

ANSWERS TO EIGHT QUESTIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED

‘Alí Nakhjavání

Answers to Eight Questions Frequently Asked

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FOREWORD

This compilation of 8 essays consists, for the most part, of responses I have given to questions put to me at different times by some of the friends. As similar questions are bound to be asked these days, it was suggested to me that when assembled, these responses would be a useful handbook.

I hope that the compilation, as it stands, would help the friends in their discussion or study groups.

‘Ali Nakhjavání

August 2014

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE MINISTRY OF THE UNIVERSAL HOUSE OF JUSTICE

Preamble

When the beloved Guardian passed away on November 4, 1957, the news of his passing convulsed the entire Bahá'í World. A second distress soon followed when the announcement was made by the Hands of the Cause that Shoghi Effendi had left no Will and Testament, had appointed no successor as Guardian of the Faith, and that the Aghṣán one and all had broken the Covenant. The "first effect" of this realization, as indicated in the message of the Hands of the Cause to the Bahá'í world, "was to plunge" them "into the very abyss of despair" (MC 36). A similar sense of dismay seized the entire Bahá'í World.

Soon after the Universal House of Justice was established it sent a message (dated 6 October 1963) to the Bahá'í World. This message states that the House of Justice "finds that there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi" (MUHJ 14). Reflecting on this message, the friends everywhere soon realized that they had not properly understood the contents of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

Shoghi Effendi had already stated that the World Order as delineated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will "undoubtedly" contained "manifold mysteries" (BA 8), and that we "must trust to time, and the guidance of God's Universal House of Justice, to obtain a clearer and fuller understanding of its provisions and implications" (BA 62).

The obligation of the friends was now well-defined. They had to wait for the "guidance" of the Universal House of Justice, to elucidate what certainly appeared to be "obscure questions" (WT 20). The expectations of the believers were fulfilled when, in response to questions asked, the Universal House of Justice wrote on 9 March 1965, on 27 May 1966, and on 7 December 1969, three letters (See MUHJ items # 23, 35 & 75 respectively) and explained for the friends the basic truths underlying the evolution of the Administrative Order of our Faith, and left them free to conclude that the passing of the beloved Guardian, without having appointed a Successor as Guardian and Authorized Interpreter, was a clear possibility and an understandable event.

When the English translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas was published in 1992, the Universal House of Justice had yet another opportunity to explain the implications of Paragraph 42 of the Most Holy Book. In relation to the Law of Succession in the Faith, this paragraph stands out as a most significant and decisive statement. In this paragraph, Bahá'u'lláh clearly envisages a time when there would be no institution to embody the functions incumbent upon the Appointed and Authorized Aghṣán (that is to say, a Guardianship). Further, the Universal House of Justice would not exist at that time and it would not be propitious to elect that Body. These points are fully covered in Notes 66 and 67, (pages 196 and 197) of the English text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

1963

Regarding the timing of the election of the Universal House of Justice we see in its letter mentioned above, dated 9 March 1965, the manner in which Shoghi Effendi foreshadowed the election of the

Universal House of Justice: “The Guardian had given the Bahá’í World explicit and detailed plans covering the period until Ridván 1963, the end of the Ten Year Crusade. From that point onward, unless the Faith were to be endangered, further divine guidance was essential”. The rightness of the time was further confirmed by references in Shoghi Effendi’s letters to the Ten Year Crusade being followed by other plans under the direction of the Universal House of Justice. One such reference is the following passage from a letter addressed to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles on 25th February 1951, concerning its Two Year Plan which immediately preceded the Ten Year Crusade:

“On the success of this enterprise, unprecedented in its scope, unique in its character and immense in its spiritual potentialities, must depend the initiation, at a later period in the Formative Age of the Faith of undertakings embracing within their range all National Assemblies functioning throughout the Bahá’í World undertakings constituting in themselves a prelude to the launching of worldwide enterprises destined to be embarked upon, in future epochs of that same Age, by the Universal House of Justice, that will symbolize the unity and coordinate and unify the activities of these National Assemblies.” (UD 261)

There can be no doubt that the “undertakings embracing within their range all National Assemblies functioning throughout the Bahá’í World” mentioned in the above passage of the Guardian, certainly refer to the plans that Shoghi Effendi gave to each of the twelve National Assemblies which he described as the Generals of the Ten Year Plan.

On pages 53-55 of one of his long messages to the friends in the East, written in Persian and dated Naw-Rúz of the Bahá’í Year 111, Shoghi Effendi urges the friends to form new Local Assemblies from groups in isolated Bahá’í localities, and bring into being enough Local Assemblies to establish new National Assemblies, so that by the end of the Ten Year Plan—i.e. in 1963—it would be possible to elect the Universal House of Justice.

With the stipulation made in Paragraph 42 of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, as well as with such statements, as quoted above, it would be, in my opinion, totally untenable to maintain that Shoghi Effendi was not aware that his passing would occur sometime during the Ten Year Crusade. If, therefore he did not appoint a second Guardian as his Successor, and if he did not write a Will and Testament in the traditional way, would it not be entirely logical to conclude that lack of action in these matters was a conscious act on his part?

In his personal conversations with pilgrims Shoghi Effendi was reported to have repeatedly said that his ‘Dispensation’ was like his Will and Testament. The closest statement made by him in writing, however, hinting at such a conclusion, is a letter, written on his behalf, dated 10 January 1935 to Dr. Mühlischlegel, in which he states that his ‘Dispensation’ constitutes “an invaluable supplement” to the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as well as to the Book of the Covenant, which is Bahá’u’lláh’s Will and Testament. (LDG Vol. 1,65)

Regarding the prophecy of Daniel as it relates to 1963, we read the following in one of the Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

“Now concerning the verse in Daniel, the interpretation whereof thou didst ask, namely “Blessed is he who cometh unto the thousand three hundred and thirty five days according to this calculation a century will have elapsed from the dawn of the Sun of Truth, then will the teachings of God be firmly

established upon the earth, and the Divine Light shall flood the world from the East even unto the West. Then, on this day, will the faithful rejoice.” (PA 49-50)

Indeed it was in 1963 that the Bahá’í World Community, under the galvanizing and sustaining motivation of Shoghi Effendi’s Ten Year Crusade, was enabled to diffuse the Light of the Faith world-wide, and celebrate not only this victory, but also the emergence of the Universal House of Justice at the Bahá’í World Congress in London.

Furthermore, the following two paragraphs might well bear upon this very theme. They contain an early hint by Shoghi Effendi on the importance of this very date of 1963, which he says would witness the “final erection” of the “Edifice” of God’s Holy Cause:

“Ours, dearly-beloved co-workers, is the paramount duty to continue, with undimmed vision and unabated zeal, to assist in the final erection of that Edifice the foundations of which Bahá’u’lláh has laid in our hearts, to derive added hope and strength from the general trend of recent events, however dark their immediate effects, and to pray with unremitting fervor that He may hasten the approach of the realization of that Wondrous Vision which constitutes the brightest emanation of His Mind and the fairest fruit of the fairest civilization the world has yet seen.

Might not the hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh mark the inauguration of so vast an era in human history?” (WOB 48)

Compatibility of Texts

From the above summary three points clearly emerge:

1. It had been contemplated in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas that there would be no co-existence between the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice.
2. The date for the election of the Universal House of Justice had to be in 1963, at the end of the Ten Year Plan.
3. It would certainly be reasonable to assume that Shoghi Effendi was conscious of his impending passing.

It would be helpful at this point to consider the method adopted by Bahá’u’lláh in His Kitáb-i-Ahd regarding the line of succession. In it He stipulates that Mírzá Muhammad-’Ali is to succeed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Now, compare that with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s method in the first part of His Will and Testament. In it He stipulates that Shoghi Effendi is to be succeeded, generation after generation, by Appointed Aghṣán serving as Guardians. To me there is a similarity of method here, one that provided a sense of continuity and concealed for a time the tests that were inevitably to fall on the friends as future events unfolded. Shoghi Effendi’s mention of “future Guardians” in his writings could well be, in my opinion, equally understood as a further application of this same method. All would be tested in due course as to their faithful adherence to the Covenant.

Does this similarity of method not remind us of the golden key that Shoghi Effendi placed in our hands with which to unlock one of the mysteries of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament? He pointed out to us that a study of the authenticated texts of the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and those of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá “will reveal the close relationship that exists between them, as well as the identity of purpose and method

which they inculcate” (WOB 4). Is this not also a reminder of the warning given by Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Iqán: “from time immemorial even unto eternity the Almighty hath tried, and will continue to try, His servants, so that light may be distinguished from darkness” (KI 8) and furthermore we read in the same Book: “the divine Purpose hath decreed that the true should be known from the false He hath, therefore, in every season sent down upon mankind the showers of tests from His realm of glory” (KI 53).

Who Limits the Spheres of Jurisdiction?

In the ‘Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh’ Shoghi Effendi points out that one of his duties was to provide “the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its [the Faith’s] elected representatives” (WOB 148). It is obvious that the reference here is to the elected members of Local Spiritual Assemblies, National Conventions, National Spiritual Assemblies, as well as of the Universal House of Justice.

This function of the Guardianship was partly discharged when, under his guidance and direction, the Constitutions of Local and Spiritual Assemblies were formulated and put into effect during his own ministry. What remained was to determine the boundaries of the work of the Universal House of Justice. The terms of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá were superlative. He wrote: “Whatsoever they [the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice] decide is of God” (WT 11). He further added: “That which this body, [the elected members of the Universal House of Justice (WT 20)] whether unanimously or by a majority, doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself” (WT 19).

To complete his duty as Interpreter of these words in relation to the work of the Universal House of Justice, Shoghi Effendi wrote in his ‘Dispensation’ the following:

“The interpretation of the Guardian, functioning within his own sphere, is as authoritative and binding as the enactments of the International House of Justice, whose exclusive right and prerogative is to pronounce upon and deliver the final judgment on such laws and ordinances as Bahá’u’lláh has not expressly revealed. Neither can, nor will ever, infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain of the other. Neither will seek to curtail the specific and undoubted authority with which both have been invested”. (WOB 150)

It is highly significant that Shoghi Effendi, while defining his duty as Guardian to interpret what had been revealed, goes on to give the assurance to the Community, as well as to the world, that the Universal House of Justice, when elected, will never “infringe upon the sacred and prescribed domain” of interpretation, which is the exclusive right of the Guardianship. This assurance was fully realized and permanently set in place when the Universal House of Justice, in its Constitution wrote:

“The provenance, the authority, the duties, the sphere of action of the Universal House of Justice all derive from the Revealed Word of Bahá’u’lláh which, together with the interpretations and expositions of the Centre of the Covenant and the Guardian of the Cause ... who, after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is the sole authority in the interpretation of Bahá’í Scripture ... constitute the binding terms of reference of the Universal House of Justice and are its bedrock foundation”. (CUHJ 4)

It must be remembered that apart from its vital function as the Supreme Bahá’í Legislative Body, the Universal House of Justice is named by Bahá’u’lláh Himself in Paragraph 42 of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas as the

Central Institution to which the Bahá'í Community must turn after the termination of the line of the Aghṣán. This is confirmed by the statement made by the Guardian that the two institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice are the “chosen Successors” of Bahá'u'lláh and of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá (WOB 20). On the basis of these texts, the Universal House of Justice in its Constitution describes its own “fundamental object” as the responsibility “to ensure the continuity of that divinely-appointed authority which flows from the Source of the Faith” (CUHJ 4), and then adds the following statement: “There being no successor to Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, the Universal House of Justice is the Head of the Faith and its supreme institution, to which all must turn” (CUHJ 4). The position of the Universal House of Justice as Head of the Faith will be maintained, “until such time” in the words of this Constitution, “as Almighty God shall reveal His new Manifestation to Whom will belong all authority and power” (CUHJ 4).

In light of the above quotations, it becomes clear that in addition to its legislative authority, the Universal House of Justice, while it is assured of divine guidance in not infringing upon the domain of interpretation, is invested with responsibilities which do and must include such powers and duties that are incumbent upon the Head of the Faith. Furthermore it is obvious that the two broad areas of responsibility of the Universal House of Justice—namely legislation and headship of the Faith, are as inseparable and indispensable as were, in the case of Shoghi Effendi, his responsibilities as Interpreter and Head of the Faith. Thus, if anyone may venture to state that the sphere of jurisdiction of the Universal House of Justice is confined to legislation, such an assumption would clearly be baseless and entirely unwarranted and unjustified.

It follows therefore that no institution or individual can correctly determine whether the Guardian or the Universal House of Justice are, at any given time, within or without their own respective limits of jurisdiction. This point is confirmed by the Guardian in one of his letters where this truth is clearly set forth:

“...It is not for the individual believers to limit the sphere of the Guardian’s authority, or to judge when they have to obey the Guardian and when they are free to reject his judgment. Such an attitude would evidently lead to confusion and to schism. The Guardian being appointed interpreter of the Teachings, it is his responsibility to state what matters which, affecting the interests of the Faith, demand on the part of the believers complete and unqualified obedience to his instructions.” (LG 312).

The principle clearly outlined above by the Guardian applies equally to the Universal House of Justice, inasmuch as matters affecting the interests of the Faith on a world-scale are best judged and determined by the House itself. As indicated above, Shoghi Effendi’s formal and confident assurance in his ‘Dispensation’ to the Bahá’ís everywhere and to the world at large, to the effect that the Universal House of Justice will never transgress its own limits of jurisdiction, should provide the ultimate safeguard and guarantee, to one and all, that the foundations on which the structure of the Administrative Order is resting are firmly set and stable.

Is the Universal House of Justice the Head of a Complete and Unmutilated World Order?

Let us now consider the contents and implications of a crucial paragraph in ‘The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh':

“Divorced from the institution of the Guardianship the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh would be mutilated and permanently deprived of that hereditary principle which, as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has written, has been invariably upheld by the Law of God. ‘In all the Divine Dispensations,’ He states, in a Tablet addressed to a follower of the Faith in Persia, ‘the eldest son hath been given extraordinary distinctions. Even the station of prophethood hath been his birthright’. Without such an institution the integrity of the Faith would be imperiled, and the stability of the entire fabric would be gravely endangered. Its prestige would suffer, the means required to enable it to take a long, and uninterrupted view over a series of generations would be completely lacking, and the necessary guidance to define the sphere of the legislative action of its elected representatives would be totally withdrawn.” (WOB 148)

So the question is, did the ending of the Guardianship in November 1957 have the negative effects described above, or did the Cause survive this event complete and undamaged?

Shoghi Effendi definitely knew that the line of the Aghṣán would at some time come to an end. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas openly contemplates this eventuality in the very paragraph (42) that anticipates the Institution of the Guardianship. Further, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes no provision in His Will and Testament for the continuation into the future of the Guardianship in the event that the line of the Aghṣán is extinguished. So it is very clear that this passage in ‘Dispensation’ cannot be saying that the Cause will be wounded or damaged unless there is an unbroken line of living Guardians during the entirety of the Dispensation. So, how are we to understand the paragraph?

When one looks at the paragraph that immediately follows it, that is, the one that refers to the paralysis that would ensue if the World Order were ‘severed’ from the House of Justice, it is clear that Shoghi Effendi is simply describing, in dramatic language, the centrality and vital importance of these two institutions. Each, in turn, is anticipated to perform indispensable and essential functions.

We therefore need to consider and analyze the various points Shoghi Effendi has made and relate them to the period of his ministry, considering what his absence would have entailed. We set forth the points in brief, followed by comments:

1. Without the Guardianship, the World Order would be deprived of the hereditary principle.

COMMENT: The 36 years of the Guardianship certainly endowed the World Order with his eminent grace.

2. Without the Guardianship, the World Order would have been beset by peril and danger.

COMMENT: If ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Testament had not installed the Office of the Guardianship as His immediate Successor, Mírzá Muhammad-’Ali would have played havoc with the community, using the Book of the Covenant to advance his case.

3. Without the Guardianship the prestige of the World Order would have suffered.

COMMENT: By making the Guardian the “sacred head” (WT 14) of the House of Justice, and because of the provision that the Guardian “cannot override the decisions” of the Universal House of Justice (WOB 150), ‘Abdu’l-Bahá enhanced the prestige of the Supreme Body (WOB 8).

4. Without the Guardianship the World Order would not have benefited from Shoghi Effendi's breadth of vision.

COMMENT: The Guardian's book 'God Passes By' provides an historical panorama covering the first one hundred years of Bahá'í history. Shoghi Effendi gives us an invaluable interpretation of this history and correlates it with the major events of the century. Thanks also to the Guardian's World Order letters, his entrancing vision of the future, and the steps which would lead to its realization, have been fully laid out for us.

5. Without the Guardianship the elected institutions of the Faith, locally, nationally and internationally, would have been deprived of the Guardian's guidance.

COMMENT: As already indicated above, Shoghi Effendi gave his guidance for the formulation of National and Local Bahá'í Constitutions. As to the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, in view of the provision that he "is debarred from laying down independently the constitution that must govern the organized activities of his fellow-members" (WOB 150), Shoghi Effendi made it clear in his 'Dispensation' that the two areas of authorized interpretation and binding legislation had been exclusively reserved to each of the two successive Successors of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, namely the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice respectively.

How Can The Universal House of Justice Determine That Its Enactments Do Not Depart From The Spirit Of The Teachings?

The statement in the 'Dispensation' which gives rise to this issue is the following:

"the Guardian ...cannot override the decision of the majority of his fellow-members, but is bound to insist upon a reconsideration by them [members of the Universal House of Justice] of any enactment he conscientiously believes to conflict with the meaning or to depart from the spirit of Bahá'u'lláh's revealed utterances." (WOB 150)

To understand adequately the implications of this statement, we must first consider the meaning or meanings of the word "enactment" or the word of which it is a derivative, namely "enact". According to the Webster dictionary the verb "enact" is used when a "legal and authoritative act" is performed. It also implies the act of passing a "bill" or a legal draft into a law. It is obvious that in the sentence from the "Dispensation" quoted above, the second meaning is meant, because of the categorical statement, also in the same sentence, clearly affirming that when a final decision is taken, the Guardian "cannot override" or veto such a decision. Thus the issue of reconsideration is a step to be taken in the process of arriving at the final decision.

This issue has been dealt with in the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice. In the absence of the Guardian, the Universal House of Justice has formally stated that among its "binding terms of reference" and the elements which constitute "its bedrock foundation", are the "interpretations and expositions" of the Guardian. (CUHJ 4)

Furthermore in a letter dated 27 May 1966 the Universal House of Justice assures us that "a careful study of the Writings and interpretations on any subject on which the House of Justice proposes to legislate always precedes its act of legislation." In the same letter the Universal House of Justice makes this further clear affirmation: "the Universal House of Justice, itself assured of divine guidance, is well

aware of the absence of the Guardian and will approach all matters of legislation only when certain of its sphere of jurisdiction, a sphere which the Guardian confidently described as ‘clearly defined’”. (MUHJ 85)

In the light of the above quotations, in my view, it should not be difficult to arrive at the conclusion that Shoghi Effendi’s statement in the ‘Dispensation’ could well be understood as a reminder of, and indeed an emphasis on, the imperative obligation to refer to his interpretations and expositions prior to any act of legislation. This assurance has been explicitly given to the Bahá’í World in the statements quoted above from the writings of the Universal House of Justice.

Wide range of Responsibilities of the Office of Headship, as Invested in The Universal House of Justice

Based on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s and Shoghi Effendi’s writings these responsibilities include the following duties and powers:

1. to safeguard the unity of the community (WOB 148);
2. to resolve all problems which have caused differences (WT 20);
3. to maintain the integrity of the Bahá’í teachings (WOB 148);
4. to elucidate questions that are obscure (WT 20);
5. to maintain the flexibility of the teachings of the Faith (WOB 148);
6. to promulgate and apply its laws (WOB 20 & 145)
7. to protect its institutions (WOB 20);
8. to adapt it loyally and intelligently to the requirements of progressive society (WOB 20);
9. to conduct all Bahá’í administrative affairs (WOB 153);
10. to resolve difficult problems and all important and fundamental questions (WT 14 & BA 47);
11. to create new institutions (CC Vol. 1, 329);
12. to make deductions from the sacred and authorized writings (CC Vol. 1, 323);
13. to launch and direct teaching plans (CC Vol. 1, 340);
14. to be the last refuge of a tottering civilization (WOB 89);
15. to consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world (WOB 20).

As the Universal House of Justice is, after the Guardian, the Central Authority in the Cause, the body unto which “all things must be referred” (WT 14), it was able to create institutions to ensure the “discharge of the functions of protection and propagation” and to provide “for the receipt and disbursement of the Huqúqu’lláh” (CUHJ 4).

The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice outlines in five paragraphs what it considers to be “among the powers and duties with which the Universal House of Justice has been invested” (CUHJ 5). The contents of these paragraphs, without any exception, are based on, and have their roots in, Tablets revealed by Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as well as letters of Shoghi Effendi. They deal with the responsibilities of the Supreme Institution in such matters as preserving the sacred Texts, defending and protecting the Cause, proclaiming and propagating its Message, advancing its interests, promoting universal peace, ushering in the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh, safeguarding the personal rights, freedom and initiative of individuals, and promoting the advancement and betterment of the world. The last

three paragraphs also enumerate the legislative, executive and judicial powers vested in the institution of the House of Justice.

What does Unconditional Obedience Imply?

Bahá'u'lláh in the thirteenth Glad-Tidings (Bishárát) wrote:

“The men of God’s House of Justice have been charged with the affairs of the people Inasmuch as for each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution, such affairs should be referred to the Ministers of the House of Justice that they may act according to the needs and requirements of the time. They that, for the sake of God, arise to serve His Cause, are the recipients of divine inspiration from the unseen Kingdom. It is incumbent upon all to be obedient unto them.” (TAB 26-27) (This self-same passage is repeated in the Eighth Ishráq.)

Furthermore in the Eighth Leaf of Paradise we read: “It is incumbent upon the Trustees of the House of Justice to take counsel together God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth, and He, verily is the Provider, the Omniscient.” (TAB 68)

We note in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament His insistent call to the friends to turn to the Universal House of Justice, and obey its directives. We read the following: “the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, [is] under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of His Holiness, the Exalted One [the Báb] Whoso rebelleth ... against them hath rebelled against God...., whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God” (WT 11). “That which this body doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself. Whoso doth deviate therefrom is verily of them that love discord, hath shown forth malice and turned away from the Lord of the Covenant.” (WT 19-20)

In one of His Tablets ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has furthermore written the following:

“The Supreme House of Justice will take decisions and establish laws through the inspiration and confirmation of the Holy Spirit, because it is in the safekeeping and under the shelter and protection of the Ancient Beauty, and obedience to its decisions is a bounden and essential duty and an absolute obligation, and there is no escape for anyone.” (MUHJ 85)

To confirm the sense of the above passages we read in Shoghi Effendi’s ‘Dispensation’, the following affirmation which corroborates Bahá'u'lláh's and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statements on the inspiration and divine guidance which surround and overshadow the decisions of the Universal House of Justice. He writes: “the members of the Universal House of Justice, ... and not the body of those who either directly or indirectly elect them, have thus been made the recipients of the divine guidance which is at once the life-blood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation.” (WOB 153)

From these explicit and authoritative statements we should know of a certainty that when divine inspiration is well-assured, obedience becomes a spiritual obligation. This theme is fully discussed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His ‘Some Answered Questions’:

“Know that infallibility is of two kinds: essential infallibility and acquired infallibility Essential infallibility is peculiar to the supreme Manifestation, for it is His essential requirement But acquired infallibility is not a natural necessity; on the contrary, it is a ray of the bounty of infallibility which shines from the Sun of Reality Thus many of the holy beings were the mediators of grace

between God and men. If God did not protect them from error, their error would cause believing souls to fall into error, and thus the foundations of the Religion of God would be over-turned, which would not be fitting nor worthy of God ...

. ... For instance, the Universal House of Justice will be under the protection and the unerring guidance of God Now the members of the House of Justice have not, individually, essential infallibility, but the body of the House of Justice is under the protection and unerring guidance of God; this is called conferred infallibility.” (SAQ 173)

This statement made by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explicitly and certainly gives us the assurance that when an individual or institution, authorized in revealed sacred texts as freed from error, renders a decision or issues a directive requiring the friends to obey, the community of the faithful should be confident that such a decision or directive has been prompted and motivated by divine inspiration. Should this be otherwise, it would not only be unbecoming and unbefitting of a just God, but the result would certainly be the subversion of the very foundations of God’s Holy Faith.

The friends of course realize that the objectives specified in the plans and messages of the Universal House of Justice are designed to help us in our direct teaching work. To the extent that we adhere to the wishes of the Supreme Body will we be the recipients of added confirmations and blessings.

A COMMENTARY ON THE BAHÁ'Í APPROACH TO POLITICS

Introduction

The following statement made by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Centre of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant and Authorized Interpreter of His teachings clearly defines the central theme of the Bahá'í Revelation: "In this wondrous Revelation ... the foundation of the Faith of God and the distinguishing feature of His law is the consciousness of the Oneness of Mankind" (WOB 36). Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith defines its primary purpose as follows: "The principle of the Oneness of Mankind [is] the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve" (WOB 42).

These statements made by the Authorized Interpreters of the Faith are clearly based on pronouncements such as these recorded by the pen of Bahá'u'lláh Himself: "It is not for him to pride himself who loveth his own country, but rather for him who loveth the whole world. The earth is but one country, and mankind its citizens", "That indeed is a man who today dedicateth himself to the service of the entire human race" (WOB 198), "The well-being of mankind, its peace and security are unattainable unless and until its unity is firmly established" (WOB 203). And addressing the members of His own community, He writes: "Let your vision be world-embracing" (TAB 87).

As we survey the conditions of the world today, we find, alas, that the attitude of the mass of the people, as well as the policies of those who are in authority, support in the name of democracy, a doctrine which is far from the standards advocated in the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. Such a doctrine demands that national advantages supersede international interests, and that therefore world solidarity is only secondary to national aspirations. Even within the country itself, very often party interests overshadow the welfare of the nation.

The Bahá'í attitude to the solution of world problems is a holistic one. This is based on Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation: "Regard the world as the human body ... Not for one day did it gain ease And if, at one time, through the care of an able physician a member of that body was healed the rest remained afflicted as before." (GLS. 254-255) The following statement by Shoghi Effendi relates the principle of non-interference in politics to the same concept of holism. He has written: "[I]n a world of interdependent peoples and nations the advantage of the part is best to be reached by the advantage of the whole, and that no abiding benefit can be conferred upon the component parts if the general interests of the entity itself are ignored or neglected". (WOB 198) Shoghi Effendi has further pointed out in other letters that the Bahá'ís should adhere to the principle of non-interference in political affairs even at the cost of unpopularity and criticism.

The Principle of Non-Interference in Politics

In such a scenario it should not be difficult for Bahá'ís to understand why, or to explain why, they cannot subscribe to the political theories that prevail in human society today. How would it be admissible for Bahá'ís to see the welfare of humanity being sacrificed for the preservation of a political doctrine—a doctrine which Bahá'ís believe has now become outdated and obsolete in a world of interdependent continents, nations, races, and classes.

When politics is corrupted by various forms of nationalism, of particularism and of prejudice, it becomes abhorrent to Bahá'ís. But any political theory which transcends divisiveness, is non-partisan, is opposed to the supremacy of a particular race, class or nation and is genuinely dedicated to world peace, will undoubtedly have the wholehearted support of the Bahá'ís. Even today Bahá'ís willingly participate in projects of relief work after natural disasters, in humanitarian undertakings untainted by direct political influences, and all social activities which promote the welfare of the world of humanity.

It must be remembered also that although Bahá'ís view mankind as one entity, they nevertheless are loyal to their respective national governments and are anxious to promote its best interests at all times. They are impelled by a spirit of sane patriotism, and are prepared to serve individually in nonpolitical positions, such as administrative posts, in the structure of governments. In times of war, they do not oppose recruitment, but apply, if possible, to serve in non-combatant capacities.

However, obedience to government has its limits. Shoghi Effendi has made the clear distinction between obedience in matters related to the administration of the Faith and matters of belief. On Shoghi Effendi's behalf, his secretary has written: “[W]hereas the friends should obey the government under which they live, even at the risk of sacrificing all their administrative affairs and interests, they should under no circumstances suffer their inner religious beliefs and convictions to be violated and transgressed by any authority whatever. A distinction of a fundamental importance must, therefore, be made between spiritual and administrative matters. Whereas the former are sacred and inviolable, and hence cannot be subject to compromise, the latter are secondary and can consequently be given up and even sacrificed for the sake of obedience to the laws and regulations of the government. ..In matters of belief ... no compromise whatever should be allowed, even though the outcome of it be death or expulsion.” (LDG v.I, 54-55)

Non-interference in politics does not mean lack of interest in political events in the world or within one's country. As lovers of mankind and as loyal citizens of their respective countries, Bahá'ís are keenly interested in all political developments, just as they are concerned about all public affairs.

In fact, in these occurrences they see evidences of the workings of the twin processes of integration and disintegration, as expounded in the Bahá'í Writings, and are thus able to correlate, for themselves and for others, the Bahá'í vision with what is happening in all quarters and on all levels of human society.

What are the Bahá'ís doing?

Unfortunately in certain quarters, misunderstandings sometimes have emerged about the true aims of the Bahá'í Community. Questions such as these have been raised: Are the Bahá'ís deluding themselves? Is their non-interference in the political pursuits of the nation and within the country due to self-interest and self-preservation? Are they really concerned about the fate of a world which seems to be moving towards disaster? What are they practically doing for world solidarity and peace?

Answers to such legitimate queries can only be adequately answered if we turn our gaze first to the broad outline of Bahá'u'lláh's analysis of mankind's social and spiritual evolution thus far achieved, and, in addition when we consider His vision of the continued progress of this evolution in the future.

Looking at the social and political evolution of human society up to this point, Shoghi Effendi has given us the following explanation: "[The principle of the Oneness of mankind] represents the consummation of human evolution—an evolution that has had its earliest beginnings in the birth of family life, its subsequent development in the achievement of tribal solidarity, leading in turn to the constitution of the city-state, and expanding later into the institution of independent and sovereign nations". He continues his explanation by anticipating that this process is destined to lead to "a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life" and that "the attainment to this final stage in this stupendous evolution is not only necessary but inevitable, [and] its realization is fast approaching" (WOB 43).

In another subsequent letter, Shoghi Effendi compares this inevitable stage of development in mankind's social and organic evolution to the coming of age of the entire human race—a stage which will be characterized by the "emergence of a world community, the consciousness of world citizenship, [and] the founding of a world civilization and culture." Such attainments are "initial stages" that "as far as this planetary life is concerned" should be regarded as "the furthestmost limits in the organization of human society, though man, as an individual, will, nay must indeed, as a result of such a consummation, continue indefinitely to progress and develop" (WOB 163).

As to Shoghi Effendi's elucidation of the spiritual evolution of human society, he refers to one of the fundamental teachings of the Bahá'í Faith, namely that "religious truth is not absolute but relative, that Divine Revelation is a continuous and progressive process, that all the great religions of the world are divine in origin, that their basic principles are in complete harmony, that their aims and purposes are one and the same, that their teachings are but facets of one truth, that their functions are complementary, that they differ in the non-essential aspects of their doctrines, and that their missions represent successive stages in the spiritual evolution of human society." (FB 2)

With this sweeping outline of the two essential processes of the organic and spiritual evolution of mankind, we now see how Shoghi Effendi has crowned his analysis of the two processes with his declaration of the essential role to be played by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, as decreed by an All-Seeing, All-Conscious and All-Wise Providence: These are his inspired words: "Humanity, whether viewed in the light of man's individual conduct or in the existing relationships between organized communities and nations, has, alas, strayed too far and suffered too great a decline to be redeemed through the unaided efforts of the best among its recognized rulers and statesmen—however disinterested their motives, however concerted their action, however unsparing in their zeal and

devotion to its cause. No scheme which the calculations of the highest statesmanship may yet devise; no doctrine which the most distinguished exponents of economic theory may hope to advance; no principle which the most ardent of moralists may strive to inculcate, can provide, in the last resort, adequate foundations upon which the future of a distracted world can be built. No appeal for mutual tolerance which the worldly-wise might raise, however compelling and insistent, can calm its passions or help restore its vigour. Nor would any general scheme of mere organized international cooperation, in whatever sphere of human activity, however ingenious in conception, or extensive in scope, succeed in removing the root cause of the evil that has so rudely upset the equilibrium of present-day society. Not even, I venture to assert, would the very act of devising the machinery required for the political and economic unification of the world—a principle that has been increasingly advocated in recent times—provide in itself the antidote against the poison that is steadily undermining the vigor of organized peoples and nations. What else, might we not confidently affirm, but the unreserved acceptance of the Divine Program enunciated, with such simplicity and force ... by Bahá'u'lláh, embodying in its essentials God's divinely appointed scheme for the unification of mankind in this age, coupled with an indomitable conviction in the unfailing efficacy of each and all of its provisions, is eventually capable of withstanding the forces of internal disintegration which, if unchecked, must needs continue to eat into the vitals of a despairing society. It is towards this goal—the goal of a new World Order, Divine in origin, all-embracing in scope, equitable in principle, challenging in its features—that a harassed humanity must strive.” (WOB 33-34)

What the Bahá'ís—a pitiful five to six millions only all over the world at this time—are doing, is to draw the attention of receptive souls and interested seekers to Bahá'u'lláh's Divine Program. While engaged in this effort, they are building up the Bahá'í Community, as far as their limited resources are concerned, in accordance with the blue print ordained in the authoritative writings of their Faith, under the guidance of its Supreme Administrative Body. They are also inviting seekers to study the Bahá'í writings and examine the Administrative Order, inherent in the sacred texts, which has already been established and is gradually being consolidated.

Even at this very early stage of this Order's construction, Bahá'ís believe that their efforts have produced a model and “pattern” (WOB 144), based on the authentic writings of their Faith, which is worthy of consideration and acceptance by the people of the world. Bahá'u'lláh has abolished the institution of professional clergy. Therefore, as greater numbers of rank and file Bahá'ís become better trained in the fundamentals of their Faith, and as more and more devoted seekers after God's Truth in this Day are attracted to the Faith and join the community, becoming in their turn active workers and helpers in the field of Bahá'í service to humanity, the sooner would the main features of the structure under construction be fully displayed before the eyes of a skeptical world, attracting thereby more willing and ready souls to carry the work to its completion, as foreordained by a Divine Providence.

Bahá'ís see, therefore, three forces at work:

1. The organic development of the human race as it approaches its stage of universal solidarity which is the stage of its maturity and coming of age, and is described by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the “Union of the nations of the world” (WOB 37)
2. The spirit infused in the world through the mysterious influences of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.
3. The humble endeavours of the Bahá'ís themselves in living the Bahá'í way of life, in sharing the message revealed by Bahá'u'lláh with receptive and ready souls, inviting them to study the Bahá'í

teachings, and in their participation in the spiritual, administrative and social life of the community within the structure of the Administrative Order of the Faith—the embryonic stage of the future World Order envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh.

Are the Bahá'ís Aiming at Seizing Political Power to Rule the World?

How can a community one of whose basic and constitutional principles is not to interfere in political affairs, and to refrain from becoming tools of unscrupulous politicians, ever contemplate such a possibility? Over and over again we read in the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh that His mission is that of attracting hearts to the good pleasure of God. In His Will and Testament, the Kitáb-i-Ahd, we read the following exhortation to His community: “O ye the loved ones and the trustees of God! Kings are the manifestations of the power and the daysprings of the might and riches of God. Pray ye on their behalf. He hath invested them with the rulership of the earth and hath singled out the hearts of men as His Own domain” (Tab 220-221).

Members of the Bahá'í communities throughout the world involve themselves wholeheartedly in purely social and economic development projects which are free from political schemes. At the United Nations, the Bahá'í International Community takes an active part as a consultative member in the meetings and projects of the Social and Economic Council. A similar policy is followed on the national and local levels, whenever the promotion of the basic welfare of the population is of concern. In addition Bahá'ís are always supportive of any programme which reinforces the standards of morality, especially among the youth and the children. It would be totally unjustified to ascribe a policy of escapism to what the Bahá'ís are doing in their relationship to their social environment.

Bahá'ís consider the political theories that prevail in the world today to be out of tune with the requirements of the Spirit of our Age. They believe in a system of national authority willing to comply with the rulings of an international authority, similar to a family which is disposed to be submissive in its allegiance to a higher tribal authority—a system freed from any form of nomination, or of candidacy, or electioneering, unbound to any political party, and global and universal in its fundamental outlook. Considerations such as these explain why they avoid entering in the arena of current political confrontations and active polarities and controversies.

Bahá'ís, however, are intelligently interested in the political developments in their respective countries and the world at large, and will willingly participate with others in any study or discussion about political theories, provided such discourses are conducted in the abstract. Since their teachings require them to be loyal to the rulings of their respective governments, Bahá'ís therefore will refuse to attack any existing regime or to rebel against it.

It is true that in Shoghi Effendi's writings we read about the establishment of a “Bahá'í State” as the sixth stage in the evolution of the Faith in any given country. The statement in question reads as follows: “[M]ultitudinous issues ... must be faced ... to enable a sore-tried Faith to pass through the successive stages of unmitigated obscurity, of active repression, and of complete emancipation, leading in turn to its being acknowledged as an independent Faith, enjoying the status of full equality with its sister religions, to be followed by its establishment and recognition as a State religion, which in turn must give way to its assumption of the rights and prerogatives associated with the Bahá'í state, functioning in the plenitude of its powers, a stage which must ultimately culminate in the emergence of the world-wide Bahá'í Commonwealth” (ADJ 12).

Of all the seven stages enumerated and anticipated by the Guardian, only two, namely the third stage, described as emancipation, and the fourth which involves the acquisition of rights equal to other

religious communities, are associated with conscious efforts on the part of the institutions of the Faith. The first two stages, namely obscurity and repression clearly refer to conditions outside the sphere of action undertaken by Bahá'ís. The last three stages fall in the category of predictions, for they would be realized as consequences of the free choice and initiative of the world's governments, not because the Bahá'ís would seek to impose on others the Bahá'í system of World Order or assume the reins of government. In the words of Shakespeare, Bahá'ís would become great, not because they sought and achieved greatness, but because greatness would be "thrust upon them." In other words, it will be the inscrutable Will of God, working through the will of the rank and file of the people that will bring about such a prophesied triumph to His Cause, which is none other but the emergence of the Christ-promised Kingdom of God on earth.

To sum up, we could say that the concept of the separation of church and state is a standard policy of God's Faith in its day to day activities. This policy, for example, is clearly in harmony with Jesus Christ's admonition to render unto Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what is God's (Matthew 22:212). However the promise of ultimate victory is also recorded: "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world, and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." (1 John 5:4). The fulfilment of the promise of the merger between Church and State was not a goal of the early Christians. The process was set in motion through the initial support given to the Christian Faith by Emperor Constantine. It was because of his initiative that greatness was thrust on the Christian Faith. The Bahá'í writings contain a similar prediction about the future destiny of the Cause. This is clearly stated in a letter written in Persian by Shoghi Effendi to the friends in the East, dated Naw-Ruz 110.

What do the Bahá'í Teachings Say About the Way or Ways that Would Lead To a Federated and United Humanity?

Shoghi Effendi has made the following emphatic observation in one of his letters regarding the concept of World Order: "That so fundamental a revolution [i.e. the federation of mankind] involving such far-reaching changes in the structure of society, can be achieved through the ordinary process of diplomacy and education seems highly improbable" (WOB 45). This does not mean that Bahá'ís will not wholeheartedly support any activity which aims at consolidating amity, solidarity and unity among peoples, classes and creeds. They are aware, however, that such endeavors, while worthy of every support can only be temporary palliatives.

The influence of the organic and unifying forces of life, invigorated by the effusions of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, and, alas, the inevitable infliction of more suffering through grave world crises, upheavals and convulsions, seem to be destined to combine in order to awaken the conscience of the masses. Shoghi Effendi has given us this vision of God's Major Plan for human society, in a message dated March 1941: "God's purpose is none other than to usher in, in ways He alone can bring about, and the full significance of which He alone can fathom, the Great, the Golden Age of a long-divided, a long-afflicted humanity. Its present state, indeed even its immediate future is dark, distressingly dark. Its distant future, however, is radiant, gloriously radiant—so radiant that no eye can visualize it". (PDC 190)

What Guidance is Found in the Bahá'í Writings On the Structure of the System of the Lesser Peace, As Anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh?

We can do no better than quote the following passage from the writings of Shoghi Effendi which deals thoroughly with this question:

“Some form of a world super-state must needs be evolved, in whose favor all the nations of the world will have willingly ceded every claim to make war, certain rights to impose taxation and all rights to maintain armaments, except for purposes of maintaining internal order within their respective dominions. Such a state will have to include within its orbit an international executive adequate to enforce supreme and unchallengeable authority on every recalcitrant member of the commonwealth; a world parliament whose members shall be elected by the people in their respective countries and whose election shall be confirmed by their respective governments; and a supreme tribunal whose judgment will have a binding effect even in such cases where the parties concerned did not voluntarily agree to submit their case to its consideration. A world community in which all economic barriers will have been permanently demolished and the interdependence of Capital and Labor definitely recognized; in which the clamor of religious fanaticism and strife will have been forever stilled; in which the flame of racial animosity will have been finally extinguished; in which a single code of international law—the product of the considered judgment of the world’s federated representatives—shall have as its sanction the instant and coercive intervention of the combined forces of the federated units; and finally a world community in which the fury of a capricious and militant nationalism will have been transmuted into an abiding consciousness of world citizenship—such indeed, appears, in its broadest outline, the Order anticipated by Bahá’u’lláh, an Order that shall come to be regarded as the fairest fruit of a slowly maturing age”. (WOB 40-41)

**Does Action Taken from Time to Time
By National Assemblies to Contact Their Respective Governments
To Assist in Relieving The Sufferings of
The Friends in Iran Constitute a Political Act?
Similar Approaches Are Made by Bahá’ís in
Various Countries to Members of the Nation’s Parliament.**

In Iran particularly the authorities have ignored petitions of redress from restrictions and persecutions, written by Bahá’ís residing in the country. The reason given is that the Bahá’í Faith is not a divinely-revealed religion mentioned in the Qur’an, whose Prophet is the Seal of Prophets. It is alleged, without any evidence, furthermore, that the Bahá’í community is a political organization. In one case when a petition written on behalf of the Bahá’í community in Iran was delivered to the Office of the President of the country, the carrier was arrested and imprisoned.

What Bahá’ís in the free world are doing, as requested by the Universal House of Justice—and formerly by the beloved Guardian—is to ask their respective Governments to bring the matter of their persecuted brethren who are not allowed to raise their voice in their own country in defense of themselves, to the attention of the Iranian authorities and ask that the human rights of the Bahá’ís as citizens of the country be respected and protected. Such appeals cannot be construed as political in nature.

In fact we see that Bahá’u’lláh in His Tablets to various Kings of the world invariably asked these Rulers to come to the aid of His Cause. None of these Rulers, alas, responded to His Call

INTERPRETATION AND ELUCIDATION

Introduction

The word “Interpreter” or the act of “interpretation” is used sometimes to refer to God’s Manifestations. However, it is more commonly used to apply to Appointed Souls who have been specifically invested with the authority to interpret Their Utterances. Such interpretations are regarded authoritative and binding.

Regarding the first usage, we read for example from the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh the following: “He hath in every age and cycle, in conformity with His transcendent wisdom, sent forth ... One Who is indeed the Expounder, the true Interpreter” (TAB 161). A typical example of this kind of function is Bahá’u’lláh’s revelation of the Kitáb-i-Íqán where He expounds and interprets the metaphors and mysteries hidden in the scriptures of the past.

The second usage which is in line with the theme of this discussion, applies to the specific authority conveyed by the Manifestation of God to appointed individuals. We find the following, for example, from the Pen of Bahá’u’lláh: “Know assuredly that just as thou firmly believeth that the Word of God, exalted be His glory, endureth for ever, thou must, likewise, believe with undoubting faith that its meaning can never be exhausted. They who are its appointed interpreters, they whose hearts are the repositories of its secrets, are, however, the only ones who can comprehend its manifold wisdom” (GLS. 175).

Of course individual believers can also give their own interpretation and comprehension of the teachings, and these could be interesting, but they can never be binding on the friends. The Universal House of Justice has explained this question very clearly: “A clear distinction is made in our Faith between authoritative interpretation and the interpretation or understanding that each individual arrives at for himself from his study of its teachings. While the former is confined to the Guardian, the latter, according to the guidance given to us by the Guardian himself, should by no means be suppressed. In fact such individual interpretation is considered the fruit of man’s rational power and conducive to a better understanding of the teachings, provided that no disputes or arguments arise among the friends and the individual himself understands and makes it clear that his views are merely his own. Individual interpretations continually change as one grows in comprehension of the teachings” (MUHJ 88).

Two Appointed and Authorized Interpreters

In this Dispensation there were two and only two Authorized Interpreters, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi.

Regarding ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Bahá’u’lláh refers to Him as the “Mystery of God”, the “Limb of the Law of God”, He through Whose “knowledge and wisdom” the world will be “illuminated”, and Who is “an ocean of bounty unto all men ..” (WOB135-6) In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá’u’lláh clearly enjoins upon His

followers: “[R]efer ye whatsoever ye understand not in the Book to Him Who hath branched from this mighty Stock” (KA #174).

Based on such assertions ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declared: “I am the Interpreter of the Word of God”, He again writes: “I am the manifest Interpreter of the Word of God” (WOB 133 & 132).

As to Shoghi Effendi, in His Will and Testament, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to him as the “Expounder of the words of God” (WT 11), and the “Interpreter” (WOB 148). And Shoghi Effendi in reference to himself clearly states that “he has been specifically endowed with such power as he may need to reveal the purport and disclose the implications of the utterances of Bahá’u’lláh and of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá” (WOB 151).

In the quotation above, the word “purport” means that which is intended, while the word “implications” means that which is implied but not plainly expressed. Thus the function of an Authorized Interpreter is to unveil for us the intention and hidden meanings of what is outwardly and explicitly revealed. This seems to be why Shoghi Effendi in his “God Passes By”, does not only refer to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the Interpreter of the Teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, but the “Interpreter of His Mind” (GPB 245).

As stated above such Appointed Interpreters, such Depositories of the hidden secrets of God’s Utterances, and such Disclosers of the Mind of the Author or Authors of revealed words, have been in this Dispensation confined to two inspired Luminaries, namely ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi.

What is Elucidation?

To elucidate is to make clear something which is unclear, or to determine that which is indefinite. We see for example that Shoghi Effendi has written that some of the laws of the Aqdas needed subsidiary “elaboration and elucidation”, and for this purpose Bahá’u’lláh revealed a number of Tablets after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas during the latter part of His life (GPB 216). In their writings both ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi had to elucidate certain matters, as was called for.

If their elucidations stemmed from their inner knowledge of the intent of a sacred text revealed, then undoubtedly such pronouncements would fall in the category of interpretations. If however, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá or Shoghi Effendi, as Inspired Heads of the Faith, were clarifying what steps needed to be taken in a situation which was indefinite, then the elucidation or preferably the guidance given would clearly not be a form of interpretation.

The Universal House of Justice has explained the difference between the two situations in one of its letters, from which we quote: “The elucidations of the Universal House of Justice stem from its legislative function and as such differ from interpretation. The divinely inspired legislation of the House of Justice does not attempt to say what the revealed word means—it states what must be done in cases where the revealed Text or its authoritative interpretation is not explicit. It is, therefore, on quite a different level from the Sacred Text and the Universal House of Justice is empowered to abrogate or amend its own legislation whenever it judges the conditions make this desirable” (From a letter to an individual believer, dated 15 December 1994).

Among the powers and duties of the Universal House of Justice, in accordance with its Constitution, is “to analyse, classify and coordinate the Writings” (CUHJ 5). The terms as quoted are the exact words

used in one of Shoghi Effendi's letters, explaining the duties of the Universal House of Justice. It is not too difficult to understand that such "analysis" and "coordination" of texts would be necessary for the Universal House of Justice to enable it to take decisions on "questions that are obscure" as stated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in His Will and Testament, when He was listing the duties of the Universal House of Justice (WT 20).

