National Spiritual Assembly
of the Bahá’ís of the United States

1 April 2021

To all Local Spiritual Assemblies
and registered Bahá í groups

Dearest Bahá í Friends,

The National Spiritual Assembly is pleased to share with you five letters written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice on a subject on the hearts and minds of many at this time—vaccinations. Believers have been turning to the institutions of the Faith for advice on this matter, in light of, as described in one of these messages, “the difficulty of attaining the truth, which seems to be an inherent characteristic of the process of disintegration that is assailing humanity in its transition to a new order.” We trust that the guidance shared in these communications, sent between July 2020 and February 2021 and from which all personal identifiers have been removed, will assist you in responding to the concerns of the friends.

This recent guidance brings into focus some principles on which we are encouraged to reflect, including the independent investigation of reality, guided by consultation and scientific consensus; of reliance on competent physicians; of the need for obedience to civil law; and of our social obligation to consider what is best for society when determining our own private actions.

Be assured of our prayers for your communities that the Spirit of God may draw the friends ever closer in bonds of friendship and cordiality during these tumultuous days.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,



Kenneth E. Bowers
Secretary

Attachments (5)

cc: Continental Board of Counselors for the Americas

 All Regional Bahá í Councils

 All Regional Training Institutes

536 Sheridan Road • Wilmette, IL 60091-2891

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The Universal House of Justice
Department of the Secretariat

10 July 2020

Transmitted by email:
U.S.A.

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter dated 26 November 2019 inquiring whether a Bahá’í is required to obey civil laws mandating vaccination. We have been asked to convey the following and regret the delay in our response because of the pressure of work at the Bahá’í World Centre.

A fundamental Bahá’í principle is loyalty and obedience to government. As Shoghi Effendi explained in a letter dated 21 December 1948 written on his behalf to an individual believer, “We must obey in all cases except where a spiritual principle is involved, such as denying our Faith.”[[1]](#footnote-1) If a Bahá’í is faced with a governmental mandate of vaccination, the Bahá’í Writings would not provide him or her justification for refusing to comply with such a legal requirement; therefore, a religious exemption could not be claimed. Of course, if the law itself provided another applicable exemption, a believer would be free to decide, including for family members for whom he or she is responsible, whether to invoke such an exemption.

Be assured of the supplications of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that you and your children may be surrounded by the tender mercies of the Blessed Beauty.

With loving Bahá’í greetings, Department of the Secretariat

Bahá’í World Centre • P.O. Box 155 • 3100101 Haifa, Israel
Tel: 972 (4) 835 8358 • Email: secretariat@bwc.org

The Universal House of Justice
Department of the Secretariat

8 December 2020

Transmitted by email: …

Mr….

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 20 November 2020 seeking guidance on the advisability of taking the coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine that is anticipated to be widely available soon. We have been asked to convey the following.

Nothing has been found in the Bahá’í Writings on the subject of vaccination. Nevertheless, in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá’u’lláh stated: “*Resort ye, in times of sickness, to competent physicians; We have not set aside the use of material means, rather have We confirmed it through this Pen, which God hath made to be the Dawning-place of His shining and glorious Cause*.”[[2]](#footnote-2) Moreover, in reply to scientific issues raised on a number of occasions, Shoghi Effendi consistently advised Bahá’ís that such matters would need to be investigated by scientists. In recent decades, advances in medical science have led to the production of effective vaccines, the use of which has freed humanity from many debilitating and deadly infectious diseases. Reports indicate that the coronavirus vaccines currently being developed offer great promise for protecting individuals from, and helping to reduce transmission of, the virus. As to the advisability and efficacy of the various options that may become available, the friends should follow the counsel of medical and other scientific experts.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat

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The Universal House of Justice
Department of the Secretariat

15 December 2020

Transmitted by email:

U.S.A.

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 25 November 2020 asking how to reconcile statements appearing in an extract of a letter dated 14 May 2008 written on behalf of the House of Justice regarding vaccination. We have been requested to convey the following.

