

Letters of the Quranic Dispensation
Research department of the Bahá'í World Centre

M E M O R A N D U M

To: The Universal House of Justice
From: Research Department

Date: 2 October 1994

Letters of the Quranic Dispensation

In an electronic mail message dated 30 August 1994, Mr. . . . requested information on a quotation from Bahá'u'lláh, cited by the Guardian in *God Passes By*:

. . . the Letters of the Bayán, whose station is ten thousand times more glorious than that of the letters of the Qur'anic Dispensation. . .¹

Mr. . . . wishes to know if the "Letters of the Bayán" are the same as the Letters of the Living. Also, he asks the identity of the "Letters of the Qur'anic Dispensation". These questions were referred to the Research Department, and we offer the following response.

The word "Letters" (*ḥurúf*), used in the quotation above, has a definite background in the Writings of the Báb. The Báb used the term *ḥurúf* in a number of ways that are similar but not identical in meaning. For instance, He used *ḥurúf* to indicate all followers of a religion. As an example, in the Persian Bayán, Váḥid 2, chapter 4, we find "Ḥurúf-i-Alif" as a reference to the generality of the followers of Jesus Christ. In the same chapter, the term "Ḥurúf-i-Qur'án" is a reference to Muslims in general.

The term *ḥurúf* is also used in the Persian Bayán (Váḥid 4, chapter 6) to describe the earliest believers of the Prophet Muḥammad, i.e., those followers through whom other people accepted Islám. In the same manner, the Báb identified his own earliest believers as the "Ḥurúf-i-Ḥayy" or Letters of the Living.

In addition, *ḥurúf* is found in the Persian Bayán as an appellation of the Shí'ih Imáms. In Váḥid 2, chapter 17, for example, Imám Ḥusayn is referred to as the "Ḥarf-i-Khámis" or the "Fifth Letter" (*Ḥarf* is the singular form of *Ḥurúf*).

The Research Department has not, to date, found any authoritative interpretation of the quoted passage from *God Passes By* and therefore Mr. . . . is free to decide for himself in which context the term should be understood.

1) *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1987), p. 98.