Obscure Questions

One of the immediate "obscure" matters that the Universal House of Justice had to elucidate soon after its election was whether the institution of the Guardianship as an on-going institution had terminated or was it to be extended into the future. The House of Justice's decision was conveyed on 6 October 1963. It read that "there is no way to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi" (MUHJ 14). The decision had a preamble stating that the decision was taken after "prayerful and careful study of the Holy Texts" and consultation with the Hands of the Cause residing in the Holy Land. We could say that this was elucidation through legislation.

In the days of the Guardian the American National Spiritual Assembly asked Shoghi Effendi about the nature of the Court of Arbitration mentioned in the Writings. Shoghi Effendi's reply was as follows: "[R]egarding the nature and scope of the Universal Court of Arbitration, this and other similar matters will have to be explained and elucidated by the Universal House of Justice, to which, according to the Master's explicit Instructions, all important and fundamental questions must be referred" (BA 47). This would certainly be another form of elucidation through legislation.

The House of Justice Explains

In one of its main messages, the Universal House of Justice dealt with the question of the difference between interpretation and elucidation. It would be best to end this essay by quoting the relevant section of that message on this subject:

"There is a profound difference between the interpretations of the Guardian and the elucidations of the House of Justice in exercise of its function to "deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book." The Guardian reveals what the Scripture means; his interpretation is a statement of truth which cannot be varied. Upon the Universal House of Justice, in the words of the Guardian, "has been conferred the exclusive right of legislating on matters not expressly revealed in the Bahá'í writings." Its pronouncements, which are susceptible of amendment or abrogation by the House of Justice itself, serve to supplement and apply the Law of God. Although not invested with the function of interpretation, the House of Justice is in a position to do everything necessary to establish the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh on this earth. Unity of doctrine is maintained by the existence of the authentic texts of Scripture and the voluminous interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi together with the absolute prohibition against anyone propounding "authoritative" or "inspired" interpretations or usurping the function of Guardian. Unity of administration is assured by the authority of the Universal House of Justice. [F64. WOB, p. 153.]

"Such," in the words of Shoghi Effendi, "is the immutability of His revealed Word. Such is the elasticity which characterizes the functions of His appointed ministers. The first preserves the identity of His

Faith, and guards the integrity of His law. The second enables it, even as a living organism, to expand and adapt itself to the needs and requirements of an ever-changing society” (Letter dated 21 March 1930, *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 23) (MUHJ 56).

THE RULERS AND THE LEARNED

The need to reconcile seemingly incompatible values

It is important when studying any religious or secular philosophy for one to consider all the elements of that system before arriving at a final assessment, and not to draw conclusions after having come across one or a few of its component parts. Quite often the excellence of a theory or doctrine lies in its ability to reconcile two outwardly irreconcilable extremes. Thus it is only when the entirety of a given program is studied, can an unbiased seeker arrive at a final judgment.

Shoghi Effendi has given expression to the importance of reconciling extremes in these perceptive observations: “Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá’í can hope to reconcile the principles of mercy and justice, of freedom and submission, of the sanctity of the right of the individual and of self-surrender, of vigilance, discretion and prudence on the one hand, and fellowship, candour, and courage, on the other” (BA 68-69).

A careful study of political systems that have governed society in the past clearly shows that sooner or later struggles and conflicts arose between those who held the reins of governmental authority, and those who represented the metaphysical, the magical, or the religious concerns of the rank and file of society. However, when temporal and spiritual forces worked together, they often produced spiritual dictatorships. And when they were forcibly separated, and specially when the spirit of religion was entirely stifled, the system usually ended in anarchy and chaos. In the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, a divinely ordained system has been formulated which blends these extremes together.

Here is Shoghi Effendi’s exhortation to those who hold the reins of authority and influence in the world. He writes: “Leaders of religion, exponents of political theories, governors of human institutions, who at present are witnessing with perplexity and dismay the bankruptcy of their ideas, and the disintegration of their handiwork, would do well to turn their gaze to the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, and to meditate upon the World Order which, lying enshrined in His teachings, is slowly and imperceptibly rising amid the welter and chaos of present-day civilization” (WOB 24). In the foregoing statement, the Guardian of the Faith is eagerly calling on the intelligentsia of the world to study carefully the distinctive features of the Bahá’í Administrative Order.

Is regard for ranks compatible with the concept that we are all created from the same dust?

Let us see how apparent disagreements in the texts are not necessarily contradictory, but are instead complementary. In the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh on the subject of relations among members of a community we read: “Know ye not why We created you all from the same dust? That no one should exalt himself over the other” (AHW 68); “Of all men the most negligent is he that disputeth idly and seeketh to advance himself over his brother” (PHW 5); “[T]o regard oneself as superior in knowledge, learning or virtue, or to exalt oneself or seek preference, is a grievous transgression” (MUHJ 376-377). Furthermore, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá adds His voice to that of His Father and states: “All men are equal before the law” (PT 160).

If such pronouncements are taken in isolation from other statements of the Blessed Beauty, they could give the impression that the Bahá'í Faith advocates an egalitarian form or system of government. However, when taken in the context of other authentic Bahá'í pronouncements, we find that the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh is far from promoting an egalitarian or communistic human society. For example from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh we read: "To transgress the limits of one's own rank and station, is in no wise permissible. The integrity of every rank and station must needs be preserved" (GLS 188).

'Abdu'l-Bahá's explanation is even more emphatic. We read the following: "Equality is a chimera! It is entirely impracticable! Even if equality could be achieved it could not continue... Some are full of intelligence, others have an ordinary amount of it, and others again are devoid of intellect...How could it be possible that wisdom and stupidity should be equal? Humanity, like a great army requires a general, captains, underofficers in their degree, and soldiers, each with their own appointed duties. Degrees are absolutely necessary to ensure an orderly organization. An army could not be composed of generals alone, or of captains only, or of nothing but soldiers without one in authority" (PT 157). We should realize that generally when regard and respect are due, such courtesies should be genuine and are to be shown because of acknowledged outstanding achievements made as well as the position or rank being occupied.

'Abdu'l-Bahá has further elaborated this theme: He states: "[T]here is a difference in the intrinsic or natal capacity of individuals. Ten children of the same age, with equal station of birth, taught in the same school, partaking of the same food, in all respects subject to the same environment, their interests equal and in common, will evidence separate and distinct degrees of capability and advancement...One may become a learned professor while another, under the same course of education, proves dull and stupid" (BWF 249).

'Abdu'l-Bahá also explains that differentiations occur in the world of the spirit, as well. He writes: "As for what is meant by the equality of souls ... at the time when they first become manifest in the world of the body, [they] are equal, and each is sanctified and pure. In this world, however, they will begin to differ one from another, some achieving the highest station, some a middle one, others remaining at the lowest stage of being. Their equal status is at the beginning of their existence; the differentiation followeth their passing away" (SAB 171).

So we see that in the material world, and in the world of the spirit, differentiations are inevitable. Such differences arise, on the one hand, from unavoidable variable inherent potentialities together with the social environment in which the individual lives and grows, and on the other, by reason of the way in which each individual uses his own will power every day of his life. It rests on the individual, therefore, to choose to do what is profitable or good (which would lead to his advancement), or to do what is harmful or evil (which would obviously lead to his retardation and ruin).

The above explanations clearly show that individual effort is crucial, however, civilized society also needs order; and that order calls for ranks. According to Bahá'u'lláh the "integrity" of ranks "must needs be preserved." Bahá'u'lláh also directs His general exhortation to His followers, by warning them not to ever consider themselves better and nobler than others, for such an attitude would be accounted as a "grievous transgression". Thus, while collectively ranks must be preserved in society, each individual, in whatever position he is occupying, and in whatever rank is assigned to him, should radiantly endeavour to pursue the path which would be most pleasing in the sight of God. He should

achieve such a goal without ever considering himself, by virtue of the rank he is occupying, in accordance with Shoghi Effendi's statement, as a "central ornament of the body of the Cause" (BA 64).

The Universal House of Justice has summed up this aspect of the Bahá'í teachings with these illuminating words: "The true spiritual station of any soul is known only to God. It is quite a different thing from the ranks and stations that men and women occupy in the various sectors of society" (MUHJ 377).

Who are the Rulers and the Learned in a Bahá'í Commonwealth?

In His Tablet of Wisdom, Bahá'u'lláh states: "Abase not the station of the learned in Bahá and belittle not the rank of such rulers as administer justice amidst you" (TAB 138-139). Likewise, in the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, the Book of His Covenant, He writes: "Blessed are the rulers and the learned among the people of Bahá" (TAB 221). When Shoghi Effendi was asked who were the rulers and the learned in such statements, he answered in a letter dated 4 November 1931: "In this holy cycle the 'learned' are, on the one hand, the Hands of the Cause of God, and, on the other, the teachers and diffusers of His teachings who do not rank as Hands, but who attained an eminent position in the teaching work. As to the 'rulers' they refer to the members of the Local, National and International Houses of Justice. The duties of each of these souls will be determined in the future" (MUHJ 215).

In the light of the above, the "rulers" in the Bahá'í Dispensation are the members of the elected institutions on all three levels of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. As to the learned, since no more Hands of the Cause could be appointed, the Universal House of Justice explained that the Counsellors and their Auxiliary Boards, who were to carry out the functions of protection and propagation formerly assigned to the Hands, would fall in the category of "the learned" (MUHJ 215). Furthermore, as Shoghi Effendi clearly asserted, all Bahá'í "teachers and diffusers" of the Faith who have "attained an eminent position in the teaching work", would also fall in such a category.

When Shoghi Effendi passed away in November 1957, there were 27 living Hands of the Cause appointed by him throughout the world. These he designated, as the "Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth" (MBW 127), in one of his last messages to the Bahá'í World, dated October 1957, at a time when the Ten Year Plan was reaching its midway point. These "Chief Stewards" understood, and so did the Bahá'í World, that when the Universal House of Justice would be established the Headship of the Faith would revert to that Institution.

In His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh clearly ordains the functions and duties of the rulers and the learned in His Dispensation. The institution of the House of Justice is formally established in that Most Holy Book, and the functions of its members as the "Deputies of God" and the "Trustees of the All-Merciful" (GPB 214) are explicitly recorded, while the members of the Universal House of Justice are additionally referred to as the "men of God's House of Justice" who are "the recipients of divine inspiration from the unseen Kingdom" (KA 91).

As to the "learned" we read in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas addressing them as "the learned ones in Bahá" the following: "Ye are the billows of the Most Mighty Ocean, the stars of the firmament of Glory, the standards of triumph waving betwixt earth and heaven. Ye are the manifestations of steadfastness amidst men and the daysprings of Divine Utterance to all that dwell on earth" (KA 82).

However, as indicated above, the 27 Hands of the Cause into whose care he had temporarily left the destiny of God's Holy Faith, realized that in addition to their general functions as Hands of the Cause, they had been called upon to act as "Chief Stewards", who in the words of the Universal House of Justice were to keep the "ship" of the Cause "on its course" and bring it "safe to port" (MUHJ 6). The highly significant aspect of this transition period in the history of the Faith is that it had been anticipated in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas itself, in Paragraph 42. In this paragraph, which also deals with the question of the management of the endowments of the Cause, Bahá'u'lláh anticipates a period of interregnum, when the affairs of the Cause would have to be directed by "the people of Bahá who speak not except by His leave" (KA 35).

In the Notes of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas the following explanation has been given on behalf of the Universal House of Justice: "Bahá'u'lláh provides [in Paragraph 42] for the possibility that the line of Aghṣán would terminate prior to the establishment of the Universal House of Justice. He designated that in such a situation "endowments shall revert to the people of Bahá". The term "people of Bahá" is used with a number of different meanings in the Bahá'í Writings. In this instance they are described as those "who speak not except by His leave and judge not save in accordance with what God hath decreed in this Tablet." Following the passing of Shoghi Effendi in 1957, the Hands of the Cause of God directed the affairs of the Cause until the election of the Universal House of Justice in 1963" (KA page 197).

It is noteworthy that in Paragraph 42 of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas the people of Bahá of the interregnum are described as "champions of victory". This term resonates with Bahá'u'lláh's description of the Hands of the Cause (or more precisely the learned ones in Bahá) as "standards of triumph" in Paragraph 173 of the same Book. Furthermore, in the English text, the two words "victory" and "triumph", which are closely synonymous, are translations of the single word "nasr", which appears in both sentences of the original text. But even more significant is the fact that in one of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh refers to the Hands of the Cause as those who "utter not a word on any subject ere Thou hast spoken" (LG 322) - a description which echoes the same sentiment as those "who speak not save by His leave", mentioned in Paragraph 42 of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. Thus, there is hardly any doubt that in that Paragraph of the Aqdas, the Hands of the Cause of God are primarily intended as the "people of Bahá" in whose hands the reins of authority were to "revert" temporarily.

Collaboration between the Learned and the Rulers on the National and Local levels of the Administrative Order

The Universal House of Justice has made a number of statements on this subject. The principles governing the relationships between the Continental Boards of Counsellors and their Auxiliary Boards on the one hand, and National Spiritual Assemblies and their Local Spiritual Assemblies on the other, are basic guidelines that will ensure the healthy growth of these institutions and the national and local communities they are called upon to serve. The following excerpts from letters written by the Universal House of Justice on this subject will outline a few of the salient features that must be intelligently upheld by both arms of the Administrative Order at this time.

"Although the Counsellors occupy a rank lower than that of the Hands of the Cause, they are nevertheless charged with the same two responsibilities [of propagation and protection of the Faith] and follow in the footsteps of the Hands of the Cause" (LG 326).

"The Counsellors and the National Assemblies have one common objective which is service to the Cause and the promotion and protection of its interests. The closer the collaboration between these two

institutions the richer will be the blessings showered upon them and the community” (LG 326).

“Freedom from administrative responsibilities makes it possible for the Counsellors and their Auxiliary Board Members to be removed from the entanglements and involvements that engagement in administrative duties sometimes entails, and heightens their capacity to be a source of inspiration and stimulation to the friends” (LG 326).

“A Board of Counsellors has the particular responsibility of caring for the protection and propagation of the Faith throughout a continental zone which contains a number of national Bahá’í communities. In performing these tasks, it neither directs nor instructs the Spiritual Assemblies or individual believers, but it has the necessary rank to enable it to ensure that it is kept properly informed and that the Spiritual Assemblies give due consideration to its advice and recommendations” (LG 326).

“It should not be assumed that these two arms act independently of each other and are not in need of the essential support which each must give to the other. Their functions are indeed complementary” (LG 327).

“The differentials of rank, functions or procedures are meant to canalize, not obstruct, the work of the Cause” (LG 327).

“Every institution of this divinely created Order is one more refuge for a distraught populace; every soul illumined by the light of the sacred Message is one more link in the oneness of mankind, one more servant ministering to the needs of an ailing world” (LG 327).

THE ATTITUDE OF BAHÁ'ÍS TOWARDS SELF-DEFENCE AND WAR

Carrying arms by individual Bahá'ís for self-defence

In "God Passes By" page 198, we read that Bahá'u'lláh Who had emphasized the ban imposed on the waging of holy war (GPB 219), had also added the injunction that "it is better to be killed than to kill" (DB XXXV). In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Paragraph 159, His intention is further clarified. We read: "It hath been forbidden you to carry arms unless essential." According to the Notes appended to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, 'Abdu'l-Bahá has in a Tablet given permission to a believer to carry arms "for self-protection in a dangerous environment" (KA 241). The Universal House of Justice, in one of its letters refers also to a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which it is stated that "in the case of attack by robbers and highwaymen, a Bahá'í should not surrender himself, but should try, as far as circumstances permit, to defend himself, and later on lodge a complaint with the government authorities" (LG 117).

The beloved Guardian, when asked about such situations, responded in a letter on his behalf by stating: "In an emergency, when there is no legal source at hand to appeal to, a Bahá'í is perfectly justified in defending his life" (LG 117). Shoghi Effendi shed further light on the subject, when in another letter written on his behalf, he made the following statement: "[F]orbidden self-defence by Bahá'u'lláh should not be taken too literally ... Bahá'u'lláh could surely have not meant that a Bahá'í should not attempt to defend his life against any irresponsible assailant who might attack for any purpose whatever, whether religious or not. Every reasonable person would feel under such circumstances justified in protecting his life" (UD 427).

A case of a pioneer couple living in a remote area lacking police protection was presented to the Universal House of Justice. The question was whether this couple could have a weapon in their possession for defending themselves, as thieves had broken into their house twice and robbed them. The advice of the Universal House of Justice was that "in the circumstances ...it would be permissible for the pioneer family to keep a weapon in the house, provided the law permits" (LG 117).

Collective defensive campaigns during the Bábí Dispensation

The events during the Dispensation of the Báb which transpired in Mazandaran, Nayríz and Zanján have at times been regarded by non-Bahá'í authors as military campaigns similar to the jihads or holy wars during the lifetime of Muhammad. In the first place the so-called holy wars which were waged during the last eight years or so of the life of Muhammad, were not offensive crusades. 'Abdu'l-Bahá has explained emphatically that these campaigns were entirely defensive in nature. Here is what He has stated concerning the Arab tribes that surrounded the Muslim community: "[T]he means by which these Arab tribes lived consisted in pillage and robbery, so that they were perpetually engaged in fighting and war, killing one another, plundering and devastating each other's property ... Muhammad received the Divine Revelation among these tribes, and after enduring thirteen years of persecution from them, He fled [from Mecca to Medina]. But this people did not cease to oppress, they united to exterminate Him and all His followers. It was under such circumstances that Muhammad was forced to take up arms. This is the truth: we are not bigoted and do not wish to defend Him, but we are just, and we say what is just. Look at it with justice. If Christ Himself had been placed in such circumstances among such tyrannical and barbarous tribes, and if for thirteen years He with His disciples had

endured all these trials with patience, culminating in flight from His native land—if in spite of this, these lawless tribes continued to pursue Him, to slaughter the men, to pillage their property, and to capture their women and children—what would have been Christ’s conduct with regard to them?” (SAQ 19-20).

History repeated itself but in a different form during the Dispensation of the Báb. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His “A Traveller’s Narrative” has given us the following explanation: “Governors and magistrates sought a pre-text for amassing wealth, and officials a means of acquiring profits; celebrated doctors from the summits of their pulpits incited men to make a general onslaught; the power of the religious and the civil law linked hands and strove to eradicate and destroy this people. Now this people had not yet acquired such knowledge as was right and needful of the fundamental principles and hidden doctrines of the Báb’s teachings, and did not recognise their duties. Their conceptions and ideas were after the former fashion and their conduct and behaviour in correspondence with ancient usage. The way of approach to the Báb, was moreover closed, and the flame of trouble visibly blazing on every side. At the decree of the most celebrated doctors, the government, and indeed the common people, had, with irresistible power, inaugurated rapine and plunder on all sides, and were engaged in punishing and torturing, killing and despoiling, in order that they might quench this fire and wither these poor souls” (TN 21).

In the Introduction to the “Dawn Breakers”, we have a paragraph which deals with this wave of persecution that overtook the Bábí community, showing that the upheavals of Mázindarán, Nayríz, and Zanján were likewise defensive in nature, and not in any way offensive: “On these three occasions a number of Bábís, driven to desperation, withdrew in concert from their houses to a chosen retreat, and erecting defensive works about them, defied in arms further pursuit. To any impartial witness it was evident that the mullas’ allegations of a political motive were untrue. The Bábís showed themselves always ready—on an assurance that they would be no longer molested for their religious beliefs—to return peacefully to their civil occupations. They would fight for their lives with determined skill and strength; but they would not attack. Even in the midst of a fierce conflict they would not drive home an advantage nor strike an unnecessary blow” (DB XXXIV).

When the Dispensation of the Báb ended with the birth of the Bahá’í Revelation, Bahá’u’lláh called on the remnants of the Bábí community to turn over a new leaf. They were now prohibited from engaging in any form of resistance collectively. As already indicated above, He affirmed that the days of defensive holy war had terminated and that from now on “It is better to be killed than to kill”

Bahá’ís and war

When one studies the writings of the Faith, it becomes evident that the primary objective of the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh is the realization of permanent peace among the nations and peoples of the world—a peace, which under the influence and inspiration of the teachings of the Faith, will ultimately produce a planetary civilization, which is none other but the promised Kingdom of God on earth.

Bahá’u’lláh’s statements on this theme are emphatic. We read: “We desire but the good of the world and the happiness of the nations ... Yet, so it shall be, these fruitless strifes, these ruinous wars shall pass away, and the Most Great Peace shall come ... These strifes and this bloodshed and discord must cease, and all men be as one kindred and one family Let not a man glory in this, that he loves his country, let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind” (BNE 52-53).

Throughout His travels in Europe and North America, as well as in the innumerable Tablets He wrote, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s voice and pen proclaimed the importance and urgency of universal peace.

Among His many declarations are these unforgettable statements: “[W]ar is destruction while universal peace is construction; war is death while peace is life; ... war is an appurtenance of the world of nature while peace is of the foundation of the religion of God; war is darkness upon darkness while peace is heavenly light; ... war is like a devouring wolf while peace is like the angels of heaven; war is the struggle for existence while peace is mutual aid and co-operation among the peoples of the world and the cause of the good-pleasure of the True One in the heavenly realm” (SAB 296-297).

However, we live in a world today whose leaders, while agreeing in principle with the concept and need of universal peace, yet find themselves paralyzed and bereft of the will power to achieve this objective. This is why we see that nations are generally anxious not only to further reinforce their armed forces, but also to find reliable allies and sign treaties of military collaboration with them, in order to consolidate their own safety and survival. Seeking recruits for the national army, and training them in the arts of warfare are essential and primary goals of the overwhelming majority of the nations of the world. In such a scenario it is important for Bahá’ís to know what their attitude should be, specially when their nations become involved in actual warfare.

We know of course that the Bahá’í teachings require the believers to obey the laws of the governments under which they live, and that among such requirements, depending on the laws in each country, would be enlistment in the army. One of the duties of each National Assembly in such situations would be to determine whether joining the army, in the estimation of the respective established government, is an obligation resting on all citizens, and therefore compulsory, or whether it is a recommendation, and therefore optional. The result of such investigation should be made available to the friends, when required.

What is the duty of Bahá’ís when enlisted in the army?

It is clear that as Bahá’ís we should never in times of war or national emergencies seek to abandon, on grounds of religious belief, our duty to obey our governments and to discharge our obligation as responsible citizens of our countries. Hardships and dangers there will certainly be, but we should not avoid them in the name of religion. During the Second World War many questions arose in the minds of the institutions and individual believers on the principles involved, and the noble and honorable way in which Bahá’ís should behave in specific cases. Shoghi Effendi was approached in all such matters, and as a result we have in hand a collection of letters written on his behalf containing precious guidelines that show us the policies we should follow when such problems arise.

I will set forth below pertinent extracts from these letters, which provide important instructions for our study and guidance:

“With reference to the absolute pacifists or conscientious objectors to war, their attitude judged from the Bahá’í standpoint, is quite anti-social and due to its exaltation of the individual conscience leads inevitably to disorder and chaos in society.

Extreme pacifists are thus very close to the anarchists, in the sense that both these groups lay an undue emphasis on the rights and merits of the individual. The Bahá’í conception of social life is essentially based on the principle of the subordination of the individual will to that of society. As in everything it

follows the 'golden mean'. The only way that society can function is for the minority to follow the will of the majority.

The other main objection to the conscientious objectors is that their method of establishing peace is too negative. Noncooperation is too passive a philosophy to become an effective way for social reconstruction. Their refusal to bear arms can never establish peace. There should be first a spiritual revitalization which nothing except the Cause of God can effectively bring to every man's heart" (UD 435-436).

"He has noted your Assembly's [British] request for his advice as to what forms of national service friends may volunteer for in times of emergency. While the believers, he feels, should exert every effort to obtain from the authorities a permit exempting them from active military service in a combatant capacity, it is their duty at the same time, as loyal and devoted citizens, to offer their services to their country in any field of national service which is not specifically aggressive or directly military. Such forms of national work as air raid precaution service, ambulance corps, and other humanitarian work or activity of a non-combatant nature, are the most suitable types of service the friends can render, and which they should gladly volunteer for, since in addition to the fact that they do not involve any violation of the spirit or principle of the Teachings, they constitute a form of social and humanitarian service which the Cause holds sacred and emphatically enjoins" (UD 122-123).

