

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

27 October 1986

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

Your very thought-provoking letter of 24 June 1986 has been the subject of considerable research, and the Universal House of Justice has instructed us to send you the following reply.

The crucial task before you in relation to your two little daughters would seem to be to foster their confidence in and love for God, their acceptance of His Will and their assurance of the validity of the Bahá'í principle of the equality of men and women. In working towards this there are certain facts of history and principle in the Faith that you need to accept and reconcile.

You raise two basic issues, that all the Manifestations of God known to us have been men, and that they have appeared in the East.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself in a talk given in Malden, Massachusetts, confirms that “The East has ever been the dawning point of the Sun of Reality. All the Prophets of God have appeared there. The religions of God have been promulgated, the teachings of God have been spread, and the law of God founded in the East. The Orient has always been the center of lights.” (*The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 289) Indeed, one can see that the Prophets of God named in the Scriptures have appeared, not just in the East, but in a very limited area of the East, stretching from the Levant and Egypt across Iran as far as India. We have no authenticated records of Chinese or Japanese Prophets. However, to complement this we must remember that the Founders of the Great Religions are but one of the kinds of prophet, and we should study the following Qur’anic statements:

And every nation had an apostle; so when their apostle came, the matter was decided between them with justice and they shall not be dealt with unjustly.

(Surah 10, verse 47)

And certainly We raised in every nation an apostle saying: Serve God and shun the devil...

(Surah 16, verse 36)

And on the day when We will raise up a witness out of every nation, then shall no permission be given to those who disbelieve, nor shall they be made to solicit favor.

(Surah 16, verse 84)

... And there is not a people but a warner has gone among them.

(Surah 35, verse 24)

There are Prophets mentioned in the Qur’án, such as Húd and Šálih, about whom the Bible is silent. Idrís, whom the Qur’án states was a Prophet, is identified with Hermes by Bahá’u’lláh, Who states “In every tongue he hath a special name.” It is clear that He must have lived in very ancient times. Bahá’u’lláh made no mention of Buddha, and if it had not been for ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement we would not have been in a position to state definitely that Buddha had been a Manifestation of God. There are a myriad traditions in the legends of peoples that point back to some sort of divine revelation but, as the beloved Guardian’s secretary pointed out on his behalf in a letter written to an individual believer on 13 March 1950, “... We cannot possibly add names of people we (or anyone else) think might be Lesser Prophets to those found in the Qur’án, the Bible and our own Scriptures. For only these can we consider authentic Books.” We must just accept that

there are undoubtedly many prophetic figures of whom all authentic record has been lost. As to the future, the Research Department knows of no Text which states explicitly in which country Manifestations of God will appear.

The reason for the appearance of a Manifestation of God in a given place is not to honor a particular people or nation. Shoghi Effendi indicates a quite different reason in *The Advent of Divine Justice* and, more concisely, in a letter to an individual written on his behalf on 23 January 1944:

The ever-recurring miracle in the establishment of every religion is that such poor instruments accomplish the work of God. It is to demonstrate the fact that God is the power that overcomes every obstacle, and that Revelations are divine in origin, that leads Him to always choose the worst people among whom to manifest His Messenger and the most obscure and helpless of the population—relatively speaking—to establish the foundations of His Faith. The Bahá'í Dispensation is no exception to this rule, as you yourself have observed.

Beyond these points is the fact that God, the Almighty Creator, does not have to justify His choice of a race or nationality from which to raise up a Manifestation. As all sacred scriptures tell us, He does as He wills and shall not be asked of His doing, and we bow in humility before Him. Besides, as you must know, conceptions of race, nation, oriental, occidental, and the like reflect earthly limitations and are not qualifications attached to the reality of the soul in the limitless realms of God.

Regarding your desire to assist your daughters to overcome their perceptions of the unequal status of women, you are perhaps not aware of the compilation on women recently released to National Spiritual Assemblies. Through the divine insights and instructions provided in this compilation, you can inspire your daughters with knowledge of the glorious station to which women are called in the Age of Bahá'u'lláh, and imbue them with assurance in the promises of the Blessed Beauty, so that through constant endeavor they may become as brilliant stars radiating a spirit of freedom from the stultifying notions of the past. On the particular question of the relationship between womanhood and prophethood, it is hoped that the following comments will be of help.

Even though there have been outstanding women such as Sarah, Ásíyih, the Virgin Mary, Fáṭimih, Ṭáhirih and the Greatest Holy Leaf in every Dispensation, it is an incontrovertible fact that all Manifestations of God known to us have been men. Moreover, it is a clear provision in Bahá'í administration that the Guardians were to be men and that membership on the Universal House of Justice is confined to men. Whether these facts point to a differentiation in function that is unalterable, or whether it was merely a characteristic of a period which will change when mankind attains its maturity is a matter that will, no doubt, become clear in the future. The important point for Bahá'ís to remember is that, in face of the categorical pronouncements in Bahá'í Scripture establishing the equality of men and women, even these facts are no evidence at all of the superiority of the male over the female sex. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained that equality does not mean identity of function. He has also stated that the few areas in which men and women are not equal are “negligible.”

We must also remember that sex is a characteristic of this world, not of the spiritual world. When the Guardian was asked about “soul mates” and the problem that could arise in the next world if one were to remarry in this life, his secretary replied on his behalf, on 4 December 1954:

There is no teaching in the Bahá'í Faith that “soul mates” exist. What is meant is that marriage should lead to a profound friendship of spirit, which will endure in the next world, where there is no sex, and no giving and taking in marriage; just the way we should establish with our parents, our children, our brothers and sisters and friends a deep spiritual bond which will be everlasting, and not merely physical bonds of human relationship.

The House of Justice hopes that these remarks will help to ease some of your perplexity and will assist you and your dear wife to raise your daughters as devoted and knowledgeable Bahá'ís, confident of the validity of the principles promulgated by Bahá'u'lláh. Surely as they meet problems and questions and face them fearlessly, their understanding of the Cause of God will deepen and this will increase their ability to deal with the difficulties of life.

We are asked to assure you of the prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that ... and ... may be the recipients of God's constant benediction and that their parents may be divinely assisted to protect and train them.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat