

XLVII. BAHÁ'Í SUMMER SCHOOLS AND INSTITUTES

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

Original English



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A. Summer Schools

1. Purpose of Summer Schools

"The basic purpose of all Bahá'í Summer Schools, whether in East or West, is to give the believers the opportunity to fully acquaint themselves, not only by mere study but through whole-hearted and active collaboration in various Bahá'í activities, with the essentials of the Administration and in this way enable them to become efficient and able promoters of the Cause...."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, September 25, 1933: Centers of Bahá'í Learning, p. 8, A Compilation of the Universal House of Justice, Wilmette, 1980 ed.)

1. Undue Time Should Not Be Spent on Philosophic and Esoteric Subjects

"The reports we have received on summer school sessions held in Europe this year indicate that some of them spend undue time on philosophic and esoteric subjects and insufficient emphasis on the Bahá'í Faith and its Teachings."

"The beloved Guardian stressed that one of the important purposes of Bahá'í summer schools is to deepen the knowledge of the believers in the history and Teachings of the Faith so that they can become better teachers. To this end he emphasized the study of Islam and the Qur'an so that the friends would have a background against which to study the Bahá'í Writings, and he urged study of the principles of Bahá'í Administration."

"In addition he stated that summer schools should become high occasions for teaching the Message. To an individual believer he wrote: 'Through daily association with the believers, non-Bahá'ís will come to see the Cause functioning as an active and living community entirely dedicated to the service of what is best and highest in the world. The lectures will familiarize them with the principles underlying the New World Order, while their participation in the social life of the believers will enable them to see the way in which these very same principles are put into operation.'"

"It is requested that National Assemblies review summer school and winter school curricula in light of these important principles. At this time, when the prosecution of the Nine Year Plan to



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final victory is of supreme importance, it is also urged that during summer school sessions opportunities be provided to impress upon the believers the urgent need for pioneering and teaching."

"We pray that summer schools may become increasingly effective in educating the friends so that they in turn may become useful channels for the diffusion of the Divine fragrances."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies of Europe, September 26, 1969) [pg 560]

1. Summer Schools Can Attract Many Souls

"How wonderful it would be if all the friends could arrange to spend at least a few days in one of these summer schools and take an active part in their development. These centers could attract many souls if properly arranged and made interesting; those non-Bahá'ís who visit them will then have some time to get into the spirit of the place and make a study of the Cause...."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, received about May 1, 1932: Centers of Bahá'í Learning, p. 2)

1. Lecture Method Not Sufficient

"Shoghi Effendi feels that the real purpose of these Summer Schools is to deepen the knowledge of the friends. Lectures are very essential for they give a wonderful picture of the subject matter. But it is not sufficient to have a picture; the friends should deepen their knowledge and this can be achieved if, together with the lectures, there are study classes and seminar work carried on by the same lecturer. The world is undoubtedly facing a great crisis and the social, economic and political conditions are daily becoming more complex. Should the friends desire to take the lead in informing the world, they should start by educating themselves and understand what the troubles and problems really are which baffle the minds of men. It is in these Summer Schools that this training should be provided for the friends."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, January 27, 1932: Ibid., pp. 1-2)

1. Supervised by National Assembly

"Regarding the Summer Schools in general: Although there is no objection to their being under the direct management of a special Committee elected for that purpose, they must be generally supervised by the N.S.A. in respect to policy, etc. In other words, they must be considered as a national and not a purely local institution."

"For purposes of convenience the N.S.A. may appoint as members of such Committees, those who are situated near the Summer Schools and are able to pay direct attention to their affairs."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of Australia and New Zealand, April 18, 1942: Letters from the Guardian to Australia and New Zealand, p. 45)

1. Summer Schools Inseparable Part of Teaching Campaign

"...The institution of the Summer School constitutes a vital and inseparable part of any teaching campaign, and as such ought to be given the full importance it deserves in the teaching plans and activities of the believers. It should be organized in such a way as to attract the attention of the non-believers to the Cause and thus become an effective medium for teaching. Also it should afford the believers themselves an opportunity to deepen their knowledge of the Teachings, through lectures and discussions and by means of close and intense community life."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles, October 17, 1936: Centers of Bahá'í Learning, pp. 2-3) [pg 561]

1. Introduce Bahá'í Atmosphere

"...They must try and introduce the Bahá'í atmosphere of life and thought into their Summer Schools, rather than making the Summer School an episode and a pleasant vacation period, during which they learn a little more about the Faith."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, May 23, 1954: Ibid., p. 12)

1. Dancing, Nothing in Teachings Against

"As regards the questions you asked him: There is nothing in the teachings against dancing, and any arrangements for it at summer schools, etc., is left to the discretion of the Committee or Assembly in charge to make."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, February 24, 1947: Ibid., p. 16)

1. Topics to be Discussed

"The wide range of the topics that are to be discussed and studied by the friends cover most of the important aspects of the Cause and such a plan will undoubtedly give them a broad and a sound knowledge of the essentials of the Faith. Special stress, however, should be put on the history of the Movement as well as on the guiding principles of Bahá'í Administration; for on these two points most of the believers are not adequately informed. It is, therefore, a great opportunity for them to strengthen the basis of their beliefs and to try to deepen their understanding of the basis of the present-day Bahá'í administrative system."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, August 5, 1932: Ibid., p. 7)

1. The Summer School Curriculum Should Concentrate on Deepening the Student's Grasp of the Teachings

"He feels ... that some of the courses are not sufficiently Bahá'í in nature, but carry the student off into an unnecessary study of special techniques — history, psychology or whatever it may be, which however valuable these topics may be in training the human mind and fitting the

individual for contact with others, are a waste of time, in view of the very limited period that most of the Bahá'ís spend at a Bahá'í summer school."

"The friends should concentrate on deepening their grasp of the Teachings, particularly on studying what has already been done, and what must be done to fulfil the goals...."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, May 11, 1954)

1. It is Important that Courses on Covenant-Breaking Be Included in the Summer School Curriculum

"...your Assembly cannot be too careful or vigilant in watching over the Community, seeking out the sources of corruption and protecting the friends. He feels that a course in Covenant-breaking should be included in the Summer School curriculum, so that the friends may understand the nature of this evil, and how it has affected our Faith for one hundred years, and other Faiths in the past. The American Bahá'ís, aside from the older ones, do not seem to have any concept whatsoever of what a Covenant-breaker is, and the place to educate them in these matters is in the Summer [pg 562] Schools and on other occasions when they meet in large numbers."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, September 21, 1957)

1. Indispensable for Students to Study the Pattern of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh

"A careful look at the subjects mentioned in your program clearly reveals the fact that the friends have at last come to realize how indispensable it is for them to deepen their knowledge of the background and of the administrative development of the Cause. These were, indeed, the two main points which they had hitherto neglected to study, and the time has come when they have to attach to them all the importance they deserve. Particularly remarkable has been your effort in regard to the study of the Administration — an important new feature in the history of the Cause, the study of which is becoming increasingly indispensable to every thoughtful student of the Faith. It is hoped that in the next few years all our Bahá'í Summer Schools, whether in the States or abroad, will make a conscious and thorough attempt to fully acquaint the friends with the origin, nature and peculiar significance of the nascent administrative institutions of the Cause, which constitute a humble, though a very exact pattern, of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. It is of the utmost importance that from now the believers should get familiar with the rudiments of the Administration, that they may not follow the path which the followers of older religions have trodden and which have led to their eventual downfall."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, October 20, 1933)

1. The Importance of the Study of Islam — Need Competent Lecturers and Writers, Not Necessarily Bahá'ís

"First is the importance of the study of Islam — which subject is still new to the majority of the believers, but whose importance for a proper and sound understanding of the Cause is absolutely indispensable. Your Committee should therefore continue to emphasize the study of

this all-important subject, and make every effort to provide the attendants with all the facilities required, such as textbooks, competent lecturers and writers, who though not necessarily Bahá'ís, should have a correct knowledge and sound appreciation of Islam, so as to be able to impress its true significance and mission upon all the attendants at the school."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, August 14, 1939)

1. Teaching of the Qur'an is Absolutely Indispensable

"...the Guardian would certainly advise, and even urge the friends to make a thorough study of the Qur'an as the knowledge of this Sacred Scripture is absolutely indispensable for every believer who wishes to adequately understand and intelligently read the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. Although there are very few persons among our Western Bahá'ís who are capable of handling such a course in a scholarly way, yet, the mere lack of such competent teachers should encourage and stimulate the believers to get better acquainted with the Sacred Scriptures of Islam. In this way, there will gradually appear some distinguished Bahá'ís who will be so well versed in the teachings of Islam as to be able to guide the believers in their study of that religion."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, December 2, 1935: Centers of Bahá'í Learning, p. 9)

1. Character Building and Ethics

"The course on character building ... the Guardian feels, is particularly important and should be given due emphasis and studied carefully and thoroughly specially by the young believers in attendance at the school. Those standards of Bahá'í conduct, which he himself has set forth in his last general epistle, 'The Advent of Divine Justice', and which it should be the paramount duty of every loyal and conscientious believer to endeavor to uphold and promote, deserve serious study and meditation, and should constitute the main central theme of this year's program...."

"The principles and methods laid down by the Guardian in his 'Advent of Divine Justice' on this vital subject of Bahá'í ethics, should indeed prove of invaluable inspiration and guidance to all the students and friends attending the Summer School classes, and thus prepare them to better appreciate the privileges, and more adequately discharge the responsibilities, of their citizenship in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh."

(From a letter written on behalf of the Guardian to an individual believer, May 20, 1939: Ibid., p. 10)

1. Few Days Not Sufficient to Learn Everything

"Definite courses should be given along the different phases of the Faith and in a manner that will stimulate the students to proceed in their studies privately once they return home, for the period of a few days is not sufficient to learn everything. They have to be taught the habit of studying the Cause constantly, for the more we read the Words the more will the truth they contain be revealed to us."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, November 24, 1932)

1. Bahá'í Youth Attendant at Louhelen Shoulder Responsibility in Connection with Development of the Bahá'í University

"Remembering the strong emphasis repeatedly laid by the Guardian on the importance of the institutions of the summer school, both as a center for the preparation and training of prospective teachers and pioneers, and for the commingling and fellowship of various elements in the Bahá'í Community, the Bahá'í Youth, on whom Louhelen Ranch has exercised a particular and indeed irresistible appeal, and whose sessions they have so frequently and in such large numbers attended, have a peculiar responsibility to shoulder in connection with its development into that ideal Bahá'í University of the future, which should be the aim of every existing Bahá'í Summer School to establish in the fulness of time."

"Through their regular attendance at each and every session of the school, and their participation in all phases of its activities, intellectual, spiritual, social and recreational, and above all by their faithful and close adherence to those high standards of Bahá'í life and conduct, they can best and most effectively contribute towards the growth of that institution [pg 564] and attract to it the attention and interest of the non-Bahá'í world outside."

(From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the Louhelen School, July 29, 1939)



B. Bahá'í Teaching Institutes

1. Teaching Institutes

"...this is essentially an activity aimed at deepening the knowledge of the friends to prepare them for active participation in the teaching work. In some countries it may continue to be an activity conducted either in local Bahá'í Centres or possibly housed in hired quarters, like most Summer Schools. However, in other countries, and particularly in mass teaching areas, it may have to be a modest structure acquired or erected in the rural areas where the majority of the believers reside rather than in capital cities, to obviate transportation expenses for those attending."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, May 14, 1964: Centers of Bahá'í Learning, p. 19)

1. Institute Should Be Centre of Complex Activities

"Your Institutes should not only be seats of Bahá'í learning but also centres from which mass teaching and consolidation work over a large area must be inspired and conducted. The Institute is not merely a building, nor solely a place where Bahá'í classes can be held for a few days. It should be the centre of complex activities which systematically assist your Assembly in the achievement of its goal in teaching and consolidation."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of India: June 23, 1966)

1. Subjects to be Taught

"The material to be taught is prepared ahead of time, presented in simple language, and translated into the vernacular..."

"The subjects taught usually consist of Bahá'í History, Laws and Teachings, and the Administrative Order. Special emphasis is laid upon living the Bahá'í life, the importance of teaching, prayer, fasting, Nineteen Day Feasts, Bahá'í elections, and contribution to the Fund."

(From 'Suggestions on Operation of Teaching Institutes': enclosure in letter dated 24 December, 1964, from the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Guatemala: Centers of Bahá'í Learning, p. 19)

1. Issuing Diplomas Discouraged — Sometimes They Are Misused

"We have also noted that you intend to give graduation diplomas to the friends who attend the institutes. Your desire to acknowledge devoted attendance at the institutes is most commendable, but we feel it would be preferable in future to give a suitable gift, such as a book, rather than a diploma. From experience in other areas of the world we have learned that such diplomas sometimes are misused by their recipients. For this reason we have discouraged their use."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly of Guatemala, October 27, 1965: Ibid., p. 20) [pg 565]

1. A Teaching Institute at Present is a Function and Not Necessarily a Building

"We greatly appreciate your desire to serve the Cause and at the same time honour the beloved Hand of the Cause and wonder whether more feasible plans would appeal to you. For instance, you might consider establishing a fund to maintain Bahá'í tutors in villages, who would teach not only reading and writing but the elements of the Faith as well. We have always stressed to those National Spiritual Assemblies which establish Teaching Institutes that at the present time such an Institute is a function and not necessarily a building and there are many places where such educational work can be pursued if a number of teachers can be supported. On the other hand, we have no idea of the size of the principal you have in mind for your endowment and wonder whether a very simple school where not only children but adult literary classes could be held, would meet your intention."

(From a letter of the Universal House of Justice to an individual believer, April 18, 1971: Ibid.) [pg 566]

