

Extracts from letters written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

It should not be surprising to find that certain aspects of the Teachings of the Faith may not conform to one's personal understanding. "Weigh not the Book of God with such standards and sciences as are current amongst you, for the Book itself is the unerring Balance established amongst men," Bahá'u'lláh states. "In this most perfect Balance whatsoever the peoples and kindreds of the earth possess must be weighed, while the measure of its weight should be tested according to its own standard, did ye but know it." As you persevere in your efforts to resolve your concerns, you are encouraged to focus your attention principally on the proofs of the authority of Bahá'u'lláh. This process will be facilitated through prayer, study of the Writings, participation in Bahá'í community life, and identification of preconceived ideas which are derived from the standards and theories of current society. As the years go by and humanity's understanding of the spiritual nature of the human being grows and develops, its view of many of the issues that are a cause of much uncertainty and contention today can be expected to change.

(From a letter dated 22 December 2009 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

In contrast to many contemporary conceptions, the Bahá'í teachings maintain that a person must rise above certain material aspects of human nature to develop and manifest inherent spiritual qualities that characterize his or her true self. The Sacred Texts contain laws and exhortations that, in many instances, redirect or restrict behaviours that arise from impulses, tendencies, and desires, whether inborn or acquired. Some of these are physical, while others are emotional or psychological. Yet, whatever their origin, it is through their regulation and control that the higher, spiritual nature is able to predominate and flourish. Those who are not Bahá'ís may have no cause to take into account such considerations. A Bahá'í, however, cannot set aside the implications of these teachings and must endeavour to respond to the best of his or her ability, though it be little by little and day by day. In so doing, all believers face challenges, although the specific type or extent of a test may differ. They act with faith in Bahá'u'lláh's declaration, "Know assuredly that My commandments are the lamps of My loving providence among My servants, and the keys of My mercy for My creatures", and they respond to His call, "Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty."

(From a letter dated 22 April 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

The perspective presented in the Bahá'í writings departs sharply from the pattern of thought achieving ascendancy in many societies. Bahá'u'lláh states that the knowledge of God is revealed through His Manifestation, Who has an innate awareness of the human condition and the social order, and Whose purpose is to set forth such precepts as will effect a profound transformation in both the inner life and external conditions of humankind. "No man, however acute his perception," He affirms, "can ever hope to reach the heights which the wisdom and understanding of the Divine Physician have attained." 'Abdu'l-Bahá explains that the human being has two natures, the spiritual or higher nature and the material or lower nature, and that the purpose of life is to gain mastery over the limitations and promptings of one's material nature and to cultivate spiritual qualities and virtues—the attributes of the soul which constitute one's true and abiding identity. Worldly desire is not the essence of a human being, but a veil that obscures it. Adherence to the Teachings of the Divine Educator refines the character and develops the potentialities with which each person is endowed; it liberates the individual and society from lower inclinations that give rise to the ills that afflict humanity.

(From a letter dated 9 May 2014 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer)

The duty to obey the laws brought by Bahá'u'lláh for a new age, then, rests primarily on the individual believer. It lies at the heart of the relationship of the lover and the Beloved; “Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty,” is Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation. Yet what is expected in this connection is effort sustained by earnest desire, not instantaneous perfection. The qualities and habits of thought and action that characterize Bahá'í life are developed through daily exertion. “Bring thyself to account each day”, writes Bahá'u'lláh. “Let each morn be better than its eve”, He advises, “and each morrow richer than its yesterday.” The friends should not lose heart in their personal struggles to attain to the Divine standard, nor be seduced by the argument that, since mistakes will inevitably be made and perfection is impossible, it is futile to exert an effort. They are to steer clear of the pitfalls of hypocrisy, on the one hand—that is, saying one thing yet doing another—and heedlessness, on the other—that is, disregard for the laws, ignoring or explaining away the need to follow them. So too is paralysis engendered by guilt to be avoided; indeed, preoccupation with a particular moral failing can, at times, make it more challenging for it to be overcome.

What the friends need to remember in this respect is that, in their efforts to achieve personal growth and to uphold Bahá'í ideals, they are not isolated individuals, withstanding alone the onslaught of the forces of moral decay operating in society. They are members of a purposeful community, global in scope, pursuing a bold spiritual mission—working to establish a pattern of activity and administrative structures suited to a humanity entering its age of maturity. Giving shape to the community's efforts is a framework for action defined by the global Plans of the Faith. This framework promotes the transformation of the individual in conjunction with social transformation, as two inseparable processes. Specifically, the courses of the institute are intended to set the individual on a path in which qualities and attitudes, skills and abilities, are gradually acquired through service—service intended to quell the insistent self, helping to lift the individual out of its confines and placing him or her in a dynamic process of community building.

(From a letter dated 19 April 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to individual believers)