

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 150

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

We have come to the King of Festivals in the undiminished glow of the marvelous benedictions of the Holy Year through which we have just passed, confirmed, renewed and energized in our sacred pursuits. For it was a time when the Abhá Beauty shed upon His worldwide community the radiance of His grace in such effulgence as to invest with astonishing success the efforts of His followers to observe so significant a double anniversary as the centenary of His Ascension and of the inauguration of His Covenant. It was the memorial pause that yielded a proclamation of the Most Great Name that resounded throughout the earth as never before; but what was so clearly an external phenomenon was quite markedly a reflection of an inner attainment to a deeper understanding of our relation to Bahá'u'lláh than hitherto obtained. The greater appreciation in ourselves of the universality of the community, of its embodiment of the first and overarching principle of His Faith, has left a new and compelling impression upon our hearts; the effects of that awareness were strikingly demonstrated at the commemoration in the Holy Land last May and more broadly at the World Congress last November, as if to confirm our assurance in these desperately troubled times that the world of humanity is moving inexorably towards its as-yet elusive destiny of unity and peace. Indeed, during the Holy Year, we were transported on the wings of the spirit to a summit from which we have seen the fast-approaching glory of the Lord's immemorial promise that all humankind will one day be united.

The thrilling details of the happenings throughout the year are too numerous to describe here, for the workings of the Holy Spirit were universally felt, imbuing the activities of the friends with a mysterious force. Let it suffice, then, to recall such highlights as the gathering last May of the largest number of Bahá'ís to participate in an event in the Holy Land; the circumambulation of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh by the representatives of virtually every nation; the presence of the majority of the living Knights of Bahá'u'lláh at the time of the depositing of the Roll of Honor at the entrance door of the Most Holy Shrine; the unprecedented size of the World Congress and the vast variety of its participants, including a huge body of youth who engaged in their own auxiliary program; the procession of the representatives of the races and nations of the world on that spectacular occasion; the satellite broadcast which linked the Congress and the World Center with all the continents. These were of a rare category of experience, and they have immortalized the fame of the centennial commemorations.

The innumerable, imaginative efforts undertaken by the friends around the world, from remote villages to great cities, in observance of these important anniversaries illustrated afresh the profound degree to which the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh has been consolidated, and they generated the teaching work in many areas, with unusual and surprising results. The unprecedented publicity accorded the purpose and activities of the Holy Year through the mass media in large and small countries, the notice given by legislative bodies and public officials to the centennial, the gestures of recognition and appreciation of the Faith by governmental agencies, the involvement of representatives of the Bahá'í International Community in major global events, including the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro last June, in connection with which a public monument bearing an inscription from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and a large imprint of the Greatest Name was dedicated—such developments gave clear indications that the profile of the community has been raised in the public eye.

Apart from all these outstanding events and developments, but of even greater magnitude because of its far-reaching implications for the whole human race, was the release at Naw-Rúz of

the annotated English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Most Holy Book. We draw a stage closer, then, to a time envisaged by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “When the laws of the Most Holy Book are enforced,” the Master said, “... universal peace will raise its tent in the center of the earth, and the blessed Tree of Life will grow and spread to such an extent that it will overshadow the East and West.”

The centennial year was also a period in which the situation in the world at large became more confused and paradoxical: there were simultaneous signs of order and chaos, promise and frustration. Amid the convolutions of the current global state of affairs, but with such feelings of wonder and joy, courage and faith as the Holy Year has induced in our hearts, we, at this Riḍván, in the one hundred and fiftieth year of our Faith, are embarked upon a Three Year Plan. Its brevity is compelled by the swiftly changing tides of the times. But the Plan’s primary purpose is indispensable to the future of the Cause and of humankind. It is the next stage in the unfoldment of the divine charter of teaching penned by the Center of the Covenant. The Plan will be a measure of our determination to respond to the immense opportunities at this critical moment in the social evolution of the planet. Through resolute pursuit of its stated objectives and full realization of its goals, as suited to the circumstances of each national community, the way will be made clear for a fit projection of the role of the Faith in relation to the inevitable challenges facing all humanity towards the end of the fast-fleeting, fate-laden twentieth century.

A massive expansion of the Bahá’í community must be achieved far beyond all past records. The task of spreading the Message to the generality of mankind in villages, towns and cities must be rapidly extended. The need for this is critical, for without it the laboriously erected agencies of the Administrative Order will not be provided the scope to be able to develop and adequately demonstrate their inherent capacity to minister to the crying needs of humanity in its hour of deepening despair. In this regard the mutuality of teaching and administration must be fully understood and widely emphasized, for each reinforces the other. The problems of society which affect our community and those problems which naturally arise from within the community itself, whether social, spiritual, economic or administrative, will be solved as our numbers and resources multiply, and as at all levels of the community the friends develop the ability, willingness, courage and determination to obey the laws, apply the principles and administer the affairs of the Faith in accordance with divine precepts.

The new Plan revolves around a triple theme: enhancing the vitality of the faith of individual believers, greatly developing the human resources of the Cause, and fostering the proper functioning of local and national Bahá’í institutions. This is to lend focus to requisites of success as the Plan’s manifold goals are pursued in these turbulent times.

Against the conspicuous signs of moral decadence which daily is corroding the foundations of civilized life, these graphic words of Bahá’u’lláh assume an acute urgency: “The vitality of men’s belief in God is dying out in every land; nothing short of His wholesome medicine can ever restore it. The corrosion of ungodliness is eating into the vitals of human society; what else but the Elixir of His potent Revelation can cleanse and revive it?” Such words have particular implications for the actions of anyone who has recognized the Lord of the Age. A crucial consequence of this recognition is a belief that impels acceptance of His commandments. Depth of belief is assured by the inner transformation, that salutary acquisition of spiritual and moral character, which is the outcome of obedience to the divine laws and principles. Towards this end the release of the annotated Kitáb-i-Aqdas in English, and its anticipated early publication in other major languages, provide a mighty infusion of divine guidance for realizing the vitality of faith which is essential to the spiritual well-being and happiness of individuals and the strengthening of the fabric of the community. No less essential to nourishing this vitality is the cultivation of a sense of spirituality, that mystic feeling which unites the individual with God and is achieved through meditation and prayer.

Training of the friends and their striving, through serious individual study, to acquire knowledge of the Faith, to apply its principles and administer its affairs, are indispensable to developing the human resources necessary to the progress of the Cause. But knowledge alone is not adequate; it is vital that training be given in a manner that inspires love and devotion, fosters firmness in the Covenant, prompts the individual to active participation in the work of the Cause and to taking sound initiatives in the promotion of its interests. Special efforts to attract people of capacity to the Faith will also go far towards providing the human resources so greatly needed at this time. Moreover, these endeavors will stimulate and strengthen the ability of Spiritual Assemblies to meet their weighty responsibilities.

The proper functioning of these institutions depends largely on the efforts of their members to familiarize themselves with their duties and to adhere scrupulously to principle in their personal behavior and in the conduct of their official responsibilities. Of relevant importance, too, are their resolve to remove all traces of estrangement and sectarian tendencies from their midst, their ability to win the affection and support of the friends under their care and to involve as many individuals as possible in the work of the Cause. By their constantly aiming at improving their performance, the communities they guide will reflect a pattern of life that will be a credit to the Faith and will, as a welcome consequence, rekindle hope among the increasingly disillusioned members of society.

As National Spiritual Assemblies, with the ready support of the Continental Counselors, chart the course to be followed in this brief span, the World Center will attend to coordinating widely diverse activities throughout the planet, giving further direction to the external affairs of the Faith as the Bahá'í International Community is drawn more deeply into dealing with world issues. It will do this while at the same time pursuing with deliberate speed the gigantic building projects on God's Holy Mountain, which constitute part of a process clearly perceived by Shoghi Effendi as synchronizing with two no less significant developments: the establishment of the Lesser Peace and the evolution of Bahá'í national and local institutions. By the end of the Plan all remaining construction phases of the Mount Carmel projects will have been set in motion; the structural framework of the International Teaching Centre, the Center for the Study of the Texts and the Extension to the International Archives Building will have been raised up; and seven terraces below the Shrine of the Báb will have been completed.

The dramatic expansion of the work of the Cause in recent years and the developments expected during this new Plan demand material resources which have not been adequate for some time, even though substantial increases have been made in the contributions to Bahá'í Funds. The economic crises so widely reported seem destined to grow even worse, but neither the economic nor other pressing problems confronting humanity will ultimately be resolved unless the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh is given due regard by nations and peoples and unless it receives the adequate material support of its avowed adherents. May the friends everywhere consider, together with their Bahá'í institutions and individually, undaunted by the uncertainties, the perils and the financial stringency afflicting nations, what must now be done by each and all to meet this inescapable, sacred responsibility resting upon them.

Our appeal for immediate, redoubled and sustained action on all aspects of the Plan is addressed primarily to the individual believer of every locality, who possesses within himself or herself the measures of initiative that ensure the success of any global Bahá'í enterprise, and "on whom, in the last resort," as our beloved Guardian plainly stated, "depends the fate of the entire community." The goals of the Three Year Plan will not be easily won, but they must be magnificently achieved, whatever the sacrifice. There should therefore be no hesitation or delay on the part of individuals or Spiritual Assemblies in attending to them, lest the problems of mankind pile up unchecked, or the rise of internal crises slows us down. Let it ever be borne in mind that we earn our victories through test and trial; we turn crisis to the advantage of progress by seizing the opportunity it provides to demonstrate the viability and winning power of our principles. In

the onward surge of the Cause of God, crisis and victory have always alternated and have ever proven to be the staple of progress. As we savor the triumphs of the Holy Year, let us not forget the reality of this recurrent experience. Let us also remember that our blessings are equal to our challenges, as repeatedly shown by our glorious history.

Beloved friends: Do not be dismayed or deterred. Take courage in the security of God's law and ordinances. These are the darkest hours before the break of day. Peace, as promised, will come at night's end. Press on to meet the dawn.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]