

19 May 2009

To the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith

Dearly loved Friends,

From National Conventions conducted across the globe over the past few weeks, there resounded expressions of the love and sympathy that Bahá'ís everywhere, proud to be counted as your spiritual brothers and sisters, hold for you in their hearts. Aware of the spiritual energies released by your steadfastness and sacrifice and reinforced thereby, they are engaged in defending your rights, propagating the Bahá'í teachings, and contributing to the well-being of the world of humanity.

Included among the many communications referred to in our letter dated 14 May 2009 are reports of the unprecedented rise you have witnessed in opportunities to dispel from the minds of your fellow citizens misunderstandings regarding the history and teachings of the Faith. That you have demonstrated increasing resilience, holding fast to your beliefs and carrying out your spiritual obligations despite intensified persecution, has had far-reaching effects, the implications of which cannot as yet be adequately appreciated. Only time will reveal the full significance of the momentous events which have converged upon you in recent years. Especially noteworthy in this respect are the growing eagerness of the Iranian people to understand the true character of the Faith and the rising awareness among the youth of your country that a new source of hope for the future is to be found in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Your hearts thus assured, we urge you to move forward, wisely and within the framework of the guidance laid out in our previous communications, to discharge your individual spiritual responsibilities.

A number of you have raised questions in your letters that revolve around the theme of strengthening the community. This, indeed, is a matter of fundamental importance, and every believer would do well to bear its requirements in mind. Already you have seen in the unity of thought and action achieved among the believers, in their enthusiasm and fellowship, the effect that performing your individual spiritual responsibilities has on the life of the community. There are a host of other factors that enhance the vitality of community life as well. Chief among them are the spiritual education provided to children and youth, opportunities created to deepen understanding of the teachings, gatherings held to celebrate the Nineteen Day Feast and to mark other occasions, efforts made to foster and maintain unity in all matters, assistance offered to young people and families in need, and the time spent visiting with friends and neighbours in their homes, engaging in meaningful conversation and weaving bonds of affection and solidarity.

To the degree that the principles and spirit of the Faith are reflected in the character of the community, its vitality will show forth and its individual and collective endeavours increase in efficacy. Present circumstances, which require you to carry on in the absence of the Yárán and the Khádímín and the inspiration and aid they provide, will demand of each of you new levels of tolerance and discipline, as well as a commitment to encourage and support one another. At the same time you should recognize that, as your individual activities take on a more outward-looking orientation, the management of the internal affairs of the community will grow easier.

The discharge of the foregoing individual and collective responsibilities forms part of Bahá'í identity; it is one of the commitments to which every follower of Bahá'u'lláh is held. Such expressions of your belief are well within recognized standards of individual human rights. Continue, then, to carry them out with confidence and vigour, guided by the dictates of wisdom, faithful to civil law, and sensitive to social conditions.

Our letter to you dated 18 March 2009 called attention to the role consultation plays in raising the community's level of maturity and in enhancing its effectiveness. Thus, we were pleased to note from your recent letters its more widespread practice among the believers. The law of consultation, as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, is a fundamental teaching of the Faith. He tells us that through consultation the "maturity of the gift of understanding" is made manifest. "It is and will always be", He states, "a cause of awareness and of awakening and a source of good and well-being." "Consultation bestoweth greater awareness and transmuteth conjecture into certitude", He further asserts. "It is a shining light which, in a dark world, leadeth the way and guideth." Consultation paves the path of individual and collective endeavour. The growth, progress, and enduring unity of the community are ensured by its practice. It is indispensable for the ordering of human affairs. 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to consultation as "the cause of great victories", assuring us that "it attracteth the aid and bestowal of God."

As you know, Bahá'í consultation is to be undertaken with the utmost love, sincerity, and unity. Its participants must come together in a prayerful attitude, seeking assistance from the Realm of Glory, expressing their thoughts freely, surrendering all attachment to their individual opinions, and giving fair-minded and careful consideration to the views of others, in an effort to reach consensus. 'Abdu'l-Bahá advises us that should it be found, in the course of coming to a decision, that discussion has become prolonged or given rise to disputation, consultation should be deferred and taken up at a more propitious time. Be confident that, as you engage in Bahá'í consultation among families or in small groups, your sincere efforts to abide by these principles will, through the power of the Covenant and with Divine assistance, enable you to resolve a great majority of the issues that confront you. Of course, it must be remembered that the purpose of consultation need not always be to arrive at a particular or final decision. Often the aim may simply be to engage in an exchange of views so as to help clarify a certain matter and bring about unity of vision. Further, you should recognize that, given current circumstances, there may be issues that cannot be resolved at present and which should be left for future consideration.

Some of you have enquired about the Nineteen Day Feast, the observance of which is ordained by Bahá'u'lláh in His Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Since the early days of the Faith, the Feast has been a distinctive feature of your spiritual and social life, essential to the development of the individual and the community, and it should continue to be observed with wisdom and with consideration for local circumstances. Within the context of the clear guidance regarding its nature and purpose, you have a wide degree of latitude in which to organize and conduct such meetings.

We remember you often in the Holy Shrines and offer prayers of gratitude for your steadfastness. In you we see these words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá made manifest:

O spiritual friends and loved ones of the All-Merciful!

In every Age believers are many but the tested are few. Render ye praise unto God ye that are tested believers, that ye have been subjected to every kind of trial and ordeal in the path of the supreme Lord. In the fire of ordeals, your faces have flushed aglow like unto pure gold, and amidst the flames of cruelty and oppression which the wicked had kindled, ye suffered yourselves to be consumed while remaining all the time patient. Thus ye have initiated every believer into the ways of steadfastness and fortitude.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]