

work of the Faith in many lands.

It is indeed unfortunate that some newly-enrolled believers, due to their lack of knowledge about our all-comprehensive Faith, and in their desire to tread the path of least resistance and to silence the voice of their conscience, misconstrue the very fundamental principle of man's eternal life. Thus the gift of God entrusted to us to be used as a torch which casts its rays through the obscure paths of life is changed into a fire which consumes every fiber of our spiritual entity and allows nothing to survive, except the skeleton of our physical creation, destined to be transformed into dust.

I found to my utter grief that some Bahá'í families, though themselves active members of different Bahá'í communities, due to their grave misunderstanding of this fundamental principle, have not uttered even a word to their children about our eternal legacy--the glorious Faith. Unmindful of the consequences of this ignorance in all the hearts and minds of their dear ones, they act as if they belong to a secret society. There is not a single token of the Faith in their well-furnished houses. I even found some of them ashamed to mention their religious affiliation. Thus the Faith remains unknown to their children who, I am sure, will disperse from their homes never gazing at the immense horizon floodlit with the rising Sun of Truth.

When asked, the parents have invariably answered: "We want them to find it by themselves and investigate it independently."

Such answers brought so much sorrow to my heart that I could not find adequate words and expressions to pour out my feelings.

"To find it by themselves." What a false dictum. How will they find it? Through whom and from where, if not in their own homes, from their own parents' loving and vigilant directions? If we do not pity our children and throw them to the devouring waves of this turbulent ocean called "society," how do we expect others to pity them, hold their hands, save them and set them on the shores of safety and security?

If this is what we mean by "independent investigation," why do we then exert our utmost to arrange schools for them, register their names well ahead of time, even many years in advance for attendance universities? Why do we keep on urging them to attend all the classes at every period, encourage them to do better work and take pride in their daily advancement in what is called arts and sciences? Why do we not leave them free to find their own way to educational institutions and abandon them to their own choice, never asking them whether they spent their days in schools, or in bars and gambling houses?

For material education we surely urge our children to go into special training, require discipline, and we are vigilant to see that they will never lose any opportunity. But alas! In this, the most vital matter, which is like unto sunshine in all the aspects of the lives of our dear ones, and which insures their eternal happiness, we remain heedless, nonchalant and

carefree.

Should our intention be limited to raising ourselves from the distress of unbelief, doubt and scepticism to the condition of recognition, faith and certitude in the truth of the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh, when do reach this ultimate goal and recognize Him as the Divine Educator, then our journey ends. It means that thereafter every act of Bahá'u'lláh and every utterance revealed by Him will have to be accepted as the manifestation of truth; and the spirit of investigation will help the traveler who has embarked on this journey to discard the impurities of falsehood from the gems of truth and advance on this path until every member of his physical temple and even every hair will find tongues to proclaim the light of the faith ignited in his heart and soul.

But the journey is not ended. Having reached the station of faith, the traveler is at the shore of an endless and fathomless ocean of divine utterances. He has to plunge into it, not to examine the truth of every word, principle or precept. Nay, on the contrary, with a heart full of certitude and an attitude of utter humility and supplication the believer will meditate and pray and then seek to discover pearls of wisdom and will behold beauty and innumerable mysteries enshrined in every word.

The Object of all Knowledge

Before turning to the main subject of this letter, let us refer to the following two extracts from the immortal Narrative of Nabíl to refresh our memory of the glorious deeds of the heroes and saints of our beloved Cause. These illustrate the two aspects of the problem at hand will, I feel sure, shed much light on our research.

"As soon as the Call from Shíráz reached his ears, Hujjat deputed of his disciples, Mullá Iskandar, in whom he reposed the fullest confidence, to enquire into the whole matter and to report to him the result of his investigations. Utterly indifferent to the praise and censure of his countrymen, whose integrity he suspected and whose judgment he disdained, he sent his delegate to Shíráz with explicit instructions to conduct a minute and independent enquiry. Mullá Iskandar attained the presence of the Báb and felt immediately the regenerating power of His influence. He tarried forty days in Shíráz, during which time he imbibed the principles of the Faith and acquired, according to his capacity, a knowledge of the measure of its glory.

"With the approval of the Báb he returned to Zanján. He arrived at a time when all the leading `ulamás of the city had assembled in the presence of Hujjat. As soon as he appeared, Hujjat enquired whether he believes in, or rejected, the new Revelation. Mullá Iskandar submitted the writings of the Báb which he had brought with him, and asserted that he whatever should be the verdict of his master, the same would he deem it his obligation to follow. `What!' angrily exclaimed Hujjat. `But for the presence of this distinguished company, I would have chastised you severely. How dare

you consider matters of belief to be dependant upon the approbation or rejection of others?' Receiving from the hand of his messenger the copy of the Qayyúmu'l-Asmá', he, as soon as he had perused a page of that book, fell prostrate upon the ground and exclaimed: 'I bear witness that these words which I have read proceed from the same Source as that of the Qur'án. Whoso has recognized the truth of that sacred Book must needs testify to the Divine origin of these words, and must needs submit to the precepts inculcated by their Author. I take you, members of this assembly, as my witnesses: I pledge such allegiance to the Author of this Revelation that should He ever pronounce the night to be the day, and declare the sun to be a shadow, I would unreservedly submit to His judgment, and would regard His verdict as the voice of Truth. Whose denies Him, him will I regard as the repudiator of God Himself.' With these words he terminated the proceedings of that gathering." (The Dawn-Breakers, Nabíl's Narrative, pp. 178-179 (Bahá'í Publishing Committee, New York, 1932, 1953 edition.)

"It was in those days that his special envoy, Mashhadí Ahmad, whom he had confidentially despatched to Shíráz with a petition and gifts from him to the Báb, arrived at Zanján and delivered into his hands, while he was addressing his disciples, a sealed letter from his Beloved. In the Tablet he received, the Báb conferred upon him one of His own titles, that of Hujjat, and urged him to proclaim from the pulpit, without the least reservation, the fundamental teachings of His Faith. No sooner was he informed of the wishes of his Master than he declared his resolve to devote himself to the immediate enforcement of whatever injunction that Tablet contained. He immediately dismissed his disciples, bade them close their books, and declared his intention of discontinuing his courses of study. 'Of what profit,' he said, 'are study and research to those who have already found the Truth, and why strive after learning when He who is the Object of all knowledge is made manifest?'" (The Dawn-Breakers, pp. 532-533)

Every human temple, regardless of race, color, country or clime, is considered by Bahá'u'lláh as a mine in which God has, through His inscrutable wisdom and boundless love, deposited gems which are to be discovered, polished and cultured through the process of proper, divine, all-embracing education. These gems are the latent powers and talents with which every individual is endowed. When these powers and talents are discovered and correctly trained, the world of humanity will become the mirror of Heaven in which all divine perfections are gloriously reflected.

Divine Education--The Root of Knowledge

The vast subject of Bahá'í education has many ramifications stretching over all aspects of man's life, and our Bahá'í literature is replete with elucidations which reveal to our eyes the most obscure corners of the human soul. How lamentable that mankind stubbornly abandons these abundant divine bounties and chooses the path of disgrace and

perdition!

It is still more lamentable if those who believe in the Supreme Manifestation of God deprive themselves of following His loving advice. Until such time as we will have authorized classifications and translations of the holy texts, I shall limit myself in this letter to the references on parents' obligations toward their children.

We must first know that there is a vast difference between education, in the sense of character training, and instruction. The beloved Master has emphasized that education must always have priority over mere accumulation of knowledge. To know many facts, to memorize numerous formulae and to repeat parrot-like theories of science is not honor for man. True honor lies in man's education and moral conduct which enable him to be the mirror of divine perfections and shine like unto a guiding star, ready to die rather than to apply his knowledge for the destruction of mankind.

It is toward this ultimate goal that we are encouraged to advance. Divine education is considered by Bahá'u'lláh to rank as "the most exalted" amongst His commandments and is a "great protection" for the Cause of God. Educational institutions must first instill divine laws and precepts in the hearts and minds of children. Thus the children grow up to worship God and to love one another as His sons and daughters. Immediately after giving us this commandment, Bahá'u'lláh warns us against excess of any system which, individually or collectively, inculcates prejudice and intolerance in the innocent hearts of our children.

Parental Responsibility

Let us take a lesson from nature. When a mother conceives, nature creates a certain condition in her physical temple which forms the growing fetus. In that proper atmosphere the physical growth of the child starts. The parents, though intensely eager to behold the face of their little ones, never force its birth. On the contrary, they patiently await the approach of the hour appointed by providence and keep every other thing in perfect harmony with the natural process. When that blessed moment comes through the operation of natural forces, the children are born into this immense world.

Now let us apply the same rule to the second home of the child into which it is introduced through its physical birth.

