

Naw Rúz 1974: Baha'i Era 131

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To the Bahá'ís of the World

Dearly-loved Friends,

A span of eighteen years separates us from the centenary of Bahá'u'lláh's Ascension and the unveiling of His Almighty Covenant. The fortunes of humanity in that period no man can foretell. We can, however, confidently predict that the Cause of God, impelled by the mighty forces of life within it, must go on from strength to strength, increasing in size and developing greater and greater powers for the accomplishment of God's purpose on earth.

The abundant evidences of Divine confirmation which have rewarded the strenuous and dedicated efforts of the Bahá'í community during the past decade are apparent throughout the earth and give incontrovertible assurance of its capacity to win the good pleasure of Bahá'u'lláh and answer every call made upon it in His service.

The Five Year Plan to which this community is now summoned is the

opening campaign of these critical years. It is the third global plan embarked upon by the Army of Light in its implementation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, that world-encompassing programme disclosed in His perspicuous Tablets and described by the Guardian of the Cause of God as the Charter for the propagation of the Faith throughout the world. It was the Guardian himself, the beloved "sign of God", who, through his exposition and interpretation of the Revelation, through his discipline and education of the Bahá'í community and through a series of national plans assigned to the various units of that community, forged the Administrative Order of the Faith and made it an instrument for the carrying out of this great Charter, and he himself designed and launched the first global plan, the unique, brilliant and spiritually glorious Ten Year Crusade. The victories of that crusade implanted the banner of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the planet and the following Nine Year Plan reinforced and extended the bastions of the Faith and raised the number of National Spiritual Assemblies the - supporting pillars of the Universal House of Justice -- to one hundred and thirteen, a number increased to one hundred and fifteen by the formation at this Ridvan of the National Spiritual Assemblies of Hong Kong and South East Arabia.

This Five Year Plan has three major objectives: preservation and consolidation of the victories won; a vast and widespread expansion of the Bahá'í community; development of the distinctive character of Bahá'í life particularly in the local communities. The achievement of these overall aims requires the accomplishment of particular tasks at the World Centre of the Faith, and by national and local communities.

At the World Centre work will continue on the collation and classification of the Sacred Texts; authorized translations of three compilations of Scripture will be made and published, namely, Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh revealed after the "Kitab-Aqdas", prayers and extracts from the Writings of the Bab, greatly augmenting the fragments of His Utterance now available in the West, and of the Master's works comprising a wide selection from the vast range of subjects illumined by His Divine wisdom; construction will begin on the building on Mount Carmel to serve as the seat of the Universal House of Justice and it is hoped to complete it during the Five Year Plan; further extension and beautification of the gardens and lands surrounding the Holy Places will take place; strengthening of the relationship between the Bahá'í International Community and the United Nations will continue; and efforts will be constantly made to protect the Faith from persecution and to free it from the restraints imposed by religious orthodoxy.

In the international sphere the erection of two Mashriqu'l-Adhkars one - in India and one in Samoa -- will be initiated; eight International Teaching Conferences will be held during the middle part of the Five Year Plan; two for the Arctic, one in Anchorage and one in Helsinki during July 1976, one in Paris in August 1976, one in Nairobi in October 1976, one in Hong Kong in November 1976, one in Auckland and one in Bahia, Brazil in January 1977 and one in Mérida, Mexico in February 1977.

Sixteen new National Spiritual Assemblies will be formed, namely the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahamas, Burundi, Cyprus, the French Antilles, Greece, Jordan, Mali, Mauritania, the New Hebrides, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Surinam and French Guiana, Togo, and Upper Volta; their national Haziratu'l-Quds, Temple sites and endowments must be acquired; the dissemination of news and messages, so vital to the knowledge, encouragement and unity of the Bahá'í community, must be made efficient and rapid, and in anticipation of a vast expansion in the number of believers, of Local Spiritual Assemblies and of localities where Bahá'ís reside a coordinated programme of translating and publishing Bahá'í literature with the eventual aim of providing the Sacred Text and the teachings of the Faith to all mankind is to be developed -- a programme which will include the founding of six Bahá'í Publishing Trusts and the continued subvention of Bahá'í literature, 409 inter-Assembly assistance projects are scheduled and, at the outset of the Plan, 557 pioneers are called for.

One of the distinguishing features of the Cause of God is its principle of non-acceptance of financial contributions for its own purposes from non-Bahá'ís; support of the Bahá'í Fund is a bounty reserved by Bahá'u'lláh to His declared followers. This bounty imposes full responsibility for financial support of the Faith on the believers alone, every one of whom is called upon to do his utmost to ensure that the constant and liberal outpouring of means is maintained and increased to meet the growing needs of the Cause. Many Bahá'í communities are at present dependent on outside help, and for them the aim must be to become self-supporting, confident that the Generous Lord will, as their efforts increase, eventually enable them to offer for the progress of His Faith material wealth as well as their devotion, their energy and love.

The proclamation of the Faith, following established plans and aiming to use on an increasing scale the facilities of mass communication must be vigorously pursued. It should be remembered that the purpose of proclamation is to make known to all mankind the fact and general aim of the new Revelation, while teaching programmes should be planned to confirm individuals from every stratum of society.

