

Note: Following this brief letter to a believer are two compilations: one on "**Guidance to Poets**," and one on "**Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings on the Subject of Writers and Writing**."

THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE
Department of the Secretariat
13 March 1988

Mr. xxxx

Dear Bahá'í Friend,

The Hand of the Cause of God referred your letter of 19 January 1988 to the Universal House of Justice. The Research Department was requested to examine the questions you had raised about references in the Bahá'í Writings concerning poets, and we are now directed to send you the enclosed memorandum prepared by that Department in response.

The House of Justice hopes that a study of this material will be of assistance and encouragement to you as one who likes to write.

With loving Bahá'í greetings,
For Department of the Secretariat

Enclosure
cc: The Hand of the Cause ...

MEMORANDUM

To: The Universal House of Justice Date: 13 March 1988

From: The Research Department

GUIDANCE TO POETS

The questions concerning the guidance contained in the Bahá'í Writings about poets, raised in the letter of 19 January 1988 from Mr. xxxx to the Hand of the Cause of God ..., have been studied by the Research Department and we provide the following response.

1. Guidance to Poets

As to whether Bahá'u'lláh outlined certain responsibilities, obligations, preference, and limits in relation to poets, Shoghi Effendi indicates that poets are "addressed separately" by Bahá'u'lláh. They, along with "the wise men of the world, ... its men of letters, ... its mystics and even ... its tradesmen" are exhorted by Bahá'u'lláh "to be attentive to His voice, to recognize His Day, and to follow His bidding."

There are many passages in the Writings which testify to the high position Bahá'u'lláh gives to the practice of the arts. For example:

It hath been revealed and is now repeated that the true worth of artists and craftsmen should be appreciated, for they advance the affairs of mankind. Just as the foundations of religion are made firm through the Law of God, the means of livelihood depend upon those who are engaged in arts and crafts. True learning is that which is conducive to the well-being of the world, not to pride and self-conceit, or to tyranny, violence and pillage.

Many verses from Arabic and Persian poetry have been quoted in the Writings of the Central Figures of the Faith. For instance, throughout the work, "The Seven Valleys" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1978), Bahá'u'lláh makes reference to the two great poets of Shiraz, Hafiz, and Sa'di, and many others who were also known as Sufi mystics.

With regard to whether there are specific instructions in the Writings to guide the activity of poets, we enclose for Mr. xxxx a compilation entitled "Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings on the Subject of Writers and Writing", from which a number of principles can be drawn. For example:

- the importance of not transgressing the "bounds of tact and wisdom"
- the power of "human utterance" and the need to temper it with "moderation" and "refinement"
- the use of eloquent language, etc.

Personal qualities of the poet are also important. In this regard, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, in describing the development of the Bahá'ís of Persia, in particular (but not exclusively) the women, indicated that:

They are imbued with all the virtues and excellences of humanity. They are eloquent; they are poets and scholars and embody the quintessence of humility.

("The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912", 2nd ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, B.E. 1982), p. 136.)

2. Prayers and Tablets addressed to Poets

There are many Tablets addressed to poets by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, most of which have not as yet been translated into English. Many of these Tablets have been collected in a book compiled by Ni'matu'llah Bayda'i entitled "Tadhkiriy-i Shu'aray-i-Qarn-i Avval-i-Bahá'í", 4 volumes (Tihran: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, B.E. 121, 123, 126, 129).

A sample of the material available in English translation includes:

- In "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas" [rev. ed.], (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), Bahá'u'lláh addresses a Tablet to Maq̄sud in which He comments on Maq̄sud's poetry in these terms:

Every word of thy poetry is indeed like unto a mirror in which the evidences of the devotion and love thou cherishest for God and His chosen ones are reflected. Well is it with thee who hast quaffed the choice wine of utterance and partaken of the soft flowing stream of true knowledge. Happy is he who hath drunk his fill and attained unto Him and woe betide the heedless. Its perusal hath truly proved highly impressive, for it was indicative of both the light of reunion and the fire of separation.

(pp. 175-76)

- In the "Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas", vols. 1-3 (Chicago: Bahá'í Publishing Society, 1930, 1940, 1930) on pages 223-24; p. 404; and p. 546, there are three Tablets of the Master to individuals who had submitted poems to Him:

O thou who art attracted to the Kingdom of God! Thy letter was read with the utmost attention. The poetry was beautiful.

Praise be to God, thou art severed from all else save the Heavenly Father. Thou hast been of the earth -- thou art now of the Kingdom. Thou hast been of the world -- thou art now of the Realm of Might. Thou art spreading the divine Teachings. Thank thou God, thou art bearing trials in the path of the Kingdom and art enduring persecutions and sufferings. These afflictions are conducive to the spiritual development and the descent of the Holy Spirit.

O thou dear maid-servant of God! I supplicate God that He suffer thee to become a herald of the Kingdom in all those places, so that thou mayest proclaim the glad-tidings of the Lord of Hosts.

O thou who art sweet tongued! Thy poem is a wonder to the minds and intellects and thy composition an evidence of the gift of the great Lord. Therefore, thy wine is the pure wine, thy heart the recess of light and thy brow radiant with love.

If the people of the world were fair in judgment, the sweetness of thy poem should be a sufficient proof.

A young boy of the posterity of Israel whose pure mouth still emits the fragrance of milk, uttering such a marvelous anthem!

O thou maid-servant of God! Thy poetry was received. The context was elegant. The words were eloquent and the theme, the Manifest Light. Consequently, it was highly appreciated. Endeavor, so far as it is possible for thee, that day by day thou mayest string the pearls of poesy with sweeter rhythm and more eloquent contents, in order that

it may become conducive to the perpetuity of thy name in the spiritual meetings. Upon thee be greeting and praise!

Also, in "*Memorials of the Faithful*" (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971), 'Abdu'l-Bahá describes the life and service of a number of early believers whom He characterizes as poets. See pages 32-38; pp. 81-82; pp. 102-3; and, pp. 145-47.

EXTRACTS FROM THE BAHÁ'I WRITINGS ON THE SUBJECT OF WRITERS AND WRITING

July 1980

From the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh

Thou hast written that one of the friends hath composed a treatise. This was mentioned in the Holy Presence, and this is what was revealed in response: Great care should be exercised that whatever is written in these days doth not cause dissension, and invite the objection of the people. Whatever the friends of the one true God say in these days is listened to by the people of the world. It hath been revealed in the Lawh-i-Hikmat: "The unbelievers have inclined their ears towards us in order to hear that which might enable them to cavil against God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting." Whatever is written should not transgress the bounds of tact and wisdom, and in the words used there should lie hid the property of milk, so that the children of the world may be nurtured therewith, and attain maturity. We have said in the past that one word hath the influence of spring and causeth hearts to become fresh and verdant, while another is like unto blight which causeth the blossoms and flowers to wither. God grant that authors among the friends will write in such a way as would be acceptable to fair-minded souls, and not lead to cavilling by the people.

(From a Tablet of Bahá'u'lláh to an individual believer)

Say: O men! This is a matchless Day. Matchless must, likewise, be the tongue that celebrateth the praise of the Desire of all nations, and matchless the deed that aspireth to be acceptable in His Sight. The whole human race hath longed for this Day, that perchance it may fulfill that which well beseemeth its station, and is worthy of its destiny. Blessed is the man whom the affairs of the world have failed to deter from recognizing Him Who is the Lord of all things.

("Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), XVI, p. 39)

How great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain! How vast the number of such verities as no expression can adequately describe, whose significance can never be unfolded, and to which not even the remotest allusions can be made! How manifold are the truths which must remain unuttered until the appointed time is come! Even as it hath been said: "Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it."

Of these truths some can be disclosed only to the extent of the capacity of the repositories of the light of Our knowledge, and the recipients of Our hidden grace. We beseech God to strengthen thee with His power, and enable thee to recognize Him Who is the Source of all knowledge, that thou mayest detach thyself from all human learning, for, what would it profit any man to strive after learning when he hath already found and recognized Him Who is the Object of all knowledge?" Cleave to the Root of Knowledge, and to Him Who is the Fountain thereof, that thou mayest find thyself independent of all who claim to be well versed in human learning, and whose claim no clear proof, nor the testimony of any enlightening book, can support.

("Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1984), LXXXIX, pp. 176-77)

In this Day the secrets of the earth are laid bare before the eyes of men. The pages of swiftly-appearing newspapers are indeed the mirror of the world. They reflect the deeds and the pursuits of divers peoples and kindreds. They both reflect them and make them known. They are a mirror endowed with hearing, sight and speech. This is an amazing and potent phenomenon. However, it behoveth the writers thereof to be purged from the promptings of evil passions and desires and to be attired with the raiment of justice and equity. They should enquire into situations as much as possible and ascertain the facts, then set them down in writing.

