

BAHÁ'Í JOURNAL

Published by

NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSEMBLY OF THE BAHÁ'ÍS OF THE BRITISH ISLES

46 BLOOMSBURY STREET, LONDON, W.C.1

No. 26

NOVEMBER, 1940

MESSAGE FROM THE GUARDIAN

"Anxious welfare English believers praying protection, cable assurance, deepest love, Shoghi Rabbani."

This cable was received a few days ago, and it was with grateful hearts that we were able to reply: "Friends safe assured continuing teaching deepest love."

Dear Friends.—How warming and encouraging it is to know that our Guardian is praying at the Holy Shrines for our protection, that his thoughts turn towards us in this time of peril. We assuredly, turn to him for guidance and leadership, and remember ever the words of the Master in His Will and Testament. "O ye the faithful loved ones of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! It is incumbent you to take the greatest care of Shoghi Effendi, the twig that hath branched from the fruit given forth by the two hallowed and Divine Lote-Trees, that no dust of despondency and sorrow may stain his radiant nature, that day by day he may wax greater in happiness, in joy and spirituality, and may grow to become even as a fruitful tree. For he is, after 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the guardian of the Cause of God . . ."

Let every believer seek again the assurance of the Will and Testament, the "Charter of the New World Order." Let each one renew his pledge to remain firm in its mighty Covenant, and by obedience to the Guardian to strengthen the bonds of our brotherhood and preserve the unity of our Faith. Let no breath of worldly criticism, no mis-

givings of those unable to comprehend our high purpose, no doubts of the faint-hearted, cause us to waver in our duty, and above all, let no thought of personal comfort, either material or in the regard of our fellows, allow us to deviate from that straight and selfless path which we are called upon to tread. "The mighty stronghold shall remain impregnable and safe through obedience to him who is the guardian of the Cause of God."

The Master's mandate, "To take the greatest care of Shoghi Effendi," is upon our shoulders. He is our Guardian, but we are privileged to reinforce his work, and beyond that to contribute to his happiness and well-being. We know from his own writings, and from the reports of pilgrims, that what cheers him most is to receive reports that the friends are happy and united and are exerting themselves to teach the Cause. When he hears of discord and apathy he becomes saddened. Therefore, every effort we make to subdue the ego in the cause of harmony, every new exertion in the cause of teaching, contributes to the happiness and well-being of the "Centre of the Cause." Let us prove our love for the Guardian.

Teaching

"When thou wert engaged in the service of the Cause, thou wert my partner in all trials and difficulties. Thou hast been my associate and companion and both of us were intoxicated and exhilarated with the wine of the love of God."

Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Vol. II.

NEWS

Philip Hainsworth is in hospital in Londonderry, and will probably be so for a few weeks. He is suffering from a skin disease, but writes very cheerfully and is glad of the opportunity for study. Write to him c/o The Bradford Spiritual Assembly.

Ralph Naylor is with his unit in Iceland; also c/o The Bradford Spiritual Assembly.

Mother George is very well and has been attending the Feasts in London.

Miss Grace Challis has been very ill, and is now convalescing; it is better not to write to her as she has to rest, but we can all remember her in our prayers.

SERVICE

Conditions of war increase immensely opportunities for service to our fellow men. There are homeless, orphans, unhappy ones in our midst, and we should be entirely unworthy of the name Bahá'í unless we give them all the help and comfort in our power. Spiritual Assemblies should give serious attention to this matter, and consider how best the Bahá'í community can serve the larger community in which it lives.

The London Spiritual Assembly has been able to take united action in this matter. The victims of bombing in London need clothing of all kinds; the Spiritual Assembly has collected garments of

all sorts from the friends (stipulating that they should be in good condition, clean and properly mended if necessary) and has passed them on to the Women's Voluntary Service, through whose good offices they have been distributed to those in need. Several parcels have been sent from the London friends.

It is hoped that all Bahá'í communities will do likewise, and seek every opportunity to relieve distress. Other things are needed besides clothes; help with children, someone to go a message, someone to talk to, someone to write a letter.

BAHA'I PUBLISHING TRUST

The Publishing Trust is in need of Funds to continue its work. At the moment there are two publications on hand. "An Outline of the Administrative Order," by H. M. Balyuzi, and "A Compilation from the Sacred Writings," which can be given to enquirers. Both these are badly needed for ourselves and for the Teaching work. We cannot have them until the money is available.

IN MEMORIAM

"I have made death a messenger of joy to thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve? I made the light to shed on thee its splendour. Why dost thou veil thyself therefrom?"

Mrs. Ellen Emma Taylor. November 12th.
(Known to many friends as "Auntie Nellie";
Mrs. Brown's aunt.)

NATIONAL TEACHING COMMITTEE

"If thy daily living become difficult, soon God, thy Lord, will bestow upon thee that which will satisfy thee. Be patient in the time of affliction and trial, endure every difficulty and hardship with a dilated heart, attracted spirit and eloquent tongue in remembrance of the merciful. Verily, this is the life of satisfaction, of spiritual existence, heavenly repose, divine benediction, and the celestial table."

'Abdu'l-Bahá "The Divine Art of Living."

Correspondence

Now that force of circumstance has scattered some of us up and down the country the Committee has set up a bureau for putting those so isolated in touch with one another, urging them to maintain a regular interchange of news and information on Bahá'í matters.

Literature

Will those requiring a supply of pamphlets and other literature for teaching purposes, please apply to the Secretary.

Dear Co Builders of the Kingdom of Bahá'u'lláh,

In these days of stress and trial may we be ever mindful of one another, in prayer supporting one another, bearing one another's burdens, and by the grace of Bahá'u'lláh endure to the end. Never let us forget our high privilege and great responsibility. If we do not make known the power of Bahá'u'lláh and the efficacy of the divine plan, who will? Nay, let us each prove the promise of Bahá'u'lláh to assist all those who arise to serve Him, and so fulfil our pledge for establishing new Spiritual Assemblies.

Yours devotedly in service to Bahá'u'lláh,

National Teaching Committee.

REPORTS

Birmingham

Good work was done during a visit to this city by Mr. Hurst, of Leeds. Through the efforts of the two resident believers meetings were arranged and several people interested. A striking handbill freely distributed and a newspaper advertisement helped to provide an audience.

Newcastle

Signs of great activity. Miss D. Jacobs has spoken on two occasions to the Theosophical Society, and interested many of them. A Study Class is well attended and continued to meet during her absence. Miss Jacobs is now back there again.

Ilkeston

Miss D. Cansdale visited Mrs Lacey and talked informally to many of her relations, celebrating the Birth of the Báb with Mrs. Lacey and Miss Richardson.

Cheltenham

A fireside meeting has been held on three successive Thursdays and will probably become a regular weekly activity. The average attendance so far is nine, many of whom are young people. Literature has been distributed and those coming to the meeting have been lent books by Madame Charlot.

The Public Library has bought a copy of "The Promise of All Ages."

Bath

Ken Clark, a young man who heard of the Faith in Manchester, has been very helpful here. He is not a declared believer, but anxious to help. He entertained David Hofman for a few days and introduced him to a number of his friends. The latter writes: "There are two or three very interested, and I hope to arrange some meetings." Miss Gamble is staying about five miles outside Bath, and I intend visiting her. It would be an excellent place to establish a study class as there is a large number of people evacuated here for the duration of the war.

Bristol

A number of very good contacts have been made here. One small meeting has been held with the result that two of those present have arranged for another one in their own home. The chief need is to hold a general meeting, and out of that to begin a study class, or regular fireside meeting. The difficulty is to find a place where a regular meeting could be held, but it is hoped that one of those interested will help in this way.

Salisbury

Mrs. Rideout and Miss Hill continue to hold meetings in Amesbury, and to study the teachings. A few people have been approached in Salisbury, and it is hoped to arouse a wider interest later on.

London

All meetings and Feasts are held on Saturday and Sunday afternoons at 2 p.m., each week.

ADMINISTRATION

Spiritual Assemblies

Spiritual Assemblies, both local and National, will in the future be termed Houses of Justice. The institution of the Local House of Justice is ordained by Bahá'u'lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The National House of Justice was created by 'Abdu'l-

Bahá in His Will and Testament. The keynote of the Administrative Order is Justice.

The Local Spiritual Assembly (as we now know this Institution) is the basic unit. The National Spiritual Assembly stands upon the strength of the Local Assemblies. Therefore, the importance of the Local Spiritual Assembly cannot be over-rated. The L.S.A. is elected annually on the first day of Ridván (April 21st), to serve the Community. It is the Assembly, and not the members who compose it, that administers. In its deliberations, the Assembly is responsible to Bahá'u'lláh. This, however, does not mean keeping apart from the Community. It is the definite obligation of the Assembly to consult with the Community at the Nineteen Day Feast. A Spiritual Assembly which neglects its obligations will find itself unable to serve, its efforts nullified and vain, because it cannot draw upon the power flowing from Bahá'u'lláh. The Community on the other hand is expected by the Law of Bahá'u'lláh, to obey its Assembly. In case of dissatisfaction with the decisions of the Local Spiritual Assembly, the members of the Community have the right of appeal to the National Spiritual Assembly.

