

**Transcript of a talk by
Dr. Peter Khan
in Vancouver B.C. on August 20, 2005**

Dear Friends it is a pleasure for me to be here this afternoon, to be back in Vancouver, and to have the opportunity to talk to you and to share with you my personal thoughts about the present stage and the future developments of the Cause of God.

I think it is fair to say that the past five years have been without precedent in the recent history of the Faith. The tremendous upsurge of vitality, energy and activity by believers in communities across the entire surface of the globe has no precedent in recent memories. One is reminded of the fervor of the early years of the Ten Year Crusade when valiant pioneers went out to open the virgin territories of the globe in response to the call and encouragement of the Guardian. That same kind of devotion, of sacrificial activity, has been apparent during the five years of this plan. As the plan draws to a close, and a new plan comes into being, to be announced for Ridvan 2006, it will be one of the functions of the Universal House of Justice to provide Its own evaluation of the present plan. I do not preempt that with my own comments, but I certainly feel that my impression is that the House of Justice will regard this plan as having been an outstanding success, far beyond our comprehension and our expectations. And this is a tribute not only to all the Bahá'ís of the world but, above all, it is a tribute to the mysterious power of the creative Word of God.

If there is one victor in the Five Year Plan, it is the creative power of the Word of God. That is the one common theme as we review the upsurge of activity in all parts of the world. Study circles and institutes, irrespective of their format, irrespective of their methodology, irrespective of the approach they adopt, all bring the individual Bahá'í or friend of the Bahá'ís, bring that individual in contact with the Word of God. And that Word of God works its mysteries in the heart of that individual, liberating the spirit, ennobling the emotions, the ideals, of the individual, disclosing visions and insights that previously were unknown.

Devotional meetings are proving an astonishing source of attraction to people who are not Bahá'ís as well as to Bahá'ís. It is clear that in all parts of the world, people are searching for spiritual food. They are famished. There is a passage in the Kitáb-i-Iqán, where Bahá'u'lláh speaks of, what He describes as the latter days, and He says at that time the world will be enveloped in oppression. And He says what greater oppression could there be than an individual wanting (and I am paraphrasing) that an individual wanting to find Truth and not knowing where to go for it. In that sense, our devotional meetings offer opportunities, without pressure, without harassment, without any form of evangelizing, where human beings can get together and share the Word of God and be bathed in the spirit of the power of these words.

In children's classes, which of course have been a feature of the Twelve Month Plan, which preceded the present Five Year Plan, in children's classes, we see adults and youth offering to children something more than life itself. Offering to them the Word of God that will nourish their souls, that will be a core within their being, on which they can draw for the rest of their lives. So, as I say, if there is a victor in the Five Year Plan, it is the mystery of the creative power of the Word of God.

The result of this, of course, is that the human resources of the Bahá'í Faith have expanded rapidly in that period. There have been a number of new enrollments, but far beyond that has been the expansion of human resources as a consequence of the rise in activity level of the rank and file of the

Bahá'ís. We also find that when people decide now to enter the Faith, to take up membership of it, there is a far greater likelihood of their remaining committed to the Faith as a result of the fact that, more often than not, they have been through these institute programs, and study circles and the like, and have a solid base of knowledge on which to found their activity and so to remain committed to the work of the Faith, through the vicissitudes that are an inevitable part of life.

This activity of the Five Year Plan has been a major change in the content and the functioning of Bahá'í communities in all parts of the world. And as a result, we have had a certain number of problems, which I tend to categorize as “normal” problems (if there can be such a thing!). They are problems which you can expect whenever there is a commitment to some kind of change. They are mainly of two kinds, one kind are people who say I am very comfortable with the way I am. I don't want to get involved in all this stuff. Go and do it, and good luck to you, but I prefer not to participate in the study circles, the institute programs and the various other activities. And our response to that is that they are perfectly free to do as they wish. This is a religion which attaches a great degree of importance to individual initiative and freedom. Those who feel, for whatever reason, be they right or be they wrong, that they know enough about the writings that they don't need this kind of thing, fine; they are free to maintain their position. And they should not be criticized, or harassed, or condemned, or pressured.

