

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

19 April 2001

[To an individual]

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The principal issue raised in your letter is that of the timing for the occurrence of the Lesser Peace, in light of your impression that the Bahá'í Writings anticipate its coming before the conclusion of the twentieth century; i.e., the end of December 2000.

Enclosed for your information is a copy of a memorandum prepared by the Research Department, at the request of the House of Justice, on the subject of the attainment of the unity of nations and the Lesser Peace. Assembled in this document are a number of pertinent passages from authoritative texts of the Faith.

In reviewing this material it becomes apparent that there is nothing in the authoritative Bahá'í Writings to indicate that the Lesser Peace would be established before the end of the twentieth century. However, there are clear statements affirming that the unity of nations would be, in the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "securely established" during the twentieth century.

These statements, and others appearing in the enclosed document, should be viewed from the perspective that the evolution of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is an organic process proceeding in accordance with the Divine Will and animated by a spiritual reality. In response to a question, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote: "The kingdom of peace, salvation, uprightness, and reconciliation is founded in the invisible world, and it will by degrees become manifest and apparent through the power of the Word of God!" As a result of consecrated human endeavor over decades, and indeed centuries, this spiritual reality is gradually expressed in physical form.

An orientation to process is apparent throughout the writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi concerning the attainment of world peace. For example, the Guardian reported the Master as having acclaimed actions taken at the conclusion of the First World War to have signaled "the dawn of the Most Great Peace." This stands in contrast to preoccupation with the short term in the wider society today which focuses exclusively on events rather than on evolutionary processes.

You should also take note of the distinction between the unity of nations and the Lesser Peace. Shoghi Effendi, in response to questions from believers, clarified that "unity in the political realm," to which 'Abdu'l-Bahá referred in his enunciation of the seven candles of unity, "is a unity which politically independent and sovereign states achieve among themselves." As expressed in the passages cited in the enclosed memorandum, the Lesser Peace will initially be a political unity arrived at by decision of the various governments of the world. The unity of nations can be taken as that unity which arises from a recognition among the peoples of the various nations, that they are members of one common human family.

The twentieth century has been distinguished by the emergence of the unity of nations, to which both Shoghi Effendi and the House of Justice have referred in the enclosed document. This movement, the evidence of which accumulates with each passing day, stands in sharp contrast to the nationalistic tenor of the nineteenth century, and is an evidence of the spirit of a new age moving in the hearts of humankind. Viewed from this perspective, there can be no doubt that the promise of 'Abdu'l-Bahá has been fulfilled, and the unity of nations securely established in the century now concluded. The further expansion and strengthening of this consciousness of world

solidarity in the years to come will have their effect in the political realm, and will influence the evolution towards world government.

It should not be imagined that the processes now moving in the world will be free from challenge or difficulty. There may well be setbacks, and conflicts may erupt periodically, as humanity proceeds towards the emergence and consolidation of the Lesser Peace, giving rise in due course to the establishment of the Most Great Peace.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

MEMORANDUM

19 APRIL 2001

To the Universal House of Justice
From the Research Department

Attainment of the Unity of Nations and the Lesser Peace

Introduction:

The Bahá'í Writings about world peace envisage the Most Great Peace coming as the culmination of two distinct processes which unfold gradually over a lengthy period. One of these processes concerns the growth and development of the Bahá'í community, with the evolution of the Administrative Order and its efflorescence in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The other process, the subject of this memorandum, is associated with developments in the wider society, notably the attainment of the unity of nations and the establishment of the Lesser Peace.

Unity of Nations and the Lesser Peace:

Shoghi Effendi refers to Bahá'u'lláh addressing "all the kings of the earth, summoning them to cleave to the Lesser Peace, as distinct from that Most Great Peace which those who are fully conscious of the power of His Revelation and avowedly profess the tenets of His Faith can alone proclaim and must eventually establish..." In the words of Bahá'u'lláh:

Now that ye have refused the Most Great Peace, hold ye fast unto this, the Lesser Peace, that haply ye may in some degree better your own condition and that of your dependents.

O rulers of the earth! Be reconciled among yourselves, that ye may need no more armaments save in a measure to safeguard your territories and dominions. Beware lest ye disregard the counsel of the All-Knowing, the Faithful.

Be united, O kings of the earth, for thereby will the tempest of discord be stilled amongst you, and your peoples find rest, if ye be of them that comprehend. Should anyone among you take up arms against another, rise ye all against him, for this is naught but manifest justice.