Here we will quote Article 46, of the Articles of Association of our National Spiritual Assembly, which express very adequately the spiritual obligations of the Spiritual Assemblies:—

"Among the most outstanding and sacred duties incumbent upon those who have been called upon to initiate, direct and co-ordinate the affairs of the Faith as Members of Local Spiritual Assemblies or the National Spiritual Assembly are:—

"To win by every means in their power the confidence and affection of those whom it is their privilege to serve; to investigate and acquaint themselves with the considered views, the prevailing sentiments and the personal convictions of those whose welfare it is their solemn obligation to promote, to purge their deliberations and the general conduct of their affairs of self-contained aloofness, the suspicion of secrecy, the stifling atmosphere of dictatorial assertiveness and of every word and deed that may savour of partiality, self-centredness and prejudice; and while retaining the sacred right of final decision in their hands, to invite discussion, ventilate grievances, welcome advice, and foster the sense of interdependence and co-partnership, of understanding and mutual confidence between themselves and all other Bahá'ís."

MYSTICISM OR RELIGION

There are so many varied forms of mysticism that it is difficult to generalise. But, today, it is essential for the Bahá'í teacher to have some knowledge of mysticism and to be able to recognise

it under its various aspects, for it is becoming more and more widely spread in the religious thought of the West.

Its importance to us is the view it takes of the station of the human soul, and the station of the Founder of religion. Briefly mysticism generally holds that the human soul contains part of God, and that the purpose of life is for that part to rejoin the Essence. (This is what is called divine immanence . . . that is God dwelling within His creature.) Arising from this belief are whole systems of mystical theory. One of the most famous is that of re-incarnation and Karma. This doctrine is held by most Theosophists who brought it from the Buddhist and Hindu mystics of India. It teaches that the soul (that part of God within) has to go through many lives in this world before it can become purified enough to re-enter the "ocean" from which it came. Karma is the law which governs subsequent existences, as they are the result of how the soul has behaved previously. This has many variations, such as the re-appearance of the soul in the body of animals, etc. Karma is thought to explain hardship and trouble, since they are only the result of what the soul has sowed in previous lives. This doctrine is also invoked to compensate people who are born maimed, by another life on earth in which they will be healthy.

This doctrine, obviously, has an immediate effect on behaviour and social life. In its extreme it leads to ascetism, non-co-operation in social life, and to such practices of deforming the body as can be seen in the East. It is a barren philosophy and has never produced a high social order; in its view life is a painful illusion, an imprisonment to the soul, from which it should seek to escape as soon as possible.

Mysticism must also affect the belief about the station of the Founders of the world's religions. Again, generally, it means that the Christ is one who has attained, through many incarnations, to Christhood, or Buddhahood. All human beings are capable, says mysticism, of this attainment, because within all is part of the divine Essence. This view of the station of Christ has become widely spread in the west, and is held by some Christian Scientists, Theosophists, and others.

Religion, by which we mean the teaching of a Manifestation of God, does not agree with these doctrines. Firstly, it teaches that no part of God resides in the human soul (God is transcendent). The Bahá'í teachings are very clear on this point, and show that the human soul is a mirror which may reflect the light of God, but which is certainly not a part of God. The human soul is a creation

of God, made "In His image" it is true, but not part of Himself. Innumerable references in the Bahá'í teachings dwell on this. God is exalted beyond His creation, independent of it, self-existent. The Victory Tablet stresses this.

With regard to the station of the Manifestation of God, religion is equally clear. The Kitáb-i-Iqán, Part II, is almost wholly an exposition of this. The Christ, the Manifestation of God, is in a station of His own, neither God nor man. He is the Mediator between the unknown Essence, and the creature, who is in need of knowledge of the Unknown. He is the Mouthpiece of God on earth, specially appointed and empowered, to reveal to men so much of the truth and beauty of God as their own state of development calls for.

The social implications of the teachings of religion are therefore to purify the mirror of the soul, by "holy and sanctified deeds," so that the light of God may be reflected from it; to establish a social order (or system of human relationships) which will enable mankind to reach such a state of progress that the human world may reflect to its maximum capacity, the divine principles of Justice, Love, etc.

It may be noted that mysticism arises from religion itself; its source is a religious system. Thus there are Christian, Hindu, Muhammadan, mystics. It is also helpful to remember that if mysticism is pursued to its logical end, action becomes anti-social. A great example is seen in St. Francis, who practised mysticism to the extent of trying to walk over the Alps barefoot, realised that that was not what God wanted, and returned to a more normal and wonderful way of life.

"Mysticism and the Bahá'í Revelation," by Ruhi Afnan, is an excellent work on this subject, and is obtainable from the Bahá'í Publishing Trust (2/-).

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Please study the following questions with the references given, and thoroughly acquaint yourselves with the subject.

What is the Bahá'í teaching on,

1. The Trinity.

Reference: Some Answered Questions p. 129.

2. Evil.

Reference: Some Answered Questions, p. 301; Paris Talks, p. 165; Kitáb-i-Iqán, p. 69.

3. Interpretation of Holy Books.

Reference: Kitáb-i-Iqán, whole of Part I, especially pp. 20, 24, 29, 33, 38; 56, 61, 66, 71, 80, 91. Some Answered Questions, p. 126.