



# Timeless Legacy

Honouring the Master in  
letters of the Universal  
House of Justice

1995 – 2021



# **Timeless Legacy**

*Honouring the Master in  
letters of the  
Universal House of Justice*

Prepared for the centenary  
of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

178 B.E.

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## *Introduction*

Over the years, the name of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá appears frequently in letters of the Universal House of Justice. His actions and words are cited repeatedly to illuminate the progress of the Cause and the nature of the work being undertaken by the worldwide Bahá’í community at any given time. This is a clear demonstration of the living value of the Master’s legacy and the timeless relevance of His wisdom.

This booklet presents a collection of statements quoting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words or remembering His deeds, extracted from letters of the House of Justice over the past 25 years. Some of these statements are just brief mentions making a connection between ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and current happenings. Others are discussions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s insights on a particular theme. Yet others memorialise events of tremendous historical significance that were initiated by Him.

Because the name of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is often mentioned by the House of Justice at pivotal junctures and on important occasions, a perusal of such mentions provides an enlightening glimpse into the evolving work of the Divine Plan. The purpose of this booklet is to offer a few such glimpses, in support of the “profound reflection on the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the strength of the Covenant of which He was the Centre” that the House of Justice has called upon us to undertake this centennial year.

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## *Preparations for the Four Year Plan to commence at Ridván 1996*

### **26 December 1995 – To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors**

With great happiness we welcome you to this momentous conference, which is graced by the presence of three Hands of the Cause of God. It marks the opening of a period of intense activity as the twentieth century, hailed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as “a century of life and renewal,” draws to a close, and a new century of enormous challenge for all mankind opens before us. To guide the activities of the Bahá’í world during this period, we have decided to launch a Four Year Plan at Ridván 1996. The provisions of that Plan are to be the focus of your consultations in the coming six days.

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## *Looking back on the ‘century of light’*

### **Ridván 153 – To the Bahá’ís of the World**

Ridván 2000, the point at which the Four Year Plan is to be concluded, will come many months before the end of the twentieth century. At that juncture in time, the Bahá’í world will look back in appreciation at the extraordinary developments and dazzling achievements that will have distinguished the annals of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh during that eventful period—a period which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called the “century of light.” Not the least of the accomplishments then to be recognised will be the completion of the current projects on Mount Carmel which, together with the other edifices on that holy mountain, will stand as a monument to the progress which the Administrative Order will have attained by that time in the Formative Age. The highlight of such appreciations will, God willing, be the holding at the World Centre of a major event to mark the completion of the buildings on the Arc and the opening of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb to the public.

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*Acquisition of an historic place associated with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*

**Riḍván 154 – To the Bahá’ís of the World**

Nor can we neglect to recognise other developments during the past year which confirmed the high merit of the manifold efforts being exerted by our world community and the results being achieved. Among these, to mention a few, were: the acquisition of the apartment at 4 Avenue de Camoëns in Paris where the beloved Master, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, resided during His historic visit to the city; the special session on 14 August of the Federal Chamber of Deputies in Brazil to mark the 75th anniversary of the introduction of the Bahá’í Faith into that country—a unique, official occasion at which Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánúm was present as the honoured guest; the launching last July of the Bahá’í International Community’s site on the World Wide Web, entitled “The Bahá’í World,” which to date has received from more than 90 countries and territories over 50,000 visits, averaging some 200 per day.

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*Considering humanity’s challenges in the light of  
Bahá’u’lláh’s Teachings*

**25 February 1999 – To all National Spiritual Assemblies**

The year 2000 will conclude the hundred years that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá described as “the century of light.” His perspective on the twentieth century offers Bahá’ís and Bahá’í communities an opportunity to participate meaningfully in many of the activities and discussions expected to take place around the world over the coming two years.

To assist the friends in this respect, the Universal House of Justice has asked the Bahá’í International Community’s Office of Public Information to prepare the enclosed document, “Who is Writing the Future?” As you will see, it both examines the events of the twentieth century in the light of Bahá’u’lláh’s Teachings, and relates these developments to the challenges facing humanity at century’s end. Its purpose is to serve as a source of ideas, perspectives, images, and language that will stimulate a wide range of creative responses among Bahá’ís.



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*Passing of the last remaining link with the family of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*

**19 January 2000 – To the Bahá’ís of the World**

In the early hours of this morning, the soul of Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum, beloved consort of Shoghi Effendi and the Bahá’í world’s last remaining link with the family of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, was released from the limitations of this earthly existence. In the midst of our grief, we are sustained by our confidence that she has been gathered to the glory of the Concourse on High in the presence of the Abhá Beauty.

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*On creating a culture of growth*

**9 January 2001 – To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors**

Training alone, of course, does not necessarily lead to an upsurge in teaching activity. In every avenue of service, the friends need sustained encouragement. Our expectation is that the Auxiliary Board members, together with their assistants, will give special thought to how individual initiative can be cultivated, particularly as it relates to teaching. When training and encouragement are effective, a culture of growth is nourished in which the believers see their duty to teach as a natural consequence of having accepted Bahá’u’lláh. They “raise high the sacred torch of faith,” as was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s wish, “labour ceaselessly, by day and by night,” and “consecrate every fleeting moment of their lives to the diffusion of the divine fragrance and the exaltation of God’s holy Word.” So enkindled do their hearts become with the fire of the love of God that whoever approaches them feels its warmth. They strive to be channels of the spirit, pure of heart, selfless and humble, possessing certitude and the courage that stems from reliance on God. In such a culture, teaching is the dominating passion of the lives of the believers. Fear of failure finds no place. Mutual support, commitment to learning, and appreciation of diversity of action are the prevailing norms.

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*Raising up Houses of Worship as part of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s  
Divine Plan*

**Riḍván 2001 – To the Bahá’ís of the World**

A feature of the Fifth Epoch will be the enrichment of the devotional life of the community through the raising up of national Houses of Worship, as circumstances in national communities permit. The scheduling of these projects will be determined by the Universal House of Justice in relation to the advancement of the process of entry by troops within countries. This development will unfold throughout successive stages of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan. Upon the completion of the Mother Temple of the West, the Guardian started a program of constructing continental temples. The first among these were the Mashriqu’l-Adhkárs in Kampala, Sydney and Frankfurt, which were built in response to Ten Year Plan goals. The Universal House of Justice continued along these lines with the building of Temples in Panama City, Apia, and New Delhi. But this continental stage has yet to be completed: one more edifice remains to be built. It is with profound thankfulness and joy that we announce at this auspicious moment the decision to proceed with this last project. During the Five Year Plan, erection of the Mother Temple of South America in Santiago, Chile, will commence and thus fulfil a wish clearly expressed by Shoghi Effendi.

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*Understanding what is at stake in the efforts we are making*

**24 May 2001 – To the Believers Gathered for the Events Marking  
the Completion of the Projects on Mount Carmel**

Reflection on what the Bahá’í community has accomplished throws into heartbreaking perspective the suffering and deprivation engulfing the great majority of our fellow human beings. It is necessary that it should do so, because the effect is to open our minds and souls to vital implications of the mission Bahá’u’lláh has laid on us. “Know thou of a truth,” He declares, “these great oppressions that have befallen the world are preparing it for the advent of the Most Great Justice.” “God be

praised!" 'Abdu'l-Bahá adds, "The sun of justice hath risen above the horizon of Bahá'u'lláh. For in His Tablets the foundations of such a justice have been laid as no mind hath, from the beginning of creation, conceived." In the final analysis, it is this Divine purpose that all our activities are intended to serve, and we will advance this purpose to the degree that we understand what is at stake in the efforts we are making to teach the Faith, to establish and consolidate its institutions, and to intensify the influence it is exerting in the life of society.

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*Quoting 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a call to heroism*

## **27 December 2005 – To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors**

Above all, the friends need to remain ever conscious of the magnitude of the spiritual forces that are at their disposition. They are members of a community "whose world-embracing, continually consolidating activities constitute the one integrating process in a world whose institutions, secular as well as religious, are for the most part dissolving." Of all the peoples of the world, "they alone can recognise, amidst the welter of a tempestuous age, the Hand of the Divine Redeemer that traces its course and controls its destinies. They alone are aware of the silent growth of that orderly world polity whose fabric they themselves are weaving." It is their institutions that "will come to be regarded as the hallmark and glory of the age" they have been called upon to establish. The "building process," to which they are consecrated, is "the one hope of a stricken society." For, it is "actuated by the generating influence of God's changeless Purpose, and is evolving within the framework of the Administrative Order of His Faith." And remind them that they are the illumined souls envisioned by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His prayer: "Heroes are they, O my Lord, lead them to the field of battle. Guides are they, make them to speak out with arguments and proofs. Ministering servants are they, cause them to pass round the cup that brimmeth with the wine of certitude. O my God, make them to be songsters that carol in fair gardens, make them lions that couch in the thickets, whales that plunge in the vasty deep."

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*Institution of the Hands of the Cause was confirmed  
in the Master's Will*

**26 November 2007 – To the Bahá'ís of the World**

We are moved on the occasion of this Day of the Covenant to reflect on the august Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God in the aftermath of the decease only two months ago of the last remaining Hand of the Cause, Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá. It was just a few weeks before the fiftieth anniversary of the passing of Shoghi Effendi that our world community suffered this grievous loss. How sobering, indeed, it is to realise that Dr. Varqá's departure brought to an end the remarkable stewardship of an institution whose legacy is unparalleled in religious history! At so significant a juncture in the Formative Age of the Faith, it is only fitting that an effort be made to understand more deeply than before the significance of the achievements of so outstanding an organ of the Administrative Order—one that proved to be so integral to the evolution of our world community during its nascent years.

We trace the origins of the Institution to Bahá'u'lláh Himself, Who designated four renowned promoters of His teachings as Hands of the Cause of God. In a period before the administrative system of the Faith was inaugurated, they became rallying points for the friends, as much because of the virtuous character of their personal lives as for their unceasing endeavours in proclaiming the Teachings and defending the Faith against its detractors. They remained resolute in such activities despite the severe persecution, including imprisonment in some instances, to which they were subjected by the authorities. These distinguished personages remained active during the ministry of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Who, in 1899, instructed them to take steps to form the Local Spiritual Assembly of Ṭíhrán, on which they all served. The focus of these first Hands on propagation and protection of the Faith, as well as their efforts to edify believers as to the importance of the new Laws, intimated even then the pattern of functioning the Institution would adopt at a later stage in the advancement of the Bahá'í community.

**The Master** did not Himself appoint Hands of the Cause, but referred to four believers posthumously as such. However, His Will and Testament confirmed the Institution and extended it by authorising the Guardian of

the Faith to appoint consecrated souls to it. At first, over a period of three decades, Shoghi Effendi named ten such souls posthumously; all were distinguished for the constancy, vigour and impact of their efforts to propagate the Cause and promote its best interests. The Guardian's designation in December 1951 of twelve living believers as Hands of the Cause introduced the Bahá'í world to a wholly new dynamic in the operation of the Order of Bahá'u'lláh; through it the Hands exerted an unusual vitality during the Ten Year Crusade, particularly after the sudden passing of the Sign of God. His subsequent appointment of seven more in February 1952 and replacement thereafter of five of those deceased kept the number of living Hands at nineteen until less than a month before his departure, when in his last message to the Bahá'í world he identified an additional eight, bringing the total to twenty-seven. Shoghi Effendi's description of them as the "Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth" prefigured the world-shaking reality of the unexpected responsibilities that would be thrust upon them on the morrow of his passing.

The Guardian now forever gone, the Hands' first task, despite the sorrow that overwhelmed them, was to restore the composure of a grief-stricken community. A vital aspect of that task was, of course, to settle the minds of the friends about the direction that the Faith would take. The Hands acted with dispatch. Only sixteen days after the burial of the Guardian, they issued from the Holy Land a proclamation to the Bahá'ís of East and West. Declaring that, after a thorough search, no will or instruction of Shoghi Effendi had been found, they set forth in this message the procedures they would follow in meeting the daunting challenge they faced. It announced that a body of nine Hands, designated "Custodians", was constituted to function at the Bahá'í World Centre to protect the Faith, maintain communications with National Spiritual Assemblies in connection with the prosecution of the Ten Year Plan and on administrative matters, and attend to all issues related to the preservation of the World Centre of the Faith. The friends everywhere derived from this first communication assurance that the ship of the Cause would safely traverse the waters severely troubled by the Guardian's passing. Subsequent messages issued from conclaves of the Hands held in the Holy Land further infused confidence in the believers who arose to meet the goals set before them in the Plan.

The Hands residing outside the Holy Land, in addition to giving close attention to the progress of the Plan in their own regions, undertook extensive journeys to visit and encourage the believers in every clime. Their travels covered the entire surface of the planet as they pursued every opportunity to advance the work of the Plan left by Shoghi Effendi. The obligations of the Hands spelled out in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá were carried out with the selflessness, fearlessness and zeal characteristic of their activity. To “diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to promote learning, to improve the character of all men”—all these they undertook with outstanding, sometimes astonishing, results. Such travels did not cease with the conclusion of the Ten Year Plan but continued with unabated intensity, the legendary journeys of Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum generating immeasurable stimulus. Thus the activities of the Hands demonstrated to a superlative degree the efficacy of Bahá'u'lláh's assertion that the “movement itself from place to place, when undertaken for the sake of God, hath always exerted, and can now exert, its influence in the world.”

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*'Abdu'l-Bahá's exposition of two calls to success and prosperity*

## **Riqdán 2008 – To the Bahá'ís of the World**

Every follower of Bahá'u'lláh conscious of the forces of integration and disintegration operating in society today sees the relationship between the rise in receptivity to the Faith in all parts of the globe and the failings of the world's systems. That such receptivity will increase as the agonies of humanity deepen is certain. Let there be no mistake: The capacity building that has been set in motion to respond to mounting receptivity is still in its earliest stages. The magnitude of the demands of a world in disarray will test this capacity to its limits in the years ahead. Humanity is battered by forces of oppression, whether generated from the depths of religious prejudice or the pinnacles of rampant materialism. Bahá'ís are able to discern the causes of this affliction. “What ‘oppression’ is more grievous”, Bahá'u'lláh asks, “than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it?” There is no time to lose. Continued

progress must be achieved in the activity and development of the three participants in the Plan.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has extolled "two calls" to "success and prosperity" that can be heard from the "heights of the happiness of mankind". One is the call of "civilisation", of "progress of the material world". It comprises the "laws", "regulations", "arts and sciences" through which humanity develops. The other is the "soul-stirring call of God", on which depends the eternal happiness of humanity. "This second call", the Master has explained, "is founded upon the instructions and exhortations of the Lord and the admonitions and altruistic emotions belonging to the realm of morality which, like unto a brilliant light, brighten and illumine the lamp of the realities of mankind. Its penetrative power is the Word of God." As you continue to labour in your clusters, you will be drawn further and further into the life of the society around you and will be challenged to extend the process of systematic learning in which you are engaged to encompass a growing range of human endeavours. In the approaches you take, the methods you adopt, and the instruments you employ, you will need to achieve the same degree of coherence that characterises the pattern of growth presently under way.

Sustaining growth in cluster after cluster will depend on the qualities that distinguish your service to the peoples of the world. So free must be your thoughts and actions of any trace of prejudice—racial, religious, economic, national, tribal, class, or cultural—that even the stranger sees in you loving friends. So high must be your standard of excellence and so pure and chaste your lives that the moral influence you exert penetrates the consciousness of the wider community. Only if you demonstrate the rectitude of conduct to which the writings of the Faith call every soul will you be able to struggle against the myriad forms of corruption, overt and subtle, eating at the vitals of society. Only if you perceive honour and nobility in every human being—this independent of wealth or poverty—will you be able to champion the cause of justice. And to the extent that administrative processes of your institutions are governed by the principles of Bahá'í consultation will the great masses of humanity be able to take refuge in the Bahá'í community.

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*Centenary of the interment by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá of  
the sacred remains of the Báb*

**21 March 2009 – To the Bahá’ís of the World**

[Complete letter]

This Naw-Rúz marks the centenary of one of the outstanding events in the Apostolic Age of the Bahá’í Dispensation, the interment by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá of the sacred remains of the Báb in their permanent resting place on God’s holy mountain. In the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá: “The most joyful tidings is this, that the holy, the luminous body of the Báb ... after having for sixty years been transferred from place to place, by reason of the ascendancy of the enemy, and from fear of the malevolent, and having known neither rest nor tranquillity has, through the mercy of the Abhá Beauty, been ceremoniously deposited, on the day of Naw-Rúz, within the sacred casket, in the exalted Shrine on Mt. Carmel.”

In commemoration of that triumph of the Cause, the members of the Universal House of Justice, accompanied by the members of the International Teaching Centre, have today offered prayers of thanksgiving in the Shrine of the Báb on behalf of the worldwide Bahá’í community, expressing gratitude for the unflinching divine protection vouchsafed to the Cause of God. In their solemn contemplation, their hearts were stirred as they recalled the indelible image of the Master left to posterity when, on this day a hundred years ago, having with His own hands laid that peerless Trust in its final place of repose, He rested His head upon the edge of the blessed casket of the Báb, and “sobbing aloud, wept with such a weeping that all those who were present wept with Him”. They remembered, too, the manifold obstacles with which He had been confronted in constructing this sacred edifice and His unbounded relief at having accomplished one of the principal objectives of His Ministry.

A century ago, the Faith was emerging from a period of severe crisis during which the incarceration of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá by His inveterate antagonists in the Ottoman Empire had been renewed, a grievous assault on the unity of the Cause had been launched by the Covenant-breakers, and an upsurge in the persecution of the heroic Persian believers had produced a fresh wave of sacrifice. In the immediate future there lay



dazzling victories. The strenuous and fate-laden journeys of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the western world would release incalculable spiritual powers destined to give rise to unprecedented progress of the Faith in the American and European continents He visited. The Tablets of the Divine Plan would set in motion processes designed to bring about, in due course, the spiritual transformation of the planet. The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would establish the basis for a future world order.

Today the Cause of God is again confronted by cruel and relentless opponents seeking in vain to eradicate it in the land of its birth. However, this is occurring in a world far different from that of a hundred years ago, when the Faith was largely unknown and its defenders were few. From all parts of the world the followers of Bahá’u’lláh appeal for justice, while providing, in the example of their lives, compelling evidence of the absurdity of the accusations levelled against their Iranian brethren. In this appeal they are joined by fair-minded people of all backgrounds, including thousands of Iranians who express their concern at the denial of the human rights of their Bahá’í compatriots.

The sacrifices of the Báb and the dawn-breakers of the Cause are yielding abundant fruit. Energised and confident, the followers of the Greatest Name throughout the world have mobilised their resources in a vast and concerted endeavour to offer the healing balm of Bahá’u’lláh’s Teachings to the multitudes of humanity. The magnificent progress achieved over the past century demonstrates the invincible power with which the Cause is endowed. It is but a portent of the ultimate realisation of the oneness of humankind.

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## *Centenary of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s travels to the West*

### **29 August 2010 – To the Bahá’ís of the World**

[Complete letter]

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s departure one hundred years ago from Haifa for Port Said signalled the opening of a glorious new chapter in the annals of the Faith. He was not to return to the Holy Land for three years. Referring to that historic moment the Guardian would later write: “The establishment of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh in the Western Hemisphere—the most

outstanding achievement that will forever be associated with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry—had ... set in motion such tremendous forces, and been productive of such far-reaching results, as to warrant the active and personal participation of the Centre of the Covenant Himself..." With the inauguration of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's travels to the West, the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh, hemmed in for more than half a century by the hosts of enmity and oppression, burst its restraints. For the first time since its inception, the recognised Head of the Faith enjoyed a freedom of action to pursue unencumbered its divinely prescribed mission.

By any earthly measure, 'Abdu'l-Bahá would have seemed ill prepared to carry out the task before Him. He was sixty-six years old, an exile since childhood, with no formal schooling, a prisoner for forty years, in failing health, and unfamiliar with Western customs and languages. Yet He arose, without thought of comfort, undeterred by the risks involved, and utterly reliant upon divine assistance, to champion the Cause of God. He interacted with diverse peoples in nine countries on three continents. The scope and intensity of His tireless exertions were such as to "dumbfound His followers in East and West with admiration and wonder" and to "exercise an imperishable influence" on the course of the Faith's future.

Over the next few years, Bahá'ís around the world will joyously call to mind the many episodes associated with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's historic journey. But this anniversary is more than a time for commemoration. The words uttered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His travels, and the deeds He undertook with such consummate wisdom and love, offer an abundance of inspiration and manifold insights from which the body of the believers can today draw, whether in their efforts to embrace receptive souls, to raise capacity for service, to build local communities, to strengthen institutions, or to exploit opportunities emerging to engage in social action and contribute to public discourse. We should, therefore, reflect not only upon what the Master achieved and set in motion but also on the work that remains undone to which He has summoned us. In the Tablets of the Divine Plan, He expressed His inmost longing:

O that I could travel, even though on foot and in the utmost poverty, to these regions, and, raising the call of "Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá" in cities, villages, mountains, deserts and oceans, promote the divine teachings! This, alas, I cannot do. How intensely I deplore it! Please God, ye may achieve it.

Nearly a century has passed since these words were recorded. Stage after stage of the Divine Plan has been successfully prosecuted. The Faith

has been established in all corners of the world. We are present in those places that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá yearned to visit. Individuals, communities, and institutions are now endowed with the capacity necessary for systematic, sustained, and coherent action. During this precious period of remembrance, then, let each and every one of His faithful lovers arise and act in His Name. Let them offer their share, no matter how humble, to the progress of the Plan He authored—that priceless and everlasting bequest.

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*‘Abdu’l-Bahá cited with reference to advancing the frontiers of learning*

## **28 December 2010 – To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors**

Advancing the frontiers of learning

What we have described in the preceding paragraphs and in so many messages over the last decade and a half can best be viewed as the latest in a series of approaches to the growth of the Bahá’í community, each suited to specific historical circumstances. This divinely propelled process of growth was set in motion by the fervour generated in the Cradle of the Faith more than one hundred and sixty years ago, as thousands responded to the summons of a New Day, and received impetus through the exertions made by early believers to carry the message of Bahá’u’lláh to neighbouring countries in the East and scattered pockets in the West. It acquired greater structure through the Tablets of the Divine Plan revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and gained momentum as the friends spread out systematically across the globe under the direction of the Guardian to establish small centres of Bahá’í activity and erect the first pillars of the Administrative Order. It gathered force in the rural areas of the world as masses of humanity were moved to embrace the Faith, but slowed considerably as the friends strove to discover strategies for sustaining large-scale expansion and consolidation. And, for fifteen years now, it has been steadily accelerating since we raised the call at the outset of the Four Year Plan for the Bahá’í world to systematise the teaching work on the basis of the experience it had gained through decades of difficult but invaluable learning. That the current approach to growth, effective as it

is, must evolve still further in complexity and sophistication once it has taken root in a cluster, demonstrating ever more notably the “society-building power” inherent in the Faith, few would fail to recognise.



Clearly, learning to consult on specific issues related to the global Plan, no matter how crucial, represents but one dimension of the capacity-building process in which the Local Spiritual Assembly must engage. Its continued development implies adherence to the injunction laid down by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that “discussions must all be confined to spiritual matters that pertain to the training of souls, the instruction of children, the relief of the poor, the help of the feeble throughout all classes in the world, kindness to all peoples, the diffusion of the fragrances of God and the exaltation of His Holy Word.” Its steady advancement requires an unbending commitment to promote the best interests of the community and a vigilance in guarding the process of growth against the forces of moral decay that threaten to arrest it. Its ongoing progress calls for a sense of responsibility that extends beyond the circle of friends and families engaged in the core activities to encompass the entire population of the village. And sustaining its gradual maturation is unshakable faith in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s assurance that He will enfold every Spiritual Assembly within the embrace of His care and protection.



Referring to members of Spiritual Assemblies, the Guardian wrote that they “must disregard utterly their own likes and dislikes, their personal interests and inclinations, and concentrate their minds upon those measures that will conduce to the welfare and happiness of the Bahá’í Community and promote the common weal.” Bahá’í institutions do exercise authority to guide the friends, and exert moral, spiritual and intellectual influence on the lives of individuals and communities. However, such functions are to be performed with the realisation that an ethos of loving service pervades Bahá’í institutional identity. Qualifying authority and influence in this manner implies sacrifice on the part of those entrusted to administer the affairs of the Faith. Does not ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tell us that “when a lump of iron is cast into the forge, its ferrous qualities of blackness, coldness and solidity, which symbolise the attributes of the human world, are concealed and disappear, while the

fire's distinctive qualities of redness, heat and fluidity, which symbolise the virtues of the Kingdom, become visibly apparent in it." As He averred, "ye must in this matter—that is, the serving of humankind—lay down your very lives, and as ye yield yourselves, rejoice."



Referring to rectitude of conduct, Shoghi Effendi spoke of the "justice, equity, truthfulness, honesty, fair-mindedness, reliability, and trustworthiness" that must "distinguish every phase of the life of the Bahá'í community." Though applicable to all its members, this requisite was directed principally, he underscored, to its "elected representatives, whether local, regional, or national," whose sense of moral rectitude should stand in clear contrast to "the demoralising influences which a corruption-ridden political life so strikingly manifests". The Guardian called for "an abiding sense of undeviating justice" in a "strangely disordered world" and quoted extensively from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, setting the sights of the friends on the highest standards of honesty and trustworthiness. He appealed to the believers to exemplify rectitude of conduct in every aspect of their lives—in their business dealings, in their domestic lives, in all manner of employment, in every service they render to the Cause and to their people—and to observe its requirements in their uncompromising adherence to the laws and principles of the Faith. That political life everywhere has continued to deteriorate at an alarming rate in the intervening years, as the very conception of statesmanship has been drained of meaning, as policies have come to serve the economic interests of the few in the name of progress, as hypocrisy has been allowed to undermine the operation of social and economic structures, is evident. If indeed great effort was required for the friends to uphold the high standards of the Faith then, how much greater must be the exertion in a world that rewards dishonesty, that encourages corruption, and that treats truth as a negotiable commodity. Profound is the confusion that threatens the foundations of society, and unwavering must be the resolve of all those involved in Bahá'í activity, lest the slightest trace of self-interest becloud their judgement. Let the coordinators of every training institute, the members of every Area Teaching Committee, every Auxiliary Board member and every one of his or her assistants, and all members of every local, regional and national Bahá'í body, whether elected or

appointed, appreciate the significance of the Guardian's plea to ponder in their hearts the implications of the moral rectitude which he described with such clarity. May their actions serve as a reminder to a beleaguered and weary humanity of its high destiny and its inherent nobility.



Every follower of Bahá'u'lláh knows well that the purpose of His Revelation is to bring into being a new creation. No sooner had “the First Call gone forth from His lips than the whole creation was revolutionised, and all that are in the heavens and all that are on earth were stirred to the depths.” The individual, the institutions, and the community—the three protagonists in the Divine Plan—are being shaped under the direct influence of His Revelation, and a new conception of each, appropriate for a humanity that has come of age, is emerging. The relationships that bind them, too, are undergoing a profound transformation, bringing into the realm of existence civilisation-building powers which can only be released through conformity with His decree. At a fundamental level these relationships are characterised by cooperation and reciprocity, manifestations of the interconnectedness that governs the universe. So it is that the individual, with no regard for “personal benefits and selfish advantages,” comes to see him- or herself as “one of the servants of God, the All-Possessing,” whose only desire is to carry out His laws. So it is that the friends come to recognise that “wealth of sentiment, abundance of good-will and effort” are of little avail when their flow is not directed along proper channels, that “the unfettered freedom of the individual should be tempered with mutual consultation and sacrifice,” and that “the spirit of initiative and enterprise should be reinforced by a deeper realisation of the supreme necessity for concerted action and a fuller devotion to the common weal.” And so it is that all come to discern with ease those areas of activity in which the individual can best exercise initiative and those which fall to the institutions alone. “With heart and soul”, the friends follow the directives of their institutions, so that, as 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains, “things may be properly ordered and well arranged”. This, of course, is not a blind obedience; it is an obedience that marks the emergence of a mature human race which grasps the implications of a system as far-reaching as Bahá'u'lláh's new World Order.

And those who are called upon from among the ranks of such enkindled souls to serve on the institutions of that mighty system understand well the Guardian's words that "their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent." "Never" would they be "led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles." "With extreme humility," they approach their tasks and "endeavour, by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candour, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win, not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they serve, but also their esteem and real affection." Within the environment thus created, institutions invested with authority see themselves as instruments for nurturing human potential, ensuring its unfoldment along avenues productive and meritorious.

Composed of such individuals and such institutions, the community of the Greatest Name becomes that spiritually charged arena in which powers are multiplied in unified action. It is of this community that 'Abdu'l-Bahá writes: "When any souls grow to be true believers, they will attain a spiritual relationship with one another, and show forth a tenderness which is not of this world. They will, all of them, become elated from a draught of divine love, and that union of theirs, that connection, will also abide forever. Souls, that is, who will consign their own selves to oblivion, strip from themselves the defects of humankind, and unchain themselves from human bondage, will beyond any doubt be illumined with the heavenly splendours of oneness, and will all attain unto real union in the world that dieth not."

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*‘Only a single decade remains of the first century of the Formative Age’*

## **Riḍván 2011 – To the Bahá’ís of the World**

[Complete letter]

At the opening of this glorious season our eyes are brightened as we behold the newly unveiled brilliance of the gilded dome that crowns the exalted Shrine of the Báb. Restored to the supernal lustre intended for it by Shoghi Effendi, that august edifice once again shines out to land, sea, and sky, by day and by night, attesting the majesty and holiness of Him Whose hallowed remains are embosomed within.

This moment of joy synchronises with the close of an auspicious chapter in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan. Only a single decade remains of the first century of the Formative Age, the first hundred years to be spent beneath the benevolent shade of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The Five Year Plan now ending is succeeded by another, the features of which have already been made the object of intense study across the Bahá’í world. Indeed, we could not be more gratified by the response to our message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors and to the Riḍván message of twelve months ago. Not satisfied with a fragmentary grasp of their contents, the friends are returning to these messages again and again, singly and in groups, at formal meetings and spontaneous gatherings. Their understanding is enriched through active and informed participation in the programmes of growth being nurtured in their clusters. Consequently, the Bahá’í community worldwide has consciously absorbed in a few months what it needs to propel it into a confident start to the coming decade.

Over the same period, cumulative instances of political upheaval and economic turmoil on various continents have shaken governments and peoples. Societies have been brought to the brink of revolution, and in notable cases over the edge. Leaders are finding that neither arms nor riches guarantee security. Where the aspirations of the people have gone unfulfilled, a store of indignation has accrued. We recall how pointedly Bahá’u’lláh admonished the rulers of the earth: “Your people are your treasures. Beware lest your rule violate the commandments of God, and ye deliver your wards to the hands of the robber.” A word of caution: No



matter how captivating the spectacle of the people's fervour for change, it must be remembered that there are interests which manipulate the course of events. And, so long as the remedy prescribed by the Divine Physician is not administered, the tribulations of this age will persist and deepen. An attentive observer of the times will readily recognise the accelerated disintegration, fitful but relentless, of a world order lamentably defective.

Yet, discernible too is its counterpart, the constructive process that the Guardian associated with "the nascent Faith of Bahá'u'lláh" and described as "the harbinger of the New World Order that Faith must ere long establish." Its indirect effects can be seen in the outpouring of feeling, especially from the young, that springs from a longing to contribute to societal development. It is a bounty accorded to the followers of the Ancient Beauty that this longing, which wells up inexorably from the human spirit in every land, is able to find such eloquent expression in the work the Bahá'í community is carrying out to build capacity for effective action amongst the diverse populations of the planet. Can any privilege compare with this?

For insight into this work let every believer look to 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the centenary of Whose "epoch-making journeys" to Egypt and the West is being marked at this time. Tirelessly, He expounded the teachings in every social space: in homes and mission halls, churches and synagogues, parks and public squares, railway carriages and ocean liners, clubs and societies, schools and universities. Uncompromising in defence of the truth, yet infinitely gentle in manner, He brought the universal divine principles to bear on the exigencies of the age. To all without distinction—officials, scientists, workers, children, parents, exiles, activists, clerics, sceptics—He imparted love, wisdom, comfort, whatever the particular need. While elevating their souls, He challenged their assumptions, reoriented their perspectives, expanded their consciousness, and focused their energies. He demonstrated by word and deed such compassion and generosity that hearts were utterly transformed. No one was turned away. Our great hope is that frequent recollection, during this centennial period, of **the Master's** matchless record will inspire and fortify His sincere admirers. Set His example before your eyes and fix your gaze upon it; let it be your instinctive guide in your pursuit of the aim of the Plan.

At the inception of the Bahá'í community's first global Plan, Shoghi Effendi described in compelling language the successive stages by which

the divine light had been kindled in the Síyáh-Chál, clothed in the lamp of revelation in Baghdád, spread to countries in Asia and Africa even as it shone with added brilliancy in Adrianople and later in ‘Akká, projected across the seas to the remaining continents, and by which it would be progressively diffused over the states and dependencies of the world. The final part of this process he characterised as the “penetration of that light ... into all the remaining territories of the globe”, referring to it as “the stage at which the light of God’s triumphant Faith shining in all its power and glory will have suffused and enveloped the entire planet.” Though that goal is far from being fulfilled, the light already blazes intensely in many a region. In some countries it shines in every cluster. In the land where that inextinguishable light was first ignited, it burns bright despite those who would snuff it out. In diverse nations it achieves a steady glow across whole neighbourhoods and villages, as candle after candle in heart after heart is lighted by the Hand of Providence; it illuminates thoughtful conversation at every level of human interaction; it casts its beams upon a myriad initiatives taken to promote the well-being of a people. And in every instance it radiates from a faithful believer, a vibrant community, a loving Spiritual Assembly—each a beacon of light against the gloom.

We pray earnestly at the Sacred Threshold that each one of you, bearers of the undying flame, may be surrounded by the potent confirmations of Bahá’u’lláh as you convey to others the spark of faith.

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*The Mashriqu’l-Adhkár and the emergence of justice in human affairs*

### **Riḍván 2012 – To the Bahá’ís of the World**

Mid-afternoon on the eleventh day of the Riḍván festival one hundred years ago, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, standing before an audience several hundred strong, lifted a workman’s axe and pierced the turf covering the Temple site at Grosse Pointe, north of Chicago. Those invited to break the ground with Him on that spring day came from diverse backgrounds—Norwegian, Indian, French, Japanese, Persian, indigenous American, to name but a few. It was as if the House of Worship, yet unbuilt, was fulfilling the wishes of the Master, expressed on the eve of the ceremony, for every such edifice: “that humanity might find a place of meeting” and “that the

proclamation of the oneness of mankind shall go forth from its open courts of holiness”.

His listeners on that occasion, and all who heard Him in the course of His travels to Egypt and the West, must have but dimly comprehended the far-reaching implications of His words for society, for its values and preoccupations. Still today, can anyone claim to have glimpsed anything but an intimation, distant and indistinct, of the future society to which the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh is destined to give rise? For let none suppose that the civilisation towards which the divine teachings impel humankind will follow merely from adjustments to the present order. Far from it. In a talk delivered some days after He laid the cornerstone of the Mother Temple of the West, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá stated that “among the results of the manifestation of spiritual forces will be that the human world will adapt itself to a new social form,” that “the justice of God will become manifest throughout human affairs”. These, and countless other utterances of the Master to which the Bahá’í community is turning time and again in this centennial period, raise awareness of the distance that separates society as it is now arranged from the stupendous vision His Father gifted to the world.



... Clearly, then, the development of the individual, the community, and the institutions holds immense promise. But beyond this, we note with particular joy how the relationships binding these three are marked by such tender affection and mutual support.

By contrast, relations among the three corresponding actors in the world at large—the citizen, the body politic, and the institutions of society—reflect the discord that characterises humanity’s turbulent stage of transition. Unwilling to act as interdependent parts of an organic whole, they are locked in a struggle for power which ultimately proves futile. How very different the society which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in unnumbered Tablets and talks, depicts—where everyday interactions, as much as the relations of states, are shaped by consciousness of the oneness of humankind. Relationships imbued with this consciousness are being cultivated by Bahá’ís and their friends in villages and neighbourhoods across the world; from them can be detected the pure fragrances of reciprocity and cooperation, of concord and love. Within such unassuming settings, a visible alternative to society’s familiar strife is emerging. So it becomes

apparent that the individual who wishes to exercise self-expression responsibly participates thoughtfully in consultation devoted to the common good and spurns the temptation to insist on personal opinion; a Bahá'í institution, appreciating the need for coordinated action channelled toward fruitful ends, aims not to control but to nurture and encourage; the community that is to take charge of its own development recognises an invaluable asset in the unity afforded through whole-hearted engagement in the plans devised by the institutions. Under the influence of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, the relationships among these three are being endowed with new warmth, new life; in aggregate, they constitute a matrix within which a world spiritual civilisation, bearing the imprint of divine inspiration, gradually matures.



One more step is possible. The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as "one of the most vital institutions of the world", weds two essential, inseparable aspects of Bahá'í life: worship and service. The union of these two is also reflected in the coherence that exists among the community-building features of the Plan, particularly the burgeoning of a devotional spirit that finds expression in gatherings for prayer and an educational process that builds capacity for service to humanity. The correlation of worship and service is especially pronounced in those clusters around the world where Bahá'í communities have significantly grown in size and vitality, and where engagement in social action is apparent. Some of these have been designated as sites for the dissemination of learning so as to nurture the friends' ability to advance the junior youth programme in associated regions. The capacity to sustain this programme, as we have recently indicated, also fuels the development of study circles and children's classes. Thus, beyond its primary purpose, the learning site fortifies the entire scheme of expansion and consolidation. It is within these clusters that, in the coming years, the emergence of a local Mashriqu'l-Adhkár can be contemplated. Our hearts brimming with thankfulness to the Ancient Beauty, we rejoice to inform you that we are entering into consultations with respective National Spiritual Assemblies regarding the erection of the first local House of Worship in each of the following clusters: Battambang, Cambodia; Bihar Sharif, India; Matunda Soy, Kenya; Norte del Cauca, Colombia; and Tanna, Vanuatu.

To support the construction of the two national and five local Mashriqu'l-Adhkárs, we have decided to establish a Temples Fund at the Bahá'í World Centre for the benefit of all such projects. The friends everywhere are invited to contribute to it sacrificially, as their means allow.

Beloved co-workers: The ground broken by the hand of 'Abdu'l-Bahá a hundred years ago is to be broken again in seven more countries, this being but the prelude to the day when within every city and village, in obedience to the bidding of Bahá'u'lláh, a building is upraised for the worship of the Lord. From these Dawning-Points of the Remembrance of God will shine the rays of His light and peal out the anthems of His praise.

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*Social action as conceived in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's teachings  
on Divine civilisation*

## **26 November 2012 – To all National Spiritual Assemblies**

Social action, of whatever size and complexity, should strive to remain free of simplistic and distorted conceptions of science and religion. To this end, an imaginary duality between reason and faith—a duality that would confine reason to the realm of empirical evidence and logical argumentation and which would associate faith with superstition and irrational thought—must be avoided. The process of development has to be rational and systematic—incorporating, for example, scientific capabilities of observing, of measuring, of rigorously testing ideas—and at the same time deeply aware of faith and spiritual convictions. In the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: “faith compriseth both knowledge and the performance of good works.” Faith and reason can best be understood as attributes of the human soul through which insights and knowledge can be gained about the physical and the spiritual dimensions of existence. They make it possible to recognise the powers and capacities latent in individuals and in humanity as a whole and enable people to work for the realisation of these potentialities.



The endeavours of the worldwide Bahá'í community can be seen in terms of a number of interacting processes—the spiritual enrichment of the individual, the development of local and national communities, the maturation of administrative institutions, to mention but a few—which trace their origins back to the time of Bahá'u'lláh Himself and which gathered strength during the ministries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. Under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, these processes have continued to advance steadily: the scope of their influence has gradually been extended and new dimensions added to their operation. Social and economic development is among them. This particular process, pursued most notably through a variety of educational activities down the years, received considerable impetus in 1983, when the House of Justice, in a message dated 20 October, asked for “systematic attention” to be given to this area of activity following the rapid expansion of the Bahá'í community during the 1970s.



An exploration of the nature of social action, undertaken from a Bahá'í perspective, must necessarily place it in the broad context of the advancement of civilisation. That a global civilisation which is both materially and spiritually prosperous represents the next stage of a millennia-long process of social evolution provides a conception of history that endows every instance of social action with a particular purpose: to foster true prosperity, with its spiritual and material dimensions, among the diverse inhabitants of the planet. A concept of vital relevance, then, is the imperative to achieve a dynamic coherence between the practical and spiritual requirements of life. 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that while “material civilisation is one of the means for the progress of the world of mankind,” until it is “combined with Divine civilisation, the desired result, which is the felicity of mankind, will not be attained”. He continues:

*Material civilisation is like a lamp-glass. Divine civilisation is the lamp itself and the glass without the light is dark. Material civilisation is like the body. No matter how infinitely graceful, elegant and beautiful it may be, it is dead. Divine civilisation is like the spirit, and the body gets its life from the spirit, otherwise it becomes a corpse. It has thus been made evident that the world of mankind is in need of the breaths of the*

*Holy Spirit. Without the spirit the world of mankind is lifeless, and without this light the world of mankind is in utter darkness.*

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*Results today from seeds planted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá a century ago*

## **5 December 2013 – To the Bahá’ís of the World**

[Complete letter]

When He arrived in the Holy Land, exactly one hundred years ago today, at the conclusion of His “epoch-making journeys” to Egypt and the West, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá eschewed any ceremony or fanfare just as He had at His departure. But between His going and His return, a defining period in Bahá’í history had unfolded—a “glorious chapter”, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, during which “seeds of undreamt-of potentialities” had been sown, “with the hand of the Centre of the Covenant Himself”, in the “fertile fields” to the west.

The accounts of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s travels and of the effect He had on those who met Him are legion. Some went to extraordinary lengths to enter His presence—going by boat, by foot, or even under railway trains—and, by the urgency of their desire to see Him, imprinted themselves on the consciousness of future generations of adults and children. The testimonies of those who were transformed by even a brief, sometimes near wordless encounter with their beloved Master remain deeply stirring. In the wide array of visitors He received—rich and poor, black and white, indigenous and émigré—the universal embrace of His Father’s Faith was unmistakably in evidence. It is impossible to adequately gauge the full scope of what ‘Abdu’l-Bahá accomplished within this period. Many of the seeds He planted, and which He nurtured towards maturity through an extensive correspondence that He maintained until the end of His life, would blossom into a steadfast community capable of bearing the great weight of work in the years to come, supporting the first structures of national Bahá’í administration and beginning to act on the Master’s longing that the divine teachings be brought to every city and shore.

The friends have, of course, called these points to mind during this centenary period, and they have done much more besides. As we hoped, they have given their attention to the tasks before them, drawing

inspiration from **the Master**'s potent example and timeless counsels. We have been pleased to see how, in particular, efforts to bring spiritual education to children and young people have flourished. Work to establish the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, the singular significance of which 'Abdu'l-Bahá stressed so pointedly during His visit to the United States, is making progress in eight countries, whilst in every land, devotional meetings—a communal aspect of the godly life—are thriving. The Bahá'í community's increasing engagement with the life of society, which is enabling it to offer a fresh perspective to formal and informal conversations of all kinds, carries distinct echoes of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's deep concern for the needs of the age. In clusters where the demands created by the scale and intensity of activity are most acutely felt, more complex schemes of coordination are emerging through a gradual and patient process of learning. In certain regions of the world where the institutions are overseeing special initiatives, an influx of eager pioneers is helping to strengthen the foundations of sustained growth and broaden the scope of what can be achieved by a community. The work of expansion and consolidation is advancing through the unflagging labours of countless devoted souls who have, in numerous ways, followed 'Abdu'l-Bahá in treading the plane of sacrifice. The heightened capacity of a worldwide community to assist populations to move towards the vision conceived by Bahá'u'lláh was conspicuously evident at the Eleventh International Bahá'í Convention. That same capacity was vividly illustrated in the film *Frontiers of Learning* and explored in detail in the document *Insights from the Frontiers of Learning*, which have stimulated profound reflection not only on the dynamics of growth but also on the means to treat the roots of many a social malady. And in the closing months of this three-year period came the most spectacular demonstration of how the present generation has responded to the call of service to humankind singularly embodied in the Person of **the Master**: the gathering of more than eighty thousand youth in a four-month series of conferences held in well over a hundred far-strewn locations across the globe.

Although each possessed its own unique features, all conferences shared essential attributes in common—the meticulous care that characterised the preparations, the oneness of mind that was palpable at each gathering, the energy that has surged therefrom. In the strenuous efforts they made to attend can be glimpsed the depth of commitment



felt by the participants. Some laboured with great sacrifice to raise the necessary funds from meagre resources; in other cases, by explaining the noble purpose and wholesome nature of the events, the friends obtained special permission from the authorities for the arrangements. Shipping lines were persuaded to change course to collect participants, while some youth walked for days to reach a venue. Reports of the insights generated, the creativity released, the moving testimonies delivered on each occasion and, most of all, the impetus lent to acts of service are evidence that those present were touched by spiritual forces more enduring, more deeply rooted than anything that could be elicited by the thrill of fellowship and large numbers alone. It is most heartening that tens of thousands of youth, unwilling to succumb to triviality or to settle for easy conformity, have now been brought within the widening embrace of a conversation and pattern of action of far-reaching consequence regarding how to live a coherent life and be an agent of spiritual and social transformation. The new levels of collaboration these conferences demanded of the institutions to mobilise and guide such large numbers and prepare the host of facilitators to assist them; the wholehearted collective effort required of the community as it threw wide open the circle of participation and witnessed the profound effect of doing so; the serious commitment evinced by the individual who, drawing on the concepts explored in the conference materials, is joining the tens of thousands occupied with reaching out to hundreds of thousands of others—these, together, have contributed to a marked rise in capacity in the three protagonists upon whom the success of the Five Year Plan depends. And while we acknowledge that the youth are at the forefront of this advance, its distinguishing feature is that the community rose as one to support, encourage, and champion this phenomenon, and now rejoices to see itself progress as an interdependent, organic whole, readier to meet the imperatives of this day.

Given all this, we have no hesitation in recognising that what these developments reveal is an advance in the process of entry by troops of a kind not experienced heretofore.

We call upon all to reflect upon the significance of the endeavour in which the community of the Greatest Name is engaged, the purpose of which **the Master** strove to underline so often in the course of His travels, and to rededicate themselves to contribute their share to its outcome. “Try with all your hearts”, He urged one audience, “to be willing channels

for God's Bounty. For I say unto you that He has chosen you to be His messengers of love throughout the world, to be His bearers of spiritual gifts to man, to be the means of spreading unity and concord on the earth." "Perchance," He remarked on another occasion, "God willing, this terrestrial world may become as a celestial mirror upon which we may behold the imprint of the traces of Divinity, and the fundamental qualities of a new creation may be reflected from the reality of love shining in human hearts." To this end do all your efforts tend. During the second half of the Five Year Plan, the society-building power of the Faith must be released within thousands of clusters where programmes of growth need to be initiated, reinforced, or extended. The challenge for Bahá'í institutions and their agencies will be to furnish the means to accompany all those who cherish a pure and earnest desire for a better world, whatever their degree of involvement in the process of spiritual education so far, and help them translate that desire into the practical steps that day by day and week by week accrete to build vibrant, flourishing communities. How fitting that, at this hour, a generation of youth has come into its own, ready to assume growing responsibility, since its contribution to the work at hand will prove decisive in the months and years ahead. In our prayers at the Sacred Threshold, we will entreat the Almighty to sustain all those who would be a part of this immense undertaking, who prefer the true prosperity of others over their own ease and leisure, and whose eyes are fixed upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá for a flawless pattern of how to be; all this, that "those who walk in darkness should come into the light" and "those who are excluded should join the inner circle of the Kingdom".

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### *Lessons from the building of the first two Houses of Worship*

#### **1 August 2014 – To the Bahá'ís of the World**

As the friends worldwide rejoice in these heartening advances, their energies remain focused on the processes gaining strength in cluster after cluster. In this, they have not failed to appreciate the dynamic interaction between worship and endeavours to uplift the spiritual, social, and material conditions of society. May all those who are thus labouring in towns and cities, neighbourhoods and villages, derive insights from the

exertions made to raise up the first two Houses of Worship at the turn of the twentieth century, in the East and then in the West.

In the city of 'Ishqábád, a devoted band of believers who settled from Persia, and who, for a time, found peace and tranquillity in Turkistán, bent their energies towards the creation of a pattern of life that would reflect the exalted spiritual and social principles enshrined in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh. In a span of a few decades, this group, originally consisting of a handful of families, was joined there by others and grew to a few thousand believers. This community, fortified by ties of camaraderie and animated by unity of purpose and a spirit of faithfulness, was enabled to reach a high degree of cohesiveness and development, for which it gained renown throughout the Bahá'í world. These friends, guided by their understanding of the divine Teachings, and within the bounds of the religious freedom they were accorded, toiled to create the conditions that would lead to the founding of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, that "crowning institution in every Bahá'í community". On a befitting tract of land in the centre of the city that had been obtained some years before with the consent of the Blessed Beauty Himself, facilities were built for communal well-being—a meeting hall, schools for children, a hostel for visitors, and a small clinic, among others. A sign of the notable achievements of the Bahá'ís in 'Ishqábád, who in those productive years became distinguished for their prosperity, magnanimity, and intellectual and cultural attainments, was their attention to ensuring that all Bahá'í children and youth were literate in a society with rampant illiteracy, especially among girls. Within such an environment of unified endeavour and progress, and fostered at every stage of development by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a magnificent House of Worship emerged—the most prominent edifice in the area. For over twenty years, the friends experienced the heavenly joy of having realised their lofty aim: the establishment of a focal point of worship, a nerve centre of community life, a place where souls gathered at daybreak for humble invocation and communion before flowing out of its doors to engage in their daily pursuits. While the forces of irreligion eventually swept through the region and thwarted hopes, the brief appearance of a Mashriqu'l-Adhkár in 'Ishqábád is an enduring testament to the volition and effort of a body of believers who established a rich pattern of life deriving its impetus from the power of the Creative Word.

In the Western Hemisphere, shortly after work commenced on the House of Worship in 'Ishqábád, the members of the nascent Bahá'í community in North America were galvanised to demonstrate their faith and devotion by constructing a Temple of their own, and they wrote in 1903 to seek the Master's consent. From that moment, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár became inseparably intertwined with the fate of those dedicated servants of Bahá'u'lláh. While progress on this complex project was obstructed over decades by the effects of two world wars and a widespread economic depression, each stage in its development was intimately tied to the expansion of the community and the unfoldment of its administration. On the same day as the interment of the sacred remains of the Báb on Mount Carmel in March 1909, delegates gathered to establish the Bahá'í Temple Unity, a national organisation whose elected Board became the nucleus of the far-flung local communities of the continent. This development soon gave rise to the formation of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada. 'Abdu'l-Bahá Himself laid the cornerstone of the building during His travels to North America, endowing the Mother Temple of the West with tremendous spiritual potentialities. And contributions for this historic enterprise flowed from Bahá'í centres in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the Pacific—a demonstration of the solidarity and sacrifice of the Bahá'ís of the East and West.

As the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in every land centre their thoughts on God and occupy themselves each day with His remembrance, ceaselessly exerting effort in His Name, let them draw inspiration from these stirring words addressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to a believer who was devoted to building the first House of Worship, raised under His close and loving direction:

*Hasten now to 'Ishqábád, in the utmost detachment and aflame with the fire of attraction, and convey to the friends of God ardent greetings from 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Kiss thou each one's face and express this servant's deep and sincere affection to all. Do thou on behalf of 'Abdu'l-Bahá move the earth, carry the mortar, and haul the stones for the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár so that the rapture of this service may bring joy and gladness to the Centre of Servitude. That Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is the first visible and manifest establishment of the Lord. Therefore, it is this servant's hope that each and every virtuous and righteous soul will sacrifice his all, evince great happiness and exultation, and rejoice in*

carrying the earth and mortar so that this Divine Edifice may be raised, the Cause of God may spread, and in every corner of the world the friends may arise with the utmost resolve to accomplish this great task. Were 'Abdu'l-Bahá not imprisoned and were there not obstacles in his path, he himself would assuredly hasten to 'Ishqábád and carry the earth for the building of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár with the utmost joy and gladness. It behoveth the friends now to arise with this intention in mind and serve in my place so that in a short time this Edifice may be revealed to all eyes, the loved ones of God may engage in making mention of the Abhá Beauty, the melodies of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár may rise at dawn-tide to the Concourse on high, and the songs of the nightingales of God may bring joy and ecstasy to the denizens of the All-Glorious Realm. Thus will the hearts rejoice, the souls delight in joyful tidings, and the minds be illumined. This is the highest hope of the sincere ones; this is the dearest wish of them that are nigh unto God.

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### *Approaching the centenary of the Tablets of the Divine Plan*

#### **29 December 2015 – To the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors**

Over the coming years, the community will, in fact, encounter a series of anniversaries, concluding with the Centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in November 2021, which will close the first century of the Formative Age. Next year the Bahá'í world will mark one hundred years since the first of the Tablets of the Divine Plan flowed from the pen of the Master. In these fourteen Tablets, revealed during one of humanity's darkest hours, 'Abdu'l-Bahá laid out a charter for the teaching work that defined its theatre of action as the entire planet. Held in abeyance until 1937, when the first in a succession of Plans launched at the instigation of the Guardian was assigned to the Bahá'ís of North America, the Divine Plan has continued to unfold over the decades since as the collective capacity of Bahá'u'lláh's followers has grown, enabling them to take on ever-greater challenges. How wondrous the vision of the Plan's Author! Placing before the friends the prospect of a day when the light of His Father's Revelation would illuminate every corner of the world, He set out not only strategies for achieving this feat but guiding principles and

unchanging spiritual requisites. Every effort made by the friends to systematically propagate the divine teachings traces its origins to the forces set in motion in the Divine Plan.

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*Deliberations preceded by prayers at the House of the Master*

**2 January 2016 – To the Bahá'ís of the World**

Before the first century of the Formative Age concludes, there lies a span of time that stretches between two anniversaries associated with documents of measureless significance. It begins with the centenary of the revelation by 'Abdu'l-Bahá of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, just as the friends are embarking on a new stage in the unfoldment of that Plan. It ends at the lapse of one hundred years since the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, which was followed by the opening of the Master's Will and Testament. With these thoughts in mind, and in preparation for their deliberations, the Continental Counsellors, led by the members of the Universal House of Justice and the International Teaching Centre, visited the House of the Master—the place where three of the Tablets of the Divine Plan had been revealed and where, a few weeks after 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing, His Will and Testament had been read aloud to believers from four continents. In that sacred House, on the eve of the present Conference, passages were recited from those two Charters which, Shoghi Effendi explained, set in motion processes for the propagation of the Faith and the establishment of its Administrative Order. This was a fitting prologue to five days of consultation focused on diffusing more widely the light of Bahá'u'lláh and strengthening the ability of His institutions to act as channels through which His promised blessings may flow to humankind.

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*Commemoration of the revelation of the Tablets of the Divine Plan*

**26 March 2016 to the Bahá'ís of the World acting under the Mandate of 'Abdu'l-Bahá**

[Complete letter]

Today at dawn, on your behalf, the members of the Universal House of Justice gathered with the members of the International Teaching Centre in **the Master's** room at the house in Bahjí to commemorate that pivotal moment when the first of the Tablets of the Divine Plan was revealed by the pen of **'Abdu'l-Bahá**. Prayers from those wondrous Tablets were offered in thanksgiving for the glorious achievements of the past. Divine assistance was sought in support of the labours required in the forthcoming stage of the Plan's unfoldment. And heavenly bounties were implored to ensure still greater victories in meeting the challenges of future stages, one after another, reaching as far as the fringes of the Golden Age.

The Divine Plan, that sublime series of letters addressed by **'Abdu'l-Bahá** to the Bahá'ís of North America between 26 March 1916 and 8 March 1917, constitutes one of the mighty Charters of His Father's Faith. Set forth in those fourteen Tablets, Shoghi Effendi explains, is "the mightiest Plan ever generated through the creative power of the Most Great Name." It is "impelled by forces beyond our power to predict or appraise" and "claims as the theatre for its operation territories spread over five continents and the islands of the seven seas." Within it are held "the seeds of the world's spiritual revival and ultimate redemption."

In the Tablets of the Divine Plan **'Abdu'l-Bahá** not only provided the broad vision necessary to carry out the responsibilities entrusted by Bahá'u'lláh to His loved ones, but He also outlined spiritual concepts and practical strategies necessary for success. In His exhortations to teach and to travel to teach; to arise personally or deputise others; to move to all parts of the world and open countries and territories, each meticulously named; to learn the relevant languages and translate and disseminate the Sacred Texts; to train the teachers of the Faith and especially youth; to teach the masses and, particularly, indigenous peoples; to be firm in the Covenant and protect the Faith; and to sow seeds and cultivate them in a process of organic growth, we find hallmarks of the entire series of Plans—each a specific stage of the Divine Plan shaped by the Head of the Faith—that will continue to unfold throughout the Formative Age.

The initial response to the Tablets of the Divine Plan was limited to the noble exploits of a few who, like the immortal Martha Root, arose independently. It was Shoghi Effendi who assisted the Bahá'ís of the world to gradually grasp the significance of this Charter and learn to approach its requirements in a systematic manner. The Plan was held in abeyance for nearly twenty years while the Administrative Order took shape, after

which communities were patiently guided to conduct national plans, including the two Seven Year Plans in North America that constituted the first stages of the Divine Plan, until finally, in 1953, all could unite in the first global Plan, the Ten Year Crusade. Shoghi Effendi looked beyond that crucial decade to “the launching of world-wide enterprises destined to be embarked upon, in future epochs” of the Formative Age, “by the Universal House of Justice, that will symbolise the unity and coordinate and unify the activities of these National Assemblies.” The Divine Plan continues at the present time with the intensive effort to establish a pattern of community life that can embrace thousands upon thousands in clusters that cover the face of the planet. Let every Bahá’í appreciate, more deeply than ever before, that the provisions of the next stage of the Divine Plan set forth in our recent message to the Counsellors’ Conference comprise the challenging requirements of the present hour—requirements both urgent and sacred, which, when sacrificially and persistently addressed, may hasten “the advent of that Golden Age which must witness the proclamation of the Most Great Peace and the unfoldment of that world civilisation which is the offspring and primary purpose of that Peace.”

How is it possible to adequately convey our feelings of irrepressible love and unbounded admiration as we reflect on the exploits of the members of your communities, past and present, in pursuit of your sacred mission? The vision that unfolds before our eyes is of a grassroots stirring, an organic flowering, a resistless movement that has grown imperceptibly at times and at others in great surges to eventually embrace the entire world: God-intoxicated lovers exceeding their personal capacities, embryonic institutions learning to exercise their powers for the well-being of humanity, communities emerging as shelters and schools in which human potential is nourished. We pay homage to the humblest ministrations and ceaseless endeavours of the Faith’s devoted rank and file, as well as to the extraordinary accomplishments of its heroes, knights, and martyrs. On vast continents and scattered islands, from arctic regions to desert climes, atop mountain plateaus and across lowland plains, in crowded urban quarters and villages along rivers and jungle paths, you and your spiritual forebears brought the message of the Blessed Beauty to peoples and nations. You sacrificed rest and comfort and left your homes to journey to unfamiliar lands or homefront outposts. You set aside your own interests for the common good. Whatever your means, you sacrificially



contributed your share of resources. You taught the Faith to multitudes, to groups in various settings, and to individuals in your homes. You quickened souls and helped them on their own paths of service, disseminated widely the Bahá'í writings and participated in deep study of the teachings, strove for excellence in all fields, engaged diverse peoples of all strata in conversations pertaining to the search for solutions to humanity's ills, and initiated efforts for economic and social development. Though misunderstandings and problems sometimes arose, you forgave one another and marched together in serried lines. You raised the framework of the Administrative Order and clung steadfastly to the Covenant, protecting the Faith from every blow directed against it. In your ardour for the Beloved, you endured prejudice and estrangement, privation and loneliness, persecution and imprisonment. You welcomed and nurtured generations of children and youth upon whom the vitality of the Faith and future of humanity depend, and as tested veterans, you heeded **the Master's** admonition to serve until your last breath. You have written the story of the unfoldment of the Divine Plan on the scroll of its first century. Before you, beloved friends, lies stretched out the blank scroll of the future on which you and your spiritual descendants will inscribe fresh and lasting deeds of renunciation and heroism for the betterment of the world.

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*The Tablets of the Divine Plan and the believers of North America*

**26 March 2016 – To the chosen recipients of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Tablets of the Divine Plan, the Bahá'ís of the United States and the Bahá'ís of Canada**

We cannot allow this historic moment to pass without adding—to our message to the believers worldwide—a word to those whom the Author of the Divine Plan singled out for a sacred responsibility and whose triumphs and travails shaped much of the past century in accordance with His high expectations.

Soon after the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh, **'Abdu'l-Bahá** determined that one of the principal objectives of His ministry would be to establish a community in North America under the banner of His Father's Cause. He dispatched teachers, illumined pilgrims, embarked upon an unparalleled

visit in His declining years, laid the cornerstone of your House of Worship, carved in fourteen Tablets addressed to you a divine mission, and “out of the abundance of His heart chose to bestow on His favoured disciples, to the very last day of His life, the tokens of His unfailing solicitude.” Later, at a time when the believers in the Cradle of the Faith were hamstrung by persecution, when the light of the Faith in Europe was eclipsed by the growing spectre of another war, when the most vibrant centre in central Asia was dismantled, and even the world centre of the Faith itself was disrupted by a conflagration in the Holy Land, the “one chief remaining citadel,” the “mighty arm” that still raised aloft “the standard of an unconquerable Faith,” was, Shoghi Effendi observed, “none other than the blessed community of the followers of the Most Great Name in the North American continent.” He placed you—the Plan’s chief executors and its co-executors—among the vanguard of Bahá’u’lláh’s resistless legions.

It is impossible here to recount the range of your illustrious achievements during the past century. You have already accomplished that which is worthy of the gratitude and admiration of the entire Bahá’í world, but your mission is far from complete. After a century of resolute action, you should, more than ever before, be able to discern the straight path traced by heavenly inspiration across the many stages of the Divine Plan since its systematic execution began in 1937, and thus grasp the full implications of the latest stage about to open. The tasks confronting you are not identical with those of an earlier age. With the international spread of the Faith largely concluded, demands on you are now most pressing on the homefront. The process of entry by troops that emerged so tenuously in the Ten Year Crusade, and was fostered in the decades that followed, is now being extended through a sound process of community building in centre after centre in all those countries and territories that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá marked out so long ago. Your sister communities, so many of which you helped to establish, are now mature, and you stand with them ready to take on the sterner challenges that lie ahead. The movement of your clusters to the farthest frontiers of learning will usher in the time anticipated by Shoghi Effendi at the start of your collective exertions, when the communities you build will directly combat and eventually eradicate the forces of corruption, of moral laxity, and of ingrained prejudice eating away at the vitals of society.

This is a time for jubilation. Take pride in the sacrifices and victories of so many devoted souls who arose in response to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s call. With

the same spirit of renunciation shown by your predecessors, cast away the idle fancies and distractions of a world that has lost its way that you may consecrate yourselves in the next five years to the priceless opportunities and inescapable obligations of the latest stage of a spiritual enterprise on which the fate of humanity ultimately depends.

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*The fruit of successive Plans is seen in the Mother Temple of South America*

### **14 October 2016 – To the Friends Gathered in Santiago, Chile, for the Dedication of the Mother Temple of South America**

The Mashriqu'l-Adhkár is “one of the most vital institutions in the world”. A Temple and its associated dependencies embody two essential and inseparable aspects of Bahá'í life: worship and service. As a potent symbol and an integral element of the divine civilisation towards which Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation ushers all peoples, the House of Worship becomes the focal point of the community from which it emerges. “The holy fragrances of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár”, 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains, “vivify the souls of the righteous, and its vitalising breezes confer life upon the pure in heart.” Indeed, its influence is such as to galvanise an entire people to reach for a more profound sense of unified purpose. The gaze of the Bahá'í world is at this hour fixed upon its newly dedicated Temple, and we are certain that this longed-for victory will bring jubilation to the friends everywhere. Yet they will surely not be content to simply rejoice amongst themselves. Inspired by all that this sublime edifice stands for, let them invite others to discover the abiding joy that comes from the praise of God and from service to humankind.



With their resolve kindled by the rallying call of **the Master** in His Tablets delineating the Divine Plan, and urged on by Shoghi Effendi in the successive directions he gave for the Plan's prosecution, pioneers travelled to the nations of Latin America and began nurturing communities that could maintain Local and, eventually, National Spiritual Assemblies—communities that came to be designated by the Guardian as

“associates of the chief executors of the Plan bequeathed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá”. The success of large-scale teaching endeavours revealed the purity and open-mindedness of the continent’s inhabitants in all their diversity, and their evident receptivity to the divine impulse.

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*Guidance from Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on  
the creation of prosperity*

### **1 March 2017 to the Bahá’ís of the World**

... By consecrating oneself to the service of others, one finds meaning and purpose in life and contributes to the upliftment of society itself. At the outset of His celebrated treatise *The Secret of Divine Civilisation*, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states:

*And the honour and distinction of the individual consist in this, that he among all the world’s multitudes should become a source of social good. Is any larger bounty conceivable than this, that an individual, looking within himself, should find that by the confirming grace of God he has become the cause of peace and well-being, of happiness and advantage to his fellow men? No, by the one true God, there is no greater bliss, no more complete delight.*

Viewed in this light, many seemingly ordinary economic activities gain new significance because of their potential to add to human welfare and prosperity. “Every person must have an occupation, a trade or a craft,” explains the Master, “so that he may carry other people’s burdens, and not himself be a burden to others.” The poor are urged by Bahá’u’lláh to “exert themselves and strive to earn the means of livelihood”, while they who are possessed of riches “must have the utmost regard for the poor”. “Wealth”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has affirmed, “is praiseworthy in the highest degree, if it is acquired by an individual’s own efforts and the grace of God, in commerce, agriculture, art and industry, and if it be expended for philanthropic purposes.” At the same time, the Hidden Words is replete with warnings of its perilous allure, that wealth is a “mighty barrier” between the believer and the proper Object of his adoration. No wonder, then, that Bahá’u’lláh extols the station of the wealthy one who is not

hindered by riches from attaining the eternal kingdom; the splendour of such a soul “shall illuminate the dwellers of heaven even as the sun enlightens the people of the earth!” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declares that “if a judicious and resourceful individual should initiate measures which would universally enrich the masses of the people, there could be no undertaking greater than this, and it would rank in the sight of God as the supreme achievement”. For wealth is most commendable “provided the entire population is wealthy.” Examining one’s life to determine what is a necessity and then discharging with joy one’s obligation in relation to the law of Ḥuqúqu’Illáh is an indispensable discipline to bring one’s priorities into balance, purify whatever wealth one possesses, and ensure that the share which is the Right of God provides for the greater good. At all times, contentment and moderation, benevolence and fellow feeling, sacrifice and reliance on the Almighty are qualities that befit the God-fearing soul.

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### *Announcing plans for the centenary of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing*

#### **Ridván 2018 to the Bahá’ís of the World**

Only three years remain of a quarter-century effort that began in 1996 focused on a single goal: a significant advance in the process of entry by troops. At Ridván 2021, the followers of Bahá’u’lláh will embark on a Plan lasting a single year. Brief, but pregnant with portent, this one-year endeavour will begin a new wave of Plans bearing the ark of the Cause into the third century of the Bahá’í Era. During the course of this auspicious twelvemonth, the Bahá’í world’s commemoration of the centenary of the Ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá will include a special gathering at the Bahá’í World Centre to which representatives of every National Spiritual Assembly and every Regional Bahá’í Council will be invited. This, however, is to be but the first in a sequence of events that will prepare the believers for the demands of the decades to come. The following January, the elapse of one hundred years since the first public reading of **the Master’s** Will and Testament will be the occasion for a conference in the Holy Land bringing together the Continental Boards of Counsellors and all members of the Auxiliary Boards for Protection and Propagation. The spiritual energy released at these two historic gatherings must then be carried to all the friends of God in every land in which they reside. For

this purpose, a series of conferences will be convened worldwide in the months that follow, a catalyst to the multi-year endeavour that shall succeed the coming One Year Plan.

Thus, a new phase in the unfoldment of the Master's Divine Plan is approaching. ...

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### *Social achievements of the Bahá'ís of Iran in the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*

#### **9 November 2018 to the Bahá'ís of the World**

During the ministries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, the first community of sufficient size that could begin to systematically apply Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to unite material and spiritual progress was that of the believers in the Cradle of the Faith. The steady flow of guidance from the Holy Land enabled the Bahá'ís of Iran to make tremendous strides in but one or two generations and to contribute a distinctive share to the progress of their nation. A network of schools that provided moral and academic education, including for girls, flourished. Illiteracy was virtually eliminated in the Bahá'í community. Philanthropic enterprises were created. Prejudices among ethnic and religious groups, aflame in the wider society, were extinguished within the community's loving embrace. Villages became distinguished for their cleanliness, order, and progress. And believers from that land were instrumental in raising in another land the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár with its dependencies designed to "afford relief to the suffering, sustenance to the poor, shelter to the wayfarer, solace to the bereaved, and education to the ignorant." Over time, such efforts were augmented by scattered initiatives of other Bahá'í communities in various parts of the world. However, as Shoghi Effendi remarked to one community, the number of believers was as yet too small to effect a notable change in the wider society, and for more than the first half century of the Formative Age the believers were encouraged to concentrate their energies on the propagation of the Faith, since this was work that only Bahá'ís could do—indeed their primary spiritual obligation—and it would prepare them for the time when they could address the problems of humanity more directly.

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*Believers are called upon to embody the Master's counsels*

## **26 November 2018 to the Bahá'ís of the World**

[Complete letter]

In this season, from the Day of the Covenant to the commemoration of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, every Bahá'í heart is stirred by remembrance of Him Who is the Mystery of God, the Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's impregnable Covenant, the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the embodiment of every Bahá'í ideal, the Most Mighty Branch of God whereunder all can find shelter. May His boundless love and tender solicitude give you reassurance and sustenance as you strive to fulfil the trust He bestowed upon you in His Testament and His Divine Plan. At night in that hallowed room in His home where He departed this life for reunion with His beloved Lord, we will testify to your fidelity to His call, evident in your tireless labours to create a refuge for humanity at this moment of increasing injustice and affliction.

Three brief years remain until the centenary of **the Master's** passing, when Bahá'ís the world over will gather and take account of the distance traversed over the first century of the Formative Age. May His loved ones, individually and collectively, little by little and day by day, increasingly embody His counsels: to be united in the Cause and firm in the Covenant; to avoid calumny and never speak ill of others; to see no strangers but regard all as members of one family; to set aside divergent theories and conflicting views and pursue a single purpose and common goal; to ensure that the love of Bahá'u'lláh has so mastered every organ, part, and limb as to leave no effect from the promptings of the human world; to arise with heart and soul and in one accord to teach the Cause; to march in serried lines, pressed together, each supporting the others; to cultivate good character, perseverance, strength, and determination; to know the value of this precious Faith, obey its teachings, walk in this road that is drawn straight, and show this way to the people.

