

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

13 May 1996

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to respond on its behalf to your thoughtful letter...

The questions raised in your letter go to the heart of the issues facing Bahá'ís everywhere at this critical point in world history. We are witnessing the disintegration of the great civilization which has, for over two centuries, dominated world history and shaped the behavior and attitudes of the most influential sectors of modern society. The defining characteristic of this civilization has been a materialistic view of reality, the conviction that both human consciousness and human society are essentially the products of material forces and that it is to these forces that we must look for the resolution of the great problems facing our world.

Clearly, this world view reflects a profound error about the nature of humankind. It has demonstrated conclusively its impotence to solve any significant problem facing the world's people today—political, social, economic, or moral. In the face of so massive a failure, a growing majority of people everywhere are being forced to reexamine fundamental assumptions. Speaking some fifty years ago of this accelerating breakdown, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith wrote:

A tempest, unprecedented in its violence, unpredictable in its course, catastrophic in its immediate effects, unimaginably glorious in its ultimate consequences, is at present sweeping the face of the earth.... Bewildered, agonized and helpless, [humanity] watches this great and mighty wind of God invading the remotest and fairest regions of the earth, rocking its foundations, deranging its equilibrium, sundering its nations, disrupting the homes of its peoples, wasting its cities, driving into exile its kings, pulling down its bulwarks, uprooting its institutions, dimming its light, and harrowing up the souls of its inhabitants.

As you have said, political calculations and partisan agendas that are based on the interpretation of reality that our world has inherited from the past hold no answers, whether socialist or capitalist, whether of the East or the West.

The question arises, therefore, on what basis can the advancement of civilization and the development of human nature continue? It is Bahá'u'lláh's answer to this question that poses the fundamental challenge of our age. In asserting that "this is the Day in which God's most excellent favors have been poured out upon men" and that "the world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order," Bahá'u'lláh points humanity to the fulfillment of the promise that has sustained our race throughout the past thousands of years of civilization. His words envision an entirely new relationship between the regeneration of the individual's spiritual life and the reconstruction of society. Again, to cite the words of the Guardian:

The Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, whose supreme mission is none other but the achievement of this organic and spiritual unity of the whole body of nations, should, if we be faithful to its implications, be regarded as signaling through its advent the COMING OF AGE OF THE ENTIRE HUMAN RACE. It should be viewed not merely as yet another spiritual revival in the ever-changing fortunes of mankind, not only as a further stage in a chain of progressive Revelations, nor even as the culmination of one of a series of recurrent prophetic cycles, but

rather as marking the last and highest stage in the stupendous evolution of man's collective life on this planet.

It is in this context, we believe, that you will, through your own meditations and your association with your fellow Bahá'ís, find the answers to the questions that concern you. Essentially, the Bahá'í community is "pioneering" a new approach to the organization of society and the individual person's relationship to it, one that is based on a spiritual conception of reality. This effort follows two parallel tracks. On the one hand, we do all we can as Bahá'ís to acquaint those around us, including the organizations of society, with the principles and concepts revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, in the hope that this guidance may be put to practical use in the life of humanity. On the other, we are slowly building a global community which demonstrates, beyond argument, that humanity, in all its diversity, can learn to live and work as a single people in a global homeland.

We cannot take on our consciences the responsibility for the way in which others respond. Nor can we afford to be diverted from our efforts by the accumulating evidences around us of the suffering and destruction that results from humanity's present course of action. Merely to glance back over the past several decades is to realize how steadily and irresistibly Bahá'u'lláh's vision of humanity's destiny is being reflected in the objective experience of our world. This process is steadily gathering momentum, and the challenge to each Bahá'í, as an individual, is to become an instrument of this historic process.

We are, as you say, only a minority. But this has always been the case at any great turning-point in history. It is the Revelation of God that makes this minority a creative force in history and that brings to each of its active members the deepest sense of fulfillment that human life affords.

The Universal House of Justice has been touched by the sincerity of the spiritual search reflected in your letter, and assures you that it will pray ardently in the Holy Shrines that Bahá'u'lláh will surround you with His confirmation and blessing.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat