

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** The Universal House of Justice

**Date:** 14 July 2003

**From:** Research Department

### **Utterances and Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Quoted in Compilations and Letters of the Universal House of Justice**

The Research Department has studied the queries in the emailed letters dated 22 May 2003 from Dr. Rhett Diessner. The general focus of his concerns is the status of certain texts attributed to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that appear in either compilations or letters prepared by or under the supervision of the Universal House of Justice. His questions and our responses follow below.

#### **Status of an utterance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá published in a compilation**

Dr. Diessner states his understanding that the quotations in the “utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá” section of a compilation prepared under the supervision of the House of Justice are in the category of pilgrims’ notes. He asks whether including an “utterance” in a compilation of the House of Justice thereby “privilege[s] the quality of that quote”, that is, “would we then assume the quote represents ‘the true spirit of the teachings on the subject’”; and, further, can this same assumption be made regarding “any utterance of the Master that is included in any compilation that was compiled under the supervision of the Universal House of Justice”?

He draws attention to the following oral statement of the Master that appears in pilgrims’ notes and a compilation:

The first thing to do is to acquire a thirst for Spirituality, then Live the Life! Live the Life! Live the Life! The way to acquire this thirst is to meditate upon the future life. Study the Holy Words, read your Bible, read the Holy Books, especially study the Holy Utterances of Bahá’u’lláh; Prayer and Meditation, take much time for these two. Then will you know this Great Thirst, and then only can you begin to Live the Life!

(An oral statement of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá recorded in the pilgrim’s notes of Miss Anise Rideout and published in “Star of the West”;<sup>1</sup> it also appears in the compilation “The Importance of Deepening Our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith” under the subheading “Extracts from the Utterances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá”<sup>2</sup>)

He also provides an extract from a letter of the House of Justice in which a statement of Shoghi Effendi is quoted that a particular utterance of the Master reported by a pilgrim “can certainly be taken as the true spirit of the teachings on the subject”. We read,

---

<sup>1</sup> “Star of the West”, volume 19, number 3, June 1928, page 69.

<sup>2</sup> “The Importance of Deepening our Knowledge and Understanding of the Faith”, compiled by the Universal House of Justice, published in “The Compilation of Compilations” (Maryborough: Bahá’í Publications Australia, 1991), volume 1, pages 187–234; see #425.

We have your letter of 18 December 1973 asking about a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá on the subject of embracing.

We have seen no such Tablet, but we have seen reference to a pilgrim's note and the comment of the beloved Guardian on it.

The pilgrim's note reports the Master as saying: 'Women and men must not embrace each other when not married, or not about to be married. They must not kiss each other... If they wish to greet each other, or comfort each other, they may take each other by the hand.' In a letter to an individual written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi it is said: The Master's words to..., which you quoted, can **certainly be taken as the true spirit of the teachings**<sup>3</sup> on the subject of sex. We must strive to achieve this exalted standard.' (October 19, 1947)

(10 February 1974 written by the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly; published in "Lights of Guidance"<sup>4</sup>)

Dr. Diessner is doubtlessly familiar with the principle that oral statements attributed to 'Abdu'l-Bahá that appear in the notes of pilgrims are not considered authentic, authoritative or a part of Bahá'í Scripture. Further, the principle is taken from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Writings:

Thou has written concerning the pilgrims and pilgrims' notes. Any narrative that is not authenticated by a Text should not be trusted. Narratives, even if true, cause confusion. For the people of Bahá, the Text, and only the Text, is authentic.

We have not found any statement in the letters of the House of Justice asserting that the status of an extract from pilgrim's notes is in any sense "privileged" or enhanced if the extract is used in compilations prepared under its supervision. However, it seems reasonable that when such extracts are included in a compilation it is because they do indeed reflect "the true spirit of the teachings on the subject" in question. This understanding is also supported by the use of the utterance of 'Abdu'l-Bahá in question in the following extract from a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice:

The Universal House of Justice has received your email letter of 3 June 2002, enquiring as to how to conquer one's self so that one is better able to serve the Cause. You make reference to Shoghi Effendi's own actions before assuming the mantle of Guardianship bestowed upon him after the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The theme of personal striving is, of course, woven throughout the Sacred Writings, and you may wish to explore it in consultation with a member of the Auxiliary Boards in your region. We offer below some general comments.

An initial step can be found in the advice of 'Abdu'l-Bahá: "The first thing to do is to acquire a thirst for Spirituality, then Live the Life! Live the Life! Live the Life! The way to acquire this thirst is to meditate upon the future life. Study the Holy Words, read your Bible, read the Holy Books, especially study the Holy Utterances of Bahá'u'lláh; Prayer and Meditation, take much time for these two.

---

<sup>3</sup> Bold has been added just as it appears in Dr. Diessner's letter.

<sup>4</sup> "Lights of Guidance, A Bahá'í Reference File", Helen Bassett Hornby, ed., 5<sup>th</sup> Ed. (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1997), #1438.

Then will you know this Great Thirst, and then only can you begin to Live the Life!" ("Star of the West" volume 19, number 3, p. 69).

(27 August 2002 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

On the other hand, we draw Dr. Diessner's attention to the following statement of the House of Justice concerning the authenticity of utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá found in the writings of Shoghi Effendi:

In response to your email of 31 May 2000, the Universal House of Justice has asked us to affirm that the utterances of 'Abdu'l-Bahá quoted in the writings of the Guardian can be taken as authentic.

(15 June 2000 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual)

### **Status of Tablets of 'Abdu'l-Bahá quoted in letters of the House of Justice**

Dr. Diessner asks whether one may assume that a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá "has been authenticated" if text from it has been quoted in a letter of the House of Justice to an institution or an individual. He provides the following extract that appears in "Star of the West" and if we understand correctly, in a letter of the House of Justice dated 2 December 1985:

The more difficulties one sees in the world the more perfect one becomes. The more you plough and dig the ground the more fertile it becomes. The more you cut the branches of a tree the higher and stronger it grows. The more you put the gold in the fire the purer it becomes. The more you sharpen the steel by grinding the better it cuts. Therefore, the more sorrows one sees the more perfect one becomes. That is why, in all times, the Prophets of God have had tribulations and difficulties to withstand. The more often the captain of a ship is in the tempest and difficult sailing the greater his knowledge becomes. Therefore I am happy that you have had great tribulations and difficulties.... Strange it is that I love you and still I am happy that you have sorrows.

(Published in "Star of the West", volume 14, number 2, May 1923, page 41, and described there as "From a Tablet of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, about 1910")

It might be helpful to begin by noting that the Research Department has not found any statement in the Bahá'í Writings that suggests that the authenticity of a Tablet might be assumed if it is quoted in a letter of the House of Justice.

Regarding the extract quoted above, we have not identified the letter of the House of Justice dated 2 December 1985, but we have found it quoted in several more recent ones. Regarding the authenticity of the Tablet from which the extract has been taken, as we have not yet identified the original Tablet, its authenticity cannot be confirmed.