In another passage, Bahá'u'lláh has related the Lesser Peace to the gathering together of world leaders at a convocation in which measures for unity and concord would be devised.

We pray God—exalted be His glory—and cherish the hope that He may graciously assist the manifestations of affluence and power and the daysprings of sovereignty and glory, the kings of the earth—may God aid them through His strengthening grace—to establish the Lesser Peace. This, indeed, is the greatest means for insuring the tranquillity of the nations. It is incumbent upon the Sovereigns of the world—may God assist them—unitedly to hold fast unto this Peace, which is the chief instrument for the protection of all mankind. It is Our hope that they will arise to achieve what will be conducive to the well-being of man. It is their duty to convene an all-inclusive assembly, which either they themselves or their ministers will

attend, and to enforce whatever measures are required to establish unity and concord amongst men. They must put away the weapons of war, and turn to the instruments of universal reconstruction. Should one king rise up against another, all the other kings must arise to deter him. Arms and armaments will, then, be no more needed beyond that which is necessary to insure the internal security of their respective countries. If they attain unto this all-surpassing blessing, the people of each nation will pursue, with tranquillity and contentment, their own occupations, and the groanings and lamentations of most men would be silenced.

The theme of a gathering to deliberate on the measures required for an enduring world peace is referred to in several other places in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, including:

The time must come when the imperative necessity for the holding of a vast, an all-embracing assemblage of men will be universally realized. The rulers and kings of the earth must needs attend it, and, participating in its deliberations, must consider such ways and means as will lay the foundations of the world's Great Peace amongst men. Such a peace demandeth that the Great Powers should resolve, for the sake of the tranquillity of the peoples of the earth, to be fully reconciled among themselves. Should any king take up arms against another, all should unitedly arise and prevent him. If this be done, the nations of the world will no longer require any armaments, except for the purpose of preserving the security of their realms and of maintaining internal order within their territories. This will ensure the peace and composure of every people, government and nation.

Subsequently 'Abdu'l-Bahá specified one of the outcomes of this convocation to be a comprehensive treaty, the provisions of which would be binding on all governments:

True civilization will unfurl its banner in the midmost heart of the world whenever a certain number of its distinguished and high-minded sovereigns—the shining exemplars of devotion and determination—shall, for the good and happiness of all mankind, arise, with firm resolve and clear vision, to establish the Cause of Universal Peace. They must make the Cause of Peace the object of general consultation, and seek by every means in their power to establish a Union of the nations of the world. They must conclude a binding treaty and establish a covenant, the provisions of which shall be sound, inviolable and definite. They must proclaim it to all the world and obtain for it the sanction of all the human race. This supreme and noble undertaking—the real source of the peace and well-being of all the world—should be regarded as sacred by all that dwell on earth. All the forces of humanity must be mobilized to ensure the stability and permanence of this Most Great Covenant. In this all-embracing Pact the limits and frontiers of each and every nation should be clearly fixed, the principles underlying the relations of governments towards one another definitely laid down, and all international agreements and obligations ascertained. In like manner, the size of the armaments of every government should be strictly limited, for if the preparations for war and the military forces of any nation should be allowed to increase, they will arouse the suspicion of others. The fundamental principle underlying this solemn Pact should be so fixed that if any government later violate any one of its provisions, all the governments on earth should arise to reduce it to utter submission, nay the human race as a whole should resolve, with every power at its disposal, to destroy that government. Should this greatest of all remedies be applied to the sick body of the world, it will assuredly recover from its ills and will remain eternally safe and secure.

Distinct from, but closely related to, this theme is the promise by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, both orally and in writing, that the unity of nations will be established during the twentieth century, as an essential foundation for world peace.

In one of His talks, He stated:

I am most hopeful that in this century these lofty thoughts shall be conducive to human welfare. Let this century be the sun of previous centuries, the effulgences of which shall last forever, so that in times to come they shall glorify the twentieth century, saying the twentieth century was the century of lights, the twentieth century was the century of life, the twentieth century was the century of international peace....

As was reported in the *Montreal Daily Star* newspaper:

“Are there any signs that the permanent peace of the world will be established in anything like a reasonable period?” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was asked. “It will be established in this century,” He answered. “It will be universal in the twentieth century. All nations will be forced into it.”

In commenting on other pronouncements of the Master on this theme, the House of Justice stated the following in a letter written on its behalf on 29 July 1974:

It is true that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made statements linking the establishment of the unity of nations to the twentieth century. For example: “The fifth candle is the unity of nations—a unity which, in this century, will be securely established, causing all the peoples of the world to regard themselves as citizens of one common fatherland.” And, in *The Promised Day Is Come*, following a similar statement quoted from *Some Answered Questions*, Shoghi Effendi makes this comment: “This is the stage which the world is now approaching, the stage of world unity, which, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá assures us, will, in this century, be securely established.”

However, attainment of the unity of nations should not be regarded as being synonymous with the establishment of the Lesser Peace. In answer to a question about the timing of the Lesser Peace, Shoghi Effendi stated, in a letter written on his behalf in 1946, that: “All we know is that the Lesser Peace and the Most Great Peace *will* come—their *exact* dates we do not know.”

Nevertheless, the unity of nations can quite properly be regarded as one stage—and indeed a highly significant step—in the lengthy process of the establishment of the Lesser Peace. In response to a question from an individual, the House of Justice stated, in a letter written on its behalf on 31 January 1985, that:

Bahá’u’lláh’s principal mission in appearing at this time in human history is the realization of the oneness of mankind and the establishment of peace among the nations; therefore, all the forces which are focused on accomplishing these ends are influenced by His Revelation. We know, however, that peace will come in stages. First, there will come the Lesser Peace, when the unity of nations will be achieved, then gradually the Most Great Peace—the spiritual as well as social and political unity of mankind, when the Bahá’í World Commonwealth, operating in strict accordance with the laws and ordinances of the Most Holy Book of the Bahá’í Revelation, will have been established through the efforts of the Bahá’ís.

As to the Lesser Peace, Shoghi Effendi has explained that this will initially be a political unity arrived at by decision of the governments of various nations; it will not be established by direct action of the Bahá’í community....

The Lesser Peace itself will pass through stages; at the initial stage the governments will act entirely on their own without the conscious involvement of the Faith; later on, in God’s good time, the Faith will have a direct influence on it in ways indicated by Shoghi Effendi in his “The Goal of a New World Order.”

The progressive development of the Lesser Peace, including its consolidation, is clarified by the statement of the Guardian, in his letter of Ridván 105 B.E. to the friends in the East, concerning the duration of the Formative Age:

Its duration is unknown and lies concealed within the treasury of God's knowledge. Its termination will coincide with the establishment of this most perfect, this most mighty Order throughout the East and the West, the resplendent emergence of organic unity among the component parts of human society, and the consolidation of the foundations of the Lesser Peace among the governments and nations of the world.

Further elaboration was provided by the House of Justice when requested by an individual believer to clarify the following passage from the 1996 Ridván message:

However short the path to peace, it will be tortuous; however promising the anticipated event that will set its course, it must mature through a long period of evolution, with its attendant tests, setbacks and conflicts, towards the moment when it will have emerged, under the direct influences of God's Faith, as the Most Great Peace.

In the letter of 29 July 1996 sent on its behalf in reply to that individual, the House of Justice wrote:

Clearly, the emergence of the Lesser Peace will be a gradual process and its various stages will no doubt witness tests and setbacks, as well as great advances. It will certainly include, however, a development of historic importance: that point at which the majority of the world's nation-states formally commit themselves to a global order comprising institutions and laws, and equipped with the means by which collective decisions can be enforced. While we cannot at present foresee the precise form that this development will take, much less the point at which it will occur, we recognize that it is a feature of the process of the Lesser Peace.

With the emphasis being given in recent years to the completion of the present phase in the construction of the Edifices of the Administrative Order on the slopes of Mount Carmel, some believers have enquired whether there is a causative relationship between the accomplishment of this construction program and the establishment of the Lesser Peace. The Secretariat of the House of Justice responded to one such enquiry, in a letter of 14 December 1987, as follows:

The Universal House of Justice ... has instructed us to say that it knows of nothing in the writings of the Faith to indicate that the establishment of the Lesser Peace depends on the completion of the Arc on Mount Carmel.

The passage which may have given rise to this conception may well be the statement made by the beloved Guardian which is published on pages 74–75 of *Messages to the Bahá'í World...* You will note that in this passage the Guardian describes three things which will synchronize. It is important to note that he is describing, not events, but processes or developments and, although he says they will synchronize—a statement which in itself provides important guidance for the institutions of the Cause—he does not state that they are dependent one upon the other.

The Events of the Twentieth Century:

It is useful to review some of the statements appearing in the Bahá'í Writings concerning the events in the twentieth century which represent stages in the progression of humanity towards the unity of nations and the Lesser Peace. In 1931 Shoghi Effendi characterizes the emergence of world mindedness in the following terms:

To the states and principalities just emerging from the welter of the great Napoleonic upheaval, whose chief preoccupation was either to recover their rights to an independent existence or to achieve their national unity, the conception of world solidarity seemed not only remote but inconceivable. It was not until the forces of nationalism had succeeded in overthrowing the foundations of the Holy Alliance that had sought to curb their rising power, that the possibility of a world order, transcending in its range the political institutions these

nations had established, came to be seriously entertained. It was not until after the World War that these exponents of arrogant nationalism came to regard such an order as the object of a pernicious doctrine tending to sap that essential loyalty upon which the continued existence of their national life depended.

A highly significant milestone in this process was the formation of the League of Nations after the First World War, an event which was praised by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, despite His warning that:

... although the League of Nations has been brought into existence, yet it is incapable of establishing universal peace.

In the years leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War, Shoghi Effendi affirmed that:

Though the great outcry raised by post-war nationalism is growing louder and more insistent every day, the League of Nations is as yet in its embryonic state, and the storm clouds that are gathering may for a time totally eclipse its powers and obliterate its machinery, yet the direction in which the institution itself is operating is most significant. The voices that have been raised ever since its inception, the efforts that have been exerted, the work that has already been accomplished, foreshadow the triumphs which this presently constituted institution, or any other body that may supersede it, is destined to achieve.

He drew attention to “the most significant landmarks in its checkered history,” outstanding among which was its decision to impose collective sanctions upon a member which the League deemed to have committed an act of aggression. Shoghi Effendi pointed out that:

For the first time in the history of humanity the system of collective security, foreshadowed by Bahá’u’lláh and explained by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, has been seriously envisaged, discussed and tested. For the first time in history it has been officially recognized and publicly stated that for this system of collective security to be effectively established strength and elasticity are both essential—strength involving the use of an adequate force to ensure the efficacy of the proposed system, and elasticity to enable the machinery that has been devised to meet the legitimate needs and aspirations of its aggrieved upholders. For the first time in human history tentative efforts have been exerted by the nations of the world to assume collective responsibility, and to supplement their verbal pledges by actual preparation for collective action. And again, for the first time in history, a movement of public opinion has manifested itself in support of the verdict which the leaders and representatives of nations have pronounced, and for securing collective action in pursuance of such a decision.

His vision of the significance of this action was not obscured by the apparent failure of the collective sanctions to accomplish their stated objective.

Shoghi Effendi affirmed that the goal of the process by which the League of Nations was established was that of attainment to “. . . the stage at which the oneness of the whole body of nations will be made the ruling principle of international life.”

He elaborated on the details of this process some two decades later in 1947, when the United Nations Organization had replaced the League of Nations and was itself proceeding along the path of development of its powers and functions, with his anticipation that this process:

... must, however long and tortuous the way, lead, through a series of victories and reverses, to the political unification of the Eastern and Western Hemispheres, to the emergence of a world government and the establishment of the Lesser Peace, as foretold by Bahá’u’lláh and foreshadowed by the Prophet Isaiah.

Distinct from, but closely related to, this process of organizational development has been the emergence of a world consciousness. As long ago as 1931, the Guardian referred to:

... the gradual diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity which is spontaneously arising out of the welter of a disorganized society.

One decade later, he commented that:

The world is, in truth, moving on towards its destiny. The interdependence of the peoples and nations of the earth, whatever the leaders of the divisive forces of the world may say or do, is already an accomplished fact. Its unity in the economic sphere is now understood and recognized.

As humanity was plunged into a world war which Shoghi Effendi described as “the titanic upheaval foreshadowed seventy years ago by the prophetic Pen of Bahá’u’lláh” and as the “long-predicted world-encircling conflagration,” he pointed out to the Bahá’ís that this great conflict was an “essential prerequisite to world unification.”

Recent Developments:

In recent years, the House of Justice has taken the opportunity provided by its Ridván messages to draw the attention of the worldwide Bahá’í community to the profound significance of the events occurring in the wider society as humanity exhibits a growing consciousness of the unity of the nations and peoples of the planet.

Particularly significant are the following passages taken from the October 1985 statement *The Promise of World Peace* addressed to the peoples of the world:

Among the favorable signs are the steadily growing strength of the steps towards world order taken initially near the beginning of this century in the creation of the League of Nations, succeeded by the more broadly based United Nations Organization; the achievement since the Second World War of independence by the majority of all the nations on earth, indicating the completion of the process of nation building, and the involvement of these fledgling nations with older ones in matters of mutual concern; the consequent vast increase in cooperation among hitherto isolated and antagonistic peoples and groups in international undertakings in the scientific, educational, legal, economic and cultural fields; the rise in recent decades of an unprecedented number of international humanitarian organizations; the spread of women’s and youth movements calling for an end to war; and the spontaneous spawning of widening networks of ordinary people seeking understanding through personal communication.

The tentative steps towards world order, especially since World War II, give hopeful signs. The increasing tendency of groups of nations to formalize relationships which enable them to cooperate in matters of mutual interest suggests that eventually all nations could overcome this paralysis. The Association of South East Asian Nations, the Caribbean Community and Common Market, the Central American Common Market, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, the European Communities, the League of Arab States, the Organization of African Unity, the Organization of American States, the South Pacific Forum—all the joint endeavors represented by such organizations prepare the path to world order.

The army of men and women, drawn from virtually every culture, race and nation on earth, who serve the multifarious agencies of the United Nations, represent a planetary “civil service” whose impressive accomplishments are indicative of the degree of cooperation that can be attained even under discouraging conditions. An urge towards unity, like a spiritual springtime, struggles to express itself through countless international congresses that bring together people from a vast array of disciplines. It motivates appeals for international projects involving children and youth. Indeed, it is the real source of the remarkable movement towards ecumenism by which members of historically antagonistic religions and sects seem irresistibly drawn towards one another. Together with the opposing tendency to warfare and

self-aggrandizement against which it ceaselessly struggles, the drive towards world unity is one of the dominant, pervasive features of life on the planet during the closing years of the twentieth century.

The pace of change accelerated as the twentieth century approached its conclusion. In 1996 the House of Justice wrote:

... world leaders are often taking collective actions that, to a Bahá'í observer, signify a tendency towards a common approach by nations to solving world problems. Consider, for instance, the unusual frequency of the global occasions on which these leaders have gathered since the Holy Year four years ago, such as the one in observance of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations, at which the attending heads of state and heads of government asserted their commitment to world peace. Noteworthy, too, are the promptitude and spontaneity with which these government leaders have been acting together in responding to a variety of crises in different parts of the world. Such trends coincide with the increasing cries from enlightened circles for attention to be given to the feasibility of achieving some form of global governance. Might we not see in these swiftly developing occurrences the workings of the Hand of Providence, indeed the very harbinger of the monumental occasion forecast in our Writings?

While in 1998 it commented that:

... amid the din of a society in turmoil can be discerned an unmistakable trend towards the Lesser Peace. An intriguing inkling is provided by the greater involvement of the United Nations, with the backing of powerful governments, in attending to long-standing and urgent world problems; another derives from the dramatic recognition by world leaders in only recent months of what the interconnectedness of all nations in the matter of trade and finance really implies—a condition which Shoghi Effendi anticipated as an essential aspect of an organically unified world.

Reviewing the significant events which occurred in the world over the past four years, the House of Justice stated at Ridván 2000 that “world leaders took bold steps towards fashioning the structures of a global political peace” and that:

... attempts at implementing and elaborating the methods of collective security were earnestly made, bringing to mind one of Bahá'u'lláh's prescriptions for maintaining peace; a call was raised for an international criminal court to be established, another action that accords with Bahá'í expectations; to focus attention on the imperative need for an adequate system to deal with global issues, world leaders are scheduled to meet in a Millennium Summit; new methods of communications have opened the way for everyone to communicate with anyone on the planet.

A few months later, in reporting on millennial gatherings held in New York during the year 2000 to address global issues pertaining to peace—the Millennium Forum in May, the Millennium Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders in August, and the Millennium Summit of the leaders of more than 150 nations held in September—the House of Justice commented, in its message of 24 September 2000, that:

For any observer imbued with the Bahá'í vision of peace and its inherent processes, the substance and implications of these recent events, seen together with previous world conferences that during the last decade also involved leaders of nations, must be gratifying indeed to contemplate. It must, too, be doubly thrilling to realize that at so early a stage in the Bahá'í era, representatives of our international community took part so notably in these occurrences that have set down milestones along the way towards that new World Order so clearly foreshadowed by the Pen of Bahá'u'lláh.

