

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

22 July 1981

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 6 March 1981 and has instructed us to send you the following comments on the issues you have raised.

The House of Justice feels that your questions are very perceptive and that, in many instances, you have, yourself, provided the answers. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá so often points out, the Manifestation of God is a Divine Educator. He attracts the hearts of men, pours out His spirit upon those who respond to Him, instructs them in the right way of life, uses them to carry forward the development of human society, and disciplines them by His law. We Bahá'ís, we who have answered His call, bear the responsibility of carrying forward His work among mankind, and in spite of our innumerable failings His plan is irresistibly progressing. The great tragedy of mankind at this time is the failure of the vast majority of human beings to heed the Divine Call, and this is in large part occasioned by the failure of most of those who have believed to live up to the high standard that Bahá'u'lláh has set. This is the condition in which we must work in our service to mankind, turning a sin-covering eye to the faults of others, and striving in our own inmost selves to purify our lives in accordance with the divine Teachings.

The Day of God is a Day of Joy, but also a Day of Judgment. Every man is guided both by the Love of God and by the Fear of God. In their relationships with one another individual believers should be loving and forgiving, overlooking one another's faults for the sake of God, but the Spiritual Assemblies are the upholders of the law of God. They are embryonic Houses of Justice. The education of a child requires both love and discipline; so also does the education of believers and the education of a community. One of the failings of Bahá'ís, however, is to confuse these two roles, individuals behaving like little Spiritual Assemblies, and Spiritual Assemblies forgetting that they must exercise justice.

Great love and patience are needed towards new believers, especially those who have come from very troubled backgrounds, but ultimately they too have to learn the responsibilities they have taken upon themselves by accepting Bahá'u'lláh and must uphold the principles that Bahá'u'lláh has revealed. If they do not do so, how can the condition of mankind be improved? Some people accept the Faith, not as a response to the divine Summons to God's service, but as a way to find love and happiness and companionship and understanding for themselves. At the beginning this is only natural, for people are sorely in need of such spiritual strengths, but if such people do not soon progress to the point where they are more concerned about what they can do for God and His Cause than what it can do for them, they will surely become disillusioned and drift away. Arousing in the hearts of the friends the enthusiasm and spirit of selfless service that will carry them over this transition is one of the most fundamental aspects of deepening and consolidation. Deepening is far more a matter of developing a spiritual attitude, devotion and selflessness than it is of acquiring information, although this, of course, is also important.

In a letter to an individual Bahá'í, dated 5 April 1956, the beloved Guardian's secretary wrote on his behalf:

He was very sorry to hear that you have had so many tests in your Bahá'í life. There is no doubt that many of them are due to our own nature. In other words, if we are very sensitive, or if we are in some way brought up in a different environment from the Bahá'ís amongst whom we live, we naturally see things differently and may feel them more acutely;

and the other side of it is that the imperfections of our fellow-Bahá'ís can be a great trial to us.

We must always remember that in the cesspool of materialism, which is what modern civilization has to a certain extent become, Bahá'ís—that is some of them—are still to a certain extent affected by the society from which they have sprung. In other words, they have recognized the Manifestation of God, but they have not been believers long enough, or perhaps tried hard enough, to become “a new creation.”

All we can do in such cases is to do our duty; and the Guardian feels very strongly that your duty is towards Bahá'u'lláh and the Faith you love so dearly; and certainly is not to take the weaker course and sever yourself from the Bahá'í Community.

He feels that, if you close your eyes to the failings of others, and fix your love and prayers upon Bahá'u'lláh, you will have the strength to weather this storm, and will be much better for it in the end, spiritually. Although you suffer, you will gain a maturity that will enable you to be of greater help to both your fellow-Bahá'ís and your children.

The ideal of human life is described again and again and in multitudes of ways in the Writings. These aspects of the Teachings are discussed in Teaching Institutes and Summer Schools and elaborated in many books. Then, in general, it is left to the individual believer, as a responsibility between himself and God, to follow these Teachings. It is not the business either of the believers or of the Spiritual Assemblies to pry into the lives of individual friends to ascertain the degree to which they are living up to the standards of the Cause. Only if misbehavior becomes blatant and flagrant does it become a matter for action, and then it is a matter for action by the Assembly and not by individuals. Even then the Assembly must be loving and patient, and exhort the believer to follow the Path of the Cause, but, if he persists in openly and flagrantly flouting the Bahá'í law, the Assembly has no alternative to ultimately depriving him of his voting rights.

Applying these principles requires mature understanding and judgment, and great love for one's fellowmen. It is a weighty responsibility which rests upon the shoulders of the members of Spiritual Assemblies. Undoubtedly errors are made and will continue to be made, but the more the friends are united and wholeheartedly support their Assemblies, the sooner will these mature in their decisions and actions, outgrow their mistakes, and become strong magnets for the Faith.

Briefly, then, one can say that the Bahá'ís, while in the process of improving their own lives, are engaged in attracting their fellowmen to the Love of God, educating them through the Teachings of God, introducing them to the vivifying discipline of the Law of God, and enlisting them as fellow-warriors in the Army of God. The difficulties that you describe are the result of the problem of properly balancing these many aspects of following the Bahá'í Cause and of training new believers from the point of acceptance of the Message to being champions of the Faith.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat