

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE UNITED STATES

January 31, 2018

To the American Bahá'í community

Beloved Friends and Co-workers:

In our February 25 letter to you last year, we illustrated how the framework of the Five Year Plan provides the most effective means to steadily and inevitably eradicate the ills that afflict our nation—racial prejudice not least among them. In our letter of December 8, we called on the friends everywhere to build on the momentum generated by their celebrations of the bicentenary of Bahá'u'lláh's birth to achieve unprecedented levels of teaching effort. At this juncture, we wish to once again address the importance of understanding our teaching work and the quest for justice as interrelated elements of a single all-encompassing process set in motion by the Blessed Beauty, to be realized through our prosecution of the successive Plans formulated by the Universal House of Justice.

Deepening our understanding of the forces at work in our society and the nature of our response as Bahá'ís—especially as outlined in the current series of Plans—is critical to the cohesiveness, strength, and progress of our community. The Supreme Body has observed that wherever an intensity of teaching and community-building activities is maintained, it serves as a strong defense against the forces of materialism that would otherwise sap the precious energies of the friends. The American people as a whole, increasingly frustrated, alarmed, and anxious, are searching for answers and for a way forward. Seeking for truth, they are daily treated to a cacophony of competing voices which, to a greater or lesser extent, rest their respective cases on faulty foundations or bespeak outmoded habits of thought and behavior. Everywhere there is an increasing longing for an authentic and credible source to which people can turn for insight and for hope. As conditions in society grow more troubled, and the needs ever more urgent and pressing, we must strive to fully appreciate both the challenges and the opportunities of the hour.

There is a wealth of guidance in the Bahá'í writings about conditions in America, the role it is destined to play in world affairs, and the challenges we are bound to face on the road toward that destiny. We commend to the careful attention of every believer certain essential texts that will both edify us and inspire our services at this critical juncture in our history. Among them are Shoghi Effendi's seminal book-length letter to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, written in 1938 and published as *The Advent of Divine Justice*—especially the sections describing the spiritual prerequisites for success in teaching, which the Universal House of Justice has correlated with the capacities the Plan's framework of action is designed to foster. Likewise essential is the collection of his letters published as *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*. These writings—complementing our daily prayer, study of the sacred texts and the messages of the House of Justice, teaching, and other efforts in service—are invaluable sources of guidance and inspiration as we boldly enter the arena of action. Our permanent and seasonal schools will be arranging special programs for the study of these and other relevant texts in connection with the teaching work, and we hope that similar efforts will be made at the local level.

We cannot explore all of the themes presented to us in this guidance within the limited span of a single letter. But we do wish to call attention to a few essential concepts. First is the importance of reaching out to specific populations mentioned numerous times by

'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and the Universal House of Justice for the unique and vital contributions they will make to the creation of the new social order envisaged by the Blessed Beauty. Fresh and revitalized efforts must be made to reach out to American Indians and African Americans. Immigrant groups should also be included for special outreach, as they too have demonstrated heightened receptivity and vast potential. We are delighted that progress is being made in various clusters on all these fronts, particularly among younger people, and increasingly involving entire families. We hope that these efforts will accelerate. To this end, we now ask for a notable increase in the number of friends choosing to live among these populations as homefront pioneers.

Bahá'u'lláh, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and Shoghi Effendi all outlined the qualities necessary for success as a Bahá'í teacher. Among them are genuine love for all people—a love mirroring God's own love for them—demonstrating in word and deed a sincere desire for their happiness and progress. This is shown in a spirit of humility toward all, recognition of everyone's inherent capacities, a high degree of concern for the common well-being, and behavior that manifests an unbounded sense of loving fellowship. It also entails the ability to walk together with all people on the spiritual path—a path in which insights gleaned through interaction with the Word of God and their application in service are intertwined.

These qualities, characterizing individuals, institutions, and the community as a whole, provide for growing numbers everywhere to be together imbued with the spirit of the Faith. We can through systematic action—with institute training at its heart—steadily build the capacity to form deep, loving friendships inclusive of all peoples, as we pray and socialize together as true friends, provide spiritual education to our children and junior youth, consult about the conditions in our communities and act together for our common benefit, and bring insights from the Bahá'í teachings to bear on today's most pressing issues. We can envision the emergence in every locality of a rich and dynamic pattern of life, featuring a growing nucleus of those who have fully embraced the Bahá'í revelation and are active in service; beyond them a steadily enlarging circle of friends of the Faith who are also contributing in meaningful ways to the life of the community; and beyond them, still another circle of those who, whether consciously or not, are being affected by the spiritual powers released as a direct result of these efforts. This is surely the essence of our struggle for a world founded on the principles of divine justice. As we advance, this will increasingly demonstrate to a skeptical and disillusioned world the invincible power of the Cause of God.

We cannot too strongly emphasize that the need of the hour is action. Prayer, study, and reflection are all critical, to be sure—but the transforming effect of the Bahá'í revelation on ourselves and on the world can only be fully realized in the field of service. Let us move forward deliberately and prayerfully, but also urgently, to fulfill the sacred mission with which we have been entrusted by the Lord of the Age.

We are still too few in number, and the challenges ahead can seem overwhelming. Yet everything in our experience teaches us the vast benefits of serving shoulder to shoulder, of holding to a common vision, and of offering each other loving support. We know that

when we try, when we help each other, when we reflect unity of purpose, when we serve together patiently, when we are true both inwardly and outwardly to our principles—growing ever stronger and more effective through both steadfastness and practical experience—we attract divine confirmations and attain victory. What is more, we know that there are multitudes of wonderful, capable people eager to create a better world; people who, if given the chance, will respond with fullness of heart to the divine message.

Let us recall the words of our beloved Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, reminding us of the priceless opportunity that is ours—to establish once and for all a world filled with divine love and founded on justice, where every soul finds acceptance and fulfills the true purpose of life:

The Faith of the Blessed Beauty is summoning mankind to safety and love, to amity and peace; it hath raised up its tabernacle on the heights of the earth, and directeth its call to all nations. Wherefore, O ye who are God's lovers, know ye the value of this precious Faith, obey its teachings, walk in this road that is drawn straight, and show ye this way to the people. Lift up your voices and sing out the song of the Kingdom. Spread far and wide the precepts and counsels of the loving Lord, so that this world will change into another world, and this darksome earth will be flooded with light, and the dead body of mankind will arise and live; so that every soul will ask for immortality, through the holy breaths of God.

With assurance of our ardent prayers,

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