

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

5 December 2013

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

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 characterized 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 mobilize 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 recognizing 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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