

Home of Baha Ollah
Acre Syria
March 18th 1915

Dear friends:

"I am straining my ears toward the city of Shiraz - the sacred birthplace of the Bab - that perchance I may hear the sweet rapturous songs of its inhabitants. The people of Shiraz are intelligent, vivacious, quick-witted and endowed with a poetic nature. God willing this Divine Conflagration will be set aflame in their midst. It will be an enlightenment never to be followed by extinction. Today from all the countries of the world discordant and harsh voices are being raised which have a jarring and disagreeable effect upon the hearts. Above and beyond this dissonant babel, the harmonious melody of the Kingdom of Akha is poured forth by the Bird of Paradise to calm the contentious spirits and soothe the wrangling hearts. How sad it is that one is forced to listen to the strains of the martial music sung by the soldiers as they march, column after column disappearing ^{for ever} in the darkness of the night of destruction! Will they not hearken to the rich symphonies of the Nightingale of Truth? Will they not lend their ears to the celestial concert played by the Angels of Peace? Will they not hear the lively carols and orchestral lays of the Thrushes of the gardens of conciliation? Will they not listen to the stirring hymns and moving anthems of the glorious congregation of the servants of humanity? While Travelling throughout Europe and America I observed that the names of the poets of Shiraz - Saadi and Hafiz - were often on the lips of men. Their poems and lyrics were translated into many languages and their poetic and philosophic thoughts are quoted by their literary men. In one home I saw the following Distichs of Saadi was framed and hunged on the wall of the drawing room: -

'The world, my brother! will abide with none,
By the world's Maker let thy heart be won.
Rely not, nor repose on this world's gain,
For many a son like thee she has reared and slain.
What matters when the spirit seeks to fly,

Now just as these poets of Shiraz are made famous throughout the Western climes, I hope that many souls may arise out of that city and travel in all parts of the world, spreading the Word of God, singing the Melody of the Kingdom of Abha, giving the glad-tidings of the Appearance of the Blessed Perfection and attracting the hearts to the principles of Divine Civilization." These were the words of the Master as we sat in his presence this morning. He continued his talk but I could not take note. We felt the spirit of his utterances and hoped that his expectations might be fulfilled before long. We had another meeting in the evening and again he spoke for quite a long while on kindred subjects. Soon the month of the Bahai fasting will be over and as an epilogue to these past memorable days I would like to insert herein a short article written by our Doctor Habibollah on this subject. He says:-

"It is a natural question pressed upon the mind of every person: 'Why should I fast?' The word 'Fast' is ^{derived} from an Anglo Saxon word 'faestan' akin to English fast, firm. Its religious significance is to abstain from food and drink for a given period as a spiritual discipline or moral training. Although its origin is obscure, yet we know that it has been practiced in every religion. All the Divine Messengers either practiced it themselves or regarded it as one of the pillars of their respective religions. In ancient times it was practiced by Parsees, Hindus, Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks and Romans, (either for providing food for the dead, for the receiving of sacramental ^{our} viands or for the subjection of the lower nature). In the Jewish religion it was a prominent and inseparable feature of it. (Besides the other passages in the Old Testament which give the idea of fasting is the well-known and strictly observed 'day of the atonement' which is written in Leviticus. 15: 29-34 the non-observance of which had a penalty of death and Jehovah called it 'the everlasting statute for the purification of soul from all sins'. The early Fathers and divines of the Christian era influenced by the words of Christ which silenced the objection of the disciples of John by saying 'the days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them and then will they fast (they themselves)

(the Fathers) practiced it and made it obligatory on all the members of the church. Even up to the present time the Roman Catholic church and the Greek church regard fasting obligatory while the Anglican Church considers it ~~but~~ a praise worthy and useful exercise. In the Mahamaden religion its practice is not only regarded ^{as} important but with daily prayers it forms the most essential point in their religious duties, (because during the month of Ramadhan the Koran was revealed to the Prophet). It is also thought to be the means of turning the wrath of God in national calamities and of mitigating the penalties of sin.

"But in this great Dispensation - the Day of God - it is neither a ^{scourge} for inflicting punishment on account of ~~our~~ sin nor a means of mitigating the wrath of God, but rather ^{signifies} resignation to His Will and for the "Love of the Beauty" of the All-Glorious King which is a great beauty in itself. For Baha Ollah hath said: 'Abstain from all food from sunrise to sunset for the Love of My Beauty and let not the carnal desires prevent ye from this great beauty.' Undoubtedly this physical abstinence of 12 hours from food and drink has a deeper and more spiritual significance, an ^{inadequate} summary of which may be thus briefly outlined:

1. To follow the Will of the Loving God which if practiced, ^{it will} by itself be a safeguard against all evil temptations and a magnet for the attraction of God's great Beauty.

2. To remind man that as he abstains from material food he must likewise abstain from disposing ^{of} the properties of others.

3. To give him a spiritual vision and suffering him to become mindful of the conditions of the poor ~~ones~~ - thus he may ^{bestow} upon them the food which has been economized as the result of fasting.

4. To acquire a strong will, self-command and self-control, - so that as he is abstaining from material food he may also abstain from self-condemning deeds and immoralities, such as Murder, theft, backbiting and slandering, Keeping aloof from association with evil doers; and consequently the security of human society becomes

5. To bring a better understanding and social relationships while they gather together in their meetings and homes to fast and to break fast.
 6. To soften the hard-hearted man and teach him piety and charitable activities. Because the history of mankind shows us that all the devotional and charitable enterprises have been done on such occasions.
 7. To purify his heart and sanctify his soul, since it is a fact that those who fast during these days will also abstain from all abominable deeds.
 8. When he gets up and turns to God in the quiet morning hours and asks Divine Help, naturally he becomes well-rooted in the high qualities of firmness in his religion.
 9. When the cold damp climate of winter is changed into warm, bright spring days and there is an ^{especial} extra metabolic change in the system, one gets a new regime of life and new hygienic accommodation.
- (In short, Bahai fasting is not a burden but a Divine Grace. It is not so long as to make one emaciated or exhausted. While it is possible, as it is asserted in some quarters, to live for 40 days on water alone, isn't it worth while to beautify character and spiritualize the heart at the expense of 12 hours fasting during these 19 days of the most ideal season?)

As the principles of the Bahai Cause are spread and diffused the wisdom and sanity of each one of the Divine laws are unfolded and brought to light. Scientists and philosophers, thinkers and scholars will amplify and explain them. Then the minds becoming illumined with the rays of the Sun of Reality will grasp easily the signification and importance of these spiritual ^{teachings} doctrines. We are now at the threshold of the progress of the Cause. This revelation is like unto a closed casket, therein are hidden many jewels of heavenly Ideals. We must open it with the Key of Love and adorn our beings with those gems of the Kingdom. Blessed is the soul who has found this Key!