but the Local Assemblies must likewise do everything in their power to help the friends to go forth and attain their objectives. Each individual Bahá'í must likewise feel that it is his personal duty to the Cause at this time and his greatest privilege, and must ask himself what he can do during the coming six years, beginning now, to hasten the attainment of the goals of the World Crusade. The Bahá'ís are the leaven of God, which must leaven the lump of their nation. In direct ratio to their success will be the protection vouchsafed, not only to them but to their country. These are the immutable laws of God, from which there is no escape: "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required."

(From a letter dated 21 September 1957 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States) [74]

It is upon the individual believer, constituting the fundamental unit in the structure of the home front, that the revitalization, the expansion, and the enrichment of the home front must ultimately depend. The more strenuous the effort exerted, daily and methodically, by the individual labouring on the home front to rise to loftier heights of consecration, and of self-abnegation, to contribute, through pioneering at home, to the multiplication of Bahá'í isolated centres, groups and Assemblies, and to raise, through diligent, painstaking and continual endeavour to convert receptive souls to the Faith he has espoused, the number of its active and whole-hearted supporters; the sooner will the vast and multiple enterprises, launched beyond the confines of the homeland, now so desperately calling for a greater supply of men and means, be provided with the necessary support that will ensure their uninterrupted development and hasten their ultimate fruition....

(From a postscript by Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 21 September 1957 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States) [75]

Reformatted and minor corrections made in July 2026