

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARIAT

10 August 2018

Transmitted by email:

U.S.A.

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 8 Sharaf 174 (6 January 2018) in which you convey your concern that what Shoghi Effendi termed “the double crusade” is not being addressed by the American Bahá'í community and ask why the House of Justice has not raised this subject. The House of Justice appreciates the sincerity and candor with which you have set forth your views and your request for a frank reply. It has asked us to respond as follows.

Your desire to be faithful to the beloved Guardian's guidance to the American Bahá'í community is unquestioned. However, it appears that some of the challenges you have faced in relating that guidance to the present activities of the Bahá'í community may be due to a very particular conception of what the double crusade means, how it relates to the current series of Plans of the Faith, and what should be done to carry it out. As you will recall, in *The Advent of Divine Justice* Shoghi Effendi summons American believers to a double crusade—“first to regenerate the inward life of their own community, and next to assail the long-standing evils that have entrenched themselves in the life of their nation.” To attain these objectives he considers three weapons necessary: “A rectitude of conduct which, in all its manifestations, offers a striking contrast to the deceitfulness and corruption that characterize the political life of the nation and of the parties and factions that compose it; a holiness and chastity that are diametrically opposed to the moral laxity and licentiousness which defile the character of a not inconsiderable proportion of its citizens; [and] an interracial fellowship completely purged from the curse of racial prejudice which stigmatizes the vast majority of its people”

The above summary in *The Advent of Divine Justice* appears after Shoghi Effendi's in-depth and trenchant analysis, supported by numerous passages from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, of each of the American Bahá'í community's three essential prerequisites of success. A careful study of the Guardian's discussion, including the passages he cites, reveals the fundamentally spiritual nature of the concepts and approaches he wishes American believers to understand and carry out. He refers to the “spiritual prerequisites of success”; “the imponderable, the spiritual, factors, which are bound up with their own individual and inner lives, and with which are associated their human and social relationships”; and “those essential virtues of self-renunciation, of moral rectitude, of chastity, of indiscriminating fellowship, of holy discipline, and of spiritual insight”. A small sampling of the many excerpts Shoghi Effendi quotes in support of his argument further confirms that matters of the spirit are at the core of what he wished Bahá'ís to consider. In relation to rectitude of conduct, the following

passage from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh is among many included: “The purpose of the one true God in manifesting Himself is to summon all mankind to truthfulness and sincerity, to piety and trustworthiness, to resignation and submissiveness to the will of God, to forbearance and kindness, to uprightness and wisdom. His object is to array every man with the mantle of a saintly character, and to adorn him with the ornament of holy and goodly deeds.” In the discussion of a chaste and holy life, one finds these words of Bahá'u'lláh: “O ye the beloved of the one true God! Pass beyond the narrow retreats of your evil and corrupt desires, and advance into the vast immensity of the realm of God, and abide ye in the meads of sanctity and of detachment, that the fragrance of your deeds may lead the whole of mankind to the ocean of God's unfading glory.” And in regard to freedom from racial prejudice, there appears this statement of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: “Naught but the celestial potency of the Word of God, which ruleth and transcendeth the realities of all things, is capable of harmonizing the divergent thoughts, sentiments, ideas, and convictions of the children of men.”

In a letter dated 8 December 1935 written on his behalf to an individual believer, Shoghi Effendi stated: “The universal crisis affecting mankind is ... essentially spiritual in its causes.” More recently, the House of Justice has observed: “The Bahá'í community encourages and supports the manifold efforts being made by people of goodwill to better the condition of humankind and promote unity and harmony among the peoples and nations of the earth. However, the believers should never, for even one moment, lose sight of the fact that the crisis now engulfing every part of the planet is essentially spiritual.” If the crisis afflicting humanity is spiritual, can there be any question that its solution must also be spiritual? Is it any wonder that Shoghi Effendi referred to the “spiritual” prerequisites for success? Must not that same focus on spiritual truths and principles lie at the heart of the current series of Plans of the Faith? What else but the Word of God can spiritually ennoble, educate, and inspire souls to address the needs of the time? As the House of Justice has explained, the Word of God is at the center of the Bahá'í community's current endeavors: “Central to the pattern of action evolving in a cluster is the individual and collective transformation effected through the agency of the Word of God.” In study circles, participants are introduced to the study of the Word of God, consider its application and implications, and enter into a lifelong immersion in it, which will shape their knowledge, volition, and action; in children's classes, children memorize and learn about the Word of God; in the junior youth program, young people explore and are empowered by concepts found in the Word of God; and in devotional meetings, attendees recite and are inspired by the Word of God. Even in the Bahá'í community's other areas of focus—projects and activities for social action and involvement in the discourses of society—the Word of God offers insights for addressing the issues facing society and contributing to its social and economic betterment.

Thus, thoughtful consideration of the features of the current series of Plans reveals that their core is fundamentally spiritual—aimed at transforming the individual and society through exposure to the spirit of and concepts in the Word of God. This aim is the essence of the double crusade, as the text of *The Advent of Divine Justice* reveals. In addition, the theme of the three spiritual prerequisites for success identified by Shoghi Effendi was explicitly addressed in the Ridván 2008 message of the House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of the world. More than two full pages of the 28 December 2010 message of the House of Justice that introduced the previous Five Year Plan were devoted to an exploration of the spiritual prerequisites for success. And yet again, the same theme was highlighted in the 26 March 2016 message of the House of

Justice to the Bahá'ís of the United States and of Canada. The suggestion that the House of Justice has not made reference to the issue of the double crusade is incorrect.

One more point of clarification may be helpful. Your letter appears to imply that the American Bahá'í community has not been doing anything to address the double crusade, as evidenced by your perception that Bahá'ís are not sufficiently involved in movements and activities that seek to bring about social justice. The House of Justice has explained that in situations which do not involve partisan politics Bahá'ís may participate in efforts to change social policy. Bahá'ís do engage with others in the wider society to this end as part of a broad and coherent pattern of action. But as the House of Justice explained many years ago:

To enter into the quixotic tournament of demolishing one by one the evils in the world is, to a Bahá'í, a vain waste of time and effort. His whole life is directed towards proclaiming the Message of Bahá'u'lláh, reviving the spiritual life of his fellowmen, uniting them in a divinely created World Order, and then, as the Order grows in strength and influence, he will see the power of that Message transforming the whole human society and progressively solving the problems and removing the injustices which have so long bedeviled the world.

There are many well-meaning people who are striving to improve society by fighting its evils, which usually means contending against individuals, groups, or institutions who are seen as oppressive, unjust, or corrupt. Yet no matter how high-minded a particular cause might be, if it is advanced through contention and confrontation, it merely provokes and intensifies the flame of a countermovement initiated by others who act on what they consider to be their own high-minded beliefs. Real solutions remain elusive. The cycle of contention continues without end, with one group after the other seizing enough power to implement its views before becoming overcome by those in opposition. One need only look to the endless mutations of racist oppression over hundreds of years, adapting so as to undermine every social advance in that area.

In the *Kitáb-i-'Ahd*, Bahá'u'lláh states: “Conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book”. Therefore, Bahá'ís must not allow themselves to be drawn into the struggles and conflicting interests that divide many factions and groups of humanity. While we should not be idle in addressing social ills as the process of disintegration accelerates, our aim is not to choose sides in contentious social debates simply to proclaim what we believe to be right. Rather the object of our participation is to learn to elevate discourse and improve practice as we work with others in the search for effective solutions. It is through understanding, sharing, and transforming into practical action the distinctly spiritual and social teachings of the Faith that we can offer our greatest contribution to the betterment of society and to the eventual elimination of those evil tendencies decried by the Guardian: the object of the double crusade.

In *The Advent of Divine Justice*, Shoghi Effendi refers to the arenas, private and public, in which believers are called on to fulfill the spiritual prerequisites of success: “a high sense of moral rectitude in their social and administrative activities, absolute chastity in their individual lives, and complete freedom from prejudice in their dealings with peoples of a different race, class, creed, or color.” Similarly, the House of Justice is now asking the friends to bring such considerations to bear in the countless spaces they have been creating—through their engagement in the Five Year Plan—in the activities for community-building, social action, and

involvement in the discourses of society. It is this, rather than the introduction of any particular program into the Bahá'í community or its more extensive participation in any specific movement in the wider society, that will ensure the Guardian's ultimate aims for its destiny and the destiny of the nation of which it is a part. Enclosed for your consideration is an extract from a letter sent to another believer on this topic.

Far from a retreat from the double crusade into passivity, this approach calls for tireless and sacrificial effort. It is not confined to words but calls for systematic action and for learning to foster greater capabilities. It is not satisfied with an expression of contempt for injustice or for a temporary alleviation that can be swept away in the next generation but demands nothing less than the profound and lasting transformation of the social order.

The House of Justice suggests that by prayerfully considering the ideas discussed in this letter, by re-examining the Guardian's words in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, by carefully studying the messages of the House of Justice concerning the current series of Plans, and by wholeheartedly dedicating yourself to acting on their provisions, you can resolve the perceived challenges that have been of concern to you. Rest assured of the supplications of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that you may be sustained by the unfailing grace of the Blessed Beauty as you strive to contribute your share to the present stage of the double crusade described by the beloved Guardian.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,

Department of the Secretariat

Enclosure

cc: National Assembly of the United States (with enclosure)