

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

15 October 1992

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your letter of 3 September 1992 and is very glad that you have raised this matter. It has recently been disturbed at the degree to which these issues seem to have been giving concern to Bahá'ís in different parts of the world. It may, indeed, be providential for the matter to be brought to the fore now, before the English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is published. We have been asked to convey to you the following comments.

As you know, the human soul is "a heavenly gem ... whose mystery no mind, however acute, can ever hope to unravel," "one of the signs of God, a mystery among His mysteries." If even the soul of man is so ineffable a reality, how can a human being claim to understand or to set forth the nature of the Manifestations of God, of the relationships between Them, or of Their relationship to God, let alone to grasp the nature of God Himself?

Bahá'u'lláh has explained these mysteries to a degree never before approached, but we must accept that they are realities that cannot be defined in a rigorous manner, as one would attempt to define the terms of mathematics or even of philosophy. This is a realm of knowledge in which poetry, analogy, hyperbole and paradox are to be expected; a realm in which the Manifestations Themselves speak with many voices. Undoubtedly you are familiar with the passage in the Kitáb-i-Íqán in which Bahá'u'lláh elaborates this theme, commenting on Muḥammad's statement: "Some of the Apostles We have caused to excel the others. To some God hath spoken, some He hath raised and exalted. And to Jesus, Son of Mary, We gave manifest signs, and We strengthened Him with the Holy Spirit."

By virtue of this station, they have claimed for themselves the Voice of Divinity and the like, whilst by virtue of their station of Messengership, they have declared themselves the Messengers of God. In every instance they have voiced an utterance that would conform to the requirements of the occasion, and have ascribed all these declarations to Themselves, declarations ranging from the realm of divine Revelation to the realm of creation, and from the domain of Divinity even unto the domain of earthly existence. Thus it is that whatsoever be their utterance, whether it pertain to the realm of Divinity, Lordship, Prophethood, Messengership, Guardianship, Apostleship or Servitude, all is true, beyond the shadow of a doubt. Therefore, these sayings which We have quoted in support of Our argument must be attentively considered, that the divergent utterances of the Manifestations of the Unseen and Daysprings of Holiness may cease to agitate the soul and perplex the mind.

The Bahá'ís must study the Kitáb-i-Íqán and the explanations given by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi and not be misled into thinking that any statement made in the Sacred Texts, in the writings of Shoghi Effendi, or in the letters of the Universal House of Justice is made in ignorance of these fundamental clarifications.

In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh again and again speaks with the Voice of God, a station that He affirms in this passage from the Súriy-i-Haykal:

Naught is seen in My temple but the Temple of God, and in My beauty but His Beauty, and in My being but His Being, and in My self but His Self, and in My movement but His Movement, and in My acquiescence but His Acquiescence, and in My pen but His Pen, the

Mighty, the All-Praised. There hath not been in My soul but the Truth, and in Myself naught could be seen but God... The Holy Spirit Itself hath been generated through the agency of a single letter revealed by this Most Great Spirit, if ye be of them that comprehend.

At another time, as published in *Gleanings 50*, He wrote:

And whenever I chose to hold my peace and be still, lo, the voice of the Holy Ghost, standing on my right hand, aroused me, and the Supreme Spirit appeared before my face, and Gabriel overshadowed me, and the Spirit of Glory stirred within my bosom, bidding me arise and break my silence. If your hearing be purged and your ears be attentive, ye will assuredly perceive that every limb of my body, nay all the atoms of my being, proclaim and bear witness to this call: "God, besides Whom is none other God, and He, Whose beauty is now manifest, is the reflection of His glory unto all that are in heaven and on earth."

In *Messages to America*, on p. 100, we find this illuminating statement:

It was in such dramatic circumstances, recalling the experience of Moses when face to face with the Burning Bush in the wilderness of Sinai, the successive visions of Zoroaster, the opening of the heavens and the descent of the Dove upon Christ in the Jordan, the cry of Gabriel heard by Muḥammad in the Cave of Hira, and the dream of the Báb, in which the blood of the Imam Ḥusayn touched and sanctified His lips, that Bahá'u'lláh, He "around Whom the Point of the Bayán hath revolved," and the Vehicle of the greatest Revelation the world has yet seen, received the first intimation of His sublime Mission, and that a ministry which, alike in its duration and fecundity, is unsurpassed in the religious history of mankind, was inaugurated. It was on that occasion that the "Most Great Spirit," as designated by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, revealed itself to Him, in the form of a "Maiden," and bade Him "lift up" His "voice between earth and heaven"—that same Spirit which, in the Zoroastrian, the Mosaic, the Christian, and Muḥammadan Dispensations, had been respectively symbolized by the "Sacred Fire," the "Burning Bush," the "Dove," and the "Angel Gabriel."

On a related subject, the following reply to a question from an individual believer was written on behalf of the Guardian 19 October 1947:

Bahá'u'lláh is not the Intermediary between other Manifestations and God. Each has His own relation to the Primal Source. But in the sense that Bahá'u'lláh is the greatest Manifestation to yet appear, the One Who consummates the Revelation of Moses, He was the One Moses conversed with in the Burning Bush. In other words Bahá'u'lláh identifies the Glory of the Godhead on that occasion with Himself. No distinction can be made amongst the Prophets in the sense that They all proceed from one source, and are of one essence. But Their stations and functions in this world are different.

It was with the magnitude of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation in mind that the Universal House of Justice referred to Him as "the most precious Being ever to have drawn breath on this planet." This is analogous to Bahá'u'lláh's own statement in relation to the Báb: "Behold how great and lofty is His station! His rank excelleth that of all the Prophets and His Revelation transcendeth the comprehension and understanding of all their chosen ones." These are both allusions to that "distinction" which in no way contradicts the essential "unity" of the Manifestations of God, as referred to by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Íqán:

Conceive accordingly the distinction, variation, and unity characteristic of the various Manifestations of holiness, that thou mayest comprehend the allusions made by the creator of all names and attributes to the mysteries of distinction and unity, and discover the answer to thy question as to why that everlasting Beauty should have, at sundry times, called Himself by different names and titles.

You may be quite confident that no “new theology” is being created—such a development would be entirely impossible in the Bahá’í Faith. All that is happening is that, in the year of the Centenary of Bahá’u’lláh’s Ascension, the Bahá’í world is proclaiming more clearly than ever before the greatness of the event of His appearance in this world, and what it really means to say that we are witnessing the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth.

It is likely that in dealing with such matters individual friends will go beyond what the teachings of the Faith justify, but such errors will in due course be rectified and should not be permitted to give rise to disputations.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat