

24 November 2009

To the Believers in the Cradle of the Faith

Dearly loved Friends,

News has reached us that, having recently received the Persian translation of the compilation on family life originally released in English in March 2008, you have begun to study its pages and consult on its content. It brings us joy to know that you are giving due attention to a matter of such fundamental importance, and we are moved to share with you a few thoughts in this respect.

The followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the world, of every gender, race and ethnicity, are working alongside their friends and colleagues to build a society rooted in justice and characterized by unity—a society in which individuals see their outward differences as a reflection of the beauty and perfection of the multi-hued rose garden of humanity and in which, drawing inspiration from the Divine teachings and applying their God-given talents, they labour confidently to further the progress of an ever-advancing civilization. Bahá'ís consider it a priceless bounty to participate in this momentous enterprise and recognize that its success depends, in no small measure, on the acquisition of high moral standards. The family unit, the nucleus of human society, constitutes a space within which praiseworthy morals and essential capacities must be developed, for the habits and patterns of conduct nurtured in the home are carried into the workplace, into the social and political life of the country, and finally into the arena of international relations.

Among the signs of moral decay in the present social order is the weakening of the spiritual ties that bind the family. Failure within the household to acknowledge the equality of the sexes and to respect the rights of children gives rise to a culture that belittles women and children, condones the imposition of a single will upon others, and opens the way for aggression and violence—first in the family, then at school and work, and eventually in the streets and in society at large. Under such circumstances, the family environment, potentially the ideal milieu for learning the principles of consultation and collective decision making, serves to perpetuate tyranny and oppression in society.

In the context of family solidarity, an essential point needs to be borne in mind: while many cultures emphasize the importance of the family, and there is much evidence which attests the positive role it plays in promoting social progress, it is equally true that excessive attention to family interests can lead, however unwittingly, to a narrow social outlook, one that is ultimately detrimental to the broader community. How many the stable and united families that, in their intolerance towards one or another segment of society, instil in their younger generations an “us and them” mentality, heedless of the fact that the transmission of such poisonous attitudes stifles in their children love for humanity and hampers their sense of justice. Small wonder if, upon attaining adulthood, individuals reared in such an environment tend either to be indifferent to the suffering of others or to regard violence and oppression as justified—indeed, even to contribute to tyranny. What is more, in a repressive society, when faced with the difficult task of defending human rights and protecting victims of oppression, such individuals may well choose the path of silence or tacit collusion with the oppressor, rather than advocating the cause of justice, impeding thereby their own spiritual development as well as the progress of their nation.

Teaching justice and fair-mindedness in the home is fundamental to any attempt to address this social deficiency. Children must be so raised as to regard every soul, irrespective of religion, ethnicity, or any other affiliation, as a fellow human being and to hold dear the words that capture the spirit of the age: “The tabernacle of unity hath been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. Ye are the fruits of one tree, and the leaves of one branch.” Consider how through education children gradually learn to look beyond their own interests to those of their family.

With yet further training, they recognize the importance of respecting the interests of others and see as a sacred obligation service to their neighbours. At a higher level still, proper education can help children to broaden their horizons and set their sights on the advancement and glory of their nation. And when their breadth of vision expands even wider, they will undoubtedly come to see the progress of the entire human race and the furtherance of the true interests of all the peoples of the world as a guiding purpose of their lives. The family unit provides an environment within which such lofty and world-embracing principles can be taught and nurtured. It is the matrix in which generation after generation can be reared in the conviction that the well-being of the individual is inextricably bound to the progress and well-being of others.

Dearly loved friends! During these times of adversity, when you must shoulder myriad hardships in the face of oppression and injustice, and as the Iranian nation struggles to find solutions to highly complex issues, we urge you to continue to reflect upon the question of family life and upon the progress made by the Bahá'í community in this respect. You are encouraged to share your understanding of this subject with your neighbours, friends and co-workers so that each may benefit from insights gained by the other. Explore in consultation with them what it means in practical terms for every member of the family to play a constructive part in creating a proper home environment and what measures can be taken to ensure that increasingly significant progress in this regard is made with each generation. In this way may you, one and all, render a signally important service to your nation.

In the Holy Shrines we call you ever to mind and offer ardent prayers on your behalf.

[signed: The Universal House of Justice]