

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

12 August 1998

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has asked us to . . . reply to your letters . . . elaborating your previously expressed views concerning your feeling of a need for Bahá'í sacred literature in simplified English, and we are to convey the following.

The House of Justice fully appreciates that the real purpose of your letters is to find a way to help the largest number of people, whatever their ability in English, to experience the Word of God as brought by Bahá'u'lláh; and it sympathizes with your desire to make the Teachings accessible to those who are not adept at reading English. Undoubtedly, a great deal can be done to fulfill your desire; however, it is important for you to understand basically that the standard of presentation of the divine Word cannot be lowered, and that it must be made available to all, including those who cannot read it in its elevated style. No simplification of language can take its place.

Even an unlettered person is capable of responding to the exalted language of the Holy Scriptures, as it is the inner spirit of the divine Texts that touches the heart. Bahá'u'lláh states in a well-known Tablet that, "The Word of God is the king of words and its pervasive influence is incalculable.... The Word is the master key for the whole world, inasmuch as through its potency the doors of the hearts of men, which in reality are the doors of heaven, are unlocked." Hearts become attracted and souls confirmed through the mysterious effects of exposure to the living Word—that Word which has demonstrated the power to stimulate intellectual development. You yourself have mentioned that a mystical experience enabled you to persevere in learning to understand the divine Texts.

You write that the people who you are trying to reach are not well educated and thus not able to comprehend the language of the Writings. It is not the prerogative of anyone to judge what another individual is capable of understanding from the Word of God. Consider, for instance, that throughout the world millions of Christians, from all walks of life, have for generations derived spiritual sustenance from the King James Bible. The publication of the Bible in simplified English is a relatively recent development and coincides with a period in which Christian organizations have lost much of their historical vitality; it also coincides with the lamentable decline in the standard of English usage in the United States and other English-speaking countries. An even more potent example relates to Islám, many generations of the adherents of which, literate or illiterate, have memorized all or large portions of their Holy Book, the Qur'án; it would be unthinkable to such believers to be presented with the proposition of simplifying the language of Muḥammad's Revelation.

The House of Justice does not want to see a dilution of the standard of English translation of the Writings established by Shoghi Effendi. Regarding such translations, it is suggested that you may find it illuminating to read the two paragraphs in the introduction to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas . . . concerning "the style of language in which the Kitáb-i-Aqdas has been rendered into English."

The matter of Englishing certain Arabic or Persian terminologies has been and will continue to be given attention by the House of Justice. For instance, it has already decided that terms and place names, like Teheran and Shiraz, which have recognized spellings in languages using the Roman alphabet, need not appear in their transliterated forms as Tīhrán and Shíráz in materials intended for general distribution among non-Bahá'ís.

It is of course understood that some people do not have the vocabulary to read literature of a certain level. It is possible, therefore, to accompany the Texts with explanatory material. If, in this context, you wish to pursue your question further, you will have to take it up with your National Spiritual Assembly and abide by its advice.

As you strive to deepen your knowledge of the Faith and to serve its vital interests, be assured of the ardent prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that you may be divinely assisted and confirmed.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat