

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

12 June 1984

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your letter of 18 October 1983 was received by the Universal House of Justice and it was very glad to note that many of the problems seemed to have been resolved. It regrets the delay in replying to you, but, as you will understand, the pressure of work has been very heavy and, as the additional clarification that you requested did not seem to be a matter of urgency, a reply has been postponed until now. On the points you raised we have now been instructed to convey the following comments.

As you quite correctly appreciate, the fundamental purpose of all religion is the spiritual development of the souls of human beings. This is expressed in the Short Obligatory Prayer, and also there is the following very clear statement written on behalf of the beloved Guardian to an individual believer on 8 December 1935:

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 realize fully the necessity of praying. For prayer is absolutely indispensable to their inner spiritual development, and this, [as] already stated, is the very foundation and purpose of the religion of God.

(Published in U.S. *Bahá'í News*, No. 102, August 1936, p. 3)

In addition to this fundamental purpose underlying all Revelation, there is a particular central purpose for each Dispensation. The one for this Dispensation is the establishment of the oneness of the world of humanity, and it is a Bahá'í teaching that the spiritual development of the soul requires not merely prayer and meditation, but also active service to one's fellowmen in accordance with the laws and principles of the Revelation of God. The reconstruction of human society and the spiritual advancement of individual souls go hand in hand.

People are in many different conditions, come from many different backgrounds, and face many different problems in attaining unity in spirit and practice. Our guiding light is the Message of Bahá'u'lláh. The Administrative Order is the strong framework within which we work and the channel for the outflowing of the spirit into the world.

All Bahá'ís are fallible human beings, each one has his own insights, enthusiasms and degree of wisdom and understanding. Differences of viewpoint could cause the community to fragment into a thousand pieces, if it were not cemented together by the strong bond of the Covenant, and if the friends were not willing to subordinate their own ideas to the considered decisions that issue from the divinely ordained process of consultation and, at the same time, exercise the utmost forbearance towards their fellow believers, their individual characteristics and their shortcomings. One of the most potent statements of the Guardian, which illuminates many issues, is:

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, candor, and courage on the other.*

Since we are all imperfect and have to learn the perfect standard which Bahá'u'lláh has unveiled, there are often things in the Teachings themselves which individual believers find difficult, and which they have to strive to learn and understand. All the believers are growing and this is a gradual process. Each one, as you say, must develop wisdom, and with this must realize the fundamental importance of the unity of the community and the bond of love and affection among the believers, for the sake of which he will sacrifice many things...

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat