

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

22 April 1996

[To an individual]

Your email message ... has been received at the Bahá'í World Centre, and the Universal House of Justice has asked us to reply as follows to your question regarding teaching the Faith....

In His Writings, Bahá'u'lláh states clearly the essential requisites for our spiritual growth, and these are reiterated and amplified by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His talks and Tablets. They can be summarized briefly as prayer and meditation, the endeavor to conform one's behavior to the exalted standard set forth in the Bahá'í Teachings, participation in the life of the Bahá'í community, teaching the Faith and contributing to the Bahá'í Fund. Different individuals, according to their natures, will follow these paths in varying ways, but all are essential to spiritual growth. The House of Justice points out that there can be no rigid formula on how to attain the right balance in our approach to spirituality, and that the best course here, as in so many things, is to follow the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Regarding, in particular, teaching the Cause of God, from a letter written on behalf of the beloved Guardian, we are reminded that it is a sacred obligation enjoined upon every believer.

Bahá'u'lláh has enjoined upon the Bahá'ís the sacred obligation of teaching. We have no priests, therefore the service once rendered by priests to their religions is the service every single Bahá'í is expected to render individually to his religion. He must be the one who enlightens new souls, confirms them, heals the wounded and the weary upon the road of life, and gives them to quaff from the chalice of everlasting life—the knowledge of the Manifestation of God in His Day.

Further, Bahá'u'lláh exhorts us to “Teach thou the Cause of God with an utterance which will cause the bushes to be enkindled, and the call ‘Verily, there is no God but me, the Almighty, the Unconstrained’ to be raised therefrom.”

While living the Bahá'í life, good works and service to our fellow men are important aspects in exemplifying and promoting the Faith, 'Abdu'l-Bahá emphasizes that these alone are not sufficient. He states:

It is at such times that the friends of God avail themselves of the occasion, seize the opportunity, rush forth and win the prize. If their task is to be confined to good conduct and advice, nothing will be accomplished. They must speak out, expound the proofs, set forth clear arguments, draw irrefutable conclusions establishing the truth of the manifestation of the Sun of Reality.

The relevant guidance provided in messages and letters from the House of Justice can best be understood in light of the knowledge that teaching the Faith is each individual's sacred duty, prescribed by God, and is fundamental for the advancement of the Cause and our own spiritual progress. In its 1995 Riḍván message, the House of Justice wrote, “For to teach, Bahá'u'lláh Himself affirms, is to do the ‘most meritorious of all deeds.’” In another Riḍván message, teaching is described as “the food of the spirit ... it ensures the victory of the Covenant and brings those who give their lives to it the supernal happiness of attainment to the good pleasure of their Lord.” The emphasis on teaching which you perceive in these messages in no way diminishes the importance of the other requisites for spiritual growth, but rather should inspire the believers to submerge themselves yet deeper in prayer, meditation and study of the Word of God, and to strive

more vigilantly to live the Bahá'í life and to be of service to their fellow man, as essential requirements to fulfilling their obligation to teach the Faith.

Regarding the distinctive roles of the institutions of the Faith and the individual believers in the spread of the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, in the transformation of the individual and collective lives of peoples and the eventual establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, they are described by the House of Justice as follows:

Though the institutions of the Faith are responsible for planning the goals and activities of the Cause, for stimulating and encouraging the believers to arise, and for supporting and unifying them in their services, it is, in the final analysis, through the spiritual decisions and actions of the individual believers that the Faith moves forward on its course to ultimate victory.

You ask what you should do if you feel the institutions are not functioning according to the Sacred Writings. You will find it helpful in this respect to deepen your understanding of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the subject of the Covenant, possibly by arranging to study with a believer who is clearly knowledgeable in the Faith. To question the actions or directions of a Bahá'í institution certainly does not in itself constitute a violation of the Covenant. One of the distinguishing features of the Bahá'í Faith is the extent to which it liberates the individual to give expression to his understanding of the Bahá'í Teachings and to offer to the institutions of the Faith his views about the needs and opportunities which he perceives to exist. However, this remarkable freedom of thought is accompanied by the duty placed upon every believer to obey the Spiritual Assemblies, and to recognize that the wisdom of consultation by an Assembly may be regarded as yielding a greater understanding of an issue than that to which one individual has access.

You are assured of the loving prayers of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines on your behalf, that you may achieve your desire for a deeper understanding of the verities of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and that your endeavors in the path of service to His Cause may be divinely guided and confirmed.

Department of the Secretariat