

## 1 Discussion of Proselytizing

2 (why-Bahais need to have this conversation) Stop Blocking Other's Blessings!

### 3 Advent of Divine Justice:

4 Every laborer in those fields, whether as traveling teacher or settler, should, I feel, make  
5 it his **chief and constant concern**

- 6 • **to mix**, in a friendly manner, with all sections of the population, irrespective of class,  
7 creed, nationality, or color,
- 8 • **to familiarize** himself with their ideas, tastes, and habits,
- 9 • **to study** the approach best suited to them,
- 10 • **to concentrate**, patiently and tactfully, on a few who have shown marked capacity and  
11 receptivity, and
- 12 • **to endeavor**, with extreme kindness,
- 13 • **to implant** such love, zeal, and devotion in their hearts as to enable them to become in  
14 turn self-sufficient and independent promoters of the Faith in their respective localities.

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15 *"Consort with all men, O people of Bahá," is Bahá'u'lláh's admonition, "in a*  
16 *spirit of friendliness and fellowship. If ye be aware of a certain truth, if ye*  
17 *possess a jewel, of which others are deprived, share it with them in a language*  
18 *of utmost kindness and goodwill. **If it be accepted**, if it fulfill its purpose, your*  
19 *object is attained.*

20 **If anyone should refuse it**, leave him unto himself, and beseech God to guide  
21 him. Beware lest ye deal unkindly with him. A kindly tongue is the lodestone of  
22 the hearts of men. It is the bread of the spirit, it clotheth the words with  
23 meaning, it is the fountain of the light of wisdom and understanding."

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24 An effort, moreover, can and should be made, not only by representative Bahá'í bodies, but  
25 also by prospective teachers, as well as by other individual believers, deprived of the privilege  
26 of visiting those shores or of settling on that continent,

- 27 • to **seize every opportunity** that presents itself to make the acquaintance, and
- 28 • **awaken the genuine interest**, of such people who are either citizens of these countries,  
29 or are in any way connected with them, whatever be their interests or profession.
- 30 • Through the **kindness shown** them, or any literature which may be given them, or any  
31 connection which they may establish with them, the American believers can thereby  
32 **sow such seeds in their hearts** as might, in future circumstances, germinate and yield  
33 the most unexpected results.

34 Care, however, should, at all times, be exercised, lest in their eagerness to further the  
 35 international interests of the Faith they frustrate their purpose, and turn away, through any act  
 36 that might be misconstrued as an attempt to proselytize and bring undue pressure upon them,  
 37 those whom they wish to win over to their Cause.

38 **My Note:** The fact that proselytizing is **mentioned once briefly**, in the paragraphs above (and not found  
 39 in the Kitab-i-Aqdas), gives **balance** to the importance of proclaiming the faith, and Asking for new  
 40 membership-- more than it does in being afraid to ask people to join the faith of God for this day. Let  
 41 not our interpretation of this one- time pronouncement to American Pioneers (who were mostly white  
 42 going into black and brown countries), and past issues with practices of Christianity and other  
 43 religions, deprive others of the bounty of drawing closer to Baha'u'llah and God.

44 I would particularly direct my appeal to those American believers, sore-pressed as they are by  
 45 the manifold, the urgent, and ever-increasing issues that confront them at the present hour,  
 46 who may find it possible, whatever be their calling or employment, whether as businessmen,  
 47 schoolteachers, lawyers, doctors, writers, office workers, and the like, to establish permanently  
 48 their residence in such countries as may offer them a reasonable prospect of earning the means  
 49 of livelihood.

50  
 51 They will by their action be relieving the continually increasing pressure on their Teaching Fund,  
 52 which in view of its restricted dimensions must provide, when not otherwise available, the  
 53 traveling and other expenses to be incurred in connection with the development of this vast  
 54 undertaking. Should they find it impossible to take advantage of so rare and sacred a privilege,  
 55 let them, mindful of the words of Bahá'u'lláh, determine, each according to the means at his or  
 56 her disposal, to appoint a deputy who, on that believer's behalf, will arise and carry out so  
 57 noble an enterprise.

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58 *"Center your energies," are Bahá'u'lláh's words, "in the*  
 59 *propagation of the Faith of God. Whoso is worthy of so high a*  
 60 *calling, let him arise and promote it. Whoso is unable, it is his duty*  
 61 *to appoint him who will, in his stead, proclaim this Revelation,*  
 62 *whose power hath caused the foundations of the mightiest*  
 63 *structures to quake, every mountain to be crushed into dust, and*  
 64 *every soul to be dumbfounded."*

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#### 65 **THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE (30 June 1993)**

66 It is understandable that you feel concern about methods of teaching which apply pressure to  
 67 people to declare their Faith in Bahá'u'lláh, or which register as believers those who apparently  
 68 have no real knowledge of the Faith or its Message. It troubles you that such methods of  
 69 teaching seem to be sanctioned by the institutions of the Faith in . . . and that your  
 70 remonstrances have met with no satisfying response from those institutions.

71 **The teaching of the Cause has always called for wisdom, devotion, enthusiasm, purity of**  
 72 **intention and eloquence of speech.** Like other human beings, Bahá'ís tend to go to extremes,  
 73 and too few people bring the proper balance to the way they act. This is particularly true in the  
 74 teaching of the Faith.

- 75 • **At one extreme are those who** are so on fire with love for the Faith and with awareness  
 76 of the desperate need of the people for its healing message, that they **overstep the**  
 77 **bounds of wisdom and discretion and stray into the area of proselytizing.**
- 78 • **At the other extreme are those who** are so gentle in their approach and so concerned  
 79 never to arouse an adverse reaction that they **fail to convey the enormous importance**  
 80 **of the Cause or to convince their hearers;** for if the messenger is not enthusiastic, how  
 81 can he convey enthusiasm to others?
- 82 • The first extreme leads to misrepresentation of the teachings and causes  
 83 disillusionment; the second results in the stagnation of the community and its failure to  
 84 fulfill its fundamental duty of conveying this life-giving message to the world.

85 In this, as in all aspects of the work of the Cause, the solution lies in the friends being patient  
 86 and forbearing towards those whose shortcomings distress them, and in endeavoring, through  
 87 the Assemblies' consultation, to draw closer to a proper balance while maintaining the  
 88 momentum of the work and canalizing the enthusiasm of the believers.

89 In one of its messages, published on page 32 of *Wellspring of Guidance*, the Universal House of  
 90 Justice gave the following advice:

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91 *Those who declare themselves as Bahá'ís should become*  
 92 *enchanted with the beauty of the teachings and touched by the*  
 93 *love of Bahá'u'lláh. The declarants need not know all the proofs,*  
 94 *history, laws, and principles of the Faith, but in the process of*  
 95 *declaring themselves they must, in addition to catching the spark*  
 96 *of faith, become basically informed about the Central Figures of*  
 97 *the Faith, as well as the existence of laws they must follow and an*  
 98 *administration they must obey.*

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99 **In the western world in recent decades, Bahá'ís have grown used to thinking that the process**  
 100 **by which a person accepts the Faith takes a long time, and that it is unthinkable for someone**  
 101 **to intelligently accept Bahá'u'lláh within minutes of hearing of Him.** This may be the pattern  
 102 to which they have become accustomed, but it is far from being a universal one.

103 When people accepted the Faith quickly in Africa and other parts of the Third World, western  
 104 Bahá'ís sometimes explained it away by saying that such people were less educated and had  
 105 fewer ideas to work their way through. Now the same process is happening in the countries of

106 the former Eastern Bloc, and highly educated people are accepting the Faith as soon as they  
 107 hear of it, embracing it enthusiastically, and rapidly deepening their understanding of its  
 108 teachings by reading every Bahá'í book they can lay their hands on.

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109 *So it is clear that receptivity to spiritual truth is, as Bahá'u'lláh indicated, a*  
 110 *matter of purity of heart, not of education or lack of it.*

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111 In the west of Europe, too, there are signs of greater receptivity towards the Faith among the  
 112 people, and some are ready to join the community of the Most Great Name if approached in  
 113 the proper manner. In such cases when an individual hears the Message of Bahá'u'lláh and is  
 114 moved to declare his faith, there should be no obstacle placed in his way.

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115 *Great care must be taken that when the heart of the individual is touched by*  
 116 *the power of Bahá'u'lláh's Message and the declarant has expressed his desire*  
 117 *to embrace the Faith, **the process of deepening be followed almost***  
 118 ***immediately.** Deepening the knowledge of the new believer in the verities of*  
 119 *the Faith is the most vital part of teaching; but deepening is not merely the*  
 120 *imparting of knowledge—it requires also to imbue the soul of the person with*  
 121 *the love of Bahá'u'lláh so that his faith may grow day by day and he becomes*  
 122 *a steadfast believer.*

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123 In the following statement, Shoghi Effendi advises the Bahá'í teacher to advance the process of  
 124 deepening for a person who is attracted to the Faith:

125 **Let him [the Bahá'í teacher] consider the degree of his hearer's receptivity** and decide for  
 126 himself the suitability of either the direct or indirect method of teaching, whereby he can  
 127 impress upon the seeker the vital importance of the Divine Message and persuade him to  
 128 throw in his lot with those who have already embraced it.

129 **Let him remember the example set by 'Abdu'l-Bahá,** and His constant admonition to shower  
 130 such kindness upon the seeker and exemplify to such a degree the spirit of the teachings he  
 131 hopes to instill into him, that the recipient will be spontaneously impelled to identify himself  
 132 with the Cause embodying such teachings.

133 **Let him refrain, at the outset, from insisting on such laws and observances as might impose**  
 134 **too severe a strain on the seeker's newly awakened faith,** and endeavor to nurse him,  
 135 patiently, tactfully, and yet determinedly, into full maturity, and aid him to proclaim his  
 136 unqualified acceptance of whatever has been ordained by Bahá'u'lláh.

137 **Let him, as soon as that stage has been attained, introduce him to the body of his fellow-**  
 138 **believers,** and seek, through constant fellowship and active participation in the local activities  
 139 of his community, to enable him to contribute his share to the enrichment of its life, the

140 furtherance of its tasks, the consolidations of its interests, and the coordination of its activities  
141 with those of its sister communities.

142 ***Let him not be content until he has infused into his spiritual child so deep a longing as to***  
143 ***impel him to arise independently,*** in his turn, and devote his energies to the quickening of  
144 other souls, and the upholding of the laws and principles laid down by his newly adopted Faith.

145 ***(The Advent of Divine Justice, pp. 51–52)***

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147 From these words of the Guardian we can see that wisdom, encouragement, persuasion, and  
148 patience, are all called for, and that these must be attuned to the response shown by the  
149 hearer. We also see that the process of deepening continues long after the new believer has  
150 enrolled in the Bahá'í community....

151 With loving Bahá'í greetings,

152 Department of the Secretariat

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154 **Universal House of Justice (3 January 1982)**

155 It is true that Bahá'u'lláh lays on every Bahá'í the duty to teach His Faith. At the same time,  
156 however, we are forbidden to **proselytize**, so it is important for all believers to understand the  
157 difference between teaching and **proselytizing**. It is a significant difference and, in some  
158 countries where teaching a religion is permitted, but **proselytizing** is forbidden, the distinction  
159 is made in the law of the land.

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160 ***Proselytizing implies bringing undue pressure to bear upon someone to***  
161 ***change his Faith. It is also usually understood to imply the making of threats***  
162 ***or the offering of material benefits as an inducement to conversion.***

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163 In some countries mission schools or hospitals, for all the good they do, are regarded with  
164 suspicion and even aversion by the local authorities because they are considered to be material  
165 inducements to conversion and hence instruments of **proselytization**.

166 Bahá'u'lláh, in *The Hidden Words*, says, “O Son of Dust! **The wise are they that speak not**  
167 **unless they obtain a hearing**, even as the cup-bearer, who proffereth not his cup till he findeth  
168 a seeker, and the lover who crieth not out from the depths of his heart until he gazeth upon the  
169 beauty of his beloved....” , and on page 55 of *The Advent of Divine Justice*, a letter which is  
170 primarily directed towards exhorting the friends to fulfill their responsibilities in teaching the  
171 Faith, Shoghi Effendi writes: “Care, however, should, at all times, be exercised, lest in their  
172 eagerness to further the international interests of the Faith they frustrate their purpose, and  
173 turn away, through any act that might be misconstrued as an attempt to proselytize and bring

174 undue pressure upon them, those whom they wish to win over to their Cause.” Some Bahá’ís  
175 sometimes overstep the proper bounds, but this does not alter the clear principle.

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176 *The responsibility of the Bahá’ís to teach the Faith is very great. The*  
177 *contraction of the world and the onward rush of events require us to seize*  
178 *every chance open to us to touch the hearts and minds of our fellowmen. The*  
179 *Message of Bahá’u’lláh is God’s guidance for mankind to overcome the*  
180 *difficulties of this age of transition and move forward into the next stage of its*  
181 *evolution, and human beings have the right to hear it.*

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182 Those who accept it incur the duty of passing it on to their fellowman. **The slowness of the**  
183 **response of the world has caused and is causing great suffering; hence the historical pressure**  
184 **upon Bahá’ís to exert every effort to teach the Faith for the sake of their fellowmen.** They  
185 should teach with enthusiasm, conviction, wisdom and courtesy, but without pressing their  
186 hearer, bearing in mind the words of Bahá’u’lláh:

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187 *“Beware lest ye contend with anyone, nay, strive to make him aware of the*  
188 *truth with kindly manner and most convincing exhortation. If your hearer*  
189 *respond, he will have responded to his own behoof, and if not, turn ye away*  
190 *from him, and set your faces towards God’s sacred Court, the seat of*  
191 *resplendent holiness.”*

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192 (*Gleanings* CXXVIII)

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194 **Building Momentum: A Coherent Approach to Growth** a document prepared by  
195 **the International Teaching Centre. (April 2003)**

196 In its message of 17 January 2003 to the Bahá’ís of the world, the Universal House of Justice  
197 presents a cogent analysis of the progress of the Bahá’í world in advancing the process of entry  
198 by troops since the beginning of the Five Year Plan.

199 **It has also been reassuring to note that when non-Bahá’ís realize there is no pressure**  
200 **or proselytizing involved, but rather a genuine desire on the part of Bahá’ís to share the**  
201 **spiritual sustenance in the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh,** they respond positively and readily return  
202 to Bahá’í gatherings on their own. A program recently conducted in Medchal, India, offers a  
203 striking example of such a response. A presentation on the Bahá’í Faith’s perspective on moral  
204 education was delivered to 80 teachers and students at the Government Industrial Training  
205 Institute. As a result of this event, more than half of those present chose to enroll in a study  
206 circle. Similarly, in Luxembourg at the end of a public meeting organized by the Bahá’ís on the  
207 spiritual education of children, 10 local residents registered for a Bahá’í study circle.