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Headings have been added)

THE ENLIGHTENED MIND

The Universal Applicability of Bahá'í Laws and Principles

By way of preamble, I would like to draw your attention to one of the distinctive features of our religion: the fact that we have, as an integral element of the structure of our teachings, the concept of the supremacy of the rule of law. By that I mean that the laws and teachings of our Faith are applicable to all members of the Bahá'í community irrespective of any other consideration. This is relatively unusual; so often in religious communities there are certain individuals who, rightly or wrongly, feel themselves excused from some aspects of their teachings by virtue of their rank, their social standing, or some other consideration; whereas in our religion there are a number of universal principles applicable, without distinction, to all. I want to spend a few minutes – before getting into the meat of my subject – I want to spend a few minutes exploring a few of those universally applicable principles, and I think they can be gathered together under the heading of the “enlightened mind”.

We are all familiar with the fact that religions have, as a matter of course, down through the span of human history, religions have concerned themselves with enlightenment. It's even been carried to the point of caricature. Janet and I have just spent a few days being very lazy, which included watching television in Northern California. Those of you who have been equally indolent may be familiar with a TV ad for Yellow Pages, some poor soul climbs a mountain to find an individual who is some kind of guru and a source of enlightenment and our traveler seeks guidance from him on how all information can be obtained and this enlightened soul refers him to the Yellow Pages. Be that as it may, the attainment of enlightenment has always been the goal of religion.

A Distinctive Approach

Our religion is distinctive in two ways with regard to enlightenment. One is the fact that, to us, the ideal state is dynamic not static. We differ radically from the ideal state expressed in various religions, the paradise of a static condition, the sense of attaining an enlightenment where one is basically static and unchanging. The other distinctive characteristic of our approach to enlightenment is the fact that we see fulfillment and enlightenment not exclusively in solitary pursuits but through interaction with others in service or consultation or some form of cooperation; to us the enlightened state includes that service-oriented or cooperatively-oriented interaction with other human beings.

I want to spend a few minutes dwelling on some of the characteristics that I see in the Bahá'í Faith which pertain to enlightenment. There is a rather obvious hidden motive here. I'm deliberately selecting those characteristics that will be of value to me later in my talk. I'm deliberately selecting things which are universally applicable, and later, when I talk about the educated Bahá'í or the Bahá'í engaged in scholarly pursuits, I will refer back to them and I will say, as politely as possible, "See? Those things about enlightenment are still applicable even if you are involved in education or scholarship." Hopefully it won't be too terribly obvious, but it will be along those lines. I do this because so often in the past those who achieved eminence or renown in education or scholarship regarded themselves as excused from some of the characteristics of the enlightened mind to which the Bahá'í Teachings refer.

An Open-Minded Attitude

One of the characteristics of the enlightened individual, as I see it in the teachings, is that he or she has an open-minded attitude to life-long learning; and I see this as a requirement imposed on all Bahá'ís irrespective of whether they are literate or illiterate.

I've had close experience in contact with illiterate Bahá'ís and I noticed how, in many instances, their attitude to learning is highly developed: learning from experience, learning from observation of nature, learning from interaction with others. And it has reinforced my view that

our teachings say to all of us that, irrespective of any consideration, we should commit ourselves to life-long learning. Obviously this includes formal learning, but it doesn't restrict itself to only formal learning. The House of Justice in a recent letter said, "Devotion to learning has been an integral feature of Bahá'í life and belief from the beginning."¹ And as you will realize, in the recently concluded Five Year Plan and the one in which we are now embarked, learning is integral—learning by experience, by reflection, by revision of plans for the next cycle, or whatever, is stitched in to the very concept of Bahá'í community activity. This learning, of course, requires an open-minded attitude as intrinsic to it, but that open-minded attitude is not carried to extremes; it's one thing to be open-minded but it's another thing to be gullible and naive and to believe—all kinds of strange things which turn out to be superstitious, or totally irrational, or the like. So, there are extremes in the approach to open-mindedness and we are advised in our Writings to avoid the extremes of gullibility and naiveté. Obviously, it's a very complicated subject because a lot of great scientific discoveries have appeared quite bizarre in their original form. I remember reading about Alfred Wegener, who first discovered the concept of continental drift and how difficult it was for him to get the scientific community to accept his theory which has now become universally endorsed.