The 14 May letter—in the part to which you may not have had access—quoted the following passage from a letter dated 22 January 1944 written on Shoghi Effendi’s behalf to an individual believer: “Regarding your question about vaccination: these are technical matters which have not been specifically mentioned in the teachings, and consequently the Guardian cannot make any statement about them.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Because vaccination is not addressed in the Bahá’í Writings, the House of Justice has, absent other factors, left to individuals the decision whether to be vaccinated. However, if a Bahá’í is faced with a governmental mandate of vaccination, the Bahá’í writings would not provide him or her justification for refusing to comply with such a legal requirement. Therefore, a religious exemption could not be claimed. Of course, if the law itself provided another applicable exemption, a believer would be free to decide, including for family members for whom he or she is responsible, whether to invoke such an exemption.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat

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The Universal House of Justice
Department of the Secretariat

11 February 2021

Transmitted by email: …

Dr….

Dear Bahá’í Friend,

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter dated 9 December 2020 seeking guidance regarding what you observe to be the tendency of some Bahá’í friends to rely on unsound sources of information for scientific or medical questions and to insist upon such perspectives in discussions within the community. While the House of Justice appreciates your suggestion to share the views of Bahá’í experts with the community, it does not feel that this will resolve the fundamental problem you perceive. Further, we have been asked to convey the following.

One of the unfortunate features of the present age is the difficulty of attaining truth, which seems to be an inherent characteristic of the process of disintegration that is assailing humanity in its transition to a new order. “*In these days truthfulness and sincerity are sorely afflicted in the clutches of falsehood*,” Bahá’u’lláh lamented, “*and justice is tormented by the scourge of injustice*.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Of course, there are a number of Bahá’í teachings that directly bear on this dilemma. To the extent to which the friends imbibe and hold fast to these teachings, they can guard themselves and their communities from the tumult buffeting society and contribute to its protection and transformation.

The independent investigation of reality is a fundamental principle enunciated by Bahá’u’lláh, through which, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explained, “*the world of humanity may be saved from the darkness of imitation and attain to the truth* ….”[[5]](#footnote-5) In the Hidden Words, Bahá’u’lláh called the individual to observe justice, by whose aid “*thou shalt see with thine own eyes and not through the eyes of others, and shalt know of thine own knowledge and not through the knowledge of thy neighbor*.”[[6]](#footnote-6) An essential method for the attainment of truth is consultation—“*the lamp of guidance which leadeth the way, and is the bestower of understanding*.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

Furthermore, the Bahá’í Writings stress the importance of science. “*Great indeed is the claim of scientists … on the peoples of the world*”, Bahá’u’lláh observed.[[8]](#footnote-8) ‘Abdu’l-Bahá wrote that the “*sciences of today are bridges to reality*”[[9]](#footnote-9) and repeatedly emphasized that “*religion must be in conformity with science and reason*”.[[10]](#footnote-10) Significantly, on an occasion when a scientific question was asked of Shoghi Effendi, he responded in a letter written on his behalf that “we are a religion and not qualified to pass on scientific matters”.[[11]](#footnote-11) And in reply to scientific issues raised on a number of occasions, he consistently advised Bahá’ís that such matters would need to be investigated by scientists.

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In light of the foregoing, when faced with issues of a scientific or medical nature, Bahá’ís should seek out and rely on the best expert advice available. For example, in connection with medical matters, believers should bear in mind Bahá’u’lláh’s statement in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas: “*Resort ye, in times of sickness, to competent physicians; We have not set aside the use of material means, rather have We confirmed it through this Pen, which God hath made to be the Dawning-place of His shining and glorious Cause*.”[[12]](#footnote-12) In relation to the coronavirus pandemic, the friends should follow the counsel of medical and other scientific experts on the advisability and efficacy of the various vaccination options that are becoming available and the wisdom of particular public health measures. They should not be concerned merely with their own personal choices and well-being, but in reaching their decisions, they should also consider their social responsibilities and the common good.

Of course, with a new outbreak of a previously unknown disease, available information may change rapidly. If an individual believer is unclear as to what may be reputable sources on a given issue, he or she may seek the recommendations of Bahá’í institutions or friends who have scientific training. In rare instances when experts appear to be providing inconsistent opinions, then one would do well to pursue the prevailing or majority expert opinion. Responding through his secretary to a believer who had received conflicting medical advice, Shoghi Effendi once advised: “you should refer to other doctors, and follow the majority vote.”[[13]](#footnote-13) It is scientific consensus arrived at through the sound methods of science, rather than a particular opinion from an individual expert, that should be sought. In this regard, there are reputable national and international health agencies created for the purpose of assessing circumstances that impact public health and well-being, and of determining what can be considered the established scientific consensus.

Through adherence to the above principles, Bahá’ís can offer a much-needed example of respect for science and truth. Yet, while these principles are straightforward and no doubt generally known to the friends, in recent years, the challenges associated with finding the truth pertaining to various issues in the wider society have grown more acute, creating greater opportunities for confusion and misdirection. In particular, one aspect of this breakdown that exacerbates the confusion is the systematic misuse of media and communication technologies—whether traditional or Internet-based. While the advancement of such technologies has had many positive effects and offers promise as yet unrealized, regrettably those same instrumentalities are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and too often can have socially destructive consequences. Through these vehicles, the uninformed, the self-interested, and the malicious can easily disseminate rumours, conspiracy theories, and outright falsehoods regarding just about any conceivable issue, including important scientific and medical ones. As these erroneous statements circulate and are repeated many times through different means, especially through social media—supported in some instances by isolated voices who may present themselves as experts—they take on the status of authoritative views in the minds of some. Information surrounding the current global pandemic is a prime example, with the consequences of such misinformation being potentially catastrophic. In the search for truth and understanding, the friends should therefore weed out those sources of information that prove to be biased and unreliable, which are attempting to offer unsubstantiated views for partisan purposes, in order to determine where consensus lies among reliable sources.

There, of course, remain scientific or medical matters about which experts have legitimate differences of opinion. Believers may, thus, come to various conclusions about such

matters, and there is no obligation for the friends to have uniformity of thought about them. However, they should not allow differing opinions to become a point of contention among themselves and should act in ways that demonstrate their care for the welfare of others. If specific questions arise in relation to the activities of the Bahá’í community, the friends should turn for resolution to the institutions of the Faith.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat

The Universal House of Justice
Department of the Secretariat

26 February 2021

Transmitted by email

[To a National Spiritual Assembly]

Dear Bahá’í Friends,

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter dated 15 Mulk 177 (20 February 2021), in which you explain that, owing to the contradictory nature of the available information concerning the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and the effectiveness and safety of vaccination against it, disagreements have arisen amongst some of the believers in your country. In this regard, you request guidance that you may share with your community. We have been asked to convey the following.

Your efforts to guide your community during this challenging period are warmly acknowledged. Enclosed are copies of two letters written on behalf of the House of Justice to individual believers that relate to the issues you have raised. The contents of these letters may be shared with the friends in whatever manner you consider appropriate as these will no doubt assist them to obtain a better understanding of the principles involved. An additional point that can be drawn to the attention of the believers is that the purpose of being vaccinated extends beyond the protection it affords the individual concerned. There is also an important social component; namely, that when a large enough proportion of the population is vaccinated, the spread of a disease amongst them is retarded, thereby protecting those who—for whatever reason—are unable to be vaccinated. The friends should therefore also weigh this social obligation as they make their decision on this matter.

In relation to your query about whether it would be appropriate for you to encourage the friends to be vaccinated, it would appear sufficient for you to advise them to follow the recommendations of reputable public health experts in your country. Ultimately, this is a matter for individuals to decide.

Be assured of the supplications of the House of Justice in the Holy Shrines that you may be aided by the Abhá Beauty as you continue to guide your community.

With loving Bahá’í greetings,
Department of the Secretariat

Enclosures

cc: International Teaching Centre (with enclosures)

Board of Counsellors … (with enclosures)

Counsellor … (with enclosures)

Counsellor … (with enclosures)

1. Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, para. 113, p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Shoghi Effendi, *Directives from the Guardian*, p. 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, p. 298. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Hidden Words*, Arabic No. 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bahá’u’lláh, *Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Bahá’u’lláh, *Epistle to the Son of the Wolf*, p. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace*, p. 373. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Letter dated 30 September 1950 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. I, p. 483. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, para. 113, p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Shoghi Effendi, 14 February 1945, in *The Compilation of Compilations*, vol. I, p. 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)