

Guidance to Poets

by The Universal House of Justice
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MEMORANDUM

To: The Universal House of Justice

Date: 13 March 1988

From: The Research Department

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 Ali Akbar Furutan, 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. Furutan 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 Maqsd in which He comments on Maqsd'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.