The other extreme we have, which is the other part of these so called “normal problem,” are those who are at the other end of the spectrum. The zealots, who insist that if you are not participating in these various core activities of the plan, for a start there is something wrong with you in relation to the covenant, “Why are you not doing this? You should be,” and that you should not do anything else! That you should not have firesides, deepening classes, study classes, campus activities, proclamation, Bahá'í studies programs and the like. I categorize that also as a normal problem. It is a normal problem of human enthusiasm. And gradually it moderates. And gradually it calms down and gradually things return to a certain degree of equilibrium as the Bahá'í community goes forward. The House of Justice has never at any time abrogated the responsibility placed on Bahá'ís, by no less a figure than the Guardian and his interpretations of the sacred Writings, to have firesides; the importance of systematic deepenings in the foundational books of our Faith; the intensive study of Gleanings, the Kitáb-i-Iqán and of course now the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and other books; the necessity to acquire a good sound understanding of the theory of practice of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. These are with us, have been with us, and will remain with us, throughout the Dispensation. They have not been changed by the commendable enthusiasm for the core activities. And often one can find that some of the perdavations??? are due to a confusion between priority and exclusivity. There are things that are priority. Core activities are priorities, because they are specified as part of the Five Year Plan. But this does not mean that they should be exclusive.

This present five years, which is a source of exultation, enthusiasm and joy in the Bahá'í community, is also a five year period which has seen the world around us plunge into a far greater degree of difficulty than it has hitherto experienced. It seems to me that one of the great challenges the world faces as a result of the experiences of the past five years is the rise of pessimism, the deep concern that is pervading a greater and greater portion of our society, the realization that civilization itself is in jeopardy. And this is not a thought that any reasonable person might well have entertained for an extended period of time before the present phase of some five or so years. Now it is becoming apparent that things are not going through one of the ephemeral phases of ups and downs that distinguish human history. But rather something very fundamental is occurring; one of the great historic celestial??? changes of human history is upon us.

My impression is that the decline of the quality of civilized life in the world around us can be categorized under three headings. The first is what I call the fracture in social functioning. By that I mean the breakdown of the things that are taken for granted as part of social intercourse, the commerce of daily life, the rise in crime, the spread of disorder and disturbance in society, the militancy, the anger, the tensions, the protests, that increasingly invade our society. The gradual but relentless spread of terrorism, starting from negligible beginnings but now becoming a major factor, which is of course affecting those of us who travel, we have become intimately aware of the problems of the society in terms of the extraordinary measures taken to combat terrorism with regard to airline travel and the like. Beyond that, the spread of corruption, almost becoming accepted as being normal, the spread of corruption in government circles, involving high officials throughout the world, in business, in civil service, and, in more recent years, in religious organizations of all. The lack of control of human greed, invading business practices, affecting employment, destabilizing the security that individuals may legitimately want to feel with regard to long term employment, all these things, are part of what I call the fracture in social functioning, which I see as one of the three characteristics of this declining order.

The second one is a breakdown in personal morality. Throughout the world, not only in the western world, but in the world of the East, the post-communist world, the so-called Third World, and so on, there is an alarming and quite sharply increasing breakdown in personal morality. The acceptance of dishonesty, the casual acceptance of lying in normal transactions, the sexual promiscuity in various forms being masked in the name of freedom and liberation, the pursuit of superficiality in past-times and interests (rather than the superficial practices simply being occasional when your mind is gone and you just want to watch T.V. no matter what is on, that's fine) this has become an addiction to superficiality to shut out the realities of a troubling world. The lack of refinement, in speech, in vocabulary, in manners, and even in the disorderly dress, which often passes as present-day up-to-date fashion, all of these things, I think, are part of the breakdown of personal morality.

And the third characteristic of the society, which I see to be in an alarming decline, is the rise of racial, ethnic and factional tensions, the militancy and the separatist outlook of minorities in all countries, whether they are racial or ethnic minorities. In these countries likewise we see, the tyranny exerted by the majority in ignoring minority rights, the division of society into competing adversarial elements, segmented by religious differences or by social class, or the like, and the indoctrination of grieved minorities in hatred. In so many parts of the world, we see that the schools in their curriculum, in their approach, in their textbooks, in the kind of teachers they select, blatantly and quite unashamedly, teach hatred, and this has become acceptable. This is reported in newspapers almost without comment. It causes some ephemeral alarm when one of the products of the schools becomes a bomber and blows up trains or something like that, but it has become accepted that schools in certain areas, in certain places, will be left free by society to teach hatred without restraint.

These three elements, I see as providing a framework with which to view the disturbed and very ominous condition of present-day civilization, be it in the West or in the East. These three elements are also referred to, in a completely different way, by Shoghi Effendi in *The Advent of Divine Justice*, where he refers to the positive requirements of building a new world.

The main point I want to make this afternoon is to draw your attention to my view that the Writings, which of course we know refer to the present day as being an age of transition, that these Writings of our religion promise us, quite categorically, without any reservation, without any qualification, that

this age of transition will definitely and surely lead to the unification of human society, to its harmony, to the rule of justice throughout the world, and on this foundation, a world civilization will be built. It will take hundreds of years to set that foundation and the world civilization, which will rest upon it, will develop in the course of time into the future for untold thousands of years. There are Writings that tell us that we live in the age of transition and that our role as Bahá'ís is to be a spiritualizing element, working in concert with the great spiritual forces released into the world by the power of God at this time in history, the so-called Major Plan of God. And by working in the world, we Bahá'ís play our significant and assigned role to be a spiritualizing element as these great forces, at work in the world, beyond our comprehension, shape the affairs of men and give rise ultimately to this new world civilization. What I want to point out to you is my understanding that we are called upon, at the present time, to sow the seeds of that new civilization. That it is not something we sit back and wait for, that it will occur hundreds and hundreds of years into the future when we are all dead and buried and forgotten about. Shoghi Effendi, in *The Promise Day Has Come*, states that within the administrative structure of the Faith, an embryonic civilization, incomparable and world-embracing, is imperceptibly maturing. And I find this a remarkable statement. That within our administrative order, as the Guardian says, there is right now an embryonic civilization, incomparable and world-embracing, and that it is imperceptibly maturing. What I get from that is that the practices enjoined upon us as part of our Bahá'í life within the shelter of the administrative order, the various plans that our given to us, and the various precepts set out in our Writings, all have as a fundamental objective, the maturing of a civilizing process to which we are subjected by such participation. And of course, you can imagine, such a civilizing process must have its moments of challenge and definitely its tests, and indeed heartache.

The Writings tell us that the world civilization will be born when the Most Great Peace is established and the worldwide sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh, as the promised one of all ages, is established. It will be a civilization with the fullness of life, such as the world has never seen nor can yet conceive. However, my understanding is that what we are required to do today is to engage in civilizing processes, which are part of the foundation of that future civilization. For example, the core activities of the Five Year Plan seem to me to be far more than the mundane activities of a fledgling Bahá'í community. It seems to me that in summoning us to the core activities of the Five Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice is in a very real sense calling upon us to engage in practices which are the core of a civilized way of life -- a devotional element, collective as well as personal; the transmission of important values, from one generation to another, through children classes; the systematic approach to the acquisition of knowledge that it is inherent in the institute process; the outward orientation, which is part of the service component of these core activities. If we look at these, if we look far beyond their immediate purpose and their immediate form, I think that we will see in them the vague outlines of a civilizing process to which we have been called by virtue of these activities.

There are a number of other aspects of the Writings which support my thesis, that we today are engaged in laying the foundation for the civilizing process. I have referred, just a few minutes ago, to Shoghi Effendi's statement that world civilization will be born when the Most Great Peace is established. In that context, it was intriguing to me to read that Shoghi Effendi, way back almost sixty years ago, commented on the activities of President Woodrow Wilson of the United States in the latter part of World War I in the early part of the Twentieth Century. Wilson laid out fourteen points, which formed the basis for the League of Nations, which although it was doomed to failure, gave rise ultimately to the United Nations, which is having its own particular problems, but we anticipate will give rise to a further form and structure ultimately leading to international governmental organization. Shoghi Effendi referred to the actions of Woodrow Wilson, in whenever

it was, 1918 or 1919, and he described those actions as constituting the dawn of the Most Great Peace. Had he written that this was the dawn of the Lesser Peace, it would have been much more readily intelligible to me, but no, he said it was the dawn of the Most Great Peace. And I think he was directing our attention to the nature of processes in the growth of the Faith and that these processes have very long roots, extending back to the various earliest days of the Cause, and, in that sense, the civilizing process in which we are engaging may be regarded within a similar context of giving rise to forces and trends and behaviors, which will have their fruit hundreds of years into the future.

I have often wondered why it is that this religion, in contrast to every other religion in history, in its early days, has devoted so much of its scarce and limited resources to the pursuit of beauty. I know of no other religion that has done this. In Christianity, the beauty of the gothic cathedrals, the great sculptures, the magnificent expressions of devotion to Christ came well down the road, many many hundreds of years later, with the flowering of the Byzantine civilization and the like. So it was in Islam. Its early days were not distinguished by the pursuit of beauty. It is rather in its later years, with the glories of the Caliphate and the Abbasids, the magnificence of Moorish Spain and the like, that we saw beauty and elegance and the greatness of harmony.

By contrast, this religion has made a firm commitment to beauty from its earliest days. If you look in the history of the Faith and the record of Bahá'u'lláh and His remarks about beauty and His [one side of tape finished, sentence cut off here]

... undertook carrying heavy loads of earth and plants on his shoulders to go by foot to beautify the surrounds of the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh. If you look at the fact that Shoghi Effendi, busy as he was with the work as Guardian of the Faith, the administration of the Cause with pitifully few helpers around him at that time, yet he devoted a significant part of his time as well as the resources of the Faith to the beautification of Mount Carmel, the erection of the superstructure of the Shrine of the Báb, the mapping out of Bahá'ís gardens, the construction of the Archives Building and the like, one sees in that a strange, and what I think is a unique commitment to beauty even at the very real cost of absorbing resources which could otherwise be used for other purposes, as well as energy and time. And that practice has been followed by the Universal House of Justice, of course in most recent years with the construction of the buildings of the Arc and the Terraces. There I see in the philosophy of the decisions made by the House of Justice the same commitment to beauty, again at a time when resources are limited. When there are limited amount of materials and energy available, nevertheless, beauty has been pursued. And I see that as a most significant and a most important contribution to the character of world civilization. The world civilization to flourish in centuries to come will be a civilization of beauty. And I think in large part this will be because the Bahá'í Faith has manifested an unshakable commitment to beauty from its very earliest days. And Bahá'ís will be distinguished from others by their vision of beauty in the ideal world.

Those of you who engage in trivial pastimes such as myself, and occasionally go to movies, will occasionally see movies which portray the future. Sometimes it is a horrifying future, sometimes it is intended to be a fairly attractive future with intergalactic things going on and the like. What is noticeable, in even the most attractive portrayals of the future, is the absence of what we could call beauty. It is basically synthetic, it is plastic, it is smooth, it is shiny, but it does not have the things we would describe as beautiful -- the elements of nature, the elements of magnificence of inspiration, of architecture and the like. It brings home to me that there is a dearth of vision of beauty in the world today and that one of the purposes of the Bahá'í Faith is to retain a commitment to beauty, to bring that forward to the future civilization.

Now our Writings go into great detail into the nature of civilization. I want to refer briefly to them, because it is not the main point I want to make, but I want to make a brief reference to them. I find that 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His book, *The Secrets of Divine Civilization*, refers, to my mind, to the nature of the civilized individual, whereas Shoghi Effendi in *The Unfoldment of World Civilization* seems to refer more to the nature of the social structure in a civilized society. And if we admit that our work today, in the spread of the Faith and development of the Bahá'í community, is a commitment to that civilizing process, it would be worth our while to examine closely what 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian say. What I get from *Secrets of Divine Civilization* is that 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to certain characteristics of the civilized individual: that he or she is enlightened, that he seems to be well-informed, high-minded, incorruptible, a person who promotes literacy and education, who encourages art and industry, and who has a great respect for learning and craftsmanship. It is, from *Secrets of Divine Civilization*, the civilized individual is one of high morals -- a person who has the energy and commitment to oppose the passions of the lower nature of man, who is one of good character, who is spiritualized in the best sense of the word. And thirdly, he refers to the civilized individual as being altruistic. In other words, concerned with the welfare of others as well as that of himself, using his resources for philanthropic purposes, creating a society without the extremes of wealth and poverty. All of these are part of the civilized individual as portrayed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in *Secrets of Divine Civilization* and they all resonate with various statements that are found in the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, in the *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, and in other places in our Writings.

Shoghi Effendi in *Unfoldment of World Civilization* seems to me to address a somewhat different theme in the sense that he refers principally to the social dimensions of civilized life. And there again it seems we can summarize it as certain characteristics. One is, civilized life involves a rule of law. It is a society with a strong sense of justice and obedience to law, but with individual freedom and ability to exercise one's initiative and to practice diversity. And there again we see echoes in our precepts of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. He describes a civilized society as one which is unified -- unified in a sense of fostering cooperation, interaction and harmony. And perhaps above all, Shoghi Effendi's description of the civilized society is that it is creative. It is imbued with the creative spirit of change. He refers to the civilized society as one which stimulates the intellectual, moral and spiritual life through the reconciliation of religion and science. Civilized society promotes physical development, raising the standards of health, prolonging human life, and eliminating disease. It has an intellectual component in sharpening and refining the human brain, and in fostering scientific research. And it has a technical component in using more effectively the resources of the planet and increasing productivity. There again we find echoes to various precepts in the Faith concerning the development of individual and social life and concerning the fostering of creativity.

This brings me to the point of my talk that I believe that there are certain actions we should take today as part of our fostering the civilizing process. I do not say them in the sense of wanting to divert you away from the core activities of the Plan, but rather I say them in terms of the fact that they fit in with. They are part and parcel of Bahá'í life as expressed with priority to the core activities, but with all the other elements of Bahá'í life included. And I want, in the last part of my talk, to set out for you fairly specifically what I see to be the civilizing actions required of us now. Of course these are only my own personal impressions and no more than that.

Firstly, I think what we need throughout the world is a new and refined concept of spirituality as defined through inference from the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The word spirituality has acquired some very strange and unreal meanings in our society, which has inhibited proper expression. We

need to rescue that word, make it our own, and base it on inferences or deductions we make from the example of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who was to us, par excellence, the exemplar of spirituality. More specifically, I think we need within this renewed concept of spirituality a heightened awareness of the reality of the spiritual forces that our now, and always have been, and will be pervading the universe. We have to some degree, as a result of the scientific advances of the last hundred and fifty years, some awareness of the reality of the physical forces pervading the universe – the electro-magnetic waves, gamma waves, alpha particles, beta waves, neutrinos, cosmic rays and a whole host of other things. We know about that. Physics studies them. Things are done with them and papers are written about them and the like. We need to likewise, to acquire a heightened awareness that, along with all this other stuff, there are great spiritual forces moving in the world today. That they have been intensified with the coming of Bahá’u’lláh, and that they are at work in the world and there are things we can do to attract these forces to ourselves and certain things we can do which drive these forces away from us. Our Writings speak of a variety of behaviors which attract spiritual forces to us. There are a whole host of such passages in the Writings. The power of unity is one through attraction of spiritual forces when individuals are united with each other. Those who share the message of God with others, what we call teaching, we are told that they attract spiritual forces to each other. The very act of prayer is an act which attracts spiritual forces and so on to great numbers. We are also told there are certain behaviors which will drive spiritual forces away from us. Gossip, backbiting, destructive criticism, all of these things are prohibited in our religion, not simply because they are destructive to the well-being and the cohesion of society, but far beyond that, because they drive from us spiritual forces. We deny ourselves the benefit of spiritual forces whenever we engage in gossip, backbiting and destructive criticism and other things that are mentioned in that context in the Writings.

We need a greater awareness that spirituality is not contradicted by a systematic and planful approach. That the spiritual individual is one who is also rationalistic, who is not necessarily impulsive and chaotic and sporadic, but is rationalistic, systematic planning and carrying out activities in his or her life. Within that context, I think, we ought to recognize that there are a number of very mysterious things going on. One of the examples of spirituality, of the injunctions of spirituality that I wrestled with as a Bahá’í youth, was the apparently contradictory formulation of obligatory prayer. And I remember, as a new Bahá’í, thinking to myself I have trouble with obligatory prayer, because it looks like a contradiction in terms. Prayer is reaching out to God, the spontaneous yearning of the individual to express devotion to God. Obligatory is: thou shalt do it! Thou shalt do it today, and thou shalt do it tomorrow and thou shalt do it the next day. It is an obligation. How can these two be reconciled? And it was only as I thought about this at some length that I realized that they are reconciled. That one’s ability to pray is often not natural and has to be developed and if it is not obligatory, then you put it off until next week when you have more time. But the fact that it is obligatory means one does it out of a sense of obligation and gradually one’s attitudes change. One’s spiritual life is enriched by it. One, in a sense, learns to pray by having to do it.

Another mystery is that of cleanliness. We have categorical statements in our writings which refer to the importance of cleanliness and refinement. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “cleanliness and refinement, exalt the human condition and further the development of man’s inner reality. Even in the physical realm, cleanliness will conduce to spirituality.”¹ I mention this because we live in a society where lack of refinement is often taken to be something that is modern, something that is avant guard, something

¹ Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, p. 146

that is hip, or whatever, something that is part of modern life. And yet our Writings indicate the opposite. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas refers to the importance of refinement in dress, in language, in manners, in interests and in recreations, as being necessary for spiritual development. And I think we need to recognize that spirituality embraces refinement – refinement of manners, neatness of dress, and the like, as well as cleanliness and the other elements of which I spoke.

We need to recognize that spirituality is consistent with the pursuit of excellence -- in the arts, crafts, trades and professions. The Bahá'í community, for many years, suffered from young Bahá'ís who were so caught up in pernicious pilgrim notes about catastrophes that they neglected their long-term development of training in arts, crafts, trades and professions. And when one spoke to them, they presented to you this lurid image of the breakdown of civilization in instantaneous events of a catastrophic nature and they said what is the use and they refused to engage in such activities. As a result, their lives have been greatly impaired in terms of personal happiness and fulfillment as well as service to the Faith. We do not want that again. We rather want each generation in the Bahá'í community to commit itself to the pursuit of excellence in arts, crafts, trades and professions so that we carry these beneficial skills, which humanity has acquired at great labor and effort, over many thousands of years, that these are carried forward into the new civilization.

There are three things I want to mention before I conclude. The first one of these is the development of a new concept of spirituality as part of our contribution to the civilizing process. The second of the three is this. I think it would be useful for us to take a second look at the importance of the concept of duty in our personal lives, including our Bahá'í functioning. I say this not because of anything that is particularly wrong with the Bahá'í community or anything else like that, but rather that we live in a self-indulgent society, which has downgraded the importance of duty. And which attaches great latitude to the individual to do just whatever he or she feels like at the moment rather than doing things out of a sense of duty. And it seems to me that the civilized individual or the civilized society, as described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, as well as the broader context of the precepts of our Faith, do require attention to the concept of duty. We obey the laws of our Faith out of a sense of duty. We say the obligatory prayer each day not only out of the desire to pray and the joy and the like, but quite often out of a sense of duty. There are times when you are exhausted and the last thing you want to do is to say your prayer, but we do it out of a sense of duty. The same applies to the period of fasting, from sunrise to sunset, nineteen days a year. There are of course those individuals who yearn for it, who wait for it, who find it a period of great exultation. And there are others who do find it a very exulted and wonderful period, but also find that a high component of duty is involved in their adherence to it. There are those who get very hungry at three o'clock in the afternoon. I remember when I was at the university of Michigan and the university of Queensland and sometimes I would be teaching three or four hours of classes in the morning and you would reach twelve noon and your tongue would not fit in your mouth, it was too big! It was swollen up with thirst. Then what do you do? There are a lot of things that go on and they are a duty. One does them not because one thinks "oh, this is wonderful! I am fasting. It is part of the Writings. I do it with great joy." I do it because it is part of my duty as a Bahá'í. So I will do it and somehow I will survive until sunset and then everybody better look out!

Nothing illustrates the mysterious character of duty more than the obligation to pay a certain portion of one's surplus resources as Huqúqu'lláh, the right of God. This is not the time to go into the intricacies of the law and try to unravel all the various questions that people dream up about it, but certainly it is a mysterious law. It is a law, yet secret. Nobody can ask you for it. You can go through your entire life blissfully not adhering to it, and nobody will know and nobody will say

anything even if they did know, because it is none of their business. It is simply a matter between you and God. If there is anything that draws greater attention to the mysteries of duty than Huqúqu'lláh, I don't know what it is. But certainly as our consciousness is heightened about the concept of duty in our religion, as part of its contribution to civilization, I think so it will be that the Huqúqu'lláh will assume a greater dimension of importance in our private, personal lives.

Attendance at Feasts, support of community activities (I am not one of those), there are probably many in the audience who will say that they go to Feast every nineteen days out of a spirit of joy. When I was going to Feasts (we don't have them in the World Centre) but when I was going to Feasts, there were often times when I went out of nothing more than duty. I was tired. I didn't want to go. I didn't anticipate particularly enjoying the thing, but I went because it is my duty to go and I think one needs to recognize the centrality of duty in one's Bahá'í social obligations as well as personal practices.

One of the matters, at present, of great interest to the Universal House of Justice is the process of Bahá'í elections. And the House of Justice is interested in and wants to, and will of course, develop means by which the electoral process, that is characteristic of the Bahá'í community, that that electoral process is enhanced, is further developed, acquires greater meaning and significance and its functioning evolves in appropriate ways so that we more closely approach the ideals set out in the Writings in terms of participation in elections, participation in the unit conventions to elect the delegates to the National Convention and elect the National Assembly, participation in elections for the Local Assembly in our community and other forms of such activity. What we need is a greater awareness that we have the duty to participate in Bahá'í elections, because it is part of the civilizing process. It is an integral element of the concept of citizenship that we seek to establish in building a new civilization.

And finally, the third of the three points I wanted to make on this context, I think a contribution to the development of the civilizing process will come through our development of an enhanced character to our inter-personal relations. To create a true sense of community among us, which transcends ethnic, racial and class lines, we need more effort expended to more greatly invigorate the Nineteen Day Feast. To make it an occasion of even greater of spiritual nourishment and life than it is today. Through the selection of the readings, the smoothness and attention to detail in the organization, the creativity, within of course appropriate limits, the creativity of the program and the like. This is the foundation of the social life of the population in the future, and we need now to take further steps to develop it in an appropriate manner.

Consultation remains before us as an important Bahá'í practice, which is capable of being developed to a far greater extent than we have done so -- consultation at the Feast, consultation at the Local Spiritual Assembly meeting, but also consultation between the marriage partners, consultation within the family setting, consultation as the basis for human social interaction in local as well as more extensive groups. The precepts given to us by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, respect for the views of others, frankness, courtesy, detachment, a decision based on issues rather than other factors, all of these are things that slip easily from the tongue. Yet when you look closely at them, the practice of consultation requires that we inflict serious damage on a number of cultural practices in the world today. So be it. Various cultural practices in the world today must change in accord with the requirements of a new society. And consultation, I see, as the engine for modification of a number of traditional attitudes and practices that are cherished by people in many parts of the world. For example, frankness, there are many cultures in which it is considered impolite to be frank. You offer

hints, you make allusions, and you make veiled references to it. It is insulting to people to come out and say it straight out. Rather you have to honor their powers of perception by expecting that they will pick up on these hints and the like. So frankness is something we very simply recite as an element of consultation and we need to stop and think that this is going to be a very very difficult thing to accomplish. Courtesy is again something we would all adhere to except in the heat of the moment. Detachment is great when it is somebody else's idea that we can kick around very well, but when it is something that you have been thinking of for the last several weeks and you have finally cast the pearl before your colleagues and it is not accepted, detachment takes on a whole different meaning. Decision based upon issues, again, can be very much perturbed, for example, when there are several members of the family in the same consultative body. And what do you do when you are in disagreement with one of the other members is your family? Is blood thicker than water under such settings? What happens when dutiful Eastern wife feels differently about a matter from her Eastern husband? Is she going to vote the way he does out of a sense of loyalty and respect? Or is she going to follow the precepts of the Faith and probably incur a certain degree of criticism on the way home? These are very slight matters that I mention to you simply to illustrate the fact that consultation and development of interpersonal relations, if we are to pursue it seriously, we are going to have to be prepared for damage to be inflicted to very cherished, time honoured, practices that are part of the traditional culture of a number of societies. Nevertheless, we as Bahá'ís, have taken the step along the path of civilization. In becoming Bahá'ís, in committing ourselves to this religion, we do acknowledge that we are devoting our lives to creating a better world, to assisting humanity to pass through this turbulent age of transition, to rectify the problems that are manifest in a declining civilization and to create a new civilization of glory and wonder and great development beyond our possibility to conceive at the present day. It is toward this that we are devoting our lives.

Thank you.