"It is still his firm conviction that the believers, while expressing their readiness to unreservedly obey any directions that the authorities may issue concerning national service in time of war, should also, and while there is yet no outbreak of hostilities, appeal to the government for exemption from active military service in a combatant capacity, stressing the fact that in doing so they are not prompted by any selfish considerations but by the sole and supreme motive of upholding the Teachings of their Faith, which make it a moral obligation for them to desist from any act that would involve them in direct warfare with their fellow-humans of any other race or nation. The Bahá'í Teachings, indeed, condemn emphatically and unequivocally any form of physical violence,—and warfare in the battlefield is obviously a form, and perhaps the worst form which such violence can assume.

There are many other avenues through which the believers can assist in times of war.... It is immaterial whether such activities would still expose them to dangers, either at home or in the front, since their desire is not to protect their lives, but to desist from any acts of willful murder.

The friends should consider it their conscientious duty, as loyal members of the Faith, to apply for such exemptions, even though there may be slight prospect of their obtaining the consent and approval of the authorities to their petition" (UD 128-129).

"In connection with your application for exemption from active military service, the Guardian trusts that the authorities will give careful consideration to this matter, and will find it possible to relieve the Bahá'í friends from the necessity of serving in the army in a combatant capacity. Should they, however, refuse to grant such exemptions, the believers should unhesitatingly assure them of their unqualified obedience and of their readiness to join and serve in the army in whatever manner the government deems best" (UD 134).

"Regarding your question about military service, the Guardian sees no reason why the Bahá'í in question should not bring a test case, and press the matter ...During the hearing of such cases the Bahá'ís should make it absolutely clear that we do not fear being placed in danger, and are not asking to

be given a safe berth in hours of national crisis—quite the contrary any dangerous service the Bahá'ís can render their fellow-men during the agonies of war, they should be anxious to accept” (UD 259).

“Our position as Bahá'ís is not that we won't obey our Government or support the country if attacked, it is that we do not believe in, or wish to take part in, killing our fellow-men. We are not conscientious objectors at all; we will serve, but wish ... to be classified as non-combatants” (LG 407).

There are also a few letters from the Universal House of Justice shedding light on other aspects of active military service, from which we quote the following extracts:

“Bahá'ís cannot voluntarily enlist in any branch of the Armed Forces where they would be subject to orders to engage in the taking of human life” (LG 407).

“There is no objection to a Bahá'í enlisting voluntarily in the armed forces of a country in order to obtain a training in some trade or profession, provided that he can do so without making himself liable to undertake combatant service. There is likewise no objection to a Bahá'í seeking or continuing a career in the armed forces, provided that he can do so without making himself liable to undertake combatant service” (LG 409).

“When the question of National Service, such as you describe... includes training in skills and professions useful to mankind, such as agriculture, the friends may certainly volunteer for such services, provided they are definitely assured that their training will not subject them later to call up for military service in combatant roles” (LG 409).

“The House of Justice has stated on other occasions in response to questions similar to those which you have raised, that there is no objection to a Bahá'í enlisting voluntarily in the armed forces of a country in order to partake of a training programme, provided he can do so ... after making clear to the relevant authorities [his] position as a Bahá'í, so that [he] can be assigned to those duties which do not require combatant service” (LSAH 462).

THE RECIPROCITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE COMMUNITY

A Lesson From Nature

In each of the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms of existence the component parts and the whole are mutually dependent. The three kingdoms are also dependent upon each other. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá gives us the following principle which underlies the very existence of created things: “In surveying the vast range of creation thou shalt perceive that the higher a kingdom of created things is on the arc of ascent, the more conspicuous are the signs and evidences of the truth that cooperation and reciprocity at the level of a higher order are greater than those that exist at the level of a lower order.” (CC One 509). We thus clearly see that in the human kingdom, the constituent parts of the body of man depend upon one another. At the same time the body of man is in need of the three kingdoms of nature inferior in rank, while human intelligence is essential for the perfection and development of the world of nature. Indeed God created man to be His nature’s developer, not its destroyer.

There are of course degrees of reciprocity. And at times odd and abnormal eccentricities also exist, specially in some species of the animal world. For example, although wolves survive through their essential collaboration as a pack, yet we find the odd lone wolf that prefers to be on its own. The rogue elephant also can separate itself at times from the family group, and choose to go it alone. But these are exceptions. The means that perpetuates a species in nature is its capacity to exist as a collectivity. Clear examples in the animal world of the indispensability of gregarious existence are of course ant hills and beehives.

In the human kingdom the individual cannot ever survive for long outside the community into which he is born or chooses to belong. Laws need to be in place in order not only to direct the conduct of the individual, but social principles and guidelines are also needed to govern society itself. Human society in its evolution towards a world wide body-politic is perforce in need of a sound system comprising social, economic, political and administrative principles and guidelines to govern its collective life. This latter aspect of mankind’s life has been addressed fully and emphatically in the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, in addition to the moral and spiritual injunctions in these teachings which are specifically designed to regulate the conduct of the individuals as responsible citizens of a world community.

Qualifications of Membership in the Community of the Faithful

In past religious Dispensations, we see that hardly any commitment with community implications is expected of a new recruit. We find that to become a member of the religious community, the emphasis is laid on personal faith and belief. Let us take the two most widespread religions in the world, namely Christianity and Islam. The emphasis in most Christian denominations is the performance of baptism, which is an act by which a person is admitted to membership of the Church. In Islam it is basically a verbal acknowledgement of belief in the oneness of God and the Messengership of the Prophet Muhammad. A believer in either Christianity or Islam, in the course of his growth towards maturity in his religion, gradually realizes the need to involve himself in social services which would benefit his

community and indeed his fellow-men. However, such a course of action, was not one of the basic articles of his faith when he was admitted as a follower of that religion.

As to specific calls to engage in offensive holy wars, which are usually raised by the leadership of some religious communities and presented as binding obligations, of course qualified members of the community of the faithful of course respond, each according to his inclinations. But these fall in the category of emergencies, and do not form part of the regular ongoing routine process of being enrolled as a member of the community.

Bahá'u'lláh has explained that the aims and objectives of the Prophets of God delivering Their messages has always been a two-pronged programme of education. He writes: "God's purpose in sending His Prophets unto men is twofold. The first is to liberate the children of men from the darkness of ignorance, and guide them to the light of true understanding. The second is to ensure the peace and tranquility of mankind and provide all the means by which they can be established." (GLS 79-80). We find the same twofold aims, but this time expressed by Bahá'u'lláh as God's purposes of man's creation, as clearly set forth in the following two texts. On the one hand, in the Short Obligatory we read: "I bear witness, O my God, that Thou hast created me to know Thee and to worship Thee." And, on the other, to complete His theme, He identifies in one of His Tablets the second purpose of man's creation by stating: "All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization." (GLS 215)

Thus we see that in addition to the move by the individual to respond to the Call of the New Manifestation, the collective responsibilities of the community were never overlooked in the Dispensations of the past, although this was not clearly so indicated or regarded as one of the qualifications of membership in the community of the faithful.

When Shoghi Effendi, however, enumerated the qualifications of a true believer, he began by mentioning such requirements as recognition of the stations of the Central Figures of the Faith, obedience to the laws and teachings revealed, and acceptance of the essential role of the Covenant, but then he added: "...and close association with the spirit as well as the form of the present day Bahá'í administration throughout the world." (BA 90) "Close association" with the "spirit and form" of the Administrative Order implies unconditional participation in the collective activities of the Bahá'í Community. Therein lies one of the many distinctions of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh compared to previous Dispensations.

In a number of his major communications and writings, Shoghi Effendi referred to the Administrative Order as the "Child of the Covenant" (e.g. GPB 243). If a person would challenge the inherent authority of the Administrative Order, he would in effect be casting doubt on the integrity of the Exponents of the Covenant, (that is the Master and the Guardian) and indeed on its very Author (that is Bahá'u'lláh Himself). It is because of this essential element of Bahá'í doctrine that we read in a letter written on behalf of the beloved Guardian, the following remarkable statement: "To accept the Cause without the administration is like to accept the teachings without acknowledging the divine station of Bahá'u'lláh. To be a Bahá'í is to accept the Cause in its entirety. To take exception to one basic principle is to deny the authority and sovereignty of Bahá'u'lláh, and therefore is to deny the Cause. The administration is the social order of Bahá'u'lláh. Without it all the principles of the Cause will remain abortive. To take exception to this, therefore, is to take exception to the fabric that Bahá'u'lláh has prescribed—it is to disobey His law." (LG 2)

It would not be sufficient or pleasing in the sight of the Blessed Beauty, therefore, for a Bahá'í, God forbid, to say that he will accept the Central Figures of the Cause and its Covenant, and he will additionally abide by all Bahá'í laws and ordinances which apply to him as an individual, but he would prefer to be left alone, and not participate in community activities. Likewise the reverse is also unacceptable,—that is for a Bahá'í to be fully supportive of community and even of teaching programmes and activities, yet be careless in his observance of the laws of the Faith and live an un-Bahá'í way of life individually. So often such behaviour becomes a cause of disgrace for the reputation of God's Holy Cause.

Extracts from Shoghi Effendi's Letters on the Way We Should Regard Community Life

In a letter to a Bahá'í Youth written on behalf of the beloved Guardian we read the following:

“His brotherly advice to you, and to all loyal and ardent young believers like you, is that you should deepen your knowledge of the history and of the tenets of the Faith, not merely by means of careful and thorough study, but also through active, whole-hearted and continued participation in all the activities, whether administrative or otherwise, of your community. The Bahá'í community life provides you with an indispensable laboratory, where you can translate into living and constructive action the principles which you imbibe from the Teachings. By becoming a real part of that living organism you can catch the real spirit which runs throughout the Bahá'í Teachings ...

May Bahá'u'lláh enable you to attain this high station, and may He keep the torch of faith for ever burning in your heart!” (CC TWO 424-425)

In another letter written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi comments on the relationships between our inner lives and the environment in which we live. We read: “Man's... inner life moulds the environment and is itself deeply affected by it. The one acts upon the other and every abiding change in the life of man is the result of these mutual reactions. No movement in the world directs its attention upon both these aspects of human life and has full measures for their improvement, save the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh. And this is its distinctive feature. If we desire therefore the good of the world we should strive to spread these teachings and also practice them in our own life. Through them will the human heart be changed, and also our social environment provides the atmosphere in which we can grow spiritually and reflect in full the light of God shining through the revelation of Bahá'u'lláh”. (CC ONE 84-85).

In a letter to one of the friends in Germany, Shoghi Effendi's secretary wrote on his behalf the following: “They [the friends] must come to realize that the Administration is a system both living and dynamic, and that, through obedience to its principles and regulations, they will gain greater strength in teaching the Faith, and be able to direct their energies as a united force into the different channels of service that lie open to them. One of the main reasons why the Faith does not advance more rapidly is because the friends have not learned to live with, and work within the framework of, the Administrative Order. Either they crystalize it into too set a form, or they rebel against what they feel to be a System, and do not give it sufficient support. Both of these extremes impede the progress of the Faith and the efficiency of the believers.” (LDG 181-182)

And finally is this marvelous description by Shoghi Effendi of the vitality and reciprocity which characterize the operation of the Administrative Order: “Should we build up the Administrative World

Order to a point of absolute perfection but at the same time allow it to be hampered or disconnected from the channels within, through which channels the Holy Spirit of the Cause pours forth, we would have nothing more than a perfected body out of touch with and cut off from the finer promptings of the soul or spirit. If, on the other hand, the influxes and goings forth of the spirit are scattered, diffused, and subjected wholly to the more or less imperfect guidance and interpretation of individual believers, lacking both the wisdom secured through consultation and the lights of real unity which shine through consultative action and obedience thereto—a disordered and disorganized activity would be witnessed, which would but dimly reflect the divine purpose of this age, which is no less than the establishment of the reign of divine love, justice and wisdom in the world, under and in conformity to the Divine Law.

“In the body of man, which is the true divine example or parallel, the spirit, when in ideal control of all the lesser parts of the body—each part is in perfect reciprocity with the other parts. The commands and impulses of the spirit are obeyed by the body and the body in turn in its actions and functions identifies and determines the expression the spiritual impulses shall take. This is divine unity—and this law, being universal and found in every created object in the universe, has full application to the universal Bahá’í organism made up of the believers everywhere, which has been established by the Manifestation of God.” (PBA 1-2)

Observing the laws of the Faith in our personal lives represents one leg, one hand, or one wing. Participating in the processes of the Administrative Order, under the overall guidance of the Universal House of Justice, is the other leg, the other hand, and the other wing. Our best performance, prescribed and designed for us by our loving Creator, is to use both legs to enable us to march, both hands to empower us to function, and both wings to equip us to fly in the heaven of His good-pleasure.

PRAYER AS A LADDER

We usually think of two kinds of prayers: 1) The Obligatory Prayers, one of three, to be recited every day and 2) Prayers for various occasions, such as for healing, for removal of difficulties, for success in teaching, for children, for travellers, for praise and thanksgiving and so on.

The first question is: Is there in the Bahá'í Faith a strict and rigid formula or set form for prayer and meditation to be adhered to by the believers? Such formulas and prescriptions do not of course exist. The friends are left free to choose their own path in seeking to offer their prayers to their Beloved. There are, however, some general guidelines in the Writings from which I will quote key words or phrases.

First is the importance of preparation for prayer, and the attitude and approach to prayer. We find references to the emotional and mental condition of the worshipper, through words such as these: humility, spirituality, love of God, radiance, a mood or state of mind conducive to conversation with God.

In one of His Tablets Bahá'u'lláh likens prayer to a “ladder of ascent” (IOPF 5) with which one ascends to the realms above. I would like to develop this analogy. I see three phases here.

The first is looking for the ladder in the store-room and placing it in position. I see this phase to be getting into the prayerful mood, and readying our soul for attaining the presence of our Lord

Then comes the ascent which is the second phase. That is when we use one of the revealed prayers. Each sentence would represent a step upwards. We should regard that our focus on the implications of each sentence is vital, just as care is needed as we focus on each ascending step of our ladder. We should avoid the habit of satisfying ourselves with the “murmur of syllables and sounds and words and letters”, as ‘Abdul-Bahá’s prayer clearly points out this truth to us. The last stage is to become conscious that we are in the presence of our Beloved. We have now attained our objective, as we are on the roof, ready for whatever we had intended to do, when we fetched the ladder. This is the phase of our meditation, of our contemplation, and most importantly of our conversation with our Beloved.

This would be the appropriate time to supplicate Him to inspire us with a solution of any problem we may have, to remove obstacles from our path, or to bring about the realization of our hopes and aspirations.

At this point I must pause for a moment, and speak to you on a point which is of the utmost importance on the subject of prayer. The heart of the issue is this: Do we really know what is good for us and what is not? Nine persons out of ten would normally wonder why such a question is asked, as it is clear that every adult person obviously would know best what is in his interest and what is not.

Maybe some of us will be surprised to realize that our Teachings assure us that we do not really know what is positively to our advantage, and what is not. It is enough for me to quote for you the following passage from one of Bahá'u'lláh’s prayers: “I bear witness at this moment, O my God, to my helplessness ... I know not that which profiteth me or harmeth me. Thou art, verily, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise”¹.

There is another prayer published in “Prayers and Meditations” which conveys the same thought. Likewise there are at least two Tablets—not yet translated into English—from the Pen of the Blessed Beauty explaining this basic truth of our Faith.

One of the American pilgrims visited the Master in ‘Akka. Her first question was that so far none of the requests made in prayer to God had been favourably answered. She wanted to know the reason. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s answer was simply one short sentence: “It is because you insist!” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá did not elaborate.

It is clear that insistence in prayer means that one has come to the conclusion that one knows what is desirable and beneficial, whereas quite often the opposite may be true. If we reflect on this point, it becomes evident that answer to prayer could be one of three things, only one of which is positive. The other two would be “This is not the time, I will give it to you later” or “This is harmful, and it will not be granted to you.” So many of us want the answer to be always just one thing: “Yes, and now”.

It seems to me that true prayer is a detached prayer. That is when one humbly presents one’s request, but simultaneously acknowledges one’s ignorance of what is profitable or harmful. Therefore one makes the fulfilment of one’s request to be conditional upon God’s Will and His good pleasure.

In prayer we should turn our heart, our soul and our thoughts to Bahá’u’lláh, God’s Manifestation for today. We may address our prayer, if we find it easier, to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá or to Shoghi Effendi, provided we bear in mind their respective stations, and ask them to transmit our request to Bahá’u’lláh. We can also pray to Bahá’u’lláh and ask that our supplication be offered to God. There is thus a difference between a prayer offered “to” and a prayer offered “through”.

A final vital point about prayer is that if during the meditation phase of our prayer, a thought comes to us which appears to be a reasonable and sound first step towards a solution, Shoghi Effendi advises that we should take immediate action, with the following additional observation: If the solution was the right one, our objective would have been attained. If, however, the course of action was wrong, we should be sure that God will then interfere in our lives, and will Himself right the wrong.

OUR CORE ACTIVITIES

Many have been the believers, specially the older ones, who, after my departure from the Holy Land, have corresponded with me, or have travelled to France to see me, or have met me during my travels, and who have conveyed to me, very quietly, certain misgivings about some of the decisions of the House of Justice, for example about the Institute process, the setting up of elected or appointed Regional Councils, the division of each National Assembly area into clusters, the prominence of the functions of the Counsellors, the use of the Ruhi books in study circles etc, none of which are prescribed in the writings of the beloved Guardian.

Their argument has always been that such innovations constituted a change in the character and nature of the Administrative Order, as bequeathed to us by the Guardian. I sympathized with their arguments, but I always willingly spent hours giving my understanding of the organic process of the growth and development of the Faith, under ever changing circumstances. Obviously Bahá'u'lláh had created the Universal House of Justice, so that among other vital duties, the Faith would enable the Faith to be always in the forefront of progressive and dynamic communities.

I even would remind them of the famous quotation of the Guardian regarding the Administration of the Faith, in which he points out that after the election of the Universal House of Justice, it will “consider afresh the whole situation, and lay down the principle which shall direct, so long as it deems advisable, the affairs of the Cause”². Bahá'u'lláh gave us the Laws, among which was the Law of the Covenant³, which determined the process of the work of the Office of Headship of the Faith. After Him this Headship would devolve first, on Appointed Aghsán (i.e. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi) and then on the Universal House of Justice.

In addition to the Laws, Bahá'u'lláh, according to the Guardian, adumbrated the main features of His World Order⁴. According to His sacred Texts, Only His Appointed Aghsán could authoritatively interpret His Writings, and disclose the Grand Vision and Design of the World Order adumbrated and envisaged by Him.

In all matters of subsidiary legislative matters to the Laws as well as in all administrative issues, (not interpretive or expository in nature) the House of Justice was empowered to take action.

I was so glad to find that in almost all cases these devoted believers could see the justification of the factors which were at play and which we were currently experiencing in our community.

In fact, rather recently one of the friends in Europe assembled texts from the English writings of Shoghi Effendi on the various aspects of the work of the Administrative Order, with emphasis on the elected (not appointed) Institutions of the Faith. He sent the compilation to me for my review, and more importantly for me to determine whether it was befitting to submit it for review and for circulation and publication.

After examining the contents of the compilation, I wrote him an email in response, suggesting the release of such a compilation of such texts at this time would imply that, God forbid, the Universal House of Justice is not, or was not, aware of their significance and application. As a result, the Bahá'í

world had been misdirected and misguided by the instructions received from the Supreme Body. This dear believer saw the point and wrote back to say that he was now convinced that he should not proceed with the release of his compilation at this time.

We must remember that Shoghi Effendi, as Guardian and Head of the Faith, found it at times necessary to by-pass or side step the very directives he had given to the friends in his communications about the authority of elected National or Local Assemblies. For example, in the case of Iran, he instructed the National Assembly to cancel the result of its vote for an officer of the Assembly, and he named the Assembly member who should occupy that office. Also, in the course of the Ten Year Crusade, he quite often directed pilgrims to which country they should pioneer, without any regard to, or consultation with, the European Teaching Committee which had been appointed for such duties by the American National Spiritual Assembly. When such cases are studied carefully, it becomes clear that the Head of the Faith had intervened temporarily because of the elements of urgency, or of emergency which impacted on the issues concerned.

The number of National Assemblies rose during the Ten Year Crusade from 12 to 56. The number at this time is over 180 National Assemblies. The Universal House of Justice sadly noted that new and inexperienced National Assemblies were, for the most part, composed of members who were totally unaware of their sacred responsibilities, and it would take some time for these National Assemblies to become deepened in their appreciation of their sacred responsibilities.

When we study the messages of the Universal House of Justice we note that in 1996, at the outset of the Four Year Plan, the Supreme Body took a decision that has proved to be a turning point in the progress of the Faith worldwide. The decision was that from that time onwards every National Assembly, in consultation with the Continental Counsellors, ought to establish a Training Institute to initiate a systematized programme of deepening of the friends as well as of their associates in the essentials of the Teachings of the Cause.

Over the months and years that followed more detailed guidance was given by the House of Justice about the core activities to be initiated by this Institute which will need to have an Administrative Coordinator, and possibly a small group of supporting staff, employed as personnel of the National Office. National Assemblies were also advised to open children's classes, study circles and even reflection meetings to those of the wider public who had enough attraction and interest to become more familiar with the domestic and internal affairs of the community.

It must also be remembered that at that time and in the immediate following years, only some 20% of the National Assemblies of the world were wide awake and active in directing teaching plans. About 50% of the rest were only waveringly engaged, but could not be relied upon without reminders and urgings by the Counsellors, while the remaining 50% were alas usually meeting with a bare quorum, and when they occasionally met, it was to see what incoming correspondence from Haifa or elsewhere had been received.

It became obvious that the Counsellors would need to have a more dynamic and vigorous role in assuming temporarily wider responsibilities in the direction of the teaching work of the Faith, under the direction of the International Teaching Centre at the World Centre.

At no time was it contemplated that such institutional projects directed administratively were to cancel out or replace the efforts of the individual friends in their efforts to mix with the local people, as

outlined in our sacred and authoritative texts, to find prayerfully receptive souls, to arouse their interest in the Teachings of the Faith, and to hold firesides in Bahá'í homes. Institutional and individual activities were to complement each other, not, God forbid, to work against each other.

Over the years, we notice that the assumption of the Counsellors of greater involvement in assisting National Assemblies has produced excellent results. We can confidently take it for granted that the overwhelming majority of the more than 180 National Assemblies of the world are, at this time, attentive, responsive and responsible organs of the Bahá'í International Community.

One of the vital purposes of these activities has always been to advance the process of entry by troops into the Cause. There is no doubt that when the hour will strike for such a glorious entry, the institutions of the Faith worldwide will certainly be more ready than ever before in welcoming them with open arms, and enabling them to participate in the various branches of our core activities.

ABBREVIATIONS

ADJ	Advent of Divine Justice
AHW	Arabic Hidden Words
BA	Bahá'í Administration
BNE	Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era
BWF	Bahá'í World Faith
CC Vol. 1	Compilation of Compilations Vol. 1
CC Vol. 2	Compilation of Compilations Vol. 2
CUHJ	Constitution of the Universal House of Justice
DB	The Dawn-Breakers
FB	The Faith of Bahá'u'lláh
GLS	Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh
GPB	God Passes By
KA	Kitáb-i-Aqdas
KI	Kitáb-i-Íqán
IOPF	The Importance of Obligatory Prayer and Fasting
LDG Vol. 1	Light of Divine Guidance, Vol. 1
LG	Lights of Guidance
LSAH	Local Spiritual Assembly Handbook
MBW	Messages to the Bahá'í World 1950-1957
MC	Ministry of the Custodians
MUHJ	Messages from the Universal House of Justice – 1963-1986

PA	The Passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
PBA	Principles of Bahá’í Administration
PDC	Promised Day is Come
PHW	Persian Hidden Words
PT	Paris Talks
SAB	Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá
SAQ	Some Answered Questions
TAB	Tablets of Bahá’u’lláh revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas
TN	Traveller’s Narrative
UD	Unfolding Destiny
WOB	World Order of Bahá’u’lláh
WT	Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

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Notes

[←1]

Page 165 of the American Prayer Book, beginning with the words: “He is the Gracious Thy Call hath attracted me...”.

[←2]

Bahá'í Administration page 41

[←3]

Aqdas # 42

[←4]

World Order of Bahá'u'lláh pp.36 & 157