Continual Striving to Progress

We are told also that the attributes of the enlightened individual include those of a constant striving for progress and for the achievement of excellence, again applicable to all Bahá'ís, literate or illiterate: this sense of aspiration, the sense of wanting to improve oneself, wanting to improve one's performance in whatever activity one is engaged in, should be coupled to a sense of humility in relation to others. These are, in the larger society, often mutually exclusive; those who aspire to excellence seem to feel it necessary to discard humility along the way as a means of buttressing their self-concept of excellence, and that certainly is not part of our religion. We're told also that the aspiration to enlightenment should include respect for the accomplishments of others, constant encouragement of others in their own aspiration.

Participation in Community Life

It seems to me that one should mention also that the enlightened Bahá'í, in our religion, is one whose exalted aims and aspirations do not exclude him or her from engaging in the life and activities of the community, including its mundane aspects. We are quite removed from the person who is so involved in the pursuit of abstract algebra or the mysteries of the general theory of relativity that he or she cannot bring themselves to help to set the table, or do the dishes, or to help to weed the garden or something like that. 'Abdu'l-Bahá remains, as always, a shining example not only of the profundity of His wisdom, the nature of His personal characteristics, but also of His lack of inhibition about involving Himself in the mundane aspects of the life. We have many examples of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in Akká and in Haifa and how readily and with such good spirit He participated in the mundane aspects of the life of the community and in service to others. And, of course, as you can well understand the enlightened individual is one who retains, and in fact fosters, an appropriate degree of respect for the authority of Bahá'í institutions.

So often, in the larger society, there are individuals who feel that for certain reasons they don't have to follow what everybody else follows: they're too important, they're too significant, their characteristics are such that they can either dispute with the institutions or disregard them. We are, as you well realize, a work in progress as a Bahá'í community. As such we fall down from time to time. We don't pretend not to make mistakes and errors, but we do say that we learn from them, we try not to make the same mistakes over and over again, and that overall there is progress. Along those lines, one finds that, occasionally, some of our shortcomings include a segment of the Bahá'í community feeling it should be immune from the requirements of some aspects of enlightenment, such as humility and engaging in mundane aspects of life. They feel immune for various curious reasons: it may be because of wealth; with a wealthy Bahá'í sometimes feeling that it's okay to get someone else to do that mundane task, but not me, in fact I'll pay you to do it, if you really want me to. Or Bahá'ís of high social status may feel that it would be demeaning of their status, of their prestige in the larger society if they participate in the mundane aspects of community life. Sometimes it is a matter of the family lineage. Having a distinguished ancestor or relative seems to confer a kind of aura in the mind of the individual, that he or she doesn't have to do what the rest of us are doing. Sometimes it's a

matter of education, that educated individuals should not have to concern themselves with all the trivia that the rest of us are dealing with. All such false concepts are demolished by contemplation of the peerless example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

These are the characteristics of the enlightened individual, and as I said there has been a deliberate purpose in my marking them because I think that they pertain to what I want to say as I continue about education and scholarship.

EDUCATION

Education in the Present Day

Education is under great stress in many parts of the world for a variety of reasons. It is not a popular subject her legislators and those who allocate the national resources of the country. The lack of funding means that, as you travel around the world, you see schools and universities, the fabric of which is deteriorating. They are not in very good shape as far as buildings go, salaries of teachers in primary, high school and tertiary levels are low and not keeping up with inflation, fees are rising astronomically in many countries and are excluding capable students from acquiring education. There is an ongoing pressure for grade inflation, a pressure to give good grades to people and for a greater percentage of the students to get very high grades. There’s also pressure to produce courses of lower standard so that grades can correspondingly be better. The system in many countries shows signs of corruption: an increase in cheating; the bribery of teachers; the low salaries of teachers; the downloading of essays from the Internet; bullying and violence in schools including violence towards fellow students and toward teachers.

One of the very significant stresses in the educational system is that the purpose of education is presented largely in terms of its income potential. In making a decision about whether to proceed to advanced education, what course to follow, and whether to continue in it, the argument is largely, in our society, presented in terms of, “If you do this, you will get more income and it will average out ahead of the rest of the population over the course of several decades.” This argument is, of course, weak. It doesn’t work anymore. People who go into

non-educated disciplines generally end up making more money than the poor souls who struggle for so many years to get a Masters' degree or a Ph.D. degree. So it raises the questions in the minds of a lot of people in our society: what is the purpose of education? Why should I expose myself to a system which is increasingly corrupt and which doesn't have a financial pay-off.

Religion and Education

For people of a religious background, such as we are, additional questions arise about education. They don't apply to the entire Bahá'í community, but one does meet, from time to time, Bahá'ís who raise one or more of these questions. There are those who are deeply concerned that if their young people embark on education in a secular setting it will weaken their faith; for example, they should not study psychology because it rests on the material concept of human nature and that will take them away from religion. From that perspective, they should not study philosophy, or economics, or sociology, or history, or whatever because it will weaken their religious faith. There are those, perhaps (not many of them, hopefully) who feel that religion contains all the knowledge one needs; as quoted in the *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, knowledge is a point that the ignorant have multiplied,² and by pursuing education in a secular setting one is exposing oneself to this multiplication of ignorance. There are some who have an apocalyptic view of the imminence of catastrophe, which gives rise to the question "why bother with education when the whole rotten mess is going to blow up anyhow?" This creates a pressure on young people not to make a long-term commitment of an educational nature.

Also, within the last few years, with the legitimate pressure for the core activities to be expanded and developed in the Five Year Plan, there are extremists who say that matters are so urgent at this time that we should abandon our long-term pursuits—educational or otherwise – because we have to get these 1500 intensive programs of growth. Their view is that nothing is more important than that, we should give up whatever else we are doing, just do this and maybe later (if there's time) you can go and get your education.

So, these are various pressures that apply within the Bahá'í settings beyond those to which I have drawn attention in referring to the deterioration of the structure of education and its

facilities in the larger society. We have to look at all of this from the perspective of authentic Bahá'í teachings, not from what people tell us as “this is what you should do”, and “this is what is unpublished” or “this is what I know the House of Justice said, but it hasn't said that out loud”—or all this kind of comment. We have to avoid these things, we have to root our faith in authentic Bahá'í teachings which can readily be examined and the accuracy of which clearly discerned.

We know that there is some accuracy in these concerns that certain Bahá'ís have expressed. There is some accuracy in the fact that one's faith can be weakened by secular education, but it is intrinsically an inaccurate statement. As we'll see presently, the contrary applies; the Guardian's writings refer to the mutual reinforcement between insights in the Bahá'í teachings and secular education. There is some truth that things are a mess and getting a lot worse, but our sense of the transition in society is of two processes of decline and growth, punctuated by events of a calamitous nature rather than in the Apocalypse, as it's conventionally expressed.

As regards the pressure of the moment (the needs of the Five Year Plan and the like) these are legitimate concerns. The House of Justice messages, including its Ridván message and that of 27 December 2005, do quite properly call attention to the pressing need for concerted action on the part of Bahá'ís all over the world in pursuit of the core activities, in developing clusters which can sustain and maintain intensive programs of growth. But these messages also distinguish between *priority* and *exclusivity* and the failure to make the distinction between priority and exclusivity is leading to distortions. We know where the priorities lie, the Five Year Plan, the message of the House of Justice. The House of Justice does not call for exclusivity. Friends here at this conference have spoken to me privately and asked me with great sincerity, “Is it alright to continue to have firesides?” Who am I to say no? Who is the House of Justice to abrogate something laid down by Shoghi Effendi so forcefully as the need for individual teaching, for firesides, for proclamation, for student activities on campus, for all the other things that make Bahá'í life rich and meaningful?

Beyond that anybody who has experience in enterprises—whether they are business enterprises, organizations of various kinds, industrial activities or anything like that – anyone with experience in that knows that exclusive focus on the short-term needs is the way to doom. Any enterprise, be it a Bahá'í administrative enterprise or otherwise, that focuses only on the short-term is doomed to be storing up trouble for itself in the future. We have to, with intelligent minds, devote priority to the short-term but not to neglect the long-term. Otherwise we will find ourselves, in a few years' time, lacking the resources to meet the emergent needs of the Faith in years to come. Over the several decades of my Bahá'í activities—it extends now to about five decades. I have noticed believers who had become so obsessed with the short term, in terms of their service to the needs of the Faith, that they neglected the long-term in their personal development. As a result they found that after about ten years they were unemployable. They could not serve the Faith, they didn't have the skills, they didn't have the long term development, they didn't have the orientation. All they could do is to continue to play the theme they had been playing which was applicable ten years ago and which was obsolete now. So focus on the long term as well as the short term is very crucial.

The Bahá'í Approach to Education

The Bahá'í teachings, as I read them, indicate to me a pronounced emphasis on education and the acquisition of knowledge. I read again and again statements to that effect. Bahá'u'lláh says “Knowledge is one of the wondrous gifts of God. It is incumbent upon everyone to acquire it.”³ One is afraid to open a dictionary and look up the meaning of the word “incumbent”. Because Bahá'u'lláh says “It is *incumbent* upon everyone to acquire it.” ‘Abdu'l-Bahá says “To promote knowledge is, thus, an inescapable duty *imposed* on every one of the friends of God.”⁴ This and many other statements, I think, should be considered very carefully by any Bahá'í planning the course of his or her life: those plans should accommodate the strength of the statements of Bahá'u'lláh, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, and the Guardian on the duty, the incumbency placed on the individual to pursue the acquisition of knowledge.

The Writings contain other statements pertinent to the subject of education. Pertinent to the fact of “why are we getting an education when you can make much more money as a...”

[pauses]—if I refer to any specific occupation, there are probably some people in the room doing that, so I won't even mention it. You can make a lot of money as a Mafia hit-man—I presume there's none of those in the room.

A very insightful statement by Bahá'u'lláh appears in *Tablets Revealed After the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, where He says, “Knowledge is a veritable treasure for man, and a source of glory, of bounty, of joy, of exaltation, of cheer and gladness unto him.”⁵ This is a most significant statement, where Bahá'u'lláh is telling us that the acquisition of knowledge is a source of joy, cheer and gladness. Fundamentally, one of our basic reasons for the pursuit of education is that it is a source of happiness—not particularly around exam time, and maybe not when the results come out. But overall in the course of one's life, the life devoted to the acquisition of knowledge, to the pursuit of education, in its broadest as well as in its narrow formal sense, therein lies fulfillment, contentment, and as Bahá'u'lláh says, gladness and joy.

Shoghi Effendi is quite unequivocal in relating effectiveness of teaching the Cause to knowledge. He writes in one place (or his secretary on his behalf), “If the Bahá'ís want to be really effective in teaching the Cause, they need to be much better informed and able to discuss intelligently, intellectually the present condition of the world and its problems.”⁶ And this is just one from a selection of many passages. Most of what I'm reading is either from the *Compilation on Scholarship* or a supplementary compilation on *Issues Pertaining to the Study of the Cause*, both of which have been published in recent years. In that sense our answer to the concern on “should I have an education or not?” is: refer to the *Writings*, refer to what it says about the importance of education, its value in teaching the Faith, its personal rewards in terms of happiness, joy, contentment, gladness and cheer, as Bahá'u'lláh says.

Specific Subject of Study

The Universal House of Justice, from time to time, receives letters from very sincere and devoted believers who say, “Please tell me what are the disciplines in which the Cause has a particular need and I'll study one of them.” These letters touch us. They are moving. They represent the devotion of a believer who is willing to put himself or herself on the hands of the

Head of the Faith and say, “I will do anything you like. If you tell me to go and study astrophysics I’ll study astrophysics; if you tell me to study archaeology, I’ll study archaeology. I want to do whatever will meet the needs of the Faith at the present time.” The most common response of the House of Justice – and there is no universal response because things do change – but the most common response of the House of Justice follows that given by Shoghi Effendi to similar questions. Here is a passage where the Guardian, through his secretary, said: “Concerning the course of study you may follow... The Cause is such that we can serve it no matter what our profession may be. The only necessity is that we be spiritually minded and not be guided by purely material considerations.”⁷ And, of course, if one’s orientation is toward the service of the Faith as the dominant consideration, then that transcends material considerations. It seems to me that one should therefore not feel narrowly constrained in the subject one chooses to pursue in education.

Obviously, one has to consider employment, because it is very frustrating to go through a course of study for many years and then find that there are no employment possibilities for it. Then one has to change one’s line of work and one feels, rightly or wrongly, that much of the effort has been wasted (generally that isn’t the case but, nevertheless, it is a source of disappointment). So one should legitimately give some due weight to the prospects for employment. One should consider, of course, one’s talents and opportunities. There are so many dear Bahá’í friends in other parts of the world, particularly the Third World, who yearn for education, struggle to get opportunities and often are disappointed. It’s no use going to them and preaching to them that, “Thou must go and get an advanced education” when these poor souls are struggling to find the resources and the opportunities to acquire any kind of education. Those of us who do have opportunities are in some way privileged and need to take advantage of these opportunities.

Special needs do arise from time to time in the work of the Cause. I now mention a few of them but I should also caution that these needs change with the passage of time. At the moment, for example, the World Centre is desperately in need of certain kinds of people we can’t find. We need people, for example, to help our International Bahá’í Library make a much-needed quantum leap forward in its functioning. We need people with Masters of Library

Science with a specialization in informatics so that we can use cutting-edge informatics to develop the International Bahá'í Library. We need archivists who have a skill in modern technology for archival information retrieval, and the like. We have a desperate need for people in conservation science. One meets so many people who have a bachelor degree in chemistry and who say, "What can I do with my bachelor degree?" One of the things you can do is do post-bachelors degree work in conservation science and help us at the international level, or at the national level if you prefer, to conserve the precious documents of the Faith, the paper documents, the Tablets, the authentic Writings, the historical documents and, beyond that, conservation in its broader sense of object conservation: the conservation of textiles, the conservation of sacred artifacts and, of course, of Holy Place buildings. There are also needs at the World Centre in the engineering disciplines for maintenance of the cutting-edge facilities of the Arc, as well as the various professional trades.

These are needs at the moment but they may not be needs in five years time; you don't want to put all your eggs in one basket and say, "I'll train for this" because you may find that the needs have changed with the passage of time. But they are certainly very legitimate and very pressing needs and I suspect that they're needs that are going to be intrinsic to the Bahá'í world for decades in the future, because what we do now at the World Centre in terms of library and archival development, and the like, will later be translated to similar activity in the larger national communities and subsequently in the smaller national communities all over the world.

The Pre-eminence of the Authoritative Text

We are told in our Faith that one of the important parameters in the acquisition of education is the need to always give pre-eminence to the authority of the Manifestation of God. The House of Justice says, "In the simultaneous endeavour to pursue their studies and to delve deeply into the Bahá'í teachings, believers are enjoined to maintain a keen awareness that the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh is the standard of truth against which all other views and conclusions should be measured."⁸ This is certainly very, very important because, as the words say, the Revelation is the standard of truth. There are lots of things out there which are an accepted part of secular education. Some of them conform to the Bahá'í teachings and some of them don't; and

when we find something that does not conform, we should not allow ourselves to be shaken in our faith. We should not become obnoxious towards our teachers or adopt a position of superiority and try to educate them in what Bahá'u'lláh says, because that's pretty counterproductive, apart from obnoxious. But at the same time we should not allow our faith to be in any way disturbed.

Having said that, I think one needs to be very careful of this subject; there are many aspects of the Bahá'í teachings where one has to be very careful to avoid rushing too quickly to judgment. For example, astrophysics: there is probably still some controversy in the astrophysical community on whether the origin of the universe is a steady state creation or a big bang. And, our Writings speak of creation as being without beginning and without end. That being so, I think that we have to be very wary of rushing to conclusions and saying Bahá'ís support the steady-state model rather than the Big Bang model. Both models are still works in progress, both of them will be refined, and other models may emerge. I think we have to be cautious in this regard.

Innumerable letters have come to the Universal House of Justice about cloning and what do we say about cloning. The response of the House of Justice, as I understand it, has been very cautious, basically saying "let's see how things develop, let's see what science uncovers." There are a number of issues that are yet obscure; the Universal House of Justice has refrained from making any dogmatic statements on cloning because it is a very complex subject. The same applies to the question of evolution, and of course we've had an excellent discussion here at this conference in relating the various theories of evolution, intelligent design vis-à-vis Darwinian evolution, and the like. This is very good because there is an element of care and caution, a refusal to rush to a judgment or adopt a narrow perspective by quickly saying "Well, that's wrong because it is contradicted by Bahá'u'lláh." The same, of course, applies to the evaluation of theories of psychology, or sociology or, indeed, of economics. Obviously, we have a different perspective on the nature of man, which affects these disciplines, yet at the same time those disciplines offer so much that is valid.

You find in the two compilations to which I have referred, that the Guardian has described in some of his writings to the reciprocal, mutually reinforcing relationship between secular knowledge and insight into the Bahá'í teachings. There are instances where he refers to the fact that study of subjects such as sociology, history, economics and the like—and I think they're no more than examples – provides insight into the Bahá'í teachings. And then there are other passages where he describes the exact reciprocal relationship: he says that study of the Bahá'í teachings provides insight into the secular disciplines of history, economics, sociology, and the like. Far beyond the concern about education weakening one's faith is the fact that if it is pursued in an appropriate manner by believers who are strongly rooted in their religion, far from weakening their faith it reinforces it. It gives insights of mutual benefit, illuminating more deeply aspects of the teachings and also contributing new light on aspects of those secular disciplines.

The Need To Acquire Education

I wanted, before I leave education, to draw your attention to the strength of the Guardian's admonitions to us on the acquisition of education. I can do this no more effectively by reading to you a statement of the Guardian which I find quite astonishing. He says: "It is just as important for Bahá'í young boys and girls to become properly educated in colleges of high standing as it is to be spiritually developed. The mental, as well as the spiritual side of the youth has to be developed before he can serve the Cause efficiently⁹." There is a wealth of information in that passage which is not gained by reading it so quickly. Its first sentence almost borders on heresy! Here is the Guardian of the Cause, no less, saying it is just as important—*just as important*—for Bahá'í young boys and girls to become properly educated in colleges of high standing as it is to be spiritually developed. It's an incredible statement, and you can't say, "Well that was what he said on that day to that particular person." There is a generality to the statement, and it's reinforced by many other statements we have in the letters of the Guardian. And then of course the second sentence is equally significant. "The mental, as well as the spiritual side of the youth has to be developed before he can serve the Cause efficiently." We can all serve the Cause. We are all trying one way or the other. To do it efficiently is something

else, and the Guardian here is pointing to the balance between the intellectual or mental development and the spiritual development in order that this efficiency may come into being.

BAHÁ'Í SCHOLARSHIP

Questions of Concern

The next subject I want to address briefly is the subject of scholarship, and this can be brief because a lot of things have been said and a lot of things have been clarified in recent years. However, there are some issues that have come up in recent months and years that I have become aware of in my present functioning as a member of the House of Justice. These are some of the questions I notice believers are asking. Firstly, should faithful believers persist in intellectual inquiry and scholarship when it has attracted such controversy and questioning of provisions of the Covenant. I think we all know that there has been this controversy on the Internet and various other places, occasionally intruding into some of the letters of the House of Justice, of individuals who are purported to be part of the scholarly Bahá'í community and are questioning the Covenant and raising all sorts of issues and probably saying some very nasty things about some of us. And so one raises the question "Is it not better to stay away from the whole thing for a few years until it all calms down?" because "I don't want it be a source of controversy and contention. Maybe this is not a good time to go into Bahá'í scholarly activity."

Another question is: "Is it not self-indulgent or irrelevant to engage in Bahá'í scholarship when there is so much emphasis on advancing the process of entry by troops and the core activities of the Plan. And thirdly, "How can unquestioned faith in the validity of the teachings be reconciled with the inquiry and investigation that's part of scholarly activity?"

These are questions I notice, that have been raised by very, very sincere believers. They are questions that are unequivocally answered by the authoritative Bahá'í writings of recent years and particularly with the authority of the House of Justice.

The Need for Scholarship

The Faith has, without any equivocation, emphasized the continuing need for Bahá'í scholarly activity. Again and again we have passages from the Guardian, and from the House of Justice which say, without hesitation: we want more Bahá'ís to be engaged in scholarly activity. Don't hold back. Don't run away. Don't feel afraid that it will disturb your adherence to the Covenant or that you will be a source of headache and difficulty and nuisance to the Bahá'í community. Go for it. Be part of the Bahá'í scholarly community.

The House of Justice has said in a recent letter—or a letter written on its behalf by its secretariat, “The Universal House of Justice regards Bahá'í scholarship as of great potential importance for the development and consolidation of the Bahá'í community as it emerges from obscurity.”¹⁰ That statement of the House of Justice is without qualification, and it does no more than reiterate statements made equally as strongly by the Guardian. So those who have some concerns should not do so. At the same time, obviously they should be smart and intelligent. They should make themselves strong in the Covenant. They should become steadfast believers in the Cause. They should immerse themselves deeply in the provisions of the Covenant—understand it at a deep fundamental level so nothing can shake them and the nasty statements that sometimes appear on the Internet will not be a source of spiritual disturbance to them.

Relationship to Core Activities of the Five Year Plan

The second question of self-indulgence in relation to the core activities, I think I have referred to and I will refer to again presently. Certainly it is not self-indulgent, we do need Bahá'í scholarly activity just as we need the priority to the core activities of the Plan. It is not either/or, it is both, together. It rests upon recognition of the distinction between priority and exclusivity, as I have mentioned earlier it is also founded on recognition of the need to continually enrich Bahá'í community life, intellectually as well as spiritually.

Faith and the Rational Process

The third question of unquestioned faith in the validity of the teachings reconciled with inquiry and investigation is again addressed in the Writings of the Faith: the pre-eminence of the authority of Bahá'u'lláh together with the use of the rational process to explore and to acquire deeper insight. The Writings, and particularly more recently the statements of the House of Justice, have emphasized—and this has been taken from a very long letter addressed to this North American Association for Bahá'í Studies, so I don't need to dwell on it too much – the House of Justice addressing this Association has said, amongst other things, that “no attempt should be made to define too narrowly the form that Bahá'í scholarship should take.”¹¹ There are all kinds of people and they should be encouraged to do all kind of things. The House has called for the mutual respect and tolerance and that Bahá'í scholarship should embrace those whose principal interest is in theological issues as well as those whose interest lies in relating the Faith to the contemporary thought in the arts and sciences: again, all, together rather than either/or.

Certainly the Guardian has referred to the need to correlate the teachings to the current thought in various disciplines. That's certainly true. It does not allow us then to denigrate the activities of those who carry out important activities of a more theological nature, or even of a more abstract nature. All, together; mutually supportive, rather than “Why are you doing that instead of this?” or “That's unimportant and this is important”.

I remember many years ago I was exposed to an iniquitous subject called projective geometry, Counsellor Aghdasi made some reference in his talk yesterday to something called non-Euclidian geometries, and this was one of the non-Euclidian geometries resting upon a series of axioms, none of which made sense. For example, one of the axioms of projective geometry is that parallel lines meet at a point called syzygy (which is an interesting word without any vowels in it). I reluctantly exposed myself to projective geometry, I struggled with it and eventually I decided that I needed to acquire insight into it. Lo and behold, after many hundreds of years of the development of projective geometry, down through the Middle Ages, it turns out to be of vital importance in certain areas of astrophysics, relativity and radio astronomy. So we have to

be very, very careful of condemnation of anything of a scholarly nature as being of no practical value.

GLOBAL CIVILIZATION

Finally, let me move on to saying a few words about global civilization. You might well enquire, “why is it being mentioned essentially in the same breath as education and scholarship?” Our Writings indicate that there is a sequence to the development of the World Order in the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh: the establishment of the Lesser Peace that we’re working towards. We have the unity of nations, we are engaged in the process of evolution of the Lesser Peace, this will lead to the emergence of a new World Order, and the establishment of the Most Great Peace; and the Guardian says, then will a world civilization be born and flourish. That’s a long way down the road: even the youngest of us will be an old fossil by that time. So why are we concerned with global civilization at this time? We do so are because of an intriguing statement of Shoghi Effendi where he refers, in *The Promised Day Is Come*, to the administrative order of the Faith and he says “Within this administrative structure an embryonic civilization, incomparable and world-embracing, is imperceptibly maturing.”¹² The world civilization is off into the future but its embryo is within the present Administrative Order and, therefore, it is both legitimate and important that we give some thought to it in this context. In order to foster this global civilization there are three things that I want to recommend we do.

The first is a very obvious one: development of our spiritual attitudes. That’s the foundation of civilization, as I think Behrooz Sabet in his excellent presentation on *The Secret of Divine Civilization* yesterday afternoon referred to civilization described by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Certainly our spiritual attitude is foundation to that, our personal conduct, development of manners, courtesy, cleanliness, neatness of dress. That’s one aspect of global civilization we’re required to work on right now. The second one is the scholarship aspect. We need more Bahá’í scholarship in anything that you can possibly think of because that will enrich us as part of the development of the embryo of world civilization for the future. And, finally, and most controversially, I want to encourage all of us who are centred in scholarly activities not to neglect the core activities of the Plan. It doesn’t mean you need to become Superman or

Superwoman and work 25 or 26 hours a day. What I'm saying is that those of us whose passion is scholarly activity should also be aware that scholarly activity relates very directly to the core activities.

How does it relate to the core activities? It does so because intrinsic to the core activities is the Bahá'í attempt to solve a problem which has defied the power of every religion for the past 6000 years. For 6000 years the followers of religion have tried and failed to break down the dichotomy between a few hyper-active, over-worked leaders and a mass of followers who are required to be passive, to follow orders, to sit there and be quiet and "Do what you're told". This is not what the Bahá'í Faith's about. The Bahá'í Faith is about an active community, of people who are actively involved at every level, in decision making, in creative thinking, in exploring the teachings. No such community has ever existed in the religious history of humanity and we need to establish it. If we don't, things will not work. The Administrative Order will not function. The Bahá'í electoral process will become ossified unless we solve this problem. If we do solve it, it will take us decades to attain our objective.

The core activities of the Five Year Plan, with the participatory element, with the lack of an authoritative guru to dictate the consultation of a study circle, represents a major commitment on the part of the Faith to break down the false dichotomy between the hyper-active leader and the hyper-passive congregation. And I think it is important that Bahá'ís of a scholarly orientation contribute to this, if for no other reason than it will result in a vast increase in the manpower of the Faith as a matrix from which will come the future scholars and the future scholarly endeavours. It is therefore a matter not only of the needs of the Cause; it is also a matter of basic self-interest. Those of us who are interested in the scholarly pursuits of the Faith, out of a matter of self-interest, our adherence, our support of the core activities of the Faith will produce the future generation of scholars, the new generation of intellectual activity, of fertility, of creative thought and innovation which will make the Bahá'í community alive, dynamic, full of energy and fresh thinking and contribute to the richness of the Cause.

Footnotes:

1. *Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith: Extracts from Letters Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice*, 1998 letter #1, 10 December 1992.
2. “Knowledge is one point, which the foolish have multiplied.” *Kitáb-i-Íqán*, Chicago: US Bahá'í Publishing Trust, p. 79.
3. Tarazat, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 39. Also in *Scholarship* (compilation) 1995, selection #1.
4. Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, selection # 97. *Scholarship*, selection #19.
5. Tajalliyát, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, p. 52. *Scholarship*, selection #2.
6. *Scholarship*, selection #34, 5 July 1949 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi 5 July 1949 to an individual.
7. *Scholarship*, selection #72, 9 November 1931 on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual.
8. *Scholarship*, selection #50, 19 October 1993 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual.
9. *Scholarship*, selection #31, 19 October 1993 on behalf of the Guardian to an individual.
10. *Scholarship*, selection #35, January 1979 on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an academic seminar.

11. Secretariat of the Universal House of Justice to the Association of Baha'i Studies - North America, 23 January 1991, cited in *Scholarship* (compilation), selection #14, 19 October 1993 letter to an individual; also cited in *Issues Related to the Study of the Bahá'í Faith: Extracts from Letters Written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice*

12. Shoghi Effendi 1941. *The Promised Day Is Come*, Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, p. 17