

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

14 March 1985

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your letter of 16 January 1985 in which you share the anguish of your heart and express deep concern for the fate of the suffering masses of mankind has been received by the Universal House of Justice. We are instructed to convey this reply to you.

The world is clearly beset by ills and is groaning under the burden of appalling suffering. The trials of the innocent are indeed heartrending and constitute a mystery that the mind of man cannot fathom. Even the Prophets of God Themselves have borne Their share of grievous afflictions in every age. Yet in spite of the evidence of all this suffering, God's Manifestations, Whose lives and wisdom show Them to have been far above human beings in understanding, unitedly bear testimony to the justice, love and mercy of God.

To understand the condition of the world it is necessary to step back, so to speak, to gain a clearer view of the panorama of God's great redemptive Major Plan, which is shaping the destiny of mankind according to the operation of the divine Will. It should not be surmised that the calamitous events transpiring in all corners of the globe are random and lack purpose, though individually they may be difficult to comprehend. 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." We can confidently anticipate therefore, the arrival of the "new life-giving spring" once the destructive icy blasts of winter's tempests have run their course.

As Bahá'ís, we know that the "sovereign remedy" for each and every one of these ills lies in turning and submitting to the "skilled," the "all-powerful" and "inspired Physician." Bahá'u'lláh has assured us in His writings that God has not forsaken us. He is the All-Seeing and All-Knowing, the "prayer-hearing, prayer-answering God" to those who turn to Him in supplication, and He intervenes actively in human history by sending His Manifestations, Sources of knowledge and spiritual truth to "liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance" and to "ensure the peace and tranquillity of mankind." In this Age, God has determined to establish His everlasting Kingdom among men, and so, to this end, He sent us the spirit and message of the New Day through two successive Manifestations, Who alas, were rejected by the generality of people.

When we contemplate the fate of mankind, it is important to reflect on the very complex arena in which man plays out the drama of his existence. There are a number of elements involved. For example, man is a spiritual being located within the material creation; hence he is subjected to opposing forces, and has to live in accordance with values which refer to two worlds, the material world with all its imperfections and the spiritual world with its perfections. Tension derives from the fact that "In man there are two natures; his spiritual or higher nature and his material or lower nature. In one he approaches God, in the other he lives for the world alone." Man's actions then have both a material and spiritual consequence. While the material effect of his actions is usually clearly perceptible, their spiritual effect can only be determined by reference to spiritual principles revealed by the Manifestation of God. Suffering and trials, sent by God to test and perfect His creatures, are another integral part of life. They contain the potential for man's progress or retrogression, depending on the individual's response. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains:

The souls who bear the tests of God become the manifestations of great bounties; for the divine trials cause some souls to become entirely lifeless, while they cause the holy souls to ascend to the highest degree of love and solidity....

In addition to the factors associated with man's station and nature, the Writings indicate that man's soul "is independent of all infirmities of body or mind," and not only continues to exist "after departing from this mortal world," but progresses "through the bounty and grace of the Lord." Therefore, an evaluation of man's material existence and achievements cannot ignore the potential spiritual development stimulated by the individual's desire to manifest the attributes of God and his response to the exigencies of his life, nor can it exclude the possibility of the operations of God's mercy in terms of compensation for earthly suffering, in the next life.

God in His bounty has endowed every created thing, however humble, "with the capacity to exercise a particular influence, and been made to possess a distinct virtue." And, reminiscent of the parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30), Bahá'u'lláh, in the *Gleanings* (page 149), draws our attention to the need to make efforts to develop and demonstrate in action our God-given potential:

All that which ye potentially possess can, however, be manifested only as a result of your own volition. Your own acts testify to this truth....

Is it not an evidence of the justice of God that each of us, whether materially comfortable or struggling for physical survival, is assessed in terms of the efforts we have made to seize whatever opportunities existed in our lives, to develop and use our allotted talent, be it large or small? "Each shall receive his share from thy Lord," is Bahá'u'lláh's assurance. Thus, if we bestir ourselves, we will all have access to the rewards of this life and the next.

In the same passage from the *Gleanings*, Bahá'u'lláh also raises the possibility that possessing free will, human beings may well commit evil and "wittingly" break "His law." By the exercise of his free will, man either affirms his spiritual purpose in life or chooses to perpetuate evil by living below his highest station. The question is asked: "Is such a behavior to be attributed to God, or to their proper selves?" And concludes:

Every good thing is of God, and every evil thing is from yourselves....

The amelioration of the conditions of the world requires the reconstruction of human society and efforts to improve the material well-being of humanity. The Bahá'í approach to this task is evolutionary and multifaceted, involving not only the spiritual transformation of individuals but the establishment of an administrative system based on the application of justice, a system which is at once the "nucleus" and the "pattern" of the future World Order, together with the implementation of programs of social and economic development that derive their impetus from the grass roots of the community. Such an integrated approach will inevitably create a new world, a world where human dignity is restored and the burden of inequity is lifted from the shoulders of humanity. Then will the generations look back with heartfelt appreciation, for the sacrifices made by Bahá'ís and non-Bahá'ís alike, during this most turbulent period in human history.

With regard to your concern that certain remote geographical regions have historically been deprived of Divine Revelation, the following extracts indicate that there are many other Prophets Who have appeared in the world, but Whose names are not mentioned in the Scriptures with which we are familiar, for example:

And to every people have we sent an apostle...

(*Qur'án*, XVI, 38)

God hath raised up Prophets and revealed Books as numerous as the creatures of the world, and will continue to do so to everlasting.

(Selections from the Writings of the Báb, p. 125)

Know thou that the absence of any reference to them [Prophets before Adam] is no proof that they did not actually exist. That no records concerning them are now available, should be attributed to their extreme remoteness, as well as to the vast changes which the earth hath undergone since their time.

(Gleanings, p. 172)

While Asia has clearly been blessed as the birthplace of many Manifestations of God, we have found nothing in the Writings to suggest exactly where in the world these Messengers of God in the remote past, may have arisen. In a letter written on behalf of the Guardian, we have the promise that "... there always have been Manifestations of God, but we do not have any record of Their names."

We are instructed to assure you that the Universal House of Justice will offer prayers at the Holy Shrines that your faith may be deepened and your perplexities resolved, and we share with you these solacing words of Bahá'u'lláh:

O My servants! Sorrow not if, in these days and on this earthly plane, things contrary to your wishes have been ordained and manifested by God, for days of blissful joy, of heavenly delight, are assuredly in store for you. Worlds, holy and spiritually glorious, will be unveiled to your eyes. You are destined by Him, in this world and hereafter, to partake of their benefits, to share in their joys, and to obtain a portion of the sustaining grace. To each and every one of them you will, no doubt, attain.

(Gleanings, p. 329)

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat