

Riḍván 2014

To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly loved Friends,

A full three years have passed since the inception of the current stage in the unfoldment of the Divine Plan, an undertaking that binds together the followers of Bahá'u'lláh in one united spiritual endeavour. Just two years separate the friends of God from its fixed conclusion. The two essential movements which continue to propel the process of growth—the steady flow of participants through the sequence of training institute courses and the movement of clusters along a continuum of development—have both been immensely reinforced by the outpouring of energy released at the youth conferences held last year. The expanded capacity the Bahá'í world has acquired for mobilizing large numbers of young people in the field of service can now yield further fruit. For in the time that remains, the critical tasks of strengthening existing programmes of growth and beginning new ones urgently beckon. The community of the Greatest Name is well positioned, before the expiration of this period, to add to the clusters where such programmes have already emerged the two thousand that remain of the goal.

How glad we are to see that this endeavour is being vigorously advanced across the far-flung regions of the globe, and in a diversity of circumstances and settings, in clusters already numbering some three thousand. Many clusters are at a point where momentum is being generated through the implementation of a few simple lines of action. In others, after successive cycles of activity, the number of individuals taking initiative within the framework of the Plan has increased and the pitch of activity intensified; as the quality of the process of spiritual education is enhanced through experience, souls are more readily attracted to participate in it. From time to time, there may be a lull in activity or an obstacle to the way forward; searching consultation on the reasons for the impasse, combined with patience, courage, and perseverance, enables momentum to be regained. In more and more clusters, the programme of growth is increasing in scope and complexity, commensurate with the rising capacity of the Plan's three protagonists—the individual, the community, and the institutions of the Faith—to create a mutually supportive environment. And we are delighted that, as anticipated, there are a growing number of clusters where a hundred or more individuals are now facilitating the engagement of a thousand or more in weaving a pattern of life, spiritual, dynamic, transformative. Underlying the process even from the start is, of course, a collective movement towards the vision of material and spiritual prosperity set forth by Him Who is the Lifegiver of the World. But when such large numbers are involved, the movement of an entire population becomes discernible.

This movement is especially in evidence in those clusters where a local *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár* is to be established. One such, by way of example, is in Vanuatu. The friends who reside on the island of Tanna have made a supreme effort to raise consciousness of

the planned House of Worship, and have already engaged no less than a third of the island's 30,000 inhabitants in an expanding conversation about its significance in a variety of ways. The ability to sustain an elevated conversation among so many people has been refined through years of experience sharing the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh and extending the reach of a vibrant training institute. Junior youth groups on the island are particularly thriving, urged on by the support of village chiefs who see how the participants are spiritually empowered. Encouraged by the unity and dedication that exist among them, these young people have not only dispelled the languor of passivity in themselves but have, through various practical projects, found means to work for the betterment of their community, and as a result, those of all ages, not least their own parents, have been galvanized into constructive action. Among the believers and the wider society, the bounty of being able to turn to a Local Spiritual Assembly for guidance and for the resolution of difficult situations is being recognized, and in turn, the decisions of the Spiritual Assemblies are increasingly characterized by wisdom and sensitivity. There is much here to indicate that, when the elements of the Plan's framework for action are combined into a coherent whole, the impact on a population can be profound. And it is against the background of ongoing expansion and consolidation—the thirtieth cycle of the intensive programme of growth has recently concluded—that the friends are actively exploring, with the rest of the island's inhabitants, what it means for a *Mashriqu'l-Adhkár*, a “collective centre for men's souls”, to be raised up in their midst. With the active support of traditional leaders, Tanna islanders have offered no less than a hundred design ideas for the Temple, demonstrating the extent to which the House of Worship has captured imaginations, and opening up enthralling prospects for the influence it is set to exert on the lives lived beneath its shade.

This heartening account has its counterpart in numerous advanced clusters where the implications of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings are being brought to bear on the conditions of life in neighbourhoods and villages. In each, a people, increasingly aware of the Person of Bahá'u'lláh, is learning, through reflection on experience, consultation, and study, how to act on the truths enshrined in His Revelation, such that the widening circle of spiritual kindred is ever more closely bound together by ties of collective worship and service.

In many ways, the communities that have progressed furthest are tracing an inviting path for others to follow. Yet whatever the level of activity in a cluster, it is the capacity for learning among the local friends, within a common framework, that fosters progress along the path of development. Everyone has a share in this enterprise; the contribution of each serves to enrich the whole. The most dynamic clusters are those in which, irrespective of the resources the community possesses or the number of activities being undertaken, the friends appreciate that their task is to identify what is required for progress to occur—the nascent capacity that must be nurtured, the new skill that must be acquired, the initiators of a fledgling effort who must be accompanied, the space for reflection that must be cultivated, the collective endeavour that must be coordinated—and then find creative ways in which the necessary time and resources can be made available to achieve it. The very fact that each set of circumstances presents its own challenges is enabling every community not simply to benefit from what is being learned in the rest of the Bahá'í world but also to add to that body of knowledge. Awareness of this reality frees one from the fruitless search for a rigid formula for action while still allowing the insights gleaned in diverse settings to inform the process of growth as it takes a particular shape in one's own surroundings. This entire approach is completely at odds with narrow conceptions

of “success” and “failure” that breed freneticism or paralyse volition. Detachment is needed. When effort is expended wholly for the sake of God then all that occurs belongs to Him and every victory won in His Name is an occasion to celebrate His praise.

So much in the Writings of our Faith describes the relationship between effort exerted and the heavenly aid vouchsafed in response: “If only ye exert the effort,” is the Master’s reassurance in one of His Tablets, “it is certain that these splendours will shine out, these clouds of mercy will shed down their rain, these life-giving winds will rise and blow, this sweet-smelling musk will be scattered far and wide.” In our frequent visits to the Holy Shrines, we earnestly entreat the Almighty on your behalf that He may sustain and strengthen you, that your endeavours to reach out to those yet unacquainted with the divine teachings and confirm them in His Cause may be richly blessed, and that your reliance on His limitless favours may be unwavering. Never are you absent from our prayers, and never will we cease remembering in our supplications your consecrated acts of faithfulness. As we contemplate the imperatives that lie before the followers of the Blessed Beauty over the next two years, the Master’s emphatic call to action is a spur to the spirit: “Tear asunder the veils, remove the obstacles, proffer the life-giving waters, and point out the path of salvation.”

*The Universal House of Justice*