

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Riḍván 2019

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

As the Most Great Festival has drawn closer, we have been transported by feelings of gratitude and anticipation—gratitude for the wonders that Bahá'u'lláh has enabled His followers to accomplish, anticipation of what the immediate future holds.

The momentum generated by the worldwide celebrations of the bicentenary of the Birth of Bahá'u'lláh has only grown since. The accelerated development of the Bahá'í community, its rising capacity, and its ability to draw on the energies of more of its members emerge vividly from a summary of its recent global attainments. Of these, an increase in community-building activities stands out in particular. The current Five Year Plan follows twenty years of effort by the Bahá'í world to systematically refine and multiply these activities—but remarkably, in the Plan's first two and a half years, the number of core activities alone rose by more than half. The worldwide community has shown the capacity to engage, at any given time, over a million people in such activities, helping them to explore and respond to spiritual realities. In the same short period, the number of gatherings for prayer nearly doubled—a much-needed response to humanity's growing estrangement from the Source of hope and bounty. This development holds special promise, for devotional meetings infuse a new spirit into the life of a community. Interwoven with educational efforts for all ages, they reinforce the lofty purpose of those efforts: to foster communities distinguished by their worship of God and their service to humankind. Nowhere is this more evident than in those clusters where the participation of large numbers in Bahá'í activities is being sustained and the friends have passed the third milestone in their community's development. We are delighted to see that the number of clusters where the process of growth has advanced this far has already more than doubled since the beginning of the Plan and now stands at around five hundred.

This brief survey cannot do justice to the scale of the transformation that is under way. The outlook for the remaining two years of the Plan is bright. Much has been achieved this last year by widely disseminating lessons learned from the stronger programmes of growth in clusters that, as we hoped, have become reservoirs of knowledge and resources. The International Teaching Centre, the Counsellors, and their tireless auxiliaries have stopped at nothing to ensure that friends in all parts of the world can benefit from this acceleration in learning and apply the insights being gained to their own realities. We rejoice to see that in a growing number of clusters, and in neighbourhoods and villages within them, a nucleus of friends has emerged who through action and reflection are discovering what is required, at a particular point, for the process of growth to advance in their surroundings. They are drawing on the potent instrument of the institute, through which capacity to contribute to the spiritual and material prosperity of the community is enhanced, and as they act, the number of those joining them is increasing. Naturally, conditions vary greatly from place to place, as do the

characteristics of growth. But through systematic striving, everyone can make a more and more effective contribution to the work at hand. In every setting, there is pure joy in engaging other souls in meaningful and uplifting conversations that lead, whether quickly or gradually, to the stirring of spiritual susceptibilities. The brighter the flame kindled within the heart of the believer, the greater will be the force of attraction felt by those exposed to its warmth. And to a heart consumed with love for Bahá'u'lláh, what more fitting occupation can be imagined than to seek out kindred spirits, to encourage them as they enter the path of service, to accompany them as they gain experience and—perhaps the greatest joy of all—to see souls become confirmed in their faith, arise independently, and assist others on the same journey. These are among the most cherished of all the moments that this transitory life affords.

The prospects for advancing this spiritual enterprise are made the more thrilling by the approach of the bicentenary of the Birth of the Báb. Like the bicentenary that preceded it, this anniversary is a moment incalculably precious. It provides all Bahá'ís with marvellous opportunities for awakening those around them to the great Day of God, to the extraordinary effusion of heavenly grace signalled by the appearance of two Manifestations of the Divine Being, successive Luminaries Who brightened the horizon of the world. The measure of what might be possible in the coming two cycles is known to all from the experience of the bicentenary two years ago, and all that was learned on that occasion must be channelled into the plans for the Twin Holy Birthdays this year. As the two-hundred-year anniversary draws near, we will offer frequent supplications on your behalf in the Sacred Shrines, praying that your efforts to befittingly honour the Báb will succeed in advancing the Cause He foretold.

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. It is to be constructed in the vicinity of the Riḍván Garden, on land consecrated by the footsteps of the Blessed Beauty; the Shrine of 'Abdu'l-Bahá will thus lie on the crescent traced between the Holy Shrines in 'Akká and Haifa. Work on the architectural plans is advancing, and more information will be shared in the coming months.

Feelings of surpassing joy now surge within us, as we contemplate the year ahead and all that it promises. We look to every one of you—those who are occupied with rendering service to Bahá'u'lláh, labouring in every nation for the cause of peace—to fulfil your high calling.

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