

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

30 June 1993

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice received on ... your letter concerning the teaching activities in ... , and we have been asked to convey the following response to you. We regret the length of time which has elapsed since the writing of your letter; our reply has been delayed by the pressure of work at the Bahá'í World Centre over the past few months.

It is understandable that you feel concern about methods of teaching which apply pressure to people to declare their Faith in Bahá'u'lláh, or which register as believers those who apparently have no real knowledge of the Faith or its Message. It troubles you that such methods of teaching seem to be sanctioned by the institutions of the Faith in . . . and that your remonstrances have met with no satisfying response from those institutions.

The teaching of the Cause has always called for wisdom, devotion, enthusiasm, purity of intention and eloquence of speech. Like other human beings, Bahá'ís tend to go to extremes, and too few people bring the proper balance to the way they act. This is particularly true in the teaching of the Faith. At one extreme are those who are so on fire with love for the Faith and with awareness of the desperate need of the people for its healing message, that they overstep the bounds of wisdom and discretion and stray into the area of proselytizing. At the other extreme are those who are so gentle in their approach and so concerned never to arouse an adverse reaction that they fail to convey the enormous importance of the Cause or to convince their hearers; for if the messenger is not enthusiastic, how can he convey enthusiasm to others? The first extreme leads to misrepresentation of the teachings and causes disillusionment; the second results in the stagnation of the community and its failure to fulfill its fundamental duty of conveying this life-giving message to the world.

In this, as in all aspects of the work of the Cause, the solution lies in the friends being patient and forbearing towards those whose shortcomings distress them, and in endeavoring, through the Assemblies' consultation, to draw closer to a proper balance while maintaining the momentum of the work and canalizing the enthusiasm of the believers.

In one of its messages, published on page 32 of *Wellspring of Guidance*, the Universal House of Justice gave the following advice:

Those who declare themselves as Bahá'ís should become enchanted with the beauty of the teachings, and touched by the love of Bahá'u'lláh. The declarants need not know all the proofs, history, laws, and principles of the Faith, but in the process of declaring themselves they must, in addition to catching the spark of faith, become basically informed about the Central Figures of the Faith, as well as the existence of laws they must follow and an administration they must obey.

In the western world in recent decades, Bahá'ís have grown used to thinking that the process by which a person accepts the Faith takes a long time, and that it is unthinkable for someone to intelligently accept Bahá'u'lláh within minutes of hearing of Him. This may be the pattern to which they have become accustomed, but it is far from being a universal one. When people accepted the Faith quickly in Africa and other parts of the Third World, western Bahá'ís sometimes explained it away by saying that such people were less educated and had fewer ideas to work their way through. Now the same process is happening in the countries of the former Eastern Bloc, and highly educated people are accepting the Faith as soon as they hear of it,

embracing it enthusiastically, and rapidly deepening their understanding of its teachings by reading every Bahá'í book they can lay their hands on. So it is clear that receptivity to spiritual truth is, as Bahá'u'lláh indicated, a matter of purity of heart, not of education or lack of it.

In the west of Europe, too, there are signs of greater receptivity towards the Faith among the people, and some are ready to join the community of the Most Great Name if approached in the proper manner. In such cases when an individual hears the Message of Bahá'u'lláh and is moved to declare his faith, there should be no obstacle placed in his way. Great care must be taken that when the heart of the individual is touched by the power of Bahá'u'lláh's Message and the declarant has expressed his desire to embrace the Faith, the process of deepening be followed almost immediately. Deepening the knowledge of the new believer in the verities of the Faith is the most vital part of teaching; but deepening is not merely the imparting of knowledge—it requires also to imbue the soul of the person with the love of Bahá'u'lláh so that his faith may grow day by day and he becomes a steadfast believer.

In the following statement, Shoghi Effendi advises the Bahá'í teacher to advance the process of deepening for a person who is attracted to the Faith:

Let him [the Bahá'í teacher] consider the degree of his hearer's receptivity, and decide for himself the suitability of either the direct or indirect method of teaching, whereby he can impress upon the seeker the vital importance of the Divine Message, and persuade him to throw in his lot with those who have already embraced it. Let him remember the example set by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and His constant admonition to shower such kindness upon the seeker, and exemplify to such a degree the spirit of the teachings he hopes to instill into him, that the recipient will be spontaneously impelled to identify himself with the Cause embodying such teachings. Let him refrain, at the outset, from insisting on such laws and observances as might impose too severe a strain on the seeker's newly awakened faith, and endeavor to nurse him, patiently, tactfully, and yet determinedly, into full maturity, and aid him to proclaim his unqualified acceptance of whatever has been ordained by Bahá'u'lláh. Let him, as soon as that stage has been attained, introduce him to the body of his fellow-believers, and seek, through constant fellowship and active participation in the local activities of his community, to enable him to contribute his share to the enrichment of its life, the furtherance of its tasks, the consolidations of its interests, and the coordination of its activities with those of its sister communities. Let him not be content until he has infused into his spiritual child so deep a longing as to impel him to arise independently, in his turn, and devote his energies to the quickening of other souls, and the upholding of the laws and principles laid down by his newly adopted Faith.

(The Advent of Divine Justice, pp. 51–52)

From these words of the Guardian we can see that wisdom, encouragement, persuasion, and patience, are all called for, and that these must be attuned to the response shown by the hearer. We also see that the process of deepening continues long after the new believer has enrolled in the Bahá'í community...

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat