

XXXVI. ORIENTALS

Compiled from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, Abdu'l

Original English



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1. Warning Concerning Oriental Moslems

"As to your question as to what races should be regarded as coming under the heading of 'Orientals' in connection with Abdu'l-Bahá's warnings: there is no doubt He was primarily thinking of the Near Eastern races of Islamic extraction, who have every reason to look upon the Faith either with contempt as a mere heresy within, or sect of, Islam, or with hatred as a potential threat to the supremacy of their religion. Likewise, it is these Near Eastern races, particularly the Persian, who have been most persistently exposed to the propaganda and bad example of the Covenant-breakers, old and new, and from whose ranks these very Covenant-breakers have sprung. These circumstances, combined with the fact that, like His Prophetic Forebears, Bahá'u'lláh appeared amongst the people most in need of enlightenment — and hence at their lowest ebb morally — are the reasons for not only Abdu'l-Bahá's and his own repeated warnings concerning Orientals, but also for the conduct, so often demonstrated, unfortunately, by these same Orientals, and which amply justifies our attitude of great precaution and wariness concerning receiving them in our midst and believing their declarations to be sincere. Shoghi Effendi also feels that the Moslems of India should likewise be included in this category, owing to their respective religious and racial background."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, May 9, 1947: Bahá'í News, No. 197, July 1947, pp. 6-7)

1. The Mere Name of Bahá'í Does Not Constitute a Bahá'í

"...the Guardian wishes the Bahá'ís to bear in mind the repeated counsels of the Master that the friends should be on their guard when dealing with Easterners. Not only should they trust no one unless he bears some letter of introduction from his Assembly but also after he is permitted in the Bahá'í group they should be very careful in their dealings with him. This does not mean that they should be unkind to him or have a constant suspicion that would gradually alienate him from the Cause, but to be on their guard lest he misuses their trust. The case of Ahmed Sohrab is a very good example of what an Easterner can do. He thinks to be doing shrewd business when a westerner would consider the act to be deceitful. As Bahá'u'lláh says often in His Tablets the friends should develop a flair wherewith they can detect the good from the evil person. Mere name of Bahá'í does not constitute a Bahá'í. His character also has to be Bahá'í."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, December 18, 1932)



ORIGINAL

1. Avoid Making Any Effort to Convert Orientals to the Faith — i.e., Muslims from the Middle East, Pakistan and India

"As a general rule the friends should not seek out contacts among Orientals (i.e., [pg 430] those of Muslim background from the Middle East, Pakistan and India), whether students or not. However, when contact with Orientals occurs in the course of normal social events the friends, as in all other cases, should show courtesy and kindness, but in these days when the political situation is so confused the friends should consciously avoid making any effort to convert Orientals to the Faith."

"Should such individuals, however, show real interest in the Faith even to the point of wishing to declare, your National Assembly should be contacted by either the Local Spiritual Assembly or the individual teacher so that you in turn can contact the National Spiritual Assembly of the country of origin of the applicant, giving that Assembly full particulars and requesting it to inform you whether there is any objection to the enrolment of that particular individual. Nevertheless, if it appears that the Oriental wishing to declare is contemplating a return to his own country soon, you should follow your present practice of requesting that he declare to the proper administrative institution of his own country."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, January 18, 1968)

1. Iranian Bahá'ís Need Not Avoid All Contact with Iranian Muslims — However, They Should Not Seek Them Out for Friendly Contacts nor for Teaching

"The House of Justice feels that the friends, and sometimes the Bahá'í institutions, have tended to over-react to the instructions given from time to time about contacting and teaching Muslims from Iran and other places in the Middle East, and they often take to extremes the cautions given in such instructions. The friends sometimes think they should shun such people entirely or that any contact with them is considered a breach of Bahá'í law. We are asked to point out that the House of Justice has never forbidden the friends to contact Iranian Muslims, as such a general prohibition would be contrary to the spirit of the Faith. However, given the history and the current situation of the Faith in Iran, it has urged the friends in the West to act toward these people with wisdom and caution. In fact, the House of Justice has clarified the matter on various occasions by stating the following to National Spiritual Assemblies:

"The instructions of the beloved Guardian regarding teaching orientals from the Middle East are to be upheld, even more so at this time because of the present situation in Iran. Iranian Muslims in particular should not be sought out in order to teach them the Faith. It cannot be categorically said, however, that the friends should have no contact with Iranian Muslims. Some of the Bahá'ís have relatives who are Iranian Muslims, some have close Iranian Muslim friends who happen to reside in the West, and they should not relinquish these friendships. At the same time it should be stressed to the Iranian Bahá'ís that while they should not cut themselves off from their Muslim relatives and friends — a step which could create animosity and turn them against the Faith — they should not normally seek out Iranian Muslims in order to initiate friendly contacts with them or teach them the Faith."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, March 6, 1983) [pg 431]

1. In Certain Cases Iranian Muslims Could Be Considered for Enrollment — Each Instance to be Referred to the Universal House of Justice for Approval

"Moreover, the House of Justice feels that there are a number of cases in which Iranian Muslims could be considered for enrolment as Bahá'ís; for example, in cases where the Muslim spouse of a Bahá'í has shown his or her interest and sincerity and has never engaged in opposing the Cause. Another example is when an Iranian is a permanent resident of the United States or Canada and apparently has no ulterior motives, such as assuming Bahá'í membership to resolve his visa problems. Proposed enrolments should be referred to the House of Justice for approval so that, if necessary, the matter can be taken up with the Iranian National Assembly. Of course, even in the cases cited enrolment cannot always be immediately effected. Consideration must be given to other factors: the reaction of relatives in Iran could be a factor in determining the timeliness of enrolling such persons. In such instances it could be explained to them that although they have accepted the Faith in their hearts and are regarded as Bahá'ís in belief, their enrolment must be postponed because of the situation in Iran. Meanwhile, the Bahá'ís should maintain friendly contacts with them and deepen them in their knowledge of the Faith."

(Ibid.)

1. Bahá'í Professionals Should Not Refuse to Make Themselves Available Professionally to Iranian Muslims

"Already a number of Bahá'í professionals are being approached by Iranian Muslims seeking their expertise. It would be unwise for these Bahá'ís to refuse to make themselves available to them professionally. However, cultural and social contacts should take place only with the knowledge and approval of the appropriate Bahá'í institution."

(Ibid.) [pg 432]