By divine education at home we mean the creation of an atmosphere in which the child can breathe the spiritual powers of this Age, and in due time like unto a rose, may blossom out, unfold, and proclaim his existence in the garden of God under the care and protection of the Divine Gardener. This cannot be achieved by force or by any form of compulsion, just as the child's birth cannot be realized by outside forces. We never try to pull the flower out of its stem in winter. The flowers will adorn the stems in due time, according to rules and regulations especially conferred upon the plants by the Creator.

Let us illustrate this by giving an example. The children who grow up in

houses where the music of Mozart or Beethoven is often played surely grow to enjoy that kind of music. This is achieved because the atmosphere of the house was filled with such melodies. The child has breathed them in. As a matter of fact this united aim becomes a focus which brings parents very close to each other.

Should the parents read the Writings each morning and evening as commanded by the Ancient Beauty; hold firesides in their homes where they show love, respect and reverence to the people regardless of race, class and creed; recite the obligatory prayers; fast; attend the Nineteen Day Feasts; celebrate the nine Holy Days; and in all of these commemorations have the children comprehend the importance and significance of each act, then there remains nothing for the parents to fear. They will proudly watch the growing flowers in their own homes. Thus the spirit of the Cause will fill every layer in the atmosphere of the house. The warmth and light of this divine love emanated from such a home will definitely help the little ones to grow into fruitful trees in the Garden of God, and in due course they will proclaim not only by their words but also by the sanctity of their deeds that they are gathered under the banner of the Greatest Name; committed to be soldiers in the army of life, winning victories in the forefront of the battle lines of teaching, consolidation and pioneering fields of service.

Our Writings further indicate that expectant mothers are advised to recite the words of God to foster the spiritual growth of the conceived children. After the birth of the child, the mother is exhorted to say prayers as she puts her dear ones to bed. The influence of these words on the infants' hearts has been described as the influence of the light and the heat of sunshine on the growing flowers. As the children grow, the parents are called on to teach them the Words of God. At the age of five they are to be gathered together to receive divine education. We clearly observe that education is emphasized and is given the first rank in the order of importance. It is explicitly recommended to first teach the children courtesy and reverence, after which comes the acquisition of knowledge.

Need for Early Spiritual Training

Knowledge must go hand in hand with divine education, otherwise man's learning will be governed by greed and lust. These qualities will change science into a disgrace and bring about the eternal destruction of all man's achievements. `Abdu'l-Bahá, in His love for children, begs the friends to do their utmost to give proper Bahá'í education to their dear ones so they may understand the importance of the practice of its precepts in their lives. He promises that the children trained in the divine gardens of love and in homes imbued with the Bahá'í spirit will learn in one month what others will learn in twelve. He urges the parents to be diligent in directing the frail steps of their little ones to the path of eternal glory. All of this should be done with tender affection, loving care and kindness. He warns us against beating the children and making them the victims of tongue lashings and rebukes. Experience shows that such treatment is detrimental to the proper

growth of the child's mental, spiritual and even his physical powers; it dams the opening and inflow of his latent powers. In addition, he grows to hate his home and all that pertains to it.

We must always remember this fundamental principle of the Master affirming that education of the child who is more than fifteen is extremely difficult and, in some cases, impossible. Can we straighten a branch when it has become hard and stiff? Such children, we are warned by the Master, will be left in the abyss of misery, the victims of inequity, arrogance, pride and ignorance, and very often of mental deficiencies. They will be despised and humiliated, sick and invalid and forever ashamed of themselves. They will barely pass the tests of life.

What will they think of their parents who had the torch of guidance and did not try to show it to their loved ones?

Parents who thus reduce their offspring to such depths of misery through their negligence will surely be responsible to God. We are emphatically warned by the Ancient Beauty that He will charge the parents with this negligence and will consider this as a great sin--a sin which will never be forgiven.

The injunction of Bahá'u'lláh to parents about the divine education of their children is so emphatic that, as pointed out by Him, those who ignore such a responsibility are, in the sight of God, deprived of their rights of parenthood.

I appeal to the hearts of the parents who desire nothing but the welfare of their children, the apples of their eyes, or, as the Arabs say, "the fragments of their hearts which walk on earth." I supplicate them to ponder upon the conditions prevailing in the world and find out for themselves whether children need protection or whether they should be left to themselves and to the cruel influence of life.

That the world is too much with us and that society is overcome by many social diseases no sound mind can ever deny. Pollution has penetrated into all the pores of man's existence and the swamps of moral corruption have flooded the farthest and driest deserts and the most remote corners of every barren waste. Carnal desires and animal passions are unleashed and all aim to be gratified. Gratification of this beast of lust is to be fulfilled by all means--at the risk of breaking every sacred standard in man's life. To accede to the desires of self has become a universal verdict.

Plunged into this overtly immoral world, where the raging beast of lust is the domineering monarch, caught in the throes of its devilish machinations, unable to separate the diabolical from the divine, and almost insensible to benevolent love, pity and reverence, our children, our poor children, find themselves engulfed by their own urges within and hypnotized by their dazzling and alluring lights. Don't they need lamps at their feet, an inherent and powerful force to enable them to live as true men, to walk with celestial pride and to lead a clean, a holy and pure life as a prelude to the eternal one?

Protection of Bahá'u'lláh's Teachings

Whatever the explanation the world may give and however it justifies its present plight, it is crystal clear to the adherents of our Faith that the road projected by Bahá'u'lláh through this world enveloped in darkness is illumined by the protective measures of His teachings.

The unpardonable forgetfulness and negligence of parents in their attitude toward their children are the result of wrong deductions and will ultimately bring the children to the abyss of disgrace and shame, and in the life to come will hold them subject to God's justice.

If we live in a house without a lamp, the consequences of unseen troubles and even disasters will no doubt await us. If we do not ignite the fire of faith in the hearts of our little ones, the decline of their mental, physical and spiritual lives will immediately set in. Where there is light everything is properly placed and clearly seen; and the residents of the house can use everything with proper perspective. The same thing is true of the light of faith when ignited in the hearts and souls of children. Then all their God-given gifts, talents and capacities will function harmoniously and efficiently.

As the immense horizon of life stretches in front of our children's eyes, we see them torn between two forces. The one pulls them down to the point where all their pleasures turn into agony, and the other, symbolized by a voice within them, which seeks to lift them to summits of splendors where even death is changed into glory and eternity. Look at them with their expectant, innocent and bewildered eyes, undecided amidst the controversial and devouring forces of life. Do we sit comfortably in our seats as Roman spectators and watch human lives thrown into the mouths of beasts? Or, as honest parents, do we help them, guide them, and assist them to raise their eyes and behold the rising Sun of Glory?

Backbiting Quenches the Spirit

From my experience I know of one calamity which pitilessly brings gradual death to the growing spirit of our children. This disaster is very often an undesired guest, but alas, sometimes is invited, given the best seats--our hearts--and is offered the sweetest moments of our precious lives. It is like the freezing breeze of midwinter which passes through almond groves, kills the blossoms and leaves the poor farmers who were comfortably settled in their warm rooms, poverty-stricken and sorrowful.

This hideous intruder is backbiting. No matter how much we endeavor to bring up our children in the spirit of the Faith, to teach them its laws, principles and precepts, if there is the slightest whisper of backbiting in our homes, let us be sure that our dear little ones are gone forever and irretrievably lost.

The perilous effects are so imperceptible that one's own ego is not warned and the parents are not alerted to the symptoms of the spreading spiritual ailment.

One of the old teachers of the Cause used to say that we try to pull a very heavy load to the top story of the house, and when the load is up, an ignorant man applies the sharp edge of his knife to the rope carrying the load. The downfall is sure. All the efforts of the many laborers who pulled the load are lost forever and in one instant. The same thing is true of the poisonous atmosphere created by this hideous guest in our own abode.

We think the children are playing with their toys and are not paying attention to what we are saying. It may be true that they do not consciously respond to the conversation of their elders, but their eyes see and their ears hear and register things within.

The children's hearts and souls are like clean mirrors or containers of pure, crystal and translucent water. Every word uttered by us against other friends, like a drop of ink, sinks deep into the transparent hearts. At the beginning, the color may not seem to have changed, but we know that it is absorbed with all its poisonous effects. Should the drops of the poison be repeated, the child's whole existence becomes victim to a spiritual disease, the first symptoms of which are his reluctance to attend Bahá'í classes, his grudges, and even sometimes his hatred, toward other Bahá'ís.

What do we expect our children to do when we as elders sit in our homes and talk against our fellow Bahá'ís, members of committees and local Spiritual Assemblies, and perhaps the secretary or a member of the National Assembly? The children look up to these divine institutions and we lower them to the dust in their growing minds and loving hearts. Then when they are of age, they do not feel any sense of security and safety in the friends' homes, nor do they trust Bahá'í committees, local Spiritual Assemblies or the National Spiritual Assembly. That is why, when we ask them to attend classes or summer schools, their reaction is obviously antagonistic. It is exactly as if we paralyze the child and then ask him to run, or starve him and then demand the performance of athletic feats.

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