

Writers and Writing

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WRITERS AND WRITING

Compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice

FROM THE WRITINGS OF BAHA'U'LLAH

Thou hast written that one of the friends hath composed a treatise. This was mentioned in the Holy Presence, and this is what was revealed in response: Great care should be exercised that whatever is written in these days doth not cause dissension, and invite the objection of the people. Whatever the friends of the one true God say in these days is listened to by the people of the world. It hath been revealed in the Lawh-i-Hikmat: "The unbelievers have inclined their ears towards us in order to hear that which might enable them to cavil against God, the Help in Peril, the Self-Subsisting." Whatever is written should not transgress the bounds of tact and wisdom, and in the words used there should lie hid the property of milk, so that the children of the world may be nurtured therewith, and attain maturity. We have said in the past that one word hath the influence of spring and causeth hearts to become fresh and verdant, while another is like unto blight which causeth the blossoms and flowers to wither. God grant that authors among the friends will write in such a way as would be acceptable to fair-minded souls, and not lead to cavilling by the people.

(From a Tablet of Baha'u'llah to an individual believer)

Say: O men! This is a matchless Day. Matchless must, likewise, be the tongue that celebrateth the praise of the Desire of all nations, and matchless the deed that aspireth to be acceptable in His Sight. The whole human race hath longed for this Day, that perchance it may fulfil that which well beseemeth its station, and is worthy of its destiny. Blessed is the man whom the affairs of the world have failed to deter from recognizing Him Who is the Lord of all things.

("Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1984), XVI, p. 39)

How great the multitude of truths which the garment of words can never contain! How vast the number of such verities as no expression can adequately describe, whose significance can never be unfolded, and to which not even the remotest allusions can be made! How manifold are the truths which must remain unuttered until the appointed time is come! Even as it hath been said: "Not everything that a man knoweth can be disclosed, nor can everything that he can disclose be regarded as timely, nor can every timely utterance be considered as suited to the capacity of those who hear it."

Of these truths some can be disclosed only to the extent of the capacity of the repositories of the light of Our knowledge, and the recipients of Our hidden grace. We beseech God to strengthen thee with His power, and enable thee to recognize Him Who is the Source of all knowledge, that thou mayest detach

thyself from all human learning, for, what would it profit any man to strive after learning when he hath already found and recognized Him Who is the Object of all knowledge?" Cleave to the Root of Knowledge, and to Him Who is the Fountain thereof, that thou mayest find thyself independent of all who claim to be well versed in human learning, and whose claim no clear proof, nor the testimony of any enlightening book, can support.

("Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah", rev. ed. (Wilmette: Baha'i Publishing Trust, 1984), LXXXIX, pp. 176-77)

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In this Day the secrets of the earth are laid bare before the eyes of men. The pages of swiftly-appearing newspapers are indeed the mirror of the world. They reflect the deeds and the pursuits of divers peoples and kindreds. They both reflect them and make them known. They are a mirror endowed with hearing, sight and speech. This is an amazing and potent phenomenon. However, it behoveth the writers thereof to be purged from the promptings of evil passions and desires and to be attired with the raiment of justice and equity. They should enquire into situations as much as possible and ascertain the facts, then set them down in writing.

(From Tarazat, published in "Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas" [rev. ed.], (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1982), pp. 39-40)

It ill beseemeth thee to turn thy gaze unto former or more recent times. Make thou mention of this Day and magnify that which hath appeared therein. It will in truth suffice all mankind. Indeed expositions and discourses in explanation of such things cause the spirits to be chilled. It behoveth thee to speak forth in such wise as to set the hearts of true believers ablaze and cause their bodies to soar....

Teach thou the Cause of God with an utterance which will cause the bushes to be enkindled, and the call "Verily, there is no God but Me, the Almighty, the Unconstrained" to be raised therefrom. Say: Human utterance is an essence which aspireth to exert its influence and needeth moderation. As to its influence, this is conditional upon refinement which in turn is dependent upon hearts which are detached and pure. As to its moderation, this hath to be combined with tact and wisdom as prescribed in the Holy Scriptures and Tablets. Meditate upon that which hath streamed forth from the heaven of the Will of thy Lord, He Who is the Source of all grace, that thou mayest grasp the intended meaning which is enshrined in the sacred depths of the Holy Writings.

(from Lawh-i-Hikmat, published in "Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas" [rev. ed.], (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1982), pp. 142-43)

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.

(From Lawh.-i-Maqṣud, published in "Tablets of Baha'u'llah Revealed after the Kitab-i-Aqdas" [rev. ed.], (Haifa: Baha'i World Centre, 1982), pp. 175-76)

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FROM THE WRITINGS OF 'ABDU'L-BAHA

It is my hope that thou mayest succeed in writing thy book. However, the language should be moderate, tempered, and infinitely courteous. Look not at the language used by that hostile writer, for he was prejudiced and unrefined. Any person, with the slightest degree of fairness, will understand that his writing is totally biased and inspired by enmity. This is enough proof that what he hath written is spurious.

(From a Tablet to an individual believer--translated from the Persian)

Pure souls, such as Mirza Abu'l-Fadl, upon him be the Glory of God, spend their nights and days in demonstrating the truth of the Revelation, by adducing conclusive and brilliant proofs and expanding the verities of the Faith, by lifting the veils, promoting the religion of God and spreading His fragrances.

(From a Tablet to an individual believer translated from the Persian)

Great care should be exercised in preparing this translation. Mr.... should make a supreme effort so that the language will be most exquisite, eloquent and lucid, even if the translated text is to be submitted to, and made dependent upon the opinions of, experts in language.

(From a Tablet to an individual believer--translated from the Persian)

The subjects to be taught in children's school are many, and for lack of time We can touch on only a few: First and most important is training in behaviour and good character; the rectification of qualities; arousing the desire to become accomplished and acquire perfections, and to cleave unto the religion of God and stand firm in His Laws, to accord total obedience to every just government, to show forth loyalty and trustworthiness to the ruler of the time, to be well wishers of mankind, to be kind to all.

And further, as well as in the ideals of character, instruction in such arts and sciences as are of benefit, and in foreign tongues. Also, the repeating of prayers for the well-being of ruler and ruled; and the avoidance of materialistic works that are current among those who see only natural causation, and tales of love, and books that arouse the passions.

To sum up, let all the lessons be entirely devoted to the acquisition of human perfections.

Here, then, in brief are directions for the curriculum of these schools.

Greetings be unto you, and praise.

(From a Tablet to an individual believer, published in "The Baha'i World", vol. 16, p. 37)

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FROM LETTERS WRITTEN ON BEHALF OF SHOGHI EFFENDI TO INDIVIDUAL BELIEVERS

I am overjoyed at such a splendid production. I strongly urge you to secure the assistance of one of the best and most respected publishers in England and to ensure that it will receive the fullest attention regarding its outward form

and style of printing. The book is correct in its presentation of the essentials of the Faith, eminently readable, exquisitely arranged, and has a distinctive charm unsurpassed by any book of its kind whether written by Eastern or Western believers. I heartily recommend it to every earnest and devout teacher of the Cause.

(In the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 11 November 1927 written on his behalf)

Your literary ability makes you specially qualified to teach the Cause. For in the world of to-day much can be achieved through the power of pen. All you need is to try to deepen your knowledge of the history and the teachings of the Faith, and thus well-equipped you will assuredly win a glorious success. Baha'u'llah has given us the assurance that He will be always on our side and will give us all the help we may need. You should, therefore, arise steadfastly to serve our beloved Cause and dedicate the rest of your life to the noble ideal which it seeks to realize.

(30 July 1932)

What Baha'u'llah meant primarily with "sciences that begin and end in words" are those theological treatises and commentaries that encumber the human mind rather than help it to attain the truth. The students would devote their life to their study but still attain no where.

Baha'u'llah surely never meant to include story writing under such a category; and shorthand and typewriting are both most useful talents very necessary in our present social and economic life.

What you could do, and should do, is to use your stories to become a source of inspiration and guidance for those who read them. With such a means at your disposal you can spread the spirit and teachings of the Cause; you can show the evils that exist in society, as well as the way they can be remedied. If you possess a real talent in writing you should consider it as given by God and exert your efforts to use it for the betterment of society.+F1

(30 November 1932)

He has received and read with deepest interest the manuscripts you had enclosed in your letter, one entitled ..., and the other consisting of a long poem in which you had made an attempt to present the Message indirectly.

F1. This advice was given to a believer who asked whether such skills as shorthand and typing, and the writing of stories dealing with human experience, would be classified among those sciences that "begin and end in words", as mentioned by Baha'u'llah.

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As to this last one, he approves of your suggestion to write a sequel to it, and to refer more directly to the Cause. He would, however, advise you to couch the whole subject in such a form as to make it interesting and appealing to the non-Baha'i reader. The direct presentation of the Teachings is surely highly important and even indispensable nowadays. But it should be done with utmost care and tact, and in a manner that would appeal to the non-believers.

(31 December 1935)

There is a great need for teaching the Cause at present; every Baha'i should teach, and each one has his own capacities and can expect to reach certain souls who respond to his efforts. Your gift of writing should by all means be utilized in serving the Cause. Every one is perforce only an instrument in giving the Message which is more or less coloured by his own capacities and approach to life. There is no harm in this. You should write freely what you feel, what you wish to convey to the mind of the reader; afterwards you yourself, and those who pass upon Baha'i manuscripts and publications, can make sure that all your points conform to the teachings. The way you give them out and present them is an individual matter and there is no objection to this at all.

He would not recommend fiction as a means of teaching; the condition of the world is too acute to permit of delay in giving them the direct teachings, associated with the name of Baha'u'llah. But any suitable approach to the Faith, which appeals to this or that group, is certainly worthy of effort, as we wish to bring the Cause to all men, in all walks of life, of all mentalities.+F2

(23 March 1945)

Regarding your question about what courses would be most useful for you to study: He feels that both radio and journalistic work are fields in which the Baha'is could well learn to express themselves for the sake of helping their teaching work, and advises you, if you have the time, to study these subjects.

(15 August 1945)

F2. This advice was given to a believer who sought the counsel of the Guardian on ways one might use writing skills to teach the Faith. The believer proposed writing a novel in which the Baha'i teachings and their source would be presented indirectly and in such a way as to stimulate curiosity and search by the reader.

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Your suggestion regarding a book for the general public is a good one. The question is not only have we Baha'is competent to present this subject in a way which would catch the attention of the public, but also even if such a book existed would it achieve its end? We have, unfortunately, not very many capable Baha'i writers, and the condition of confusion in the World is such that it seems doubtful if such a work would arrest the attention of distracted mankind. However, we need more and better Baha'i books, and he suggests you present your idea to the German, British and American N.S.A.'s.

(26 October 1950)

There is no objection to your being a journalist as long as you try to keep off political issues; especially the big East-West issue. You have a talent for writing, and it might be of help to you financially and in making contacts for the Faith.

(30 November 1950)

Regarding the advice you asked him for, he feels that to devote all one's studies with the object of becoming a Baha'i author, is rather risky. We need Baha'i authors badly, but you have to be assured that you have the talent to earn your living in that field, and also serve the Faith in it.

He feels that the best thing for you to do is to devote your studies to acquiring a sound education, if you like along literary lines, and then see what develops.

(14 May 1957)

FROM A LETTER WRITTEN ON BEHALF OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

The Universal House of Justice has considered your letter of 6 December 1979 concerning the novel you are writing involving a romantic relationship and asking whether you should continue this project in light of the advice of 'Abdu'l-Baha that curricula of schools should avoid tales of love.

We have been asked to say that what should be avoided are stories that arouse the passions. From what you say, the purpose of your story is to appeal to higher motivations in life and, in fact, to spread the spirit and teachings of the Cause.

(23 December 1979 to an individual believer)