That you may fulfil His highest expectations, we pray for each of you.

## **18 January 2019 to the Bahá'ís of the World**

'Abdu'l-Bahá also emphasised the importance of the contribution that Bahá'ís are called on to make to the establishment of world peace:

*... peace must first be established among individuals, until it leadeth in the end to peace among nations. Wherefore, O ye Bahá'ís, strive ye with all your might to create, through the power of the Word of God, genuine love, spiritual communion and durable bonds among individuals. This is your task.*



For Bahá'ís, the attainment of peace is not simply an aspiration to which they are sympathetic or a goal complementary to their other aims—it has always been a central concern. In a second Tablet 'Abdu'l-Bahá addressed to the Central Organisation for a Durable Peace in the Hague, He asserted that “our desire for peace is not derived merely from the intellect: It is a matter of religious belief and one of the eternal foundations of the Faith of God.” He observed that for peace to be realised in the world, it was not adequate that people should be informed about the horrors of war:

*Today the benefits of universal peace are recognised amongst the people, and likewise the harmful effects of war are clear and manifest to all. But in this matter, knowledge alone is far from sufficient: A power of implementation is needed to establish it throughout the world.*

“It is our firm belief”, He continued, “that the power of implementation in this great endeavour is the penetrating influence of the Word of God and the confirmations of the Holy Spirit.”



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## *Foreshadowing the close of the first century of the Formative Age*

### **Ridván 2019 to the Bahá'ís of the World**

The close of the first century of the Formative Age is but two and a half years away. It will seal one hundred years of consecrated effort to consolidate and expand the foundation so sacrificially laid during the Faith's Heroic Age. At that time the Bahá'í community will also mark the centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that moment when the beloved Master was released from the confines of this world to rejoin His Father in the retreats of celestial glory. His funeral, which occurred the following day, was an event "the like of which Palestine had never seen". At its conclusion, His mortal remains were laid to rest within a vault of the Mausoleum of the Báb. However, it was envisaged by Shoghi Effendi that this would be a temporary arrangement. A Shrine was to be erected, of a character befitting the unique station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, at the appropriate time.

That time has come. The Bahá'í world is being summoned to build the edifice which will forever embosom those sacred remains. ...

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## *Counsels on the avoidance of controversy*

### **1 December 2019 to all National Spiritual Assemblies**

... Social media and related communication tools tend to give the greatest exposure to all that is controversial, and the very same tools allow individuals, in an instant, to disseminate more widely whatever catches their attention and to register their support or opposition to various sentiments, whether explicitly or tacitly. The unparalleled ease with which a person can join in such public debate and the nature of the technology make momentary lapses of judgement and incautious actions more likely and their residue more enduring.

This holds particular implications for Bahá'ís, who know well that the principles of their Faith require them to refrain from involvement in political controversies and conflicts of all kinds. "Speak thou no word of politics" was the counsel of 'Abdu'l-Bahá to one believer, adding, "Except

to speak well of them, make thou no mention of the earth's kings, and the worldly governments thereof." Shoghi Effendi warned against allowing our vision of the Cause to be clouded "by the stain and dust of worldly happenings, which, no matter how glittering and far-reaching in their immediate effects, are but the fleeting shadows of an imperfect world". ...

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### *Resilience in the face of the Covid crisis*

#### **Naw Rúz 177 to the Bahá'ís of the World**

At a time of another crisis, 'Abdu'l-Bahá offered these words of counsel: "In a day such as this, when the tempests of trials and tribulations have encompassed the world, and fear and trembling have agitated the planet, ye must rise above the horizon of firmness and steadfastness with illumined faces and radiant brows in such wise that, God willing, the gloom of fear and consternation may be entirely obliterated, and the light of assurance may dawn above the manifest horizon and shine resplendently." The world stands more and more in need of the hope and the strength of spirit that faith imparts.



For now, our thoughts and our prayers are focused on the health and well-being of all the friends of God and all those among whom you dwell. We pray earnestly, also, for the Almighty to bestow upon you assurance, stamina, and staunch spirits. May your minds be ever bent upon the needs of the communities to which you belong, the condition of the societies in which you live, and the welfare of the entire family of humanity, to whom you are all brothers and sisters. And in your quiet moments, when no course of action other than prayer seems possible, then we invite you to add your supplications to our own and ardently pray for the relief of suffering. We turn to these words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Whose whole existence was an example of selfless commitment to the well-being of others:

*O Thou Provider! Assist Thou these noble friends to win Thy good pleasure, and make them well-wishers of stranger and friend alike. Bring them into the world that abideth forever; grant them a portion of heavenly grace; cause them to be true Bahá'ís, sincerely of God; save*

*them from outward semblances, and establish them firmly in the truth. Make them signs and tokens of the Kingdom, luminous stars above the horizons of this nether life. Make them to be a comfort and a solace to humankind and servants to the peace of the world.*

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*Hastening ‘the attainment of a just, diverse, and united society’*

## **22 July 2020 to the Bahá’ís of the United States**

A moment of historic portent has arrived for your nation as the conscience of its citizenry has stirred, creating possibilities for marked social change. It holds significance not only for the destiny of America anticipated in the Sacred Writings, but also for the mission entrusted to your community by the hand of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who cherished you dearly and called you to a path of sacrifice and high endeavour. We are pleased to see that, led by your National and Local Spiritual Assemblies, you are seizing opportunities—whether those thrust upon you by current circumstances or those derived from your systematic labours in the wider society—to play your part, however humble, in the effort to remedy the ills of your nation. We ardently pray that the American people will grasp the possibilities of this moment to create a consequential reform of the social order that will free it from the pernicious effects of racial prejudice and will hasten the attainment of a just, diverse, and united society that can increasingly manifest the oneness of the human family.



The principles and exhortations that guide your steps are well known to you from the writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. The concepts and approaches for social transformation developed in the current series of Plans that can be utilised to promote race unity in the context of community building, social action, and involvement in the discourses of society have been set out in our messages. Every believer, as the promulgator of Bahá’u’lláh’s central principle of the oneness of humanity, should deeply meditate upon it and weigh its demanding implications for the profound alteration of thought and action required at this time. “The American Bahá’í Community, the leaven destined to leaven the whole,”

the Guardian admonished, cannot hope “to either escape the trials with which this nation is confronted, nor claim to be wholly immune from the evils that stain its character.” “A tremendous effort is required by both races if their outlook, their manners, and conduct are to reflect, in this darkened age, the spirit and teachings of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh,” he also stated. “Let neither think that the solution of so vast a problem is a matter that exclusively concerns the other. Let neither think that such a problem can either easily or immediately be resolved.” “Each one should endeavour to develop and assist the other toward mutual advancement,” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained. “Love and unity will be fostered between you, thereby bringing about the oneness of mankind.”

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*Announcing details on the centenary events to come in 178 B.E.*

## **25 November 2020 to the Bahá’ís of the World**

The momentum that is sure to build with each successive cycle of the One Year Plan will be further augmented by the release of two films. The first of these, which will become available in time for the centennial commemoration, will be a portrait of the Person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Besides being a tribute to His life and work, it will explore how, by championing the oneness of humanity through His words and deeds, He offered a challenge to the stale assumptions and prejudices of the age, and gave stimulus to a process of unification which continues to this day. A second film, following soon after the first, will reflect on the expiration of the first hundred years of the Formative Age from the vantage point of the heights to which the Bahá’í community has climbed, and from where it can now gaze upon new horizons.



Besides providing for advances within clusters everywhere, the coming Plan will be a year for profound reflection on the life of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the strength of the Covenant of which He was the Centre, as the community prepares to commemorate the centenary of His Ascension. The observance of this anniversary will undoubtedly prompt individuals and communities alike to contemplate the significance of that infinitely poignant moment when He Who was the Mystery of God departed from

this world. His passing took from the Bahá'ís of that era a Figure Who was the object of their ardent love and loyalty; to the faithful of this age, He remains without parallel: a perfect embodiment in word and deed of all that His Father taught, the One through Whom the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh was "proclaimed, championed and vindicated". We are conscious that the coming year will also mark a century since His Will and Testament—that "momentous", "historic", "immortal" Document—"called into being, outlined the features and set in motion the processes" of the Administrative Order, "the very pattern of that divine civilisation which the almighty Law of Bahá'u'lláh is designed to establish upon earth". This "unique" and "divinely-conceived" Order, this "mighty administrative structure", had been fashioned by its Architect to perpetuate the Covenant and channel the spiritual powers of the Cause. It will be apparent, then, that the Day of the Covenant next year, exactly twelve months from now, will be especially meaningful. We ask National Spiritual Assemblies to determine how these two dates, occurring so close together, may each be observed, taking into account prevailing conditions in their countries.

All the while, earnest preparations continue to be made in the Holy Land for the commemoration of the centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá at a gathering at which, it is hoped, representatives of National Spiritual Assemblies and Regional Bahá'í Councils will be present. Similarly, plans are already being made for the conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors and Auxiliary Board members, which will coincide, in January 2022, with the lapse of one hundred years since the first public reading of the Will and Testament of the Master. Conditions in the world may, of course, require the plans being made for these gatherings at the Bahá'í World Centre to change. But come what may, we have no doubt that the efforts made in local communities worldwide to befittingly commemorate the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and to honour the Day of the Covenant in this coming centennial year will provide the impetus needed to launch the succeeding stage in God's Minor Plan, even as Providence propels the unfoldment of His Major Plan in accordance with His incontestable decree.

**Ridván message 2021**

And so the One Year Plan begins. Its purpose and requirements have already been set out in our message sent on the Day of the Covenant; this Plan, though brief, will suffice to prepare the Bahá'í world for the Nine Year Plan that is to follow. A period of special potency, which opened one hundred years after the revelation of the Tablets of the Divine Plan, will soon close with the centenary of the Ascension of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, marking the conclusion of the first century of the Formative Age and the start of the second.



Held in abeyance for two decades while local and national organs of the Administrative Order were being raised up and strengthened, the Divine Plan conceived by 'Abdu'l-Bahá was formally inaugurated in 1937 with the commencement of the first stage of its first epoch: the Seven Year Plan assigned by the Guardian to the North American Bahá'í community.