The vast reservoir of spiritual energy, zeal and idealism resident in Bahá'í youth, which so effectively contributed to the success of the Nine Year Plan, must be directed and lavishly spent for the proclamation, teaching, and consolidation of the Cause. Spiritual Assemblies are urged to provide consultation and the offer of guidance to Bahá'í youth who seek to plan their lives in such a way as to be of utmost service to the Cause of God.

The education of children in the teachings of the Faith must be regarded as an essential obligation of every Bahá'í parent, every local and national community and it must become a firmly established Bahá'í activity during the course of the Plan. It should include moral instruction by word and example and active participation by children in Bahá'í community life.

This Five Year Plan must witness the development in the world-wide Bahá'í community of distinctive Bahá'í characteristics implanted in it by Bahá'u'lláh Himself. Unity of mankind is the pivotal principle of His Revelation; Bahá'í communities must therefore become renowned for their demonstration of this unity. In a world becoming daily more divided by factionalism and group interests, the Bahá'í community must be distinguished by the concord and harmony of its relationships. The coming of age of the human race must be foreshadowed by the mature, responsible understanding of human problems and the wise administration of their affairs by these same Bahá'í communities. The practice and development of such Bahá'í characteristics are the responsibility alike of individual Bahá'ís and administrative institutions, although the greatest opportunity to foster their growth rests with the Local Spiritual Assemblies.

The divinely ordained institution of the Local Spiritual Assembly operates at the first levels of human society and is the basic administrative unit of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order. It is concerned with individuals and families whom it must constantly encourage to unite in a distinctive Bahá'í society, vitalized and guarded by the laws, ordinances and principles of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. It protects the Cause of God; it acts as the loving shepherd of the Bahá'í flock.

Strengthening and development of Local Spiritual Assemblies is a vital objective of the Five Year Plan. Success in this one goal will greatly enrich the quality of Bahá'í life, will heighten the capacity of the Faith to deal with entry by troops which is even now taking place and, above all, will demonstrate the solidarity and ever-growing distinctiveness of the Bahá'í community, thereby attracting more and more thoughtful souls to the Faith and offering a refuge to the leaderless and hapless millions of the spiritually bankrupt, moribund present order.

"These Spiritual Assemblies", wrote 'Abdu'l-Bahá, "are aided by the Spirit of God. Their defender is 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Over them He spreadeth His Wings. What bounty is there greater than this?" Likewise, "These Spiritual Assemblies are shining lamps and heavenly gardens, from which the fragrances of holiness are diffused over all regions, and the lights of knowledge are spread abroad over all created things. From them the spirit of life streameth in every direction. They, indeed, are the potent sources of the progress of man, at all times and under all conditions."

During the Five Year Plan Local Spiritual Assemblies which are being formed for the first time are to be formed whenever there are nine or more adult believers in the relevant area; thereafter they must be elected or declared at Ridvan. National Spiritual Assemblies are called upon to assign, and encourage the Local Spiritual Assemblies to adopt, goals within the overall framework of the Five Year Plan, to consult with them and to assist them to make great efforts to gradually assume their proper function and responsibilities in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The friends are called upon to give their whole-hearted support and cooperation to the Local Spiritual

Assembly, first by voting for the membership and then by energetically pursuing its plans and programmes, by turning to it in time of trouble or difficulty, by praying for its success and taking delight in its rise to influence and honour. This great prize, this gift of God within each community must be cherished, nurtured, loved, assisted, obeyed and prayed for.

Such a firmly founded, busy and happy community life as is envisioned when Local Spiritual Assemblies are truly effective, will provide a firm home foundation from which the friends may derive courage and strength and loving support in bearing the Divine Message to their fellow-men and conforming their lives to its benevolent rule.

The deeds and programmes, all these multifarious world-wide activities to which you are summoned have but one aim -- the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth. At every stage of this process and at all levels of Bahá'í responsibility, whether individual, local or national, you will be encouraged, advised and assisted by the divinely ordained institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, an institution powerfully reinforced by the successful establishment of the International Teaching Centre. Through the emergence of this Centre the seal has been set on the accomplishment of the goal, announced nearly ten years ago, of ensuring the extension into the future of the specific functions of protection and propagation conferred upon the Hands of the Cause in the Sacred Text. Through the work of the International Teaching Centre, which supervises and coordinates the work of the Boards of Counsellors around the world, the love, the guidance, the assistance of the Hands, through the Boards of Counsellors, their Auxiliary Board members and their assistants, permeates the entire structure of Bahá'í society.

The Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic world commonwealth have indeed assured to that growing community, the care for its welfare, for the development of its character, for its spiritual encouragement which are among the duties of their high office.

As the old order gives way to the new, the changes which must take place in human affairs are such as to stagger the imagination. This is the opportunity for the hosts of the Lord. Undismayed and undeterred by the wreckage of "long-cherished ideals and time-honoured institutions", now being "swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines", the world community of Bahá'ís must surge forward eagerly, and with ever-increasing energy, to build those new, God-given institutions from which will be diffused the light of the holy principles and teachings sent down by God in this day for the salvation of all mankind.