

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

23 August 1984

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 29 July 1984 and has instructed us to send you the following reply.

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.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat