

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

April 20, 2020

To the American Bahá'í community

Beloved Friends and Co-workers,

As across the globe the community of the Greatest Name commences its annual observance of the joyous Festival of Ridván, we extend to each and every one of you our warmest and most loving greetings. Perhaps no other year in recent memory has provided us with more overwhelming evidence of humanity's desperate need for the all-embracing, unifying message of Bahá'u'lláh than this one. You have our deepest gratitude for all you have accomplished this year and throughout the course of this Five Year Plan to advance His world-redeeming, world-transforming Cause in this land.

You are doubtless familiar with the Universal House of Justice's assertion that the worldwide Bahá'í community has never been in a stronger position than it is now. Our review of the Faith's progress in this country enables us to state with confidence that the American Bahá'í community is no exception to this observation. The number of participants in core activities rose from 41,000 to 57,000 over the course of 2019–20, with the number of friends from the larger society—comprised of people from a remarkable diversity of racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds—making up nearly 40 percent of the total. The number of clusters surpassing the third milestone on the continuum of growth increased from 19 to 34, an average of more than one a month since last Ridván. In each of these clusters, hundreds of Bahá'ís and their friends, inspired by the Faith's teachings, are coming together for the betterment of their communities—and the world.

These numbers provide indisputable evidence of a dynamic process underway in our nation, through which we are accelerating our capacity to embrace multitudes of our fellow citizens, nurture them, and walk with them side by side in the path of service. They are also attributable to a rising confidence in the friends to speak with assurance about the Central Figures of our Faith and Their sublime, supremely logical teachings. In yet another way, we are adding a most powerful and persuasive force to our efforts to translate the teachings into a living reality.

While a detailed accounting of our progress is impossible within the limited span of a letter like this, we wish to call particular attention to the dramatic rise in the number of devotional gatherings in this community, which doubled over the course of the past year. Considering the severity of the hardships and trials currently facing us, it is not difficult to understand why thousands feel a need to build communities distinguished for their hopeful and encouraging spiritual atmosphere. A few years ago, in preparing us for the current Plan, the Universal House of Justice emphasized this very point:

Devotional meetings are occasions where any soul may enter, inhale the heavenly fragrances, experience the sweetness of prayer, meditate upon the Creative Word, be transported on the wings of the spirit, and commune with the one Beloved. Feelings of fellowship and common cause are generated, particularly in the spiritually heightened conversations that naturally occur at such times and through which the "city of the human heart" may be opened. By convening a gathering for worship at which adults and children of any background are welcome, the spirit of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* is evoked in any locality.

From this, we can see how foundational the concept of devotional meetings is to progress in any cluster. In the linking of devotional meetings to the spirit of the *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, the connection between worship and service also becomes clear.

The vital importance of these meetings and the heartening momentum that has already been achieved in holding them has inspired us to set the following goal: in this final year of the Plan, we ask that every Bahá'í household in the nation undertake the hosting of a regular devotional meeting. The members of the National Spiritual Assembly have pledged to do their part, and we lovingly invite you to join us in achieving this vision.

We cannot contemplate the coming year without calling to mind the words of the beloved Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, who, at another time of extreme peril for humanity, reminded us that all of the processes unfolding in the world have their origins in one common source and serve one ultimate aim. Such words as these must surely provide comfort and assurance to the heart of every stalwart follower of the Blessed Beauty:

Such simultaneous processes of rise and of fall, of integration and of disintegration, of order and chaos, with their continuous and reciprocal reactions on each other, are but aspects of a greater Plan, one and indivisible, whose Source is God, whose author is Bahá'u'lláh, the theater of whose operations is the entire planet, and whose ultimate objectives are the unity of the human race and the peace of all mankind.

Finally, we, the community of His followers in the United States, must never forget the special mission Bahá'u'lláh has conferred on us to contribute to the great destiny foretold for this nation—a destiny that will only be fulfilled when our society truly embodies the principles of equality and divine justice to which it has been called. The Supreme Institution of the Bahá'í world has reminded us of this in a message on the 100th anniversary of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's revelation of the first of His Tablets of the Divine Plan:

The movement of your clusters to the farthest frontiers of learning will usher in the time anticipated by Shoghi Effendi at the start of your collective exertions, when the communities you build will directly combat and eventually eradicate the forces of corruption, of moral laxity, and of ingrained prejudice eating away at the vitals of society.

Dearest and most cherished friends! Let us do all we can to be equal to the challenges of the present hour. In all you do, be assured our unceasing prayers for your happiness and well-being surround you, as do our supplications that blessings and confirmations will attend your devoted services. We eagerly anticipate news of the victories you will without a doubt attain in the coming year.

With our deepest love,

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