

Letters of THE GREATEST HOLY LEAF

Bahiyih Kkanum

Translated from Persian



The Pen of the divine Ordainer has so decreed that this house of sorrows should be encompassed by unending calamity and pain. Even before the dark clouds of one disaster are scattered, the lowering storm of yet a new grief takes over, casting its darkness across the inner skies of the heart. Such has been the lot of this broken-hearted one and the other leaves of the Holy Tree, from earliest childhood until this hour; such has been the fruit we have plucked from the tree of our lives.

We can see before us the Holy Shrine where lies the blessed, riddled body of the Primal Point, and memory of the delicate and tender remains of other martyrs passes before our eyes. The remembrance of the Ancient Beauty's dungeon in Tīhrān, and that most noble Being's exile from city to city, culminating in the murk of the Akká prison, is engraved upon our minds. The calamities, the massive afflictions, endured by 'Abdu'l-Bahá throughout His entire life, and His wailing at the break of dawn are recorded for all time upon the tablets of the soul, and those cries that rose out of His luminous heart will linger on in the mind's ear.

It is clear, too, how the most dire of all ordeals, the ascension of the divine Beauty, made the structure of our existence to topple down; how being deprived of Him consumed the very limbs of our bodies. And when our fiery tears brought on by this were not yet dried, and the heart's wound had not healed over, then the bearer of God's decree called us to yet another anguish, that dire calamity, that terrible disaster, the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Then were we, the sorrow-stricken, thrust again into the fires of separation, and the pitch darkness of deep mourning enshrouded this family.

Beloved friends of the Blessed Beauty: what could have been the purpose of those holy Beings in enduring such agonies? Why did those precious and luminous souls accept all that hardship and pain? Any just observer will acknowledge that They had no other end in view but to better the human race, and cleanse it from the imperfections of this contingent world, and see to its advancement, and endow all peoples with the wondrous virtues of humankind. Thanks be to God's bounties, the signs of such perfections, the lights of such bestowals, have become clearly manifest throughout the world. The tree of His Cause grows ever more massive, day by day, and heavier with fruit, and from moment to moment taller, and it shall cast its wondrous shade over all who seek its shelter. The fruit of these boughs is plain to see: this Tree will bear sincere love and true friendship, traits of Heaven and qualities of God. This immortal Tree will yield kindness and humbleness, learning and wisdom, and the divine virtues.

The aim of those blessed Ones, then, those Temples of holiness, in enduring, over a whole century, all Their trials and tribulations, was to firmly establish a way of life whereby human character in general and that of God's loved ones in particular would be rectified. To such a



TRANSLATION

degree must this come to pass that from their very breathing and walking, their rising up, sitting still, moving about, their every act—it can clearly be seen that they are different from those others who are neglectful of God and veiled away from Him: that they can be distinguished from the others as easily as you can tell the day-star from the dark.

Although through the mighty influence of the Word of God the inner self of each of the friends and of those who are steadfast in His perfect Covenant is held fast by the magnet of His love, and they are known in every land by this distinguishing characteristic and are everywhere illumined by this light—still the thing to remember is this: until the accidental events which arise from the world of the trivial and the personal are completely lost in the world of the universal, that is, in the bounties and attributes of the Merciful—that true and primal glory can never be revealed as it merits, nor ever show forth the beauty with which it is endowed. Let every steadfast soul ever bear in mind the anguish of those holy Beings and the trials They endured, and because of the wrongs They suffered, and the blood of the martyrs in His path, out of pity for what has befallen God's Cause and His Law, put the good of the Cause before any other good, and its honour before any other. Let him face every problem, whether minor or major, with goodwill and purity of motive. Let him not make of God's Law, created as it was to bring about unity and love, a means of discord. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says: 'If religion be the cause of disunity, then irreligion is surely to be preferred.'

Today as well, the Chosen Branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, is at all times waiting expectantly—and indeed, it is the most cherished desire of his heart—to see this reality, this proof of serious effort, this feature that distinguishes the Bahá'ís from all others, clearly and unmistakably revealed in the life of every single Bahá'í. As is well known, at the time when the Day-Star of the Covenant did set, the Chosen Branch was absent from this luminous Spot, and when he received the terrifying news of that direst of ordeals, he was overcome by a grief such as no words can describe. Broken in health, his heart brimful of sorrows, he returned to this blessed place. At that time the unfaithful, with extreme perversity and at a high point of rebellion, were openly and secretly spreading their calumnies, and this behaviour of theirs added still more to the Guardian's burden of grief. He left, therefore, and spent some time in seclusion, carrying on the affairs of the Faith, seeing to its interests and its institutions, communing with God, and imploring His help.

The Lord be praised, because of the divine bounties, during his absence there were such evidences of staunchness and loyalty and high resolve and unity and love and fervour among all the friends, men and women alike, both of East and West, and in the Holy Land—that on the one hand the Centre of Sedition, and the arrogant and the malevolent, found themselves utterly defeated, their hopes of making a breach in the Faith bitterly disappointed, while on the other, the exemplary quality and sound condition of the believers, as referred to, was a comfort to the Guardian's heart. Thus he was able, happy now and in perfect health, to return to this Spot, and to carry out his sacred obligations.

By this time a great many matters of the utmost importance had accumulated, and letters were coming in continuously from individuals and communities, which for lack of time could not be dealt with individually. The Guardian therefore dispensed with replies to individuals and sent out general letters to the Spiritual Assemblies, in which in the clearest terms he set forth the obligations devolving upon all, and gave the friends his instructions. These basic spiritual

guidelines were received by the believers with great delight and the utmost joy; they immediately put them into practice, and thus the preliminary steps were taken, and in every area progress was being made to an ever-increasing degree.

Now, however, as the letters continually streamed in, the contents of one or two of them showed that among some of the believers a certain ill-feeling had arisen, and further, that some did not, as they should, respect and duly defer to their Spiritual Assembly. It is obvious what an effect this kind of news, whether implied or clearly stated, had on the Guardian's heart, and what an unfavourable reaction it produced. The result was that for the second time his health failed, and then, at the importunity of this evanescent soul and the urgent entreaties of the Holy Household and the repeated appeals of those in close association with him—he went away last summer.

This proved of the greatest benefit to him, and his health was completely restored. And then, one following the next, there came in good reports from Spiritual Assemblies everywhere, and other gatherings and groups, and also individuals, and this brought him great joy; so much so that following that summer's journey, out of his intense love for the believers, he began to correspond even with individuals; and continually, in the various meetings, he would express his satisfaction with and praise of all the servants of the Blessed Beauty's Threshold and the loyal friends of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Alas, however, once again in some communities, he noted from certain letters an absence of spirituality and good-fellowship among some of the friends, and a lack of respect among some for their Assemblies. Once more, as a result of this, his heart was filled with sorrow and once again he decided on departure. This lowly maidservant and the other members of the Household and all the Holy Leaves did all we could to blot away this grief from his radiant spirit. When in his presence, we would bring up all the good news that by the grace of God continued to pour in, and to speak of the staunchness, the loyalty, the love, the sacrifices of the believers both of East and West. We begged him to reconsider his decision—but to no avail.

He told us: 'My heart is sensitive. Just as I feel the ill-feeling that exists between individuals, and am injured by it, so too do I treasure the excellent qualities of the believers; indeed, I hold these dearer than words can tell. After that most dread ordeal, the one and only solace of my heart was the loyalty, the staunchness, the love of the friends for the Blessed Beauty and for 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Nothing can ever detract from the value of such excellent qualities, and I am deeply grateful to all the friends, men and women alike, for this. And yet, this love of theirs, with all its fervour, can never, by itself, bring the Ark of the Faith to the longed-for shore. It can never prove the claims of the people of Bahá to the people of the world. To safeguard the religion of God and reinforce its power, the friends must make use of effective means: their love must be so great that they worship one another, and shut any mutual ill-feeling out of their hearts.

'If, for example, the non-Bahá'ís should ask the friends, "What differentiates you from all the rest?", and if, to this, the friends answer, "In the pathway of our love for the Centre of our Faith, we would sacrifice our lives and possessions," those of the civilized world would never be content with such a reply. They would merely say: "Your love, your sacrifice for a single individual cannot possibly serve as a remedy for the chronic ills which plague society today." If the friends then answer: "Our religion provides principles and moral teachings whose value the wisest of

the day cannot deny," this will be the response: "Noble principles and teachings will produce an effect on human character, and heal the mortal sicknesses which afflict society, only at such time when those who claim to believe in and support them are themselves the first to act upon them, and to demonstrate and incorporate the value and the benefits of them in their own everyday transactions and lives." Unless this comes about, there is nothing to distinguish the Bahá'ís from the rest.'

He also told us: 'The people of the world are carefully watching the Bahá'ís today, and minutely observing them. The believers must make every effort, and take the utmost care to ward off and remove any feelings of estrangement, and consider themselves duty-bound to comply with the decisions of their Spiritual Assemblies. To the same degree that ill-feeling among some of the believers has cast its shadow on my heart, to that same degree will my heart reflect their mutual agreement, understanding and loving affection, and their deference to the authority of their Spiritual Assemblies. And whenever I shall feel such lights reflected, I will at once return to the Holy Land and engage in the fulfilment of my sacred obligations. Convey this message of mine to all the friends.' It is now two weeks since he made this touching statement and left the Holy Land.

O dearly-loved ones of 'Abdu'l-Bahá! We know from His sacred Will that we must 'Take the greatest care of Shoghi Effendi ... that no dust of despondency and sorrow may stain his radiant nature' and that the tree of his spiritual being may bear fruit. We must ever keep this in mind, and from hour to hour we must develop our heedfulness, our love and affection, our sagacity and magnanimity. It is the hope of this writer that the friends of God will put forth such efforts, and will so radiate their love for Him, as to light up the world; a love that will make the heart of the Guardian leap for joy, and then, God willing, he will soon come back again, so that before I close my eyes upon this life, the separation I endure will be over, and I can bid you all farewell with a happy heart.

My only joy, in these my numbered days, and the joy of the Master's consort, rests in the hands of those well-loved friends of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Upon you be the glory of the All-Glorious.

Notes:

21 Sha'bán 1342 A.H. (28 March 1924 A.D.), to the members of the Spiritual Assemblies and all the Friends of God in the East