

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2008

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

Thousands upon thousands, embracing the diversity of the entire human family, are engaged in systematic study of the Creative Word in an environment that is at once serious and uplifting. As they strive to apply through a process of action, reflection and consultation the insights thus gained, they see their capacity to serve the Cause rise to new levels. Responding to the inmost longing of every heart to commune with its Maker, they carry out acts of collective worship in diverse settings, uniting with others in prayer, awakening spiritual susceptibilities, and shaping a pattern of life distinguished for its devotional character. As they call on one another in their homes and pay visits to families, friends and acquaintances, they enter into purposeful discussion on themes of spiritual import, deepen their knowledge of the Faith, share Bahá'u'lláh's message, and welcome increasing numbers to join them in a mighty spiritual enterprise. Aware of the aspirations of the children of the world and their need for spiritual education, they extend their efforts widely to involve ever-growing contingents of participants in classes that become centres of attraction for the young and strengthen the roots of the Faith in society. They assist junior youth to navigate through a crucial stage of their lives and to become empowered to direct their energies toward the advancement of civilization. And with the advantage of a greater abundance of human resources, an increasing number of them are able to express their faith through a rising tide of endeavours that address the needs of humanity in both their spiritual and material dimensions. Such is the panorama before us as we pause this Riḍván to observe the progress of the worldwide Bahá'í community.

On several occasions we have indicated that the aim of the series of global Plans that will carry the Bahá'í world to the celebration of the centenary of the Faith's Formative Age in 2021 will be achieved through marked progress in the activity and development of the individual believer, of the institutions, and of the community. At this, the midway point of what will be a quarter of a century of consistent, focused exertion, the evidences of increased capacity are everywhere apparent. Of particular significance is the widening impact of the dynamism flowing from the interactions between the three participants in the Plan. Institutions, from the national to the local level, see with ever greater clarity how to create conditions conducive to the expression of the spiritual energies of a growing number of believers in pursuit of a common goal. The community is serving more and more as that environment in which individual effort and collective action, mediated by the institute, can complement each other in order to achieve progress. The vibrancy it manifests and the unity of purpose that animates its endeavours are drawing into its swelling ranks those from every walk of life eager to dedicate their time and energies to the welfare of humanity. That the doors of the community are more widely open for any receptive soul to enter and receive sustenance from Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is clear. No greater testament is there to the efficacy of the interactions among the Plan's three participants than the dramatic acceleration in the tempo of teaching that was witnessed this past year. The advance made in the process of entry by troops was significant indeed.

Within the sphere of these enhanced interactions, individual initiative is becoming increasingly effective. In previous messages we have referred to the impetus that the institute process imparts to the exercise of initiative by the individual believer. The friends in every continent are engaged in study of the Writings for the explicit purpose of learning to apply the teachings to the growth of the Faith. Remarkable numbers are now shouldering responsibility for the spiritual vitality of their communities; energetically, they are carrying out those acts of service befitting a healthy pattern of growth. As they have persevered in the field of service to the Cause,

maintaining a humble posture of learning, their courage and wisdom, zeal and acuity, fervour and circumspection, determination and trust in God have combined all the more to reinforce one another. In their presentation of the message of Bahá'u'lláh and the exposition of its verities, they have taken to heart the words of Shoghi Effendi that they must neither “hesitate” nor “falter”, neither “overstress” nor “whittle down” the truth which they champion. Neither are they “fanatical” nor “excessively liberal”. Through their constancy in teaching, they have increased their ability to determine whether the receptivity of their listener requires them to be “wary” or “bold”, to “act swiftly” or to “mark time”, to be “direct” or “indirect” in the methods they employ.

What we continue to find encouraging is how well disciplined is this individual initiative. Communities everywhere are gradually internalizing the lessons being learned from systematization, and the framework defined by the current series of Plans lends consistency and flexibility to the endeavours of the friends. Far from restricting them, this framework enables them to seize opportunities, to build relationships, and to translate into reality a vision of systematic growth. In a word, it gives shape to their collective powers.

As we survey what has been accomplished around the world, our hearts are filled with particular admiration for the believers in Iran, who, under the most arduous conditions, have arisen boldly to serve their country and are bending their energies toward its revitalization, though the avenues open to them are limited. And given the restrictions placed on the administration of the Faith, they have set out on an individual basis to acquaint their fellow citizens with the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, directly engaging them in conversations about His redeeming message. Not only have they received unprecedented support from enlightened souls as they have begun to do so, but they have encountered a receptivity far beyond anything they would have imagined possible.

Every follower of Bahá'u'lláh conscious of the forces of integration and disintegration operating in society today sees the relationship between the rise in receptivity to the Faith in all parts of the globe and the failings of the world's systems. That such receptivity will increase as the agonies of humanity deepen is certain. Let there be no mistake: The capacity building that has been set in motion to respond to mounting receptivity is still in its earliest stages. The magnitude of the demands of a world in disarray will test this capacity to its limits in the years ahead. Humanity is battered by forces of oppression, whether generated from the depths of religious prejudice or the pinnacles of rampant materialism. Bahá'ís are able to discern the causes of this affliction. “What ‘oppression’ is more grievous”, Bahá'u'lláh asks, “than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it?” There is no time to lose. Continued progress must be achieved in the activity and development of the three participants in the Plan.

‘Abdu'l-Bahá has extolled “two calls” to “success and prosperity” that can be heard from the “heights of the happiness of mankind”. One is the call of “civilization”, of “progress of the material world”. It comprises the “laws”, “regulations”, “arts and sciences” through which humanity develops. The other is the “soul-stirring call of God”, on which depends the eternal happiness of humanity. “This second call”, the Master has explained, “is founded upon the instructions and exhortations of the Lord and the admonitions and altruistic emotions belonging to the realm of morality which, like unto a brilliant light, brighten and illumine the lamp of the realities of mankind. Its penetrative power is the Word of God.” As you continue to labour in your clusters, you will be drawn further and further into the life of the society around you and will be challenged to extend the process of systematic learning in which you are engaged to encompass a growing range of human endeavours. In the approaches you take, the methods you adopt, and the instruments you employ, you will need to achieve the same degree of coherence that characterizes the pattern of growth presently under way.

Sustaining growth in cluster after cluster will depend on the qualities that distinguish your service to the peoples of the world. So free must be your thoughts and actions of any trace of prejudice—racial, religious, economic, national, tribal, class, or cultural—that even the stranger sees

in you loving friends. So high must be your standard of excellence and so pure and chaste your lives that the moral influence you exert penetrates the consciousness of the wider community. Only if you demonstrate the rectitude of conduct to which the writings of the Faith call every soul will you be able to struggle against the myriad forms of corruption, overt and subtle, eating at the vitals of society. Only if you perceive honour and nobility in every human being—this independent of wealth or poverty—will you be able to champion the cause of justice. And to the extent that administrative processes of your institutions are governed by the principles of Bahá'í consultation will the great masses of humanity be able to take refuge in the Bahá'í community.

As you press ahead, be confident that the Concourse on high is marshalling its forces and stands ready to come to your aid. Our continued prayers will surround you.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]