

A letter from Bahiyyih Khánum, the Greatest Holy Leaf, to the friends of the Lord and the hand-maids of the Merciful throughout the West, Haifa, 30 March, 1924

Beloved Friends:

It has been my share ever since the divine call to a better and nobler life was first sounded amid the cities of heedless and distracted Persia, to be a witness to the stirring and heart-rending events that form part of the annals of our dear Cause and that stain its pages throughout with innocent blood. The memory of that youthful and God-sent Herald, the Báb, who faced execution with nobility and heroism for the upliftment and true regeneration of mankind, lies vivid in our thoughts, and His blessed remains resting on the slope of Mount Carmel keep the recollection of His short but glorious life still more fresh.

The torture and ghastly deaths that the innumerable martyrs of the Cause so willingly chose unto themselves, and the manifestations of an unflinching faith and an undaunted fortitude that crowned the life of those blessed souls and that still lie untold to many, haunt me every day. The thought of our Lord Bahá'u'lláh brought up with the luxury known only to few, and yet choosing to spend many a month in a choking dungeon away from His kindred and loved ones, and then carried as a homeless exile until He was taken to the penal town of 'Akká and imprisoned there as a religious criminal, fills my heart at once with a deep affliction and an overpowering veneration. And the numberless ordeals and hardships, deprivations and torments that our dear Master 'Abdu'l-Bahá so patiently and quietly bore are vivid before my eyes.

After having witnessed all these painful events and after having passed through them all it was again my share and that of the holy mother and the holy leaves to suffer the bitter bereavement and cast all human bonds away that attached us to our Lord Bahá'u'lláh. The separation was too great for our feeble hearts and yet with His help and consolation we patiently bore it; but the effect of His last days on earth and of the bounties that He has showered on everyone of us had not yet been wiped away from our hearts when we were afflicted with another calamitous event so great for our frail and feeble frames that we thought we would surely succumb to a loss so much beyond our imagination.

The farewell days of our master 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His touching yet, mysterious goodbye to a family that had had its little share of His brimful cup of a life-long sacrifice and that had stood by Him in the darkest hours ever known; His excessive love for His zealous fellow-workers and followers in every country, and

His genuine yearning to see the Cause He adored on the highway of universal acceptance are all I think beyond human expression.

Let us then, affectionate brothers and sisters, ponder for a while upon the underlying reason that had made God's divine Messengers prefer a life of torture to one of ease, and those blessed martyrs, so many of them cut off in the springtime and promise of their youth, choose death with faces radiant with joy. What did the Báb sacrifice His promising youth for except out of a burning desire to have mankind live in unity and peace; and what was the spirit that animated those bold and heroic martyrs but love and adoration to a Cause they wished to triumph?

What made Bahá'u'lláh born and brought up in opulence, fling away all earthly possessions and choose upon himself unspeakable hardships and deprivation, save for an earnest appeal to the world at large to turn their hatred for one another into genuine love, and to make a world seething with blood a peaceful home for God's children; and why did 'Abdu'l-Bahá who could have chosen a life of ease and comfort, prefer to lead a crusade against the strongholds of human hearts and make a direct appeal to individuals as well as groups that unless we love one another with all our might and with all our heart we are absolutely doomed?

Their hatred for one another into genuine love and to make a world seething with blood a peaceful home for God's children, and why did 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who could have chosen a life of ease and comfort, prefer to lead a crusade against the strongholds of human hearts and make a direct appeal to individuals as well as groups that unless we love one another with all our might and with all our heart we are absolutely doomed.

He carried a crusade not with a sword of steel but with a sword of love and affection. And if we dare call ourselves Bahá'ís it simply means that we have to follow in their wake. It means that we must always have the public weal in mind and not give up ourselves wholly to our inclinations and desires, and it means that we must picture before us the perseverance and self-sacrifice of those early volunteers and make a whole-hearted effort to be like unto one of them; and it shall be only in this way that we can safeguard this great Cause of God.

This in brief, is what our beloved Guardian, Shoghi Effendi, is patiently and eagerly expecting from every single one of us. This, he says, should mark us from all other men and this should differentiate us from those to whom religion is something to believe in and not to inspire to action.

Our beloved Guardian was away in England when 'Abdu'l-Bahá's glorious life on earth was ended. The news of His departure was deeply felt by Shoghi Effendi, and to one who was so near and dear to the Master, this separation meant more than to many [others]. Weak in health and over-powered with grief he arrived in the holy land and the home wherein his Master lived was now deep in sorrow. And in those darkest hours of bereavement the life-long enemies of our Master, stirred by their idle imaginings, started their foretold and ill-fated activities.

This saddened Shoghi Effendi's heart very much and he decided to choose seclusion for some time. Away from his family and his friends all by himself, he thought over the problems that face the Bahá'í Movement today, through prayers he sought help from his Lord and Master and he decided upon the temporary organization that would safeguard the interests of the Cause and that would encourage the dear friends to spread this Message and to live the life it teaches. For many months he was thus away, when feeling encouraged by the firmness and perseverance of the friends throughout the world and over the happy way they proved the activities of God's enemies to be fruitless and of no avail, he returned back to the Holy Land fresh and hopeful and started helping and guiding us with a marvellous fervour and animation.

Finding that the individual letters were too many to answer in person and not wishing the progress of the Cause to be hampered by the slightest thing, he sacrificed sending his personal messages of love and encouragement to the individual friends and he expressed his heart-felt sentiments in general letters to Assemblies and countries.

The organization of the Assemblies was thus moving rapidly forward. The Cause was being spread in every country and Shoghi Effendi's heart the happiest for it all. Such were the conditions when he received to his utter astonishment letters that he noted showed lack of love and unity among the loved ones of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It grieved him very much to see some of those whom the Master so dearly loved, bear ill-feeling towards one another and through their lack of love and unity and through denial to follow the advice of their spiritual assemblies, relegate the whole standard of the Cause to a mere philosophy of life.

Such news had [a] great effect upon his tender heart and it reflected upon his physical health. Whereupon through the wish and desire of the friends then present in Haifa and through mine and the family's insisted appeal, he consented to take a rest during the hot summer season all the happy news that we had received from abroad and that we had forwarded to him so filled his blessed

heart again with encouragement and joy that upon his return from his summer rest he resumed his work with an astonishing zeal and activity.

His heart was joyful and in his evening meetings with the friends he always shared the news he had received from abroad and through his encouraging words he instilled such a fervor in every single one present that they all felt they would fly away and share in this noble task. Indeed his love for those earnest workers had grown so great that he had decided to make an effort and append to the answer of each letter a personal message in his own handwriting.

Again the unexpected took place and the news [received] from some centers that the spirit which 'Abdu'l-Baha said should characterize every Bahá'í community does not prevail and that many have belittled the guidance of the different spiritual assemblies. His heart was thus sore and depressed and he again decided to seek seclusion until the friends realized their great responsibilities and [to] make an effort toward real unity. I and the members of the holy family did all in our power to give him the happy news we had received from some countries and we begged him to change his decision but he said; "My heart is very sensitive to such things. Inasmuch as I am rejoiced when I hear of true love and fellowship among my brothers and sisters, in an equal measure if not more, I am grieved when I hear that such is not the case. It is quite true that every Bahá'í heart swells with love and adoration at the mention of the Báb, Bahá'u'lláh or the Master's name, and stands firm and true to the last Will of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and for that I am very thankful to them, but you agree with me that this alone cannot be the emblem of this world Cause. There should be love and sympathy among the individuals of every group and true affection for one another should be the stamp for their hearts.

Suppose a non-Bahá'í should ask us as to what should denote a Bahá'í and to differentiate him from everybody else, and were we to answer a hero-worship and adoration to the Center of the Cause that makes a Bahá'í willing to give up his life and property, he would be sure to answer you that that alone will not bring about the regeneration of the world.

That alone will not wipe out international hatred fostered for ages past, and will not solve the economic plight before which the world stands aghast today.

And were we to tell him that our religion proclaims certain principles that no one can challenge or deny, we would be told that principles alone are no proof of its effect either, and not until the Bahá'ís first translate these principles into their own everyday life and live according to the standard of the Cause they proclaim, will

they be qualified to invite the whole world to come and follow their teachings. It is when the Bahá'ís prove their religion by no greater argument but actions and deeds that we are sure to be promulgating the Cause and that men will come and willingly join our ranks." And [then] he said, "Many are carefully watching today the life and behavior of the Bahá'ís and many are trying to estimate the true value of the Bahá'í Movement and the effect that it shall have in the future through the ideas and self-sacrifice of its followers.

The friends must therefore be very careful to wipe out of their ranks all feeling of hatred or misunderstanding and to replace it by genuine love. Just as discord among the friends has deeply grieved me, in every manner will their unity and harmony fill my heart with joy and win over my life and strength to themselves. I shall now leave and when I see that the conditions have changed and that sincere affection is the reigning force in every Bahá'í community, I shall at once return and cooperate with them with my heart and soul. Send this message to all my friends abroad." After these touching remarks, two weeks ago he again left us to ourselves.

Now brothers and sisters remember what our Master 'Abdu'l-Bahá tells us in His last Will. Let us recollect the passage where He asks us not to do anything that will depress and grieve Shoghi Effendi or mar the shining brightness and radiance of his heart, but always to try to help him in raising this lofty edifice of world-brotherhood. May we not keep that always in our memory and strive forward toward a unity that shall not only win the heart of every non-Bahá'í, but shall to a larger and larger measure gladden our own and dear Guardian.

My days are numbered and my life is flying to a close and yet I feel certain that those dear ones abroad will accept this meager and humble appeal, and will make me cherish the hope that before I am called away and ready to separate in body from you, I can see genuine love and unity prevail among those my Master so dearly loved and I can witness with human eyes my Guardian's heart overflow with joy. This is what I beseech you and may it be fully realized.

Your sister and fellow-worker,

(sealed) Bahíyyih