(From Tarazat, published in "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas" [rev. ed.], (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), pp. 39-40)

It ill beseemeth thee to turn thy gaze unto former or more recent times. Make thou mention of this Day and magnify that which hath appeared therein. It will in truth suffice all mankind. Indeed expositions and discourses in explanation of such things cause the spirits to be chilled. It behoveth thee to speak forth in such wise as to set the hearts of true believers ablaze and cause their bodies to soar....

Teach thou the Cause of God with an utterance which will cause the bushes to be enkindled, and the call "Verily, there is no God but Me, the Almighty, the Unconstrained" to be raised therefrom. Say: Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation. As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets. Meditate upon that which hath streamed forth from the heaven of the Will of thy Lord, He Who is the Source of all grace, that thou mayest grasp the intended meaning which is enshrined in the sacred depths of the Holy Writings.

(from Lawh-i-Hikmat, published in "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas" [rev. ed.], (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), pp. 142-43)

Every word of thy poetry is indeed like unto a mirror in which the evidences of the devotion and love thou cherishest for God and His chosen ones are reflected. Well is it with thee who hast quaffed the choice wine of utterance and partaken of the soft flowing stream of true knowledge. Happy is he who hath drunk his fill and attained unto Him and woe betide the heedless. Its perusal hath truly proved highly impressive, for it was indicative of both the light of reunion and the fire of separation.

(From Lawh.-i-Maqsud, published in "Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas" [rev. ed.], (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), pp. 175-76)

From the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá

It is my hope that thou mayest succeed in writing thy book. However, the language should be moderate, tempered, and infinitely courteous. Look not at the language used by that hostile writer, for he was prejudiced and unrefined. Any person, with the slightest degree of fairness, will understand that his writing is totally biased and inspired by enmity. This is enough proof that what he hath written is spurious.

(From a Tablet to an individual believer - translated from the Persian)

Pure souls, such as Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, upon him be the Glory of God, spend their nights and days in demonstrating the truth of the Revelation, by adducing conclusive and brilliant proofs and expanding the verities of the Faith, by lifting the veils, promoting the religion of God and spreading His fragrances.

(From a Tablet to an individual believer translated from the Persian)

Great care should be exercised in preparing this translation. Mr... should make a supreme effort so that the language will be most exquisite, eloquent and lucid, even if the translated text is to be submitted to, and made dependent upon the opinions of, experts in language.

(From a Tablet to an individual believer - translated from the Persian)

The subjects to be taught in children's school are many, and for lack of time We can touch on only a few: First and most important is training in behaviour and good character; the rectification of qualities; arousing

the desire to become accomplished and acquire perfections, and to cleave unto the religion of God and stand firm in His Laws, to accord total obedience to every just government, to show forth loyalty and trustworthiness to the ruler of the time, to be well wishers of mankind, to be kind to all.

And further, as well as in the ideals of character, instruction in such arts and sciences as are of benefit, and in foreign tongues. Also, the repeating of prayers for the well-being of ruler and ruled; and the avoidance of materialistic works that are current among those who see only natural causation, and tales of love, and books that arouse the passions.

To sum up, let all the lessons be entirely devoted to the acquisition of human perfections.

Here, then, in brief are directions for the curriculum of these schools.

Greetings be unto you, and praise.

(From a Tablet to an individual believer, published in "The Bahá'í World", vol. 16, p. 37)

From letters written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to individual believers

I am overjoyed at such a splendid production. I strongly urge you to secure the assistance of one of the best and most respected publishers in England and to ensure that it will receive the fullest attention regarding its outward form and style of printing. The book is correct in its presentation of the essentials of the Faith, eminently readable, exquisitely arranged, and has a distinctive charm unsurpassed by any book of its kind whether written by Eastern or Western believers. I heartily recommend it to every earnest and devout teacher of the Cause.

(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 11 November 1927 written on his behalf)

Your literary ability makes you specially qualified to teach the Cause. For in the world of to-day much can be achieved through the power of pen. All you need is to try to deepen your knowledge of the history and the teachings of the Faith, and thus well-equipped you will assuredly win a glorious success. Bahá'u'lláh has given us the assurance that He will be always on our side and will give us all the help we may need. You should, therefore, arise steadfastly to serve our beloved Cause and dedicate the rest of your life to the noble ideal which it seeks to realize.

(30 July 1932)

What Bahá'u'lláh meant primarily with "sciences that begin and end in words" are those theological treatises and commentaries that encumber the human mind rather than help it to attain the truth. The students would devote their life to their study but still attain nowhere.

Bahá'u'lláh surely never meant to include story writing under such a category; and shorthand and typewriting are both most useful talents very necessary in our present social and economic life.

What you could do, and should do, is to use your stories to become a source of inspiration and guidance for those who read them. With such a means at your disposal you can spread the spirit and teachings of the Cause; you can show the evils that exist in society, as well as the way they can be remedied. If you possess a real talent in writing you should consider it as given by God and exert your efforts to use it for the betterment of society.¹

(30 November 1932)

He has received and read with deepest interest the manuscripts you had enclosed in your letter, one entitled ..., and the other consisting of a long poem in which you had made an attempt to present the Message indirectly.

1. This advice was given to a believer who asked whether such skills as shorthand and typing, and the writing of stories dealing with human experience, would be classified among those sciences that "begin and end in words", as mentioned by Bahá'u'lláh.

As to this last one, he approves of your suggestion to write a sequel to it, and to refer more directly to the Cause. He would, however, advise you to couch the whole subject in such a form as to make it interesting and appealing to the non-Bahá'í reader. The direct presentation of the Teachings is surely highly important and even indispensable nowadays. But it should be done with utmost care and tact, and in a manner that would appeal to the non-believers.

(31 December 1935)

There is a great need for teaching the Cause at present; every Bahá'í should teach, and each one has his own capacities and can expect to reach certain souls who respond to his efforts. Your gift of writing should by all means be utilized in serving the Cause. Everyone is perforce only an instrument in giving the Message which is more or less coloured by his own capacities and approach to life. There is no harm in this. You should write freely what you feel, what you wish to convey to the mind of the reader; afterwards you yourself, and those who pass upon Bahá'í manuscripts and publications, can make sure that all your points conform to the teachings. The way you give them out and present them is an individual matter and there is no objection to this at all.

He would not recommend fiction as a means of teaching; the condition of the world is too acute to permit of delay in giving them the direct teachings, associated with the name of Bahá'u'lláh. But any suitable approach to the Faith, which appeals to this or that group, is certainly worthy of effort, as we wish to bring the Cause to all men, in all walks of life, of all mentalities.²

(23 March 1945)

Regarding your question about what courses would be most useful for you to study: He feels that both radio and journalistic work are fields in which the Bahá'ís could well learn to express themselves for the sake of helping their teaching work, and advises you, if you have the time, to study these subjects.

(15 August 1945)

2. This advice was given to a believer who sought the counsel of the Guardian on ways one might use writing skills to teach the Faith. The believer proposed writing a novel in which the Bahá'í teachings and their source would be presented indirectly and in such a way as to stimulate curiosity and search by the reader.

Your suggestion regarding a book for the general public is a good one. The question is not only have we Bahá'ís competent to present this subject in a way which would catch the attention of the public, but also even if such a book existed would it achieve its end? We have, unfortunately, not very many capable Bahá'í writers, and the condition of confusion in the World is such that it seems doubtful if such a work would arrest the attention of distracted mankind.

However, we need more and better Bahá'í books, and he suggests you present your idea to the German, British and American N.S.A.'s.

(26 October 1950)

There is no objection to your being a journalist as long as you try to keep off political issues; especially the big East-West issue. You have a talent for writing, and it might be of help to you financially and in making contacts for the Faith.

(30 November 1950)

Regarding the advice you asked him for, he feels that to devote all one's studies with the object of becoming a Bahá'í author, is rather risky. We need Bahá'í authors badly, but you have to be assured that you have the talent to earn your living in that field, and also serve the Faith in it.

He feels that the best thing for you to do is to devote your studies to acquiring a sound education, if you like along literary lines, and then see what develops.

(14 May 1957)

From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice

The Universal House of Justice has considered your letter of 6 December 1979 concerning the novel you are writing involving a romantic relationship and asking whether you should continue this project in light of the advice of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that curricula of schools should avoid tales of love.

We have been asked to say that what should be avoided are stories that arouse the passions. From what you say, the purpose of your story is to appeal to higher motivations in life and, in fact, to spread the spirit and teachings of the Cause.

(23 December 1979 to an individual believer)

Bahá'í Academics Research Library main page: <http://bahai-library.com/>

<http://www.interlog.com/~winters/uhj/poets.html>

Note: reformatted with obvious typographical errors corrected by Cary Enoch Reinstein.

<http://www.enochsvision.com/>