

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

10 July 1989

To all National Spiritual Assemblies

Dear Bahá'í Friends,

The Holy Word has been extolled by the Prophets of God as the medium of celestial power and the wellspring of all spiritual, social and material progress. Access to it, constant study of it and daily use of it in our individual lives are vital to the inner personal transformation towards which we strive and whose ultimate outer manifestation will be the emergence of that divine civilization which is the promise of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh.

The blessings which flow from the Word of God are implicit in this instruction of Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Mother Book of His Revelation: "Immerse yourselves in the ocean of My words, that ye may unravel its secrets, and discover all the pearls of wisdom that lie hid in its depths." Again in the same book, He bids us recite the "verses of God every morning and evening." An astonishing insight as to the sublime influence of the revealed Word is conveyed in this further instruction gleaned from one of His Tablets: "Intone, O My servant, the verses of God that have been received by thee, as intoned by them who have drawn nigh unto Him, that the sweetness of thy melody may kindle thine own soul, and attract the hearts of all men. Whoso reciteth, in the privacy of his chamber, the verses revealed by God, the scattering angels of the Almighty shall scatter abroad the fragrance of the words uttered by his mouth, and shall cause the heart of every righteous man to throb. Though he may, at first, remain unaware of its effect, yet the virtue of the grace vouchsafed unto him must needs sooner or later exercise its influence upon his soul."

The most immediate access to the dynamic influence of the sacred Word is through reading. The ability to read is therefore a fundamental right and privilege of every human being. Bahá'u'lláh promotes this right in His command to parents to ensure the instruction of their sons and daughters in the "art of reading and writing." For this essential reason, in our last Riḍván message we called attention to the need for systematic attention to be given to eventually eliminating illiteracy from the Bahá'í community. This matter must assume its proper importance as a continuing objective of that community.

Let each National and Local Spiritual Assembly, according to necessity and circumstance, address itself to this objective, conscious that even where total achievement is not immediately possible, opportunities must be sought to make steady progress. Let each be confident that the shining example set by Iran, the mother community of the Bahá'í world, under the inspiration of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings and the urging of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, upholds a standard all can follow. In the earliest years of this century, when no systematic, overall plan of education existed in Iran, the Bahá'ís seized their chance and organized a widespread program of education. Its teachers were distinguished for their ability to foster child, youth and adult education, which led to significant self-improvement among the Iranian Bahá'ís. The emergence of a literate Bahá'í community was an outstanding result.

Some local or national Bahá'í communities may wish to follow the example of those who have already instituted their own literacy projects and are achieving notable success; others may wish to participate in literacy programs organized by governmental or nongovernmental organizations. Each community will have to determine whether to engage in one or the other, or to do both. Progress will depend not only on the initiatives of Bahá'í institutions in relation to children, but also on the active interest of adult believers who want to learn to read. Such friends should definitely be encouraged and assisted to achieve, with dignity, their heart's desire. Certainly, the willing participation of the friends in an undertaking of such importance to the

upliftment of individuals and the consolidation of the Bahá'í community as a whole will attract divine favors and confirmations.

The United Nations has declared 1990 to be International Literacy Year so as to mobilize an all-out, ongoing effort to eradicate illiteracy around the world. The literacy projects already in progress in the Bahá'í community, and those which are yet to be adopted, will surely lend support to this noble and necessary effort. Therefore, we commend the purpose of this special year to the attention of the entire Bahá'í world. The Bahá'í International Community's United Nations Office will send National Assemblies information concerning activities associated with International Literacy Year and how Bahá'í communities may become involved. Moreover, agencies at the Bahá'í World Centre having a special interest in literacy programs will offer helpful advice as necessary, but Spiritual Assemblies need not wait to hear from them before proceeding with their own plans.

We look forward with confident expectation to your achievements toward the ultimate fulfillment of this objective which is so essential to the progress of the Bahá'í community and indeed all humanity. And we assure you, as ever, of our continuing prayers at the Holy Shrines for your success.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]