

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

4 July 1993

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

... conveyed to the Universal House of Justice the inquiries contained in your letter to him dated 14 June 1993, and we have been instructed to send the following response.

The reason that the term “the Bahá'ís in the West” was left unchanged in the letter of 9 June 1974 addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Iceland when it was circulated to all National Spiritual Assemblies on 9 May 1993, is that it is a term the significance of which is generally understood by the friends, while to elucidate it exactly would have raised unnecessary complications in such a context.

As you are aware, many of the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas were applied in Iran and the neighboring lands of the Middle East from very early days, and others were progressively enforced by Shoghi Effendi. He used to comment to pilgrims that he was raising the pillar of the administration of the Cause in the West and the pillar of the laws in the East.

As the Faith spread in Europe and the Western Hemisphere, certain laws were applied there also, but fewer than were already current in Iran. The Faith continued to spread around the world, and the terms “east” and “west” in this context acquired specialized meanings. While the “east” continued to designate Iran, Iraq and other countries of the older Bahá'í communities of the Middle East, the term “west” came to include the rest of the world. Thus, Persian pilgrims in the time of Shoghi Effendi would stay in the “Eastern” Pilgrim House, while Australian and Chinese pilgrims would stay in the “Western” Pilgrim House.

To pioneer for the Faith and for many other reasons, believers from Iran began to move to other parts of the world. This mere change in residence was no reason for them to cease to observe those laws of the Aqdas with which they were familiar, but they had to learn not to impose them on the “western” Bahá'ís. With intermarriage between “eastern” and “western” Bahá'ís other variations arose, depending upon whether the children were raised in a western or eastern family environment.

In light of this explanation the individual believers now residing in the “west” must decide in light of their own situations which of the laws are binding upon them. The letter to the National Assembly of Iceland clearly lists those laws which are currently *not* binding on the “western” friends. The fact that they are not binding does not, of course, mean that the believers are forbidden to obey them if they wish to and circumstances permit. Bahá'ís from Iran who have migrated to the west should already know which laws are binding upon them, having learned this in their homeland. Bahá'ís of Iranian or mixed descent living in the west, whose parents have not familiarized them with the laws, should at least follow those laws which are universally binding.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat