



# The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh

Ruhi Institute



Book 8



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Ruhi Institute

## Books in the Series:

Below are the current titles in the series designed by the Ruhi Institute. The books are intended to be used as the main sequence of courses in a systematic effort to enhance the capacity of youth and adults to serve their communities. The Ruhi Institute is also developing a set of courses that branch out from the third book in the series for training Bahá'í children's class teachers, as well as another set from Book 5 for raising up animators of junior youth groups. These, too, are indicated in the list below. It should be noted that the list may undergo change as experience in the field advances, and additional titles will be added as a number of curricular elements under development reach the stage where they can be made widely available.

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- Book 2     *Arising to Serve*
- Book 3     *Teaching Children's Classes, Grade 1*  
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- Book 7     *Walking Together on a Path of Service*
- Book 8     *The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh*
- Book 9     *Gaining an Historical Perspective*
- Book 10    *Building Vibrant Communities*
- Book 11    *Material Means*
- Book 12    *Family and the Community*
- Book 13    *Engaging in Social Action*
- Book 14    *Participating in Public Discourse*

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## A Few Thoughts for the Tutor

The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh is His supreme gift to humanity. Its treatment here, though unavoidably inadequate, singles out this book as one that surpasses in significance all others in the Ruhi Institute's sequence of courses. It is envisaged that those who take participants through its three units have by now gained a good deal of experience in acting as tutors of the previous seven courses. The educational concepts and approaches mentioned in the sections entitled "A Few Thoughts for the Tutor" in the earlier books, especially Book 7, remain pertinent to the efforts of tutors of this course. It is also worth noting that its sheer volume will require those who facilitate its study to become fully familiar with the flow of ideas in each of its units. More importantly, they will need to have a firm enough grasp of the content to ensure that participants come away from their study with a greater appreciation of the meaning and efficacy of the Covenant, of the uniqueness of its divine foundations, and of the historical importance of the processes and events associated with its establishment and perpetuation.

One central aim of the entire course is to increase the awareness of participants of the unifying power inherent in Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant. Its three units are, therefore, organized in such a way as to serve this overall aim. As participants' understanding of relevant concepts advances section after section, the tutor will want to make certain that they are given the opportunity to reflect on the nature and magnitude of this power as expressed in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement, "The pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant." Such reflection will assist them in gaining insights into the far-reaching implications of the principle of the oneness of humankind for the development of the Cause and for the progress of humanity, a principle that will be realized through the power of the Covenant and will be woven into the pattern of the new World Order conceived by Bahá'u'lláh.

The first unit focuses on the magnetic person of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, on the achievements associated with His ministry, and on His Will and Testament. It includes a study of the full text of the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, the "Book of the Covenant", a document written by Bahá'u'lláh in His own hand, and of several passages from the Kitáb-i-Aqdas and His other Writings, in which He irrefutably establishes the station of His Son as the Center of His Covenant and the authorized Interpreter of His teachings. The concept of a "center" discussed in Section 10 deserves to be given sufficient attention—this, in relation to a center towards which the "faithful are enjoined to turn their faces". The explanation provided there and the ideas on which participants reflect should help them to see the imperative of the existence of this center for the preservation of the unity of the Cause and for the achievement of its God-given mission. They should also be able to recognize the fundamental difference between the spiritual authority that this Center, appointed by Bahá'u'lláh, manifests and the temporal authority exerted through multitudes of centers in society where power is concentrated. Features of the Administrative Order examined in the second and third units should enhance their understanding of this important idea.

The station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the authorized Interpreter of the Word of God is specifically addressed in Sections 11 to 13. These sections bring to the attention of participants

two ideas: First, they come to appreciate that this station is a dimension of the authority which Bahá'u'lláh conferred upon 'Abdu'l-Bahá as His Successor, and later 'Abdu'l-Bahá upon Shoghi Effendi—the authority to explain the intended meaning and purpose of the Sacred Text. Second, they see that such interpretation is not confined to the elucidation of articles of belief, Bahá'í laws and their application; it also includes matters related to the Administrative Order—the precursor of Bahá'u'lláh's World Order. What should become clear is that the command to turn to this authority does not contradict the counsel given to the individual to strive to attain the shores of true understanding through study of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and through putting His teachings into practice. What is required is for one to recognize the limitations of one's personal grasp of the Writings and to seek at all times to align it with the authoritative interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian. In fact, participants' own experience in going through the earlier courses in this sequence, which are replete with such interpretations, should serve to validate this in their minds, and the exercise in Section 13 will help them realize how vastly their understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings has increased through 'Abdu'l-Bahá's explanations.

Sections 15 and 16 provide an opportunity for participants to reflect on the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the perfect Exemplar of His Father's teachings. They are already familiar, through their study of previous courses, with episodes from His life and the exemplary qualities He manifested as He interacted with others and proclaimed the teachings. Here, they are asked to give thought to the posture we need to assume in our efforts to emulate the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, a posture that is characterized by active striving to live up to the high standard of conduct He so perfectly manifested, while remaining conscious of the fact that a great and unattainable distance separates all mortal beings from the station He occupies. The passages cited in Section 16 are among many in which the Guardian clarifies the view one must hold of the station of a Being unique in the entire span of religious history. In *God Passes By*, for example, he describes 'Abdu'l-Bahá in this vein: "He alone had been accorded the privilege of being called '*the Master*', an honor from which His Father had strictly excluded all His other sons. Upon Him that loving and unerring Father had chosen to confer the unique title of '*Sirru'lláh*' (the Mystery of God), a designation so appropriate to One Who, though essentially human and holding a station radically and fundamentally different from that occupied by Bahá'u'lláh and His Forerunner, could still claim to be the perfect Exemplar of His Faith, to be endowed with superhuman knowledge, and to be regarded as the stainless mirror reflecting His light."

A review of the major achievements of the Faith during 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry is undertaken in Sections 21 to 24. Drawing largely on chapters from *God Passes By*, it deals with four vital developments: the transfer of the remains of the Báb to their final resting place on Mount Carmel, the establishment of the Faith in the West, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's travels to Europe and North America, and the systematic expansion and consolidation of the Faith throughout the world. Though the review is only cursory, the tutor will need to ensure that the members of a group grasp the significance of the historical events described in those sections, events which set in motion worldwide processes that were visualized by Bahá'u'lláh and that are today accelerating everywhere. The following points, for example, cannot be overemphasized: that the spot on Mount Carmel where Bahá'u'lláh pitched His tent and which was designated by Him as the permanent resting place of the Báb has now become, through the groundwork laid by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the focal point of the World Administrative Center of the Faith; that, through His unerring stewardship, the Faith was established on a sound foundation in North America, a continent upon whose rulers Bahá'u'lláh had called to act with justice and to fear God; that, as a result of the travels to major cities in Europe and North America undertaken by 'Abdu'l-Bahá,

at an advanced age and on the heels of His freedom from fifty years of captivity, the fundamental verities of His Father’s Cause were widely proclaimed; and that, in revealing the Tablets of the Divine Plan in the closing years of His earthly life, He drew the grand design and opened the way for the unfoldment of successive Plans for the propagation of the Faith in all parts of the globe. In all these achievements, participants should be able to catch a glimpse of the power of the Covenant.

Much of the latter part of the unit is dedicated to the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the next major theme addressed. In this, as in earlier sections, what those who act as tutors should note is how relevant statements from the Guardian are used to guide participants through their study—for example, as they delve into key documents such as the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd or as they reflect on some of the significant achievements associated with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ministry. Here, then, participants begin their exploration of His Will and Testament in Section 26 by reading the Guardian’s description of the content of that document. It is envisioned that this approach will help them recognize how much their understanding of the various facets of Bahá’u’lláh’s vast Revelation and of the forces that it has unleashed advances through the Guardian’s matchless writings.

The reading of excerpts from the Will and Testament should be undertaken in light of three statements of the Guardian, also cited in Section 26: The first refers to the document as the “Charter of Bahá’u’lláh’s New World Order”; the second notes that it outlines “the features” and sets in motion “the processes” of the Administrative Order; and the third indicates that it constitutes, together with the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the “chief depository wherein are enshrined those priceless elements of that Divine Civilization, the establishment of which is the primary mission of the Bahá’í Faith”. Indeed, reflection on the passages from the Will and Testament quoted in Sections 27 through 34 should assist participants in seeing how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, in appointing the two institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice as His Successors, ensured the perpetuation of that spiritual center through which the faithful receive continuous guidance and towards which they turn in love and obedience. The deliberations of a group should also enable its members to realize that, in elaborating on the nature and functions of these two institutions, both of which are under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá brought into being the unique features of the World Order envisioned by Bahá’u’lláh. The insights that participants gain through these sections will then increase as they study the next two units of this book and trace the gradual evolution of the elements of the future civilization that have been taking shape through the efforts of the worldwide Bahá’í community under the guidance of these twin institutions.

One important idea that needs to be understood, as participants go through the above sections, concerns the nature of the obedience the individual shows towards the guidance of the center of authority in the Faith—the Universal House of Justice. Such understanding can be achieved only if we free our minds from all kinds of notions that the term “obedience” has conjured in humanity’s collective consciousness throughout its evolutionary process. As humankind moves towards a stage of maturity, its conception of obedience will need to be completely renewed. It is in the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh that one finds the roots of a new understanding that should take shape. In this context, the nature of the authority invested in the appointed center, as mentioned above, is entirely different from anything humanity has ever known, and the spirit of obedience and love it engenders unique. It is an obedience that springs from recognition of Bahá’u’lláh as the Manifestation of God for today and from conscious knowledge of the power and efficacy of the Order He has brought into being for the peace and happiness of all the peoples of the world. Since there are no exercises in Section 33, where the

subject is addressed directly, tutors are encouraged to give the time necessary for the exploration of this idea, so central to the Covenant.

Inseparable from the obedience shown forth in turning wholeheartedly towards the appointed spiritual center of the Faith is a pledge that all those who enter the tabernacle of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant make—a pledge to uphold the standard of conduct which He calls upon us to follow. Tutors will need to ensure that participants' attention is drawn to this vital aspect of the Covenant, which, implicit throughout the unit, profoundly affects the life of the individual. The idea is raised explicitly in Section 37 and elaborated further in Sections 38 and 39, which include relevant excerpts from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. However, the opportunity to reflect on the responsibility each of us shoulders in this respect should not be overlooked in the study of other sections, especially Sections 5 to 7, centered on the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, and those that address the station of the Master as the perfect Exemplar of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, Sections 15 and 16.

The Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as already mentioned, provides the context for the study of the next two units of this course, focused on the Guardian of the Faith and the Universal House of Justice, respectively. The second unit begins with a short description of the circumstances that attended the assumption by Shoghi Effendi of the mantle of Guardianship. Evident in these early sections is the irreplaceable role the Greatest Holy Leaf played in the days immediately following 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing and during Shoghi Effendi's short absence from the Holy Land a few months later, when he left the affairs of the Cause in her hands. Sections 5 and 6 offer only a brief overview of the life of one to whom Bahá'u'lláh granted "a station" that no "other woman hath surpassed". Nevertheless, it is hoped that participants, in going through them, will be motivated to learn more about this exceptional figure in Bahá'í history and will strive to acquire those attributes that she, as a most staunch defender of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, manifested.

Another point highlighted in the initial sections of the unit is the importance the Guardian placed, soon after assuming his responsibilities as Head of the Faith, on the establishment of the Universal House of Justice. That the achievement of this goal lay in building the foundations necessary for the eventual erection of that Supreme Body was apparent to him, and this became the impetus behind the task Shoghi Effendi immediately set out to accomplish—the systematic development of the institution of the Spiritual Assembly. Several sections of the unit, then, aim to deepen the participants' understanding of those fundamental truths about the nature of Bahá'í administration conveyed by the Guardian in his messages—in many of which he elucidates on passages from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and other sacred Writings. To this end, Sections 8 to 12 address five vital subjects: consultation as a cardinal principle that should govern collective decision-making; the nature of the relationship between Spiritual Assemblies and the individual; the nature of the relationships among the institutions of the Administrative Order; the nature of Bahá'í elections; and the nature of serving on an Assembly.

Reading the above sections with care and undertaking the corresponding exercises should enable participants to identify, to the extent possible, the distinct features of Bahá'í administration. They should, for example, be able to clearly see how the aim of consultation, as well as the attributes that should distinguish those who take counsel together and the conditions they should meet, set the Bahá'í consultative process apart from all other decision-making processes operating in society. In the context of the relationship between Assemblies and the individual, to give another example, they should be able to recognize how absent in the

current social order are those qualities that, as delineated in the Guardian's messages, bind the two together and how such qualities underlie a whole set of new attitudes towards authority, one completely at odds with what we observe in the world today. Similarly, they should be able to grasp how humble service to Bahá'u'lláh and concern for the harmonious functioning of the entire Administrative Order shape a kind of interaction among institutions and agencies of the Faith that stands in sharp contrast to those seen among various organs of society which are ruled by competition and contest. Crucially, the study of Section 11 should heighten their awareness of the uniqueness of the Bahá'í electoral process and increase their understanding of the spiritual principles embedded in it and the responsibility the sacred act of voting places on each of us. Participants should realize in this respect that to faithfully shoulder this responsibility requires of every member of the electorate, among other things, a deepened understanding of the nature of service on an Assembly, even though few will actually be called upon to serve on that institution. Again, the picture that emerges here, they should be able to see, is entirely different from the one witnessed in the political sphere.

Ultimately every member of the Bahá'í community is closely associated with the spirit as well as the form of Bahá'í administration—a system of administration which derives its authority from the Text of Bahá'u'lláh and the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. In this connection, Section 13 tries to assist participants in grasping two central ideas that every follower of Bahá'u'lláh needs to constantly keep in mind: First, Bahá'í administration is an element of the Faith inseparable from its purely spiritual and humanitarian teachings, and second, that this administrative system is giving rise to an Order—an Order which has been evolving since the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and which will continue to evolve under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. The exercise in this section is intended to help participants reflect on these two central ideas.

Sections 14 to 18 describe some of the other institutions and structures of the Administrative Order which were the focus of the Guardian's efforts during his ministry: the Bahá'í Fund, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, the Nineteen Day Feast, Huqúqu'lláh, and the summer school. Participants are by now familiar with each of these through their study of the previous courses and through their engagement in Bahá'í community life. The primary purpose of these short sections, then, is to raise their awareness of how the Guardian laid down the spiritual principles and concepts that will continue to guide the development of these institutions.

Overall, it is hoped that, as participants go through Sections 8 to 18, they will gain a more profound understanding of how the Guardian painstakingly built the structure of the Administrative Order and will catch a glimpse of its inherent power. It is this Order, tutors would do well to remember, which will, “as it expands and consolidates itself”, manifest “the potentialities and reveal the full implications” of the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and which will, “as its component parts, its organic institutions, begin to function with efficiency and vigor”, assert “its claim and demonstrate its capacity to be regarded not only as the nucleus but the very pattern of the New World Order destined to embrace in the fullness of time the whole of mankind.”

The implementation of a series of plans for the systematic execution of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan on a wide scale was another major achievement of the Faith during the ministry of Shoghi Effendi, one that was intertwined with the development of Assemblies, which occupied so much of his attention throughout the first fifteen years of his Guardianship. Sections 24 to 27 enter into a discussion of this theme. The historical narrative first takes participants through the period 1937 to 1953, during which existing National Spiritual Assemblies carried out their

respective plans for the propagation of the Faith under the direction of the Guardian. These plans were largely implemented through the dispatch of itinerant teachers and the settlement of pioneers, a topic addressed in Section 27, though only briefly. That the spiritual principles articulated by the Guardian at the time regarding the conduct of every would-be pioneer hold equal significance for us today is a concept that should not be overlooked.

Section 28 provides a short description of how, besides assisting Assemblies in carrying out plans for the geographic spread of the Faith, the Guardian built their capacity to work with like-minded organizations, to defend the interests of the Cause of God, and to seize every instance of attack against the Faith as an opportunity to make known to a growing sphere of the public its purpose and character and to raise its profile in international circles.

The Guardian's tireless efforts to guide the Bahá'í world in the execution of the Divine Plan rose to a crescendo when he launched in 1953 the Ten Year Crusade—that world-embracing spiritual crusade that involved every National Spiritual Assembly. Sections 29 to 31 are dedicated to a short review of how the Guardian initiated this momentous undertaking, one that provided the impulse, more than a decade later, for a nine-year plan launched by the Universal House of Justice, which has since been followed by an uninterrupted series of global Plans. The significance of the imagery the Guardian employs to describe that World Crusade—its aim, its driving force, its principal protagonists, and the charter that directs its course—should not be lost on participants, especially in relation to their own efforts in the field of service. In addition, the above sections should raise their awareness of how systematically and meticulously the Guardian followed, until his passing in 1957, every detail in the implementation of this first global Plan of the Faith, as he had done with the plans of the previous sixteen years.

Developing the institution of the Hands of the Cause, an institution ordained by Bahá'u'lláh and confirmed in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, was a task of significant proportions, achieved by the Guardian within the short span of six years. Participants will need to carefully go through Sections 32 and 33, which provide an overview of the steps he took in rapid succession to appoint several contingents of Hands of the Cause and of how he guided them in the fulfillment of their duties, nurtured the institution to which they belonged, and defined the nature of the collaborative relationship between it and the institution of National Assemblies. Later, in Sections 39 and 40, participants will read about the crucial role the Hands played in leading the worldwide Bahá'í community during that critical period following the passing of the Guardian until the establishment of the Universal House of Justice. Those two sections, however brief, should make clear to participants that it was through the capable leadership of the Hands that the community was able to win the goals of the Ten Year Crusade and to elect the Universal House of Justice in 1963. One idea—expressed in the tribute made to the Hands of the Cause by the House of Justice—should be etched in the minds of tutors and participants alike: “The entire history of religion shows no comparable record of such strict self-discipline, such absolute loyalty and such complete self-abnegation by the leaders of a religion finding themselves suddenly deprived of their divinely inspired guide.”

A third major accomplishment associated with the Guardian's ministry—in addition to the erection of the structure of the Administrative Order and the systematic execution of the Divine Plan—is the rise of the World Spiritual and Administrative Center of the Faith in the Holy Land. This theme is taken up in Sections 34 to 37. That the Guardian linked developments on the slope of Mount Carmel to the evolution of the Administrative Order throughout the globe is an important idea that needs to be understood. Also requiring some reflection is his reference

to the Tablet of Carmel, the Tablets of the Divine Plan, and the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the three divinely revealed charters which have set in motion three distinct processes for the development of the Administrative Center of the Faith, for the wide-scale propagation of the Faith, and for the worldwide establishment of its Administrative Order.

Tutors will notice that the above four sections, like several others in this course—for example Sections 21 to 24 in the first unit—contain long segments of text with only one or two exercises, exercises which are intended to help participants delve deeper into a key concept or gain insights into a certain spiritual truth. In taking a group through a series of such sections, a tutor should ensure that, beyond the key concepts treated in the exercises, participants become familiar with salient facts and information that have significant historical importance or that are essential to their understanding of underlying concepts. In this, a tutor need not shy away from drawing on skills acquired through experience to go back over long segments and ask questions that will bring pertinent points to the attention of the group.

Reflecting on the many passages from the Guardian’s writings quoted throughout this book will no doubt deepen participants’ understanding of his station as the authorized interpreter of the teachings of the Faith. Nevertheless, the theme is addressed specifically in Sections 42 to 46, which provide participants with an opportunity to benefit from reading selected passages from his writings that illuminate understanding regarding the station of each of the three Central Figures of the Faith.

A theme introduced in the first unit which is also dealt with in this one is related to Covenant-breaking. Participants will need to comprehend the nature of this phenomenon at different levels. In the first instance, they will clearly recognize it as an attack that is launched by those who claim to be followers of Bahá’u’lláh but violate His Covenant and turn against its appointed center. They will also readily see that this violation is the cause of division and disunity and of harm to the progress of the Cause. But they must be assisted in going further to see what motivates those who break the Covenant and to understand how their insidious ways infect the mind and heart of anyone who associates with them. Questions in Sections 17 to 20 in the first unit and Sections 19 to 23 in the second are intended to achieve this purpose, and the guidance of the House of Justice provided in the latter, in Section 41, should raise awareness of the posture we should adopt when encountering materials on various online platforms that misconstrue the teachings of the Faith and the authority of its institutions. Ultimately, what should become clear to participants, as they ponder the failure of the periodic attacks that have been hurled against the Faith by those who have tried to violate its integrity from within, is the invincible power of the Covenant to overcome all manner of opposition and to keep the unity and wholeness of the Cause of God intact.

By the time participants embark on the study of the third unit, the foundation has been laid for them to apprehend the significance of the stupendous event that took place upon the completion of the Ten Year Crusade—the election of the Universal House of Justice in April 1963. The clarification it provided to the Bahá’í world soon after its establishment that it would not be possible, according to the provisions of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi was one that could only be made by that Supreme Institution. And, in setting the Bahá’í world on a nine-year plan, it initiated those worldwide enterprises that, in the words of Shoghi Effendi, “symbolize the unity and coordinate and unify the activities” of all National Assemblies. In these developments, described in the first four sections of the unit, the implications of the existence of the Universal House of Justice become immediately apparent. And, as participants go through the sections that follow, they

will be able to perceive how, in the functioning of the House of Justice, the promises of Bahá'u'lláh, and those of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi, are gradually being fulfilled.

The rest of the unit, therefore, is organized, almost in its entirety, in such a way as to allow participants to reflect on some of the powers and duties of the Universal House of Justice as delineated in its Constitution, specifically in its Declaration of Trust. The latter is included in full in Section 6, and tutors will need to ensure that participants read it carefully several times and acquire a reasonable grasp of its content. The subsequent two sections reiterate and consolidate much of what they will have learned from their study of the previous two units regarding the authority invested in the Universal House of Justice to decide on all matters not explicitly revealed in the Text and the promise that it is the recipient of “divine inspiration from the unseen Kingdom”. Here, it would be helpful for a tutor to remind the members of a group of specific sections in the first unit where they studied passages from the Will and Testament that refer to the Universal House of Justice and to help them reflect once again on those essential concepts—such as “spiritual center”, “authority”, and “obedience”—for each of which they will have found a new and profound meaning in the context of the Covenant.

With these concepts clear in their minds, participants are assisted in Sections 9 to 14 in seeing how the institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order have continued to expand and become consolidated under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. They will first review the development that took place within that Order to extend into the future the dual functions of protection and propagation of the Faith which had been assigned by Shoghi Effendi to the institution of the Hands of the Cause. To achieve this aim, the House of Justice brought into existence in 1968 the Continental Boards of Counsellors and, five years later, the International Teaching Centre. This historic development, as well as the present-day structure and functioning of the institution of the Counsellors, is described in Sections 9 and 10, and the significant role that the institution plays in the advancement of the Cause today is addressed in Sections 11 to 13.

The approach taken in these latter three sections is similar to that in the second unit, where the development of the institution of the Spiritual Assembly was examined in the context of a few essential principles and concepts related to Bahá'í administration. Here, participants are expected to gain a more profound appreciation of the institution of the Counsellors as they consider the nature of its relationship with the individual, the vital contribution it makes to the enrichment of diverse aspects of Bahá'í community life, and the nature of its relationship with the institution of the Spiritual Assembly. What should stand out to participants in studying the above sections are the spiritual qualities and attributes that those appointed to serve on the institution of the Counsellors—Continental Counsellors, Auxiliary Board members, and assistants—manifest as they accompany friends in the field of service, particularly the complete commitment they exemplify to the diffusion of the “Divine Fragrances” and to the promotion of learning. No less important in this respect is the sacred responsibility the institution to which they belong shoulders, together with Spiritual Assemblies, to watch over the security of the Faith, to preserve the spiritual health of the Bahá'í community, to nurture the vitality of the faith of its individual members, to promote the proper functioning of its worldwide enterprises, and to assure the fulfillment of its ultimate destiny.

These sections conclude with a brief mention, in Section 14, of just a few other institutions and organizational structures that have emerged at different levels since the establishment of the Universal House of Justice. Study of this section will illustrate further the

ongoing evolution of the Administrative Order—the “nucleus” and the “pattern” of that World Order which the Bahá’í Revelation is destined to bring into being.

The focus in Sections 15 to 27 turns to another sphere within which the Universal House of Justice, as enshrined in its Constitution, exercises its powers and duties—in this case, to guide, organize, coordinate, and unify the activities of the worldwide Bahá’í community. As an example, participants are assisted in catching a glimpse of how the Supreme Body has been directing the community in carrying forward ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan. To this end, they are asked to reflect on a selection of passages excerpted from numerous messages of the House of Justice written over a twenty-five-year period, from 1996 to 2021, during which a series of global Plans to advance the process of entry by troops were implemented. Reflection on these passages should enable them to see how continuous guidance from the House of Justice impels the three protagonists of the Plan—the individual, the community, and the institutions—to develop their capacities in concert with one another and how the concepts and approaches it introduces, along with the systems and structures it establishes, empower each to contribute to the advancement of civilization. Moreover, going through the above sections should help participants to place in historical context some of the current processes underway aimed at releasing the society-building power of the Faith in their own clusters, villages and neighborhoods. In this, it is hoped, they will come to acquire a deeper appreciation of what a priceless bounty it is, in a world where chaos and confusion reign, to be recipients of the heavenly inspired, unerring guidance of the Universal House of Justice and what an inestimable privilege it is to participate in a divinely propelled, integrating process that will ultimately build anew the whole world.

Undoubtedly, studying the messages of the Universal House of Justice to gain an understanding of the totality of the vision they convey is indispensable to the progress of the three protagonists of the Plan. Certain habits of mind fostered by the institute process can assist an individual in approaching this vital task in a befitting manner. So many of these habits, of course, stand in stark contrast to those promoted by society in general. Beyond identifying such habits, as suggested in Sections 26 and 41, participants should be able to describe how they are developed in the setting of a study circle and how they are then consciously extended to various spheres of Bahá’í activity, not least those spaces in which consultation and collective reflection on action are taking place to advance the aims of the Plan.

To promulgate and apply the laws and principles of the Faith and to safeguard and enforce that rectitude of conduct which the Law of God enjoins are also among the powers and duties of the Universal House of Justice. Sections 28 to 37 take two items of correspondence as examples to demonstrate how the guidance of the Supreme Body expands our consciousness of the concept of Bahá’í law and its centrality to the civilization-building process and raises our awareness of the transformative forces which obedience to that law releases in the life of the individual and in society at large. The first item of correspondence, a letter written on its behalf to a few individual Bahá’ís, examines the current condition of society, elucidates the nature of Bahá’u’lláh’s laws and teachings, discusses the responsibility that the individual shoulders in relation to Bahá’í law, and describes the characteristics of a community that inspires its members to live and act according to the principles and ideals of the Faith. Tutors will want to make sure understanding of these four crucial themes is deepened as participants read selected passages from the letter, quoted in Sections 28 to 34, and undertake the corresponding exercises. In relation to the first theme, for example, study of the initial three sections should make clear how the materialistic society in which we all, especially youth, are immersed has entirely redefined morality; how it has imposed a set of assumptions, values, and practices that are now

taken as indisputable; how energy and resources of enormous proportions are spent in an effort to bend truth so that it conforms to personal desire and vested interest; and ultimately how, as a result, a culture is created that distorts human nature and purpose, “trapping human beings in pursuit of idle fancies and vain imaginings and turning them into pliable objects in the hands of the powerful”. This study should also sharpen the ability to recognize both the divine foundation on which human happiness and well-being rest and the source from which human beings can, in reality, seek the truth. The exercises in these sections, therefore, should not be carried out mechanically. In particular, the question posed in Section 30 requires profound reflection. Here, each participant is asked to describe how a most grievous oppression, preventing human beings from attaining unto the knowledge of God and His teachings, is being perpetuated in the world today and how humanity can break free from its shackles.

Similarly, in relation to the second theme mentioned above, as participants go through Section 31, they should come to appreciate how guidance from the Universal House of Justice sheds light on the nature of Bahá'u'lláh's laws and His teachings, helping us to see them as expressions of truths about the nature of the human being and the purpose of existence and as the highest means through which the standard of personal conduct is lifted and spiritual and material progress of society achieved. Regarding the third theme, sufficient thought should be given to the questions raised in Sections 32 and 33, which consider, on the one hand, the posture that individuals, most notably young Bahá'ís, should adopt if they are to be able to uphold the standards of the Faith—standards so radically different from society's norms—and, on the other, the nature of obedience that adherence to the laws of God demands. That one's moral development is inseparable from the degree of effort one exerts to improve the life of the community and that a community must in turn possess certain characteristics, if it is to empower its members, particularly its young, to withstand the forces of gross materialism undermining the moral fabric of society is discussed briefly in Section 34, touching on the fourth theme noted above—a theme that is expanded on in the next two sections, which require careful deliberation.

The second item of correspondence, a letter written to a National Spiritual Assembly, describes the nature of the responsibility that rests with the institutions of the Faith both to support the individual and to cultivate a pattern of community life conducive to the spiritual upliftment of its members. The excerpts quoted from that letter in Sections 35 and 36, though not extensive, will provide participants with an opportunity to consider, now in the context of Bahá'í law, the significance of an educational endeavor, specifically the one fostered by the training institute, through which virtuous conduct and self-discipline are developed in the field of service. They will also reflect on the nature and purpose of administrative sanctions, the application of which can best be seen as a necessary process that benefits both the individual and the community. In sum, it is hoped that, through the exploration of the ideas addressed in the two letters, participants will be able to acquire a vision of how the Universal House of Justice guides the individual, the community, and the institutions of the Faith in forging an entirely new set of relationships in conformity with God's decree, relationships that will release the transformative powers inherent in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.

Each of the three units of this book suggests that participants draw up a personal plan for the study of the writings of the Faith, outlining several works of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, and Bahá'u'lláh, respectively, that are currently available in many of the world's major languages. Of course, the discipline of systematic study of the writings is developed over time as the habit of reading the verses of God with eagerness and love every morning and evening takes root. Indeed, cultivating this habit is the focus of “Understanding the Bahá'í Writings”, the very first unit participants study when entering the Ruhi Institute's sequence of courses.

The thirst to explore the writings of the Faith then grows as one engages with the content of subsequent courses and treads the path of service that they trace. It is envisioned that, by the time participants reach this eighth book in the series, they will have already studied, either in their entirety or in part, some of the writings mentioned in the three units. The systematic personal plan of study they draw up will serve to strengthen further their efforts to deepen their understanding of the truths enshrined in Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and to gain insights from the illuminating interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian.

Distinct from such a plan, there are, of course, times when a few friends may wish to come together in a locality, as part of their individual efforts to deepen their knowledge of the Faith, and study a particular volume as a small group. Certain attributes that the institute is helping to develop will naturally manifest themselves in such spaces—for example, the mutual support the friends lend to one another, the joy they derive from the insights of one another, and the respect they have for the knowledge that each one possesses at any given moment, a result of eschewing the kind of thinking that categorizes individuals as the deepened and the uninformed. They also take care not to allow their own deepening efforts to so absorb them that they neglect the imperative of service in the field. They know well how easily inward-looking habits can form and how quickly momentum in advancing the process of community building in a neighborhood or village, or even an entire cluster, can be lost. In a life in which personal growth and commitment to the well-being of others are seen as an integrated whole, and not as separate and sometimes conflicting ends, humbly sharing the knowledge one acquires is essential. For example, for those engaged in this sequence of courses, the visits they undertake to homes to discuss certain significant themes—the act of service addressed in Book 2—assist them in fulfilling this important requisite. To the discussions that ensue in such settings all contribute and, from them, all derive spiritual nourishment.

A final point should be made about this book and the ones that follow it. The Universal House of Justice has likened the “development of human resources in a country” to the “building of an ever-expanding pyramid, whose base must be constantly broadened”. It has pointed out that, as increasing numbers of individuals enter the first course, and as “relatively significant percentages are then helped to reach higher and higher courses”, their “capacity for service” is enhanced. By now, from their study of the previous seven books and their engagement in progressively more complex and demanding acts of service, the capacity of participants in this course must have increased substantially. They will be ready to deal with more challenging educational content, content that not only enables them to think more deeply about the environment which surrounds them and its effects on their hearts and minds but serves, as well, to raise the quality and efficacy of the acts they perform to reshape that environment. It is in this connection that the present course and the subsequent ones will play a critical role in enhancing the capacity of individuals. The House of Justice states that institutes ought to take care, lest they “perceive their work as training in techniques, losing sight of the conception of capacity building at the heart of the institute process that entails a profound understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation.” In the preliminary section of Book 7, it is mentioned to those who serve as tutors that central to this process of capacity building is the enhancement of understanding and the fostering of spiritual qualities. Understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant—that unique and most significant phenomenon in humanity's life—and of the complete transformation its unifying power exerts on us individually and collectively, no doubt, profoundly influences one's thoughts and actions. So, while no specific act of service is associated with this course, a growing understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant will endow every action that one undertakes to serve the Cause, no matter how small, with fresh and expanded meaning. It is envisioned that one dimension of the increased capacity to which the

study of this course will contribute is to equip tutors and participants alike with invaluable knowledge, wisdom, and spiritual insights that they can then share, on appropriate occasions, with those who have more recently embarked on the path of service, many of whom are youth in their teens. They should be able, as they work shoulder to shoulder with individuals who are progressing through the earlier courses of the sequence, to help deepen their understanding of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, of the Administrative Order that it has rolled out, and of the purposeful community that it has raised. It is through such an understanding alone that one is able to catch a glimpse of Bahá'u'lláh's vision for humanity, "that Wondrous Vision which constitutes the brightest emanation of His Mind and the fairest fruit of the fairest civilization the world has yet seen".



# The Center of the Covenant and His Will and Testament

## Purpose

To gain an understanding of the unifying power of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant,  
of the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the Center of that Covenant,  
and of the duty that rests with each individual to abide by  
the injunctions of His Will and Testament



## SECTION 1

In the second book in this series, you considered the concept of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh briefly when reflecting on the station of His Son 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Whose words and example have accompanied you every step along the way in walking the path of service traced out by the series. Later, in Book 6, in building your capacity to make a cogent presentation of the Faith, you were able to explore the concept in somewhat greater depth and to gain insight into the dynamics of the Covenant and the part we each play in it, as those who recognize the beauty of the teachings and the Source from which they flow. In striving to align your thoughts and actions with the example of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Center of that Covenant, you have, in a sense, been fulfilling your obligations in this respect. Your study of this book, the eighth in the series, will serve to deepen the understanding of the Covenant that you have already acquired and heighten your appreciation of the power it exerts on our individual and collective lives.

This study will be divided into three parts. We will focus here, in the first unit, on the period following the ascension of Bahá'u'lláh. In doing so, we will read in full the Tablet He revealed that bears the title “Kitáb-i-‘Ahd”, the “Book of the Covenant”, and will try to gain further insight into the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, His chosen Successor and the Interpreter of His teachings. To this end, we will review the achievements of His ministry and explore extensive passages from His Will and Testament. The second unit of the book will guide us through the ministry of Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Faith, providing us with an opportunity to study several themes vital to the progress of the Cause, most notably the rise of the Administrative Order. The third unit will center on the Universal House of Justice, that mighty institution directly inspired by Bahá'u'lláh Himself which guides the Bahá'í community today.

We should acknowledge at the outset that our treatment of this vast subject will inevitably prove inadequate. All we hope to do in this book is to deepen, as far as possible, our understanding of the meaning and power of the Covenant and of the ennobling influence it exerts on our individual lives and on our efforts to progress along the path which will lead humanity to that Divine civilization envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh. We will undertake our exploration of the subject in light of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement, “The pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant.”

## SECTION 2

Let us begin by considering the concept of the oneness of humankind as expressed in the Bahá'í writings. Acceptance of the Bahá'í teachings implies a firm belief in humanity's oneness. This belief profoundly shapes who we are and what we do, both as individuals and as communities. “The Tabernacle of Unity”, Bahá'u'lláh proclaims, “has been raised; regard ye not one another as strangers. . . . Of one tree are all ye the fruit and of one bough the leaves. . . . The world is but one country and mankind its citizens. . . . Let not a man glory in that he loves his country; let him rather glory in this, that he loves his kind.”<sup>1</sup>

We know that Bahá'u'lláh has come to build anew the whole world and that the ultimate purpose of His Revelation is the unification of the entire human race. In the quotation below, the Guardian makes clear that the principle of the oneness of humankind, as enunciated by Bahá'u'lláh, involves much more than brotherly love and tolerance. It calls for a change in the very structure of society. It represents the final stage of a long evolutionary process in the

collective life of humanity, a stage that will be marked by the emergence of a world civilization. You are encouraged to read the quotation several times with the members of your group.

**“Let there be no mistake. The principle of the Oneness of Mankind—the pivot round which all the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh revolve—is no mere outburst of ignorant emotionalism or an expression of vague and pious hope. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with a reawakening of the spirit of brotherhood and goodwill among men, nor does it aim solely at the fostering of harmonious cooperation among individual peoples and nations. Its implications are deeper, its claims greater than any which the Prophets of old were allowed to advance. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns itself primarily with the nature of those essential relationships that must bind all the states and nations as members of one human family. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands inseparably associated with an institution adequate to embody its truth, demonstrate its validity, and perpetuate its influence. It implies an organic change in the structure of present-day society, a change such as the world has not yet experienced. It constitutes a challenge, at once bold and universal, to outworn shibboleths of national creeds—creeds that have had their day and which must, in the ordinary course of events as shaped and controlled by Providence, give way to a new gospel, fundamentally different from, and infinitely superior to, what the world has already conceived. It calls for no less than the reconstruction and the demilitarization of the whole civilized world—a world organically unified in all the essential aspects of its life, its political machinery, its spiritual aspiration, its trade and finance, its script and language, and yet infinite in the diversity of the national characteristics of its federated units.**

**“It 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.**

**“The principle of the Oneness of Mankind, as proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh, carries with it no more and no less than a solemn assertion that attainment to this final stage in this stupendous evolution is not only necessary but inevitable, that its realization is fast approaching, and that nothing short of a power that is born of God can succeed in establishing it.**

**“So marvelous a conception finds its earliest manifestations in the efforts consciously exerted and the modest beginnings already achieved by the declared adherents of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh who, conscious of the sublimity of their calling and initiated into the ennobling principles of His Administration, are forging ahead to establish His Kingdom on this earth. It has its indirect manifestations in the gradual diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity which is spontaneously arising out of the welter of a disorganized society.”<sup>2</sup>**

The explanation offered by the Guardian of the principle of the oneness of humankind and of its far-reaching implications for human affairs is profound. To reflect on this idea, complete each of the following sentences on the basis of the above quotation:

- a. The principle of the oneness of humankind is no mere outburst \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b. Its appeal is not to be merely identified with \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. It does not aim solely at \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. Its claims are greater than \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e. Its message is applicable not only to the individual, but concerns \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- f. It does not constitute merely the enunciation of an ideal, but stands \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- g. It implies an organic change in \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- h. It constitutes a challenge, at once bold and universal, to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- i. It calls for no less than \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- j. It carries with it no more and no less than a solemn assertion that \_\_\_\_\_
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In the last paragraph of the passage, the Guardian speaks of the early manifestations of Bahá'u'lláh's vision for humanity, first in the efforts of the Bahá'í community as it forges ahead to establish His Kingdom on earth and second, indirectly, in the gradual diffusion of the spirit of world solidarity, which is spontaneously arising out of the welter of a disorganized society. Today the effect of this spirit in the world is apparent in a number of developments, such as the rejection of deeply ingrained racial prejudices and heightened environmental awareness. Can you mention a few others?

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Now think of the work of the Bahá'í community. In the locality where you reside, like localities all over the world, Bahá'ís are striving to build capacity in growing numbers to contribute to the kind of individual and collective transformation called for by Bahá'u'lláh. You are well familiar with the educational endeavor and the set of interrelated acts of service that foster this capacity-building process. Say a few words about how participation in the process unfolding in villages and neighborhoods across the globe is enabling the Bahá'í community to pursue its mission to bring into reality Bahá'u'lláh's vision for humanity.

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### SECTION 3

The analogy that we find in the Bahá'í writings to help us think about the significance of the principle of oneness, and how, in its light, the relationships that sustain society will be reconceptualized, is the human body. Drawing on this analogy, the Universal House of Justice

writes, “the appearance of the rational soul in this realm of existence is made possible through the complex association of countless cells, whose organization in tissues and organs allows for the realization of distinctive capacities”. Likewise, it goes on to explain, civilization can be seen “as the outcome of a set of interactions among closely integrated, diverse components which have transcended the narrow purpose of tending to their own existence.” We know that, however modest at this stage, the efforts of the Bahá’í community are creating a pattern that will give shape to future society—a society in which the operation of the principle of oneness will find expression in the harmonious interactions that will call into being a Divine civilization. It is the sacred duty of all of us who have embraced the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh and have set our gaze upon Him to strive daily to contribute to the emergence of this pattern, the pattern of a new world order.

Now, a community entrusted with such a monumental task must possess qualities and powers that distinguish it from every other community and from every organized movement on the planet. Specifically, it must serve as an environment in which the unity that binds its individual members and its institutions is stronger than anything the human race has ever witnessed. The discipline that is required to maintain such unity must be unshakable. Let us explore this point further.

We live in a world where conflict is considered an inevitable characteristic of life. Even when not overt, the spirit of conflict is present in subtle forms as individuals and groups try to advance themselves over others. It is widely accepted that, more often than not, interests will clash. Thus, individuals and groups—indeed, entire societies—work against one another in the pursuit of their own aims. Contest, competition, and confrontation have become norms embedded in social, political, and economic systems. Accordingly, power is voraciously sought as a means to protect, in whatever way possible, one’s own interests. This is not to say that there are not many who take advantage of numerous opportunities for earnest collaboration and cooperation to achieve noble goals. Still, an underlying presence of conflict influences habits of thought and patterns of behavior and defines to some extent the structures and functioning of social institutions.

We, of course, do not consider the ways of conflict the natural expression of human existence and recognize that certain attitudes and forms of behavior, though prevalent in society and, in some instances, even regarded as praiseworthy, retard the progress of our efforts to build a unified world. Below are several adjectives, set off in pairs, that refer to different kinds of behavior. The first of each pair belongs, we could say, to a culture rooted in conflict, while the second characterizes the relationships, imbued with the consciousness of the oneness of human-kind, that we are striving to cultivate. Discuss each pair in your group and explain the difference between the two, giving examples, if possible.

- a. frank and adversarial
- b. frank and loving

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a. critical and blunt

b. analytical and respectful

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a. self-confident and proud

b. courageous and humble

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a. knowledgeable and controlling

b. knowledgeable and generous

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a. friendly and calculating

b. friendly and sincere

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a. defensive and suspicious

b. vigilant and open

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a. competent and self-interested

b. competent and self-sacrificing

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## SECTION 4

We have considered briefly how the principle of the oneness of humankind must be woven into the pattern of a new world order envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh and how the community that bears His Name must act as a greater and greater force of unity in a world accustomed to contention. Now think about the statement “the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant” and reflect on the nature and origin of this power as you read the following passage written by the Guardian:

**“A dynamic process, divinely propelled, possessed of undreamt-of potentialities, world-embracing in scope, world-transforming in its ultimate consequences, had been set in motion on that memorable night when the Báb communicated the purpose of His mission to Mullá Ḥusayn in an obscure corner of Shíráz. It acquired a tremendous momentum with the first intimations of Bahá'u'lláh's dawning Revelation amidst the darkness of the Síyáh-Chál of Tīhrán. It was further accelerated by the Declaration of His mission on the eve of His banishment from Baghdád. It moved to a climax with the proclamation of that same mission during the tempestuous years of His exile in Adrianople. Its full significance was disclosed when the Author of that Mission issued His historic summonses, appeals and warnings to the kings of the earth and the world's ecclesiastical leaders. It was finally consummated by the laws and ordinances which He formulated, by the principles which He enunciated and by the institutions which He ordained during the concluding years of His ministry in the prison-city of 'Akká.**

**“To direct and canalize these forces let loose by this Heaven-sent process, and to insure their harmonious and continuous operation after His ascension, an instrument divinely ordained, invested with indisputable authority, organically linked with the Author of the Revelation Himself, was clearly indispensable. That instrument Bahá'u'lláh had expressly provided through the institution of the Covenant, an institution which He had firmly established prior to His ascension. This same Covenant He had anticipated in His Kitáb-i-Aqdas, had alluded to it as He bade His last farewell to the members of His family, who had been summoned to His bedside, in the days immediately preceding His ascension, and had incorporated it in a special document which He designated as ‘the Book of My Covenant,’ and which He entrusted, during His last illness, to His eldest son ‘Abdu'l-Bahá.’”<sup>3</sup>**

In the first paragraph, in one sweeping statement, the Guardian provides an historical account of the unfoldment of the Faith from its birth in Shíráz to the ascension of its Author in Bahjí. You, of course, are well familiar with the actual events to which the Guardian alludes in each sentence. The following questions are intended to bring their significance into sharper focus. In answering them, you will need to draw not only on the passage above but also on your knowledge of the history of the Faith.

- a. What was set in motion when the Báb declared His Mission to Mullá Ḥusayn?

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b. What were the circumstances surrounding the Báb's declaration of His Mission to Mullá Ḥusayn on the eve of 23 May 1844?

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c. What did the dynamic process set in motion by the Báb's declaration acquire with the first intimations of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation in the Siyáh-Chál?

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d. What were the circumstances surrounding the declaration of Bahá'u'lláh's Mission in the Riḍván Garden?

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e. What effect did His declaration have on the dynamic, divinely propelled process underway?

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f. When did this process move to a climax?

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g. When was the full significance of the dynamic process underway disclosed?

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- h. How was the process set in motion on the eve of 23 May 1844 finally consummated?

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In the second paragraph of the passage quoted above, the Guardian introduces the concept of the Covenant and explains its purpose and significance. The questions below will assist you in thinking through the sequence of ideas he presents.

- a. What was needed to direct and canalize the forces let loose by Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and to insure the harmonious and continuous operation of these forces after His ascension?

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- b. With what would this divinely ordained instrument need to be invested?

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- c. With what would this divinely ordained instrument need to be organically linked?

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- d. Through what institution did Bahá'u'lláh expressly provide this divinely ordained instrument?

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- e. In what book was the institution of the Covenant already anticipated by Bahá'u'lláh?

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- f. When did Bahá'u'lláh make an allusion to the institution of the Covenant to the members of His family?

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- g. In what special document did Bahá'u'lláh incorporate the institution of the Covenant?

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- h. To Whom did Bahá'u'lláh entrust the document He designated “the Book of My Covenant”?

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## SECTION 5

The Guardian explains that an instrument was needed to ensure the steady operation of the forces let loose by the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh after His ascension, and we know from the passage we have just read that He provided that instrument through the institution of the Covenant—an institution which He incorporated in a document He designated the Kitáb-i-‘Ahdí. The word “‘ahdí” in Arabic means “my covenant”. The Guardian refers to the document as the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd, the “Book of the Covenant”, and this is how he describes it in *God Passes By*:

**“Written entirely in His own hand; unsealed, on the ninth day after His ascension in the presence of nine witnesses chosen from amongst His companions and members of His Family; read subsequently, on the afternoon of that same day, before a large company assembled in His Most Holy Tomb, including His sons, some of the Báb’s kinsmen, pilgrims and resident believers, this unique and epoch-making Document, designated by Bahá'u'lláh as His ‘Most Great Tablet,’ and alluded to by Him as the ‘Crimson Book’ in His ‘Epistle to the Son of the Wolf,’ can find no parallel in the Scriptures of any previous Dispensation, not excluding that of the Báb Himself. For nowhere in the books pertaining to any of the world’s religious systems, not even among the writings of the Author of the Bábí Revelation, do we find any single document establishing a Covenant endowed with an authority comparable to the Covenant which Bahá'u'lláh had Himself instituted.”<sup>4</sup>**

Now, complete the sentences below on the basis of the above paragraph.

- a. The Kitáb-i-‘Ahd was written \_\_\_\_\_ .
- b. The Kitáb-i-‘Ahd was unsealed on \_\_\_\_\_ .

- c. The Kitáb-i-‘Ahd was unsealed in the presence of \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ .
- d. On the ninth day after Bahá’u’lláh’s ascension, the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd was read before  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ .
- e. The Kitáb-i-‘Ahd was designated by Bahá’u’lláh as \_\_\_\_\_ .
- f. In His “Epistle to the Son of the Wolf”, the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd was alluded to by Bahá’u’lláh as \_\_\_\_\_ .
- g. The Kitáb-i-‘Ahd can find no parallel in \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ .
- h. Nowhere in the books of the world’s religious systems do we find any single document \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ .

## SECTION 6

Below is the full text of the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd. Even if you are well familiar with the book, you are asked to undertake a careful study of it again, reading it more than once and identifying the precious counsels it contains. In the next and subsequent sections of the unit, we will explore some of the implications of this “unique and epoch-making” document.

To begin, it may be helpful to review certain terms that appear in the text which may be unfamiliar to you. “Aghṣán”, which is the plural form of the word “ghuṣn”, means branches in Arabic. There are other words in Arabic and Persian that also mean branches. However, this specific term is used by Bahá’u’lláh to refer to His male descendants. The title the “Most Mighty Branch”, in Arabic “Ghuṣn-i-A‘zam”, refers to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and given the way the title was used at the time, the meaning intended was clearly understood by the entire community of Bahá’u’lláh’s followers. It was equally clear to all that the title the “Greater Branch”, or “Ghuṣn-i-Akbar”, was used to designate Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Ali, the half-brother of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. As for the term “afnán”, it is employed throughout the Writings to refer to the relatives of the Báb. He Himself, as you may know, did not leave any direct descendants.

<sup>1</sup> **Although the Realm of Glory hath none of the vanities of the world, yet within the treasury of trust and resignation We have bequeathed to Our heirs an excellent and priceless Heritage. Earthly treasures We have not bequeathed, nor have We**

added such cares as they entail. By God! In earthly riches fear is hidden and peril is concealed. Consider ye and call to mind that which the All-Merciful hath revealed in the Qur'án: "Woe betide every slanderer and defamer, him that layeth up riches and counteth them." Fleeting are the riches of the world; all that perisheth and changeth is not, and hath never been, worthy of attention, except to a recognized measure.

2     **The aim of this Wronged One in sustaining woes and tribulations, in revealing the Holy Verses and in demonstrating proofs hath been naught but to quench the flame of hate and enmity, that the horizon of the hearts of men may be illumined with the light of concord and attain real peace and tranquility. From the dawning-place of the divine Tablet the day-star of this utterance shineth resplendent, and it behooveth everyone to fix his gaze upon it: We exhort you, O peoples of the world, to observe that which will elevate your station. Hold fast to the fear of God and firmly adhere to what is right. Verily I say, the tongue is for mentioning what is good, defile it not with unseemly talk. God hath forgiven what is past. Henceforward everyone should utter that which is meet and seemly, and should refrain from slander, abuse and whatever causeth sadness in men. Lofty is the station of man! Not long ago this exalted Word streamed forth from the treasury of Our Pen of Glory: Great and blessed is this Day—the Day in which all that lay latent in man hath been and will be made manifest. Lofty is the station of man, were he to hold fast to righteousness and truth and to remain firm and steadfast in the Cause. In the eyes of the All-Merciful a true man appeareth even as a firmament; its sun and moon are his sight and hearing, and his shining and resplendent character its stars. His is the loftiest station, and his influence educateth the world of being.**

3     **Every receptive soul who hath in this Day inhaled the fragrance of His garment and hath, with a pure heart, set his face towards the all-glorious Horizon is reckoned among the people of Bahá in the Crimson Book. Grasp ye, in My name, the chalice of My loving-kindness; drink then your fill in My glorious and wondrous remembrance.**

4     **O ye that dwell on earth! The religion of God is for love and unity; make it not the cause of enmity or dissension. In the eyes of men of insight and the beholders of the Most Sublime Vision, whatsoever are the effective means for safeguarding and promoting the happiness and welfare of the children of men have already been revealed by the Pen of Glory. But the foolish ones of the earth, being nurtured in evil passions and desires, have remained heedless of the consummate wisdom of Him Who is, in truth, the All-Wise, while their words and deeds are prompted by idle fancies and vain imaginings.**

5     **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.**

6     **Conflict and contention are categorically forbidden in His Book. This is a decree of God in this Most Great Revelation. It is divinely preserved from annulment**

and is invested by Him with the splendor of His confirmation. Verily He is the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.

7 It is incumbent upon everyone to aid those daysprings of authority and sources of command who are adorned with the ornament of equity and justice. Blessed are the rulers and the learned among the people of Bahá. They are My trustees among My servants and the manifestations of My commandments amidst My people. Upon them rest My glory, My blessings and My grace which have pervaded the world of being. In this connection the utterances revealed in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas are such that from the horizon of their words the light of divine grace shineth luminous and resplendent.

8 O ye My Branches! A mighty force, a consummate power lieth concealed in the world of being. Fix your gaze upon it and upon its unifying influence, and not upon the differences which appear from it.

9 The Will of the divine Testator is this: It is incumbent upon the Aghsán, the Afnán and My kindred to turn, one and all, their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch. Consider that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book: “When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces towards Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.” The object of this sacred verse is none except the Most Mighty Branch (‘Abdu’l-Bahá). Thus have We graciously revealed unto you Our potent Will, and I am verily the Gracious, the All-Bountiful. Verily God hath ordained the station of the Greater Branch (Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí) to be beneath that of the Most Great Branch (‘Abdu’l-Bahá). He is in truth the Ordainer, the All-Wise. We have chosen “the Greater” after “the Most Great”, as decreed by Him Who is the All-Knowing, the All-Informed.

10 It is enjoined upon everyone to manifest love towards the Aghsán, but God hath not granted them any right to the property of others.

11 O ye My Aghsán, My Afnán and My kindred! We exhort you to fear God, to perform praiseworthy deeds and to do that which is meet and seemly and serveth to exalt your station. Verily I say, fear of God is the greatest commander that can render the Cause of God victorious, and the hosts which best befit this commander have ever been and are an upright character and pure and goodly deeds.

12 Say: O servants! Let not the means of order be made the cause of confusion and the instrument of union an occasion for discord. We fain would hope that the people of Bahá may be guided by the blessed words: “Say: All things are of God.” This exalted utterance is like unto water for quenching the fire of hate and enmity which smoldereth within the hearts and breasts of men. By this single utterance contending peoples and kindreds will attain the light of true unity. Verily He speaketh the truth and leadeth the way. He is the All-Powerful, the Exalted, the Gracious.

13 It is incumbent upon everyone to show courtesy to, and have regard for, the Aghsán, that thereby the Cause of God may be glorified and His Word exalted. This injunction hath time and again been mentioned and recorded in the Holy

Writ. Well is it with him who is enabled to achieve that which the Ordainer, the Ancient of Days, hath prescribed for him. Ye are bidden moreover to respect the members of the Holy Household, the Afnán and the kindred. We further admonish you to serve all nations and to strive for the betterment of the world.

<sup>14</sup> That which is conducive to the regeneration of the world and the salvation of the peoples and kindreds of the earth hath been sent down from the heaven of the utterance of Him Who is the Desire of the world. Give ye a hearing ear to the counsels of the Pen of Glory. Better is this for you than all that is on the earth. Unto this beareth witness My glorious and wondrous Book.<sup>5</sup>

## SECTION 7

You will gain invaluable insight into the nature of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant if you read the paragraph below from *God Passes By* about the content of the Kitáb-i-'Ahd and then go back to the full text in Section 6, relating the ideas mentioned by the Guardian to the relevant passages.

**“In this weighty and incomparable Document its Author discloses the character of that ‘*excellent and priceless Heritage*’ bequeathed by Him to His ‘*heirs*’; proclaims afresh the fundamental purpose of His Revelation; enjoins the ‘*peoples of the world*’ to hold fast to that which will ‘*elevate*’ their ‘*station*’; announces to them that ‘*God hath forgiven what is past*’; stresses the sublimity of man’s station; discloses the primary aim of the Faith of God; directs the faithful to pray for the welfare of the kings of the earth, ‘*the manifestations of the power, and the daysprings of the might and riches, of God*’; invests them with the rulership of the earth; singles out as His special domain the hearts of men; forbids categorically strife and contention; commands His followers to aid those rulers who are ‘*adorned with the ornament of equity and justice*’; and directs, in particular, the Aghsán (His sons) to ponder the ‘*mighty force and the consummate power that lieth concealed in the world of being*.’ He bids them, moreover, together with the Afnán (the Báb’s kindred) and His own relatives, to ‘*turn, one and all, unto the Most Great Branch (‘Abdu’l-Bahá)*’; identifies Him with ‘*the One Whom God hath purposed*,’ ‘*Who hath branched from this preexistent Root*,’ referred to in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas; ordains the station of the ‘*Greater Branch*’ (Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí) to be beneath that of the ‘*Most Great Branch*’ (‘Abdu’l-Bahá); exhorts the believers to treat the Aghsán with consideration and affection; counsels them to respect His family and relatives, as well as the kindred of the Báb; denies His sons ‘*any right to the property of others*’; enjoins on them, on His kindred and on that of the Báb to ‘*fear God, to do that which is meet and seemly*’ and to follow the things that will ‘*exalt*’ their station; warns all men not to allow ‘*the means of order to be made the cause of confusion, and the instrument of union an occasion for discord*’; and concludes with an exhortation calling upon the faithful to ‘*serve all nations*,’ and to strive for the ‘*betterment of the world*.’”<sup>6</sup>**

Write down the statements contained in the Kitáb-i-'Ahd related to each of the following:

a. The character of the Heritage Bahá'u'lláh bequeathed to His heirs

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b. The fundamental purpose of His Revelation

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c. That which we should do to elevate our station

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d. The sublimity of man's station

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e. Conflict and contention

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f. The kings and rulers of the world

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g. Bahá'u'lláh's command to His family, particularly His sons (the Aghşán), and to the kindred of the Báb (the Afnán)

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h. The Most Great Branch ('Abdu'l-Bahá)

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i. Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation to His sons (the Aghşán), His family, and the kindred of the Báb (the Afnán)

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- j. His warning to all humanity, as well as the hope He expresses in this connection

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- k. His concluding exhortation to the company of the faithful

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You have seen that the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd makes mention of “a mighty force, a consummate power” that lies concealed in the “world of being”. In a letter written on his behalf, the Guardian explains that this force refers to “the power for unity which the Covenant possesses and radiates”, and it is hoped that you will catch glimpses of this power as you move through this course. You may now wish to memorize the following quotation:

**“Today, the Lord of Hosts is the defender of the Covenant, the forces of the Kingdom protect it, heavenly souls tender their services, and heavenly angels promulgate and spread it broadcast. If it is considered with insight, it will be seen that all the forces of the universe, in the last analysis, serve the Covenant.”<sup>7</sup>**

## SECTION 8

In our exploration of the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd and other Texts that provide insight into the workings of the Covenant, two interwoven themes will be ever present—themes that you may have already identified in your study of the last section. One is related to the concept of a center to which all must turn. The other concerns the standard of conduct that Bahá’u’lláh calls on us to follow and which we pledge to uphold when we enter into the Tabernacle of His Covenant. Let us look at the first of these two themes.

We have said that the Bahá’í community must achieve an unprecedented degree of unity if it is to establish a pattern that will give shape to a future society in which the oneness of humanity is recognized as a fundamental operating principle. Clearly, then, the kind of schisms that have torn apart every religion in the past would be alien to the very purpose of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. One of the primary causes for the disagreements that spread in other religions, and which eventually split the ranks of their followers, was the lack of clarity over the question of succession. Bahá’u’lláh, however, safeguarded His community from such division by expressly calling on His followers to turn to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá after His ascension.

Succession was thus clearly defined at the outset. Further, as study of this and the next two units will make clear, at every subsequent stage in the unfoldment of the Faith, its unity has been preserved through the power of the Covenant.

In the Book of His Laws, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh states:

**“When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces towards Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.”<sup>8</sup>**

And, again, in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, we read:

**“When the Mystic Dove will have winged its flight from its Sanctuary of Praise and sought its far-off goal, its hidden habitation, refer ye whatsoever ye understand not in the Book to Him Who hath branched from this mighty Stock.”<sup>9</sup>**

In the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, which we have just briefly studied, Bahá'u'lláh refers to the first passage quoted above and leaves no doubt that the One intended was 'Abdu'l-Bahá:

**“The Will of the divine Testator is this: It is incumbent upon the Aghṣán, the Afnán and My kindred to turn, one and all, their faces towards the Most Mighty Branch. Consider that which We have revealed in Our Most Holy Book: ‘When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces towards Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.’ The object of this sacred verse is none except the Most Mighty Branch ('Abdu'l-Bahá). Thus have We graciously revealed unto you Our potent Will, and I am verily the Gracious, the All-Bountiful.”<sup>10</sup>**

So central are these three passages to Bahá'í belief that you are encouraged to commit at least one to memory. Before doing so, complete the sentences below.

- a. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh tells us that, when the ocean of His presence has ebbed and the Book of His Revelation has ended, we should turn our faces towards Him Whom \_\_\_\_\_, Who \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. Bahá'u'lláh also states, in making reference to Himself, that, when the Mystic Dove has winged its flight and sought its far-off goal, we should refer whatsoever we do not understand in the Book of His Revelation to Him Who \_\_\_\_\_.
- c. In the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, Bahá'u'lláh tells us that the object of the sacred verse “When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces towards Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root” is \_\_\_\_\_.

## SECTION 9

In *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, the Guardian quotes from several passages of Bahá'u'lláh's Writings, including excerpts from the Tablet of the Branch, which offer us a glimpse of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's exalted rank. They are provided here for your reflection.

You might not be familiar with the term "Sadratu'l-Muntahá", used in the first excerpt below, which literally means "the furthestmost Lote-Tree". It was translated into English by Shoghi Effendi as "the Tree beyond which there is no passing". As a symbol it suggests the point beyond which human beings cannot pass in their approach to God; it is the point that marks the bounds of divine knowledge accessible to humanity. The term is therefore always used in the Writings to refer to the Manifestation of God.

**"In the Súriy-i-Ghuṣn (Tablet of the Branch) the following verses have been recorded: 'There hath branched from the Sadratu'l-Muntahá this sacred and glorious Being, this Branch of Holiness; well is it with him that hath sought His shelter and abideth beneath His shadow. Verily the Limb of the Law of God hath sprung forth from this Root which God hath firmly implanted in the Ground of His Will, and Whose Branch hath been so uplifted as to encompass the whole of creation. Magnified be He, therefore, for this sublime, this blessed, this mighty, this exalted Handiwork! . . . A Word hath, as a token of Our grace, gone forth from the Most Great Tablet—a Word which God hath adorned with the ornament of His own Self, and made it sovereign over the earth and all that is therein, and a sign of His greatness and power among its people . . . Render thanks unto God, O people, for His appearance; for verily He is the most great Favor unto you, the most perfect bounty upon you; and through Him every moldering bone is quickened. Whoso turneth towards Him hath turned towards God, and whoso turneth away from Him hath turned away from My Beauty, hath repudiated My Proof, and transgressed against Me. He is the Trust of God amongst you, His charge within you, His manifestation unto you and His appearance among His favored servants . . . We have sent Him down in the form of a human temple. Blest and sanctified be God Who createth whatsoever He willeth through His inviolable, His infallible decree. They who deprive themselves of the shadow of the Branch, are lost in the wilderness of error, are consumed by the heat of worldly desires, and are of those who will assuredly perish.'**

**"O Thou Who art the apple of Mine eye!" Bahá'u'lláh, in His own handwriting, thus addresses 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'My glory, the ocean of My loving-kindness, the sun of My bounty, the heaven of My mercy rest upon Thee. We pray God to illumine the world through Thy knowledge and wisdom, to ordain for Thee that which will gladden Thine heart and impart consolation to Thine eyes.' 'The glory of God rest upon Thee,' He writes in another Tablet, 'and upon whomsoever serveth Thee and circleth around Thee. Woe, great woe, betide him that opposeth and injureth Thee. Well is it with him that sweareth fealty to Thee; the fire of hell torment him who is Thine enemy.' 'We have made Thee a shelter for all mankind,' He, in yet another Tablet, affirms, 'a shield unto all who are in heaven and on earth, a stronghold for whomsoever hath believed in God, the Incomparable, the All-Knowing. God grant that through Thee He may protect them, may enrich and sustain them, that He may inspire Thee with that which shall be a wellspring of wealth unto all created things, an ocean of bounty unto all men, and the dayspring of mercy unto all peoples.'**

**“Thou knowest, O my God,’ Bahá’u’lláh, in a prayer revealed in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s honor, supplicates, ‘that I desire for Him naught except that which Thou didst desire, and have chosen Him for no purpose save that which Thou hadst intended for Him. Render Him victorious, therefore, through Thy hosts of earth and heaven . . . Ordain, I beseech Thee, by the ardor of My love for Thee and My yearning to manifest Thy Cause, for Him, as well as for them that love Him, that which Thou hast destined for Thy Messengers and the Trustees of Thy Revelation. Verily, Thou art the Almighty, the All-Powerful.’**

**“In a letter dictated by Bahá’u’lláh and addressed by Mírzá Áqá Ján, His amanuensis, to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá while the latter was on a visit to Beirut, we read the following: ‘Praise be to Him Who hath honored the Land of Bá (Beirut) through the presence of Him round Whom all names revolve. All the atoms of the earth have announced unto all created things that from behind the gate of the Prison-city there hath appeared and above its horizon there hath shone forth the Orb of the beauty of the great, the Most Mighty Branch of God—His ancient and immutable Mystery—proceeding on its way to another land. Sorrow, thereby, hath enveloped this Prison-city, whilst another land rejoiceth . . . Blessed, doubly blessed, is the ground which His footsteps have trodden, the eye that hath been cheered by the beauty of His countenance, the ear that hath been honored by hearkening to His call, the heart that hath tasted the sweetness of His love, the breast that hath dilated through His remembrance, the pen that hath voiced His praise, the scroll that hath borne the testimony of His writings.’”<sup>11</sup>**

From these passages, we gain a sense of the unique station occupied by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in this Dispensation. To reflect further on the extraordinary figure of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, complete each of the sentences below on the basis of what you have just read.

- a. Bahá’u’lláh tells us that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is that \_\_\_\_\_ which has branched from the Sadratu’l-Muntahá.
- b. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is that Branch which has been so uplifted as to \_\_\_\_\_.
- c. Bahá’u’lláh refers to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as this \_\_\_\_\_, this \_\_\_\_\_, this \_\_\_\_\_, this \_\_\_\_\_ Handiwork.
- d. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the most great \_\_\_\_\_ unto us.
- e. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the most perfect \_\_\_\_\_ bestowed upon us.
- f. Through ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, every moldering bone is \_\_\_\_\_.
- g. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the \_\_\_\_\_ of God among us, His \_\_\_\_\_ within us, His \_\_\_\_\_ unto us, and His \_\_\_\_\_ among His favored servants.

- h. Bahá'u'lláh prays for the world to be illumined through the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of 'Abdu'l-Bahá.
- i. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is a \_\_\_\_\_ for all humankind, a \_\_\_\_\_ unto all who are in heaven and on earth, a \_\_\_\_\_ for whomsoever has believed in God.
- j. 'Abdu'l-Bahá is the Most Mighty Branch of God—His \_\_\_\_\_ .

The passages also give us an indication as to how we, as the followers of Bahá'u'lláh, should relate to 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Completing these sentences will help you to think about our relationship with Him.

- a. Well it is with those that have \_\_\_\_\_ 'Abdu'l-Bahá's shelter and \_\_\_\_\_ beneath His shadow.
- b. Bahá'u'lláh exhorts us to render \_\_\_\_\_ to God for 'Abdu'l-Bahá's appearance.
- c. Bahá'u'lláh tells us that those who turn towards 'Abdu'l-Bahá have \_\_\_\_\_ towards God, and those who have turned away from 'Abdu'l-Bahá have \_\_\_\_\_ His Beauty, have \_\_\_\_\_ His Proof, and have \_\_\_\_\_ against Him.
- d. Those who have deprived themselves of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's shadow are lost in the \_\_\_\_\_, are consumed by the \_\_\_\_\_, are of those who \_\_\_\_\_ .
- e. The glory of God rests upon those who \_\_\_\_\_ 'Abdu'l-Bahá and who \_\_\_\_\_ around Him.
- f. Bahá'u'lláh asks God that, through 'Abdu'l-Bahá, He \_\_\_\_\_ us and \_\_\_\_\_ us and that 'Abdu'l-Bahá may be inspired by that which will be a \_\_\_\_\_ unto all created things, an \_\_\_\_\_ unto all men, and the \_\_\_\_\_ unto all peoples.
- g. Blessed are those whose eyes are cheered by \_\_\_\_\_ .
- h. Blessed are those whose ears are honored by \_\_\_\_\_ .
- i. Blessed are those whose hearts have tasted \_\_\_\_\_ .

- j. Blessed are those whose breasts are dilated through \_\_\_\_\_ .
- k. Blessed are those whose pens have voiced \_\_\_\_\_ .

Having reflected on the words of Bahá'u'lláh quoted in the above passages that so beautifully describe the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, you may wish to choose one or two selections to learn by heart.

## SECTION 10

Over the past few sections we have seen that, through the institution of the Covenant, Bahá'u'lláh provided an instrument to ensure the steady operation of the forces let loose by His Revelation. By reading the Kitáb-i-'Ahd, along with the two related passages from the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, we have gained some insight into the nature of this Covenant and have noted how explicitly He called upon His followers, one and all, to turn to 'Abdu'l-Bahá after His ascension. In the last section we studied extracts from the Tablet of the Branch and other Writings of Bahá'u'lláh in an effort to deepen our appreciation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's exalted rank in this Dispensation. Let us continue to enhance our understanding of the unique station conferred on Him.

In summarizing and codifying the laws and ordinances laid down in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the Guardian explains that Bahá'u'lláh, in His Most Holy Book, appoints 'Abdu'l-Bahá both His Successor and the Interpreter of His teachings:

- A. The faithful are enjoined to turn their faces towards the One "*Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Roof*".
- B. The faithful are bidden to refer whatsoever they do not understand in the Bahá'í writings to "*Him Who hath branched from this mighty Stock*".<sup>12</sup>

In this and the next few sections we will reflect on the significance of these statements.

'Abdu'l-Bahá is the Center and Pivot of the Covenant that Bahá'u'lláh made with all those who recognize Him. The concept of a "center" is most essential to our understanding of the Covenant. The discussion below may help you gain a greater appreciation of the need for a center in organizing the life of humanity and investing it with harmony.

Consider the people of the world in relation to one another. There are forces that bind individuals in this complex world, generated by love, fear, ideology, culture, religious belief, common interest, and scores of other factors. Individuals tend to unite in large and small groups accordingly, each group itself belonging to another that is endowed with capacity to hold larger numbers together. This capacity usually implies the existence of a center. For instance, within an extended family, often the presence of one or two members, usually the elders, serves to strengthen a sense of identity among the other members and to maintain uppermost in their minds the interests of the family as a whole. A political party, to give another example, governed by a central agency, may prove capable of attracting to its ranks many individuals and families, keeping them together through a shared set of ideals, and directing their collective efforts in the pursuit of common ends. What we observe all around us today are centers of authority and power that constantly compete with one another to expand their spheres

of influence, some striving to achieve as much dominance as possible. At best, a humanity that is organized in this way can aspire merely to end wars and tolerate differences. And at worst, such a state of perpetual conflict cannot but result in total disintegration. To think further about this idea, give a few other examples of such centers in society that vie with each other for a greater share of power and influence.

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In the absence of a spiritual center that organizes the oneness of the world of humanity and to which all can turn, individual and collective life on this planet will remain plagued by conflict and contention. We can look to the physical world for an analogy to help us better understand the condition of a society bereft of a spiritual center of unity. For this purpose, we can liken the individuals in such a society to the particles of gas in a container. The particles move in every direction, colliding with one another every so often. When more freedom is given to them by making greater space available, say, by enlarging the size of the container, the average distance between the particles increases; they move in spaces that are farther and farther from one another. How reasonable is it to expect that the principle of the oneness of humankind could be realized in a society in which the interactions of its members is similar to the image just described?

Now let us consider another analogy from the physical world: the solar system, in which the movement of heavenly bodies along their specific orbits, some with their own satellites, is governed by the gravitational force of the sun. The center holds the entire system together, establishing relationships, setting rhythms and patterns, and ensuring that order is maintained. Under the center's influence, every motion is endowed with grace. And at least in the case of our own planet, the rays of the sun sustain a web of life infinitely rich and constantly evolving at higher and higher levels of complexity.

As is the case with all analogies, the utility of this imagery is limited, and it should not be taken too far. Yet it serves to emphasize how essential is a center in organizing the individual and collective affairs of humanity. Bahá'u'lláh established such a center by designating 'Abdu'l-Bahá the Center of His Covenant, and, as we will see in later sections, 'Abdu'l-Bahá—by appointing the Guardian of the Cause and confirming the authority of the Universal House of Justice—ensured that Bahá'ís would never be bereft of a center to which they could turn.

With the above in mind, discuss in your group the statement presented in the first section in the unit: "The pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant." In the space provided, write down some of your thoughts.

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## SECTION 11

The discussion in the last section has helped us to see some of the implications of the statement in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas that enjoins the believers to turn their faces towards One “Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root”. Now let us consider the second statement, that calls upon the believers to refer whatsoever they do not understand in the Bahá’í Writings to “Him Who hath branched from this mighty Stock”.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the authorized Interpreter of Bahá’u’lláh’s Words. In one of His talks, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá explains the significance of this station for the unity of the Bahá’í community:

**“Bahá’u’lláh desired that there should not be any ground or reason for disagreement among the Bahá’ís. Therefore, with His own pen He wrote the Book of His Covenant, addressing His relations and all people of the world, saying, ‘Verily, I have appointed One Who is the Center of My Covenant. All must obey Him; all must turn to Him; He is the Expounder of My Book, and He is informed of My purpose. All must turn to Him. Whatsoever He says is correct, for, verily, He knoweth the texts of My Book. Other than He, no one doth know My Book.’ The purpose of this statement is that there should never be discord and divergence among the Bahá’ís but that they should always be unified and agreed.”<sup>13</sup>**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá goes on to tell us that Bahá’u’lláh explained in the clearest language the attributes, qualities, functions, and powers of the One that He named in the Book of His Covenant to succeed Him so that no one could create “dissension and variance” among His followers by claiming to understand the true meaning of His Writings. We are warned by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to beware of anyone who speaks “from the authority of his own thoughts” or creates “a new thing out of himself”.

To think about this last point further, consider what would happen to the unity of the Bahá’í community if someone were allowed to call on the friends to turn to him, declaring to be so learned that he could clarify their thinking and enable them to understand the Faith in the “right way”. Write a few of your thoughts here:

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That Bahá’u’lláh appointed One Who is the Interpreter of His Words does not imply that we each, as individuals, cannot have our personal understanding of the guidance and

counsels found in Bahá'u'lláh's Writings and share our thoughts with others. It does mean, however, that no individual believer can present his or her personal views as authoritative and attempt to impose them on the members of the Bahá'í community. It also implies that our own personal understanding of the Writings must be aligned with the interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian, who, as we will discuss in later sections, is the Interpreter of Bahá'u'lláh's Words after 'Abdu'l-Bahá.

We should also remember that Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is so vast that it would be impossible for any ordinary human mind to fathom it. It is indeed like an ocean in which we can immerse ourselves in a lifetime of study and still discover only a small share of the countless pearls hidden in its depths. In this connection, reflect on the following passage written by the Guardian:

**“To strive to obtain a more adequate understanding of the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's stupendous Revelation must, it is my unalterable conviction, remain the first obligation and the object of the constant endeavor of each one of its loyal adherents. An exact and thorough comprehension of so vast a system, so sublime a revelation, so sacred a trust, is for obvious reasons beyond the reach and ken of our finite minds. We can, however, and it is our bounden duty to, seek to derive fresh inspiration and added sustenance as we labor for the propagation of His Faith through a clearer apprehension of the truths it enshrines and the principles on which it is based.”<sup>14</sup>**

And, apprehending at a deeper and deeper level the significance of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation would be impossible without the interpretations provided by 'Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian. This brings us to an important concept that merits reflection. As we will see in later sections of this unit, we are repeatedly advised to turn to the “Book” as a source of authority in the Faith, an indication that, in this Dispensation, we each have the privilege and obligation to read and strive to understand the Word of God. Of course, by the term “Book” is meant first and foremost the recorded utterances of Bahá'u'lláh. But the interpretations of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi can, in a certain sense, be regarded as part of the “Book”. The Universal House of Justice writes:

**“The Book is the record of the utterance of Bahá'u'lláh, while the divinely inspired Interpreter is the living Mouth of that Book—it is he and he alone who can authoritatively state what the Book means.”<sup>15</sup>**

Now reflect on the passage below in light of the statement that “the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant.”

**“Today the dynamic power of the world of existence is the power of the Covenant which like unto an artery pulsateth in the body of the contingent world and protecteth Bahá'í unity.**

**“The Bahá'ís are commanded to establish the oneness of mankind; if they cannot unite around one point how will they be able to bring about the unity of mankind?”**

**“The purpose of the Blessed Beauty in entering into this Covenant and Testament was to gather all existent beings around one point so that the thoughtless souls, who in every cycle and generation have been the cause of dissension, may not**

**undermine the Cause. He hath, therefore, commanded that whatever emanateth from the Center of the Covenant is right and is under His protection and favor, while all else is error.”<sup>16</sup>**

## SECTION 12

Having considered briefly the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as the authorized Interpreter of the Word of God, we should take a moment to reflect on the nature of His interpretations. The light of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s knowledge and wisdom illumines our minds and expands our understanding of the teachings of the Faith. Two examples will illustrate how essential are His elucidations to our efforts to gain insights into the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh and apply them to our individual and collective lives.

Let us think of our belief in the immortality of the soul. In so many passages Bahá’u’lláh speaks of the powers of the human soul, of its relationship to the body, of its capacity to recognize the Manifestation of God and obey His teachings, of its progress in this and in all other worlds of God. Now suppose an individual who has recently accepted the Faith reads several such passages from Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings. He infers from them that his belief in incarnation, rooted in certain ideas to which he was exposed from childhood, is not in harmony with the Bahá’í teachings. However, not finding any explicit reference to reincarnation in the literature available to him, he wonders whether the conclusion he has reached is correct. Eventually he puts the question to a friend, who refers him to a chapter which addresses this issue in *Some Answered Questions*, a collection of talks given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. There he reads the following passage that makes the impossibility of reincarnation clear:

**“Moreover, this material world is not of such worth or advantage that one who has been freed from its cage should seek once again to be caught in its snare. No: By God’s eternal grace the true capacity and receptivity of the human reality is made clear and manifest through traversing the degrees of existence and not through recurrence and return. When the shell is opened but once, it is made plain and clear whether it conceals a shining pearl or worthless matter. When a plant has grown but once, it puts forth either flowers or thorns: It need not grow again. Apart from this, advancing and moving through the worlds in a direct line and according to the natural order is the cause of existence, and moving against the natural order and arrangement of things is the cause of extinction. The return of the spirit after death is incompatible with the natural movement and contrary to the divine order.”<sup>17</sup>**

As a result of reading the above explanation, the individual reaches a new understanding of Bahá’u’lláh’s statements regarding the progress of the soul and the means for acquiring perfection.

The law for the burial of the dead offers another example. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas states that it is forbidden to carry the body for more than one hour’s journey from the place of death; that the body should be wrapped in a shroud of silk or cotton, and on its finger should be placed a ring bearing the inscription “I came forth from God, and return unto Him, detached from all save Him, holding fast to His Name, the Merciful, the Compassionate”; and that the coffin should be of crystal, stone, or hard fine wood. Further, there is a specific Prayer for the Dead

that is to be said just before burial. Despite these clear injunctions, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was asked about the wisdom of burying the dead in the earth and the impermissibility of cremation. Following are excerpts from the response He provided:

**“Where universal phenomena are concerned, no matter how long and hard the human intellect may struggle to find the right procedures or the perfect system, it can never discover the like of the divine creation and its order of transferences and journeyings within the chain of life. For the transferences, the compositions, the gatherings and scatterings of elements and of constituent parts and substances proceed in a chain that is mighty and without flaw. Observe the effective universal laws and see to what a degree they are solidly established, secure, and strong.**

**“And just as the composition, the formation, and growth and development of the physical body have come about by degrees, so too must its decomposition and dispersal be gradual. If the disintegration be rapid, this will cause an overleaping and a slackening in the chain of transferences, and this discontinuity will impair the universal relationships within the chain of created things. . . .**

**“In short, the composition and decomposition, the gathering and scattering and journeying of all creatures must proceed according to the natural order, divine rule, and the most great law of God, so that no marring nor impairment may affect the essential relationships which arise out of the inner realities of created things. This is why, according to the law of God, we are bidden to bury the dead. . . .**

**“And briefly stated, beyond this, although the human soul hath severed its connection with the body, friends and lovers are still vehemently attached to what remaineth, and they cannot bear to have it instantly destroyed. They cannot, for example, see the pictured face of the departed blotted out and scattered, although a photograph is only his shadow and in the end it too must fade away. So far as they are able, they protect whatever reminder they have of him, be it only a fragment of clay, a tree, or a stone. Then how much more do they treasure his earthly form! Never can the heart agree to look on the cherished body of a friend, a father, a mother, a brother, a child, and see it instantly fall to nothing—and this is an exigency of love.”<sup>18</sup>**

You can see how the elucidation provided by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as the Interpreter of the Law of God, enhances our understanding of Bahá’í burial as it relates to the prohibition of cremating the dead. Then on the same question, He goes further:

**“Another point remains, and it is this: that in case of contagious diseases, such as the plague and cholera, whether cremation of bodies with lime or other chemicals is allowable or not. In such cases, hygiene and preservation are necessarily more important; for according to the clear divine texts, medical commands are lawful, and ‘necessities make forbidden things lawful’ is one of the certain rules.”<sup>19</sup>**

The above two examples—the first, a question of doctrine or fundamental belief, and the second a matter related to the application of the laws of the Faith—help us to see how much our understanding of the Bahá’í teachings depends on the interpretations of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. But the function of interpretation is not confined within these realms; it goes beyond them to deal with a most significant dimension of Bahá’u’lláh’s stupendous Revelation: His Administrative Order.

That Bahá'u'lláh conceived the Administrative Order is clear from passages He revealed in which He established Local Houses of Justice and the Universal House of Justice, from His appointment of Hands of the Cause of God, and from other aspects of His Revelation that address administrative matters. It was 'Abdu'l-Bahá, however, Who, as the Architect of the Administrative Order, created its design and delineated its features. Shoghi Effendi developed the framework for this Order and dedicated much of his energy to laying its foundations, foundations on which will continue to be erected for centuries to come the administrative structure of the Faith. These concepts will be clarified later in this unit when we study excerpts from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and in the next unit when we will see how the Administrative Order rose through the unceasing efforts of the Guardian. For our purposes here, it would suffice to state a fundamental truth about 'Abdu'l-Bahá's authoritative interpretation: So completely did He understand the intent behind every Divine verse that, in unraveling its implications for us, He was able to bring into the realm of being elements that we would have never been able to uncover. The following passage written by the Guardian underscores this point:

**“Bahá'u'lláh's inscrutable purpose, we must ever bear in mind, has been so thoroughly infused into the conduct of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and their motives have been so closely wedded together, that the mere attempt to dissociate the teachings of the former from any system which the ideal Exemplar of those same teachings has established would amount to a repudiation of one of the most sacred and basic truths of the Faith.”<sup>20</sup>**

## SECTION 13

You may find it helpful at this point to think about what you have learned, as you have engaged in study and service, from 'Abdu'l-Bahá's interpretations of the teachings. Consider the first seven books in this sequence alone. In advancing through them, you have benefited greatly from the many passages and quotations infused with His wisdom. Below are just a few examples of the various subjects addressed by passages from His talks and Tablets found in the earlier books you have studied. What insights did you gain from His explanation of each one?

- The nature of prayer: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- The development of the soul: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- The duty of teaching: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- The mystery of sacrifice: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- The nature of service: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- The harmony of science and religion: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- The equality of men and women: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

## SECTION 14

Having reflected on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s station as the authorized Interpreter of Bahá’u’lláh’s utterances, you may wish to draw up a plan for studying His many written works and talks available in published volumes. His Will and Testament, which Shoghi Effendi calls the “Charter of Bahá’u’lláh’s New World Order”, will form the basis for much of the study in the later sections of this unit, but you will want to make it the object of your reflection throughout your life.

As for His published Tablets, you are no doubt familiar with the collections available. Penned at two separate times, the first eight between 26 March and 22 April 1916 and the final six between 2 February and 8 March 1917, His Tablets of the Divine Plan fashion in broad outline a master plan for the spiritual regeneration of the planet. They, too, are a constant source of guidance to all of us throughout our lives. *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* brings together some of the innumerable Tablets He addressed to early believers of the East and the West and gives us an indication of the vast range of subjects with which He dealt in His correspondence. *Light of the World: Selected Tablets of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá* contains seventy-six Tablets, penned after the passing of Bahá’u’lláh, which describe aspects of His life and sufferings, the purpose and greatness of His Cause, and the nature and significance of His Covenant. Relatively longer Tablets, such as the one written to Auguste Forel and the Tablets to the Hague, are available as separate publications, though a portion of His first Tablet to the Hague also appears in *Selections from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*.

*The Secret of Divine Civilization* consists of a message addressed to the rulers and people of Persia in 1875, which has been described by Shoghi Effendi as “‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s outstanding



## SECTION 15

In the last few sections we have explored some of the implications of the station conferred on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Most Holy Book as the Center of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant and the Interpreter of His Word. Now let us consider another dimension of His station.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the perfect Exemplar of His Father’s teachings. There is no need for us to illustrate here through episodes from His life the significance of this statement. Previous books in the sequence have provided so many references to Him that have shown us how He manifested, to the utmost perfection, every Bahá’í ideal. Think, for instance, about the way He approached His conversations on the teachings and about the qualities that He demonstrated in His interactions with people, as discussed in Books 2 and 6. Call to mind the stories from His life in the lessons for children in Book 3 that show them the ways of love and compassion, of selflessness and justice. Remember the glimpses you caught in Book 4 of His utter devotion to His Father and the insights you gleaned from His example in Book 5 when reflecting on the attributes of the new human being that is to be raised up through the generating influence of Baha’u’llah’s Revelation. Remember, too, the joy that characterized His being, as described in Book 7, a joy deeply seeded in the human soul and not contingent on external circumstances. At every moment, whether hopeful or despondent, in difficulty or in ease, at work or at rest, are we not filled with this joy when we call to mind His words and the example He set? Does not His occupation with the spiritual edification of souls, expressed in so many passages we have studied, inspire us in our own dealings with others? Do not His words of longing to carry His Father’s message to every corner of the globe sustain us in our own service to the Cause?

As was suggested in Book 5, in reflecting on His life, we should be aware of the dangers of two extremes. On the one hand, we should never imagine that we can ever attain His level of perfection, for He moves in a sphere all His own, a sphere which is beyond the reach of any human being. On the other hand, we cannot assume an attitude of passivity, thinking that it is fruitless to make an effort to follow the example of such an exalted Being. Throughout our lives, we should not only constantly turn to Him but also strive to emulate His ways. And conscious of the absolute sublimity of His station, we will feel the warmth of His presence and will draw strength from the knowledge of His love for us as we hear the echoes of His voice in the numerous Tablets that He addressed to early believers:

**“Verily I say unto thee: I am with you in heart and in spirit. I delight in your joy and my spirit rejoiceth in your happiness. With mine inner ear I hear your call and with mine inner sense I inhale the sweet savors of the garden of your hearts.”<sup>23</sup>**

**“Verily, I beseech God to cast upon you the glances of the eye of His mercy, to raise you up through His celestial power, to stir you into motion by His heavenly breeze, to aid you to declare the conclusive proofs and testimonies of His oneness, to sever you from the world and all that is therein, to purge and sanctify you from all that pertaineth to this earthly life, and to enable you to spread abroad the outpourings of the realm on high.”<sup>24</sup>**

**“At all times do I speak of you and call you to mind. I pray unto the Lord, and with tears I implore Him to rain down all these blessings upon you, and gladden your hearts, and make blissful your souls, and grant you exceeding joy and heavenly delights.”<sup>25</sup>**

**“Ye live, all of you, within the heart of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and with every breath do I turn my face toward the Threshold of Oneness and call down blessings upon you, each and all.”<sup>26</sup>**

**“O ye who have turned your faces toward the Exalted Beauty! By night, by day, at morningtide and sunset, when darkness draweth on, and at early light I remember, and ever have remembered, in the realms of my mind and heart, the loved ones of the Lord.”<sup>27</sup>**

You may wish to memorize one or more of the above quotations.

## **SECTION 16**

The discussion in the preceding sections has focused on the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, a station unique not only in this Dispensation but in all of religious history. Though not a Manifestation of God, He clearly stands apart from any other figure in humanity’s long evolution. The two passages below written by Shoghi Effendi provide us with further insight into the nature of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s station. You are encouraged to read them several times and to reflect on the import of their words until you feel satisfied that you have an adequate grasp of their significance. Filling in the blanks in the sentences that follow may assist you in this respect.

**“An attempt I strongly feel should now be made to clarify our minds regarding the station occupied by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the significance of His position in this holy Dispensation. It would be indeed difficult for us, who stand so close to such a tremendous figure and are drawn by the mysterious power of so magnetic a personality, to obtain a clear and exact understanding of the role and character of One Who, not only in the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh but in the entire field of religious history, fulfills a unique function. Though moving in a sphere of His own and holding a rank radically different from that of the Author and the Forerunner of the Bahá’í Revelation, He, by virtue of the station ordained for Him through the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh, forms together with them what may be termed the Three Central Figures of a Faith that stands unapproached in the world’s spiritual history. He towers, in conjunction with them, above the destinies of this infant Faith of God from a level to which no individual or body ministering to its needs after Him, and for no less a period than a full thousand years, can ever hope to rise. To degrade His lofty rank by identifying His station with or by regarding it as roughly equivalent to the position of those on whom the mantle of His authority has fallen would be an act of impiety as grave as the no less heretical belief that inclines to exalt Him to a state of absolute equality with either the Central Figure or Forerunner of our Faith. For wide as is the gulf that separates ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from Him Who is the Source of an independent Revelation, it can never be regarded as commensurate with the greater distance that stands between Him Who is the Center of the Covenant and His ministers who are to carry on His work, whatever be their name, their rank, their functions or their future achievements. Let those who have known ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who through their contact with His magnetic personality have come to cherish for Him so fervent an admiration, reflect, in the light of this statement, on the greatness of One Who is so far above Him in station.”<sup>28</sup>**

**“He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Center and Pivot of Bahá’u’lláh’s peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted Handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá’í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá’í virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being ‘round Whom all names revolve’, the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation—styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the ‘Mystery of God’—an expression by which Bahá’u’lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and superhuman knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.”<sup>29</sup>**

In the first paragraph, the Guardian tells us, referring to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, that it would be difficult for us, who stand so close to such a \_\_\_\_\_ figure and are drawn by the \_\_\_\_\_ power of so \_\_\_\_\_ a personality, to obtain a \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ understanding of the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of One Who, not only in the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh but in the \_\_\_\_\_ field of religious history, fulfills a \_\_\_\_\_. In this connection, Shoghi Effendi explains

- that, although ‘Abdu’l-Bahá moves in a \_\_\_\_\_ of His own and holds a \_\_\_\_\_ radically \_\_\_\_\_ from that of Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb, He \_\_\_\_\_ together with Them, because of the \_\_\_\_\_ ordained for Him through the \_\_\_\_\_ of Bahá’u’lláh, what may be termed the \_\_\_\_\_.
- that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá \_\_\_\_\_, in conjunction with Bahá’u’lláh and the Báb, above the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Faith of God from a \_\_\_\_\_ that no \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ ministering to its needs after Him, and for no \_\_\_\_\_ a period than a \_\_\_\_\_ years, can ever hope to reach.
- that it would be an act of impiety to degrade His \_\_\_\_\_ by identifying His \_\_\_\_\_ with or by regarding it as \_\_\_\_\_ to the \_\_\_\_\_ of those on whom the \_\_\_\_\_ of His \_\_\_\_\_ has fallen—an act of impiety as \_\_\_\_\_ as the no less heretical \_\_\_\_\_ that inclines to \_\_\_\_\_ Him to a \_\_\_\_\_ of absolute \_\_\_\_\_ with either Bahá’u’lláh or the Báb.

- that we should understand that, however wide the \_\_\_\_\_ that \_\_\_\_\_ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá from the Manifestation of God, there is a far greater \_\_\_\_\_ that stands between Him Who is the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ and His \_\_\_\_\_ who carry on His \_\_\_\_\_, whatever be their \_\_\_\_\_, their \_\_\_\_\_, their \_\_\_\_\_ or their \_\_\_\_\_.

In the second paragraph, the Guardian tells us that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is, and should for all time be regarded as,

- the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant,
- the most \_\_\_\_\_ of Bahá’u’lláh,
- the stainless \_\_\_\_\_ of Bahá’u’lláh’s \_\_\_\_\_,
- the \_\_\_\_\_ Exemplar of Bahá’u’lláh’s \_\_\_\_\_,
- the \_\_\_\_\_ Interpreter of Bahá’u’lláh’s Word,
- the \_\_\_\_\_ of every Bahá’í ideal,
- the \_\_\_\_\_ of every Bahá’í virtue,
- the \_\_\_\_\_ Branch sprung from the \_\_\_\_\_,
- the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Law of God,
- the Being ‘round Whom \_\_\_\_\_’;
- the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ of Humanity,
- the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Most Great \_\_\_\_\_,
- the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Central \_\_\_\_\_ of this most holy Dispensation.

All the above titles find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name \_\_\_\_\_.

The Guardian goes on to explain that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is, above and beyond the titles mentioned here, the ‘\_\_\_\_\_’—an expression by which Bahá’u’lláh Himself has chosen to \_\_\_\_\_ Him and which indicates how in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the \_\_\_\_\_ characteristics of a \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ knowledge and perfection have been \_\_\_\_\_ and are \_\_\_\_\_.

## SECTION 17

Let us pause here and review what we have studied up to now. We began by considering the principle of the oneness of humankind—the pivot around which all the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh revolve. We considered the implications of the operation of this principle in human affairs and the role played by the community of His followers in working towards its realization. In this context, we saw how essential it is for the community to remain united. To safeguard this unity and to ensure that His Revelation would achieve its purpose, Bahá'u'lláh entered into a Covenant with His followers. In His Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, He named 'Abdu'l-Bahá the Center of that Covenant and the Interpreter of His teachings. In reflecting on the station of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, we discussed the imperative need for a center in organizing the affairs of the community, the significance of an authorized interpreter of the teachings for preserving its unity, and the influence exerted on our individual lives by the perfect Exemplar of those teachings.

What is important for us to acknowledge now is that the stronghold of the Faith is not immune to periodic attacks, both from within and from without. Of course, the Covenant of Baha'u'llah, unique in the entire history of religion, ensures that the Faith emerges unscathed from such attacks, even those that, sadly, are launched from within. We will try to examine the nature of this latter type of attack over the next few sections.

First, we know that, in Bahá'í belief, evil has no existence of its own, as darkness is nothing but the absence of light. Yet human beings do commit deplorable deeds when they allow their lives to be ruled by their lower nature. And it is unfortunate that the whisperings of the ego deep in the breasts of men can, if unchecked, drive ambitious and power-hungry individuals to the extreme of breaking the Covenant. Thankfully, this is not a common occurrence. Usually, even the most blameworthy behavior of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh can be attributed to the shortcomings of sincere souls who are trying to understand and live by the high standards of a Faith that has only begun to exert its influence on humanity. But, as we will see, the actions of those who violate the Covenant, few as they have been in the past and inconsequential as they will continue to be in the future, constitute a class of their own. Their actions need to be understood not as expressions of shortcomings of ordinary human conduct but as manifestations of what 'Abdu'l-Bahá has likened to a spiritually contagious disease, intent on invading the entire body of the Cause.

A moment's reflection on the pattern of the Faith's irresistible advance through cycles of crisis and victory, a theme treated in earlier courses, should convince you that, once 'Abdu'l-Bahá had assumed His incomparable station as the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, and the Cause was poised to enter a new stage in its development, the time was ripe for another crisis. At the heart of this crisis was the rebellion of Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí.

The immediate sense of bewilderment that overcame the followers of Bahá'u'lláh after His ascension was dispelled by the knowledge that they had not been abandoned. In 'Abdu'l-Bahá they recognized their Solace; the Cause of God would continue through Him to be the recipient of unerring guidance. Yet scarcely had He assumed His responsibilities as Head of the Faith than the rebellion of those closest to Him began. Although the ensuing crisis could never have succeeded in creating a permanent divide in the community, it aroused agitation in the minds and hearts of many and resulted in a breach in the ranks of Bahá'u'lláh's own family, a breach that could not be repaired and which would eventually cause most of its members to move away from the shelter of the Covenant. Its ultimate outcome, however, would serve as

testimony to the infinite love and wisdom of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the invincible power of the Covenant.

During Bahá’u’lláh’s own lifetime, Muḥammad-‘Alí had shamelessly advanced the claim of partnership with his Father and had tampered with the text of the Holy Writings in his care. He had earned the displeasure of Bahá’u’lláh for his actions, but out of God’s infinite mercy he had been forgiven. In the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd he was granted a station next in rank to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and great honor could have been his had he proven himself worthy of God’s bounties. Instead, he used his influence to mount an attack on the Covenant. Even while Bahá’u’lláh’s body was still awaiting burial, he carried off two packages containing important documents of his Father, which the Blessed Beauty had entrusted to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá prior to His ascension. Gradually over time through “lies, half-truths, calumnies and gross exaggerations”,<sup>30</sup> the Guardian has told us, Muḥammad-‘Alí managed to persuade most of the family of Bahá’u’lláh and several well-known Bahá’is both in the Holy Land and in Iran to join him. These self-appointed defenders of the Faith, which they pretended to love, did everything in their power to take the reins of the Cause in their own hands. They established a vast system of correspondence with every center and individual they could reach; they dispatched emissaries to Iran, Iraq, India, and Egypt; they bribed and seduced corrupt officials whenever they could; and they even joined forces with enemies of the Faith—all this with a single purpose in mind: to disgrace ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. The crisis created by Muḥammad-‘Alí and his associates can be traced to the most ignoble impulses of human nature. The Guardian writes:

**“The true ground of this crisis was the burning, the uncontrollable, the soul-festering jealousy which the admitted preeminence of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in rank, power, ability, knowledge and virtue, above all the other members of His Father’s family, had aroused not only in Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí, the archbreaker of the Covenant, but in some of his closest relatives as well. An envy as blind as that which had possessed the soul of Mírzá Yahyá, as deadly as that which the superior excellence of Joseph had kindled in the hearts of his brothers, as deep-seated as that which had blazed in the bosom of Cain and prompted him to slay his brother Abel, had, for several years, prior to Bahá’u’lláh’s ascension, been smoldering in the recesses of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí’s heart and had been secretly inflamed by those unnumbered marks of distinction, of admiration and favor accorded to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá not only by Bahá’u’lláh Himself, His companions and His followers, but by the vast number of unbelievers who had come to recognize that innate greatness which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had manifested from childhood.”<sup>31</sup>**

To the campaign of abuses mounted against Him, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá responded with “incessant exhortations”, “earnest pleadings”, “favors and kindnesses”, and “admonitions and warnings”.<sup>32</sup> But all of this proved to be of no avail. Referring to Muḥammad-‘Alí’s misdeeds, Shoghi Effendi has stated: “The Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh had, by acts such as these, and others too numerous to recount, been manifestly violated. Another blow, stunning in its first effects, had been administered to the Faith and had caused its structure momentarily to tremble.”<sup>33</sup>

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s grief over what occurred was such that “despite the triumphs witnessed in the course of His ministry, it left its traces upon Him till the end of His days. The intensity of the emotions which this somber episode aroused within Him were reminiscent of the effect produced upon Bahá’u’lláh by the dire happenings precipitated by the rebellion of Mírzá Yahyá.”<sup>34</sup> “I swear by the Ancient Beauty!”, He wrote in one of His Tablets, “So great is My sorrow and regret that My pen is paralyzed between My fingers.”<sup>35</sup>

Before considering the implications of the actions of Muḥammad-‘Alí, you should review some of the features of this sad episode in the history of the Faith. It is suggested that you read through the above account again and then complete the exercises below.

- a. How had Muḥammad-‘Alí earned the displeasure of Bahá’u’lláh during His lifetime? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b. What bounty had been bestowed by Bahá’u’lláh on Muḥammad-‘Alí in the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. How did Muḥammad-‘Alí use his influence following the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. Muḥammad-‘Alí managed to persuade most of Bahá’u’lláh’s family and several well-known Bahá’ís both in the Holy Land and in Iran to join him through \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- e. In their efforts to take the reins of the Cause in their own hands, Muḥammad-‘Alí and his associates
- established \_\_\_\_\_ ;  
\_\_\_\_\_ ;
  - dispatched \_\_\_\_\_ ;
  - bribed and seduced \_\_\_\_\_ ;
  - joined forces with \_\_\_\_\_ .
- f. The Guardian tells us that the true ground of the crisis created by Muḥammad-‘Alí and his associates was the \_\_\_\_\_ , the \_\_\_\_\_ , the \_\_\_\_\_ which the admitted \_\_\_\_\_ of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ , above all the other members of His Father’s family, had aroused not only in Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí, \_\_\_\_\_ , but in some of his \_\_\_\_\_ as well.
- g. The envy that had been smoldering in the recesses of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí’s heart prior to Bahá’u’lláh’s ascension was as blind as \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .

- h. The envy that had been smoldering in the recesses of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí’s heart prior to Bahá’u’lláh’s ascension was as deadly as \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ .
- i. The envy that had been smoldering in the recesses of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí’s heart prior to Bahá’u’lláh’s ascension was as deep-seated as \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ .
- j. The envy that had been smoldering in the recesses of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí’s heart prior to Bahá’u’lláh’s ascension was secretly inflamed by \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ .
- k. To the campaign of abuses mounted against Him by Muḥammad-‘Alí and his companions, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá responded with \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ .
- l. By the acts Muḥammad-‘Alí had committed, Shoghi Effendi confirms, the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh had been \_\_\_\_\_ .
- m. Shoghi Effendi assures us that, though \_\_\_\_\_ in its first effects, the blow administered to the Faith by this sad episode had only caused its structure to tremble \_\_\_\_\_ .

## SECTION 18

It is painful to contemplate the words and actions of the breakers of a Covenant that offers humanity its only hope for realizing its essential oneness and for organizing its collective affairs, free from strife and contention. Yet it is important for us to understand their ways if we are each to contribute our share to the protection of His Cause. An examination of the ruthless behavior of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí and those who associated with him provides us many insights in this respect. Here are a few examples.

Muhammad-‘Alí and his associates attributed to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the very blameworthy acts that they themselves committed and the ambition for leadership that consumed their hearts. Shoghi Effendi tells us:

**“To friend and stranger, believer and unbeliever alike, to officials both high and low, openly and by insinuation, verbally as well as in writing, they represented ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as an ambitious, a self-willed, an unprincipled and pitiless usurper, Who had deliberately disregarded the testamentary instructions of His Father; Who had, in language intentionally veiled and ambiguous, assumed a rank co-equal with the Manifestation Himself; Who in His communications with the West was beginning to claim to be the return of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who had come ‘in the glory of the Father’; Who, in His letters to the Indian believers, was proclaiming Himself as the promised Sháh Bahrám, and arrogating to Himself the right to interpret the writing of His Father, to inaugurate a new Dispensation, and to share with Him the Most Great Infallibility, the exclusive prerogative of the holders of the prophetic office.”<sup>36</sup>**

It was, of course, Muhammad-‘Alí who, desiring rank and station for himself, had advanced false claims, and it was he who had deliberately disregarded the instructions of his Father. Suppose, then, that you were living in those days and heard someone whispering to you: “You know, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has become more authoritative since the passing of the Blessed Beauty. He does seem to act as if He has some claim beyond the station conferred on Him by Bahá’u’lláh. Are we not all humble servants of the Cause?” What would this individual have hoped you did not understand about the nature of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant and the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that he would have dared to initiate such a conversation with you?

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Through other arguments they advanced, Muhammad-‘Alí and his associates tried to take advantage of the love of Bahá’ís for unity. While acting with utter disregard for the integrity of the community, doing everything in their power to foment suspicion, and bent on making a breach among the believers, they laid the blame for the disunity thus created on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. This was another of their ways. Here is how Shoghi Effendi continues his description of the claims made by Muhammad-‘Alí and his associates against ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

**“They, furthermore, affirmed that He had, for His private ends, fomented discord, fostered enmity and brandished the weapon of excommunication . . .”<sup>37</sup>**

Imagine once again you were living in those perilous days and someone approached you, saying: “Perhaps the intentions of Muhammad-‘Alí and his companions are not so ignoble after all. What harm could come from talking to them and finding out what they have to say? As Head of the Faith, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá should be maintaining unity among the believers. Why would He try to expel His own brother from the Faith? Is not unity to be valued above all else?”

What misconception of unity would this person have been trying to introduce to you in order to sow the seeds of doubt in your mind?

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Besides attributing to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá their own ambitions and accusing Him of creating disunity in the Bahá’í community, Muḥammad-‘Alí and those who collaborated with him sought for the family of Bahá’u’lláh power and a certain degree of ownership over the resources of the Faith. In this they could sometimes be subtle in their ways. Let us see how Shoghi Effendi continues his description of their conduct:

**“[They, furthermore, affirmed] that He had perverted the purpose of a Testament which they alleged to be primarily concerned with the private interests of Bahá’u’lláh’s family by acclaiming it as a Covenant of world importance, pre-existent, peerless and unique in the history of all religions . . .”<sup>38</sup>**

It is not unreasonable to imagine that, by trying to cast doubt on the validity of a unique center of authority to succeed Bahá’u’lláh, they were hoping to create a situation where they could share authority with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Suppose someone approached you at the time and said: “Well, it is true that it is difficult for us to understand Bahá’u’lláh’s real intention. Muḥammad-‘Alí, like ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, spent hours and hours in the presence of the Blessed Beauty, listening to His counsels and immersed in His words. Surely Muḥammad-‘Alí’s knowledge of Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings is comparable to that of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He must know Bahá’u’lláh’s real intention.” What kind of attitude would this person have been trying to cultivate in you towards the authority clearly given by Bahá’u’lláh to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá?

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In the midst of such intrigue and misrepresentation, Muḥammad-‘Alí and his associates went even further to present themselves as helpless victims, inventing story after story of the injustices being done to them by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In ever louder voices they cried out in an effort to win sympathy for their case. The Guardian continues his description in this way:

**“[They, furthermore, affirmed] that He had deprived His brothers and sisters of their lawful allowance, and expended it on officials for His personal advancement; that He had declined all the repeated invitations made to Him to discuss the issues that had arisen and to compose the differences which prevailed . . .”<sup>39</sup>**

Suppose someone made the following apparently innocent remark to you at the time: “Maybe ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is too hard on the members of His family.” What sentiments would this person have been trying to evoke in your heart towards the members of His family? What would have been the purpose of doing so?

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Similarly, Muḥammad-‘Alí and his associates hoped to create anxiety among the friends by making them believe that the Faith was in a state of decline because of the way ‘Abdu’l-Bahá guided the community. With these words does Shoghi Effendi end this sad passage regarding the unseemly conduct of Muḥammad-‘Alí and those with whom he collaborated:

**“[They, furthermore, affirmed] that He had actually corrupted the Holy Text, interpolated passages written by Himself, and perverted the purpose and meaning of some of the weightiest Tablets revealed by the pen of His Father; and finally, that the standard of rebellion had, as a result of such conduct, been raised by the Oriental believers, that the community of the faithful had been rent asunder, was rapidly declining and was doomed to extinction.”<sup>40</sup>**

Imagine that someone approached you during those days and expressed the following concerns about the status of the Faith: “A few years ago, when Bahá’u’lláh was still among us, the Faith enjoyed increasing prestige and the community of His followers was swelling in numbers. Now look at us. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is happy that a few individuals from Europe and North America are showing interest in the Cause. Meanwhile, outstanding believers who spent years in the presence of Bahá’u’lláh have abandoned ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and have sided with Muḥammad-‘Alí. What will become of us? We should do what we think is best for the Cause of God, even if it means ignoring ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s wishes for a while. He will modify His ideas over time.” In misrepresenting the status of the Faith in this way, how would this individual have been hoping to play on your emotions?

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## SECTION 19

In the preceding section, we examined some of the ways in which Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí and his associates strove to undermine the Covenant established by Bahá’u’lláh. Even after

it became obvious that they had failed to divide the community, they did everything in their power to discredit ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the eyes of the authorities, joining forces with the enemies of the Faith in order to achieve their purpose. Ultimately, as a result of the intrigues of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí, who was embittered by his lack of success, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá became the object of close scrutiny by the authorities for some seven years, from around 1901 to 1907.

One day in August 1901, upon returning to ‘Akká from Bahjí, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was informed that the restrictions which had gradually been relaxed over the years on the exiled community of Bahá’u’lláh’s followers were to be reimposed. Orders had arrived from the Sulṭán in Constantinople that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and His brothers were to be confined within the city walls. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá submitted to several days of interrogations. Though He convinced the authorities to allow His brothers to return to Bahjí and to grant the believers enough freedom to earn their livelihoods, He and His household were vigilantly watched. Later, one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s brothers, Mírzá Badí’u’lláh, who had sided with the Covenant-breakers, would reconcile with Him briefly and confess that Muḥammad-‘Alí had sent an emissary with a gift and a letter to a high-ranking official in the region, suggesting that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was acting against the interests of the Ottoman Empire. It was a few days later that the Sulṭán’s orders had arrived.

Having succeeded in arousing suspicion against ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Muḥammad-‘Alí and his associates continued unabated to present Him as a threat to the state. They hoped their scheming would bring about ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s execution, or His exile to some remote place, so that they could then take control over the affairs of the Faith. Eventually the Sulṭán became so concerned that he appointed a commission to investigate the matter. It was now 1904. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was summoned on several occasions to answer to the charges made against Him, which He carefully and fearlessly refuted. Although the commission failed to prove any wrongdoing by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, He remained in danger. In 1907 a second commission of four officers was dispatched to ‘Akká by the Sulṭán. Guards were posted outside the home of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, while the officers went about their investigation. Muḥammad-‘Alí and his associates were jubilant. The commission’s ship remained in the harbor in the bay, and it seemed certain that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would soon be taken away. At one point the Spanish Consul, who was a great admirer of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, offered Him a freighter that could bring Him to a place of safety. But, like the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, Who had faced every danger unperturbed, He refused to flee.

Then one day around sunset, the ship started to make its way across the bay towards ‘Akká. It was generally assumed that the commission was coming to arrest ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and take Him on board. The friends were in anguish, some weeping with grief over the thought of separation from Him. But suddenly the ship changed course, and its lights could be seen moving in the direction of Constantinople. It was later learned that an attempt had been made on the life of the Sulṭán and the Ottoman Empire was in turmoil. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was out of imminent danger.

The passage below from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament describes the conduct of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí throughout the entire lamentable period. It shows how, one by one, his actions led him to pass further and further outside the shelter of the Covenant. Read the passage several times and try to identify the sad path that he chose to follow—from his initial attempts to alter the Holy Writings in his favor, as confirmed by Mírzá Badí’u’lláh, to his efforts to raise doubts among the followers of Bahá’u’lláh, even falsely accusing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá of laying claim to a Revelation from God, and finally to his growing collusion with forces outside the Faith, which eventually threatened ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s very life.

**“What deviation can be greater than breaking the Covenant of God! What deviation can be greater than interpolating and falsifying the words and verses of the Sacred Text, even as testified and declared by Mírzá Badí’u’lláh! What deviation can be greater than calumniating the Center of the Covenant himself! What deviation can be more glaring than spreading broadcast false and foolish reports touching the Temple of God’s Testament! What deviation can be more grievous than decreeing the death of the Center of the Covenant, supported by the holy verse:—‘He that layeth a claim ere the passing of a thousand years . . . ,’ whilst he (Muḥammad-‘Alí) without shame in the days of the Blessed Beauty had advanced such a claim as this and been confuted by Him in the aforementioned manner, the text of his claim being still extant in his own handwriting and bearing his own seal. What deviation can be more complete than falsely accusing the loved ones of God! What deviation can be more evil than causing their imprisonment and incarceration! What deviation can be more severe than delivering into the hands of the government the Holy Writings and Epistles, that haply they (the government) might arise intent upon the death of this wronged one! What deviation can be more violent than threatening the ruin of the Cause of God, forging and slanderously falsifying letters and documents so that this might perturb and alarm the government and lead to the shedding of the blood of this wronged one,—such letters and documents being now in the possession of the government! What deviation can be more odious than his iniquity and rebellion! What deviation can be more shameful than dispersing the gathering of the people of salvation! What deviation can be more infamous than the vain and feeble interpretations of the people of doubt! What deviation can be more wicked than joining hands with strangers and with the enemies of God!”<sup>41</sup>**

Now suppose, as you did in the last section, that you were living in those days. Remembering what you have studied in these two sections, how would you have protected yourself from the spiritually contagious disease that had infected Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí and scores of once faithful souls who associated with him? Would you have felt there was any reasonable option other than to avoid them entirely and leave them to themselves? On what would you have focused your time and energies?

## **SECTION 20**

One of the articles of faith shared by all the Bahá’ís of the world is that no power on earth can alter the course Bahá’u’lláh has set for His Cause. It is true that, during the years immediately following His ascension, Muḥammad-‘Alí and his companions spread confusion in the community of His followers, and it is true that the Covenant-breakers continued to create consternation among the believers for some time and renewed fresh hope among the enemies of the Faith. Yet the effects of this rebellion were by no means long lasting. The Guardian explains:

**“Though the rebellion of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí precipitated many somber and distressing events, and though its dire consequences continued for several years to obscure the light of the Covenant, to endanger the life of its appointed Center, and to distract the thoughts and retard the progress of the activities of its supporters in both the East and the West, yet the entire episode, viewed in its proper**

**perspective, proved to be neither more nor less than one of those periodic crises which, since the inception of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, and throughout a whole century, have been instrumental in weeding out its harmful elements, in fortifying its foundations, in demonstrating its resilience, and in releasing a further measure of its latent powers.”<sup>42</sup>**

Let us reflect on the significance of the Guardian’s words. What was this episode, like other crises in the history of the Faith, instrumental in doing?

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Now, what insights has your study up to this point given you into the theme of crisis and victory and into the many assurances in the Writings that, no matter how formidable the forces arrayed against the Cause, the power invested in Bahá'u'lláh’s Covenant will ensure its ultimate victory? How have these insights enhanced your understanding of the statement, “the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant”?

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With this reflection fresh in mind, we should read the following passage written by Shoghi Effendi:

**“Now that the provisions of a divinely appointed Covenant had been indubitably proclaimed; now that the purpose of the Covenant was clearly apprehended and its fundamentals had become immovably established in the hearts of the overwhelming majority of the adherents of the Faith; and now that the first assaults launched by its would-be subverters had been successfully repulsed, the Cause for which that Covenant had been designed could forge ahead along the course traced for it by the finger of its Author.”<sup>43</sup>**

The history of the twenty-nine-year ministry of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is not the subject of this unit. Yet, in order to gain further appreciation for the power of the Covenant, we should review, however inadequately, some of the accomplishments of the Faith during His ministry. The next few sections will be dedicated to such a review. Drawing largely on the relevant chapters in

*God Passes By*, these sections will address, each in turn, four major developments: the transfer of the remains of the Báb to their final resting place on Mount Carmel, the establishment of the Faith in the West, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s travels to Europe and North America, and the systematic expansion and consolidation of the Faith throughout the world.

Before embarking on our survey, we should remind ourselves that, besides the suffering He endured as a result of the turmoil created by Muḥammad-‘Alí following Bahá’u’lláh’s passing in 1892, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the exiled community in the Holy Land remained under restrictions placed on them by the Ottoman Empire until the latter half of 1908, when the Sulṭán was forced to relinquish much of his power. By then ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had spent more than fifty years as an exile from His homeland, having shared in the series of banishments endured by His beloved Father at the hands of those enslaved by their lust for leadership and bereft of knowledge and understanding.

## SECTION 21

We begin our brief survey with the entombment of the Báb’s remains on Mount Carmel, an act that, Shoghi Effendi tells us, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself considered His paramount duty to achieve.

In the middle of the second night following the execution of the Báb and His companion, Anís, in 1850, a devoted believer removed their mangled bodies from the edge of the moat outside Tabríz where they had been cast and took them to a silk factory owned by one of the friends. Their precious remains were laid in a wooden casket, which was then carried to a place of safety. Later the casket was taken to Tīhrán at Bahá’u’lláh’s instruction and kept hidden until 1898. In June of that year, as directed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the casket was brought overland to Beirut and by sea to ‘Akká, arriving there on 31 January 1899.

In the same year, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá laid the cornerstone for the edifice on Mount Carmel that would be built on the site selected by Bahá’u’lláh Himself to receive the Báb’s remains. On four occasions the Blessed Beauty had visited Haifa. During one of these visits, when His tent was pitched on the slope of that mountain, He had pointed out to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the site which was to serve as the permanent resting place of the Báb. Though construction on the monument began a few months after the cornerstone was in place, nearly a decade would pass before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would be able to complete the historic task entrusted to Him by His Father. Shoghi Effendi explains:

**“The long-drawn out negotiations with the shrewd and calculating owner of the building-site of the holy Edifice, who, under the influence of the Covenant-breakers, refused for a long time to sell; the exorbitant price at first demanded for the opening of a road leading to that site and indispensable to the work of construction; the interminable objections raised by officials, high and low, whose easily aroused suspicions had to be allayed by repeated explanations and assurances given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself; the dangerous situation created by the monstrous accusations brought by Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí and his associates regarding the character and purpose of that building; the delays and complications caused by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s prolonged and enforced absence from Haifa, and His consequent inability to supervise in person the vast undertaking He had**

initiated—all these were among the principal obstacles which He, at so critical a period in His ministry, had to face and surmount ere He could execute in its entirety the Plan, the outline of which Bahá'u'lláh had communicated to Him on the occasion of one of His visits to Mt. Carmel.”<sup>44</sup>

No obstacle could, of course, prevent the fulfillment of God's purpose:

*“Every stone of that building, every stone of the road leading to it,’ He, many a time was heard to remark, ‘I have with infinite tears and at tremendous cost, raised and placed in position.’ ‘One night,’ He, according to an eyewitness, once observed, ‘I was so hemmed in by My anxieties that I had no other recourse than to recite and repeat over and over again a prayer of the Báb which I had in My possession, the recital of which greatly calmed Me. The next morning the owner of the plot himself came to Me, apologized and begged Me to purchase his property.’”<sup>45</sup>*

Finally, on Naw-Rúz day in 1909, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá had a marble sarcophagus, offered as a token of love by the Bahá'ís of Rangoon, taken to the vault prepared for it. That evening, by the light of a single lamp, He laid within it, with His own hands—in the presence of believers from the East and from the West—the wooden casket containing the sacred remains of the Báb and His companion. With these words does Shoghi Effendi describe that event:

**“When all was finished, and the earthly remains of the Martyr-Prophet of Shiráz were, at long last, safely deposited for their everlasting rest in the bosom of God's holy mountain, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, Who had cast aside His turban, removed His shoes and thrown off His cloak, bent low over the still open sarcophagus, His silver hair waving about His head and His face transfigured and luminous, rested His forehead on the border of the wooden casket, and, sobbing aloud, wept with such a weeping that all those who were present wept with Him. That night He could not sleep, so overwhelmed was He with emotion.”<sup>46</sup>**

From such an extraordinary beginning, the World Administrative Center of the Faith would be brought into existence on the slope of Mount Carmel, emerging as a symbol of the majesty of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Near the mausoleum of the Báb, along a path in the shape of an arc traced by Shoghi Effendi, four edifices would be erected. Its apex would be crowned with the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, flanked by the International Archives, the Centre for the Study of the Texts, and the International Teaching Centre Building. The mausoleum itself, embellished by a golden-domed structure, would become the focal point of eighteen terraces, nine rising above it to the mountain's crest and nine cascading below it to the foot. Gardens of exquisite beauty would be laid around them all. The following words of the Universal House of Justice, written in 2001 on the occasion of the completion of the construction projects, put in perspective the significance of that singular act, on that portentous Naw-Rúz evening, many decades before:

**“The majestic buildings that now stand along the Arc traced for them by Shoghi Effendi on the slope of the Mountain of God, together with the magnificent flight of garden terraces that embrace the Shrine of the Báb, are an outward expression of the immense power animating the Cause we serve. They offer timeless witness to the fact that the followers of Bahá'u'lláh have successfully laid the foundations of a worldwide community transcending all differences that divide the human race, and have brought into existence the principal institutions of a unique and**

**unassailable Administrative Order that shapes this community's life. In the transformation that has taken place on Mount Carmel, the Bahá'í Cause emerges as a visible and compelling reality on the global stage, as the focal center of forces that will, in God's good time, bring about the reconstruction of society, and as a mystic source of spiritual renewal for all who turn to it."**<sup>47</sup>

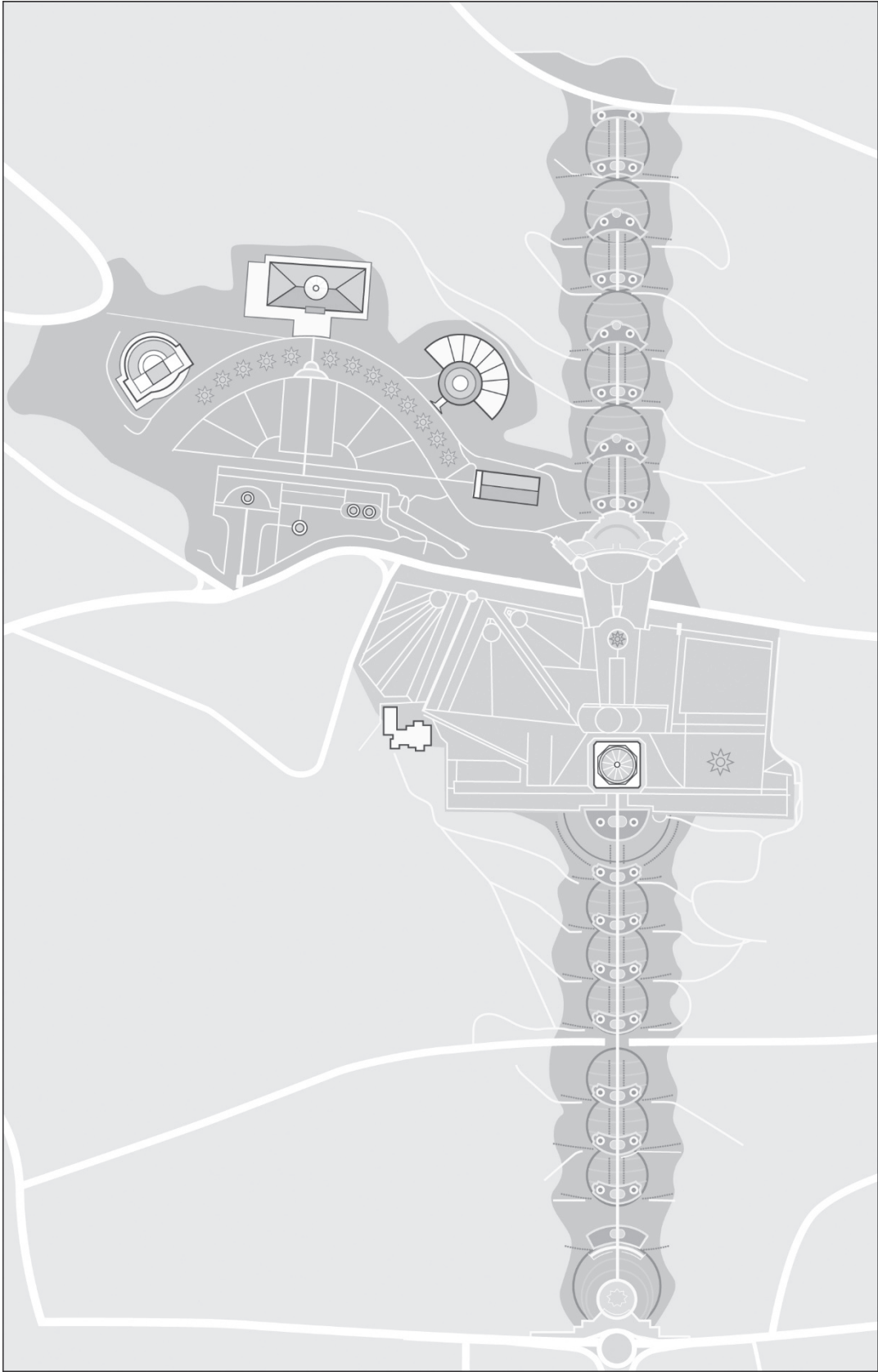
Even if you have yet to go on pilgrimage, you must have seen many beautiful photographs of the Shrine of the Báb, "the Spot round which the Concourse on high circle in adoration",<sup>48</sup> its Terraces and the other edifices on Mount Carmel. On the next page is a map that shows the close proximity of the edifices arrayed along the Arc to that sacred Spot. Together with your fellow participants in this course, identify each building, while remembering that the slope of Mount Carmel was but barren land in the days of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Imagine, then, the figure of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the Center of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant, as He safely placed the precious remains in the vault over which today stands a structure of such magnificent beauty.

## SECTION 22

Now let us turn our attention to the establishment of the Cause in the West. Shoghi Effendi reminds us that, as far back as 1844, the year that saw the birth of the Faith in Iran, the Báb had addressed the "peoples of the West", bidding them to "issue forth" from their "cities" to aid God and "become as brethren" in His "one and indivisible religion". In the Most Holy Book, Bahá'u'lláh confers a unique distinction on the rulers of the American continent. He calls on them to adorn the "temple of dominion with the ornament of justice and of the fear of God, and its head with the crown of the remembrance" of their Lord, to bind the "broken with the hands of justice", and to "crush the oppressor" with the "rod of the commandments" of their "Lord, the Ordainer, the All-Wise". The rise of the Faith in the West is to be considered one of the most significant accomplishments achieved during 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry. The sequence of events can be summarized as follows.

The first mention of the name of Bahá'u'lláh at a public gathering in the Western Hemisphere took place on 23 September 1893 at the World Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in connection with the Columbian Exposition. Less than a year later, Ibráhím Khayru'lláh, a Syrian doctor who had become a Bahá'í in Cairo, moved to Chicago. He began to teach the Faith vigorously, traveling to a number of other cities in the United States. Through his efforts, hundreds of receptive souls across the country embraced the Faith. From among them would emerge some of the most prominent followers of Bahá'u'lláh in the West. Two names stand out as particularly noteworthy: Thornton Chase, designated by 'Abdu'l-Bahá as the first American believer, and Louisa A. Moore, known to us by her married name Lua Getsinger, the mother teacher of the West.

One of the individuals attracted to the Faith by Lua Getsinger was Mrs. Phoebe Hearst. Towards the end of 1898, she organized a trip to the Holy Land in order to meet 'Abdu'l-Bahá. She extended an invitation for a number of people to undertake a visit, including Dr. and Mrs. Getsinger, Dr. Khayru'lláh and his wife, and Miss May Ellis Bolles. At the time May Bolles lived in Paris, but three years later, having married Sutherland Maxwell, she would transfer her residence to Canada and lay the foundations of the Cause in that country. Also included among the pilgrims was Mrs. Hearst's butler Robert Turner, who would become the first African-American Bahá'í. The Guardian describes this pilgrimage in the following terms:



**“The arrival of fifteen pilgrims, in three successive parties, the first of which, including Dr. and Mrs. Getsinger, reached the prison-city of ‘Akká on December 10, 1898; the intimate personal contact established between the Center of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant and the newly arisen heralds of His Revelation in the West; the moving circumstances attending their visit to His Tomb and the great honor bestowed upon them of being conducted by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself into its innermost chamber; the spirit which, through precept and example, despite the briefness of their stay, a loving and bountiful Host so powerfully infused into them; and the passionate zeal and unyielding resolve which His inspiring exhortations, His illuminating instructions and the multiple evidences of His divine love kindled in their hearts—all these marked the opening of a new epoch in the development of the Faith in the West, an epoch whose significance the acts subsequently performed by some of these same pilgrims and their fellow-disciples have amply demonstrated.**

**“‘Of that first meeting,’ one of these pilgrims, recording her impressions, has written, ‘I can remember neither joy nor pain, nor anything that I can name. I had been carried suddenly to too great a height, my soul had come in contact with the Divine Spirit, and this force, so pure, so holy, so mighty, had overwhelmed me . . . We could not remove our eyes from His glorious face; we heard all that He said; we drank tea with Him at His bidding; but existence seemed suspended; and when He arose and suddenly left us, we came back with a start to life; but never again, oh! never again, thank God, the same life on this earth.’ ‘In the might and majesty of His presence,’ that same pilgrim, recalling the last interview accorded the party of which she was a member, has testified, ‘our fear was turned to perfect faith, our weakness into strength, our sorrow into hope, and ourselves forgotten in our love for Him. As we all sat before Him, waiting to hear His words, some of the believers wept bitterly. He bade them dry their tears, but they could not for a moment. So again He asked them for His sake not to weep, nor would He talk to us and teach us until all tears were banished . . .’”<sup>49</sup>**

So enamored with the love of God did these souls become that the Guardian refers to them as “God-intoxicated pilgrims”. Following their return to Europe and the United States, efforts to spread Bahá’u’lláh’s message intensified, and receptivity proved to be great. The tempo of teaching continued to gather momentum, and eventually ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made clear that, as soon as He was free to do so, He would undertake a personal mission to the West.

A decade would pass before ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would embark on His historic travels to Europe and North America. During those ten years, He nurtured the newly formed Bahá’í communities through the many Tablets He revealed to early believers, the successive messengers and teachers He sent to them, and the verbal messages transmitted to them by a continual flow of pilgrims. As a result, the communities became increasingly consolidated, especially in North America, despite the crisis that Dr. Khayru’lláh created upon his return from pilgrimage. This foolish and ambitious man had become blinded by his own accomplishments. Hoping that he could become the leader of the community in America, he allowed himself to be seduced by Muḥammad-‘Alí and his associates and violated the Covenant. As is the case with every episode of Covenant-breaking, his efforts to divide the Bahá’í community failed in the end. However, he caused a great deal of consternation among the friends. To dispel their confusion, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá dispatched to North America such loyal and knowledgeable servants of the Cause as Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl, who deepened the believers’ understanding of the teachings.

The fruit of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ceaseless labors was a strong, energetic North American Bahá’í community, ready to take on any challenge. By 1910 the translation of some of the most important Writings of Bahá’u’lláh into English, including the Hidden Words, the Kitáb-i-Íqán, and the Seven Valleys, was being rigorously pursued. A publishing entity designed to propagate Bahá’í literature had been established, and a few periodicals focused on the Bahá’í teachings had emerged. One of these would evolve into the “Star of the West”, a magazine first issued in March 1910 that shared messages from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, translations of prayers and passages, and news and reports on the progress of the Faith.

But perhaps nothing demonstrated the zeal of the community in North America more than the decision made in 1908 by a small group in Chicago to initiate the monumental task of building the Mother Temple of the West, the cornerstone of which was laid a few years later by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself. With the assistance of their fellow believers in various parts of the United States, the members of the group managed to raise the funds necessary to make an initial payment towards the purchase of two adjoining plots of land on the shores of Lake Michigan, in the vicinity of Chicago. A year later, in March 1909, following instructions received from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, thirty-nine delegates from localities around the country assembled in that city and established a national organization known as the Bahá’í Temple Unity. This organization, recognized under the law, was given full legal authority to hold title to the property of the Temple. Contributions for this historic enterprise arrived from countries around the world, as well as from cities across the United States. By 1910, two years prior to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s arrival in America, a sum of twenty thousand dollars had been raised for this purpose—a significant sum at the time and a sign of the solidarity of Bahá’u’lláh’s followers in both the East and the West.

This is only the briefest account of the rise and establishment of the Faith in the West. There are many stories associated with this extraordinary period in the history of the Cause and with the receptive souls that were awakened by the summons of Bahá’u’lláh. You may wish to identify a few stories from this period and share them with the members of your group. In narrating the events, try to illustrate how such souls had been quickened by the power of the Covenant.

## SECTION 23

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s decade-long effort to nurture the emerging community in North America eventually culminated, as He had promised, in His historic travels to the West—the next accomplishment of His ministry that we will consider here. The restrictions that had been imposed on the sorely tried community in ‘Akka had been lifted, and the final downfall of the Sulṭán of the Ottoman Empire in 1909 removed, once and for all, every barrier that an oppressive regime had placed in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s path. By then, of course, centers had also begun to emerge in some of the major cities of Europe, and the friends there were as eager to receive Him as those in North America.

Now approaching seventy years of age, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was in poor health, having spent nearly a lifetime in exile and imprisonment. Yet He arose “with sublime courage, confidence and resolution”, Shoghi Effendi tells us, “to consecrate what little strength remained to Him, in the evening of His life, to a service of such heroic proportions that no parallel to it is to be found

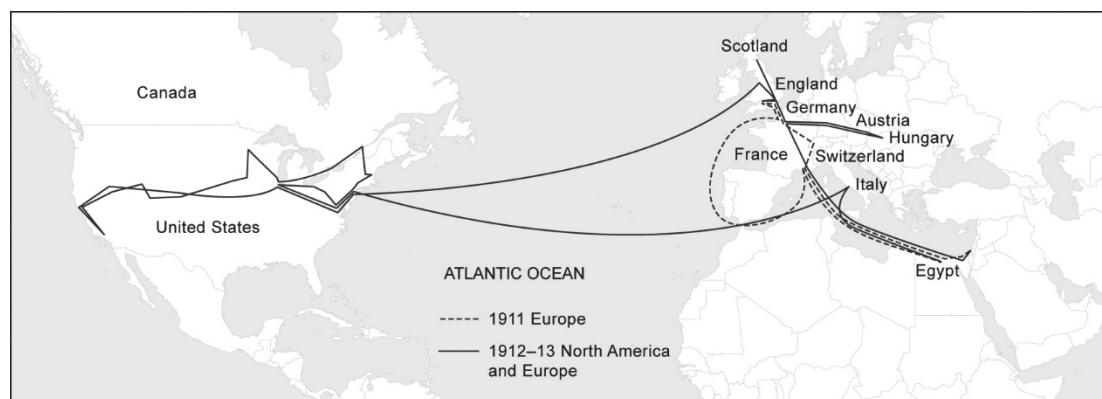
in the annals of the first Bahá'í century.” Of this momentous accomplishment, the Guardian writes:

**“He Who, in His own words, had entered prison as a youth and left it an old man, Who never in His life had faced a public audience, had attended no school, had never moved in Western circles, and was unfamiliar with Western customs and language, had arisen not only to proclaim from pulpit and platform, in some of the chief capitals of Europe and in the leading cities of the North American continent, the distinctive verities enshrined in His Father’s Faith, but to demonstrate as well the Divine origin of the Prophets gone before Him, and to disclose the nature of the tie binding them to that Faith.”<sup>50</sup>**

One September afternoon in the year 1910, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá set sail from Haifa for Egypt. After a brief stay in the coastal town of Port Said, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá embarked on a ship for Europe but, because of His health, was forced to land at the port in Alexandria and postpone His voyage. Regarding His stay in Egypt and His subsequent two short visits there, Shoghi Effendi writes:

**“In the course of His several visits to Egypt He had more than one interview with the Khedive, ‘Abbás Ḥilmí Páshá II, was introduced to Lord Kitchener, met the Muftí, Shaykh Muḥammad Bakhít, as well as the Khedive’s Imám, Shaykh Muḥammad Ráshid, and associated with several ‘ulamás, páshás, Persian notables, members of the Turkish Parliament, editors of leading newspapers in Cairo and Alexandria, and other leaders and representatives of well-known institutions, both religious and secular.”<sup>51</sup>**

The following year, on 11 August 1911, He set sail with a party of four for London. His ship docked in southern France, and He traveled to Switzerland and then to England, where He remained for about one month before proceeding to Paris. He returned to Egypt in December to pass the winter and embarked on His second journey to the West on 25 March 1912, arriving in New York two and a half weeks later. In the course of His eight-month tour of North America, He stopped in over forty cities in the United States and Canada. He then made His way back to Europe, where He visited England, Scotland, France, Germany, Hungary, and Austria. On 12 June 1913 He sailed from France for Egypt, and He returned to Haifa six months later, concluding His historic journeys on 5 December 1913.



Throughout His travels, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá displayed “a vitality, a courage, a single-mindedness, a consecration to the task He had set Himself to achieve”, expending every ounce of His energy day after day from dawn until late at night. The Guardian describes Him as “incomparable in the spontaneity, the genuineness and warmth of His sympathy and loving-kindness shown to friend and stranger alike, believer and unbeliever, rich and poor, high and low, whom He met, either intimately or casually, whether on board ship, or whilst pacing the streets, in parks or public squares, at receptions or banquets, in slums or mansions, in the gatherings of His followers or the assemblage of the learned”.

He gave hundreds of public addresses, private talks, and interviews on both continents. In all quarters there was marked receptivity to the teachings of the Faith. Even the press was quick to appreciate the import of the message He brought to people of all walks of life. His first public appearance took place on 10 September 1911, soon after His arrival in London. From the pulpit of the City Temple, He addressed an overflowing crowd, proclaiming in the clearest terms the oneness of religion and the unity of all races, religions, and classes. The Guardian sums up in these words the social principles of the Faith which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá presented on the many occasions that followed, before audiences of all types:

**“The independent search after truth, unfettered by superstition or tradition; the oneness of the entire human race, the pivotal principle and fundamental doctrine of the Faith; the basic unity of all religions; the condemnation of all forms of prejudice, whether religious, racial, class or national; the harmony which must exist between religion and science; the equality of men and women, the two wings on which the bird of human kind is able to soar; the introduction of compulsory education; the adoption of a universal auxiliary language; the abolition of the extremes of wealth and poverty; the institution of a world tribunal for the adjudication of disputes between nations; the exaltation of work, performed in the spirit of service, to the rank of worship; the glorification of justice as the ruling principle in human society, and of religion as a bulwark for the protection of all peoples and nations; and the establishment of a permanent and universal peace as the supreme goal of all mankind—these stand out as the essential elements of that Divine polity which He proclaimed to leaders of public thought as well as to the masses at large in the course of these missionary journeys.”<sup>52</sup>**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá also warned audiences of the impending conflict that would set Europe ablaze, if the leaders of the world failed to act. Sadly, all too soon World War I would break out as He had foreshadowed. Yet He made it clear that, no matter what the course of immediate events, the “banner of the unity of mankind would be hoisted, that the tabernacle of universal peace would be raised and the world become another world.”

During His travels, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá devoted an equal amount of energy to deepening the community of followers that had arisen in Europe and North America. Among the many events associated with His visit to the community in the West, two are particularly noteworthy. While in Chicago, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá laid with His own hands the cornerstone of the House of Worship on the recently purchased property facing Lake Michigan. Bahá’ís from both the East and the West assembled on that occasion. “The power which has gathered you here today notwithstanding the cold and windy weather is, indeed, mighty and wonderful,” He addressed those present. “It is the power of God, the divine favor of Bahá’u’lláh which has drawn you together. We praise God that through His constraining love human souls are assembled and associated in this way.”<sup>53</sup>

Later, in New York City, He chose to affirm the implications of the Covenant instituted by Bahá'u'lláh. Following the reading of the Tablet of the Branch, extracts of which you studied in Section 9, He made a formal proclamation of His station before a general assembly of believers. Some days after that event He uttered the following declaration in the presence of three friends, one of whom recorded His words:

**“. . . I am the Covenant, appointed by Bahá'u'lláh. And no one can refute His Word. This is the Testament of Bahá'u'lláh. You will find it in the Holy Book of Aqdas. Go forth and proclaim, ‘This is the Covenant of God in your midst.’”<sup>54</sup>**

New York City was henceforth designated the “City of the Covenant”.

These few paragraphs fall far short of conveying the full import of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s travels to the West. In a passage from *God Passes By*, the Guardian helps us catch a glimpse of this accomplishment by describing some of the scenes revolving around the majestic figure of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as He moved through the cities of Europe and North America—scenes such as the remarkable interview with Archdeacon Wilberforce in which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá answered his many questions, while that distinguished churchman sat on a low chair by His side; the enthusiastic reception accorded Him at Leland Stanford University when, before the gaze of well-nigh two thousand professors and students, He expounded on some of the noblest truths underlying His message to the West; the vast congregation of two thousand assembled in a synagogue in San Francisco, intently listening to His discourse as He demonstrated the validity of the claims advanced by both Jesus Christ and Muḥammad; the distinguished gathering of Christians, Jews and Muslims, men and women, representative of both the East and the West, that had come together to hear Him speak on world unity in the mosque at Woking. The Guardian then asks:

**“Who knows what thoughts flooded the heart of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as He found Himself the central figure of such memorable scenes as these? Who knows what thoughts were uppermost in His mind as He sat at breakfast beside the Lord Mayor of London, or was received with extraordinary deference by the Khedive himself in his palace, or as He listened to the cries of ‘Alláh-u-Abhá’ and to the hymns of thanksgiving and praise that would herald His approach to the numerous and brilliant assemblages of His enthusiastic followers and friends organized in so many cities of the American continent? Who knows what memories stirred within Him as He stood before the thundering waters of Niagara, breathing the free air of a far distant land, or gazed, in the course of a brief and much-needed rest, upon the green woods and countryside in Glenwood Springs, or moved with a retinue of Oriental believers along the paths of the Trocadero gardens in Paris, or walked alone in the evening beside the majestic Hudson on Riverside Drive in New York, or as He paced the terrace of the Hotel du Parc at Thonon-les-Bains, overlooking the Lake of Geneva, or as He watched from Serpentine Bridge in London the pearly chain of lights beneath the trees stretching as far as the eye could see? Memories of the sorrows, the poverty, the overhanging doom of His earlier years; memories of His mother who sold her gold buttons to provide Him, His brother and His sister with sustenance, and who was forced, in her darkest hours, to place a handful of dry flour in the palm of His hand to appease His hunger; of His own childhood when pursued and derided by a mob of ruffians in the streets of Ṭíhrán; of the damp and gloomy room, formerly a morgue, which He occupied in the barracks of ‘Akká and of His imprisonment in the dungeon of that city—**

memories such as these must surely have thronged His mind. Thoughts, too, must have visited Him of the Báb's captivity in the mountain fastnesses of Ádhirbáyján, when at nighttime He was refused even a lamp, and of His cruel and tragic execution when hundreds of bullets riddled His youthful breast. Above all His thoughts must have centered on Bahá'u'lláh, Whom He loved so passionately and Whose trials He had witnessed and had shared from His boyhood. The vermin-infested Síyáh-Chál of Tíhrán; the bastinado inflicted upon Him in Ámul; the humble fare which filled His kashkúl while He lived for two years the life of a dervish in the mountains of Kurdistán; the days in Baghdád when He did not even possess a change of linen, and when His followers subsisted on a handful of dates; His confinement behind the prison-walls of 'Akká, when for nine years even the sight of verdure was denied Him; and the public humiliation to which He was subjected at government headquarters in that city—pictures from the tragic past such as these must have many a time overpowered Him with feelings of mingled gratitude and sorrow, as He witnessed the many marks of respect, of esteem, and honor now shown Him and the Faith which He represented. *'O Bahá'u'lláh! What hast Thou done?'* He, as reported by the chronicler of His travels, was heard to exclaim one evening as He was being swiftly driven to fulfill His third engagement of the day in Washington, *'O Bahá'u'lláh! May my life be sacrificed for Thee! O Bahá'u'lláh! May my soul be offered up for Thy sake! How full were Thy days with trials and tribulations! How severe the ordeals Thou didst endure! How solid the foundation Thou hast finally laid, and how glorious the banner Thou didst hoist!'*"<sup>55</sup>

Read again the above passage and consider how the spiritual victories 'Abdu'l-Bahá won during His sojourn in the West are a testimony to the power of Bahá'u'lláh's Covenant. Below is some space for you to write down your thoughts.

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## SECTION 24

To complete our brief survey of the achievements of the Faith during 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry, let us now undertake a review of its systematic expansion and consolidation worldwide, in both the East and the West, under His guidance.

Even prior to the inauguration of His ministry, 'Abdu'l-Bahá's influence in His native land, which He had not seen during the long years of exile since His childhood, was notable. As early as 1875, responding to His Father's instruction, He had addressed a lengthy message to the rulers and people of Persia that was later published under the title *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. The message began with the following passage extolling the power of thought and

then set out the principles that should guide the shaping of Persian society or, in fact, any society:

**“In the Name of God the Clement, the Merciful. Praise and thanksgiving be unto Providence that out of all the realities in existence He has chosen the reality of man and has honored it with intellect and wisdom, the two most luminous lights in either world. Through the agency of this great endowment, He has in every epoch cast on the mirror of creation new and wonderful configurations. If we look objectively upon the world of being, it will become apparent that from age to age, the temple of existence has continually been embellished with a fresh grace, and distinguished with an ever-varying splendor, deriving from wisdom and the power of thought.”<sup>56</sup>**

This message foreshadowed the guidance that would later flow from the pen of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to His homeland. Following the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh, the Bahá’ís in Persia, who had received infinite bounties from the Manifestation of God, were now nurtured by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s wise and loving care. Through a stream of Tablets, some sent to the remotest villages in the country, He was able not only to stimulate the expansion of the Persian Bahá’í community but also to effect a profound transformation in its collective life. The number of the Faith’s adherents multiplied rapidly in every region of the country during His ministry, and the first systematic attempts were made to organize the teaching work undertaken by members of the Bahá’í community. It was also during this period that rudimentary consultative bodies were established—the forerunners of future Assemblies—enabling the community to take on the challenge of administering its own affairs.

Moreover, at a time when academic schools were not yet widespread in the country, and when the education given in existing religious institutions was defective, the earliest Bahá’í schools were established, some of which would eventually gain national renown. With the assistance of visiting Bahá’ís from both Europe and North America—nurses and physicians—clinics and other medical facilities would follow. In the span of three decades the Bahá’í community had been so strengthened that, despite prevalent misconceptions about the Faith, the nobility of character of its members was acknowledged by those from every segment of society.

It was not only through Tablets that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was able to encourage the development of the Persian Bahá’í community. The steady stream of believers who traveled to the Holy Land returned home galvanized by the vision of the Faith imparted to them by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. And as the community of followers in Persia became increasingly consolidated under His guidance, many began to arise to carry the message of the Faith to other parts of the world and to reinforce the efforts of their fellow believers in the few outposts already established.

In India and Burma to its east, the scope of Bahá’í activity gradually expanded as people from diverse religious backgrounds embraced the Faith. In one district in Burma, today’s Myanmar, a community of no less than eight hundred Bahá’ís maintained a school and a hospital, as well as land for community cultivation. In Japan, in China, and in Hawaii, Bahá’ís from both the East and the West traveled and settled to teach the Faith. In all of these places, the evidences of the guiding hand of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá could be seen. He Himself had expressed the desire to travel to China and is reported to have said:

**“China, China, China, China-ward the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh must march! Where is that holy, sanctified Bahá’í to become the teacher of China! China has most great capability. The Chinese people are most simplehearted and truth-seeking. The Bahá’í teacher of the Chinese people must first be imbued with their spirit, know their sacred literature, study their national customs and speak to them from their own standpoint, and their own terminologies. He must entertain no thought of his own, but ever think of their spiritual welfare. In China one can teach many souls and train and educate divine personages, each one of whom may become a bright candle of the world of humanity. Truly, I say they are free from any deceit and hypocrisies and are prompted with ideal motives.**

**“Had I been feeling well, I would have taken a journey to China myself!”<sup>57</sup>**

Meanwhile, the foundations of the Faith were systematically strengthened in centers scattered across Central Asia to the shores of the Mediterranean. In Iraq, steps were taken at ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s instruction to restore the House occupied by His Father in Baghdád, where a small community faced with constant opposition continued valiantly to administer its affairs. The first local community in Tunis, the capital of Tunisia, was firmly established. In Egypt a steady increase in the number of the adherents of the Faith was accompanied by a general expansion in its activities, including the translation into Arabic and the dissemination of some of the most important Writings of Bahá’u’lláh revealed in Persian. In the Caucasus, through the efforts of pilgrims traveling from Persia to the Holy Land, who would invariably teach the Faith along the way, small groups of Bahá’ís began to emerge, and they eventually developed into well-established communities. One of the most significant achievements of the period, however, was the erection of the first Mashriqu’l-Adhkár of the Bahá’í world in the city of ‘Ishqábád, located in the Russian province of Turkestan—a project undertaken by the thriving Bahá’í community there and fostered at every stage in its development by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá.

Likewise, the nascent communities in North America and Europe continued to be the recipients of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s constant encouragement and unerring guidance. Following His travels to the West, Bahá’í centers gradually multiplied, new periodicals were published, translations of the Writings were printed and circulated in English, French, and German, and initial attempts to organize the affairs and consolidate the foundations of the communities were undertaken. By the close of His ministry, the excavations for the Mother Temple of the West had been carried out and a contract placed for beginning its construction.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s tireless efforts for the promotion of His Father’s Faith worldwide culminated towards the close of His life in the revelation of the Tablets of the Divine Plan. In these Tablets He traced a broad outline for the systematic propagation of the Faith and charged the small body of believers in Canada and the United States with the task of ensuring that the Divine message would reach the remotest corners on earth. Among the first to respond to His call were Hyde and Clara Dunn, who promptly forsook their home in California and settled as pioneers in Australia, opening that continent to the Faith. Designated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá “herald of the Kingdom” and “harbinger of the Covenant”, Martha Root embarked in 1919 in response to His summons on the first of her historic journeys, which were to extend over a period of twenty years and to carry her several times around the globe. Not long after her departure, Leonora Holsapple Armstrong, the first pioneer to Latin America, set out from her native state of New York and settled in Brazil. It was to such souls and those who would follow in their footsteps that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá referred in the Tablets of the Divine Plan as “sanctified from



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## SECTION 25

In the last four sections, we have undertaken a brief review of some of the accomplishments associated with the twenty-nine-year ministry of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. No doubt you know that His ministry came to a close on 28 November 1921 when, at the age of 77, after a brief illness, His spirit was freed from this earthly existence. The account of His passing given by the Guardian in *God Passes By* is often read when Bahá’ís commemorate His ascension in the early morning hours of 28 November. We are reminded on that occasion how ‘Abdu’l-Bahá continued to dedicate His energies to the promotion of His Father’s Cause until the very end of His life. On the Friday before His passing, the Guardian tells us, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá attended to a number of His usual duties in Haifa. The next day He felt feverish and was unable to leave the house on Sunday to take part in a feast offered by one of the pilgrims. At 1:15 a.m. that night He arose,

**“and, walking to a table in His room, drank some water, and returned to bed. Later on, He asked one of His two daughters who had remained awake to care for Him, to lift up the net curtains, complaining that He had difficulty in breathing. Some rose water was brought to Him, of which He drank, after which He again lay down, and when offered food, distinctly remarked: ‘You wish Me to take some food, and I am going?’ A minute later His spirit had winged its flight to its eternal abode, to be gathered, at long last, to the glory of His beloved Father, and taste the joy of everlasting reunion with Him.”<sup>58</sup>**

Shoghi Effendi then describes for us in some detail the events that followed as news of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s sudden and unexpected passing spread throughout the city and across the globe. No less than ten thousand people assembled on Tuesday morning for the funeral procession—among them Muslims, Jews, Christians, and Druzes; Egyptians, Greeks, Turks, Arabs, and Kurds; Europeans and Americans; men, women, and children; government officials, diplomats, and notables of various kinds. Together, in a sign of admiration and respect, they made their way behind the coffin containing the remains of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as it was carried on the shoulders of His loved ones up the slopes of Mount Carmel to the mausoleum of the Báb. Following a simple ceremony close to the eastern entrance of the Shrine, the coffin was taken to one of its chambers, where it was lowered into its resting place.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s great work was now ended. Having accepted to live the life of an exile with His Father from the tender age of nine, He had laid the foundations of a worldwide Bahá’í community over the course of His ministry and had set in motion so many of the processes that we continue to pursue today. Perhaps no passage better sums up the achievements of that ministry than the following excerpt from *God Passes By*:

**“Through Him the Covenant, that ‘*excellent and priceless Heritage*’ bequeathed by the Author of the Bahá’í Revelation, had been proclaimed, championed and vindicated. Through the power which that Divine Instrument had conferred upon Him the light of God’s infant Faith had penetrated the West, had diffused itself as far as the Islands of the Pacific, and illumined the fringes of the Australian continent. Through His personal intervention the Message, Whose Bearer had tasted the bitterness of a lifelong captivity, had been noised abroad, and its character and purpose disclosed, for the first time in its history, before enthusiastic and representative audiences in the chief cities of Europe and of the North American continent. Through His unrelaxing vigilance the holy remains of the Báb, brought forth at long last from their fifty-year concealment, had been safely transported to the Holy Land and permanently and befittingly enshrined in the very spot which Bahá’u’lláh Himself had designated for them and had blessed with His presence. Through His bold initiative the first Mashriqu’l-Adhkár of the Bahá’í world had been reared in Central Asia, in Russian Turkistán, whilst through His unflinching encouragement a similar enterprise, of still vaster proportions, had been undertaken, and its land dedicated by Himself in the heart of the North American continent. Through the sustaining grace overshadowing Him since the inception of His ministry His royal adversary had been humbled to the dust, the arch-breaker of His Father’s Covenant had been utterly routed, and the danger which, ever since Bahá’u’lláh had been banished to Turkish soil, had been threatening the heart of the Faith, definitely removed. In pursuance of His instructions, and in conformity with the principles enunciated and the laws ordained by His Father, the rudimentary institutions, heralding the formal inauguration of the Administrative Order to be founded after His passing, had taken shape and been established. Through His unremitting labors, as reflected in the treatises He composed, the thousands of Tablets He revealed, the discourses He delivered, the prayers, poems and commentaries He left to posterity, mostly in Persian, some in Arabic and a few in Turkish, the laws and principles, constituting the warp and woof of His Father’s Revelation, had been elucidated, its fundamentals restated and interpreted, its tenets given detailed application and the validity and indispensability of its verities fully and publicly demonstrated. Through the warnings He sounded, an unheeding humanity, steeped in materialism and forgetful of its God, had been apprized of the perils threatening to disrupt its ordered life, and made, in consequence of its persistent perversity, to sustain the initial shocks of that world upheaval which continues, until the present day, to rock the foundations of human society. And lastly, through the mandate He had issued to a valiant community, the concerted achievements of whose members had shed so great a luster on the annals of His own ministry, He had set in motion a Plan which, soon after its formal inauguration, achieved the opening of the Australian continent, which, in a later period, was to be instrumental in winning over the heart of a royal convert to His Father’s Cause, and which, today, through the irresistible unfoldment of its potentialities, is so marvelously quickening the spiritual life of all the Republics of Latin America as to constitute a befitting conclusion to the records of an entire century.”<sup>59</sup>**

It is suggested that you complete the following sentences on the basis of the above passage:

- a. Through ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the Covenant, the “excellent and priceless Heritage” given to us by Bahá’u’lláh had been \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- b. Through the power that the Covenant had conferred on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the light of the Faith had \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- c. Through ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s intervention, Bahá’u’lláh’s message had been \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, and its character and purpose had been \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- d. Through ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s unrelaxing vigilance, the holy remains of the Báb, brought forth at long last from their fifty-year concealment, had been \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- e. Through ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s bold initiative, the first Mashriqu’l-Adhkár of the Bahá’í world had been \_\_\_\_\_ .
- f. Through ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s unfailing encouragement, a project to construct the first Mashriqu’l-Adhkár in North America had been \_\_\_\_\_ .
- g. Through the sustaining grace overshadowing ‘Abdu’l-Bahá since the inception of His ministry, His royal adversary, the Sulţán of the Ottoman Empire, had been \_\_\_\_\_ , the arch-breaker of the Covenant, Muḥammad-‘Alí, had been \_\_\_\_\_ and the danger which, since Bahá’u’lláh’s banishment to Turkish soil, had been threatening the heart of the Faith had been \_\_\_\_\_ .
- h. In pursuance of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s instructions, and in conformity with the principles enunciated and the laws ordained by His Father, the rudimentary institutions of the Faith had \_\_\_\_\_ .

- i. Through ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s unremitting labors, the laws and principles of His Father’s Revelation had been \_\_\_\_\_, its fundamentals \_\_\_\_\_, its tenets \_\_\_\_\_, and the validity and indispensability of its verities \_\_\_\_\_.
- j. Through the warnings ‘Abdu’l-Bahá sounded, an unheeding humanity had been \_\_\_\_\_ and made, \_\_\_\_\_.
- k. Through the mandate ‘Abdu’l-Bahá issued to a valiant community, He had set in motion a Plan which, by the time the Guardian had written this passage towards the end of the first century of the Bahá’í Era, had achieved \_\_\_\_\_, was instrumental in \_\_\_\_\_ and was so marvelously \_\_\_\_\_.

Our purpose in undertaking a survey of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ministry over the preceding sections was not so much to increase our knowledge of the history of the Faith as to help us gain a more profound appreciation of the power of the Covenant. You may wish to reflect for a moment on how the study of these sections has deepened your understanding of this power—a power which, capable of overcoming all obstacles, propels the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh from strength to strength.

## SECTION 26

We will now turn our attention to the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Before we do so, let us read the following passage from the Guardian, in which he describes the significance of that document in the context of the historical development of the Faith:

**“With ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ascension, and more particularly with the passing of His well-beloved and illustrious sister the Most Exalted Leaf—the last survivor of a glorious and heroic age—there draws to a close the first and most moving chapter of Bahá’í history, marking the conclusion of the Primitive, the Apostolic Age of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. It was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Who, through the provisions of His weighty Will and Testament, has forged the vital link which must forever connect**

**the age that has just expired with the one we now live in—the Transitional and Formative period of the Faith—a stage that must in the fullness of time reach its blossom and yield its fruit in the exploits and triumphs that are to herald the Golden Age of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh.”<sup>60</sup>**

The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá consists of three parts. Although these three sections are undated, it is reasonable to assume, on the basis of events to which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes reference in the document, that the first part was revealed around 1905 and the second and third sometime around 1907. You will remember it was during this period that, as a result of the intrigues of Muḥammad-‘Alí and his companions, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had fallen under suspicion by the authorities and two commissions had been sent to investigate Him, one in 1904 and another in 1907.

In the foreword to *God Passes By*, Shoghi Effendi refers to the Will and Testament as the “Charter of Bahá'u'lláh's New World Order, the offspring resulting from the mystic intercourse between Him Who is the Source of the Law of God and the mind of the One Who is the vehicle and interpreter of that Law.”<sup>61</sup> Later in that volume, in discussing the rise and establishment of the Administrative Order, he writes: “The Charter which called into being, outlined the features and set in motion the processes of, this Administrative Order is none other than the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, His greatest legacy to posterity, the brightest emanation of His mind and the mightiest instrument forged to insure the continuity of the three ages which constitute the component parts of His Father’s Dispensation.”<sup>62</sup> And, in a letter dated 27 February 1929, he explains further that the Will and Testament, together with the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, “constitutes the chief depository wherein are enshrined those priceless elements of that Divine Civilization, the establishment of which is the primary mission of the Bahá’í Faith.”<sup>63</sup>

In the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, then, are to be found not only those elements that are indispensable to building the world civilization envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh but also those that bind the individual’s heart to His Covenant. In this light, you are encouraged to gain an overview of the content of the document by reading through the paragraph below from *God Passes By* and completing the exercises that follow.

**“The Document establishing that Order, the Charter of a future world civilization, which may be regarded in some of its features as supplementary to no less weighty a Book than the Kitáb-i-Aqdas; signed and sealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá; entirely written with His own hand; its first section composed during one of the darkest periods of His incarceration in the prison-fortress of ‘Akká, proclaims, categorically and unequivocally, the fundamental beliefs of the followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh; reveals, in unmistakable language, the twofold character of the Mission of the Báb; discloses the full station of the Author of the Bahá’í Revelation; asserts that ‘all others are servants unto Him and do His bidding’; stresses the importance of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas; establishes the institution of the Guardianship as a hereditary office and outlines its essential functions; provides the measures for the election of the International House of Justice, defines its scope and sets forth its relationship to that Institution; prescribes the obligations, and emphasizes the responsibilities, of the Hands of the Cause of God; and extols the virtues of the indestructible Covenant established by Bahá'u'lláh. That Document, furthermore, lauds the courage and constancy of the supporters of Bahá'u'lláh’s Covenant; expatiates on the sufferings endured by its appointed**

Center; recalls the infamous conduct of Mírzá Yahyá and his failure to heed the warnings of the Báb; exposes, in a series of indictments, the perfidy and rebellion of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí, and the complicity of his son Shu‘á‘u’lláh and of his brother Mírzá Badí‘u’lláh; reaffirms their excommunication, and predicts the frustration of all their hopes; summons the Afnán (the Báb’s kindred), the Hands of the Cause and the entire company of the followers of Bahá’u’lláh to arise unitedly to propagate His Faith, to disperse far and wide, to labor tirelessly and to follow the heroic example of the Apostles of Jesus Christ; warns them against the dangers of association with the Covenant-breakers, and bids them shield the Cause from the assaults of the insincere and the hypocrite; and counsels them to demonstrate by their conduct the universality of the Faith they have espoused, and vindicate its high principles. In that same Document its Author reveals the significance and purpose of the Ḥuqúqu’lláh (Right of God), already instituted in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas; enjoins submission and fidelity towards all monarchs who are just; expresses His longing for martyrdom, and voices His prayers for the repentance as well as the forgiveness of His enemies.”<sup>64</sup>

1. The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- proclaims \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- reveals \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- discloses \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- asserts \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- stresses \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- establishes \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- outlines \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- provides \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- defines \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- sets forth \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- prescribes \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- emphasizes \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- extols \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Furthermore, the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- lauds \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- expatiates \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- recalls \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- exposes \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- reaffirms \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- predicts \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- summons \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- warns \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- bids \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- counsels \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. In His Will and Testament, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá

- reveals \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- enjoins \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- expresses \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- voices \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The three statements of Shoghi Effendi quoted in the beginning of the section merit a great deal of reflection. The first explains that the Will and Testament is the “Charter of Bahá’u’lláh’s New World Order, the offspring resulting from the mystic intercourse between Him Who is the Source of the Law of God and the mind of the One Who is the vehicle and interpreter of that Law”. In the second, we read that the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “His greatest legacy to prosperity” and “the brightest emanation of His mind”, outlines “the features” and sets in motion “the processes” of the Administrative Order. And the third tells us that His Will and Testament constitutes, together with the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, “the chief depository wherein are enshrined those priceless elements of that Divine Civilization, the establishment of which is the primary mission of the Bahá’í Faith”. These statements are profound in meaning; your understanding of their implications will deepen as we move through the remaining sections of this unit and will advance even further as you study the second and third units.

## SECTION 27

As already mentioned in this unit, the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá will surely be the object of your reflection over the course of your life. You will study it on many occasions, each time gaining further insight into its profound implications for the progress of the Cause and the realization of the oneness of humanity. We will not read the Will and Testament in its entirety here, though we will reflect on many of its passages in full as we seek to broaden our understanding of the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh.

In the context of safeguarding the unity of the Bahá’í community, we discussed earlier the concept of a center to which all must turn. The Will and Testament ensures that the Bahá’í world would have such a center after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for the remainder of Bahá’u’lláh’s Dispensation. Shoghi Effendi tells us that Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá have “in unequivocal and emphatic language, appointed those twin institutions of the [Universal] House of Justice and of the Guardianship as their chosen Successors, destined to apply the principles, promulgate the laws, protect the institutions, adapt loyally and intelligently the Faith to the requirements of progressive society, and consummate the incorruptible inheritance which the Founders of the Faith have bequeathed to the world.”<sup>65</sup> In this and the next several sections we will study extracts from the Will and Testament regarding the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice and will see how these two institutions perpetuate Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant with His followers.

The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá formally establishes the institution of the Guardianship. It explicitly names Shoghi Effendi the Guardian, allows for the possibility of other Guardians succeeding him, and sets out in clear terms the conditions according to which such a successor would have to be named. Let us begin by reading the paragraph below.

**“O my loving friends! After the passing away of this wronged one, it is incumbent upon the Aghṣán (Branches), the Afnán (Twigs) of the Sacred Lote-Tree, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God and the loved ones of the Abhá Beauty to turn unto Shoghi Effendi—the youthful branch branched from the two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees and the fruit grown from the union of the two offshoots of the Tree of Holiness,—as he is the sign of God, the chosen branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, he unto whom all the Aghṣán, the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause of God and His loved ones must turn. He is the expounder of the words of God and after him will succeed the firstborn of his lineal descendants.”<sup>66</sup>**

We should analyze with great care this passage, which is central to Bahá’í belief. In the Bahá’í Writings the phrase “the Sacred Lote-Tree” symbolizes the Manifestation of God. The paragraph speaks of “two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees”, that is, the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. You already know that the term “aghṣán”, the plural form of “ghuṣn” in Arabic, means branches. It is employed here and in other instances in the Will and Testament, as in the Writings of Bahá’u’lláh, to refer to His male descendants. The word “afnán”, you also know, is used to indicate the relatives of the Báb.

The passage refers to Shoghi Effendi as the “chosen branch” and states that he has “branched from the two hallowed and sacred Lote-Trees” and is the “fruit grown from the union of the two offshoots of the Tree of Holiness”. Shoghi Effendi’s mother was the daughter of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, making him a direct male descendant of Bahá’u’lláh, while his father was a grandson of a cousin of the Báb’s mother and therefore an Afnán.

In this passage, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is calling upon the descendants of Bahá’u’lláh, the family of the Báb, the Hands of the Cause of God, and the generality of the believers to turn after His passing to Shoghi Effendi. Clearly, then, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was naming Shoghi Effendi as that center which we have said is so essential for the unity of the Cause. He also indicates unmistakably that Shoghi Effendi is the expounder, the interpreter, of the Word of God and addresses the question of his successor. We will reserve our study of this last point for the next section, where we will analyze the above statement in conjunction with other relevant passages from the Will and Testament.

With the above ideas in mind, you are encouraged to reread the passage a number of times. After you have done so, it is suggested that you study the two opening paragraphs from the Will and Testament quoted here, in which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá extols the Covenant and speaks of Shoghi Effendi in the most exalted terms.

**“All-praise to Him Who, by the Shield of His Covenant, hath guarded the Temple of His Cause from the darts of doubtfulness, Who by the Hosts of His Testament hath preserved the Sanctuary of His most Beneficent Law and protected His Straight and Luminous Path, staying thereby the onslaught of the company of Covenant-breakers, that have threatened to subvert His Divine Edifice; Who hath watched over His Mighty Stronghold and All-Glorious Faith, through the aid of men whom the slander of the slanderer affect not, whom no earthly calling,**

glory and power can turn aside from the Covenant of God and His Testament, established firmly by His clear and manifest words, writ and revealed by His All-Glorious Pen and recorded in the Preserved Tablet.

**“Salutation and praise, blessing and glory rest upon that primal branch of the Divine and Sacred Lote-Tree, grown out, blest, tender, verdant and flourishing from the Twin Holy Trees; the most wondrous, unique and priceless pearl that doth gleam from out the Twin surging seas; upon the offshoots of the Tree of Holiness, the twigs of the Celestial Tree, they that in the Day of the Great Dividing have stood fast and firm in the Covenant; upon the Hands (pillars) of the Cause of God that have diffused widely the Divine Fragrances, declared His Proofs, proclaimed His Faith, published abroad His Law, detached themselves from all things but Him, stood for righteousness in this world, and kindled the Fire of the Love of God in the very hearts and souls of His servants; upon them that have believed, rested assured, stood steadfast in His Covenant and followed the Light that after my passing shineth from the Dayspring of Divine Guidance—for behold! he is the blest and sacred bough that hath branched out from the Twin Holy Trees. Well is it with him that seeketh the shelter of his shade that shadoweth all mankind.”<sup>67</sup>**

The exercises below will help you reflect on the bounty God has bestowed on us in the person of Shoghi Effendi.

- a. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá begins His Will and Testament by expressing praise to Bahá’u’lláh for having guarded the Temple of His Cause from the darts of doubtfulness by \_\_\_\_\_ .
- b. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá expresses praise to Bahá’u’lláh for having preserved the Sanctuary of His most Beneficent Law and protected His Straight and Luminous Path by \_\_\_\_\_ , staying thereby the onslaught of the company of Covenant-breakers, that have threatened to subvert His Divine Edifice.
- c. He offers praise to Bahá’u’lláh for having watched over His Mighty Stronghold and All-Glorious Faith, through the aid of men whom \_\_\_\_\_ , whom \_\_\_\_\_ from the Covenant of God and His Testament.
- d. He concludes the opening paragraph by acknowledging that the Testament of Bahá’u’lláh was established firmly by His clear and manifest words, \_\_\_\_\_ .
- e. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá then extols the person of Shoghi Effendi, stating that he has \_\_\_\_\_ from the Twin Holy Trees.

- f. He further praises Shoghi Effendi, referring to him as \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ that does gleam from out the Twin  
 surging seas.
- g. Having asked for blessings to rest upon the descendants of Bahá'u'lláh and  
 relatives of the Báb that have stood fast and firm in the Covenant, upon the Hands  
 of the Cause of God, and upon the believers who have stood steadfast in  
 the Covenant, 'Abdu'l-Bahá again extolls Shoghi Effendi, referring to him as that  
 \_\_\_\_\_ that has branched out from the  
 Twin Holy Trees.
- h. Still referring to Shoghi Effendi, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that well is it with those who  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ .

## SECTION 28

In the last section, we read the statement from the Will and Testament that names Shoghi Effendi the Guardian of the Cause and the authorized Interpreter of the Word of God. The Will and Testament then states that “after him will succeed the firstborn of his lineal descendants”. The question of succession is elaborated further in the Will as follows:

**“O ye beloved of the Lord! It is incumbent upon the Guardian of the Cause of God to appoint in his own lifetime him that shall become his successor, that differences may not arise after his passing. He that is appointed must manifest in himself detachment from all worldly things, must be the essence of purity, must show in himself the fear of God, knowledge, wisdom and learning. Thus, should the firstborn of the Guardian of the Cause of God not manifest in himself the truth of the words:—‘The child is the secret essence of its sire,’ that is, should he not inherit of the spiritual within him (the Guardian of the Cause of God) and his glorious lineage not be matched with a goodly character, then must he (the Guardian of the Cause of God) choose another branch to succeed him.**

**“The Hands of the Cause of God must elect from their own number nine persons that shall at all times be occupied in the important services in the work of the Guardian of the Cause of God. The election of these nine must be carried either unanimously or by majority from the company of the Hands of the Cause of God and these, whether unanimously or by a majority vote, must give their assent to the choice of the one whom the Guardian of the Cause of God hath chosen as his successor. This assent must be given in such wise as the assenting and dissenting voices may not be distinguished (i.e., secret ballot).”<sup>68</sup>**

The above two paragraphs set out the provisions for the appointment of a successor to Shoghi Effendi. Answer the following questions:

- a. Who is to appoint the successor to the Guardian? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b. Why is it stipulated that the Guardian himself is to appoint his successor? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. Do the above paragraphs make it possible for anyone other than Shoghi Effendi to appoint his successor? \_\_\_\_\_
- d. What qualities must the appointed successor to Shoghi Effendi manifest? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e. If the firstborn of Shoghi Effendi does not manifest in himself the truth of the words “the child is the secret essence of its sire,” that is, if he does not inherit of “the spiritual within him (the Guardian of the Cause of God)” and his glorious lineage is not matched with “a goodly character”, then who can the Guardian name his successor?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- f. Do the above paragraphs make it possible for Shoghi Effendi to choose a successor outside the lineal descendants of Bahá’u’lláh? \_\_\_\_\_
- g. After Shoghi Effendi has named his successor, who must give assent to the choice of the one that he has chosen? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- h. How is the assent of the nine Hands of the Cause of God elected from among all the Hands to be given? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

You probably know that Shoghi Effendi did not have any children, and during his lifetime all the surviving *Aghsán* had broken the Covenant, making it impossible for him to fulfill the provisions set out by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Testament to appoint a successor. The Institution of the Guardianship, then, involves only one Guardian. Through the foundations he laid and the enormous body of writings he left behind—a testimony to the extraordinary capacity with which he was endowed—the institution will continue to exert its influence on the progress of the Faith as it continues to evolve through successive stages under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. In this light, you may wish to reflect on the following passage from a Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, which introduces the next subject of our discussion, the Universal House of Justice:

**“The Báb, the Exalted One, is the Morn of Truth, the splendor of Whose light shineth through all regions. He is also the Harbinger of the Most Great Light, the Abhá Luminary. The Blessed Beauty is the One promised by the sacred books of the past, the revelation of the Source of light that shone upon Mount Sinai, Whose fire glowed in the midst of the Burning Bush. We are, one and all, servants of Their threshold, and stand each as a lowly keeper at Their door.**

**“My purpose is this, that ere the expiration of a thousand years, no one has the right to utter a single word, even to claim the station of Guardianship. The Most Holy Book is the Book to which all peoples shall refer, and in it the Laws of God have been revealed. Laws not mentioned in the Book should be referred to the decision of the Universal House of Justice.”<sup>69</sup>**

## **SECTION 29**

Now let us read the next paragraph of the Will and Testament in which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers largely to the Guardian but in which He also makes several essential statements about the Universal House of Justice:

**“The sacred and youthful branch, the Guardian of the Cause of God, as well as the Universal House of Justice, to be universally elected and established, are both under the care and protection of the Abhá Beauty, under the shelter and unerring guidance of the Exalted One (may my life be offered up for them both). Whatsoever they decide is of God. Whoso obeyeth him not, neither obeyeth them, hath not obeyed God; whoso rebelleth against him and against them hath rebelled against God; whoso opposeth him hath opposed God; whoso contendeth with them hath contended with God; whoso disputeth with him hath disputed with God; whoso denieth him hath denied God; whoso disbelieveth in him hath disbelieved in God; whoso deviateth, separateth himself and turneth aside from him hath in truth deviated, separated himself and turned aside from God. May the wrath, the fierce indignation, the vengeance of God rest upon him! The mighty stronghold shall remain impregnable and safe through obedience to him who is the Guardian of the Cause of God. It is incumbent upon the members of the House of Justice, upon all the Aghṣán, the Afnán, the Hands of the Cause of God to show their obedience, submissiveness and subordination unto the Guardian of the Cause of God, to turn unto him and be lowly before him. He that opposeth him hath opposed the True One, will make a breach in the Cause of God, will subvert His Word and will become a manifestation of the Center of Sedition. Beware, beware, lest the days after the ascension (of Bahá’u’lláh) be repeated when the Center of Sedition waxed haughty and rebellious and with Divine Unity for his excuse deprived himself and perturbed and poisoned others. No doubt every vainglorious one that purposeth dissension and discord will not openly declare his evil purposes, nay rather, even as impure gold, will he seize upon divers measures and various pretexts that he may separate the gathering of the people of Bahá. My object is to show that the Hands of the Cause of God must be ever watchful and so soon as they find anyone beginning to oppose and protest against the Guardian of the Cause of God, cast him out from the congregation of the people of Bahá and in no wise accept any excuse from him. How often hath grievous error**

been disguised in the garb of truth, that it might sow the seeds of doubt in the hearts of men!”<sup>70</sup>

A similar passage, quoted below, is found later in that document:

**“O ye the faithful loved ones of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá! It is incumbent upon you to take the greatest care of Shoghi Effendi, the twig that hath branched from and the fruit given forth by the two hallowed and Divine Lote-Trees, that no dust of despondency and sorrow may stain his radiant nature, that day by day he may wax greater in happiness, in joy and spirituality, and may grow to become even as a fruitful tree.**

**“For he is, after ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Guardian of the Cause of God, the Afnán, the Hands (pillars) of the Cause and the beloved of the Lord must obey him and turn unto him. He that obeyeth him not, hath not obeyed God; he that turneth away from him, hath turned away from God and he that denieth him, hath denied the True One. Beware lest anyone falsely interpret these words, and like unto them that have broken the Covenant after the Day of Ascension (of Bahá’u’lláh) advance a pretext, raise the standard of revolt, wax stubborn and open wide the door of false interpretation. To none is given the right to put forth his own opinion or express his particular conviction. All must seek guidance and turn unto the Center of the Cause and the House of Justice. And he that turneth unto whatsoever else is indeed in grievous error.”<sup>71</sup>**

To gain a better understanding of the station of the Guardian of the Cause of God, complete the following sentences in light of the two quotations above:

- a. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that the sacred and youthful branch, \_\_\_\_\_, as well as \_\_\_\_\_, to be universally \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, are \_\_\_\_\_ under the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of the Abhá Beauty, Bahá’u’lláh.
- b. The Guardian and the Universal House of Justice are \_\_\_\_\_ under the shelter and \_\_\_\_\_ of the Exalted One, the Báb.
- c. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá assures us that the mighty stronghold of the Cause will remain impregnable and safe through \_\_\_\_\_.

In the above passages, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes several emphatic statements about the Guardian to impress upon the friends the absolute necessity of obedience to him. The act of writing down a few of these in the space provided—for example, the statement that whoever rebels against the Guardian has rebelled against God—will help to crystallize this idea in your mind.



**“No doubt every vainglorious one that purposeth dissension and discord will not openly declare his evil purposes, nay rather, even as impure gold, will he seize upon divers measures and various pretexts that he may separate the gathering of the people of Bahá.”<sup>72</sup>**

## **SECTION 30**

Now let us turn to passages in the Will and Testament that refer to the Universal House of Justice. You know, of course, that Bahá'u'lláh Himself ordained the institution of the Universal House of Justice in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá confirms its authority in His Will and Testament and provides specific details regarding its election and functions:

**“And now, concerning the House of Justice which God hath ordained as the source of all good and freed from all error, it must be elected by universal suffrage, that is, by the believers. Its members must be manifestations of the fear of God and daysprings of knowledge and understanding, must be steadfast in God’s faith and the well-wishers of all mankind. By this House is meant the Universal House of Justice, that is, in all countries a secondary House of Justice must be instituted, and these secondary Houses of Justice must elect the members of the Universal one. Unto this body all things must be referred. It enacteth all ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the explicit Holy Text. By this body all the difficult problems are to be resolved and the Guardian of the Cause of God is its sacred head and the distinguished member for life of that body.”<sup>73</sup>**

The above passage treats several subjects that will be addressed over the next few sections. We will discuss in this section the method outlined by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá for the election of the Universal House of Justice. In subsequent sections we will consider its sphere of action and will then reflect on the nature of the authority conferred on it. This will be followed by a discussion of the provisions made in the Will and Testament to safeguard the unity of the Faith and ensure its steady advancement into the future, whatever circumstances confronted it, by naming Shoghi Effendi the Guardian and by confirming the authority of the Universal House of Justice.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that the Universal House of Justice is to be elected by “universal suffrage”. This is achieved through a three-stage process. While certain features of this process may change over time according to the decision of the House of Justice, it presently unfolds in the following way.

In every national Bahá’í community, all Bahá’ís in good standing eighteen years of age or older are eligible to take part in a unit convention held annually in the area where they reside. At the unit convention, they vote by secret ballot for one or more delegates from among those who are twenty-one years of age or older in their geographic unit. The number of delegates assigned to the various electoral units is in proportion to the number of Bahá’ís resident in each one.

The delegates thus elected gather, ordinarily, during the Riḍván period to elect, from among the Bahá’ís of the country twenty-one years of age or older, nine persons to serve on the National Spiritual Assembly presently for the term of one administrative year. This annual

meeting is called the National Convention. In every country provisions are in place for the collection of the ballots of any delegates who are unable to attend the annual meeting in person. Beyond the election itself, the National Convention provides an opportunity for consultations to take place among the delegates, consultations which will inform the work of the National Assembly over the coming year. A National Spiritual Assembly is, of course, a “secondary House of Justice” referred to in the passage above. “Spiritual Assembly”, whether Local or National, is a temporary appellation which, Shoghi Effendi has indicated, “will gradually be superseded by the permanent and more appropriate designation of House of Justice” as the “position and aims of the Bahá’í Faith are better understood and more fully recognized”.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, the process culminates in the election, by the members of all National Spiritual Assemblies, of nine men from the Bahá’í community to serve on the Universal House of Justice. The election is conducted once every five years during the Ridván period. Of several days’ duration, the International Bahá’í Convention is held at the Administrative and Spiritual Center of the Faith, where the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies are able to visit the Holy Shrines in preparation for the sacred duty they are called upon to discharge. In approaching this responsibility, they are sheltered in the impregnable stronghold of the Cause, which is protected by the unifying power of the Covenant. Foremost in their minds as they cast their ballots are surely passages like the one above, in which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá describes the qualities of those who are to serve on such an august body referring to them as the “manifestations of the fear of God” and as “daysprings of knowledge and understanding”, as “steadfast in God’s faith” and as the “well-wishers of all mankind”. Provisions are, of course, made for National Assembly members who, unable to travel to the Holy Land, must cast their ballots in absentia.

That the membership of the Universal House of Justice, as noted above, is confined to men may well be surprising. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has stated in the plainest terms that this provision was ordained by Bahá’u’lláh Himself and that its wisdom would “erelong be made manifest as clearly as the sun at high noon.”<sup>75</sup> Therefore, it is not possible for us to know at the present time the reason for such a stipulation. What we can say with certainty is that, given the unequivocal statements in the Writings establishing the equality between men and women, this restriction can in no way be regarded as a sign of the superiority of men over women.

With this brief description of the electoral process in mind, think about the fact that, having reached a certain age, each one of us becomes an active participant in this sacred process through our involvement in the unit convention. How should we approach our participation in the convention? What kind of thoughts should pervade our hearts and minds when we cast our ballots for those who will serve as delegates to the National Convention? You may wish to discuss these questions in your group.

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## SECTION 31

The passage we read in the last section, in addition to describing the method for the election of the Universal House of Justice, refers to its functions:

**“Unto this body all things must be referred. It enacteth all ordinances and regulations that are not to be found in the explicit Holy Text. By this body all the difficult problems are to be resolved . . .”<sup>76</sup>**

Before examining other statements from the Will and Testament that make reference to the functions of the Universal House of Justice, we should study a few passages from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh. What is important to recognize at the outset is that the powers and duties of the Universal House of Justice are rooted in the revealed Word of Bahá'u'lláh; He entrusts the affairs of humanity into the hands of the members of the Universal House of Justice, referring to them as the Trustees of God and the daysprings of authority:

**“This passage, now written by the Pen of Glory, is accounted as part of the Most Holy Book: The men of God’s House of Justice have been charged with the affairs of the people. They, in truth, are the Trustees of God among His servants and the daysprings of authority in His countries.**

**“O people of God! That which traineth the world is Justice, for it is upheld by two pillars, reward and punishment. These two pillars are the sources of life to the world. Inasmuch as for each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution, such affairs should be referred to the House of Justice that the members thereof 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. All matters of State should be referred to the House of Justice, but acts of worship must be observed according to that which God hath revealed in His Book.”<sup>77</sup>**

In another passage Bahá'u'lláh calls upon the members of the Universal House of Justice to protect and safeguard the people of the world and to promote their best interests:

**“We exhort the men of the House of Justice and command them to ensure the protection and safeguarding of men, women and children. It is incumbent upon them to have the utmost regard for the interests of the people at all times and under all conditions.”<sup>78</sup>**

And He further explains:

**“It is incumbent upon the Trustees of the House of Justice to take counsel together regarding those things which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book, and to enforce that which is agreeable to them. God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth, and He, verily, is the Provider, the Omniscient.”<sup>79</sup>**

These and other passages disclose to us a vision of the grandeur of the Universal House of Justice and the immensity of its ordained sphere of action. The statements of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Will and Testament broaden this vision and provide insight into the mode of operation of the institution:

**“Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself.”<sup>80</sup>**

And He further states:

**“It is incumbent upon these members (of the Universal House of Justice) to gather in a certain place and deliberate upon all problems which have caused difference, questions that are obscure and matters that are not expressly recorded in the Book. Whatsoever they decide has the same effect as the Text itself. And inasmuch as this House of Justice hath power to enact laws that are not expressly recorded in the Book and bear upon daily transactions, so also it hath power to repeal the same. Thus for example, the House of Justice enacteth today a certain law and enforceth it, and a hundred years hence, circumstances having profoundly changed and the conditions having altered, another House of Justice will then have power, according to the exigencies of the time, to alter that law. This it can do because that law formeth no part of the Divine Explicit Text. The House of Justice is both the initiator and the abrogator of its own laws.”<sup>81</sup>**

Clearly this small selection of quotations does not touch on all the functions of the Universal House of Justice, and we will review its powers and duties in more detail in our study of the third unit of this book. Here you may wish to reread the above passages and identify statements from which the following powers have been derived. Write them in the space provided.

– To enact laws and ordinances not expressly recorded in the Sacred Texts: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

– To abrogate, according to the changes and requirements of the time, its own enactments: \_\_\_\_\_

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- To deliberate and decide upon all problems which have caused differences: \_\_\_\_\_  
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 \_\_\_\_\_  
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  - To elucidate questions that are obscure: \_\_\_\_\_  
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  - To provide for the enforcement of its decisions: \_\_\_\_\_  
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 \_\_\_\_\_

## SECTION 32

Even from this brief study of passages referring to the Universal House of Justice, it must be apparent to you that its existence is a feature unique to the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh. We have seen that it is invested with the authority to decide on all matters not expressly recorded in the Sacred Texts, to elucidate questions that are obscure, and to settle all disputes. It is, the passages make clear, the final arbiter. The implications of the existence of the Universal House of Justice for the perpetuation of the Covenant, particularly as it pertains to the statement “the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant”, are vast. Let us gain some insights into some of these implications.

We know that all the religions of the past have suffered from internal divisions that gave rise to sects. We have already seen how the question of succession was often a cause for confusion among the believers. Invariably other kinds of difficulties, related to the lack of a clear line of succession, confronted every religion. Over the course of time, as society developed and circumstances changed, questions arose about matters not expressly recorded in the Holy Scriptures, about laws that were not specified, and about the application of various aspects of the teachings to individual and collective life. In the absence of an indisputably authoritative source of guidance to which the followers could turn for answers to these questions, profound disagreements emerged and the religion began to break into sects as conflicting views could not be reconciled.

Never can such schisms tear the fabric of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, for its integrity is preserved and its unity safeguarded through the existence of the Universal House of Justice. In the following Tablet, 'Abdu'l-Bahá elaborates on this theme:

**“Those matters of major importance which constitute the foundation of the Law of God are explicitly recorded in the Text, but subsidiary laws are left to the House of Justice. The wisdom of this is that the times never remain the same, for change is a necessary quality and an essential attribute of this world, and of time and place. Therefore the House of Justice will take action accordingly . . .**

**“Briefly, this is the wisdom of referring the laws of society to the House of Justice. In the religion of Islam, similarly, not every ordinance was explicitly revealed; nay not a tenth part of a tenth part was included in the Text; although all matters of major importance were specifically referred to, there were undoubtedly thousands of laws which were unspecified. These were devised by the divines of a later age according to the laws of Islamic jurisprudence, and individual divines made conflicting deductions from the original revealed ordinances. All these were enforced. Today this process of deduction is the right of the body of the House of Justice, and the deductions and conclusions of individual learned men have no authority, unless they are endorsed by the House of Justice. The difference is precisely this, that from the conclusions and endorsements of the body of the House of Justice whose members are elected by and known to the worldwide Bahá'í community, no differences will arise; whereas the conclusions of individual divines and scholars would definitely lead to differences, and result in schism, division, and dispersion. The oneness of the Word would be destroyed, the unity of the Faith would disappear, and the edifice of the Faith of God would be shaken.”<sup>82</sup>**

The existence of the Universal House of Justice ensures that humanity will benefit from a continuous source of guidance for the duration of Bahá'u'lláh's Dispensation, all the way through its Golden Age, which will see the emergence of a prosperous world civilization. One need only think of the magnitude of the challenge that the Bahá'í community is called upon to meet in this Day to appreciate the significance of the unique bounty God has bestowed on humanity in the institution of the Universal House of Justice. The implications for the growth of the Faith and the unity of its adherents are clear enough. But, together with the other members of your group, think about how the following processes, each connected to the establishment of a world civilization, are affected by the existence of an authoritative source of guidance:

- The administration of justice
- The promotion of peace
- The elimination of prejudice
- The social and economic development of nations
- The equitable distribution of resources
- The development of the capacities of individuals, institutions, and communities
- The preservation of human honor

## SECTION 33

Over the last few sections, we have reminded ourselves of the method for the election of the Universal House of Justice and thought about its powers and duties. We should now pause to reflect on an important concept, one that surely you have noted over the course of your study of these sections. The authority conferred on the Universal House of Justice carries with it the promise of Bahá'u'lláh that it will be the recipient of divine inspiration. “God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth” are His words. Passages throughout the Will and Testament reiterate this promise, and in other Tablets, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá speaks in equally unequivocal terms on this matter so central to the Covenant:

**“Let it not be imagined that the House of Justice will take any decision according to its own concepts and opinions. God forbid! 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.**

**“Say, O people: Verily, the Supreme House of Justice is under the wings of your Lord, the Compassionate, the All-Merciful, that is, under His protection, His care, and His shelter; for He has commanded the firm believers to obey that blessed, sanctified and all-subduing body, whose sovereignty is divinely ordained and of the Kingdom of Heaven and whose laws are inspired and spiritual.”<sup>83</sup>**

**“Beware, beware lest anyone create a rift or stir up sedition. Should there be differences of opinion, the Supreme House of Justice would immediately resolve the problems. Whatever will be its decision, by majority vote, shall be the real truth, inasmuch as that House is under the protection, unerring guidance, and care of the one true Lord. He shall guard it from error and will protect it under the wing of His sanctity and infallibility. He who opposes it is cast out and will eventually be of the defeated.”<sup>84</sup>**

An individual believer’s relationship with the Universal House of Justice is a profoundly personal one. It is left to each of us to reflect on the posture of love and obedience we assume towards that body divinely ordained by Bahá'u'lláh to guide humanity. Our understanding of its powers will, of course, deepen over time as we witness it act in the world in accordance with Divine will and as we feel our hearts fill with a profound sense of gratitude and awe.

One question that deserves our reflection here is what it means to obey the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. The word “obedience” can conjure up various notions in people’s minds. There are rules and instructions that one obeys out of fear. Then there are those decisions that, whether or not one agrees with them, are obeyed because one has no other choice. Our obedience to the guidance we receive from the Universal House of Justice is of a different kind altogether. Obedience to its guidance springs from within us. We embrace its guidance and at every moment strive to align our thoughts and actions with its wishes.

This is the obedience of a humanity that has come of age. It has the capacity to grasp the implications of an Order as far-reaching as the one ordained by Bahá'u'lláh and to appreciate the value of its institutions. Indeed, His teachings call on every individual to search out

the truth independently, and thus the trust we place in the institutions of the Faith is the result of our acceptance of Bahá'u'lláh as a Manifestation of God and our understanding of the workings of the new World Order He has called into being. We know that, in the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'u'lláh has given humanity a body which, unlike any social institutions of the past, is completely protected by God Himself from the misuse of authority. Far from mere acceptance, then, obedience to the Universal House of Justice involves conscious acknowledgement that humanity has reached the stage in its development that makes possible the establishment of an elected center to which all can turn in love and loyalty.

## SECTION 34

Having examined in some detail the institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice, we are ready to reflect on how the Will and Testament perpetuates the Covenant that Bahá'u'lláh made with His followers. We will do this by studying a passage from the second part of the Will and Testament, portions of which we have already seen.

As mentioned in Section 26, on the basis of references made in the document, it is reasonable to conclude that the second part of the Will and Testament was written around 1907. As you know, at that time, the machinations of the Covenant-breakers had once again raised suspicion about 'Abdu'l-Bahá among the authorities, and the second Commission of Inquiry had arrived in the Holy Land from the capital of the Ottoman Empire to investigate Him. There was every indication that He would be executed or exiled. Though urged by the friends to protect Himself and leave the country, 'Abdu'l-Bahá refused to flee in the face of danger. He wrote a Tablet to a trusted believer and relative of the Báb, Hájí Mírzá Muḥammad-Taquí, stating clearly that, should anything happen to Him, he should do everything in his power to ensure the Universal House of Justice was elected.

Let us read the following paragraph from the second part of the Will and Testament, written at that time. You will see that it begins by describing the danger that 'Abdu'l-Bahá faced and then makes a statement about the fundamental beliefs of the followers of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. Within this context, 'Abdu'l-Bahá refers to the Most Holy Book and to the Universal House of Justice:

**“O dearly beloved friends! I am now in very great danger and the hope of even an hour’s life is lost to me. I am thus constrained to write these lines for the protection of the Cause of God, the preservation of His Law, the safeguarding of His Word and the safety of His Teachings. By the Ancient Beauty! This wronged one hath in no wise borne nor doth he bear a grudge against any one; towards none doth he entertain any ill-feeling and uttereth no word save for the good of the world. My supreme obligation, however, of necessity, prompteth me to guard and preserve the Cause of God. Thus, with the greatest regret, I counsel you saying: Guard ye the Cause of God, protect His law and have the utmost fear of discord. This is the foundation of the belief of the people of Bahá (may my life be offered up for them): ‘His Holiness, the Exalted One (the Báb), is the Manifestation of the Unity and Oneness of God and the Forerunner of the Ancient Beauty. His Holiness the Abhá Beauty (may my life be a sacrifice for His steadfast friends) is the Supreme Manifestation of God and the Dayspring of His Most Divine Essence. All others are servants unto Him and do His bidding.’ Unto the Most Holy Book every one**

**must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority 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. By this House is meant that Universal House of Justice which is to be elected from all countries, that is from those parts in the East and West where the loved ones are to be found, after the manner of the customary elections in Western countries such as those of England.”<sup>85</sup>**

We know of course that, elsewhere in the document, the Will and Testament makes mention of both the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice and clearly envisages their working together. We read, for instance, the passage which indicates that the Guardian of the Cause of God would be the “sacred head” of the Universal House of Justice and its “distinguished member for life”. Yet in passages such as the above the Universal House of Justice and its authority are treated independently of the Guardianship.

In penning His Will and Testament, then, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá provided means for the Bahá’í community to remain protected by the power of the Covenant and continue to benefit from Divine guidance through the Golden Age of the Faith, irrespective of how circumstances would unfold. The followers of Bahá’u’lláh would never find themselves without an authoritative center to which they could turn. The unity of the Bahá’í community was safeguarded, ensuring that it would fulfill its sacred task to establish a pattern for a future society, the splendors of which we can but dimly imagine.

You know, of course, what came to pass historically. The Bahá’í world had the bounty of being guided by Shoghi Effendi—that wondrous, unique and priceless pearl—as the Guardian of the Cause from 1921 to 1957, during which time the Universal House of Justice did not exist. Five and a half years after his passing, on 21 April 1963, that promised institution came into being. Shoghi Effendi had been unable to name a successor who would fulfill the conditions set so explicitly by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Will and Testament. Whether or not there were means to appoint another Guardian, and how the Universal House of Justice would organize its work in the absence of a living Guardian, were questions that could only be addressed by the House of Justice itself, since all obscure matters, not explicit in the Sacred Text, were left for it to decide. And, indeed, soon after its election, the House of Justice advised the Bahá’í world that it found no way “to appoint or to legislate to make it possible to appoint a second Guardian to succeed Shoghi Effendi.”<sup>86</sup>

We will take up the study of this part of the history of the Faith in more detail in the third unit of the book. For now you may wish to reflect further about the fundamentals of Bahá’í belief as stated above by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Testament. How does our understanding of these fundamentals bind us together as a community? To help you in your reflections, you are encouraged to memorize the relevant portion of the passage after you have completed the sentences below.

As stated by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in His Will and Testament, this is the foundation of Bahá’í belief: ‘His Holiness, the Exalted One, is the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_. His Holiness the Abhá Beauty is the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ . All others are \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ and do \_\_\_\_\_ .’ Unto the Most Holy Book \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ and all that is not \_\_\_\_\_ therein must be  
 referred to the \_\_\_\_\_ . That which this body, whether  
 \_\_\_\_\_ or by a \_\_\_\_\_ doth carry, that is verily the \_\_\_\_\_  
 and the \_\_\_\_\_ . Whoso doth \_\_\_\_\_ therefrom  
 is verily of them that love \_\_\_\_\_ , hath shown forth \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ from the \_\_\_\_\_ .

## SECTION 35

We began our study of the Will and Testament by looking at a passage from *God Passes By* that provides an overview of that document, a document which the Guardian describes as the “Charter” of Bahá’u’lláh’s new World Order. We then studied a selection of statements from the Will and Testament that refer to the institutions of the Guardianship and the Universal House of Justice, the twin Successors of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. We first examined passages related to the nature of the Guardianship, an hereditary office to which Shoghi Effendi was appointed, and then reviewed several others that describe the nature and functions of the Universal House of Justice. In the last section we saw how, in naming these twin Successors in His Will and Testament, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá made provisions for any number of circumstances which, depending on future events, might eventually confront the Faith. Today, the Bahá’í world continues to benefit from the institution of the Guardianship through the foundations laid by Shoghi Effendi and the vast body of writings he left, while the community steadily progresses under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, the head of the Faith to which all now turn.

Of course, apart from the many statements related to these two institutions, the Will and Testament contains within it several other elements central to the development of the Cause. Chief among these are the statements that delineate the obligations and responsibilities assigned to the institution of the Hands of the Cause. You have already read several references made by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the Hands of the Cause of God in His Will and Testament. You know that, according to its provisions, nine Hands would have had to give assent to Shoghi Effendi’s choice of a successor as Guardian, had he been able to name one. You have also read the instructions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the Hands to remain vigilant, warning them to,

**“so soon as they find anyone beginning to oppose and protest against the Guardian of the Cause of God, cast him out from the congregation of the people of Bahá and in no wise accept any excuse from him. How often hath grievous error been disguised in the garb of truth, that it might sow the seeds of doubt in the hearts of men!”<sup>87</sup>**

You have read, too, the praises ‘Abdu’l-Bahá bestows in His Will and Testament on the Hands of the Cause of God for declaring “His Proofs”, for proclaiming “His Faith”, for publishing abroad “His Law”, for detaching themselves from “all things but Him”, for standing for “righteousness in this world”, and for kindling the “Fire of the Love of God in the very hearts

and souls of His servants”. Now let us look briefly at the historical development of the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God.

The institution traces its origins to the Ministry of Bahá’u’lláh, when, during the years preceding His passing, He appointed four outstanding believers in Persia to this station. Their appointment, Shoghi Effendi tells us, can be regarded as one of the “preliminary steps aiming at the disclosure of the scope and working of [the] Administrative Order”.<sup>88</sup> In these words of Bahá’u’lláh do we catch a glimpse of the functions performed by the Hands and the influence exerted by them on the life of the Cause:

**“Light and glory, greeting and praise be upon the Hands of His Cause, through whom the light of fortitude hath shone forth and the truth hath been established that the authority to choose rests with God, the Powerful, the Mighty, the Unconstrained, through whom the ocean of bounty hath surged and the fragrance of the gracious favors of God, the Lord of mankind, hath been diffused.”<sup>89</sup>**

In His Writings, then, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá confers this station on an additional four believers. One of these is “the revered martyr” known as Varqá (Dove), who, along with his son, the heroic youth Rúḥu’lláh that you read about in Book 5, gave his life for the Cause after decades of selfless service. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá expounds on the virtues of the others, using phrases such as “an emblem of the fear of God”, “a sign of guidance”, “accomplished, learned, and much honored”, “a great personage, perfect in all things”, “calling the people to the Kingdom” with every waking breath.

The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá formally defines the institution of the Hands of the Cause, explaining the means for the appointment of believers to this high rank and the obligations they are called upon to fulfill. Let us read the relevant passage:

**“O friends! The Hands of the Cause of God must be nominated and appointed by the Guardian of the Cause of God. All must be under his shadow and obey his command. Should any, within or without the company of the Hands of the Cause of God disobey and seek division, the wrath of God and His vengeance will be upon him, for he will have caused a breach in the true Faith of God.**

**“The obligations of the Hands of the Cause of God are to diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to promote learning, to improve the character of all men and to be, at all times and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things. They must manifest the fear of God by their conduct, their manners, their deeds and their words.**

**“This body of the Hands of the Cause of God is under the direction of the Guardian of the Cause of God. He must continually urge them to strive and endeavor to the utmost of their ability to diffuse the sweet savors of God, and to guide all the peoples of the world, for it is the light of Divine Guidance that causeth all the universe to be illumined. To disregard, though it be for a moment, this absolute command which is binding upon everyone, is in no wise permitted, that the existent world may become even as the Abhá Paradise, that the surface of the earth may become heavenly, that contention and conflict amidst peoples, kindreds, nations and governments may disappear, that all the dwellers on earth may become one people and one race, that the world may become even as one home.”<sup>90</sup>**

The following exercises will help to further your understanding of the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God:

- a. According to the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who must nominate and appoint the Hands of the Cause of God? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- b. Under whose direction does the body of the Hands of the Cause of God operate?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- c. The obligations of the Hands of the Cause of God are
  - to \_\_\_\_\_
  - to \_\_\_\_\_
  - to \_\_\_\_\_
  - to \_\_\_\_\_
  - to \_\_\_\_\_
- d. What does ‘Abdu’l-Bahá say the Hands of the Cause of God must manifest in their conduct, their manners, their deeds and their words? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- e. What does the Will and Testament state the Hands of the Cause of God must strive and endeavor to the utmost of their ability to diffuse? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- f. Whom does the Will and Testament state the Hands of the Cause of God must strive and endeavor to the utmost of their ability to guide? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- g. And, what does the Will and Testament state the Hands of the Cause of God must do as soon as they find anyone beginning to oppose and protest against the Guardian of the Cause?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

As delineated in the Will and Testament, the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God was further developed during the ministry of the Guardian and its functions elaborated. Shoghi Effendi appointed thirty-two believers to this high-ranking station from 1951 to 1957, twenty-seven of whom were still living at the time of his passing in 1957. A further ten believers

were named Hands by him from 1925 to 1952 posthumously, that is, following their deaths, including such early believers as Martha Root and John Esslemont. We will see later how the Hands of the Cause of God, in their capacity as Chief Stewards of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic World Commonwealth, steered the Bahá'í community through the critical five and a half years between the passing of Shoghi Effendi and the election of the Universal House of Justice. We will also see how the Universal House of Justice, having concluded that it could not legislate to make possible the appointment of additional Hands of the Cause, extended their vital functions into the future through the establishment of the Continental Boards of Counsellors.

In anticipation of your study of these significant developments in the history of the Faith, discuss the following two questions in your group:

- a. How do the qualities attributed to the Hands of the Cause—detachment, fortitude, and steadfastness—and the functions they are called upon to perform—to diffuse the Divine fragrances, to kindle the fire of the love of God, to protect the community from disunity, and so forth—differ from the attributes of those who occupy positions of learning in society and from the functions they are expected to perform?
- b. In what way does the existence of an institution of such an exalted rank, comprising appointed individuals of so high a caliber, charged with specific functions related to the propagation and protection of the Faith, contribute to the establishment of the oneness of humankind?

## SECTION 36

Now let us consider another subject addressed in the Will and Testament. Earlier we considered some of the ways in which those who, driven by envy and the desire for control, violate the Covenant and try to sow the seeds of doubt among the followers of Bahá'u'lláh. Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí and his associates had, of course, failed utterly in their repeated attempts to undermine the station of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. What you should know, however, is that the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd had provided for the possibility of Muḥammad-‘Alí’s succeeding ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had he remained faithful to His Father’s wishes. It was absolutely necessary, then, for the Will and Testament to leave no doubt that Muḥammad-‘Alí had, through his own words and actions, manifestly violated the Covenant. In this way ‘Abdu’l-Bahá would protect the friends from falling prey to any false claims raised by His half-brother after His own passing. You can surely imagine how essential it was for the progress of the Cause and the development of the Bahá'í community to make Muḥammad-‘Alí’s position so absolutely clear. Think of the immensity of the task that would fall on the shoulders of Shoghi Effendi as the Guardian of the Cause and the obstacles Muḥammad-‘Alí would attempt to lay in his path.

In this light, we will look at only one of several passages in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament related to the actions of Covenant-breakers. It is preceded by a passage that stresses the importance of protecting the Faith of God, recalling the sacrifice that so many noble souls made for the Cause, laying down their lives in the path of their Beloved. The Will and Testament then calls to mind the scene of the martyrdom of the Báb in Tabríz and the suffering that Bahá'u'lláh accepted to endure for some fifty years—the cruel conditions under which He was imprisoned in the Síyáh-Chál and the series of exiles to which He was subjected. To such

intense suffering, we are reminded, was added the betrayal of His own half-brother Mírzá Yahyá—one whom He had loved and nurtured—which culminated in a devious attempt on His life. Within this context, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá makes plain the position of Muḥammad-‘Alí:

**“O ye that stand fast and firm in the Covenant! The Center of Sedition, the Prime Mover of mischief, Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí, hath passed out from under the shadow of the Cause, hath broken the Covenant, hath falsified the Holy Text, hath inflicted a grievous loss upon the true Faith of God, hath scattered His people, hath with bitter rancor endeavored to hurt ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and hath assailed with the utmost enmity this servant of the Sacred Threshold. Every dart he seized and hurled to pierce the breast of this wronged servant, no wound did he neglect to grievously inflict upon me, no venom did he spare but he poisoned therewith the life of this hapless one. I swear by the most holy Abhá Beauty and by the Light shining from His Holiness, the Exalted One (may my soul be a sacrifice for Their lowly servants), that because of this iniquity the dwellers in the Pavilion of the Abhá Kingdom have bewailed, the Celestial Concourse is lamenting, the Immortal Maids of Heaven in the All-Highest Paradise have raised their plaintive cries and the angelic company sighed and uttered their moanings. So grievous the deeds of this iniquitous person became that he struck with his axe at the root of the Blessed Tree, dealt a heavy blow at the Temple of the Cause of God, deluged with tears of blood the eyes of the loved ones of the Blessed Beauty, cheered and encouraged the enemies of the One True God, by his repudiation of the Covenant turned many a seeker after Truth aside from the Cause of God, revived the blighted hopes of Yahyá’s following, made himself detested, caused the enemies of the Greatest Name to become audacious and arrogant, put aside the firm and conclusive verses and sowed the seeds of doubt. Had not the promised aid of the Ancient Beauty been graciously vouchsafed at every moment to this one, unworthy though he be, he surely would have destroyed, nay exterminated the Cause of God and utterly subverted the Divine Edifice. But, praised be the Lord, the triumphant assistance of the Abhá Kingdom was received, the hosts of the Realm above hastened to bestow victory. The Cause of God was promoted far and wide, the call of the True One was noised abroad, ears in all regions were inclined to the Word of God, His standard was unfurled, the ensigns of Holiness gloriously waved aloft and the verses celebrating His Divine Unity were chanted. Now, that the true Faith of God may be shielded and protected, His Law guarded and preserved and His Cause remain safe and secure, it is incumbent upon everyone to hold fast unto the Text of the clear and firmly established blessed verse, revealed about him. None other transgression greater than his can be ever imagined. He (Bahá’u’lláh) sayeth, glorious and holy is His Word:—‘My foolish loved ones have regarded him even as my partner, have kindled sedition in the land and they verily are of the mischief-makers.’ Consider, how foolish are the people! They that have been in His (Bahá’u’lláh’s) Presence and beheld His Countenance, have nevertheless noised abroad such idle talk, until, exalted be His explicit words, He said:—‘Should he for a moment pass out from under the shadow of the Cause, he surely shall be brought to naught.’ Reflect! What stress He layeth upon one moment’s deviation: that is, were he to incline a hair’s breadth to the right or to the left, his deviation would be clearly established and his utter nothingness made manifest. And now ye are witnessing how the wrath of God hath from all sides afflicted him and how day by day he is speeding towards destruction. Ere long will ye behold him and his associates, outwardly and inwardly, condemned to utter ruin.”<sup>91</sup>**

In the Will and Testament ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself explains His purpose in describing the unseemly behavior of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí:

**“My purpose is, however, to show that it is incumbent upon the friends that are fast and firm in the Covenant and Testament to be ever wakeful lest after this wronged one is gone this alert and active worker of mischief may cause disruption, privily sow the seeds of doubt and sedition and utterly root out the Cause of God. A thousand times shun his company. Take heed and be on your guard. Watch and examine; should anyone, openly or privily, have the least connection with him, cast him out from your midst, for he will surely cause disruption and mischief.”<sup>92</sup>**

Our examination of the conduct of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí has highlighted one of the most emphatic admonitions found in the Will and Testament. In it, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá warns us to be on our guard against those who break the Covenant and to avoid them entirely. He writes:

**“And now, one of the greatest and most fundamental principles of the Cause of God is to shun and avoid entirely the Covenant-breakers, for they will utterly destroy the Cause of God, exterminate His Law and render of no account all efforts exerted in the past. O friends! It behooveth you to call to mind with tenderness the trials of His Holiness, the Exalted One, and show your fidelity to the Ever-Blest Beauty. The utmost endeavor must be exerted lest all these woes, trials and afflictions, all this pure and sacred blood that hath been shed so profusely in the Path of God, may prove to be in vain.”<sup>93</sup>**

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s admonition to shun Covenant-breakers requires some thought. Why, someone may ask, is our treatment of Covenant-breakers so different from the way we are to approach all others who cross our path? Why did ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who exhorts us to shower loving-kindness upon every soul, to regard even the stranger as a friend, tell us to shun those who break the Covenant of Bahá’u’lláh? Does not the concept of “shunning”, at least nowadays, create a very negative impression?

In trying to answer these questions, we should realize that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is not asking us to show even the slightest trace of animosity towards Covenant-breakers or to harbor ill feelings towards them. All that He requires of us is to leave them alone and to avoid contact with them. And this He does to protect the Cause. Imagine a believer who might have been disinclined to heed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s warning at the time. “‘Abdu’l-Bahá is worrying too much,” he might have said to himself. “What harm can come from speaking with Muḥammad-‘Alí and his associates and from trying to reason with them? After all, I am firm in the Covenant and cannot be easily deceived.” What consequences would the actions of this friend have brought, both to him and to the Bahá’í community? To help you think through this question, you are encouraged to read the extract below from a Tablet of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, written to friends in the West.

**“O thou who art firm in the Covenant! Three consecutive letters have been received from thee. From their contents it became known that in Cleveland the hearts are afflicted by the murky breaths of the Covenant-breakers and harmony hath decreased among the friends. Gracious God! A hundred times it hath been foretold that the violators are lying in ambush and by every means desire to cause dissension among the friends so that this dissension may end in violation of the**

**Covenant. How is it that, notwithstanding this warning, the friends have neglected this explicit statement?**

**“The point at issue is clear, direct and of utmost brevity. Either Bahá’u’lláh was wise, omniscient and aware of what would ensue, or was ignorant and in error. He entered, by His supreme pen, into such a firm Covenant and Testament with all the Bahá’ís, first with the Aghṣán, the Afnán and His kindred, and commanded them to obey and turn toward Him. By His supreme pen He hath explicitly declared that the object of the following verse of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is the Most Great Branch:**

**“When the ocean of My presence hath ebbed and the Book of My Revelation is ended, turn your faces towards Him Whom God hath purposed, Who hath branched from this Ancient Root.’ Its meaning briefly is this: that after My ascension it is incumbent upon the Aghṣán, the Afnán and the kindred, and all the friends of God, to turn their faces to Him Who hath branched from the Ancient Root.”<sup>94</sup>**

## **SECTION 37**

We should end our discussion of Covenant-breaking here, remembering that we are concerned in this unit with the power of the Covenant as a force of unity in our individual and collective lives. There is no need to dwell on what is clearly not a frequent occurrence in the Faith. Most of us will never have the occasion to encounter one who has stepped outside the shadow of the Covenant, and should it ever happen, all we have to do is to avoid contact with him or her. The burden falls on the institutions of the Faith to counsel such individuals and to counteract the schemes they set in motion.

Protection of the Faith involves, of course, much more than maintaining vigilance against the danger of Covenant-breaking. Our duty to safeguard the Cause, though different in character than that of the institutions of the Faith, is weighty nevertheless. Many phrases in the Will and Testament point to the nature of our duty in this respect. “Guard ye the Cause of God,” we read earlier, “protect His law and have the utmost fear of discord.” “The greatest of all things”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has also indicated in that document, “is the protection of the True Faith of God, the preservation of His Law, the safeguarding of His Cause and service unto His Word.”

Early in our exploration of the Covenant, we noted that our study would make us aware of two ever-present, interwoven themes. One is related to the concept of a center to which all must turn, and the other is concerned with the standard of conduct that Bahá’u’lláh calls on us to follow and which we pledge to uphold upon entering into the Tabernacle of His Covenant. Fulfilling this pledge is undoubtedly the surest means through which we are able to protect the Faith. Let us consider this important idea further. Look at the list below and discuss in your group how the actions described serve to safeguard the interests of the Cause of God. Write some of your conclusions in the space provided.

- Exercising rectitude of conduct in all one’s affairs: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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– Holding to the highest standard of chastity: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

– Cleansing one’s heart of all forms of prejudice: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

– Being a source of encouragement and joy to friends and strangers: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

– Being the cause of unity in every situation in which one finds oneself: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Now memorize the following quotation if you have not already done so on an earlier occasion:

**“Every eye, in this Day, should seek what will best promote the Cause of God. He, Who is the Eternal Truth, beareth Me witness! Nothing whatever can, in this Day, inflict a greater harm upon this Cause than dissension and strife, contention, estrangement and apathy, among the loved ones of God. Flee them, through the power of God and His sovereign aid, and strive ye to knit together the hearts of men, in His Name, the Unifier, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.”<sup>95</sup>**

## SECTION 38

In discussing our responsibility to protect the Cause, we have entered into a most important subject elaborated in the Will and Testament: avoidance of conflict and contention. Let us read the passage below from that document.

**“O ye beloved of the Lord! In this sacred Dispensation, conflict and contention are in no wise permitted. Every aggressor deprives himself of God’s grace. It is incumbent upon everyone to show the utmost love, rectitude of conduct, straightforwardness and sincere kindness unto all the peoples and kindreds of the world, be they friends or strangers. So intense must be the spirit of love and loving-kindness, that the stranger may find himself a friend, the enemy a true brother, no difference whatsoever existing between them. For universality is of God and all limitations earthly. Thus man must strive that his reality may manifest virtues and perfections, the light whereof may shine upon everyone. The light of the sun shineth upon all the world and the merciful showers of Divine Providence fall upon all peoples. The vivifying breeze reviveth every living creature and all beings endowed with life obtain their share and portion at His heavenly board. In like manner, the affections and loving-kindness of the servants of the One True God must be bountifully and universally extended to all mankind. Regarding this, restrictions and limitations are in no wise permitted.**

**“Wherefore, O my loving friends! Consort with all the peoples, kindreds and religions of the world with the utmost truthfulness, uprightness, faithfulness, kindness, goodwill and friendliness, that all the world of being may be filled with the holy ecstasy of the grace of Bahá, that ignorance, enmity, hate and rancor may vanish from the world and the darkness of estrangement amidst the peoples and kindreds of the world may give way to the Light of Unity. Should other peoples and nations be unfaithful to you show your fidelity unto them, should they be unjust toward you show justice towards them, should they keep aloof from you attract them to yourselves, should they show their enmity be friendly towards them, should they poison your lives, sweeten their souls, should they inflict a wound upon you, be a salve to their sores. Such are the attributes of the sincere! Such are the attributes of the truthful.”<sup>96</sup>**

You have had ample opportunities on many occasions in this sequence of courses to reflect on the harmful effects of disunity on the Bahá’í community. What would be useful at this stage is to think about some of the traits of character and individual shortcomings that are often causes of contention and conflict. As is always the case when we analyze characteristics that are to be overcome, we have to take care to avoid making reference to any specific individuals. Keeping this in mind, try, in discussion with the other members of your group, to gain some insights into how each of the following tendencies can become, if not checked, the cause of stress and strain on the fabric of the community. Space is provided for you to write down a few of your conclusions.

- Desire to dominate others: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Desire to control everything: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- Desire to be the center of attention: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- Ambition for prestige: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- Inflexibility: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- Defensiveness: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- Jealousy and envy: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- Lack of generosity: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
- Disregard for other people's ideas: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- Lack of faith in other people: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

It is true that each of the above can, in one way or another, fuel contention in a community. We should not, however, attribute to individuals who display these shortcomings bad intentions or malice. Indeed, to do so would, in itself, be contentious. When situations arise that can lead to disunity, it is more fruitful to view such tendencies as signs of immaturity or as habits of thinking and behavior prevalent in society that individuals carry with them into the Faith. This is not to say, of course, that we should dismiss others as immature. We are all in a process of maturing as individuals and, to a certain degree, manifest some of these inclinations in our daily interactions. This is one of the features of the current stage in the unfoldment of our collective life. Recognizing this enables us to help our communities most effectively in moments of crisis.

In the above passage from His Will and Testament, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá refers to the universality of the Faith, reminding us that “universality is of God” and “all limitations” are “earthly”. Our words and our deeds, then, should acknowledge that the Faith is intended for all humanity. This, too, is a matter upon which we have often reflected in the past. How many passages have we studied in this sequence of courses alone that summon us to consort with people of every religion and background in a spirit of fellowship and friendliness. But, once again, there are a number of obstacles that must be overcome if we are to demonstrate by our conduct the universality of the Faith. Let us look at just one of them.

As individuals, but especially as groups, we can exhibit a human tendency towards estrangement from others. There seems to exist a natural inclination to see others as separate from ourselves and to make distinctions between what we perceive as “us” and “them”. So engrained is this tendency that it has come to form part of how human groups and organizations define themselves, which serves to augment further division among people. Such a posture towards our fellow human beings goes against the very principle of oneness central to the Faith. By definition, the Bahá’í community seeks to embrace all of humanity. Discuss with the other participants in this course how the educational process fostered by the institute courses, a process that is unfolding in village after village and neighborhood after neighborhood, is creating a culture that unites every group and segment of society, even those previously alienated from one another.

## SECTION 39

In addition to exhortations calling upon us to demonstrate, through our words and deeds, the universality of the Faith, the Will and Testament summons us to labor tirelessly in propagating the Cause. With these words does ‘Abdu’l-Bahá counsel us:

**“O ye that stand fast in the Covenant! When the hour cometh that this wronged and broken-winged bird will have taken its flight into the Celestial Concourse, when it will have hastened to the Realm of the Unseen and its mortal frame will have been either lost or hidden neath the dust, it is incumbent upon the Afnán,**

that are steadfast in the Covenant of God and have branched from the Tree of Holiness; the Hands, (pillars) of the Cause of God (the glory of the Lord rest upon them), and all the friends and loved ones, one and all to bestir themselves and arise with heart and soul and in one accord, to diffuse the sweet savors of God, to teach His Cause and to promote His Faith. It behooveth them not to rest for a moment, neither to seek repose. They must disperse themselves in every land, pass by every clime, and travel throughout all regions. Bestirred, without rest and steadfast to the end they must raise in every land the triumphal cry ‘O Thou the Glory of Glories!’ (Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá), must achieve renown in the world wherever they go, must burn brightly even as a candle in every meeting and must kindle the flame of Divine love in every assembly; that the light of truth may rise resplendent in the midmost heart of the world, that throughout the East and throughout the West a vast concourse may gather under the shadow of the Word of God, that the sweet savors of holiness may be diffused, that faces may shine radiantly, hearts be filled with the Divine spirit and souls be made heavenly.

“In these days, the most important of all things is the guidance of the nations and peoples of the world. Teaching the Cause is of utmost importance for it is the head cornerstone of the foundation itself. This wronged servant has spent his days and nights in promoting the Cause and urging the peoples to service. He rested not a moment, till the fame of the Cause of God was noised abroad in the world and the celestial strains from the Abhá Kingdom roused the East and the West. The beloved of God must also follow the same example. This is the secret of faithfulness, this is the requirement of servitude to the Threshold of Bahá!

“The disciples of Christ forgot themselves and all earthly things, forsook all their cares and belongings, purged themselves of self and passion and with absolute detachment scattered far and wide and engaged in calling the peoples of the world to the Divine Guidance, till at last they made the world another world, illumined the surface of the earth and even to their last hour proved self-sacrificing in the pathway of that Beloved One of God. Finally in various lands they suffered glorious martyrdom. Let them that are men of action follow in their footsteps!”<sup>97</sup>

You have considered the subject of teaching earlier in this sequence of courses and have surely partaken of the joy of sharing the message of the Faith with many souls. Yet, no matter how intensely the passion to teach burns in our hearts, remembering the figure of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and reading His counsels to us in His Will and Testament fans further the flame of the love of God and the desire to offer the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh to receptive souls. Complete the following sentences in light of the above passage:

- a. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that after His passing, it is incumbent upon us to bestir ourselves and arise with heart and soul and in one accord, to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- b. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá urges us to not rest for \_\_\_\_\_ or seek \_\_\_\_\_ ; we should \_\_\_\_\_ ourselves in every land, \_\_\_\_\_ by every clime, and \_\_\_\_\_ throughout all regions.

c. Bestirred, without rest and steadfast to the end we must \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_,  
must \_\_\_\_\_,  
must \_\_\_\_\_ and must  
\_\_\_\_\_.

d. Bestirred, without rest and steadfast to the end we must raise in every land the triumphal cry “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá!”, must achieve renown in the world wherever we go, must burn brightly even as a candle in every meeting, and must kindle the flame of Divine love in every assembly

– that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

– that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

– that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

– that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

e. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states in His Will and Testament that the most important of all things in these days is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

f. Teaching the Cause is of utmost importance for it is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

g. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá tells us that He spent His days and nights in \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

h. He did not rest for a moment until \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

i. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá urges us to rest not a moment in promoting the Cause, for this is the secret of \_\_\_\_\_ and the requirement of \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

- j. He reminds us that the \_\_\_\_\_ of Christ forgot \_\_\_\_\_ and all \_\_\_\_\_, forsook all \_\_\_\_\_, purged themselves of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and with \_\_\_\_\_ scattered far and wide and engaged in \_\_\_\_\_ the peoples of the world to the \_\_\_\_\_, until at last they \_\_\_\_\_ the world another world, \_\_\_\_\_ the surface of the earth and even to their last hour \_\_\_\_\_ in the pathway of the Beloved One of God; finally, in various lands they suffered \_\_\_\_\_.
- k. Referring to the disciples of Christ, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá calls on all people of action to \_\_\_\_\_.

In the above passage from the Will and Testament we are asked to demonstrate our faithfulness and servitude to Bahá’u’lláh by following ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s own example in teaching the Cause of God. In Book 6, you reflected a great deal on this theme. Discuss with the other members of your group how each of our individual efforts in teaching the Faith, as well as the collective endeavors we are undertaking in every part of the world through implementation of the global Plans of the Universal House of Justice, are expressions of our allegiance to Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant. Discuss, too, how the tireless efforts ‘Abdu’l-Bahá calls on us to exert, individually and collectively, help to raise humanity’s consciousness of its essential oneness and lay the foundations for the establishment of world unity.

## SECTION 40

As we have progressed through this unit, the majestic figure of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has grown more luminous before our eyes and our consciousness of His extraordinary station heightened. It seems fitting, then, that we should end the unit by thinking about our relationship as individual believers with Him, the Center of Bahá’u’lláh’s peerless Covenant. Let us begin by reading a few statements made by a number of individuals who had the bounty of entering His presence and then by reflecting on several quotations from His Writings.

Among the many statements available to us today from those who met ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and conversed with Him is the passage below from Edward Granville Browne, a well-known scholar from Cambridge, England. Having traveled to ‘Akká in April 1890 to attain the presence of Bahá’u’lláh, Browne wrote of His illustrious Son:

“Seldom have I seen one whose appearance impressed me more. A tall strongly-built man holding himself straight as an arrow, with white turban and raiment, long black locks reaching almost to the shoulder, broad powerful forehead indicating a strong intellect combined with an unswerving will, eyes keen as a hawk’s, and strongly-marked but pleasing features—such was my first impression of ‘Abbás Efendí, . . . Subsequent conversation with him served only to heighten the respect with which his appearance had from the first inspired me. One more eloquent of speech, more ready of argument, more apt of illustration, more intimately acquainted with the sacred books

of the Jews, the Christians, and the Muhammadans, could, I should think, scarcely be found even amongst the eloquent, ready, and subtle race to which he belongs. These qualities, combined with a bearing at once majestic and genial, made me cease to wonder at the influence and esteem which he enjoyed even beyond the circle of his father's followers. About the greatness of this man and his power no one who had seen him could entertain a doubt."<sup>98</sup>

Similar sentiments were expressed by Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abduh, an outstanding Egyptian scholar and Head of Al-Azhar University, who also had the bounty of meeting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. On one occasion, an inquirer commented on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s depth of knowledge, saying “I have heard that He is a most accomplished man and unmatched in intellectual attainment”. Shaykh Muḥammad ‘Abduh is reported to have responded:

“. . . Abbas Effendi is more than that. He is a great man. He is a man to whom it is correct to give the title ‘great’.”<sup>99</sup>

Kahlil Gibran, the renowned Lebanese poet, wrote of his meeting with Him:

“For the first time I saw form noble enough to be a receptacle for the Holy Spirit.”<sup>100</sup>

And here is how one Christian minister described ‘Abdu’l-Bahá upon attempting to meet Him when He arrived in New York in 1912:

“A glimpse was all I succeeded in getting. The press of eager friends and curious ones was so great that it was difficult even to get inside the doors. I have only the memory of an impressive silence most unusual at such functions. . . . At last I managed to press forward where I could peep over a shoulder and so got my first glimpse of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He was seated. A cream colored fez upon His head from under which white hair flowed almost to His shoulders. His robe, what little I could see of it, was oriental, almost white. But these were incidentals to which I could pay little attention. The impressive thing, and what I have never forgotten, was an indefinable aspect of majesty combined with an exquisite courtesy. . . . Such gentleness, such love emanated from Him as I had never seen. I was not emotionally disturbed. Remember that at that time I had no conviction, almost, I might say, little or no interest in what I came later to understand by the term His ‘Station’. . . . What was it that these people around me had which gave to their eyes such illumination, to their hearts such gladness? What connotation did the word ‘wonderful’ have to them that so often it was upon their lips? I did not know, but I wanted to know as I think I had never known the want of anything before.”<sup>101</sup>

Perhaps you know that the minister that penned these lines was Howard Colby Ives, who, a few short months later, would write the following words after having accepted the message brought by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the West:

“Here I saw a man Who, outwardly, like myself, lived in the world of confusion, yet, inwardly, beyond the possibility of doubt, lived and worked in that higher and real world. All His concepts, all His motives, all His actions, derived their springs from that ‘World of Light’. And, which is to me a most inspiring and encouraging fact, He took it for granted that you and I, the ordinary run-of-the-mill humanity, could enter into and live and move in that world if we would.”<sup>102</sup>

And, upon receiving news of the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Edward Granville Browne was moved to write:

“The death of ‘Abbás Efendi, better known since he succeeded his father, Bahá’u’lláh, thirty years ago as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, deprives Persia of one of the most notable of her children and the East of a remarkable personality, who has probably exercised a greater influence not only in the Orient but in the Occident than any Asiatic thinker and teacher of recent times.”<sup>103</sup>

## SECTION 41

We should now reflect on some passages from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. So often in our daily lives we turn our hearts in contemplation to Him and derive comfort and assurance from the warmth of His presence and draw strength and sustenance from His loving counsels. What are some of His repeated exhortations to us? What do we hear Him telling us over and over again? His counsels, of course, are many and their wisdom inexhaustible; here we confine ourselves to four.

Perhaps foremost among the themes we find in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talks and Tablets is love. He longs for us to show forth loving-kindness to all people and to associate with one another in complete amity and accord. Love, to be sure, expresses itself in varying degrees. The love of which He speaks is a reflection of the love of God, which, unlike other expressions of love that are limited, is all-pervading. Below are a few passages, selected from only one collection of His Tablets.

**“Be thou a summoner to love, and be thou kind to all the human race. Love thou the children of men and share in their sorrows. Be thou of those who foster peace. Offer thy friendship, be worthy of trust. Be thou a balm to every sore, be thou a medicine for every ill. Bind thou the souls together.”<sup>104</sup>**

**“Know thou of a certainty that Love is the secret of God’s holy Dispensation, the manifestation of the All-Merciful, the fountain of spiritual outpourings. Love is heaven’s kindly light, the Holy Spirit’s eternal breath that vivifieth the human soul. Love is the cause of God’s revelation unto man, the vital bond inherent, in accordance with the divine creation, in the realities of things. Love is the one means that ensureth true felicity both in this world and the next. Love is the light that guideth in darkness, the living link that uniteth God with man, that assureth the progress of every illumined soul. Love is the most great law that ruleth this mighty and heavenly cycle, the unique power that bindeth together the divers elements of this material world, the supreme magnetic force that directeth the movements of the spheres in the celestial realms. Love revealeth with unfailing and limitless power the mysteries latent in the universe. Love is the spirit of life unto the adorned body of mankind, the establisher of true civilization in this mortal world, and the shedder of imperishable glory upon every high-aiming race and nation.”<sup>105</sup>**

**“How good it is if the friends be as close as sheaves of light, if they stand together side by side in a firm unbroken line. For now have the rays of reality from the Sun**

of the world of existence, united in adoration all the worshippers of this light; and these rays have, through infinite grace, gathered all peoples together within this wide-spreading shelter; therefore must all souls become as one soul, and all hearts as one heart. Let all be set free from the multiple identities that were born of passion and desire, and in the oneness of their love for God find a new way of life.”<sup>106</sup>

“One amongst His Teachings is this, that love and good faith must so dominate the human heart that men will regard the stranger as a familiar friend, the malefactor as one of their own, the alien even as a loved one, the enemy as a companion dear and close. Who killeth them, him will they call a bestower of life; who turneth away from them, him will they regard as turning towards them; who denieth their message, him will they consider as one acknowledging its truth. The meaning is that they must treat all humankind even as they treat their sympathizers, their fellow-believers, their loved ones and familiar friends.”<sup>107</sup>

“O thou son of the Kingdom! All things are beneficial if joined with the love of God; and without His love all things are harmful, and act as a veil between man and the Lord of the Kingdom. When His love is there, every bitterness turneth sweet, and every bounty rendereth a wholesome pleasure. For example, a melody, sweet to the ear, bringeth the very spirit of life to a heart in love with God, yet staineth with lust a soul engrossed in sensual desires. And every branch of learning, conjoined with the love of God, is approved and worthy of praise; but bereft of His love, learning is barren—indeed, it bringeth on madness. Every kind of knowledge, every science, is as a tree: if the fruit of it be the love of God, then is it a blessed tree, but if not, that tree is but dried-up wood, and shall only feed the fire.”<sup>108</sup>

“O living flame of heavenly love! Thine heart hath been so fired with the love of God that from ten thousand leagues afar its warmth and radiance may be felt and seen. The fire lit by mortal hand imparteth light and warmth to but a little space, whereas that sacred flame which the Hand of God hath kindled, though burning in the east, will set aflame the west and give warmth to both the north and the south; nay, it shall rise from this world to glow with the hottest flame in the realms on high, flooding with light the Kingdom of eternal glory.

“Happy art thou to have obtained so heavenly a gift. Blessed art thou to be favored with His divine bestowals.

“The glory of God rest upon thee and upon them that hold fast unto the sure handle of His Will and holy Covenant.”<sup>109</sup>

## SECTION 42

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s call to love is accompanied by exhortations to obey the laws and ordinances brought by His Father and to follow the teachings. We know, of course, that this submission is not one imposed from outside, but an obedience generated from within by the force of love; it is a response to the summons of Bahá’u’lláh: “Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty.”

**“The Faith of the Blessed Beauty is summoning mankind to safety and love, to amity and peace; it hath raised up its tabernacle on the heights of the earth, and directeth its call to all nations. Wherefore, O ye who are God’s lovers, know ye the value of this precious Faith, obey its teachings, walk in this road that is drawn straight, and show ye this way to the people.”<sup>110</sup>**

**“It is certain that man’s highest distinction is to be lowly before and obedient to his God; that his greatest glory, his most exalted rank and honor, depend on his close observance of the divine commands and prohibitions. Religion is the light of the world, and the progress, achievement, and happiness of man result from obedience to the laws set down in the holy Books. Briefly, it is demonstrable that in this life, both outwardly and inwardly the mightiest of structures, the most solidly established, the most enduring, standing guard over the world, assuring both the spiritual and the material perfections of mankind, and protecting the happiness and the civilization of society—is religion.”<sup>111</sup>**

**“O army of God! Through the protection and help vouchsafed by the Blessed Beauty—may my life be a sacrifice to His loved ones—ye must conduct yourselves in such a manner that ye may stand out distinguished and brilliant as the sun among other souls. Should any one of you enter a city, he should become a center of attraction by reason of his sincerity, his faithfulness and love, his honesty and fidelity, his truthfulness and loving-kindness towards all the peoples of the world, so that the people of that city may cry out and say: ‘This man is unquestionably a Bahá’í, for his manners, his behavior, his conduct, his morals, his nature, and disposition reflect the attributes of the Bahá’ís.’ Not until ye attain this station can ye be said to have been faithful to the Covenant and Testament of God. For He hath, through irrefutable Texts, entered into a binding Covenant with us all, requiring us to act in accordance with His sacred instructions and counsels.”<sup>112</sup>**

**“O ye true friends! Day and night ‘Abdu’l-Bahá calleth his loved ones to mind, and with every breath he communeth with them and longeth to behold their blessed faces. I beseech the Lord of the worlds that they may all attain unto that which is meet and seemly and may succeed in wholly following the Law of God.”<sup>113</sup>**

**“... make ye a mighty effort, and choose for yourselves a noble goal. Through the power of faith, obey ye the teachings of God, and let all your actions conform to His laws. Read ye *The Hidden Words*, ponder the inner meanings thereof, act in accord therewith. Read, with close attention, the Tablets of *Ṭarázát* (Ornaments), *Kalimát* (Words of Paradise), *Tajallíyyát* (Effulgences), *Ishráqát* (Splendors), and *Bishárát* (Glad Tidings), and rise up as ye are bidden in the heavenly teachings. Thus may each one of you be even as a candle casting its light, the center of attraction wherever people come together; and from you, as from a bed of flowers, may sweet scents be shed.”<sup>114</sup>**

**“Religion, moreover, is not a series of beliefs, a set of customs; religion is the teachings of the Lord God, teachings which constitute the very life of humankind, which urge high thoughts upon the mind, refine the character, and lay the groundwork for man’s everlasting honor.”<sup>115</sup>**

**“O ye two well-loved handmaids of God! Whatever a man’s tongue speaketh, that let him prove by his deeds. If he claimeth to be a believer, then let him act in accordance with the precepts of the Abhá Kingdom.”<sup>116</sup>**

**“If in this day a soul shall act according to the precepts and the counsels of God, he will serve as a divine physician to mankind, and like the trump of Isráfil, he will call the dead of this contingent world to life; for the confirmations of the Abhá Realm are never interrupted, and such a virtuous soul hath, to befriend him, the unfailing help of the Company on high. Thus shall a sorry gnat become an eagle in the fullness of his strength, and a feeble sparrow change to a royal falcon in the heights of ancient glory.”<sup>117</sup>**

## **SECTION 43**

Yet another theme we find repeatedly in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s talks and Tablets is steadfastness. How often does He urge us to stand firm in the Cause and to remain steadfast in our love for the Abhá Beauty.

**“O ye who are holding fast unto the Covenant and Testament! This day, from the realms of the All-Glorious, from the Kingdom of Holiness where hosannas of glorification and praise rise up, the Company on high direct their gaze upon you. Whensoever their gaze lighteth upon gatherings of those who are steadfast in the Covenant and Testament, then do they utter their cry, ‘Glad tidings! Glad tidings!’ Then, exulting, do they lift up their voices, and shout, ‘O ye spiritual communion! O ye gathering of God! Blessed are ye! Glad tidings be unto you! Bright be your faces, and be ye of good cheer, for ye cling to the Covenant of the Beloved of all the worlds, ye are on fire with the wine of His Testament. Ye have plighted your troth to the Ancient of Days, ye have drunk deep from the chalice of loyalty. Ye have guarded and defended the Cause of God; ye have not been a cause of dividing up His Word; ye have not brought His Faith low, but have striven to glorify His Holy Name; ye have not allowed the Blessed Cause to be exposed to the derision of the people. Ye have not permitted the Designated Station to be humbled, nor been willing to see the Center of Authority discredited or exposed to mockery and persecution. Ye have striven to keep the Word whole and one. Ye have passed through the portals of mercy. Ye have not let the Blessed Beauty slip from your minds, to fade unremembered.”<sup>118</sup>**

**“I beseech God to illumine thy sight with the light of hope, to enable thee to extol His praise among His handmaidens, and to make thee firm in this path whereon the feet of the people have slipped through the severity of trials.”<sup>119</sup>**

**“Verily I say unto thee that if thou be steadfast in this Cause, and arise with all thy power to promote the Word of God in those regions, and exert thine utmost effort to breathe the spirit of life into the hearts of the righteous, thou wilt find thyself assisted by the angels of heaven and the hosts of the Concourse on high. Thou wilt raise the banner of peace and sound the clarion of love and unity throughout those lands, guide the souls unto the wellspring of life, lead them unto the arena of true understanding, grant them to drink from the cup of certitude, quicken them with**

the breaths of the All-Merciful, attire them with the robe of bounty, and give them to quaff of the wine of faithfulness through the love of Bahá. Thus will they be awakened from the slumber of selfish desire and behold the mighty signs of their Lord in this exalted creation. Better is this for thee than all the glory and dominion of the world.”<sup>120</sup>

“Verily, I place my brow upon the dust, turn my face towards the Lord of Lords, and invoke Him with all fervor and attraction, that He may look upon you with the glances of the eye of His providence and watch over you with the gaze of His loving-kindness. May He unite your hearts, gladden your breasts, harmonize your souls, rejoice you with exceeding gladness, give you to drink from the cup of salvation, and make you firm in His Cause. May He enable you to hold fast to the hem of grandeur, to hasten toward the field of sacrifice, and to be sheltered beneath the shade of that blessed Tree whose roots are planted firm and whose branches reach unto heaven.”<sup>121</sup>

“The beloved of the Lord must stand fixed as the mountains, firm as impregnable walls. Unmoved must they remain by even the direst adversities, ungrieved by the worst of disasters. Let them cling to the hem of Almighty God, and put their faith in the Beauty of the Most High; let them lean on the unfailing help that cometh from the Ancient Kingdom, and depend on the care and protection of the generous Lord.”<sup>122</sup>

“O ye loved ones of God! Be ye firm of foot, and fixed of heart, and through the power of the Blessed Beauty’s help, stand ye committed to your purpose. Serve ye the Cause of God. Face ye all nations of the world with the constancy and the endurance of the people of Bahá, that all men may be astounded and ask how this could be, that your hearts are as wellsprings of confidence and faith, and as mines so rich in the love of God. . . . And if all the believers be put to the sword, and only one be left, let that one cry out in the name of the Lord and tell the joyous tidings; let that one rise up and confront all the peoples of the earth.”<sup>123</sup>

“Walk, therefore, with a sure step and engage with the utmost assurance and confidence in the promulgation of the divine fragrances, the glorification of the Word of God and firmness in the Covenant. Rest ye assured that if a soul ariseth in the utmost perseverance and raiseth the Call of the Kingdom and resolutely promulgateth the Covenant, be he an insignificant ant he shall be enabled to drive away the formidable elephant from the arena, and if he be a feeble moth he shall cut to pieces the plumage of the rapacious vulture.”<sup>124</sup>

## SECTION 44

Finally, as we turn our hearts to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and listen to His words, we hear Him calling upon us to strive, to labor ceaselessly, to make concerted effort in the promotion of the Cause of God.

**“Striving meaneth this, that ye should live and move according to the divine counsels and admonitions and be filled with zeal and fervor, that ye should seek no rest and be engaged at all times in service.”<sup>125</sup>**

**“Wherefore, O ye friends of God, redouble your efforts, strain every nerve, till ye triumph in your servitude to the Ancient Beauty, the Manifest Light, and become the cause of spreading far and wide the rays of the Daystar of Truth.”<sup>126</sup>**

**“Expend your every breath of life in this great Cause and dedicate all your days to the service of Bahá, so that in the end, safe from loss and deprivation, ye will inherit the heaped-up treasures of the realms above.”<sup>127</sup>**

**“Wherefore, rest ye neither day nor night and seek no ease. Tell ye the secrets of servitude, follow the pathway of service, till ye attain the promised succor that cometh from the realms of God.”<sup>128</sup>**

**“Strive with the full fervor of thy soul that the wellspring of true understanding may flow within thy heart and bestow upon thee the outpourings of divine mysteries from the Kingdom of Lights. Thereupon wilt thou grasp such inner meanings as lay treasured and concealed in the Sacred Scriptures.”<sup>129</sup>**

**“A soul is known through his conduct, manners, words, and deeds. We must therefore strive with heart and soul that, day by day, our deeds may become more worthy, our conduct more pleasing, and our association with others ever greater, that is, that we may love and deal kindly with all who are on earth.”<sup>130</sup>**

**“Now is the time, O ye beloved of the Lord, for ardent endeavor. Struggle ye, and strive. And since the Ancient Beauty was exposed by day and night on the field of martyrdom, let us in our turn labor hard, and hear and ponder the counsels of God; let us fling away our lives, and renounce our brief and numbered days.”<sup>131</sup>**

**“O ye true friends! Make ye a mighty effort, that this world may become another world, and this darksome earth may become shining and resplendent through the rays of the Sun of Truth.”<sup>132</sup>**

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63. From a letter dated 27 February 1929 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 3–4.
64. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, pp. 519–21.
65. From a letter dated 21 March 1930 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá’ís of the West, published in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, pp. 19–20.
66. *Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 20–21.
67. *Ibid.*, pp. 1–3.
68. *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.
69. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, cited by the Universal House of Justice in a letter dated 9 March 1965 to a National Spiritual Assembly, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963–1986*, no. 23, pp. 52–53; also in *The Universal House of Justice*, no. 57.8, p. 55.
70. *Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá*, pp. 21–23.
71. *Ibid.*, pp. 53–54.
72. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23.
73. *Ibid.*, pp. 28–30.
74. From a letter dated 27 February 1929 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 6; also in “Notes”, prepared under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, no. 49, p. 205.

75. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, no. 38.4, p. 115.
76. *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 29.
77. From “Ishráqát” [Splendors], published in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, no. 8.57–58, pp. 157–58; also in “Some Texts Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh Supplementary to the Kitáb-i-Aqdas”, in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, p. 93.
78. From “Kalimát-i-Firdawsiyyih” [Words of Paradise], published in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, no. 6.32, p. 79.
79. *Ibid.*, no. 6.28, p. 77.
80. *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 39–40.
81. *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41.
82. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in the introduction written by the Universal House of Justice to *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 5–6.
83. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in a letter dated 27 May 1966 to an individual, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963–1986*, no. 35.7b–c, p. 85; also in *The Universal House of Justice*, no. 19.2–3, p. 13.
84. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in a letter dated 9 March 1965 to a National Spiritual Assembly, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963–1986*, no. 23.12, p. 53; also in *The Universal House of Justice*, no. 17.1, p. 12.
85. *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 38–40.
86. From a letter dated 6 October 1963 to all National Spiritual Assemblies, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963–1986*, no. 5.1, p. 14; also in *The Universal House of Justice*, no. 56.1, p. 52.
87. *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 23.
88. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 522.
89. From “Lawḥ-i-Dunyá” [Tablet of the World], published in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, no. 7.2, pp. 95–96.
90. *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 24–26.
91. *Ibid.*, pp. 6–10.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
94. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, no. 186.1–3, pp. 294–95.

95. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983, 2023 printing), V, par. 5, p. 9.
96. *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 26–28.
97. *Ibid.*, pp. 17–20.
98. From the introduction written by Edward G. Browne to *A Traveller's Narrative: Written to Illustrate the Episode of the Báb* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1975), p. xxxvi; also quoted by H. M. Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987, 2023 printing), pp. 4–5.
99. Muḥammad Rashíd Ridá quoting a conversation with Shaykh Muḥammad 'Abduh, cited by Suhayl Badí' Bushrú'í, *'Abbás Afandí, Fí al-dhikrá al-mi'awiyah li-ziyáratih ilá Miṣr (1910–1913)* ['Abbás Effendí: In remembrance of the hundredth anniversary of His visit to Egypt (1910–1913)] (Beirut: Al-Kamel Verlag, 2011), p. 110. (courtesy translation)
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101. Howard Colby Ives, *Portals to Freedom* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 2012), pp. 15–16; also quoted by H. M. Balyuzi, *'Abdu'l-Bahá: The Centre of the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1987, 2023 printing), p. 7.
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103. Edward Granville Browne, "Sir 'Abdu'l-Bahá Abbas", *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 54, no. 1 (January 1922), p. 145; also quoted by H. M. Balyuzi, *Edward Granville Browne and the Bahá'í Faith* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1970, 1980 printing), p. 119.
104. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, no. 10.2, p. 41.
105. *Ibid.*, no. 12.1, pp. 42–43.
106. *Ibid.*, no. 36.3, p. 110.
107. *Ibid.*, no. 41.3, pp. 121–22.
108. *Ibid.*, no. 154.3, pp. 251–52.
109. *Ibid.*, no. 177.1–3, pp. 283–84.
110. *Ibid.*, no. 1.6, p. 7.
111. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, par. 130, pp. 93–94.

112. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, no. 35.5, pp. 102–3.
113. *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas* (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1916, 1930 printing), vol. 3, p. 575. (authorized English translation)
114. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, no. 17.3, pp. 53–54.
115. *Ibid.*, no. 23.6, p. 78.
116. *Ibid.*, no. 115.1, p. 194.
117. *Ibid.*, no. 8.4, pp. 36–37.
118. *Ibid.*, no. 182.1, pp. 287–88.
119. *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, vol. 1, p. 184. (authorized English translation)
120. *Ibid.*, pp. 197–98. (authorized English translation)
121. *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas* (New York: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1915, 1940 printing), vol. 2, pp. 392–93. (authorized English translation)
122. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, no. 2.15, pp. 17–18.
123. *Ibid.*, no. 188.10, p. 303.
124. *Ibid.*, no. 184.2, pp. 289–90.
125. *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, vol. 3, p. 511. (authorized English translation)
126. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, no. 218.5, p. 374.
127. *Ibid.*, no. 218.6, pp. 374–75.
128. *Ibid.*, no. 218.7, p. 375.
129. *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, vol. 2, p. 476. (authorized English translation)
130. *Ibid.*, pp. 306–7. (authorized English translation)
131. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, no. 207.9, p. 364.
132. *Tablets of Abdul-Baha Abbas*, vol. 3, p. 533. (authorized English translation)





# The Guardian of the Faith

## Purpose

To gain an appreciation of the ministry of Shoghi Effendi, who single-handedly raised up the Administrative Order of the Faith, which, outlined in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament, will serve as the pattern and nucleus of Bahá'u'lláh's new World Order



## SECTION 1

Imagine you were a Bahá'í living in November 1921. What thoughts would be running through your mind upon receiving the news of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá? The spirit of that exalted Being, Whom you had loved and cherished, had winged its flight to its eternal abode. You could never hope to enter into His presence on this earthly plane and hear with your own ears His encouraging words. Your sorrow would have had no bounds. And a host of questions about the Faith and its future would have flooded your mind. You would have known that the Universal House of Justice envisioned by Bahá'u'lláh had not yet been established and would have wondered who would now guide the community. Still, conscious of the power of the Covenant, your heart would have been at ease. Crisis would be followed by victory.

Then soon you would have learned that, in His Will and Testament, 'Abdu'l-Bahá had named Shoghi Effendi the Guardian of the Cause and had called upon the friends, one and all, to turn to and obey him. He would safeguard and nurture the Bahá'í community, preparing it for the election of the Universal House of Justice. He was now the center towards whom you would direct your gaze and whose guidance you would strive your utmost to follow. This is precisely what the Bahá'ís of the world did at the time. The Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh had, once again, demonstrated its protective power.

This unit will follow the progress of the Cause from the time of the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá up to the election of the Universal House of Justice. Though much of the content will be historical in nature, the focus of our study will remain, as it did in the preceding unit, on the concept of the power of the Covenant, specifically as it relates to our individual and collective lives. We hope that this study will offer you further insight into the meaning and implications of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's statement that "the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant."

## SECTION 2

Around 1905, when Shoghi Effendi was a child of only seven or eight, 'Abdu'l-Bahá wrote the first section of His Will and Testament naming him Guardian of the Cause. Most people would have seen in him an earnest and spiritual grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá—courteous, bright, and energetic. Yet few would have had the insight to detect the signs of greatness that were his. What 'Abdu'l-Bahá saw in this small child, we know, was a "wondrous, unique and priceless pearl", the one who would someday take into his able hands the reins of the Cause of God and guide it through its most critical formative years.

At the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing, Shoghi Effendi was in his early twenties. He had spent his childhood in Haifa under the watchful eye of his Grandfather, having received his early education there and then later in Beirut. He continued his studies at Oxford University in England so that he could serve his Grandfather more adequately as a translator. "My sole aim", he wrote at the time, "is to perfect my English, to acquire the literary ability to write it well, speak it well and translate correctly and eloquently from Persian and Arabic into English."<sup>1</sup>

On 29 November 1921 Shoghi Effendi was contacted by a friend in London and asked to come to his office, which was often used as a distributing point for cables and letters to Bahá'ís. No one was in the office when Shoghi Effendi entered, and his eyes happened to catch

the name of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá on a cablegram lying open on the desk. From the sister of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Greatest Holy Leaf, the cablegram read: “HIS HOLINESS ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ ASCENDED ABHÁ KINGDOM. INFORM FRIENDS.”<sup>2</sup> Shoghi Effendi collapsed in utter shock at the news.

It took several days to make arrangements for Shoghi Effendi to travel to Haifa. He set sail for Egypt on 16 December, arriving in Haifa by train on 29 December. An envelope addressed to him by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was waiting for him. It contained the Will and Testament. Shoghi Effendi had no knowledge of the content of that weighty document, nor was he aware that he was being named the Guardian of the Cause. Apparently, he had thought that, as the oldest grandson of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, he might be charged with the task of convening the election of the Universal House of Justice.

The provisions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament were made known on 3 January 1922, after it had been seen by Shoghi Effendi. It was read aloud to nine individuals, mostly members of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s family, and its seals and signature, as well as His writing throughout, were shown to them.

On 7 January the Will and Testament was again read to a group of Bahá’ís from Persia, India, Egypt, England, Italy, Germany, America, and Japan. That afternoon, in accordance with the local custom, a memorial gathering was held on the fortieth day following the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and a lunch was served at His home, after which the provisions of His Will were announced. Among the guests was the governor of Haifa and other local notables.

Two cables were sent to Persia by the Greatest Holy Leaf that same day. “MEMORIAL MEETINGS ALL OVER THE WORLD HAVE BEEN HELD,” the first began. “THE LORD OF ALL THE WORLDS IN HIS WILL AND TESTAMENT HAS REVEALED HIS INSTRUCTIONS. COPY WILL BE SENT. INFORM BELIEVERS.”<sup>3</sup> The second stated simply: “WILL AND TESTAMENT FORWARDED SHOGHI EFFENDI CENTER CAUSE.”<sup>4</sup> To the American Bahá’í community, she sent the following cable on 16 January: “IN WILL SHOGHI EFFENDI APPOINTED GUARDIAN OF CAUSE AND HEAD OF HOUSE OF JUSTICE. INFORM AMERICAN FRIENDS.”<sup>5</sup>

### SECTION 3

It is impossible for us to fathom the depth of Shoghi Effendi’s thoughts and feelings during those initial days of the Guardianship. Already grief-stricken over the sudden passing of the Grandfather he so loved, he now had weighing on his youthful shoulders responsibility for steering the future course of the Cause of God. If only to catch a glimpse of what was stirring in his heart and mind at the time, let us read portions of two of his earliest communications. On 21 January 1922, he wrote to the Bahá’ís in the United States and Canada:

**“At this early hour when the morning light is just breaking upon the Holy Land, whilst the gloom of the dear Master’s bereavement is still hanging thick upon the hearts, I feel as if my soul turns in yearning love and full of hope to that great company of His loved ones across the seas, who now share with us all the agonies of His separation.”<sup>6</sup>**

Five days earlier he had written a letter to the Persian Bahá’í community, conveying equally touching sentiments:

**“He is God. In servitude at His threshold, I am a partner and coworker of the true and self-sacrificing loved ones of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. In this heart-wrenching calamity, that of bereavement and separation from His peerless beauty, I am, at every moment, your friend and companion.**

**“Although the human temple of our loving Master has vanished from our mortal sight, yet, as when a cloud is lifted from the face of the sun, His confirmations shall shine forth with greater radiance, and His gracious aid, shelter, and protection shall wax stronger than ever before. Now must we all fix our gaze upon the creative power of His words, await His hidden confirmations, and recall the explicit promises that have issued from His sanctified lips and blessed pen. With the utmost rapture, fervor, confidence, wisdom, attentiveness, self-effacement, detachment, determination, and steadfastness, let us step into the field of service, safeguard the impregnable stronghold of the Cause of God, and spread and promote His life-giving teachings.”<sup>7</sup>**

His 21 January letter to the North American believers continued with the following thoughts:

**“How well I remember when, more than two years ago, the Beloved Master, turning to a distinguished visitor of His, who was seated by Him in His garden, suddenly broke the silence and said:—‘My work is now done upon this plane; it is time for me to pass on to the other world.’ Did He not in more than one occasion state clearly and emphatically:—‘Were ye to know what will come to pass after me, surely would ye pray that my end be hastened’? In a Tablet sent to Persia when the storm raised years ago by that Committee of Investigation was fiercely raging around Him, when the days of His incarceration were at their blackest, He reveals the following:—‘Now in this world of being, the Hand of Divine Power hath firmly laid the foundations of this all-highest Bounty and this wondrous Gift. Gradually whatsoever is latent in the innermost of this Holy Cycle shall appear and be made manifest, for now is but the beginning of its growth and the dayspring of the revelation of its Signs. Ere the close of this Century and of this Age, it shall be made clear and manifest how wondrous was that Springtide and how heavenly was that Gift!’**

**“With such assuring Utterances and the unmistakable evidences of His sure and clear knowledge that His end was nigh, is there any reason why the followers of His Faith, the world over, should be perturbed? Are not the prayers He revealed for us sufficient source of inspiration to every worker in His Cause? Have not His instructions paved before us the broad and straight Path of Teaching? Will not His now doubly effective power of Grace sustain us, strengthen us and confirm us in our work for Him? Ours is the duty to strive by day and night to fulfill our own obligations and then trust in His Guidance and never-failing Grace.”<sup>8</sup>**

The above passages, so tender in their sentiments yet so uncompromising in their clarity, reveal to us something of the thoughts occupying Shoghi Effendi’s mind in the earliest days of his ministry. Let us pause here and think about how he set out to ease the hearts of the believers and inspire them with renewed confidence by reminding them of the repeated assurances of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá that He would not abandon them. To reflect on how the passages focus the friends on ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Center of the Covenant, fill in the blanks in the sentences below:

- a. Shoghi Effendi tells the friends that, although ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was no longer in their physical midst, His \_\_\_\_\_ would \_\_\_\_\_ forth with greater \_\_\_\_\_, and His \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ would be \_\_\_\_\_ than before.
- b. Shoghi Effendi encourages the believers to fix their gaze on the \_\_\_\_\_ of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s words, to await His \_\_\_\_\_, and to recall the \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
- c. The Guardian reassures them by quoting the following passage revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá during the turbulent period when He was under close scrutiny by the Ottoman Empire and it seemed His very life might be taken:
- “Now in this world of being, the Hand of Divine Power hath firmly laid the \_\_\_\_\_ of this all-highest \_\_\_\_\_ and this wondrous \_\_\_\_\_. Gradually whatsoever is \_\_\_\_\_ in the innermost of this \_\_\_\_\_ shall \_\_\_\_\_ and be made \_\_\_\_\_, for now is but the \_\_\_\_\_ of its \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ of the revelation of its \_\_\_\_\_. Ere the close of this \_\_\_\_\_ and of this \_\_\_\_\_, it shall be made \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ how \_\_\_\_\_ was that \_\_\_\_\_ and how \_\_\_\_\_ was that \_\_\_\_\_!”
- d. Having called to mind the assurances given by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in those dark days, the Guardian urges the friends not to be perturbed now, in the wake of His passing, and to remember that
- the prayers revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá are \_\_\_\_\_ to every worker in the Cause;
  - His instructions have \_\_\_\_\_ a broad and straight \_\_\_\_\_;
  - His now doubly \_\_\_\_\_ power of Grace will \_\_\_\_\_ them, \_\_\_\_\_ them, and \_\_\_\_\_ them in their work.
- e. He reminds them that theirs is the \_\_\_\_\_ to strive by \_\_\_\_\_ and night to \_\_\_\_\_ and then \_\_\_\_\_ in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

In the series of alternating crises and victories through which the Cause of God has always steadily advanced, the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá represented a severe blow to the emerging Bahá’í community. Consider how, at such a moment, the young Guardian consoled the friends by maintaining their focus on the words and promises of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Center of the Covenant. Now think about the present day. Surely, you and the other members of your study group have witnessed cycles of crises and victories in your efforts to contribute to the process of building vibrant and harmonious communities in localities where you reside. Discuss with the members of your group how essential it is for us to draw on the power of the Covenant to sustain us during the passage from any crisis in the Faith to the ensuing victory.

## SECTION 4

Despite the sorrow that engulfed his heart, Shoghi Effendi took up his responsibilities as Guardian with an energy and resolve that would come to characterize his entire ministry. Uppermost in his mind seems to have been the establishment of the Universal House of Justice. He made this the subject of consultation with knowledgeable and long-standing believers from both the East and the West, calling several of them to the Holy Land for this purpose. The achievement of such a sublime goal, he soon determined, would depend on strengthening the administrative foundations of the Cause at the local and national levels, and he immediately set this process in motion, as his early communications during the initial months of his Guardianship made clear. “The National Spiritual Assemblies, like unto pillars, will be gradually and firmly established in every country on the strong and fortified foundations of the Local Assemblies”, he would later write. “On these pillars, the mighty edifice, the Universal House of Justice, will be erected, raising high its noble frame above the world of existence.”<sup>9</sup>

While weighing matters of such paramount importance for the future of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi also faced extreme difficulties brought on by Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí and his associates. They were taking advantage of the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to stir up trouble once again. Therefore, having sent his preliminary instructions to the Bahá’í world, he wrote the following letter, which was published in the periodical *The Star of the West* in May 1922, conveying some of his thoughts at the time and his decision to leave the Holy Land for a period:

**“This servant, after that grievous event and great calamity, the ascension of His Holiness ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to the Abhá Kingdom, has been so stricken with grief and pain and so entangled in the troubles created by the enemies of the Cause of God, that I consider that my presence here, at such a time and in such an atmosphere, is not in accordance with the fulfillment of my important and sacred duties.**

**“For this reason, unable to do otherwise, I have left for a time the affairs of the Cause both at home and abroad, under the supervision of the Holy Family and the headship of the Greatest Holy Leaf until, by the Grace of God, having gained health, strength, self-confidence and spiritual energy, and having taken into my hands, in accordance with my aim and desire, entirely and regularly the work of service I shall attain to my utmost spiritual hope and aspiration.”<sup>10</sup>**

On 5 April 1922, with the affairs of the Faith securely in the hands of the Greatest Holy Leaf, the Guardian departed for Switzerland to gather his strength. He remained there for several months, returning to Haifa on Friday, 15 December 1922. Already during that brief

period, the friends in both the East and the West had begun to respond to the guidance he had given before his departure, and modest yet notable progress had been made in the administration of the affairs of the Faith. The day after his return to Haifa, Shoghi Effendi sent a series of cables to Bahá'í centers throughout the world:

**PERSIA: “That the Lord of Hosts may, upon my reentry to the field of Service, bestow a fresh blessing upon His valiant warriors of that favored Land is indeed my earnest prayer.”<sup>11</sup>**

**AMERICA: “The onward march of the Cause hath not been nor can it ever be stayed. I pray the Almighty that my efforts, now refreshed and renewed, may with your undiminished support lead it to glorious victory.”<sup>12</sup>**

**GREAT BRITAIN: “Solaced and strengthened, I now join my humble strivings to your untiring exertions for the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.”<sup>13</sup>**

**GERMANY: “United thus far with you in my thoughts and meditations I now gladly and hopefully add the further bond of active participation in a lifelong service at the Threshold of Bahá'u'lláh.”<sup>14</sup>**

**INDIA: “May our reunion in the glorious arena of service prove in the spiritual field of that land the herald of triumphal victories.”<sup>15</sup>**

**JAPAN: “Refreshed and reassured I now stretch to you across the distant seas my hand of brotherly cooperation in the Cause of Bahá.”<sup>16</sup>**

**MESOPOTAMIA [parts of today's Iraq and Syria]: “With zeal unabated and with strength renewed I now await your joyful tidings in the Holy Land.”<sup>17</sup>**

**TÜRKIYE: “Back to these hallowed surroundings I extend towards you my hand of fellowship and service in the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh.”<sup>18</sup>**

**FRANCE: “Awaiting your joyful tidings in the Holy Land.”<sup>19</sup>**

Two days later, he cabled:

**SWITZERLAND: “Pray convey my Swiss friends assurance of my unfailing cooperation on my happy return to the Holy Land.”<sup>20</sup>**

And the next day he dispatched two additional cables:

**ITALY: “Convey Italian friends my best wishes on my return Holy Land.”<sup>21</sup>**

**AUSTRALIA: “Awaiting lovingly glad tidings of Australian friends in Holy Land.”<sup>22</sup>**

## SECTION 5

The brief account in the preceding sections points to the unique part played by the Greatest Holy Leaf at the time of the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Already during the lifetime of her beloved Father and the ministry of her Brother she had assumed a measure of responsibility for the protection of the Faith and its steady progress. Her love and loyalty to the Cause would prove crucial to Shoghi Effendi, both immediately after he assumed the mantle of Head of the Faith and during the early part of his Guardianship. We should pause, then, and consider the life of one to whom he referred as “my chief sustainer”, “my most affectionate comforter”, “the joy and inspiration of my life”.

Bahíyyih Khánum was some two years younger than ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Given the title “the Greatest Holy Leaf” by her Father, she dedicated her life to the service of His Cause. In a Tablet addressed to her, He states:

**“Verily, We have elevated thee to the rank of one of the most distinguished among thy sex, and granted thee, in My court, a station such as none other woman hath surpassed. Thus have We preferred thee and raised thee above the rest, as a sign of grace from Him Who is the Lord of the throne on high and earth below.”<sup>23</sup>**

Only around six years old when Bahá’u’lláh was imprisoned in the Síyáh-Chál in Ṭíhrán, the Greatest Holy Leaf became accustomed to suffering from her early childhood. During that turbulent time, the family’s property, the Guardian explains, was confiscated and plundered, and they were plunged into a state of poverty “within the space of a single day”, after having been “one of the wealthiest families of Ṭíhrán”. The young Bahíyyih Khánum accompanied her Father on His series of exiles, first to Baghdád, then to Constantinople and Adrianople, and finally to the fortress-city of ‘Akká. As early as the Baghdád period, she had carried out tasks through which she had proved herself both “capable of sharing the burden” and “willing to make the sacrifice” that “her high birth demanded”. It was in ‘Akká, however, that she displayed those qualities which distinguished her, next to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, as the “brightest embodiment” of that “love which is born of God” and of that “human sympathy which few mortals are capable of evincing”. In all that she did—in the management of her Father’s household, in the social relationships that she cultivated, in the “traits of generosity, of affability and kindness” that she exhibited—she demonstrated “her worthiness to rank as one of the noblest figures intimately associated with the lifelong work of Bahá’u’lláh”.

And after the ascension of Bahá’u’lláh, the Greatest Holy Leaf stood resolutely by the side of the Brother she so cherished while practically all the other members of the family followed the dictates of worldly desires and passions and, one by one, turned away from the Center of the Covenant. “Armed with the powers with which an intimate and long-standing companionship with Bahá’u’lláh had already equipped her, and benefiting by the magnificent example which the steadily widening range of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s activities afforded her,” the Guardian wrote, “she was prepared to face the storm which the treacherous conduct of the Covenant-breakers had aroused and to withstand its most damaging onslaughts.” Long before she had already banished from her mind and heart “every earthly attachment” and had renounced “the very idea of matrimony”. Now she found herself forced “to dissolve ties of family relationship, to sever long-standing and intimate friendships, to discard lesser loyalties for the sake of her supreme allegiance to a Cause she had loved so dearly and had served so well.”

As the storm aroused by the Covenant-breakers passed and the orb of the Faith rose in the West, the Greatest Holy Leaf acted as “the honored hostess to a steadily increasing number of pilgrims who thronged ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s residence”. “Forgetful of her own self, disdainful of rest and comfort, and undeterred by the obstacles that still stood in her path,” she continued to display “those same attributes that had won her, in the preceding phases of her career, so great a measure of admiration and love.” And when ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was released from His many years of confinement, He entrusted the affairs of the Faith to His sister during His travels to Europe and North America. With these words did He address her in one of His letters written at the time:

**“O my dear sister! Praise be to God, within the sheltering grace of the Blessed Beauty, here in the lands of the West a breeze hath blown from over the rose-gardens of His bestowals, and the hearts of many people have been drawn as by a magnet to the Abhá Realm.**

**“Whatever hath come to pass is from the confirmations of the Beloved; for otherwise, what merit had we, or what capacity? We are as a helpless babe, but fed at the breast of heavenly grace. We are no more than weak plants, but we flourish in the spring rain of His bestowals.”<sup>24</sup>**

In these words, one catches a glimpse of the nature of the unshakable ties that bound ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to His beloved sister, the profound love they shared for the Blessed Beauty, and the depth of insight into spiritual reality that united their thoughts. No wonder, then, that it was the Greatest Holy Leaf who stepped forward at the time of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing to aid His chosen successor, her young great nephew, in taking the reins of the Cause in his hands. For some ten years, she shielded him and supported him until her passing on 15 July 1932. It is natural for us to think of her in terms of the kindness of heart, generosity of spirit, and unflinching sympathy that she so strikingly displayed. Yet, in guidance that she gave to the believers, such as in the passage below written to the friends in the West during a period when the Guardian was away from the Holy Land, we are able to perceive the brilliance of intellect and the intensity of faith that were equally hers.

**“Let us then, affectionate brothers and sisters, ponder for a while upon the underlying reason that had made God’s divine Messengers prefer a life of torture to one of ease, and those blessed martyrs, so many of them cut off in the springtime and promise of their youth, chose death with faces radiant with joy. What did the Báb sacrifice His promising youth for, except out of a burning desire to have mankind live in unity and peace; and what was the spirit that animated those bold and heroic martyrs but love and adoration to a Cause they wished to triumph? What made Bahá’u’lláh, born and brought up in opulence, fling away all earthly possessions and choose upon Himself unspeakable hardships and deprivation, save for an earnest appeal to the world at large to turn their hatred for one another into genuine love and to make a world seething with blood a peaceful home for God’s children; and why did ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who could have chosen a life of ease and comfort, prefer to lead a crusade against the strongholds of human hearts and make a direct appeal to individuals as well as groups that unless we love one another with all our might and with all our heart we are absolutely doomed? He carried a crusade not with a sword of steel but with a sword of love and affection. And if we dare call ourselves Bahá’ís it simply means that we have to follow in their wake. It means that we must always have the public weal in mind**

**and not give ourselves wholly to our inclinations and desires, and it means that we must picture before us the perseverance and self-sacrifice of those early volunteers and make a wholehearted effort to be like unto them; and it shall be only in this way that we can safeguard the Cause of God.”<sup>25</sup>**

Such was her complete consecration to the Cause. Such was the spirit of self-renunciation that animated her. With what simple beauty does she make us conscious of our relationship with the Covenant in the above paragraph. Though she does not refer to the Covenant explicitly, we are reminded, in reading her words, of the duties we all share to protect the Cause of God and propagate the teachings. Before moving on to the next section, you may wish to spend a few moments reflecting further on the passage by completing the following sentences:

- a. The Greatest Holy Leaf encourages us to ponder for a while upon the \_\_\_\_\_ that made God’s divine Messengers \_\_\_\_\_ a life of \_\_\_\_\_ to one of \_\_\_\_\_ .
- b. We should ponder further, she urges us, the reason that made those blessed martyrs, so many of them \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of their youth, \_\_\_\_\_ death with \_\_\_\_\_ .
- c. For what did the Báb \_\_\_\_\_ His promising youth, she asks us, except out of a \_\_\_\_\_ to have mankind live in \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ ; and what was the spirit that \_\_\_\_\_ those bold and \_\_\_\_\_ martyrs but \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to the Cause they wished to \_\_\_\_\_ .
- d. She bids us to consider what made Bahá’u’lláh, born and brought up in \_\_\_\_\_ , fling away all \_\_\_\_\_ and choose upon Himself \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ , save for an earnest appeal to the world at large to turn \_\_\_\_\_ , and to make \_\_\_\_\_ .
- e. Why, we should ask ourselves, did ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, who could have chosen a life of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ , prefer to lead a \_\_\_\_\_ against the \_\_\_\_\_ of human hearts and make a direct \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ as well as \_\_\_\_\_ that unless we \_\_\_\_\_ with all our \_\_\_\_\_ and with all our \_\_\_\_\_ we are absolutely \_\_\_\_\_ .

- f. The crusade that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá carried, the Greatest Holy Leaf makes clear, was not with a sword of \_\_\_\_\_ but with a sword of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ .
- g. And if we dare to call ourselves \_\_\_\_\_ , she reminds us, it simply means that we have to follow \_\_\_\_\_ ; it means that we must always have the \_\_\_\_\_ in mind and not give ourselves \_\_\_\_\_ to our \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ , and it means that we must picture before us the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of those \_\_\_\_\_ and make \_\_\_\_\_ to be like unto them; and it is only in this way that we can \_\_\_\_\_ .

The Greatest Holy Leaf was in the eighty-sixth year of her life when she passed away in 1932. For decades the growing community of Bahá’u’lláh’s followers had reaped the benefits of the energizing influence of her love. How significant her influence had been on the course of Bahá’í history became increasingly apparent particularly in the final decade of her life which, was so closely associated with the work of the Guardian.

## SECTION 6

In the final words of the above-quoted passage, the Greatest Holy Leaf turns our thoughts to the Divine mission that motivated the sacrificial efforts of the early believers, thoughts that should spur each of us into action to safeguard the Cause of God. It seems fitting, then, that we should now focus our attention on those qualities that distinguished the life of one who herself was such a staunch defender of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant. Here is how a member of the first pilgrim group from the West described the Greatest Holy Leaf:

“Next to meeting the Beloved Master Himself was the privilege of meeting His glorious sister, Bahíyyih Khánum, known as the Greatest Holy Leaf. Her personality is indelibly imprinted upon my memory. Tall, slender and of noble bearing, her body gave the impression of perfect poise between energy and tranquility, between wiry endurance and inward composure, imparting to the beholder a sense of security, comfort and reliance, impossible to describe.”<sup>26</sup>

Another believer, who met the Greatest Holy Leaf later in her life, commented as follows:

“Her ardor burned with a steady flame. In the face of test and danger she neither hurried nor held back, but entered the perilous way with quiet breath. Her courage was born of her understanding faith, and it was this faith, this understanding, that carried her serene through years of incessant labor and meticulous service, and through times of waiting empty-handed,—and through the bearing of irremediable sorrow and loss.”<sup>27</sup>

And from the diary of Hand of the Cause of God Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler, the last among the western pilgrims to meet the Greatest Holy Leaf during the closing days of her life, we read:

“From the Greatest Holy Leaf streamed an effulgence of beauty and heavenly love that I have never witnessed from any human being. To come into her presence was to hush and exalt the soul. She was like a bird at dawn, the coming of spring, a city on a far horizon; everything that wakes our wonder and reveals the depths and not the tumults of the heart.”<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps no better way is there for us to gain insight into the splendid qualities of the Greatest Holy Leaf than to look at her through the eyes of the Guardian. Two days after her passing, he wrote a lengthy letter to the believers in the United States and Canada that stands as testimony to a life of unparalleled devotion to the Cause and that reveals the intensity of his love for her and the pain of separation from her. Three paragraphs from that letter are quoted below.

**“The ascension of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, so tragic in its suddenness, was to her a terrific blow, from the effects of which she never completely recovered. To her He, Whom she called ‘Áqá’, had been a refuge in times of adversity. On Him she had been led to place her sole reliance. In Him she had found ample compensation for the bereavements she had suffered, the desertions she had witnessed, the ingratitude she had been shown by friends and kindred. No one could ever dream that a woman of her age, so frail in body, so sensitive of heart, so loaded with the cares of almost eighty years of incessant tribulation, could so long survive so shattering a blow. And yet history, no less than the annals of our immortal Faith, shall record for her a share in the advancement and consolidation of the worldwide community which the hand of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had helped to fashion, which no one among the remnants of His Family can rival.**

**“Which of the blessings am I to recount, which in her unfailing solicitude she showered upon me, in the most critical and agitated hours of my life? To me, standing in so dire a need of the vitalizing grace of God, she was the living symbol of many an attribute I had learned to admire in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. She was to me a continual reminder of His inspiring personality, of His calm resignation, of His munificence and magnanimity. To me she was an incarnation of His winsome graciousness, of His all-encompassing tenderness and love.**

**“It would take me too long to make even a brief allusion to those incidents of her life, each of which eloquently proclaims her as a daughter, worthy to inherit that priceless heritage bequeathed to her by Bahá’u’lláh. A purity of life that reflected itself in even the minutest details of her daily occupations and activities; a tenderness of heart that obliterated every distinction of creed, class and color; a resignation and serenity that evoked to the mind the calm and heroic fortitude of the Báb; a natural fondness of flowers and children that was so characteristic of Bahá’u’lláh; an unaffected simplicity of manners; an extreme sociability which made her accessible to all; a generosity, a love, at once disinterested and indiscriminating, that reflected so clearly the attributes of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s character; a sweetness of temper; a cheerfulness that no amount of sorrow could becloud; a quiet and unassuming disposition that served to enhance a**

thousandfold the prestige of her exalted rank; a forgiving nature that instantly disarmed the most unyielding enemy—these rank among the outstanding attributes of a saintly life which history will acknowledge as having been endowed with a celestial potency that few of the heroes of the past possessed.”<sup>29</sup>

And at the conclusion of that letter we find the following two poignant paragraphs:

**“Dearly beloved Greatest Holy Leaf! Through the mist of tears that fill my eyes I can clearly see, as I pen these lines, thy noble figure before me, and can recognize the serenity of thy kindly face. I can still gaze, though the shadows of the grave separate us, into thy blue, love-deep eyes, and can feel, in its calm intensity, the immense love thou didst bear for the Cause of thine Almighty Father, the attachment that bound thee to the most lowly and insignificant among its followers, the warm affection thou didst cherish for me in thine heart. The memory of the ineffable beauty of thy smile shall ever continue to cheer and hearten me in the thorny path I am destined to pursue. The remembrance of the touch of thine hand shall spur me on to follow steadfastly in thy way. The sweet magic of thy voice shall remind me, when the hour of adversity is at its darkest, to hold fast to the rope thou didst seize so firmly all the days of thy life.**

**“Bear thou this my message to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, thine exalted and divinely appointed Brother: If the Cause for which Bahá’u’lláh toiled and labored, for which Thou didst suffer years of agonizing sorrow, for the sake of which streams of sacred blood have flowed, should, in the days to come, encounter storms more severe than those it has already weathered, do Thou continue to overshadow, with Thine all-encompassing care and wisdom, Thy frail, Thy unworthy appointed child.”<sup>30</sup>**

There are certain qualities mentioned by the Guardian in describing the Greatest Holy Leaf in the above passages that are essential for every defender of Bahá’u’lláh’s Covenant to possess. What are some of these attributes? Write them below and, as you do, think about how they can assist each one of us in our efforts to stand firm in the Covenant.

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In light of what you have studied in these sections, could you say a few words about how the life of the Greatest Holy Leaf testifies to the power of the Covenant?

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## SECTION 7

A comprehensive analysis of the work of the Guardian is well beyond the scope of this unit. Volumes would be required to summarize the achievements of his ministry. All we will attempt to do here is to examine some of the most significant advances made by the Faith during the period of 1921 to 1957 when Shoghi Effendi passed away. As we do so, we will see how masterfully he guided the Bahá'í world, steering it along a path of development that, at each stage, would prepare it to take on a more ambitious set of challenges ahead. We will begin with the theme that became his immediate central focus: the systematic development of the institution of the Spiritual Assembly. This development was, without doubt, the hallmark of the first fifteen years of his ministry.

In 1921 the Bahá'í world consisted of several scores of centers scattered throughout the globe that functioned with some degree of organization. Almost single-handedly, the Guardian took up the task of creating a well-organized, world-encircling Bahá'í community with well-established local and national institutions—institutions of an Administrative Order considered the precursor, the nucleus, and the pattern of that new World Order conceived by Bahá'u'lláh, destined to embrace in the fullness of time the whole of humanity. His earliest communications, we already noted, made his intentions abundantly clear. Below is an extract from a letter dated 15 February 1922 to the Iranian Bahá'ís sent prior to his departure for Switzerland.

**“The Ancient Beauty, exalted be His Most Great Name, states: ‘The canopy of world order is upraised upon the two pillars of consultation and compassion,’ and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in one of His Tablets asserts: ‘The purpose of consultation is to show that the views of several individuals are assuredly preferable to one man, even as the power of a number of men is of course greater than the power of one man. Thus consultation is acceptable in the presence of the Almighty, and hath been enjoined upon the believers, so that they may confer upon ordinary and personal matters, as well as on affairs which are general in nature and universal. For instance, when a man hath a project to accomplish, should he consult with some of his brethren, that which is agreeable will of course be investigated and**

unveiled to his eyes, and the truth will be disclosed. Likewise on a higher level, should the people of a village consult one another about their affairs, the right solution will certainly be revealed. In like manner, the members of each profession, such as in industry, should consult, and those in commerce should similarly consult on business affairs. In short, consultation is desirable and acceptable in all things and on all issues.’ Therefore, the organization of the Bahá’í world and the sound and timely management and administration of the affairs of the Cause are dependent upon this: that the Spiritual Assemblies confer and consult as far as they can about all the affairs of the Cause, whether pertaining to individuals or to the body of the believers, and make the necessary determinations and decisions; that they refer the most important matters pertaining to the entire country of Iran to the Central Assembly of that land; and that that Center immediately communicate to the Holy Land whatsoever it determines to warrant consultation. And when the Universal House of Justice is established, whatsoever it decides is of God; it will be under the care, the protection and the unerring guidance of the Abhá Beauty.”<sup>31</sup>

In a similar letter dated 5 March 1922 to the Bahá’ís of the United States and Canada, the Guardian underscored the importance of Spiritual Assemblies’ taking charge of the affairs of the Faith. He referred specifically to the “vital necessity of having a Local Spiritual Assembly in every locality where the number of adult declared believers exceeds nine”.<sup>32</sup> In the same letter he reminded the friends that Local Spiritual Assemblies would eventually evolve into Local Houses of Justice and quoted the commandment of Bahá’u’lláh in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas:

**“The Lord hath ordained that in every city a House of Justice be established wherein shall gather counselors to the number of Bahá, and should it exceed this number it doth not matter. They should consider themselves as entering the Court of the presence of God, the Exalted, the Most High, and as beholding Him Who is the Unseen. It behooveth them to be the trusted ones of the Merciful among men and to regard themselves as the guardians appointed of God for all that dwell on earth. It is incumbent upon them to take counsel together and to have regard for the interests of the servants of God, for His sake, even as they regard their own interests, and to choose that which is meet and seemly. Thus hath the Lord your God commanded you. Beware lest ye put away that which is clearly revealed in His Tablet. Fear God, O ye that perceive.”**<sup>33</sup>

And, just as the Guardian had emphasized the importance of the “Central Assembly” of Iran, he called attention in the above letter to the need for an elected body that would “adequately represent the interests of all the friends and Assemblies throughout the American Continent”.<sup>34</sup> At that time, only rudimentary structures were in place for administering the affairs of the Faith at the national level in the United States and Iran. In the former, the Bahá’í Temple Unity, though a body legally recognized by the government, operated in a very narrow sphere of action, with a few specific tasks national in character. In Iran, the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tīhrán acted as a central body through which guidance from the Holy Land was channeled and which coordinated certain activities for the entire country. To establish National Spiritual Assemblies in country after country, as “local Bahá’í communities” advanced sufficiently “in number and in influence”,<sup>35</sup> was one of the Guardian’s primary concerns.

In these early communications, then, addressed to the Bahá’ís in both the East and the West, we can perceive an outline of some of the most fundamental administrative processes of

the Faith. From such a simple beginning, Shoghi Effendi would guide the development of the Cause in the years ahead, giving shape to what would become highly sophisticated structures and processes for the conduct of its affairs.

Today there are Spiritual Assemblies, both national and local, in all parts of the globe. Our purpose here is not to discuss procedural matters related to their election or to their functioning and establishment as outlined by the Guardian. He himself made clear that many of the immediate tasks assigned to Assemblies and the procedures set for their election would be considered afresh by the Universal House of Justice; it would, as the supreme governing institution of the Faith, lay down the principles that would direct, so long as it deemed advisable, the affairs of the Cause. What we will seek over the next several sections, then, is to gain insights into fundamental truths about the nature and character of Bahá'í administration that are embedded in the guidance given by Shoghi Effendi in laying the foundations of Spiritual Assemblies worldwide. To this end, we will look at five subjects: consultation as a cardinal principle that should govern collective decision-making; the nature of the relationship between Spiritual Assemblies and the individual; the nature of relationships among the institutions of the Administrative Order; the nature of Bahá'í elections; and the nature of service on an Assembly.

## SECTION 8

We begin with the first subject mentioned above, the principle of consultation, which is to govern collective decision-making at all levels. The consultative process is seen as the systematic investigation of reality, an exploration to which each participant is to contribute his or her share. We will not enter into such a profound matter in depth here but will take up the theme of consultation more extensively in the second unit of Book 10. What is important for us to think about now, however, is that Shoghi Effendi chose, so early in his ministry, to bring this vital principle to the attention of the friends in both the West and the East. Indeed, from the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá that he shared with the friends at the time, we can see how intent Shoghi Effendi was on ensuring they understood the significance of consultation, particularly the essential qualities and attitudes its participants must possess if the desired result is to be achieved. Let us look at two passages that he called to their attention.

In his 5 March 1922 letter to the believers in the West, mentioned in the last section, the Guardian quoted the following passage, addressed by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to the members of the Spiritual Assembly of Chicago:

**“Whenever ye enter the council-chamber, recite this prayer with a heart throbbing with the love of God and a tongue purified from all but His remembrance, that the All-powerful may graciously aid you to achieve supreme victory:—‘O God, my God! We are servants of Thine that have turned with devotion to Thy Holy Face, that have detached ourselves from all beside Thee in this glorious Day. We have gathered in this spiritual assembly, united in our views and thoughts, with our purposes harmonized to exalt Thy Word amidst mankind. O Lord, our God! Make us the signs of Thy Divine Guidance, the Standards of Thy exalted Faith amongst men, servants to Thy mighty Covenant. O Thou our Lord Most High! Manifestations of Thy Divine Unity in Thine Abhá Kingdom, and resplendent stars shining upon all regions. Lord! Aid us to become seas surging with the**

**billows of Thy wondrous Grace, streams flowing from Thy all-glorious Heights, goodly fruits upon the Tree of Thy heavenly Cause, trees waving through the breezes of Thy Bounty in Thy celestial Vineyard. O God! Make our souls dependent upon the Verses of Thy Divine Unity, our hearts cheered with the outpourings of Thy Grace, that we may unite even as the waves of one sea and become merged together as the rays of Thine Effulgent Light; that our thoughts, our views, our feelings may become as one reality, manifesting the spirit of union throughout the world. Thou art the Gracious, the Bountiful, the Bestower, the Almighty, the Merciful, the Compassionate.”<sup>36</sup>**

You might find it helpful to write down here some of the phrases from the above prayer that provide insight into the attributes that are to distinguish those who consult. Then try to say a few words about the character of the relationships that are forged when such attributes are present.

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In the same letter, the Guardian continued with several other passages from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Writings, including the following which enumerates the obligations incumbent on the members of a Spiritual Assembly:

**“The first condition is absolute love and harmony amongst the members of the assembly. They must be wholly free from estrangement and must manifest in themselves the Unity of God, for they are the waves of one sea, the drops of one river, the stars of one heaven, the rays of one sun, the trees of one orchard, the flowers of one garden. Should harmony of thought and absolute unity be nonexistent, that gathering shall be dispersed and that assembly be brought to naught. The second condition:—They must when coming together turn their faces to the Kingdom on High and ask aid from the Realm of Glory. They must then proceed with the utmost devotion, courtesy, dignity, care and moderation to express their views. They must in every matter search out the truth and not insist upon their own opinion, for stubbornness and persistence in one’s views will lead ultimately to discord and wrangling and the truth will remain hidden. The honored members must with all freedom express their own thoughts, and it is in no wise permissible for one to belittle the thought of another, nay, he must with moderation set forth the truth, and should differences of opinion arise a majority of voices must prevail, and all must obey and submit to the majority. It is again not permitted that any one of the honored members object to or censure, whether in or out of the meeting, any decision arrived at previously, though that decision**

**be not right, for such criticism would prevent any decision from being enforced. In short, whatsoever thing is arranged in harmony and with love and purity of motive, its result is light, and should the least trace of estrangement prevail the result shall be darkness upon darkness. . . . If this be so regarded, that assembly shall be of God, but otherwise it shall lead to coolness and alienation that proceed from the Evil One. Discussions must all be confined to spiritual matters that pertain to the training of souls, the instruction of children, the relief of the poor, the help of the feeble throughout all classes in the world, kindness to all peoples, the diffusion of the fragrances of God and the exaltation of His Holy Word. Should they endeavor to fulfill these conditions the Grace of the Holy Spirit shall be vouchsafed unto them, and that assembly shall become the center of the Divine blessings, the hosts of Divine confirmation shall come to their aid, and they shall day by day receive a new effusion of Spirit.”<sup>37</sup>**

Again, it would be helpful for you to pause and consider the conditions that must be met, according the above passage, by those who consult.

- a. The first condition is absolute \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ among the members of the assembly. They must be wholly \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ and must \_\_\_\_\_ in themselves the \_\_\_\_\_, for they are the \_\_\_\_\_ of one sea, the \_\_\_\_\_ of one river, the \_\_\_\_\_ of one heaven, the \_\_\_\_\_ of one sun, the \_\_\_\_\_ of one orchard, the \_\_\_\_\_ of one garden. Should \_\_\_\_\_ of thought and absolute \_\_\_\_\_ be nonexistent, that gathering shall be \_\_\_\_\_ and that assembly be brought to \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. As for the second condition, the members must, when coming together to consult, turn their faces to \_\_\_\_\_ and must ask aid from \_\_\_\_\_.
- c. They must then proceed with the utmost \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to express their views.
- d. They must in every matter \_\_\_\_\_ and not \_\_\_\_\_, for \_\_\_\_\_ in one’s views will lead ultimately to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ will remain \_\_\_\_\_.
- e. They must with all freedom \_\_\_\_\_.
- f. It is not permissible for us to belittle \_\_\_\_\_.

- g. Should differences of opinion arise \_\_\_\_\_ must prevail, and they must all \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to the majority.
- h. It is not permitted for any one of the members to \_\_\_\_\_ to or \_\_\_\_\_, whether in or out of the meeting, any \_\_\_\_\_ arrived at previously, though that decision be not \_\_\_\_\_, for such \_\_\_\_\_ would prevent any decision from being \_\_\_\_\_.
- i. In short, whatsoever thing is arranged in \_\_\_\_\_ and with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, its result is \_\_\_\_\_, and should the least trace of \_\_\_\_\_ prevail the result shall be \_\_\_\_\_.

From among the qualities that must distinguish participants in the consultative process, if it is to bear fruit, purity of motive seems to be particularly significant. We have thought about purity of intention and purity of heart on previous occasions. In this light, with the other members of your group, think about how purity of motive and purity of heart are essential in Bahá'í consultation and write your thoughts down below. To facilitate your discussions, you may wish to ask yourselves, for example, how attachment to preconceived ideas and divisive agendas, how desire for personal gain and self-interest, so often impede the efforts of the peoples of the world, particularly their leaders, in finding solutions to the pressing problems of humanity.

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As we have seen, in quoting the passages from 'Abdu'l-Bahá like those above, the Guardian laid stress not on technique and method in the consultative process but on the conditions it must meet, conditions which seem to speak to the inner state of those who participate in it. He would himself write the following some years into his ministry:

**“... it has ever been the cherished desire of our Master, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, that the friends in their councils, local as well as national, should by their candor, their honesty of purpose, their singleness of mind, and the thoroughness of their discussions, achieve unanimity in all things. Should this in certain cases prove impracticable the verdict of the majority should prevail, to which decision the minority must under all circumstances, gladly, spontaneously and continually, submit.**

**“Nothing short of the all-encompassing, all-pervading power of His Guidance and Love can enable this newly enfolded order to gather strength and flourish amid the storm and stress of a turbulent age, and in the fullness of time vindicate its high claim to be universally recognized as the one Haven of abiding felicity and peace.”<sup>38</sup>**

Consultation is one of the greatest instruments available to us for building unity, a concept so closely associated with the Covenant. Much of what we will consider over the next several sections regarding the relationships fostered by the Administrative Order involves the ability to reach higher and higher degrees of unity through consultation—this, whether we have been called to serve on an Assembly or are engaged in the life of the community. “Consultation is”, we read earlier, “desirable and acceptable in all things and on all issues.” You have, yourself, seen firsthand how it forms part of our mode of operation at the grassroots, a subject you considered in Book 6 of this series. You know well that, when the pattern of action, reflection, consultation and study comes to define how a group of friends operates collectively, learning becomes their mode of operation and progress proves possible. In light of your own experience, can you describe how essential are the attributes mentioned in this section to creating the dynamics necessary for unified action at the grassroots?

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## **SECTION 9**

The second subject we will consider is the nature of the relationship between a Spiritual Assembly and the individual. Elaborated so eloquently by the Guardian, this relationship is one based on qualities such as love and affection, trustworthiness and justice, forgiveness and mutual respect, in which the individual members of the community support and cherish their Assembly and the Assembly genuinely cares for those whom it serves. As early as 12 March 1923, Shoghi Effendi wrote the passage below, which gives insight into this relationship.

**“In order to avoid division and disruption, that the Cause may not fall a prey to conflicting interpretations, and lose thereby its purity and pristine vigor, that its affairs may be conducted with efficiency and promptness, it is necessary that everyone should conscientiously take an active part in the election of these Assemblies, abide by their decisions, enforce their decree, and cooperate with them wholeheartedly in their task of stimulating the growth of the Movement throughout all regions. The members of these Assemblies, on their part, must**

**disregard utterly their own likes and dislikes, their personal interests and inclinations, and concentrate their minds upon those measures that will conduce to the welfare and happiness of the Bahá'í Community and promote the common weal.”<sup>39</sup>**

For what purpose, according to the above, are we asked to participate in the election of Spiritual Assemblies, abide by their decisions, enforce their decree, and cooperate with them wholeheartedly in their task of stimulating the growth of the Faith?

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What must the members of Assemblies disregard, and upon what should they concentrate their minds?

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A letter dated 28 October 1935 written on the Guardian's behalf provides the following additional guidance:

**“The believers should have confidence in the directions and orders of their Assembly, even though they may not be convinced of their justice or right. Once the Assembly, through a majority vote of its members, comes to a decision the friends should readily obey it. Specially those dissenting members within the Assembly whose opinion is contrary to that of the majority of their fellow-members should set a good example before the community by sacrificing their personal views for the sake of obeying the principle of majority vote that underlies the functioning of all Bahá'í Assemblies.”<sup>40</sup>**

And on 23 February 1924, the Guardian wrote the following passage that explains further the nature of this relationship, specifically as it relates to those who serve on an Assembly:

**“Let us also bear in mind that the keynote of the Cause of God is not dictatorial authority but humble fellowship, not arbitrary power, but the spirit of frank and loving consultation. 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, candor, and courage on the other.**

**“The duties of those whom the friends have freely and conscientiously elected as their representatives are no less vital and binding than the obligations of those who have chosen them. Their function is not to dictate, but to consult, and consult**

not only among themselves, but as much as possible with the friends whom they represent. They must regard themselves in no other light but that of chosen instruments for a more efficient and dignified presentation of the Cause of God. They should never be led to suppose that they are the central ornaments of the body of the Cause, intrinsically superior to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles. They should approach their task with extreme humility, and endeavor, by their open-mindedness, their high sense of justice and duty, their candor, their modesty, their entire devotion to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win, not only the confidence and the genuine support and respect of those whom they serve, but also their esteem and real affection. They must, at all times, avoid the spirit of exclusiveness, the atmosphere of secrecy, free themselves from a domineering attitude, and banish all forms of prejudice and passion from their deliberations. They should, within the limits of wise discretion, take the friends into their confidence, acquaint them with their plans, share with them their problems and anxieties, and seek their advice and counsel. And, when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after dispassionate, anxious and cordial consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with earnestness and conviction and courage record their vote and abide by the voice of the majority, which we are told by our Master to be the voice of truth, never to be challenged, and always to be wholeheartedly enforced. To this voice the friends must heartily respond, and regard it as the only means that can ensure the protection and advancement of the Cause.”<sup>41</sup>

The Guardian’s statements describing the relationship between the Assembly and those in the community it serves require much reflection. In this section, of course, we can only hope to enhance our understanding of the nature of this relationship, an understanding that will grow naturally as we engage in the life of the Bahá’í community and study the writings of the Faith. To begin our reflections here, fill in the blanks:

- a. We should all bear in mind that the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Cause of God is not \_\_\_\_\_ but \_\_\_\_\_, not \_\_\_\_\_, but the spirit of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. Nothing short of the spirit of a true Bahá’í, Shoghi Effendi tells us, can hope to reconcile the principles of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the right of the individual and of \_\_\_\_\_, of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, on the one hand, and \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ on the other.
- c. Referring to the duties of those elected to serve on institutions, the Guardian says their function is not to \_\_\_\_\_, but to \_\_\_\_\_, and consult not only among \_\_\_\_\_, but as much as possible with the \_\_\_\_\_ . They must regard themselves in no other

light but that of \_\_\_\_\_ for a more \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ presentation of the Cause of God. They should never be led to suppose that they are the \_\_\_\_\_ of the body of the Cause, intrinsically \_\_\_\_\_ to others in capacity or merit, and sole promoters of its teachings and principles.

- d. He states further that they should approach their task with \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and endeavor, by their \_\_\_\_\_, their high sense of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, their \_\_\_\_\_, their \_\_\_\_\_, their \_\_\_\_\_ to the welfare and interests of the friends, the Cause, and humanity, to win, not only the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of those whom they serve, but also their \_\_\_\_\_ and real \_\_\_\_\_. They must, at all times, avoid the spirit of \_\_\_\_\_, the atmosphere of \_\_\_\_\_, free themselves from a \_\_\_\_\_, and banish all forms of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ from their deliberations. They should, within the limits of wise \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ the friends into their confidence, \_\_\_\_\_ them with their plans, \_\_\_\_\_ with them their problems and anxieties, and \_\_\_\_\_ their advice and counsel.
- e. And Shoghi Effendi concludes by noting that, when they are called upon to arrive at a certain decision, they should, after \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ consultation, turn to God in prayer, and with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ record their vote and \_\_\_\_\_ by the voice of the majority, which we are told by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to be the voice of \_\_\_\_\_, never to be \_\_\_\_\_, and always to be \_\_\_\_\_ enforced. To this voice the friends must \_\_\_\_\_ respond, and regard it as the only means that can ensure the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of the Cause.

The picture drawn by the Guardian of an Assembly and individual members of the community it serves stands in sharp contrast to what we often see in society today. Whether at the level of practice or at the level of theory, there is a tendency to legitimize tension between the people and the institutions that administer their affairs—the individual wanting more and more freedom to pursue whatever the heart desires and the institutions demanding more and more submission. What is clear, however, is that, in this stage of human history, when its essential oneness is to be woven into the structure of society, the nature of the relationship between individuals and their institutions must be entirely redefined. So many of the words we employ today to describe the organized life of humanity will need to take on new meaning, words such as “power”, “freedom”, and “authority”. The concept of authority, in particular, carries certain connotations. How often do those who do not have it, rebel against it, while those

with authority constantly remind the others of their obligation to obey. In the guidance of the Guardian, we can perceive an entirely different set of attitudes towards authority underlying the relationship between individuals and their institutions.

Specifically, what we can glean from his writings is that, for a humanity approaching its stage of maturity, authority is not viewed as an instrument of dominance but as a necessary element of social organization. Just as there are laws that govern physical existence, so, too, the individual and collective endeavors of humanity must be guided by laws, many of which are spiritual in nature. Certain institutions of society must be invested with authority to promulgate these laws, not to dictate but to create avenues through which human potential can properly unfold. Such a responsible conception of authority gives rise to a spirit of loving, eager cooperation that binds individuals and their institutions in a most natural way. To think about this further, look at the remarks below. Which do you feel are in accordance with the kind of relationship depicted by Shoghi Effendi between an Assembly and the members of the community it serves?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Order in society implies the need for authority.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Order in society demands that those in positions of authority use ways and means to control the people they govern.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A domineering attitude is a sign of strength.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Those who hold positions of authority will always seek to dominate others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ It is the law of the jungle that rules; one must dominate in order to avoid being dominated.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Self-surrender implies weakness, and individuals should never surrender their freedoms, even if it serves the common good.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The laws that governing bodies promote and enforce are designed to take away individual freedom and initiative.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Order requires the implementation of laws that ensure individual and collective progress and well-being.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Institutions should never curtail individual freedom even if it causes harm to individuals and society.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Individual freedom can be properly channeled through submission to the laws that govern a just society.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Institutions of society should learn to channel the diverse talents of individuals in service to the common weal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Freedom requires courage to rebel against authority.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Freedom is not expressed through rebellion but through submission to laws that ensure individual and collective felicity.

- \_\_\_\_\_ An institution should not govern through dictatorial authority but through loving fellowship.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Human beings are selfish by nature and need to be governed through force and coercion.
- \_\_\_\_\_ A governing body wins the trust of the people it serves through frank and loving consultation.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Those in positions of authority are required to carry out their duties with absolute devotion to the welfare of the people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Those in positions of authority earn the respect and affection of the people they serve by manifesting candor, justice, humility, and open-mindedness.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Those in positions of authority contribute to the welfare of the individuals and communities they serve when they banish all forms of prejudice and passions from their deliberations.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Being elected to serve on an institution implies that one is superior to others in capacity and merit.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Service on an institution is not a right to which one is entitled or an honor to which one should aspire; it is a duty and responsibility to which one is called.

As you continue to reflect on the above passages of the Guardian, and on the nature of the relationship between an Assembly and the individual, you should bear in mind the following: Though most of us may never have the occasion to serve as a member of an Assembly, we all share in the responsibility for the continued strengthening of this institution. We should each see ourselves as active participants in its ongoing development, rallying behind our Assembly and supporting its efforts to administer the affairs of the community. Concerned with the Assembly's growth, we look upon it with loving eyes and make sure that our own actions reinforce its efforts. To conclude this section, you may wish to ponder the significance of the following statement made by the Guardian:

**“It devolves upon us whose dearest wish is to see the Cause enter upon that promised era of universal recognition and world achievements, to do all in our power to consolidate the foundations of these Assemblies, promoting at the same time a fuller understanding of their purpose and more harmonious cooperation for their maintenance and success.”<sup>42</sup>**

## SECTION 10

The same spirit of reciprocity that characterizes the relationship between individuals and the Assembly animates relationships among the institutions and agencies of the Administrative Order, the third subject of our study. Here, too, loving collaboration is the operating principle we find enunciated again and again by the Guardian. Indeed, the need to address this

issue arose early in his ministry as a result of his efforts to increase the number of National Spiritual Assemblies worldwide.

Until that time, Local Spiritual Assemblies had enjoyed a certain degree of independence in their operation. Significant as the Local Assembly was, and continues to be, Shoghi Effendi was not fashioning a system of loose institutions in a country, each functioning according to its own vision of the Cause. Rather, he was tying local institutions to the National Spiritual Assembly, which would, of course, later be under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.

We already saw in the previous section, in discussing the relationship between individuals and their Assembly, the need for the institutions of society to be invested with authority. One of Shoghi Effendi's concerns in this regard was to ensure that the proper degree of authority was invested in the institutions at the local and national level. Striking a balance between what should be centralized in the hands of the National Assembly and what should rest with Local Assemblies was among the themes he elaborated at the time. He developed this theme further in the context of the relationship between a National Spiritual Assembly and its committees. Referring to the members of the National Assembly, he stated:

**“They should, within the limits imposed upon them by present-day circumstances, endeavor to maintain the balance in such a manner that the evils of over-centralization which clog, confuse and in the long run depreciate the value of the Bahá'í services rendered shall on one hand be entirely avoided, and on the other the perils of utter decentralization with the consequent lapse of governing authority from the hands of the national representatives of the believers definitely averted.”<sup>43</sup>**

To appreciate more fully the kind of relationship that Shoghi Effendi envisioned would characterize interactions between the institutions and agencies of the Administrative Order, think of the culture of contest that rules the world today. Within such a culture, institutions and agencies have a tendency to guard jealously the domain of their authority. It may be true that, in any given society, such spheres of authority are fixed by law. Nevertheless, imagine how much energy is spent in competition and negotiation among governing bodies at different levels in the exercise of their powers, using such instruments as budgets, public opinion, friendship, and political alliance.

What is foremost in the minds of those who form part of an agency of the Administrative Order, however, is humble service to Bahá'u'lláh. They are not obsessed with their own authority but are concerned with the harmonious functioning of the whole. On whatever agency they happen to be serving at that particular moment, they are animated by loyalty to the entire Administrative Order. The relationship depicted in the Guardian's writings is one in which every institution and agency is motivated by the dictates of genuine respect and mutual trust, by the acknowledgment that all are serving the same ends and eager to see the same divine confirmations descend upon the efforts of the friends to promote the Cause.

In the locality where you reside, which forms part of a larger geographic area, or “cluster”, you have seen how the institutions and agencies of the Faith, and groups associated with them, work together to create a cluster-level system that enables the Cause to develop and grow. Indeed, in the workings of this system, which allows for different institutions and agencies to interact so effectively, their harmonious relationship is readily apparent. Decide

which of the following statements reflect beliefs and attitudes that should define the nature of the relationship among them and which ones do not:

- \_\_\_\_\_ So long as every group stays focused on its own area of action and does not overstep, there is harmony in the workings at the cluster level.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Every group, while staying focused on its own area of action, is aware of the interconnectedness of the processes at the cluster level and is ready to extend its assistance to the efforts of other groups.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Every group strives to advance learning in relation to its own area of action, while eager to understand how knowledge and experience are being gained in other areas.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Efficiency is increased when fixed parameters are drawn for each area of action, and no one group interferes in the work of another.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The progress of the efforts of any one group or agency in the cluster is a source of joy to the others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Groups and agencies constantly vie with one another for a greater share of limited resources.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Groups and agencies consult together and with the friends they are serving in order to channel energies and talents into avenues that will be most fruitful.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Institutions and agencies mutually support and assist one another in order to contribute to the progress of the entire cluster.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Unified action, loving consultation, and mutual support among the groups and institutions serving within the cluster instill life in the entire community.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Institutions and agencies operating in a cluster see themselves as serving the same ends and welcome the accomplishments of one another.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Cooperation, not competition, is what assures the success of the efforts of groups and agencies within a cluster; when one area of activity starts to flourish it stimulates activity in other areas.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Progress is the fruit of competition; if cluster agencies are not competing with one another, they will lose motivation and drive.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When the agencies and groups in a cluster recognize the complementarity and interdependence of their endeavors, they avoid fragmented action.
- \_\_\_\_\_ When the agencies and groups in a cluster do not recognize the complementarity and interdependence of their endeavors, they dissipate their energies.

\_\_\_\_\_ The law that governs the human body with all its diverse elements is one of interconnectedness, of mutuality and cooperation; the same law should govern the functioning of agencies and institutions operating within a cluster.

\_\_\_\_\_ Harmonious interactions among groups and agencies working at the cluster-level unlock the power latent in individuals, groups and the community to work for the common good.

## SECTION 11

We turn now to the fourth subject of our study: the nature of Bahá'í elections. Given the importance of the subject, our discussion will enter into considerable detail, drawing on passages written both by the Guardian, or on his behalf, and by the Universal House of Justice. You are encouraged to take the time necessary to go through the quotations carefully and reflect on the features of the electoral process that distinguish Bahá'í administration so sharply from political processes in the world today. Remember that we are interested not in the mechanics of Bahá'í elections but in the spiritual nature of the principles underlying their operation that Shoghi Effendi expounded as he brought the Administrative Order into being.

Participating in the Bahá'í electoral process is, of course, a duty enjoined on each one of us. There are two occasions every year when we are called upon to discharge this duty. As we discussed in the preceding unit, every Bahá'í in good standing eighteen years of age or older is eligible to take part in the unit convention held annually in the area where he or she resides—this, to elect one or more delegates who, in turn, will elect the members of the National Spiritual Assembly at the National Convention from among all the adult believers in the country.

Likewise, all Bahá'ís eighteen and over are able to participate annually in the election of the Local Spiritual Assembly that serves their community. The members of most Local Assemblies are elected directly by the body of the electorate at an annual meeting. In designated localities where the number of Bahá'ís is large and the community's capacity for managing complexity is strong, this is done through a two-stage process, in a manner similar in many respects to the election of a National Assembly.

Now, let us begin our study of the electoral process by reading the passage below, which describes the posture that Shoghi Effendi urges the believers to adopt towards the voting process.

**“On the election day, the friends must wholeheartedly participate in the elections, in unity and amity, turning their hearts to God, detached from all things but Him, seeking His guidance and supplicating His aid and bounty.”<sup>44</sup>**

Regarding the qualifications for membership on an Assembly, the Guardian encourages the friends to bear the following in mind:

**“... it is incumbent upon the chosen delegates to consider without the least trace of passion and prejudice, and irrespective of any material consideration, the names of only those who can best combine the necessary qualities of unquestioned**

loyalty, of selfless devotion, of a well-trained mind, of recognized ability and mature experience.”<sup>45</sup>

And he gives further instructions in this respect:

**“Due regard must be paid to their actual capacity and present attainments, and only those who are best qualified for membership, be they men or women, and irrespective of social standing, should be elected to the extremely responsible position of a member of the Bahá’í Assembly.”**<sup>46</sup>

In the passage below, Shoghi Effendi emphasizes the responsibility placed on the individual to make the wisest possible choice at the time of election:

**“... I do not feel it to be in keeping with the spirit of the Cause to impose any limitation upon the freedom of the believers to choose those of any race, nationality or temperament who *best combine* the essential qualifications for membership of administrative institutions. They should disregard personalities and concentrate their attention on the qualities and requirements of office, without prejudice, passion or partiality. The Assembly should be representative of the choicest and most varied and capable elements in every Bahá’í community.”**<sup>47</sup>

The Universal House of Justice offers the following further guidance:

**“It is expected that in the future . . . there will be very large numbers of individuals who have the qualities which make them fit for service on Spiritual Assemblies. Of these only a few can be elected at any one time. It is also expected that, through training and experience in the process and spirit of Bahá’í elections, the members of the electorate will have raised their consciousness of their responsibility to vote for only those who satisfy the requirements that the Guardian has outlined. They will, therefore, see it as their continuing duty to familiarize themselves with the character and abilities of those who are active in the community so that, when the time for an election comes, they will already have some idea of the people from among whom they must make their choice.”**<sup>48</sup>

Some discussion of the qualifications and requirements for membership on Assembly is acceptable, but Shoghi Effendi warns against making reference to personalities, that is, to specific individuals:

**“I feel that reference to personalities before the election would give rise to misunderstanding and differences. What the friends should do is to get thoroughly acquainted with one another, to exchange views, to mix freely and discuss among themselves the requirements and qualifications for such a membership without reference or application, however indirect, to particular individuals. We should refrain from influencing the opinion of others . . .”**<sup>49</sup>

In order for the individual to make a wise choice at the time of election, it is necessary, Shoghi Effendi explains, for him or her to become fully involved in Bahá’í community life:

**“Bahá’í electoral procedures and methods have, indeed, for one of their essential purposes the development in every believer of the spirit of responsibility. By**

**emphasizing the necessity of maintaining his full freedom in the elections, they make it incumbent upon him to become an active and well-informed member of the Bahá'í community in which he lives.”<sup>50</sup>**

In this light, the practice of nominating candidates for service, we are advised by the Guardian, is alien to the spirit of Bahá'í elections:

**“Bahá'í community life thus makes it a duty for every loyal and faithful believer to become an intelligent, well-informed and responsible elector, and also gives him the opportunity of raising himself to such a station. And since the practice of nomination hinders the development of such qualities in the believer, and in addition leads to corruption and partisanship, it has to be entirely discarded in all Bahá'í elections.”<sup>51</sup>**

The Universal House of Justice explains further:

**“The fundamental difference between the system of candidature and the Bahá'í system is that, in the former, individuals, or those who nominate them, decide that they should be placed in positions of authority and put themselves forward to be voted into it. In the Bahá'í system it is the mass of the electorate which makes the decision. If an individual ostentatiously places himself in the public eye with the seeming purpose of getting people to vote for him, the members of the electorate regard this as self-conceit and are affronted by it; they learn to distinguish between someone who is well known as an unintentional result of active public service and someone who makes an exhibition of himself merely to attract votes.”<sup>52</sup>**

The following passage, written by the House of Justice, highlights a principle central both to the electoral process and to service on administrative institutions:

**“Election to an Assembly, from a Bahá'í point of view, is not a right that people are entitled to, or an honor to which they should aspire; it is a duty and responsibility to which they may be called. The purpose is that those who are elected to an Assembly should be the most worthy for this service; this does not and cannot mean that all those who are worthy will be elected.”<sup>53</sup>**

The exercises below will help you think through the ideas presented in the above passages. You should not be content simply to complete each one but should discuss them fully with the members of your study group. In many cases you will find the answers obvious. Remember that the purpose of the exercises is not to test your understanding of the Bahá'í electoral process; it is to provide you with the opportunity to reflect on the nature of, and the principles involved in, the process and to help you to shoulder your responsibilities in this respect faithfully.

1. Answer the following questions:

\_\_\_\_\_ Is it appropriate for the believers to discuss the requirements and qualifications for membership in the institution to be elected?

\_\_\_\_\_ If the believers discuss among themselves the requirements and qualifications for membership, is it acceptable for them to mention specific names of individuals that they feel are suitable for service?

\_\_\_\_\_ If the believers discuss the requirements and qualifications for membership, is it all right for them to allude to individuals that they feel would be suitable for service, without mentioning any names specifically?

\_\_\_\_\_ If the believers discuss the requirements and qualifications for membership, is it all right for them to mention specific people as examples of the qualities under discussion?

\_\_\_\_\_ Is it all right to discuss the performance of the current members of an Assembly?

\_\_\_\_\_ In the exchange of views before an election, is it all right for the believers to discuss deficiencies noted in the functioning of an Assembly?

\_\_\_\_\_ Is it all right to consider oneself suitable for service on an Assembly?

\_\_\_\_\_ If one feels one is suited for service on an Assembly, is it all right to bring to the attention of others one's qualifications and experience, without actually asking them to vote for oneself?

\_\_\_\_\_ If one has personal or professional commitments that would make it difficult to serve on an Assembly, is it acceptable to bring this to the attention of others before an election?

\_\_\_\_\_ If one knows something about a believer that would affect his or her suitability for service on an Assembly, does one have the responsibility to make this known to other voters?

\_\_\_\_\_ Is it all right for the believers to discuss who they voted for after the election?

\_\_\_\_\_ If one does not feel that one is familiar enough with the members of the community, should one try to figure out who others are voting for and follow their example?

\_\_\_\_\_ Does active participation in the life of the Bahá'í community make one more able to participate effectively in the electoral process?

\_\_\_\_\_ Is turning to God and being detached from all besides Him an important condition for one who participates in the Bahá'í electoral process?

2. Below are several factors that might come to one's mind when considering what makes individuals suited for service on an Assembly. For each, indicate whether you regard it as "important", "not very important", "irrelevant", or "unfavorable". Mark them with an "I", "NVI", "IR", and "UN" accordingly.

\_\_\_\_\_ That he or she possesses a sound understanding of the teachings of the Faith

- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she possesses a sound understanding of the messages written by the Universal House of Justice regarding the global Plan underway in the Bahá'í world
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she has a demonstrated ability to translate the teachings into action
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she has a demonstrated ability to help others translate the teachings into action
- \_\_\_\_\_ That his or her life reflects a high degree of coherence between belief and action
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she contributes, through both word and deed, to an environment conducive to the participation of growing numbers in collective action
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she has a demonstrated ability to consult well with others
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she is domineering in consultation
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she constantly puts forward suggestions about projects the community should undertake
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she is prone to conflict
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she is able to acknowledge when he or she has made a mistake
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she has proven ability in serving the interests of the Faith
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she has served in an administrative capacity before
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she has been a Bahá'í for many years
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she selflessly serves the Bahá'í community and contributes to its growth
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she shares the same concerns about the Bahá'í community that you have
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she often, as a habit, finds faults in the way the Bahá'í community is administered
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she is familiar with the progress of the Bahá'í community worldwide
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she is well traveled
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she has been exposed to other cultures
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she is entertaining when addressing an audience
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she is poised when addressing an audience
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she is charismatic
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she holds a high-ranking position in society
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she is well educated
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she has a well-trained mind
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she is well dressed
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she is wealthy

- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or her is a good and loyal friend of yours
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she puts the interests of the Faith above any personal consideration
- \_\_\_\_\_ That his or her loyalty to the Cause is unquestionable
- \_\_\_\_\_ That he or she, in being a respected and long-standing member of the community, deserves the honor of serving on its Assembly

Clearly there are many other factors that may come to a person’s mind when considering what makes an individual well suited to serve on an Assembly. You may wish to think of a few more and discuss them with your group.

## SECTION 12

Let us now consider the nature of service on an Assembly—the fifth and final subject in these sections where we are exploring the spiritual nature of some of the principles that Shoghi Effendi expounded in laying the foundations of the Administrative Order worldwide.

Even the brief examination of the nature of Bahá’í administration that we have undertaken so far shows how profoundly different service on an Assembly is from membership on other kinds of democratically elected bodies common in society. Think, for example, of a city council as it operates in most places. No matter how worthy the motive for service, an individual must choose to put his or her name forward for election and place himself or herself in the public eye specifically for the purpose of garnering votes. Once elected, he or she is expected to promote an agenda, to press for the implementation of programs that were promised during the campaign, and to represent the views of the majority of the electorate. The degree to which a member of the city council is successful in pursuing such programs will, at least to some extent, determine whether he or she is reelected for another term. To accomplish anything, then, a council member must fight for a set of proposals on issues that won him or her votes, take sides in discussions on those issues, negotiate with groups that have different views and interests, and raise objections to decisions that do not satisfy the electorate which voted for him or her. Whatever the merits of such a system, it stands in sharp contrast to the way in which Assemblies are elected and function. While called upon to consult with those they represent, Assemblies are “freed from all direct responsibility for their policies and decisions to their electorates”<sup>54</sup> and undertake their duties with hearts turned constantly towards God. The Guardian explained early in his ministry:

**“The Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh must in no wise be regarded as purely democratic in character inasmuch as the basic assumption which requires all democracies to depend fundamentally upon getting their mandate from the people is altogether lacking in this Dispensation.”<sup>55</sup>**

Clearly those who serve on the institutions of the Administrative Order should be alert if they are to avoid being unduly directed by the feelings, the opinions, and the preferences of groups within the electorate. How much more should they be on their guard, then, lest their own personal passions or individual interests ever so slightly influence them in carrying out their sacred duties. You remember the guidance of the Guardian quoted in Section 9 that members of Assemblies

**“must disregard utterly their own likes and dislikes, their personal interests and inclinations, and concentrate their minds upon those measures that will conduce to the welfare and happiness of the Bahá’í Community and promote the common weal.”<sup>56</sup>**

To reflect on the extent of the difference between service on an Assembly and on other types of governing bodies, think about the passages you have studied in this unit. Surely you have formed some conception of what service on an Assembly entails. The following exercises will assist you in consolidating your thinking in this respect:

1. Which of the statements below describe the members of the Assembly you have envisioned?

- They receive their mandate from those who elected them.
- They feel responsible for their actions to those who elected them.
- They consider their election to the Assembly an opportunity to exert power.
- They consider their election to the Assembly an opportunity to extend the sphere of their influence.
- They view their membership on the Assembly as a platform for expressing their personal talents.
- They view their membership on the Assembly as a platform for advancing their own agenda.
- They believe membership on the Assembly makes it possible for them to serve the Cause in whatever way they wish.
- They consider it both a duty and a blessing to work for the good of those who elected them but see themselves as responsible only to God.

2. Which of the following characterize their frame of mind when entering into consultation as a body?

- They enter into consultation with their minds already made up on the subject under consideration.
- They enter into consultation with the goal of having their personal views prevail.
- They enter into consultation with the aim of seeking the truth, sharing their own thoughts and listening to the views of others on the subject under consideration.
- They enter into consultation with the aim of contributing to consensus on the subject under consideration.

3. Which of the following characterize the nature of their consultations as a body?

- They try to convince one another of the merit of their individual views and opinions.
- They cling to their individual personal views as a sign of strength.

- \_\_\_\_\_ They strive to put aside all personal preferences and ignore self-interest.
- \_\_\_\_\_ They see individual views and opinions, including their own, as contributions towards gaining a better understanding of the subject under consideration.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The younger ones defer to the views of older members whenever they speak, remaining silent on such occasions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ They give more weight to the views and opinions of those they regard as their personal friends.
- \_\_\_\_\_ While respecting the views and opinions of all the members, they give due weight to the particular knowledge and experience that one member may have on the subject under consideration.

No matter how well an Assembly functions, it may encounter difficulties from time to time. The following exercises will help you think about how its membership would respond to such difficulties:

1. Suppose one of the members tends to dominate the consultations, making sure his or her views always prevail. What do the others do?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Talk among themselves outside the consultations to devise a scheme for overpowering the domineering member in the next meeting
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Let the domineering member have his or her own way for the sake of maintaining unity
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Address the matter indirectly in the meeting by suggesting that they study quotations from the Writings on the nature of Bahá'í consultation, with the hope that the domineering member will "get the hint"
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Address the matter directly, discussing it openly in a meeting in a frank and loving manner
  
2. Suppose one of the members is convinced of his or her views on a particular subject, even though it has been thoroughly explored, and it is clear that none of the other members hold the same views. What does he or she do?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Prolong the consultation with the hope that a sufficient number of the other members relent before a vote is taken
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Accept the possibility that his or her views may be wrong
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Give in for the sake of maintaining unity, but make it clear that his or her fundamental objections remain
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Have faith in the consultative process and accept that, even though the majority sees the situation differently than he or she does, there must be collective wisdom in what others are saying
  
3. Suppose it proves impossible for an Assembly to reach consensus on a subject under discussion, and so the decision is taken by a majority vote. What do the members with views differing from the majority do?

- \_\_\_\_\_ Openly voice their objections to the decision among the members of the community
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Accept the decision, but not participate in its implementation
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Participate in the implementation of the decision half-heartedly
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Exert their utmost to ensure that the decision is implemented to its fullest, confident that, if there is any mistake, it will be corrected as learning occurs
4. Suppose one of the members of an Assembly is not fully convinced of a decision made by that body, a decision that actually proves to be ineffective when later implemented. What does he or she do?
- \_\_\_\_\_ Take advantage of the situation to persuade the others that he or she was right from the beginning, in an effort to increase his or her influence over the others
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Criticize the other members for their error in judgment and for the poor consultative process that led to the decision, suggesting that they listen to him or her in the future
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Console the other members, acknowledging that everyone makes mistakes and assuring them that they can learn from their error in judgment
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Simply participate in the analysis of the situation with the others as a body, studying any relevant material or guidance in order to determine what step should be taken next

## SECTION 13

Our discussions over these past few sections were intended to shed light on the nature of Bahá'í administration as developed through the guidance of the Guardian. Two interrelated ideas now merit our reflection, ideas that we should always keep in mind, whether in relation to the institutions developed during the early years of the Guardian's ministry or to those established at later stages: First, Bahá'í administration is an inseparable element of the Faith, as central to Bahá'í belief as its spiritual teachings and its laws and exhortations, and, second, the Order to which this system of administration is giving rise will continue to evolve under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice in accordance with the exigencies of the time.

Of course, the above ideas are not new to us, but it would be valuable for each one of us to enhance our understanding of their significance as we strive to realize Bahá'u'lláh's vision of a new World Order and to build the kind of relationships it will require. We know that Bahá'í administration proceeds from the Text of Bahá'u'lláh, Who, in His Most Holy Book, calls for the establishment in every locality of a consultative body whose members should consider it their duty "to be the trusted ones of the Merciful among men". It is incumbent upon them, He states, "to take counsel together and to have regard for the interests of the servants of God, for His sake, even as they regard their own interests, and to choose that which is meet and seemly". 'Abdu'l-Bahá defined and expounded the principles proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh and delineated the features of the Administrative Order in His Will and Testament, an Order that we know is the precursor to the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh. The Guardian continued this work as he

applied these principles to the Bahá'í community throughout the world. In a letter dated 11 March 1936, the Guardian states:

**“This New World Order, whose promise is enshrined in the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, whose fundamental principles have been enunciated in the writings of the Center of His Covenant, involves no less than the complete unification of the entire human race. This unification should conform to such principles as would directly harmonize with the spirit that animates, and the laws that govern the operation of, the institutions that already constitute the structural basis of the Administrative Order of His Faith.”<sup>57</sup>**

Further, in a letter dated 27 February 1929, he explains that we cannot dissociate the administrative principles of the Faith from the purely spiritual and humanitarian teachings:

**“It should be remembered by every follower of the Cause that the system of Bahá'í administration is not an innovation imposed arbitrarily upon the Bahá'ís of the world since the Master's passing, but derives its authority from the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, is specifically prescribed in unnumbered Tablets, and rests in some of its essential features upon the explicit provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. It thus unifies and correlates the principles separately laid down by Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and is indissolubly bound with the essential verities of the Faith. To dissociate the administrative principles of the Cause from the purely spiritual and humanitarian teachings would be tantamount to a mutilation of the body of the Cause, a separation that can only result in the disintegration of its component parts, and the extinction of the Faith itself.”<sup>58</sup>**

And, in a letter dated 21 March 1930, the Guardian makes the following statement, which is essential to our understanding of Bahá'í administration:

**“It should also be borne in mind that the machinery of the Cause has been so fashioned, that whatever is deemed necessary to incorporate into it in order to keep it in the forefront of all progressive movements, can, according to the provisions made by Bahá'u'lláh, be safely embodied therein. To this testify the words of Bahá'u'lláh, as recorded in the Eighth Leaf of the exalted Paradise: *‘It is incumbent upon the Trustees of the House of Justice to take counsel together regarding those things which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book, and to enforce that which is agreeable to them. God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth, and He, verily, is the Provider, the Omniscient.’*”<sup>59</sup>**

The Guardian assures us that, as Bahá'í administration evolves, it will “at once incarnate, safeguard and foster” the spirit of the Faith, through every stage in the gradual unfoldment of its activities. Indeed, the Universal House of Justice explains the following in a message written in 2010, in the wake of a period of intense activity at the level of the cluster—a geographic construct introduced to the Bahá'í world a decade earlier to facilitate learning about growth:

**“The workings of this cluster-level system, born of exigencies, point to an important characteristic of Bahá'í administration: Even as a living organism, it has coded within it the capacity to accommodate higher and higher degrees of complexity,**

**in terms of structures and processes, relationships and activities, as it evolves under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.”<sup>60</sup>**

To think about the implications of the passages above, decide whether the following statements are true:

\_\_\_\_\_ Bahá’u’lláh has brought a body of teachings that individuals can apply to their lives as they see fit in order to grow spiritually, as well as a set of principles that will gradually permeate the life of society; there is no need for formal administration.

\_\_\_\_\_ It is true that some administration is needed, but it should be kept to the barest minimum; otherwise it will hamper the flow of the spirit of the Cause.

\_\_\_\_\_ Bahá’í administration is an end in itself; making it more efficient should be the highest priority of the Bahá’í community worldwide, and all else should be subordinated to it.

\_\_\_\_\_ The Administrative Order is inherent to the very purpose of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation; its existence is inseparable from the Faith.

\_\_\_\_\_ The institutions of the Administrative Order serve to canalize the energies released by the Revelation of Baha’u’llah and to stimulate the progress of His Faith.

\_\_\_\_\_ Bahá’í administration is the concern of a few; most of the friends need only make sure they vote in elections and attend the Nineteen Day Feast to fulfill their responsibilities in this respect.

\_\_\_\_\_ Wholehearted support for Bahá’í administration implies that we not only vote in elections and attend the Nineteen Day Feast but also take every opportunity to point out shortcomings we notice to those serving in administrative capacities.

\_\_\_\_\_ Wholehearted support for Bahá’í administration implies that we actively participate, to the best of our ability, in the life of the Bahá’í community within which the Administrative Order grows and shows its powers.

\_\_\_\_\_ Without the wholehearted support of the individual members of the community, the steady unfoldment of the Administrative Order and the efficient functioning of its institutions will be hampered.

\_\_\_\_\_ Embracing the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh requires that, as individuals, we gain an ever more profound appreciation of the spirit that will increasingly manifest itself in the structures and processes of Bahá’í administration.

\_\_\_\_\_ The system envisioned by Bahá’u’lláh—that is, His Administrative Order—will demonstrate its full potential in the far-off future; in the meantime, it is only a means for managing the affairs of small communities, and there is little we can do as individuals to foster its development.

\_\_\_\_\_ The evolution of the Bahá'í administrative system and the development of the Bahá'í community are inextricably linked at every level.

\_\_\_\_\_ During our own lifetime we will all have the bounty of seeing Bahá'í administration unfold step by step, gradually manifest its potential, and show forth its beauty—all under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice.

## SECTION 14

Though the development of the institution of the Spiritual Assembly can be considered the hallmark of the first fifteen years of his Guardianship, we should recognize that Shoghi Effendi continued to steer its steady progress during the rest of his ministry. There were, of course, several other institutions that evolved under his unerring guidance as well. We will look briefly, in this and the next few sections, at five of these: the Bahá'í Fund, the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár, the Nineteen Day Feast, Huqúqu'lláh, and the summer school. Let us begin here with the Bahá'í Fund.

Among the institutions reared by the Guardian was the Bahá'í Fund. *“And as the progress and extension of spiritual activities is dependent and conditioned upon material means,”* he explained, *“it is of absolute necessity that immediately after the establishment of local as well as national Spiritual Assemblies, a Bahá'í Fund be established, to be placed under the exclusive control of the Spiritual Assembly.”* *“It is the sacred obligation of every conscientious and faithful servant of Bahá'u'lláh who desires to see His Cause advance,”* he further wrote, *“to contribute freely and generously for the increase of that Fund.”* *“I feel urged to remind you”*, were his words to one National Spiritual Assembly, *“of the necessity of ever bearing in mind the cardinal principle that all contributions to the Fund are to be purely and strictly voluntary in character.”* He made clear, however, that *“appeals of a general character, carefully worded and moving and dignified in tone are welcome under all circumstances.”* Referring to the individual, the Guardian emphasized in a letter written on his behalf: *“It is the spirit, not the mere fact of contributing, that we should always take into account when we stress the necessity for a universal and wholehearted support of the various funds of the Cause.”* On another occasion, he advised: *“We must be like the fountain or spring that is continually emptying itself of all that it has and is continually being refilled from an invisible source. To be continually giving out for the good of our fellows undeterred by fear of poverty and reliant on the unfailing bounty of the Source of all wealth and all good—this is the secret of right living.”* *“Every Bahá'í, no matter how poor,”* was his guidance to the friends, *“must realize what a grave responsibility he has to shoulder in this connection, and should have confidence that his spiritual progress as a believer in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh will largely depend upon the measure in which he proves, in deeds, his readiness to support materially the divine institutions of His Faith.”*

In the second unit of Book 11, you will have an opportunity to learn more about the institution of the Fund. Meanwhile, you may wish to write down here some of the phrases that Shoghi Effendi uses to characterize the act of giving to the Fund:

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## SECTION 15

One of the unique features of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár. The Kitáb-i-Aqdas calls for its central edifice to be built "*throughout the lands*"—a House of Worship wherein the praise of God is celebrated with "*radiance and joy*". He instructs that these Houses of Worship be raised up "*as perfect as is possible in the world of being*" and be adorned "*with that which becometh them, not with images and effigies*". This central edifice is to form part of a complex that includes a number of dependencies dedicated to social, humanitarian, educational, and scientific pursuits. At the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing in 1921, the first Mashriqu'l-Adhkár had already been erected in the city of 'Ishqábád, located in the then Russian province of Turkestan, and construction on the second, the Mother Temple of the West, on the shores of Lake Michigan in the United States, was well underway. Shoghi Effendi, then, elaborated on the nature and characteristics of this vital institution in some of his earliest communications.

*"And of all the institutions that stand associated with His Holy Name,"* the Guardian stated, "*surely none save the institution of the Mashriqu'l-Adhkár can most adequately provide the essentials of Bahá'í worship and service, both so vital to the regeneration of the world.*" "*For it is assuredly upon the consciousness of the efficacy of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh,"* he pointed out, "*reinforced on one hand by spiritual communion with His Spirit, and on the other by the intelligent application and the faithful execution of the principles and laws He revealed, that the salvation of a world in travail must ultimately depend.*"

Referring to those who would gather in the House of Worship, the central edifice whose doors would be open to all for prayer, he wrote: "*Theirs will be the conviction that an all-loving and ever-watchful Father Who, in the past, and at various stages in the evolution of mankind, has sent forth His Prophets as the Bearers of His Message and the Manifestations of His Light to mankind, cannot at this critical period of their civilization withhold from His children the Guidance which they sorely need amid the darkness which has beset them, and which neither the light of science nor that of human intellect and wisdom can succeed in dissipating.*" "*And thus having recognized in Bahá'u'lláh the source whence this celestial light proceeds,"* Shoghi Effendi continued, "*they will irresistibly feel attracted to seek the shelter of His House, and congregate therein, unhampered by ceremonials and unfettered by creed, to render homage to the one true God, the Essence and Orb of eternal Truth, and to exalt and magnify the name of His Messengers and Prophets Who, from time immemorial even unto our day, have, under divers circumstances and in varying measure, mirrored forth to a dark and wayward world the light of heavenly Guidance.*"

As for the agencies that would, in time, be established around the House of Worship, the Guardian explained: “*Divorced from the social, humanitarian, educational and scientific pursuits centering around the Dependencies of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár, Bahá’í worship, however exalted in its conception, however passionate in fervor, can never hope to achieve beyond the meager and often transitory results produced by the contemplations of the ascetic or the communion of the passive worshipper.*” “*It cannot afford lasting satisfaction and benefit to the worshipper himself;*” he went on to say, “*much less to humanity in general, unless and until translated and transfused into that dynamic and disinterested service to the cause of humanity which it is the supreme privilege of the Dependencies of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár to facilitate and promote.*”

Although work on the Mother Temple of the West was delayed throughout the 1930s and 1940s by external circumstances, most notably World War II, it was dedicated in a ceremony in 1953. Upon its completion, the Guardian started a program for the construction of continental Houses of Worship. The first among these, built in response to goals he had set, were the Temples in Kampala, Uganda; Sydney, Australia; and Frankfurt, Germany. After his passing, the Universal House of Justice carried this program forward, overseeing the construction of Houses of Worship in Panama City, Panama; Apia, Samoa; New Delhi, India; and Santiago, Chile—thus fulfilling the Guardian’s wish for the institution of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár to be established across the divers continents. It has since continued to strengthen the institution in calling for the construction of both national and local Houses of Worship in designated places around the world.

Looking at the passages above, write down some of the essential concepts associated with the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár highlighted by the Guardian:

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One idea you undoubtedly noted above is that the institution of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkár brings together two essential, inseparable aspects of Bahá’í life: worship and service. Now think of present-day efforts in the locality where you reside. Can you say a few words about how the union of these two is reflected in the activities underway, particularly in the devotional spirit that finds expression in gatherings for prayer and in an educational process that builds capacity for service to humanity?

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## SECTION 16

Yet another institution that developed under the guidance of the Guardian was the Nineteen Day Feast. Concerning the nature of the Feast, a letter written on his behalf pointed out: *“The Nineteen Day Feast is an institution of the Cause, first established by the Báb, later confirmed by Bahá’u’lláh, and now made a prominent part of the administrative order of the Faith.”* *“Although not a binding ordinance,”* another letter written on his behalf made it clear, *“this Feast has been regarded by Bahá’u’lláh as highly desirable and meritorious. In the Aqdas He has specially emphasized its spiritual and devotional character, and also its social importance in the Bahá’í community as a means for bringing about closer fellowship and unity among the believers. The administrative significance of this Feast has been stated by the Guardian in view of the increasing need among the friends for better training in the principles and methods of Bahá’í Administration.”* *“The significance of the Nineteen Day Feast is thus threefold,”* the letter went on to explain. *“It is a gathering of a devotional, social and administrative importance. When these three features are all combined, this Feast can and will surely yield the best and the maximum of results. The friends, however, should be on their guard lest they overstress the significance of this institution created by Bahá’u’lláh. They should also take care not to underrate or minimize its importance.”*

Regarding the individual believer, Shoghi Effendi in a letter written on his behalf commented: *“Attendance at Nineteen Day Feasts is not obligatory but very important, and every believer should consider it a duty and privilege to be present on such occasions.”* In this context, he referred to the Feast as a *“vital medium for maintaining close and continued contact between the believers themselves, and also between them and the body of their elected representatives in the local community.”* *“There is a time set aside at the Nineteen Day Feasts for the Community to express its views and make suggestions to its Assembly”*, indicated another letter written on his behalf. *“The Assembly and the believers”*, the letter noted, *“should look forward to this happy period of discussion”*. But he warned that *“it should be stressed that all criticisms and discussions of a negative character which may result in undermining the authority of the Assembly as a body should be strictly avoided. For otherwise the order of the Cause itself will be endangered, and confusion and discord will reign in the Community.”* His following guidance is relevant in this respect: *“Let us be on our guard—so the Master continually reminds us from His Station on high—lest too much concern in that which is secondary in importance, and too long a preoccupation with the details of our affairs and activities, make us neglectful of the most essential, the most urgent of all our obligations, namely, to bury our cares and teach the Cause, delivering far and wide this Message of Salvation to a sorely stricken world.”*

Write down some of the features of the Nineteen Day Feast mentioned by the Guardian:

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The Guardian tells us that attendance at the Nineteen Day Feast, although both a duty and a privilege, is not obligatory; but he also tells us that it is a prominent part of the Administrative Order. How do these two statements help us see the significance of the Feast beyond the benefits that it brings to each one of us individually?

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Today the observance of the Nineteen Day Feast often takes place at the level of the neighborhood or village. From your participation in the Nineteen Day Feast in your locality, what would you say are some of the main contributions that this institution makes to the life of the community?

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## SECTION 17

The institution of Ḥuqúqu'lláh was ordained by Bahá'u'lláh in His Most Holy Book, the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, and continued to evolve over the course of the ministries of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. To the friends in Persia and nearby countries, where the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh had been applicable since the early days of the Faith, the Guardian explained through his secretary: *“Regarding the Ḥuqúqu'lláh . . . this is applied to one's merchandise, property and income. After deducting the necessary expenses, whatever is left as profit, and is an addition to one's capital, such a sum is subject to Ḥuqúq. When one has paid Ḥuqúq once on a particular sum, that sum is no longer subject to Ḥuqúq, unless it should pass from one person to another. One's residence, and the household furnishings are exempt from Ḥuqúq . . . Ḥuqúqu'lláh is paid to the Center of the Cause.”* In this respect, the following guidance was sent to the believers on behalf of Shoghi Effendi: *“The paying of the Ḥuqúq is a spiritual obligation; the friends must not be obliged by the Assemblies to pay it, but they should be encouraged to fulfill this spiritual obligation laid upon them in the Aqdas.”*

During His lifetime, Bahá'u'lláh had appointed two believers to receive and disburse these payments: Jináb-i-Sháh-Muḥammad-i-Manshádí, titled Amínu'l-Bayán, and, after his passing, Ḥájí Abu'l-Ḥasan-i-Ardikání, titled Ḥájí Amín. When Ḥájí Amín passed away in 1928, Shoghi Effendi appointed Ḥájí Ghulám-Riḍá, titled Amín-i-Amín (Trustee of the Trustee), the man 'Abdu'l-Bahá had appointed to assist Ḥájí Amín, as the Trustee. He served in this capacity until his passing in 1939. The Guardian then appointed Mr. Valíyu'lláh Varqá the Trustee and in 1951 elevated him to the rank of the Hand of the Cause of God. Upon his passing in 1955, Shoghi Effendi sent the following message to the Bahá'í world: *“Inform Hands and National Assemblies that Varqá's son, 'Alí-Muḥammad, has been appointed to succeed his father, now gathered into the concourse on high in the Abhá Kingdom, as Trustee of Ḥuqúq and elevated to rank of Hand of the Cause.”*

While developing the institution in the East, the Guardian did not feel *“the time was ripe to stress this in the West.”* His secretary wrote on his behalf in this connection: *“It is only gradually that the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh can be enforced. The time has to become ripe if the desired result is to be obtained.”* It was much later, in 1992 under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice, that the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh was made binding on the believers in the West. Hand of the Cause Dr. 'Alí-Muḥammad Varqá continued to oversee the evolution of the institution as its Chief Trustee, developing a structure of deputies and representatives around the world. With his passing in 2007, an International Board of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh brought into being by the Universal House of Justice two years earlier became fully responsible for supervising the work of National and Regional Boards of Trustees of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in all parts of the globe. You will learn more about the law of Ḥuqúqu'lláh in the third unit of Book 11 in the series.

## SECTION 18

Another development that we should consider here concerns the summer school—an annual gathering generally of several days' duration, often replicated at other times of the year. The Guardian's guidance to National Assemblies regarding the establishment of the summer school as a means for preparing the friends to teach the Cause holds particular significance in light of the introduction of the training institute into the Bahá'í community by the Universal

House of Justice in the 1990s. *“I wish to urge the necessity of concentrating, at your next summer session,”* the Guardian explained in 1932, *“on the systematic study of the early history and principles of the Faith, on public speaking, and on a thorough discussion, both formally and informally, of various aspects of the Cause. These I regard as essential preliminaries to a future intensive campaign of teaching in which the rising generation must engage, if the spread of the Cause is to be assured in that land.”* However, preparation for teaching was only one of the functions he assigned to the summer school. From statements such as these we get glimpses into the contribution it can make to the life of the Bahá’í community: *“The world is undoubtedly facing a great crisis and the social, economic and political conditions are becoming daily more complex,”* we read in one letter. *“Should the friends desire to take the lead in reforming the world, they should start by educating themselves and understand what the troubles and problems really are which baffle the mind of man. It is in these Summer Schools that this training should be provided for the friends.”*

In the next unit of this book, we will examine the implications of the establishment of training institutes in country after country for the development of the Faith worldwide. Here it might be helpful to think about how, from the early days of his ministry, the Guardian seemed to have had in mind the importance of training, particularly in relation to the teaching work. He seemed to recognize, as well, the imperative of building capacity, through such training, to address questions that humanity faces in the various facets of its life. Can you say a few words about how participation in the educational processes administered by the training institute is building the type of capacity that the Guardian envisioned?

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## SECTION 19

Our study in these sections of the development of Spiritual Assemblies and other institutions of the Faith has offered us a glimpse into the extraordinary accomplishments of the Guardian’s ministry, specifically those which occurred during the initial fifteen years under consideration. In contemplating these achievements, we should remember that there were forces, operating both within and outside the Bahá’í community, trying to undermine Shoghi Effendi at every turn. Not long after he took up his responsibilities as Guardian, signs of internal agitation began. Apart from Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí and his associates, who, as mentioned earlier, wasted no time in furthering their machinations, there were those foolish few who allowed themselves to be consumed by their own ambitions and rose up against the Guardian, failing to heed the warning in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament:

**“He that obeyeth him not, hath not obeyed God; he that turneth away from him, hath turned away from God and he that denieth him, hath denied the True One. Beware lest anyone falsely interpret these words, and like unto them that have broken the Covenant after the Day of Ascension (of Bahá’u’lláh) advance a pretext, raise the standard of revolt, wax stubborn and open wide the door of false interpretation.”<sup>61</sup>**

During the Guardian’s ministry there were several instances of Covenant-breaking, but none were able to halt the progress of the Faith. They were, however, insidious in nature and a constant burden on him. It would be instructive for us to analyze here the circumstances of three who rose up against Shoghi Effendi and the Bahá’í institutions, and ultimately against the Faith itself. Before doing so, you are encouraged to review Sections 17 to 20 of the preceding unit, which discuss how those who break the Covenant try to sow the seeds of dissension and doubt among the friends, and keep the relevant points in mind as you study the three cases. You will see how, whenever they appear, those who set themselves against the center of authority in the Faith follow similar patterns of behavior.

‘Abdul’-Ḥusayn, entitled Ávárih by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, was a prominent teacher in Persia during the Master’s lifetime. Following ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s passing, Ávárih traveled to the Holy Land to participate in the consultations called by Shoghi Effendi regarding the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, though he arrived there late. Motivated by what now seems clearly to have been personal ambition to play a prominent role in running the affairs of the Faith, Ávárih pressed for the nine members of the House of Justice to be elected immediately. He apparently accepted, however, Shoghi Effendi’s decision to strengthen the foundations of the Faith in various countries first and went to England at his request to deepen the friends’ knowledge of the teachings. He stayed in Europe only a short time and then went to Egypt, where he began to stir up mischief. As the situation worsened, he was invited to come to the Holy Land. Ávárih questioned the authenticity of the Master’s Will and Testament but admitted it was authentic after having been shown the original copy in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s handwriting. Yet his campaign of insinuation did not end. He wrote letters to believers expressing his dissatisfaction at the way the affairs of the Faith were being conducted. He returned to Persia, and eventually the Spiritual Assembly of Tīhrán had to seek guidance from Shoghi Effendi on how to deal with Ávárih. The friends themselves had begun to perceive his true motives, and he became increasingly isolated. Embittered and unrepentant for his actions, Ávárih finally disavowed the Faith altogether, joining hands with Muslim clergy and Christian missionaries in attacking it. In 1928, the first of three volumes that he wrote denouncing the Faith was published in Tīhrán. Shoghi Effendi sent a letter to the National Spiritual Assemblies in the West in October 1927 to alert them to the situation and advise them to be on their guard should Ávárih’s book secure circulation there. Here are two paragraphs from the Guardian’s letter:

**“He has most malignantly striven to revive the not unfamiliar accusation of representing the true lovers of Persia as the sworn enemies of every form of established authority in that land, the unrelenting disturbers of its peace, the chief obstacles to its unity and the determined wreckers of the venerated faith of Islam. By every artifice which a sordid and treacherous mind can devise he has sought in the pages of his book to strike terror in the heart of the confident believer, to sow the seeds of doubt in the mind of the well-disposed and friendly, to poison the thoughts of the indifferent and to reinforce the power of the assaulting weapon of the adversary.**

**“But, alas! he has labored in vain, oblivious of the fact that all the pomp and powers of royalty, all the concerted efforts of the mightiest potentates of Islam, all the ingenious devices to which the cruelest torture-mongers of a cruel race have for well-nigh a century resorted, have proved one and all impotent to stem the tide of the beloved Faith or to extinguish its flame. Surely, if we read the history of this Cause aright, we cannot fail to observe that the East has already witnessed not a few of its sons, of wider experience, of a higher standing, of a greater influence, apostatize their faith, find themselves to their utter consternation lose whatsoever talent they possessed, recede swiftly into the shadows of oblivion and be heard of no more.”<sup>62</sup>**

Ávárih lived to an advanced age, dying in December 1953 after having witnessed the many victories won by the Faith, including the successful launching of the first world-encircling plan, the Ten Year Crusade.

Now, can you find similarities in the pattern of behavior followed by Ávárih and the conduct of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí that you examined in the preceding unit? Are there similarities in the methods they used to undermine the Covenant? What kind of attitudes and sentiments towards the center of authority in the Faith was Ávárih trying to arouse in the friends?

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## SECTION 20

Ahmad Sohrab earned some degree of prominence in the West during ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ministry. He had been sent to the United States in his youth to act as servant and cook for the erudite Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl, whom ‘Abdu’l-Bahá had charged with responsibility for deepening the believers and who was, at that time, elderly and frail. Though instructed by the Master to accompany Mírzá Abu’l-Faḍl upon his departure from the United States in 1904, Ahmad Sohrab chose to remain in that country. He became proficient in English and eventually served as ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s translator during His travels in the West and later as His secretary in the Holy Land. Like Ávárih, Ahmad Sohrab was in favor of calling for the early election of the Universal House of Justice following the Master’s passing, and he was displeased with the decision of Shoghi Effendi to strengthen the functioning of Local and National Spiritual Assemblies. Having returned to the United States, where he was greatly admired by the Western believers, he was loath to follow any guidance given by the Assembly and demanded to be treated as a privileged exception. With the help of a wealthy woman, he set up an organization known as the New History Society and avidly pursued his own endeavors, seeking to bring in recruits. A letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi in August 1930 responds to a query he received on this subject:

**“Some persons in the [United] States feel that the History Society was badly represented to Shoghi Effendi. The source of all our information is the very writings of Ahmad, and the publications of that group. In all his circular letters he harped on the note of freedom and denounced the red tape that characterizes organizations. Freedom . . . is not a bad thing if considered in view of the interpretation that Bahá’u’lláh gives in the Aqdas. The freedom that He commends is a freedom which is a fruit and result of law and proper admin-istration. The other kind of freedom which is in defiance of law He considers to be animal and far from being of any good to man. He says, ‘true freedom is in obedience to My law’.”<sup>63</sup>**

Ahmad Sohrab made a concerted effort to penetrate the Bahá’í community but managed only to create a temporary flurry. Here was Shoghi Effendi’s advice, given through his secretary in 1934, to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada at the height of Ahmad Sohrab’s endeavors:

**“In regard to the activities of Ahmad Sohrab, Shoghi Effendi has already stated that such attacks, however perfidious, do not justify the friends replying or taking any direct action against them. The attitude of the National Spiritual Assembly should be to ignore them entirely. For any undue emphasis on attacks made upon the Cause by Ahmad and his supporters would make them feel that they constitute a real challenge to the Cause and a menace to its institutions. Should these attacks continue and acquire a serious importance the Guardian will surely advise the National Spiritual Assembly to take definite and decisive action.”<sup>64</sup>**

Referring to Ahmad Sohrab, a letter written on Shoghi Effendi’s behalf in 1948 explained further: “After he had, of his own accord, left the organized body of the Faith and refused to be reconciled with it he began to attack the administrators of it, first the American National Spiritual Assembly, then the entire Administrative Order, and in the end the Guardian.”<sup>65</sup> Eventually Sohrab established contacts with long-standing Covenant-breakers in the Holy Land, but not even this association could produce any result. He died in December 1958, alone.

There is no doubt that Ahmad Sohrab’s attack on the administration was little more than a pretext. What do you think was his real motive in establishing an organization of his own and in setting forth arguments that promoted freedom in defiance of administration? What similarities do you see between his conduct and that of Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí? Though not a member of Bahá’u’lláh’s family, for example, does not his behavior suggest that he had elevated himself to a special status that would, contrary to what is stated in the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, invest him with a certain authority?

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## SECTION 21

Mrs. Ruth White was a long-standing believer in the United States, who visited ‘Abdu’l-Bahá in the Holy Land in 1920. Some years following His passing, she challenged the authenticity of His Will and Testament, vehemently opposing the establishment of the institutions of the Faith, a step which she felt was not in conformity with His wishes. She went so far as to write to the United States Postmaster General asking him to prohibit the National Spiritual Assembly from “using the United States mails to spread the falsehood that Shoghi Effendi is the successor of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the Guardian of the Bahá’í Cause.” She wrote similarly to the authorities in the Holy Land. Not content with her own disaffection, she sought actively to persuade others of her views and published a book setting out her position. One of those who joined her in denouncing the Will and Testament was Dr. Wilhelm Herrigel, an early member of the German Bahá’í community. In response to the believer who wrote to him in 1930 about the situation, Shoghi Effendi stated:

**“I feel pity rather than alarm at the efforts which Mrs. White is exerting at present. These efforts, however strenuous and widespread, are doomed to utter extinction. So great and weighty an issue which she raises, involving as it does the honor of the Cause, is bound sooner or later to be verified and then I feel she will realize how grievously she has erred.**

**“That the Will is authentic is beyond the faintest shadow of doubt. The most powerful and determined opponents of the Faith in the East, who have challenged the very basis of Bahá’u’lláh’s Message, who have fiercely attacked the principles, the teachings, even the honor of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, have not even hinted at the possibility of the Will being a forged document. They have vehemently attacked its provisions, but never questioned its authenticity.”<sup>66</sup>**

And he went on to explain:

**“... the teachings of the Faith do not merely advocate certain universal principles, or propound a particular philosophy, or even inculcate a new and revitalizing spirit in its adherents. They provide, in addition, a set of laws, establish specific institutions, and lay down basic social principles for the guidance of society in future.”<sup>67</sup>**

It is not difficult to see that the objections to the Will and Testament raised by Mrs. White, who did not read or speak the Persian language, were a guise for other sentiments. Not even ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s former secretary who later broke the Covenant, Ahmad Sohrab—and, indeed, not even Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí—questioned the Will’s authenticity. Clearly, having had the privilege of meeting ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and listening to Him expound on the principles and truths enshrined in the Revelation, she imagined that the Faith she had espoused was only concerned with spiritual matters and not with institutions needed to administer its affairs. How does her view of religion minimize the scope and magnitude of the Cause of God? In particular, how is her view of administration opposed to what you now understand is that divine System which is the precursor of the World Order envisioned by Bahá’u’lláh?

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## SECTION 22

Having analyzed three instances of internal agitation from the early days of Shoghi Effendi's ministry, we should recall the suffering that 'Abdu'l-Bahá experienced at the hands of members of His own family and see how this pattern, sadly, continued in the period of the Guardianship.

Soon after Shoghi Effendi arrived in the Holy Land following 'Abdu'l-Bahá's passing and assumed the responsibilities of the Guardianship, Covenant-breakers took advantage of the moment to seize the keys to the Tomb of Bahá'u'lláh at the instigation of Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí and demanded to be acknowledged by the civil authorities as the legal custodians of the Shrine. While the matter was under investigation, the authorities took possession of the keys. These were eventually returned to Shoghi Effendi, a sign of recognition of his authority as Head of the Faith. Undeterred by their failures, the dwindling band of Covenant-breakers that had caused such sorrow to 'Abdu'l-Bahá continued to stir up trouble for the Guardian. All their efforts came to nothing, however, and Shoghi Effendi wrote the following upon the death of Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí in December 1937:

**“HAND OMNIPOTENCE REMOVED ARCHBREAKER BAHÁ’U’LLÁH’S COVENANT. HIS HOPES SHATTERED HIS PLOTTINGS FRUSTRATED SOCIETY HIS FELLOW CONSPIRATORS EXTINGUISHED. GOD’S TRIUMPHANT FAITH FORGES ON ITS UNITY UNIMPAIRED ITS PURITY UNSULLIED ITS STABILITY UNSHAKEN. SUCH DEATH CALLS FOR NEITHER EXULTATION NOR RECRIMINATION BUT EVOKES OVERWHELMING PITY SO TRAGIC DOWNFALL UNPARALLELED IN RELIGIOUS HISTORY.”<sup>68</sup>**

The final blow to the remnants of Muḥammad-'Alí's associates came in June 1957 when the authorities upheld an order that they be removed from the precincts of the Most Holy Shrine where they had entrenched themselves, blocking plans for the development of the lands surrounding it. Thus were the words in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will and Testament fulfilled: “Ere long will ye behold him and his associates, outwardly and inwardly, condemned to utter ruin.”<sup>69</sup>

Unfortunately, the members of Shoghi Effendi's immediate family went down the same path followed by so many of the previous generation. One after another his brothers and sisters and other close relatives, who had seen the devastating effects of the defection of Muḥammad-'Alí, turned against Shoghi Effendi. None of them could accept, it seems, that one whom they regarded as their equal should have any degree of authority over them as followers of Bahá'u'lláh. Like the members of the generation before them, they preferred to see authority in the Faith as the right of the family, in which all of them would have a share.

We will not enumerate the nature of the misconduct of Shoghi Effendi's relatives, for you have already seen in the actions of Mírzá Muḥammad-'Alí how blinded those close to the Center of the Cause can become by jealousy and worldly desires. It is sufficient to mention here that, while the Greatest Holy Leaf remained alive, she could offer the members of the family some measure of protection from the pernicious influence of the band of old Covenant-breakers. However, following her passing in 1932, signs of their opposition to the authority exercised by Shoghi Effendi as Guardian began to grow. Despite his patient and persistent admonishments to act with loyalty towards the Cause, they remained heedless to his warnings. And as opposition towards him turned into open defiance, he was compelled to act. One by one, in what were among the most painful episodes of his life, he had to exercise his responsibility to protect the Cause as its Guardian and expel the members of his family from its ranks, leaving him utterly alone save for his beloved wife Amatu'l-Bahá Rúḥíyyih Khánum, to whom he referred as "my helpmate", "my shield", "my tireless collaborator in the arduous tasks I shoulder".

## SECTION 23

In discharging his responsibility as Guardian of the Cause, Shoghi Effendi often reminded the friends how they should view instances of internal agitation, assuring them that it could but strengthen the foundations of the Faith. Below is one such passage.

**“Viewed in the light of past experience, the inevitable result of such futile attempts, however persistent and malicious they may be, is to contribute to a wider and deeper recognition by believers and unbelievers alike of the distinguishing features of the Faith proclaimed by Bahá'u'lláh. These challenging criticisms, whether or not dictated by malice, cannot but serve to galvanize the souls of its ardent supporters, and to consolidate the ranks of its faithful promoters. They will purge the Faith from those pernicious elements whose continued association with the believers tends to discredit the fair name of the Cause, and to tarnish the purity of its spirit. We should welcome, therefore, not only the open attacks which its avowed enemies persistently launch against it, but should also view as a blessing in disguise every storm of mischief with which they who apostatize their faith or claim to be its faithful exponents assail it from time to time. Instead of undermining the Faith, such assaults, both from within and from without, reinforce its foundations, and excite the intensity of its flame. Designed to becloud its radiance, they proclaim to all the world the exalted character of its precepts, the completeness of its unity, the uniqueness of its position, and the pervasiveness of its influence.”<sup>70</sup>**

Read the above passage several times and then fill in the blanks in the following sentences:

- a. The inevitable result of attempts to undermine the Cause, Shoghi Effendi tells us, is to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .

- b. Referring to such attempts, he explains that challenging criticisms, whether or not dictated by malice, can serve only to \_\_\_\_\_ , and to \_\_\_\_\_ .
- c. Such criticisms will purge the Faith, he indicated, from \_\_\_\_\_ .
- d. Shoghi Effendi advises us, then, that we should not only welcome any \_\_\_\_\_ , but should view as a blessing in disguise \_\_\_\_\_ .
- e. Instead of undermining the Faith, the Guardian assures us, such assaults, both from within and from without, reinforce \_\_\_\_\_ , and excite \_\_\_\_\_ .
- f. Designed to becloud the radiance of the Faith, such assaults proclaim instead to all the world the \_\_\_\_\_ of its precepts, the \_\_\_\_\_ of its unity, the \_\_\_\_\_ of its position, and the \_\_\_\_\_ of its influence.

## SECTION 24

Let us now pick up our historical narrative. During the lifetime of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the friends in both the East and the West had been instilled with a zeal for teaching the Cause. The Tablets of the Divine Plan penned by Him in 1916 and 1917 had created a sense of mission among the followers of the Faith especially in the West, and there was a longing in their hearts to fulfill His highest expectations in service to the Cause. Indeed, one of the Guardian’s earliest letters to those in the West begins by calling ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to mind with words such as the following:

**“How great is the need at this moment when the promised outpourings of His grace are ready to be extended to every soul, for us all to form a broad vision of the mission of the Cause to mankind, and to do all in our power to spread it throughout the world!”<sup>71</sup>**

From the very outset of his ministry, the Guardian, while offering such words of encouragement to the friends, linked the development of Bahá'í administration with the systematic propagation of the Faith. Of course, the Administrative Order is not simply an instrument of teaching; it is, as the precursor of the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh, the pattern for the future organization of human affairs. However, it is important for us to recognize that the systematic spread of the Cause depends on the existence of Bahá'í administration, and by 1937 the administrative machinery of the Faith was sufficiently developed for the Guardian to turn his attention to that enterprise which he had been compelled to delay for so long—the execution of the Divine Plan. Referring to the design laid out by 'Abdu'l-Bahá for the diffusion of the Faith throughout the world, Shoghi Effendi in a letter written some years later, in 1945, explained:

**“Its initiation, officially and on a vast scale, had, for well-nigh twenty years, been held in abeyance, while the processes of a slowly emerging Administrative Order were, under the unerring guidance of Providence, creating and perfecting the agencies for its efficient and systematic prosecution.”<sup>72</sup>**

There were nine National Spiritual Assemblies in existence in 1937. Often the area of jurisdiction of these initial National Assemblies covered two or more nations, and separate Assemblies for individual countries were formed later as the number of Bahá'ís grew in each. The nine operating at the time were: the United States and Canada, the British Isles, India and Burma, Egypt and Sudan, the Caucasus, Turkistan, Iraq, Persia, and Australia and New Zealand. Soon the number was reduced to seven when restrictions imposed by the Soviet state forced two to dissolve: the Caucasus and Turkistan. One serving Germany and Austria had already been dissolved in 1937 by the ruling German political party.

Over the next sixteen years, these seven Assemblies, and others that were brought into being, would carry out under the direction of the Guardian a series of plans for the systematic propagation of the Faith. Most of these plans would be national in character, though a few would include international goals. The period would culminate in the launching in 1953 of the first global undertaking, involving the participation of all existing National Assemblies—the Ten Year World Crusade.

## SECTION 25

Formally instituted in 1925, the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada was formed in 1923, superseding the institution of “Bahá'í Temple Unity” established during 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry. Recipients of His Tablets of the Divine Plan, the North American believers, sometimes referred to as its “chief executors”, embarked on a seven-year enterprise in 1937. It had two primary objectives given by the Guardian: to establish “at least one center in every state of the American Republic and in every Republic of the American continent not yet enlisted under the banner of His Faith” and to complete “the exterior ornamentation of the Temple”.

The following year the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma launched, at its own initiative, a six-year plan for the expansion of its community, a decision which met with the “full approval of the Guardian”. The outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 would greatly limit the sphere of action open to national Bahá'í communities elsewhere for some time

to come. However, as its conclusion drew near, the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles embarked on a six-year plan in 1944. Two years later, in 1946, three new plans were launched: another seven-year plan by the North American believers, a forty-five-month plan by the friends in Iran, and a four-and-a-half-year plan by the National Assembly of India and Burma.

In 1947, two additional communities joined this group when the National Assembly of Australia and New Zealand adopted a six-year plan and the National Assembly of Iraq a three-year plan. In 1948 the National Assembly of Egypt and Sudan began on a five-year initiative, as did the National Assembly of Germany and Austria, which was reformed after the Second World War. The Guardian also decided that the Bahá'í community of Canada had reached the stage where it could be separated from the community of the United States in 1948 and pursue its own five-year undertaking.

By 1951, having completed its earlier plan, the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles was ready to commence a two-year enterprise. So, too, was the National Spiritual Assembly of India, Pakistan, and Burma, which had been renamed in recognition of the recently established nation. A year later the newly formed National Spiritual Assembly of Central America launched a one-year plan.

Before continuing our exploration of the plans undertaken between 1937 and 1953, you are encouraged to fill in the table below, as noted by the example given.

National Assembly	Years	Plan
North America	1937 – 1944	Seven Year Plan
	1946 –	
India, [Pakistan], and Burma	1938 –	
	1946 –	
	1951 –	
British Isles	1944 –	
	1951 –	
Iran	1946 –	
Iraq	1947 –	
Australia and New Zealand	1947 –	
Egypt and Sudan	1948 –	
Germany and Austria	1948 –	
Canada	1948 –	
Central America	1952 –	

Besides the above plans, the African campaign, undertaken from 1951 to 1953, called for several National Spiritual Assemblies—British Isles, Egypt, India, Persia, and the United States—to join forces in their first collaborative effort.

In all cases, the objectives of the plans were either set by the Guardian himself or approved by him, and we can see how, through them, he guided the emerging worldwide Bahá'í community in systematically carrying forward the Divine Plan. What is imperative to recognize is that attainment of these objectives was intimately associated with the capacity that was being developed in the course of each plan—capacity which would enable a national community to embark on endeavors of yet greater magnitude and significance. Referring to the success of the celebrations conducted by the American Bahá'í community to mark the hundred-year anniversary of the Declaration of the Báb, which coincided with the completion of its first Seven Year Plan in 1944, he made this idea clear:

**“The consummation of the Seven Year Plan, immortalizing the fame of this richly blessed community, set the seal of complete spiritual triumph on these historic celebrations. A memorable chapter in the history of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh in the West has been closed. A new chapter is now opening, a chapter which, ere its termination, must eclipse the most shining victories won so heroically by those who have so fearlessly launched the first stage of the Great Plan conceived by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá for the American believers. The prizes won so painstakingly in both the North and South American continents must be preserved at all costs. A mighty impetus should, at however great a sacrifice, be lent to the multiplication of Bahá'í centers in Latin America, to the expansion of Bahá'í literature, to the translation of the Bahá'í sacred writings, to the proclamation of the verities of the Faith to the masses, to the strengthening of the bonds binding the newly fledged communities to each other, and to the deepening of the spiritual life of their members.**

**“The task so marvelously initiated in the Latin republics must be further consolidated ere the prosecutors of the world Plan bequeathed by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá can embark on further stages, of still greater significance, in their world teaching Mission. The cessation of hostilities will open before them fields of service of tremendous fertility and undreamed-of magnitude. The advantages and opportunities these fields will offer them cannot be exploited unless and until the work to which they have already set their hands in the Western Hemisphere is sufficiently advanced and consolidated. Time is pressing. The new tasks are already beginning to loom on the horizon. The work that still remains to be accomplished ere the next stage is ushered in is still considerable and exacting. I feel confident that the American Bahá'í community will, as it has in the past, rise to the occasion and discharge its high duties as befits the unique position it occupies.”<sup>73</sup>**

A message dated 4 November 1948 to the newly formed National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, as it embarked on its first Five Year Plan, gives us insight into how he helped national communities to build on achievements already won as they entered a new phase in their development:

**“The Five Year Plan, now set in motion, must under no circumstances be allowed to lag behind its schedule. A befitting start should be made in the execution of the Plan in all its aspects. The initial steps should be relentlessly followed by additional measures designed to hasten the incorporation of your Assembly, to accelerate the multiplication of Local Assemblies, groups and isolated centers, throughout the Provinces of the Dominion, to ensure the stability of the outpost of the Faith which must be established in Newfoundland, and to incorporate a steadily growing**



adjoining lands. To meet these objectives, each of the provinces in Persia was given a specific assignment. The Bahá'ís of Tíhrán were, alone, called upon to raise up fifty families who would leave their homes and settle new places, a goal that was surpassed as one hundred and sixty families arose to serve as pioneers between 1946 and 1950. With these moving words did the Guardian cable that community in February 1947:

**“REJOICE MAGNIFICENT PLAN CONCEIVED NATIONAL REPRESENTATIVES DEARLY BELOVED COMMUNITY BAHÁ’U’LLÁH’S NATIVE LAND. FAR REACHING PROJECT WELL BEFITS COMMUNITY WHICH IN AGE NUMBERS RICHNESS HISTORY LEADS ENTIRE BAHÁ’Í WORLD. FRIENDS FOES WITHIN WITHOUT AND FELLOW-BELIEVERS NORTH SOUTH EAST WEST INTENTLY WATCHING MANNER DISCHARGE GREATEST TASK EVER UNDERTAKEN BY PERSIAN FOLLOWERS FAITH BAHÁ’U’LLÁH. GLORIOUS COMPANY HOLY FOUNDERS LETTERS LIVING HANDS CAUSE SAINTS HEROES MARTYRS ALL GAZE EXPECTANTLY FROM ABHÁ KINGDOM UPON PRIVILEGED CUSTODIANS PRICELESS LEGACY BEQUEATHED TO PRESENT GENERATION LABORING CRADLE FAITH. . . . UPON ITS SUCCESS APPOINTED TIME CHIEFLY DEPENDS RELEASE FORCES DESIGNED EMANCIPATE HASTEN RECOGNITION FAITH IRAN.”<sup>75</sup>**

In addition to guiding the progress of the plans being executed under the direction of National Assemblies, the Guardian was creating enthusiasm among the friends, encouraging them in their efforts, and instilling in them a sense of mission that would galvanize them to action and sustain them in the face of the numerous obstacles which would inevitably confront them. His messages from that period resonate with the spiritual dynamism of the time. Below are excerpts from a few messages addressed to several different national communities. Though decades have passed since he penned these lines, they are as relevant to us today as they were when Shoghi Effendi wrote them. We would do well to keep his words before our eyes as we pursue the current and future global Plans designed to fulfill the tasks entrusted to us by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá to spread the Faith. With this in mind, you are asked to read the passages below several times and then carry out the exercises that follow.

**“The field is indeed so immense, the period so critical, the Cause so great, the workers so few, the time so short, the privilege so priceless, that no follower of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, worthy to bear His name, can afford a moment’s hesitation.”<sup>76</sup>**

**“The call has gone forth, the path is clear, the goal manifest and within their reach. Though their responsibilities be pressing and heavy and the obstacles formidable and manifold, yet the spirit of our invincible Faith will enable them to conquer if they arise unitedly and determinedly and persevere till the very end.”<sup>77</sup>**

**“There is no time to lose. There is no room left for vacillation. Multitudes hunger for the Bread of Life. The stage is set. The firm and irrevocable Promise is given. God’s own Plan has been set in motion. It is gathering momentum with every passing day. The powers of heaven and earth mysteriously assist in its execution. Such an opportunity is irreplaceable. Let the doubter arise and himself verify the truth of such assertions. To try, to persevere, is to ensure ultimate and complete victory.”<sup>78</sup>**

**“I appeal to them, with all my heart, to close their ranks, purge their hearts, broaden their vision, renew their determination, rededicate themselves to their glorious task, march resolutely forward along the road traced for them by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, beat down every barrier obstructing their path, and press on, confidently, unitedly and uncompromisingly, until their goal is attained, and the first stage in the evolution of their collective task is brought to a victorious conclusion.”<sup>79</sup>**

**“Great and overpowering as these sacrifices may now appear, they will, when viewed in their proper perspective, be adjudged as inconsiderable, and pale into insignificance when balanced against the inestimable advantages which must accrue to a community that has achieved total and complete victory for a Plan so epoch-making in character, and so charged with undreamt of potentialities.”<sup>80</sup>**

**“How bountiful, moreover, will be the rewards which He who watches from on high the varying fortunes of the Plan and presides over its destinies, must either in this world or in the next—and it may well be in both—choose to confer upon those, who, at the hour of the Plan’s greatest need, will fly to its succor, exhibit the rarest evidences of courage and heroism, and choose to subordinate their personal interests to the immediate needs and future glory of the community to which they belong.”<sup>81</sup>**

**“The invisible battalions of the Concourse on high are mustered, in serried ranks, ready to rush their reinforcements to the aid of the vanguard of Bahá’u’lláh’s crusaders in the hour of their greatest need . . .”<sup>82</sup>**

**“The Concourse on high watches their actions, and stands ready to bless and reinforce their labors. The Center of the Covenant Himself is eagerly waiting to witness the evidences of their victory, and will no doubt intercede, on their behalf, before the throne of Bahá’u’lláh, if they but arise resolutely and spur their chargers into the arena of service.”<sup>83</sup>**

1. On the basis of these passages, fill in the blanks in the following sentences:
  - a. Shoghi Effendi tells us that the field is \_\_\_\_\_, the period \_\_\_\_\_, the Cause \_\_\_\_\_, the workers \_\_\_\_\_, the time \_\_\_\_\_, the privilege \_\_\_\_\_.
  - b. The call has \_\_\_\_\_, the path is \_\_\_\_\_, the goal \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
  - c. There is no time to \_\_\_\_\_. There is no room left for \_\_\_\_\_. \_\_\_\_\_ hunger for the Bread of Life. The stage is \_\_\_\_\_. The firm and irrevocable Promise is \_\_\_\_\_. God’s own Plan has been \_\_\_\_\_. It is gathering momentum with \_\_\_\_\_.

2. Now fill in the blanks in the following sentences:

- a. We should close our \_\_\_\_\_, purge our \_\_\_\_\_, broaden our \_\_\_\_\_, renew our \_\_\_\_\_, rededicate ourselves to our \_\_\_\_\_, march resolutely forward along \_\_\_\_\_, beat down \_\_\_\_\_, and press on \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. No follower of the Faith, Shoghi Effendi says, worthy to bear His name, can afford a \_\_\_\_\_.
- c. To try, to persevere, is to ensure \_\_\_\_\_.
- d. Great and overpowering as the sacrifices made may now appear, they will, when viewed \_\_\_\_\_, be adjudged as \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ into \_\_\_\_\_ when balanced against the inestimable \_\_\_\_\_ given to a community that has achieved total and complete \_\_\_\_\_.
- e. How \_\_\_\_\_ will be the rewards of those who, at the hour of the Plan's greatest need, will \_\_\_\_\_ to its aid, \_\_\_\_\_ the rarest evidences of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, and choose to \_\_\_\_\_ their \_\_\_\_\_ to the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of the community to which they belong.

3. Finally, complete the sentences below on the basis of the quotations:

- a. Though our responsibilities may be \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and the obstacles \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, yet the \_\_\_\_\_ of our \_\_\_\_\_ Faith will enable us to \_\_\_\_\_ if we arise \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ to the very end.
- b. We should remember that the invisible battalions of the Concourse on high are \_\_\_\_\_, in serried ranks, \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ to the aid of the vanguard of Bahá'u'lláh's \_\_\_\_\_ in the hour of their \_\_\_\_\_.

- c. The Concourse on high \_\_\_\_\_ over our \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ to bless and reinforce our \_\_\_\_\_. The Center  
of the Covenant Himself is \_\_\_\_\_ to witness the  
evidences of our victory, and will no doubt \_\_\_\_\_ on our behalf  
before the throne of Bahá'u'lláh, if we arise \_\_\_\_\_ and spur our  
chargers \_\_\_\_\_.

## SECTION 27

The pattern of growth being established by Shoghi Effendi through the plans launched between 1937 and 1953 was largely concerned with the geographic spread of the Faith. Plans called for individual believers to arise and go as pioneers to specific localities unopened to the Faith, to teach, and to gradually gather together in each locality a group of believers able to form a Local Spiritual Assembly. A letter to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma makes clear that, as in the case of administration, he had set the Bahá'í world on a process of learning related to the growth of the community:

**“The Guardian would particularly suggest that special stress be laid on the necessity for pioneer teaching in those states and provinces in India and Burma, where the Cause has not yet been introduced. Those believers who have the means, and also the capacity to teach, should be encouraged, no matter how great the sacrifice involved, to settle in these virgin territories, until such time as a Local Assembly has been constituted, or at least a group of firm believers formed that can safely and gradually evolve into a firmly organized and properly functioning Local Assembly. This policy of teaching by settlement which the Guardian has also advised and indeed urged the American believers to adopt has been proved by experience to be the most effective way of establishing the Faith in new territories, and he therefore confidently recommends it for adoption by your Assembly.”<sup>84</sup>**

Clearly the progress of the various plans implemented during this period, as well as the Ten Year Crusade that followed them, depended on the movement of pioneers—those who forsook their homes to promote the Cause of God. A lengthy letter addressed by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of North America in 1938, subsequently published under the title *The Advent of Divine Justice*, reminds them of the responsibilities they each shouldered as they embarked on the first Seven Year Plan. In that letter, he writes:

**“Neither the threatening world situation, nor any consideration of lack of material resources, of mental equipment, of knowledge, or of experience—desirable as they are—should deter any prospective pioneer teacher from arising independently, and from setting in motion the forces which, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá has repeatedly assured us, will, once released, attract even as a magnet the promised and infallible aid of Bahá'u'lláh. Let him not wait for any directions, or expect any special encouragement, from the elected representatives of his community, nor be deterred by any obstacles which his relatives, or fellow-citizens may be inclined to place in his path, nor mind the censure of his critics or enemies. ‘Be unrestrained as the wind,’ is**

**Bahá'u'lláh's counsel to every would-be teacher of His Cause, 'while carrying the Message of Him Who hath caused the dawn of Divine Guidance to break. Consider how the wind, faithful to that which God hath ordained, bloweth upon all regions of the earth, be they inhabited or desolate. Neither the sight of desolation, nor the evidences of prosperity, can either pain or please it. It bloweth in every direction, as bidden by its Creator.' 'And when he determineth to leave his home, for the sake of the Cause of his Lord,' Bahá'u'lláh, in another passage, referring to such a teacher, has revealed, 'let him put his whole trust in God, as the best provision for his journey, and array himself with the robe of virtue. . . . If he be kindled with the fire of His love, if he forgoeth all created things, the words he uttereth shall set on fire them that hear him.'"**<sup>85</sup>

The annals of the Faith are filled with stories of self-sacrificing individuals who, abandoning their worldly possessions, set out for unknown places solely for the love of God. These intrepid souls became the embodiment of Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation to be unrestrained as the wind in carrying His teachings to the people of the world. Yet the challenge before all those who leave their homes to serve the Cause, today as it was then, lies not so much in settling in new places, difficult as this may be; the supreme task is to raise up from among the local population those who will carry forward the work of the Faith. The Guardian stresses this point in several letters, including the one below written to an individual in 1948:

**"Now that more of the Latin believers are active and beginning to assume responsibilities, the work will go forward on a more permanent foundation, as pioneers from a foreign land can never take the place of native believers, who must always constitute the bedrock of any future development of the Faith in their country."**<sup>86</sup>

This unit is not, of course, concerned with the act of pioneering itself. However, given the significant role that homefront and international pioneers play even today in opening new clusters to the Faith and in intensifying efforts in centers within them to establish a robust pattern of activity, it may be fruitful for you to spend a few moments thinking further about this field of service. As the Guardian explains, at the heart of every effort to pioneer is the challenge of nurturing the seeds of the Faith in a locality, seeds which are to give rise to a community of ardent followers of Bahá'u'lláh, eager to bring His teachings to bear on their social reality. Look at the statements below. Which ones express thoughts that are in keeping with this purpose?

\_\_\_\_\_ One who arises to pioneer today, as in the days of the Guardian, is guided by the plans laid down by the institutions of the Faith, in response to the provisions of the global Plans delineated by the Universal House of Justice.

\_\_\_\_\_ If someone serving as a pioneer takes up his or her post out of obedience to the institutions of the Faith, he or she can be confident that his or her efforts will be met with divine confirmations.

\_\_\_\_\_ One who arises to pioneer to an unfamiliar place should strive to learn the language and customs of the local people in order to speak to them from their perspective using terminology they will understand.

\_\_\_\_\_ Serving as a pioneer is all about making heartfelt connections; as long as one has an open heart, one does not need to think about specific plans or approaches.

\_\_\_\_\_ The goal of someone who arises to pioneer and open a new locality to the Faith is to find, as quickly as possible, a few individuals from among the local population who can replace him or her in carrying out the work and then to return home.

\_\_\_\_\_ The most joyous moments for one who has settled in a pioneering post are those when individuals indigenous to the locality, having embraced the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, arise to serve His Cause.

\_\_\_\_\_ It is paternalistic to accompany those new to the Faith step by step and assist them in increasing their capacity to offer more and more complex acts of service; the sooner the work can be given over to the local inhabitants the better.

\_\_\_\_\_ It is a form of paternalism to think that a population would, without drawing on the knowledge of the Revelation and without appropriate training and support to translate it into sustained action, be able to weave a pattern of community life that reflects the teachings of the Faith.

\_\_\_\_\_ A true spirit of pioneering requires that one humbly carry out the work without putting oneself at the center.

\_\_\_\_\_ When one settles in a new place to open it to the Faith or in a fledgling locality to strengthen the pattern of activity there, one should forever think of oneself as a pioneer.

\_\_\_\_\_ From the outset, upon settling in a pioneering post, one should think of oneself as a member of the community, working alongside other members for its spiritual and material well-being.

\_\_\_\_\_ The act of pioneering requires that one set aside personal desires and sacrifice comforts to attend to the needs of the Cause in a new locality.

## SECTION 28

Just as Shoghi Effendi was concerned with building capacity within the Bahá'í community for the systematic spread and consolidation of the Faith, so was he focused on enhancing the capacity of its institutions to disclose to the eyes of a growing public its character and purpose, to defend its interests, and to strengthen its ties with like-minded organizations of civil society. Often this capacity was developed as institutions followed his directives to defend the Faith in response to attacks hurled against it. Addressing one National Assembly in a letter dated 5 June 1947, he states:

**“No opportunity, in view of the necessity of ensuring the harmonious development of the Faith, should be ignored, which its potential enemies, whether ecclesiastical or otherwise, may offer, to set forth, in a restrained and unprovocative language, its aims and tenets, to defend its interests, to proclaim its universality, to assert**

**the supernatural, the supranational and nonpolitical character of its institutions, and its acceptance of the Divine origin of the Faiths which have preceded it.”<sup>87</sup>**

To appreciate the nature of the capacity Shoghi Effendi was nurturing, one would need to study numerous letters that he wrote throughout his ministry. In doing so, one would see how, in his response to the many crises that confronted the Faith, he provided a model which we still emulate today and how, in his analyses of world affairs, he set the stage for the participation of local and national institutions and their agencies in the life of society. And, in this respect, he mentions, in one of his earliest communications, a principle we should always keep in mind:

**“I am however assured and sustained by the conviction, never dimmed in my mind, that whatsoever comes to pass in the Cause of God, however disquieting in its immediate effects, is fraught with infinite Wisdom and tends ultimately to promote its interests in the world. Indeed, our experiences of the distant past, as well as of recent events, are too numerous and varied to permit of any misgiving or doubt as to the truth of this basic principle—a principle which throughout the vicissitudes of our sacred mission in this world we must never disregard or forget.”<sup>88</sup>**

Seizure of the House occupied by Bahá’u’lláh during His exile in Baghdád was one of several external crises with which Shoghi Effendi had to contend while simultaneously building the Administrative Order and guiding the unfoldment of the Divine Plan. About a year prior to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s ascension, the House, designated by Bahá’u’lláh a place of pilgrimage, was taken over by enemies of the Faith in that city. Throughout Shoghi Effendi’s ministry, repeated attempts were made to reclaim ownership of the House. In 1928, after the case was brought before several courts in Iraq, the Guardian encouraged the Spiritual Assembly of Baghdád to appeal to an agency of the League of Nations, which was the first worldwide intergovernmental organization to have come into existence and which could be regarded as a precursor to the United Nations. It ruled in favor of the Assembly, but the authorities in Iraq still failed to act, and the House was not returned to the Faith. Referring to the case in *God Passes By*, the Guardian wrote:

**“Suffice it to say that, despite these interminable delays, protests and evasions . . . the publicity achieved for the Faith by this memorable litigation, and the defense of its cause—the cause of truth and justice—by the world’s highest tribunal, have been such as to excite the wonder of its friends and to fill with consternation its enemies.”<sup>89</sup>**

To cite another example, in 1925 a crisis arose in Egypt, which the National Spiritual Assembly of that country, under the guidance of the Guardian, was able to turn into an unprecedented victory for the Faith. The formation of a Bahá’í Assembly in a remote village, which kindled the fanaticism of its headman, served as the prelude to the crisis. Accusations were hurled against three local Bahá’í men, and it was demanded that their Muslim wives be divorced from them on the grounds that they had abandoned Islam. The district court upheld the complaint, legally annulling the marriages, and the verdict was subsequently sanctioned by the highest religious authorities in Cairo. The text of the decision, while condemnatory of the Egyptian Bahá’ís, proceeded to declare the Faith to be “a ‘new religion’, ‘entirely independent’ and, by reason of the magnitude of its claim and the character of its ‘laws, principles and beliefs’, worthy to be reckoned as one of the established religious systems of the world.” The

significance of this declaration was enormous for a Faith that, up until that time, was “stigmatized” as a “cult”, as a “Bábí sect”, and as an “offshoot of Islam”. The Guardian hailed it as “the first Charter of the emancipation of the Cause of Bahá’u’lláh from the fetters of Islamic orthodoxy, the first historic step taken, not by its adherents as might have been expected, but by its adversaries on the road leading to its ultimate and worldwide recognition.” He then guided Bahá’í representatives in several other countries to utilize this same declaration as a way to secure official recognition of the Faith by civil authorities as an independent world religion.

Beyond this, as already indicated in Section 24, the Bahá’í communities in Turkistan and the Caucasus were subjected to restrictions imposed by the newly formed Soviet state. The situation deteriorated in 1938, and well over five hundred believers were imprisoned unjustifiably. Prominent members of the communities were eventually exiled to Siberia and other remote regions, while most of the remaining members were deported to Persia. The *Mashriqu’l-Adhkár* in ‘Ishqábád, the pride of the Bahá’í world, was taken over by the authorities and made into an art gallery. In Germany severe restrictions were placed on the Bahá’í community in the years leading up to the Second World War. All organized activity essentially ceased, and Bahá’í Assemblies and their committees were dissolved.

To such crises were added periodic outbreaks of violence against the Bahá’ís in Iran. More often than not, these attacks were instigated by Shi’ite clerics, sometimes acting in concert with government authorities. This is not the place for a discussion of the atrocities committed against Iranian believers during Shoghi Effendi’s ministry. Needless to say, the progressive development of the Faith, despite the grave ordeals it experienced at the time, served only to manifest further the power of the Covenant, testifying to these words of the Guardian: “Tribulations have failed utterly to impair its unity, or to create, even temporarily, a breach in the ranks of its adherents. It has not only survived these ordeals, but has emerged, purified and inviolate, endowed with greater capacity to face and surmount any crisis which its resistless march may engender in the future.”<sup>90</sup>

Indeed, with every unexpected crisis that confronted the Faith, Shoghi Effendi built further the capacity of the Bahá’í community to defend itself and to proclaim Bahá’u’lláh’s universal message to the world. When a wave of persecution swept over the south of Iran in 1926, for example, the Guardian made the following appeal to National Spiritual Assemblies in the East and the West, mobilizing in defense of the Faith the entire Administrative Order in existence at the time:

**“I would specially request all National Assemblies to give their anxious and immediate consideration to this grave matter, and to devise ways and means that will secure the fullest publicity for our grievances. I would remind them that whatever is published should be couched in terms that are at once correct, forceful and inoffensive.”<sup>91</sup>**

Today, the fruits of the Guardian’s many labors are clearly visible in the systematic endeavors of Bahá’í institutions and their agencies to raise the profile of the Faith in the wider society and to contribute to public discourse on important social issues, a subject taken up in Book 14 of this sequence. For now, to appreciate the extent to which this capacity has grown since the days of the Guardian, discuss with the other members of your group what you know about the current efforts of Bahá’í institutions—whether in your own local community, in the cluster where you reside, or on the international stage—in each of the following areas:

- defending the Faith against the forces that seek to undermine it
- establishing cordial relations with government officials
- collaborating with like-minded organizations of civil society
- using mass media to make the message of the Faith widely known
- participating in the discourses of society that shape policies and decisions on issues such as the equality of men and women, preservation of the environment, climate change, public health, and governance

## SECTION 29

Over the past several sections we saw how, from 1937 to 1953, the Guardian guided existing National Spiritual Assemblies and the body of believers in various parts of the world as they embarked on a series of plans for the systematic growth of the Faith—the opening stages in the execution of the Divine Plan. In this, he called for the movement of pioneers, as a method that had shown its efficacy in establishing the Faith in locality after locality, and encouraged the friends to carry out their responsibility to teach the Cause within the context of national plans. As a result of these plans, the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies worldwide increased substantially, and the National Spiritual Assemblies in existence, which grew from nine to twelve, functioned with greater vigor. It was during this period, too, that Shoghi Effendi began to draw on the rising capacity of these Assemblies to coordinate their efforts in the propagation of the Faith and in its defense.

All the capacity he had steadily built in the emerging worldwide Bahá'í community during this sixteen-year period was in anticipation of the launching at Riḍván 1953 of the Ten Year World Crusade. To appreciate the significance that this global campaign held in the mind of Shoghi Effendi, we need to place it in historical context.

October 1952 marked the hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh in the Síyáh-Chál of Ṭíhrán. Shoghi Effendi referred to this momentous event as the “Great Jubilee” and designated the twelve-month period from October 1952 to October 1953 a Holy Year. The festivities associated with the Holy Year included the convocation of four intercontinental Bahá'í teaching conferences. At the opening of the Holy Year, on 8 October 1952, Shoghi Effendi revealed the magnitude of the enterprise on which the Bahá'ís of the world would embark the coming Riḍván:

**“Feel hour propitious to proclaim to the entire Bahá'í world the projected launching . . . the fate-laden, soul-stirring, decade-long, world-embracing Spiritual Crusade involving . . . the concerted participation of all National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'í world aiming at the immediate extension of Bahá'u'lláh's spiritual dominion . . . in all remaining Sovereign States, Principal Dependencies comprising Principalities, Sultanates, Emirates, Shaykhdoms, Protectorates, Trust Territories, and Crown Colonies scattered over the surface of the entire planet. The entire body of the avowed supporters of Bahá'u'lláh's all-conquering Faith are now summoned to achieve in a single decade feats eclipsing in totality the achievements which in the course of the eleven preceding decades illuminated the annals of Bahá'í pioneering.”<sup>92</sup>**

The conclusion of the crusade would coincide with the worldwide festivities commemorating the “Most Great Jubilee” at Ridván 1963—the hundredth anniversary of the declaration by Bahá’u’lláh of His Mission in Baghdád.

Thus did the Guardian situate this first international Plan within the ten-year period marked, at its beginning and at its end, by two great centenaries associated with the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh. For the Bahá’í world, still relatively circumscribed at the time, it was an undertaking of colossal proportions. It called for the Cause to make a tremendous leap forward. The Bahá’í world would be asked to extend its reach in the short span of ten years far beyond what it had been able to do in the previous one hundred.

## SECTION 30

We now turn our attention to the final years of the Guardian’s ministry, 1953 to 1957. While the further unfoldment of the Divine Plan worldwide dominated this period, there were several other significant developments the Guardian steered during these years which we will explore as well.

Shoghi Effendi referred to the Ten Year Crusade as the “mightiest agency yet conceived for the systematic execution of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Divine Plan.” It called for institutions and individuals to focus their energies on a range of far-reaching objectives, including: the establishment of the Faith in one hundred and thirty-one additional countries and territories, the formation of forty-four new National Spiritual Assemblies, the incorporation of thirty-three of these, a vast increase in Bahá’í literature in divers languages, the establishment of six national Bahá’í Publishing Trusts, a multiplication in the number of National Bahá’í Centers, and the acquisition of properties for the future construction of Houses of Worship and the erection of two such edifices. Supplementary plans given to individual National Spiritual Assemblies by the Guardian called for an increase in the number of Local Spiritual Assemblies around the world to a total of five thousand, of which three hundred and fifty were to be incorporated.

Clearly, the spread and consolidation of the Faith through the settlement of pioneers was a central feature of the Ten Year Crusade, and the Bahá’ís of the world were galvanized by Shoghi Effendi’s call to action, which reverberated throughout his messages during the period. Below is but one example of the stirring passages he wrote at the time:

**“The avowed, the primary aim of this Spiritual Crusade is none other than the conquest of the citadels of men’s hearts. The theater of its operations is the entire planet. Its duration a whole decade. Its commencement synchronizes with the Centenary of the birth of Bahá’u’lláh’s Mission. Its culmination will coincide with the Centenary of the Declaration of that same Mission. The agencies assisting in its conduct are the nascent administrative institutions of a steadily evolving divinely appointed Order. Its driving force is the energizing influence generated by the Revelation heralded by the Báb and proclaimed by Bahá’u’lláh. Its Marshal is none other than the Author of the Divine Plan. Its standard-bearers are the Hands of the Cause of God appointed in every continent of the globe. Its generals are the twelve National Spiritual Assemblies participating in the execution of its design. Its vanguard is the chief executors of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Master Plan, their allies and associates. Its legions are the rank and file of believers standing behind**

**these same twelve National Assemblies and sharing in the global task embracing the American, the European, the African, the Asiatic and Australian fronts. The charter directing its course is the immortal Tablets that have flowed from the Pen of the Center of the Covenant Himself. The armor with which its onrushing hosts have been invested is the glad tidings of God's own Message in this Day, the principles underlying the Order proclaimed by His Messenger, and the laws and ordinances governing His Dispensation. The battle-cry animating its heroes and heroines is the cry of Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá, Yá 'Alíyyu'l-A'lá."**<sup>93</sup>

The imagery used by the Guardian in the above passage evokes feelings of order and discipline and a sense of heroism. In its military allusions, we can see what a systematic approach Shoghi Effendi encouraged the Bahá'í world to adopt in its efforts to further the Cause. Of course, the purpose of the crusade on which the Bahá'í community embarked was not the acquisition of earthly dominions. It was concerned with the advancement of spiritual civilization. On the basis of the passage, complete the sentences below.

- a. The primary aim of the Ten Year Crusade was none other than \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- b. The theater of its operation was \_\_\_\_\_ .
- c. Its duration was \_\_\_\_\_ .
- d. Its commencement synchronized with \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- e. Its culmination coincided with \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- f. The agencies that assisted in its conduct were \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- g. Its driving force was \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- h. Its Marshal was none other than \_\_\_\_\_ .
- i. Its standard-bearers were \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- j. Its generals were \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- k. Its vanguard was \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .

- l. Its legions were \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- m. The charter directing its course was \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- n. The armor with which its onrushing hosts have been invested was \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_
- o. The battle-cry animating its heroes and heroines was \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

With the above thoughts in mind, you may wish to memorize the following quotation from the Writings of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. Reflect on the heights to which He is calling each one of us. Do not His words serve to galvanize our efforts as we labor alongside one another in neighborhoods and villages in cluster after cluster?

**“To do battle, as stated in the sacred verse, doth not, in this greatest of all dispensations, mean to go forth with sword and spear, with lance and piercing arrow—but rather weaponed with pure intent, with righteous motives, with counsels helpful and effective, with godly attributes, with deeds pleasing to the Almighty, with the qualities of heaven. It signifieth education for all mankind, guidance for all men, the spreading far and wide of the sweet savors of the spirit, the promulgation of God’s proofs, the setting forth of arguments conclusive and divine, the doing of charitable deeds.**

**“Whensoever holy souls, drawing on the powers of heaven, shall arise with such qualities of the spirit, and march in unison, rank on rank, every one of those souls will be even as one thousand, and the surging waves of that mighty ocean will be even as the battalions of the Concourse on high. What a blessing that will be—when all shall come together, even as once separate torrents, rivers and streams, running brooks and single drops, when collected together in one place will form a mighty sea. And to such a degree will the inherent unity of all prevail, that the traditions, rules, customs and distinctions in the fanciful life of these populations will be effaced and vanish away like isolated drops, once the great sea of oneness doth leap and surge and roll.”<sup>94</sup>**

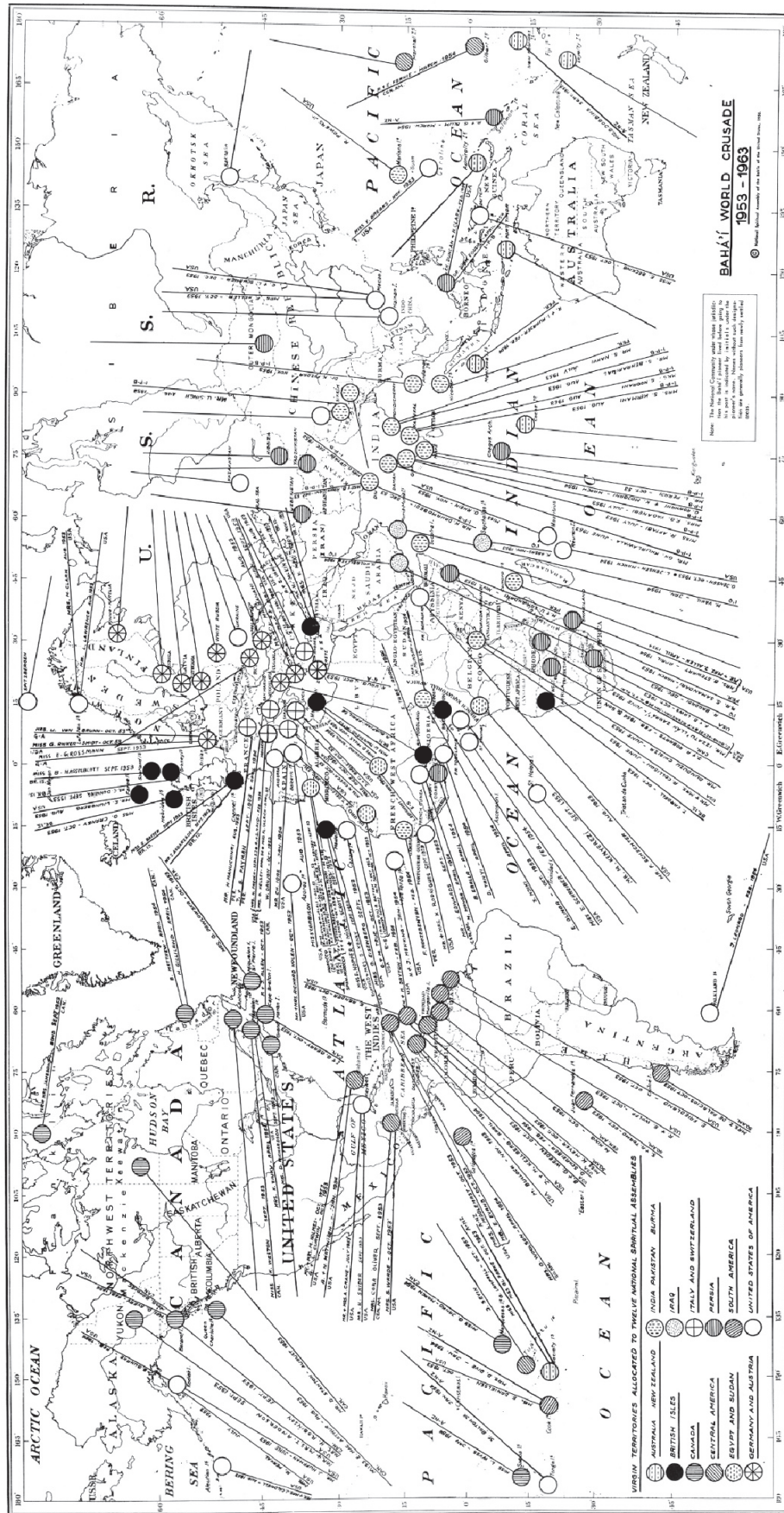
## SECTION 31

There was one special dimension to the Ten Year Crusade that all future generations of Bahá'ís will remember with tender admiration. In a cablegram dated 28 May 1953, Shoghi Effendi announced his decision to designate “knights” of Bahá'u'lláh those pioneers who succeeded in establishing the Faith's first foothold in the countries and territories identified in the Ten Year Crusade. “Once again I appeal to members of all communities”, were his words,

**“to arise and enlist, ere the present opportunity is irretrievably lost, in the army of Bahá'u'lláh's crusaders. The hour is ripe to disencumber themselves of worldly vanities, to mount the steed of steadfastness, unfurl the banner of renunciation, don the armor of utter consecration to God's Cause, gird themselves with the girdle of a chaste and holy life, unsheathe the sword of Bahá'u'lláh's utterance, buckle on the shield of His love, carry as sole provision implicit trust in His promise, flee their homelands, and scatter far and wide to capture the unsundered territories of the entire planet. . . . Planning to inscribe, in chronological order, the names of the spiritual conquerors on an illuminated Roll of Honor, to be deposited at the entrance door of the inner Sanctuary of the Tomb of Bahá'u'lláh, as a permanent memorial of the contribution by the champions of His Faith. . . . Anticipate making periodic announcements of the names of the valiant knights upon their arrival at their posts to discharge their historic missions.”<sup>95</sup>**

On 20 September 1953, five months into the Crusade, Shoghi Effendi sent the first of several cablegrams listing the names of those who had earned the accolade “Knight of Bahá'u'lláh”, together with their respective territories—a listing which amounted to “almost a fourth of the number required for the attainment of the paramount objective” to open one hundred and thirty-one virgin countries and territories to the Faith. By the close of the first year of the Crusade, pioneers had reached almost all of the countries and territories specified, and the “Roll of Honor” was nearly complete. In the summer of 1954 the Guardian commissioned the preparation of a scroll bearing the names of the Knights of Bahá'u'lláh. To the Roll of Honor would eventually be added the names of other pioneers who earned this title. And, on the befitting occasion of the centenary commemoration of the Ascension of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí in 1992, the scroll was deposited at the entrance door of the Most Holy Shrine in the spot designated by the Guardian so many years before.

Perhaps you know that Shoghi Effendi tracked the progress of the objective to open new countries and territories to the Faith on a map of the world, which is reproduced on a small scale on the next page. You are encouraged to study it carefully with your fellow participants in this course. Does not its precision evoke an image in your mind of Shoghi Effendi standing over it, meticulously adding new details and rejoicing in the achievement of every goal? Does not one feel the burden of responsibility that weighed on his once youthful shoulders to set this mighty Ark of the Cause on its course? Does not one feel, as well, the love and loyalty towards their beloved Guardian that animated those who left their homelands during the Ten Year Crusade and established themselves in the farthest reaches of the globe in order to secure the goals that he had set for them? Behind each point on the map is the story of one such soul.



## SECTION 32

The Guardian, of course, continued to build up the structure of the Administrative Order throughout the period that began with the launching of the Ten Year Crusade in 1953 and concluded with his unexpected passing in November 1957. Most significant in this respect was the rapid pace at which he developed the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God. Before we consider the functions that he assigned to that institution, we should take a step back and look at its development from an historical perspective.

You already know from your study of the first unit of this book the broad history of the institution of the Hands of the Cause—that it was established by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, Who raised four believers in Persia to this high station; that 'Abdu'l-Bahá conferred this station on an additional four in His Writings; and that it was left to the Guardian of the Cause, according to the explicit instructions in 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Will, to nominate additional Hands and to guide the development of that institution. As far back as 1925, Shoghi Effendi had appointed Dr. John Esslemont a Hand of the Cause posthumously. Dr. Esslemont, a Bahá'í from the time of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, wrote the introductory book *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, which is still in print today; he moved to the Holy Land to assist Shoghi Effendi during the early days of his ministry but, sadly, passed away in November 1925. In the years that followed, the Guardian made nine other posthumous appointments, among them Martha Root and Hájí Abu'l-Ḥasan-i-Amín, the Trustee of Ḥuqúqu'lláh.

Then, on 24 December 1951, he sent a cablegram to the Bahá'í world, in which he made this historic announcement:

**“HOUR NOW RIPE TAKE LONG INEVITABLY DEFERRED STEP CONFORMITY PROVISIONS 'ABDU'L-BAHA'S TESTAMENT . . . THROUGH APPOINTMENT FIRST CONTINGENT HANDS CAUSE GOD TWELVE IN NUMBER EQUALLY ALLOCATED HOLY LAND ASIATIC AMERICAN EUROPEAN CONTINENTS.”<sup>96</sup>**

Within the span of two months, on 29 February 1952, he elevated another seven believers to the rank of Hand of the Cause, bringing their total number to nineteen, including those in Africa and Australia. He took another significant step in the development of the institution later that year in his 8 October message announcing the launching of the Ten Year Crusade. By then, four of the Hands were residing in the Holy Land, and he wrote the following at the conclusion of the message:

**“CALL UPON FIFTEEN HANDS FIVE CONTINENTS BY VIRTUE THEIR SUPREME FUNCTION AS CHOSEN INSTRUMENTS PROPAGATION FAITH INAUGURATE HISTORIC MISSION THROUGH APPOINTMENT DURING RIḌVÁN 1954 FIVE AUXILIARY BOARDS ONE EACH CONTINENT . . .”<sup>97</sup>**

And, on 6 April 1954, the Guardian confirmed that the fifteen Hands should proceed with the appointment, “from among the resident Bahá'ís” in each continent, of the Auxiliary Boards for the propagation of the Faith, whose members would act as their “deputies, assistants and advisers”. “The Auxiliary Boards of the American, European and African continents must consist of nine members each,” he wrote, while the Boards for “the Asiatic and Australian continents of seven and two respectively.” In the message he sent for Riḏván that year, he explained to the Bahá'í world that these Auxiliary Board members would “aid and advise” the Hands “in the effective prosecution of the Ten Year Plan”.

Shoghi Effendi maintained the number of Hands of the Cause at nineteen from 1952 through early 1957, making five individual appointments during that period, each on the occasion of the passing of one from their ranks. Then, in a message sent in October 1957, he announced that he was elevating another eight believers to the station of Hand of the Cause of God, bringing their total to twenty-seven. By that time, the number of countries and territories open to the Faith had been raised from one hundred and twenty-eight at the start of the Crusade to over two hundred and fifty. The number of Local Spiritual Assemblies had crossed the one thousand mark, and the number of National Spiritual Assemblies in operation worldwide had climbed to twenty-six. It was in the context of these and other achievements that the Guardian made the announcement, referring to the Hands as “high-ranking officers of a fast-evolving World Administrative Order” and designating them, in the passage below, “Chief Stewards of Bahá’u’lláh’s embryonic World Commonwealth”.

**“So marvelous a progress, embracing so vast a field, achieved in so short a time, by so small a band of heroic souls, well deserves, at this juncture in the evolution of a decade-long Crusade, to be signaled by, and indeed necessitates, the announcement of yet another step in the progressive unfoldment of one of the cardinal and pivotal institutions ordained by Bahá’u’lláh, and confirmed in the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, involving the designation of yet another contingent of the Hands of the Cause of God, raising thereby to thrice nine the total number of the Chief Stewards of Bahá’u’lláh’s embryonic World Commonwealth, who have been invested by the unerring Pen of the Center of His Covenant with the dual function of guarding over the security, and of ensuring the propagation, of His Father’s Faith.”<sup>98</sup>**

In his 1957 announcement, the Guardian emphasized the “sacred responsibility” of the Hands of the Cause as “protectors of the Faith” and further developed that institution by bringing into being an additional Auxiliary Board in each continent, charged with the specific duty of watching over the security of the Faith. Thus there began to function in every continent two Auxiliary Boards, one for the propagation of the Faith and the other for its protection. As you are aware, two such Boards continue to operate in each continent today.

## SECTION 33

In his December 1951 message, announcing the initial set of appointments, Shoghi Effendi began a process of defining the functions of the Hands of the Cause and their relationship with other institutions of the Administrative Order. In that first announcement, in which he elevated twelve believers to the station of Hands, he advised the nine who resided outside the Holy Land to remain at their posts and to focus on the administrative and teaching duties they were carrying out at the time, pending the assignment of specific functions, as need arose. He also urged them to participate as his representatives in all four forthcoming inter-continental conferences, which were scheduled to be held successively in Africa, America, Europe, and Asia during the Holy Year in 1953.

Then, in his message sent on 6 April 1954, addressed to all Hands of the Cause and all National Spiritual Assemblies, he paid tribute to the “services rendered” by the Hands since their appointment some three years earlier and, in light of the forthcoming establishment of Auxiliary Boards for the propagation of the Faith at Ridván, went on to describe in some detail

the functions of the institution: He assigned to the Hands residing in the Holy Land the duty of acting as liaison between himself as Head of the Faith and the Continental Hands; he entrusted the body of the Hands with the responsibility of forging ties with the National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'í world for the purpose of lending them assistance in attaining the objectives of the Ten Year Crusade; he gave to the Hands in each continent discretion to determine the allocation of areas for the members of the Auxiliary Boards, as well as subsidiary matters regarding the development of their activities, and the manner of collaboration with National Spiritual Assemblies; and he established five Continental Bahá'í Funds, one each in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australasia, and Europe, to facilitate the discharge of the functions assigned to these Boards.

After having strengthened the capacity of the institution in discharging its functions related to propagation, Shoghi Effendi began to lay stress on its duties to protect the Faith in what would be the final months of his life. In a message dated 4 June 1957, he called upon the Hands of the Cause to act in concert with National Spiritual Assemblies not only in the pursuing the provisions of the Ten Year Crusade but in safeguarding the Bahá'í community from any danger that might confront it:

**“Divinely appointed Institution of the Hands of the Cause, invested by virtue of the authority conferred by the Testament of the Center of the Covenant with the twin functions of protecting and propagating the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh, now entering new phase in the process of the unfoldment of its sacred mission. To its newly assured responsibility to assist National Spiritual Assemblies of the Bahá'í world in the specific purpose of effectively prosecuting the World Spiritual Crusade, the primary obligation to watch over and ensure protection to the Bahá'í world community, in close collaboration with these same National Assemblies, is now added. . . .**

**“The security of our precious Faith, the preservation of the spiritual health of the Bahá'í communities, the vitality of the faith of its individual members, the proper functioning of its laboriously erected institutions, the fruition of its worldwide enterprises, the fulfillment of its ultimate destiny, all are directly dependent upon the befitting discharge of the weighty responsibilities now resting upon the members of these two institutions . . .”**<sup>99</sup>

We saw that, in his October 1957 message, Shoghi Effendi brought into being an Auxiliary Board in each continent for the protection of the Faith, and we know that he passed away a few weeks after that message was written. In retrospect, we can perceive the operation of Divine will in the steps he took to raise up so quickly, in the span of only six years, the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God. He established it on a firm foundation in both the Holy Land and the five continents and ensured that it was held in a place of honor and respect in the eyes of the entire body of believers, now not limited in geography to a few centers scattered across the globe but comprising a world-embracing, ever-increasingly diverse community. Further, that he enunciated so clearly the duties the institution of the Hands should discharge in collaboration with the institution of the National Spiritual Assembly reinforced in the minds of the friends the relationship of loving cooperation he envisioned would define the Administrative Order. Write down below the responsibilities he indicated the two institutions would jointly shoulder.

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## SECTION 34

Another development we should consider here is the rise of the World Spiritual and Administrative Center of the Faith, which spans the entirety of the Guardian’s ministry. In this section, we will only be able to discuss but a small fraction of the work undertaken by Shoghi Effendi in developing the World Center, touching on four specific topics: the beautification of Bahjí, the completion of the Sepulcher of the Báb, the establishment of the Monument Gardens at the focal point of the Arc on Mount Carmel, and the construction of the International Archives Building. Even these can only be treated in the briefest fashion here. Of course, the World Center has continued to evolve under the direction of the Universal House of Justice and will continue to do so into the future, and you will learn about its ongoing development in the years to come in reading reports and messages issued from the Holy Land.

Almost immediately upon assuming his responsibilities as Guardian, Shoghi Effendi began to take steps to develop, extend, and protect the properties associated with the lives of the Central Figures of the Faith and the Holy Family. You are already aware that the keys to the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh, a modest structure near the Mansion at Bahjí, were seized by Covenant-breakers shortly after the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and they had entrenched themselves in the buildings surrounding it. From the time of Bahá’u’lláh’s ascension in 1892, Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí had occupied the Mansion itself, the home in which the Manifestation had spent the final years of His earthly existence. It eventually fell into such utter disrepair that Muḥammad-‘Alí and his associates evacuated it in 1929. Over the next two years, Shoghi Effendi restored the building to its original beauty and filled it with precious relics associated with the life of Bahá’u’lláh and items of historic interest—Bahá’í literature in various languages, photographs of pioneers, copies of Assembly incorporation documents, and similar material. So magnificent was the restoration of the building that the civil authorities designated it a place of pilgrimage and historic museum, protecting it from any future claims made by the Covenant-breakers.

Though the Mansion was safeguarded in this way, Shoghi Effendi spent the greater part of his ministry attempting to secure other parcels of land around the Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh. In January 1923, he took initial steps to ensure that the ownership of the Shrine itself, the Most Sacred Spot on earth, was established on an unshakable legal basis. The keys to the Shrine were returned to him by the authorities shortly after, upholding his right to its custody as Head of the

Faith. It was not until 1952, however, that the long-cherished lands surrounding the Mansion and the Shrine, amounting to over 145,000 square meters, were obtained, allowing Shoghi Effendi to extend the magnificent gardens that had sprung up from the arid soil under his exacting eye. Covenant-breakers would continue to occupy a long two-story house in the immediate vicinity of the Shrine until 1957 when they were ordered by the authorities to leave. The unsightly structure was demolished a few months after the Guardian's passing, and gardens replaced it. The World Spiritual Center of the Faith, the Qiblih of the people of Bahá, was irrevocably secured.

From your study of the previous unit, you know that the construction of a monument on Mount Carmel in Haifa to receive the sacred remains of the Báb was one of the achievements of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's ministry. The structure consisted of several rooms, in one of which the body of the Báb had been reposed. The remains of 'Abdu'l-Bahá were later placed in a room adjoining it—this, considered a temporary arrangement by Shoghi Effendi, who envisioned that, at an appropriate time, a befitting Shrine would be erected for this purpose. In 1928, he initiated excavation work to remove rock behind the monument in order to make way for the construction of a shell that would preserve and adorn it. On the hundredth anniversary of the declaration of the Báb, 23 May 1944, he revealed a model of the design for the superstructure—an arcade crowned with a golden dome.

Actual construction would be delayed until 1948 because of the Second World War and the ensuing turmoil that engulfed the Holy Land. It is impossible to enumerate the countless details involved in the raising of the superstructure, especially under the arduous conditions that persisted in the region. All of the marble was cut and carved in Italy, and its shipment to Haifa, along with much-needed cement and steel, continued over several years until the Shrine's completion. By the centenary anniversary of the martyrdom of the Báb in July 1950 the arcade had been erected, and three years later, at Ridván 1953, the first golden tiles covering the dome were put in place. On the ninth day of that joyous Festival, which also marked the opening of the Ten Year Crusade, Shoghi Effendi himself placed a fragment from the plaster ceiling of the Báb's prison in Máh-Kú beneath one of the gilded tiles of the dome. The erection of the final unit, a stone lantern atop the dome, coincided with the closing of the Holy Year, October 1953. Here is the message Shoghi Effendi sent to the Fourth International Conference in New Delhi on that occasion:

**“A steadily swelling throng of visitors from far and near, on many days exceeding a thousand, is flocking to the gates leading to the Inner Sanctuary of this majestic mausoleum; paying homage to the Queen of Carmel enthroned on God's Mountain, crowned in glowing gold, robed in shimmering white, girdled in emerald green, enchanting every eye from air, sea, plain and hill.”<sup>100</sup>**

A few hundred meters to the East of the Shrine, four small marble monuments had already been erected years before by the Guardian. The most significant among them was the monument that marks the resting-place of the Greatest Holy Leaf. Shoghi Effendi was in Switzerland in 1932 when news reached him of her passing, and he himself traveled to Italy to commission a memorial worthy of one whom he described with such touching words as “the well-beloved and treasured Remnant of Bahá'u'lláh entrusted to our frail and unworthy hands by our departed Master”. Regarding the design of the monument, the Guardian explained that it called to mind elements of the Administrative Order of the Faith: the platform of three steps was like the Local Assemblies, the pillars like the National Assemblies, and the dome that crowned them and held them together like the Universal House of Justice.

Some years later, upon the passing of the wife of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Munírih Khánum, a smaller monument was added to mark her resting-place. Then, in 1939, twin marble monuments were erected for the graves of His Mother, Navváb, and younger Brother, Mírzá Mihdí, as reported by the Guardian in the following cable:

**“BLESSED REMAINS PUREST BRANCH AND MASTER’S MOTHER SAFELY TRANSFERRED HALLOWED PRECINCTS SHRINES MOUNT CARMEL. . . . CHERISHED WISH GREATEST HOLY LEAF FULFILLED. SISTER BROTHER MOTHER WIFE ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ REUNITED ONE SPOT DESIGNED CONSTITUTE FOCAL CENTER BAHÁ’Í ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS AT FAITH’S WORLD CENTER.”<sup>101</sup>**

The four monuments were embellished by gardens, and Shoghi Effendi laid out a broad sweeping arc above them. This arc would serve as a path around which would be erected the future international administrative buildings of the Faith.

As for the International Archives, because of the need for a suitable edifice to house the collection of sacred and historic relics in the Holy Land, Shoghi Effendi decided to start with that building and made its erection one of the goals of the Ten Year Crusade. As in the case of the Shrine of the Báb, he was intimately involved in the design of the building and the oversight of its construction. Excavation began at Náv-Ruz 1955, and by Riḍván 1957 the exterior of the edifice was completed. Rectangular in shape, the edifice is graced by fifty imposing columns, built entirely of marble imported again from Italy. The interior of the building was still unfinished when the Guardian passed away a few months later, and the Hands of the Cause of God brought the project to its completion by the close of the Ten Year Crusade.

If you have been to the World Center of the Faith, then you have experienced the sense of peace that envelops the soul as one traverses its gardens and gazes upon the splendor of its edifices. How often do those who enter its grounds perceive in the vision of beauty that Shoghi Effendi created a reflection of the kind of world which we are striving to build—a reflection of the glory which is destined to cover the earth.

## SECTION 35

Now, there is a principle important for all of us to appreciate, for it is as true today as it was in the time of the Guardian: the development of the World Administrative Center of the Faith on the slope of Mount Carmel is intimately linked to the evolution of the Administrative Order throughout the globe. In a message dated 29 March 1951, Shoghi Effendi himself made clear that the plans unfolding on Mount Carmel were dependent on the erection and perfection of “the machinery of the national and local institutions of a nascent Order”. This brings us to one final development we should discuss.

In a cable sent on 9 January 1951 to the Bahá’í world, the Guardian took a significant step in developing further the structure of the Administrative Order, making the following announcement:

**“PROCLAIM NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES EAST WEST WEIGHTY EPOCH-MAKING DECISION FORMATION FIRST INTERNATIONAL BAHÁ’Í COUNCIL FORERUNNER SUPREME ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTION DESTINED EMERGE FULLNESS TIME**

WITHIN PRECINCTS BENEATH SHADOW WORLD SPIRITUAL CENTER FAITH  
ALREADY ESTABLISHED TWIN CITIES ‘AKKÁ HAIFA.’<sup>102</sup>

In March 1952, fourteen months later, Shoghi Effendi announced the names of eight believers appointed by him to serve on the International Bahá’í Council. This institution, operating in the Holy Land, had three functions: to foster relations with state authorities, to assist in the erection of the Shrine of the Báb, and to conduct negotiations with civil authorities on certain Bahá’í administrative matters. In May 1955 he raised the membership to nine through one additional appointment.

In the paragraphs below from the abovementioned 29 March 1951 message, we see how the Guardian links the progress being made on the construction of the mausoleum of the Báb, which had already elicited “the goodwill and support of the civil authorities” of the newly established state of Israel, to the process of recognition of the World Center of the Faith:

**“The construction of the mausoleum of the Báb, synchronizing with the birth of that state, and the progress of which has been accompanied by these successive manifestations of the goodwill and support of the civil authorities will, if steadily maintained, greatly reinforce, and lend a tremendous impetus to this process of recognition which constitutes an historic landmark in the evolution of the World Center of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh—a process which the newly formed Council, now established at its very heart, is designed to foster . . .”<sup>103</sup>**

He continues by stating that this process would “attain its consummation in the institution of the Universal House of Justice and the emergence of the auxiliary administrative agencies, revolving around this highest legislative body” and would “reveal the plenitude of its potentialities with the sailing of the Divine Ark as promised in the Tablet of Carmel.” In this context, then, he writes the following, in which we can perceive the impetus that he envisioned the sacred institution of the Shrine of the Báb, situated at the heart of Mount Carmel, would give to the unfoldment of the institutions of the Faith at its World Administrative Center:

**“I cannot at this juncture overemphasize the sacredness of that holy dust embosomed in the heart of the Vineyard of God, or overrate the unimaginable potencies of this mighty institution founded sixty years ago, through the operation of the Will of, and the definite selection made by, the Founder of our Faith, on the occasion of His historic visit to that holy mountain, nor can I lay too much stress on the role which this institution, to which the construction of the superstructure of this edifice is bound to lend an unprecedented impetus, is destined to play in the unfoldment of the World Administrative Center of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh and in the efflorescence of its highest institutions constituting the embryo of its future World Order.”<sup>104</sup>**

As we will see later, the International Bahá’í Council became an elected body at Ridván 1961, under the stewardship of the Hands of the Cause of God, who, by the sheer force of self-sacrifice and self-abnegation and through the power of divine assistance, held the Bahá’í world on the course set by the Guardian after his passing. In 1963 the Council would cease to exist when the Universal House of Justice came into being.

## SECTION 36

In the grandeur of the edifices Shoghi Effendi built, the standard of beauty he set, and the sense of order he gave to the physical environment, we catch a glimpse of the extraordinary brilliance that brought into being the World Administrative Center of the Faith. The charter that guided the Guardian was the Tablet of Carmel, revealed by Baha'u'llah during one of His visits to Haifa. Remarkable for its "allusions and prophecies", its revelation unleashed the spiritual impulse for the rise and establishment of the international institutions on God's Holy Mountain. You would do well, now, to read the Tablet in full several times, pondering the significance of its powerful verses.

**"All glory be to this Day, the Day in which the fragrances of mercy have been wafted over all created things, a Day so blest that past ages and centuries can never hope to rival it, a Day in which the countenance of the Ancient of Days hath turned towards His holy seat. Thereupon the voices of all created things, and beyond them those of the Concourse on High, were heard calling aloud: 'Haste thee, O Carmel, for lo, the light of the countenance of God, the Ruler of the Kingdom of Names and Fashioner of the heavens, hath been lifted upon thee.'**

**"Seized with transports of joy, and raising high her voice, she thus exclaimed: 'May my life be a sacrifice to Thee, inasmuch as Thou hast fixed Thy gaze upon me, hast bestowed upon me Thy bounty, and hast directed towards me Thy steps. Separation from Thee, O Thou Source of everlasting life, hath well nigh consumed me, and my remoteness from Thy presence hath burned away my soul. All praise be to Thee for having enabled me to hearken to Thy call, for having honored me with Thy footsteps, and for having quickened my soul through the vitalizing fragrance of Thy Day and the shrilling voice of Thy Pen, a voice Thou didst ordain as Thy trumpet-call amidst Thy people. And when the hour at which Thy resistless Faith was to be made manifest did strike, Thou didst breathe a breath of Thy spirit into Thy Pen, and lo, the entire creation shook to its very foundations, unveiling to mankind such mysteries as lay hidden within the treasuries of Him Who is the Possessor of all created things.'**

**"No sooner had her voice reached that most exalted Spot than We made reply: 'Render thanks unto thy Lord, O Carmel. The fire of thy separation from Me was fast consuming thee, when the ocean of My presence surged before thy face, cheering thine eyes and those of all creation, and filling with delight all things visible and invisible. Rejoice, for God hath in this Day established upon thee His throne, hath made thee the dawning-place of His signs and the dayspring of the evidences of His Revelation. Well is it with him that circleth around thee, that proclaimeth the revelation of thy glory, and recounteth that which the bounty of the Lord thy God hath showered upon thee. Seize thou the Chalice of Immortality in the name of thy Lord, the All-Glorious, and give thanks unto Him, inasmuch as He, in token of His mercy unto thee, hath turned thy sorrow into gladness, and transmuted thy grief into blissful joy. He, verily, loveth the spot which hath been made the seat of His throne, which His footsteps have trodden, which hath been honored by His presence, from which He raised His call, and upon which He shed His tears.**

**“Call out to Zion, O Carmel, and announce the joyful tidings: He that was hidden from mortal eyes is come! His all-conquering sovereignty is manifest; His all-encompassing splendor is revealed. Beware lest thou hesitate or halt. Hasten forth and circumambulate the City of God that hath descended from heaven, the celestial Kaaba round which have circled in adoration the favored of God, the pure in heart, and the company of the most exalted angels. Oh, how I long to announce unto every spot on the surface of the earth, and to carry to each one of its cities, the glad-tidings of this Revelation—a Revelation to which the heart of Sinai hath been attracted, and in whose name the Burning Bush is calling: “Unto God, the Lord of Lords, belong the kingdoms of earth and heaven.” Verily this is the Day in which both land and sea rejoice at this announcement, the Day for which have been laid up those things which God, through a bounty beyond the ken of mortal mind or heart, hath destined for revelation. Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee, and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names.’**

**“Sanctified be the Lord of all mankind, at the mention of Whose name all the atoms of the earth have been made to vibrate, and the Tongue of Grandeur hath been moved to disclose that which had been wrapt in His knowledge and lay concealed within the treasury of His might. He, verily, through the potency of His name, the Mighty, the All-Powerful, the Most High, is the ruler of all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth.”<sup>105</sup>**

## **SECTION 37**

Now let us pause here and, looking at the following passage written by the Guardian, reflect for a moment on all that we have studied thus far. In it, he refers to three divinely revealed charters, each of which set in motion a distinct process: the first, the Tablet of Carmel, for the development of the institutions of the Faith at its World Center and the other two, the Tablets of the Divine Plan and the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, for the propagation of the Faith and the establishment of its Administrative Order throughout the world.

**“It is indeed my fervent and constant prayer that the members of this firmly knit, intensely alive, world-embracing Community, spurred on by the triple impulse generated through the revelation of the Tablet of Carmel by Bahá’u’lláh and the Will and Testament as well as the Tablets of the Divine Plan bequeathed by the Center of His Covenant—the three Charters which have set in motion three distinct processes, the first operating in the Holy Land for the development of the institutions of the Faith at its World Center and the other two, throughout the rest of the Bahá’í world, for its propagation and the establishment of its Administrative Order—may advance from strength to strength and victory to victory. May they hasten, by their present exertions, the advent of that blissful consummation when the shackles hampering the growth of their beloved Faith will have been finally burst asunder, when its independent status will have been officially and universally recognized, when it will have ascended the throne and wielded the scepter of spiritual and temporal authority, when the brightness of its glory will have illuminated the whole earth, and its dominion will have been established over the entire planet.”<sup>106</sup>**

Think about the way the three mighty charters mentioned in the passage above affect the lives of every one of us today. Everywhere believers are working to promote the Divine Plan. Everywhere they are participating in the rise of the Administrative Order, either serving on its institutions and agencies directly or supporting their continued development. And everywhere the hearts of the believers are focused on the World Center of their Faith. All of us turn to that Most Sacred Spot on earth daily in prayer—an act that is the physical manifestation of the attraction of our inner souls to the Blessed Beauty.

At the same time we are constantly turning towards the Universal House of Justice, in anticipation of its guidance and direction. What effect do you think it has, that the thoughts and prayers of thousands upon thousands are focused on the World Administrative and Spiritual Center of the Faith in this way?

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## SECTION 38

November of 1957 was a time of agony for the Bahá'í world. In the early morning hours of Monday, 4 November, while on a visit to London, Shoghi Effendi suddenly passed away. The Ten Year Crusade, well in progress by then, was soon to reach its midway point, and Bahá'ís across the planet were laboring intently to win the goals he had set. Now, without warning, he was gone from them.

On 20 October, Shoghi Effendi had arrived in London, accompanied by Rúhíyyih Khánum, to purchase furniture and fixtures for the interior of the International Archives Building and the gardens above it. On Sunday, 27 October, he told Rúhíyyih Khánum that his hands were aching and stiff, and she begged him to rest. By that night he had developed a fever, and a doctor was called the next day. He diagnosed the Guardian with a case of Asiatic influenza and immediately prescribed medicine for him. In the week that followed, Shoghi Effendi continued to work from his bed, reading and answering the accumulating mail, and the doctor came to visit him daily. By Saturday, the Guardian had recovered sufficiently to work several hours on a large map spread out on a table in his room that showed the progress of the Ten Year Crusade. The next day he dictated letters to Rúhíyyih Khánum and appended a few lines to others she had already prepared. They talked for a while before retiring that evening. Shoghi Effendi seemed well, and the doctor had assured them that they could depart for Haifa soon. Sometime during the early morning hours, however, he passed away. Rúhíyyih Khánum was grief stricken. Doctors concluded that he had died of a sudden heart attack and had suffered no

pain. Below is the message that she requested be cabled from Haifa to all National Spiritual Assemblies later that day.

“SHOGHI EFFENDI BELOVED OF ALL HEARTS SACRED TRUST GIVEN BELIEVERS BY MASTER PASSED AWAY SUDDEN HEART ATTACK IN SLEEP FOLLOWING ASIATIC FLU. URGE BELIEVERS REMAIN STEADFAST CLING INSTITUTION HANDS LOVINGLY REARED RECENTLY REINFORCED EMPHASIZED BELOVED GUARDIAN. ONLY ONENESS HEART ONENESS PURPOSE CAN BEFITTINGLY TESTIFY LOYALTY ALL NATIONAL ASSEMBLIES BELIEVERS DEPARTED GUARDIAN WHO SACRIFICED SELF UTTERLY FOR SERVICE FAITH.”<sup>107</sup>

Messages of love and loyalty addressed to the Hands of the Cause poured in from all parts of the globe, while Bahá’ís from more than twenty countries began to arrive in London to attend the Guardian’s funeral the next Saturday. Present were some three hundred and sixty friends, including Hands of the Cause of God and members of National Spiritual Assemblies and the Auxiliary Boards. Following a simple service at a cemetery outside the city, where an appropriate spot had been found to inter the Guardian’s remains, believers from both the East and the West filed solemnly past his casket for more than two hours. Additional prayers were then recited before the casket was lowered into a vault, on the floor of which had been placed a small rug brought from the innermost Shrine of Bahá’u’lláh at Bahjí.

Later an unimposing yet majestic monument would be erected over the spot where the earthly remains of the Guardian had been laid—a white marble column, crowned with a globe, on which was perched a golden eagle with outstretched wings. On the column were engraved the words:

“BEHOLD! HE IS THE BLEST  
AND SACRED BOUGH THAT HAS  
BRANCHED OUT FROM THE  
TWIN HOLY TREES. WELL IS IT  
WITH HIM THAT SEEKETH THE  
SHELTER OF HIS SHADE THAT  
SHADOWETH ALL MANKIND.”

## SECTION 39

With the passing of the Guardian prior to the establishment of the Universal House of Justice, responsibility for the affairs of the Faith fell on the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God, who were twenty-seven in number at the time. Designated by Shoghi Effendi the “Chief Stewards of Bahá’u’lláh’s embryonic World Commonwealth” and its “high-ranking officers”, the Hands were charged with the “dual and sacred task of safeguarding the Faith and promoting its teaching activities”. They had been under his constant guidance and direction since the first appointments in 1951, and the followers of Bahá’u’lláh throughout the world turned naturally to them at their time of grief and anguish.

‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament had envisioned the possibility of other Guardians succeeding Shoghi Effendi, and he had expounded on this possibility in his own writings. The first task before the Hands of the Cause of God, then, was to determine whether Shoghi Effendi had left any instructions in this respect. His apartment in Haifa, already locked in his absence from the Holy Land, had been further secured immediately following news of his passing. On 19 November 1957, a delegation of nine Hands, selected by their entire membership, went into the apartment and carefully searched it, looking for his will or any instructions. None were found.

The Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was explicit on the question of the appointment of a successor to Shoghi Effendi. A second Guardian of the Cause, if one was to be named, would have had to be an Aghṣan, would have had to be selected by Shoghi Effendi during his lifetime, and would have had to receive the assent of nine Hands of the Cause who had been elected by them from their own ranks. None of these criteria had been fulfilled. The Guardian did not have any children and all the Aghṣan had broken the Covenant. That he did not appoint a successor, the Hands concluded, was a sign of his strict adherence to the provisions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will.

A new situation had arisen, for which there were no clear provisions in the Sacred Text. Whether or not there was any other way for a Guardian to be named, given the circumstances, could only be determined by the Universal House of Justice—this, in accordance with the unequivocal statement in the Will: “Unto the Most Holy Book every one must turn and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice. That which this body, whether unanimously or by a majority doth carry, that is verily the Truth and the Purpose of God Himself.”<sup>108</sup> The Hands of the Cause therefore came to the decision that they would call upon the Bahá’ís of the world to dedicate their energies to bringing the Ten Year Crusade to a successful completion, at which point the Universal House of Justice would be elected. They drew confidence from passages such as the one below that, in reaching this decision, they were acting in compliance with the expressed hope of the Guardian. Addressing the Persian friends in 1954, following the completion of the first year of the Ten Year Crusade, he had written:

**“O ye loved ones of Bahá! This day is your day and this hour is indeed your hour. That which is imperative in this day and which will, like unto a magnet, attract the confirmations of God is this, that a large number of believers, men and women, young and old, rich and poor, learned and unlettered, white and black alike, bestir themselves for the triumph of His exalted Faith. Galvanized by a spirit of love and courage, they must, one and all, arise even as a single legion, and in the course of the remaining nine years scatter far and wide over the surface of the globe. ‘With the feet of detachment,’ as the Ancient Beauty admonishes, must they ‘tread under all who are in heaven and on earth’ and ‘cast the sleeve of holiness over all that have been created from water and clay.’ With hearts detached, spirits unencumbered, souls enkindled, resolve unflinching and steps unwavering, they must strive day and night to extend the reach of the Cause of God, to diffuse its sweet savors, to consolidate its foundations, to noise abroad its fame and to multiply the ranks of its adherents. Raising the call of ‘Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá!’ they must rush forth to the virgin territories and newly opened localities and, putting their whole trust in God, establish isolated centers, which may be likened to ‘points’. They must, through their efforts to teach and guide the people by words and deeds, transform these isolated centers, as soon as feasible, into groups, which**

are like unto ‘letters’. They must then develop these groups into Local Spiritual Assemblies, which are like unto complete ‘words’, and continually endeavor to increase the number of these Assemblies in various countries so that the means for the befitting convocation of National Conventions can be gradually prepared, National Spiritual Assemblies, which are like unto manifest ‘verses’, the pillars of the Throne of Divine Justice, can be systematically erected, and upon these pillars can be raised the dome of the divine Edifice, the Universal House of Justice, which is like unto the lucid ‘book’, established in its designated seat on the slopes of the Vineyard of the Lord upon His holy Mountain, adorning the institutions of His New World Order with the crown of supreme distinction.”<sup>109</sup>

You are encouraged to review the content of the above paragraph by completing the following sentences:

- a. What is imperative, Shoghi Effendi says in the above paragraph, and what will, like a \_\_\_\_\_, attract the \_\_\_\_\_ of God is for a large number of believers, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, to bestir themselves for the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Faith.
- b. He encourages them, galvanized by a \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, to arise, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, even as a single \_\_\_\_\_, and scatter \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ over the surface of the \_\_\_\_\_.
- c. He reminds them of Bahá’u’lláh’s admonition to tread, with the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_, under all who are in heaven and on earth and to cast the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ over all that have been created from water and clay.
- d. With hearts \_\_\_\_\_, spirits \_\_\_\_\_, souls \_\_\_\_\_, resolve \_\_\_\_\_ and steps \_\_\_\_\_, the friends should, the Guardian states, strive day and night to \_\_\_\_\_ the reach of the Cause of God, to \_\_\_\_\_ its sweet savors, to \_\_\_\_\_ its foundations, to \_\_\_\_\_ its fame and to \_\_\_\_\_ the ranks of its adherents.
- e. He calls upon them
  - to, raising the \_\_\_\_\_ of “Yá Bahá’u’l-Abhá!”, \_\_\_\_\_ forth to \_\_\_\_\_ territories and \_\_\_\_\_ localities and, putting their \_\_\_\_\_ in God, establish \_\_\_\_\_ centers, which may be likened to \_\_\_\_\_;

- to, through their efforts to \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ people by \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ these isolated centers into \_\_\_\_\_, which can be likened to \_\_\_\_\_ ;
- to develop these groups into \_\_\_\_\_, which can be likened to \_\_\_\_\_, and to continually endeavor to \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ of Local \_\_\_\_\_ in various \_\_\_\_\_,
  - so that the \_\_\_\_\_ for the \_\_\_\_\_ convocation of \_\_\_\_\_ can be gradually prepared and \_\_\_\_\_, which may be likened to \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Throne of \_\_\_\_\_, can be \_\_\_\_\_,
  - so that, upon these pillars, the dome of the \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_, which may be likened to the \_\_\_\_\_, can be established in its \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Vineyard of the Lord upon His \_\_\_\_\_, adorning the institutions of Bahá'u'lláh's new \_\_\_\_\_ with the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_.

## SECTION 40

You can imagine how utterly devastated the Hands of the Cause of God felt at the time of the passing of the Guardian. Yet, despite their own personal grief and sorrow, they took the helm of the Faith with unshakable resolve, safely steering the Bahá'í world through the perilous period from November 1957 to April 1963, never deviating a hair's breadth from the course that had been set by Shoghi Effendi. That they demonstrated singular heroism in their complete consecration to the Cause is borne out by the record of their achievements.

One of the immediate concerns of the Hands of the Cause was to safeguard properties in the Holy Land and other assets of the Faith, preserving the gains the Guardian had made and continuing the work he had initiated. In December 1957, they were able to fulfill his plan to tear down the two-story building that had been occupied by Covenant-breakers at Bahjí. The following year, beginning in January, the Hands each attended, as he had specified, one of the five International Conferences that he had called for to mark the midway point of the Ten Year Crusade. Over the next five years they traversed the globe tirelessly in promotion of that Plan, ensuring that its ambitious objectives were met. In the brief period of their stewardship, the number of localities throughout the world in which Bahá'ís resided climbed from approximately 4,100 to over 11,000. The number of National Spiritual Assemblies grew from twenty-six to fifty-six. Further, they were able to bring to fruition Shoghi Effendi's plans to build Houses of Worship in Kampala, Sydney, and Frankfurt. In the winter of 1961, the International Archives Building, the interior of which was completed under their supervision, was opened to pilgrims.

Over the course of this period, the general body of the Hands of the Cause of God met in six Conclaves, all of which took place in the upper hall of the Mansion of Bahá'u'lláh at Bahjí. During the first of these, conducted from 18 to 25 November 1957, they elected nine from among their own membership to serve at the World Center of the Faith as legal Custodians.

It was following their third Conclave in 1959 that the Hands of the Cause made a significant announcement regarding the International Bahá'í Council, which, as you know, was first appointed by Shoghi Effendi in 1951. Its evolution into an elected body was seen by him as an important step towards the eventual election of the Universal House of Justice, and the Hands announced plans, as anticipated by him, for members of National Spiritual Assemblies worldwide to elect nine adult believers at Ridván 1961 to serve on the International Council in the Holy Land. In issuing this announcement, the Hands asked that they not be considered for election to the Council so that they would be free to perform the services assigned to them by the Guardian. When making preparations for the election of the Universal House of Justice two years later at Ridván 1963, the Hands made a similar appeal. The significance of their request should not be underestimated. No one familiar with the history of religion would expect any group of individuals with full authority over the affairs of a religious community to resist the temptation to maintain control in some fashion. But this, indeed, is precisely what the Hands of the Cause did. With gladness and joy, they relinquished their temporary authority, placing themselves completely at the service of the Universal House of Justice.

In the next unit, we will read about the first election of the House of Justice in 1963, described by Shoghi Effendi as the “crowning unit of the administrative structure of the Faith”. For now, we should acknowledge that, under the direction of the Hands, that body was established on a firm and unassailable foundation as the Guardian had envisioned in 1922 when he set out, almost entirely alone, to strengthen the Faith at the local and national levels. It seems fitting for us to end this section, then, by reading the following tribute paid to the Hands of the Cause of God by the Universal House of Justice in 1965:

**“From the very outset of their custodianship of the Cause of God the Hands realized that since they had no certainty of divine guidance such as is incontrovertibly assured to the Guardian and to the Universal House of Justice, their one safe course was to follow with undeviating firmness the instructions and policies of Shoghi Effendi. The entire history of religion shows no comparable record of such strict self-discipline, such absolute loyalty and such complete self-abnegation by the leaders of a religion finding themselves suddenly deprived of their divinely inspired guide. The debt of gratitude which mankind for generations, nay, ages to come, owes to this handful of grief-stricken, steadfast, heroic souls is beyond estimation.”<sup>110</sup>**

## SECTION 41

We should pause to remind ourselves that, while the Faith continues to move from strength to strength, protected, as you have seen, by the shield of the Covenant, there are those who, consumed by personal ambition, attempt to create confusion among the believers from time to time in an effort to take the reins of the Cause into their own hands. One such attempt was made during the period between the passing of the Guardian and the election of the Universal House of Justice. Some two years after Shoghi Effendi's death, Charles Mason

Remey, who was one of the Hands of the Cause at the time, laid claim to the Guardianship. It is instructive to review the fate that awaited him and those who followed him.

Mason Remey was one of the nine Hands of the Cause who had searched Shoghi Effendi's apartment in Haifa for his will or any last instructions. Like the other Hands of the Cause, Remey had personally affirmed that Shoghi Effendi had appointed no successor, signing the statement issued in 1957 to this effect. He had signed, as well, the second statement calling on the friends to unite in completing the Ten Year Crusade and indicating that the entire body of Hands would decide when and how the International Bahá'í Council would evolve, leading to the election of the Universal House of Justice. As one of the nine Hands designated to serve in the Holy Land, for nearly two years he participated in the consultations that guided the development of the Bahá'í community.

Then in April 1960, Remey, who by then was age 86, issued a "Proclamation" declaring that he was the "second Guardian". Disregarding the requirements set forth in the Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá concerning the question of successorship, Remey argued that his appointment in 1951 as president of the nascent International Bahá'í Council meant that he should automatically assume the position of head of the Universal House of Justice and he was, therefore, the "second Guardian". The absurdity of his claim was clear. Refusing to abandon his attempt to seize control of the Cause, Remey was expelled from the Faith by the Hands.

In the initial confusion created by Remey's proclamation, a small number of misguided believers followed him down the barren path he was determined to walk. One group even tried to take control of the property on which the House of Worship near Chicago is built and to become the authorized voice of the Faith in the United States through legal means, but the National Spiritual Assembly secured an injunction prohibiting them from using Bahá'í terminology and infringing on the Assembly's rights. Not long after, Remey ordered that the group be dissolved.

Then in September 1964 Remey created what he called the "Second International Bahá'í Council" and appointed Joel Marangella its president. Marangella, however, apparently lost favor with Remey, who dissolved the council two years later, ordering him to return all of its papers. In 1967 Remey appointed Donald Harvey to succeed him as the "third Guardian". Then, in 1969 Marangella announced that he was the legitimate successor of Remey, rather than Harvey, and created what he called a "National Bureau of the Orthodox Bahá'í Faith".

As time went on, those who followed Remey began to disintegrate into smaller and smaller contending groups, with the leader of one eventually being arrested and convicted in 1969 for "lewd and lascivious" behavior. Remey himself died in 1974. In the end of his life, he began to attack the work of Shoghi Effendi, declaring that his efforts to develop Bahá'í administration were in error and that he, Remey, would need to start afresh. Below is the cable sent by the Universal House of Justice in 1974, advising the Bahá'í world of his death.

**“CHARLES MASON REMEY WHOSE ARROGANT ATTEMPT USURP GUARDIANSHIP AFTER PASSING SHOGHI EFFENDI LED TO HIS EXPULSION FROM RANKS FAITHFUL HAS DIED IN FLORENCE ITALY IN HUNDREDTH YEAR OF HIS LIFE BURIED WITHOUT RELIGIOUS RITES ABANDONED BY ERSTWHILE FOLLOWERS. HISTORY THIS PITIABLE DEFECTION BY ONE WHO HAD RECEIVED GREAT HONORS FROM BOTH MASTER AND GUARDIAN CONSTITUTES YET**

**ANOTHER EXAMPLE FUTILITY ALL ATTEMPTS UNDERMINE IMPREGNABLE COVENANT CAUSE BAHÁ'U'LLÁH.”<sup>111</sup>**

The remaining few who have not abandoned Remey's hollow ideas continue to try to sow the seeds of doubt in the minds of the believers, but their actions have had negligible effect on the progress of the Cause. Using various means to circulate their ideas, including the internet, they give the impression that they have significant followings. However, it was documented in 2007 that the so-called “Orthodox Bahá'ís”, to take one example, had fewer than fifty members in the United States.

The circulation of false and baseless ideas, as mentioned above, merits our reflection. In the world today, especially with the rise of the internet, it is possible for any disillusioned individual or group to make all kinds of false claims that can mislead those with only a cursory degree of knowledge on a given issue or subject, including the Faith, its purpose and its history. With minimal resources and a degree of cunning, they can create the trappings of a well-organized machinery in operation behind any set of ideas. It is important for each of us to be aware that such a possibility exists. In one case, for instance, a single individual established a group, of which he seemed to be the only real member, and set about to propagate his malicious ideas about the Faith systematically on the internet. Mass mailings have also been employed towards this end in other similar cases. Any one of us may happen to come across literature or items of correspondence that, whether explicitly or not, constitute an attack on the foundations of the Bahá'í community. The history of the Faith makes clear that the effects of such efforts, if there be any at all, are insignificant. They may cause a momentary flurry, but nothing more. Under the shadow of the Covenant, the Cause of God continues to prosper, while those striving to sow the seeds of doubt fade into obscurity. Should we encounter materials of this kind, then, it is best not to grant them undue importance. Discuss with the other members of your group the following guidance given by the Universal House of Justice in this connection:

**“... the Universal House of Justice instructs us to say that it is to be expected that books will be written against the Faith attempting to distort its teachings, to denigrate its accomplishments, to vilify its Founders and leaders and to destroy its very foundations. The friends should not be unduly exercised when these books appear and certainly no issue should be made of them. There should be no attempt made to destroy or remove such books from libraries. On the other hand there is no need at all for the friends to acquire them, and indeed, the best plan is to ignore them entirely.”<sup>112</sup>**

**“Your email message of 6 July 2011 regarding an internet article that makes disparaging remarks about the use of the materials of the Ruhi Institute in . . . was received at the Bahá'í World Centre. The concern that prompted you to bring this article to our attention is warmly appreciated. The Universal House of Justice is aware of a number of websites established on the internet that provide incorrect and often degrading information on the Faith, and while it is closely following the issue, it sees no cause for undue concern. The best approach for the friends to take when they encounter postings of this nature is to ignore them completely.”<sup>113</sup>**

**“When the friends come across websites and blogs maintained by individuals who aim to undermine the credibility of the Faith or whose words are so obviously at variance with the essence of the teachings, they are advised to ignore them and not call attention to them. They are also advised not to attempt to engage in dis-**

**cussions and debates on such sites, for such exchanges inevitably prove to be fruitless, and it is more constructive to devote one's energies in other directions.”<sup>114</sup>**

## **SECTION 42**

We have dedicated the greater part of this unit to the extraordinary work undertaken by the Guardian in raising the Administrative Order and launching the Bahá'í world on successive stages in the execution of the Divine Plan. However monumental his accomplishments in this regard, it would be a mistake to limit the scope of the ministry of that incomparable being—the sign of God on earth, that most wondrous, unique, and priceless pearl—to these areas of endeavor. He was, following the passing of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, the Interpreter of the Word of God, and he has left to posterity, in his immensely rich and voluminous written works, a wealth of guidance that will only be fully appreciated as decades and centuries unfold.

It would be impossible to explore in any one book or unit the enormous body of written statements and pronouncements given to us, whether by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá or by the Guardian, that shed light on the meaning and implications of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and reveal to us its many truths. To undertake such an exploration would require delving into myriad aspects of Bahá'í belief. For the purposes of our study here, we will confine ourselves to an examination of a few statements in which the Guardian clarifies the station of each of the Central Figures of the Faith—Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He was, of course, far too modest to speak of his own person, and so we catch a glimpse of his station in passages in which he describes the institution of the Guardianship, the Universal House of Justice, and the Administrative Order, several of which we have studied in this unit.

Some of the Guardian's most powerful passages describing the station of each of the Central Figures are found in his definitive work, “The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh”. Written in 1934 in the form of a letter to the believers in the West, it sets out in uncompromising terms basic truths that lie at the core of the Faith, putting to rest certain erroneous notions circulating among the friends at the time. To begin, read the opening passage of that stupendous document, which sets the stage for his discussion of the three Central Figures of the Faith that follows:

**“On the 23rd of May of this auspicious year the Bahá'í world will celebrate the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh. We, who at this hour find ourselves standing on the threshold of the last decade of the first century of the Bahá'í era, might well pause to reflect upon the mysterious dispensations of so august, so momentous a Revelation. How vast, how entrancing the panorama which the revolution of four score years and ten unrolls before our eyes! Its towering grandeur well-nigh overwhelms us. To merely contemplate this unique spectacle, to visualize, however dimly, the circumstances attending the birth and gradual unfoldment of this supreme Theophany, to recall even in their barest outline the woeful struggles that proclaimed its rise and accelerated its march, will suffice to convince every unbiased observer of those eternal truths that motivate its life and which must continue to impel it forward until it achieves its destined ascendancy.**

**“Dominating the entire range of this fascinating spectacle towers the incomparable figure of Bahá'u'lláh, transcendental in His majesty, serene, awe-inspiring, unapproachably glorious. Allied, though subordinate in rank, and invested with the**

**authority of presiding with Him over the destinies of this supreme Dispensation, there shines upon this mental picture the youthful glory of the Báb, infinite in His tenderness, irresistible in His charm, unsurpassed in His heroism, matchless in the dramatic circumstances of His short yet eventful life. And finally there emerges, though on a plane of its own and in a category entirely apart from the one occupied by the twin Figures that preceded Him, the vibrant, the magnetic personality of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, reflecting to a degree that no man, however exalted his station, can hope to rival the glory and power with which They who are the Manifestations of God are alone endowed.”<sup>115</sup>**

You may find it helpful to complete the following sentences as you reflect on the significance of the above passage:

- a. The Guardian, in referring to the \_\_\_\_\_ anniversary of the founding of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh, encourages us to \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ upon the \_\_\_\_\_ of so \_\_\_\_\_, so \_\_\_\_\_ a Revelation.
- b. How \_\_\_\_\_, Shoghi Effendi tells us, how \_\_\_\_\_ is the \_\_\_\_\_ that the years gone by unfold before our \_\_\_\_\_; its \_\_\_\_\_ is overwhelming.
- c. Every unbiased observer, he explains, will be convinced of the eternal truths that motivate the Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh and which will continue to impel it forward if he or she
  - \_\_\_\_\_ the unique spectacle that unfolds before us.
  - \_\_\_\_\_, however \_\_\_\_\_, the circumstances attending the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of this supreme Dispensation.
  - \_\_\_\_\_, even in their \_\_\_\_\_ outline, the \_\_\_\_\_ struggles that \_\_\_\_\_ its \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ its \_\_\_\_\_.
- d. Dominating the entire \_\_\_\_\_ of this \_\_\_\_\_ spectacle, Shoghi Effendi tells us, towers the \_\_\_\_\_ of Bahá’u’lláh, transcendental in His \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.
- e. The Guardian continues by explaining that, allied, though \_\_\_\_\_ in rank, and \_\_\_\_\_ with the \_\_\_\_\_ of presiding with Bahá’u’lláh over the \_\_\_\_\_ of this supreme Dispensation, is the youthful figure of the Báb, \_\_\_\_\_ in His \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ in His \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ in His \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_ of His \_\_\_\_\_ yet \_\_\_\_\_ life.

- f. And finally, Shoghi Effendi says, there emerges on panorama before us the vibrant and \_\_\_\_\_ personality of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, Who, though on a \_\_\_\_\_ of His own and in a \_\_\_\_\_ entirely \_\_\_\_\_ from the one \_\_\_\_\_ by the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, reflects to a \_\_\_\_\_ that no person can \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ with which the Twin Manifestations alone are \_\_\_\_\_ .

## SECTION 43

Now let us look at some specific passages from “The Dispensation of Bahá’u’lláh” regarding each of the Central Figures of the Faith, starting with the one below. As you read the passage, think about how, in describing the station of Bahá’u’lláh, Shoghi Effendi explains to us the relationship between God and His Manifestation.

**“Let no one meditating, in the light of the afore-quoted passages, on the nature of the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh, mistake its character or misconstrue the intent of its Author. The divinity attributed to so great a Being and the complete incarnation of the names and attributes of God in so exalted a Person should, under no circumstances, be misconceived or misinterpreted. The human temple that has been made the vehicle of so overpowering a Revelation must, if we be faithful to the tenets of our Faith, ever remain entirely distinguished from that ‘innermost Spirit of Spirits’ and ‘eternal Essence of Essences’—that invisible yet rational God Who, however much we extol the divinity of His Manifestations on earth, can in no wise incarnate His infinite, His unknowable, His incorruptible and all-embracing Reality in the concrete and limited frame of a mortal being. Indeed, the God Who could so incarnate His own reality would, in the light of the teachings of Bahá’u’lláh, cease immediately to be God. So crude and fantastic a theory of Divine incarnation is as removed from, and incompatible with, the essentials of Bahá’í belief as are the no less inadmissible pantheistic and anthropomorphic conceptions of God—both of which the utterances of Bahá’u’lláh emphatically repudiate and the fallacy of which they expose.”<sup>116</sup>**

To think through the concepts presented in the above passage, you are encouraged to carry out the following exercise:

- a. Referring to the station of Bahá’u’lláh, the Guardian warns us not to \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ the divinity attributed to \_\_\_\_\_ and the complete incarnation of \_\_\_\_\_ .
- b. Shoghi Effendi tells us that the human temple which has been made the \_\_\_\_\_ of so \_\_\_\_\_ a Revelation must, if we be \_\_\_\_\_ to the tenets of our Faith, ever remain \_\_\_\_\_ from that \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ .

\_\_\_\_\_—that \_\_\_\_\_ yet \_\_\_\_\_ God Who, however much we extol the \_\_\_\_\_ of His Manifestations on earth, can in no wise \_\_\_\_\_ His \_\_\_\_\_, His \_\_\_\_\_, His \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ Reality in the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ frame of a \_\_\_\_\_.

- c. Continuing the discussion, the Guardian explains that the God Who could so \_\_\_\_\_ His own reality would, in the light of the teachings of Bahá'u'lláh, \_\_\_\_\_.
- d. Placing the concept of Divine incarnation alongside others such as pantheism, which holds to the belief that God is in everything, and anthropomorphism, which presents God in the image of a human being, Shoghi Effendi goes on to say that so \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ a theory of \_\_\_\_\_ is as \_\_\_\_\_ from, and \_\_\_\_\_ with, the \_\_\_\_\_ of Bahá'í belief as are the no less \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ conceptions of God—both of which the utterances of Bahá'u'lláh \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_ of which they expose.

In the past we have thought about what it means that God is an Unknowable Essence and how we can fulfill our purpose in life to know and worship Him by gaining greater and greater understanding of His attributes through those holy and sanctified Beings we recognize as Manifestations of God. What possible misunderstandings about the nature of God and His Manifestations, in particular Bahá'u'lláh, does Shoghi Effendi put to rest in the above passage?

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## SECTION 44

In the following passage from “The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh”, the Guardian discusses the twofold station of the Báb:

**“That the Báb, the inaugurator of the Bábí Dispensation, is fully entitled to rank as one of the self-sufficient Manifestations of God, that He has been invested with sovereign power and authority, and exercises all the rights and prerogatives of independent Prophethood, is yet another fundamental verity which the Message of Bahá’u’lláh insistently proclaims and which its followers must uncompromisingly uphold. That He is not to be regarded merely as an inspired Precursor of the Bahá’í Revelation, that in His person, as He Himself bears witness in the Persian Bayán, the object of all the Prophets gone before Him has been fulfilled, is a truth which I feel it my duty to demonstrate and emphasize. . . .**

**“There can be no doubt that the claim to the twofold station ordained for the Báb by the Almighty, a claim which He Himself has so boldly advanced, which Bahá’u’lláh has repeatedly affirmed, and to which the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has finally given the sanction of its testimony, constitutes the most distinctive feature of the Bahá’í Dispensation. It is a further evidence of its uniqueness, a tremendous accession to the strength, to the mysterious power and authority with which this holy cycle has been invested. Indeed the greatness of the Báb consists primarily, not in His being the divinely appointed Forerunner of so transcendent a Revelation, but rather in His having been invested with the powers inherent in the inaugurator of a separate religious Dispensation, and in His wielding, to a degree unrivaled by the Messengers gone before Him, the scepter of independent Prophethood.”<sup>117</sup>**

Before thinking about the implications of this passage, fill in the blanks in the sentences below, which are intended to highlight the sequence of ideas presented.

- a. That the Báb, the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ Dispensation, is fully entitled to rank as one of \_\_\_\_\_ of God, that He has been invested with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, and exercises all the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_, is, the Guardian tells us, a fundamental \_\_\_\_\_ which the Message of Bahá’u’lláh \_\_\_\_\_ and which its followers must \_\_\_\_\_.
- b. Shoghi Effendi indicates that the Báb is not to be regarded merely as an \_\_\_\_\_ of the Bahá’í Revelation.
- c. In the person of the Báb, the Guardian makes clear, the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Prophets Who have gone before Him has been \_\_\_\_\_.
- d. The claim to the \_\_\_\_\_ ordained for the Báb by the Almighty, a claim which He Himself has \_\_\_\_\_, which Bahá’u’lláh has \_\_\_\_\_, and to which the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá has \_\_\_\_\_ of its \_\_\_\_\_,



the outset, the Guardian explains that, though ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is one of the Central Figures of our Faith, together with the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh, He is not a Manifestation of God. He goes on to make clear, however, that the station occupied by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is unique in all the field of religious history, far and above that of any ordinary human being. In this connection, he quotes several passages from the Writings, including those of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá Himself, and then states:

**“From such clear and formally laid down statements, incompatible as they are with any assertion of a claim to Prophethood, we should not by any means infer that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is merely one of the servants of the Blessed Beauty, or at best one whose function is to be confined to that of an authorized interpreter of His Father’s teachings. Far be it from me to entertain such a notion or to wish to instill such sentiments. To regard Him in such a light is a manifest betrayal of the priceless heritage bequeathed by Bahá’u’lláh to mankind. Immeasurably exalted is the station conferred upon Him by the Supreme Pen above and beyond the implications of these, His own written statements. Whether in the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the most weighty and sacred of all the works of Bahá’u’lláh, or in the Kitáb-i-‘Ahd, the Book of His Covenant, or in the Súriy-i-Ghuṣn (Tablet of the Branch), such references as have been recorded by the pen of Bahá’u’lláh—references which the Tablets of His Father addressed to Him mightily reinforce—invest ‘Abdu’l-Bahá with a power, and surround Him with a halo, which the present generation can never adequately appreciate.**

**“He is, and should for all time be regarded, first and foremost, as the Center and Pivot of Bahá’u’lláh’s peerless and all-enfolding Covenant, His most exalted handiwork, the stainless Mirror of His light, the perfect Exemplar of His teachings, the unerring Interpreter of His Word, the embodiment of every Bahá’í ideal, the incarnation of every Bahá’í virtue, the Most Mighty Branch sprung from the Ancient Root, the Limb of the Law of God, the Being ‘round Whom all names revolve’, the Mainspring of the Oneness of Humanity, the Ensign of the Most Great Peace, the Moon of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation—styles and titles that are implicit and find their truest, their highest and fairest expression in the magic name ‘Abdu’l-Bahá. He is, above and beyond these appellations, the ‘Mystery of God’—an expression by which Bahá’u’lláh Himself has chosen to designate Him, and which, while it does not by any means justify us to assign to Him the station of Prophethood, indicates how in the person of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the incompatible characteristics of a human nature and super-human knowledge and perfection have been blended and are completely harmonized.”<sup>118</sup>**

You have already studied the second paragraph in the preceding unit. Nevertheless, you may find it beneficial to review the content of the two paragraphs above by completing the following sentences:

- a. Having made clear that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is not a Manifestation of God, Shoghi Effendi warns us not to infer by this that He is merely \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ or at best \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

- b. To regard ‘Abdu’l-Bahá as merely one of the servants of Bahá’u’lláh or at best one whose function is confined to that of an authorized interpreter of His Father’s teachings would be a manifest \_\_\_\_\_, Shoghi Effendi states, of the \_\_\_\_\_ bequeathed by Bahá’u’lláh to \_\_\_\_\_ .
- c. Whether in the \_\_\_\_\_, the most \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of all the works of Bahá’u’lláh, or in the \_\_\_\_\_, the Book of \_\_\_\_\_, or in the \_\_\_\_\_, the references made to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá invest Him with a \_\_\_\_\_, and surround Him with a \_\_\_\_\_, which the \_\_\_\_\_ can never \_\_\_\_\_ .
- d. Shoghi Effendi explains that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is, and should for all time be regarded, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, as
- the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of Bahá’u’lláh’s \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ Covenant, His most exalted \_\_\_\_\_ ;
  - the \_\_\_\_\_ of His light;
  - the \_\_\_\_\_ of His teachings;
  - the \_\_\_\_\_ of His Word;
  - the \_\_\_\_\_ of every Bahá’í ideal;
  - the \_\_\_\_\_ of every Bahá’í virtue;
  - the \_\_\_\_\_ sprung from the Ancient Root;
  - the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Law of God;
  - the \_\_\_\_\_ “round Whom all names revolve”;
  - the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Oneness of humanity;
  - the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Most Great Peace;
  - the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Central Orb of this most holy Dispensation.
- e. Above and beyond these appellations, the Guardian states, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is the \_\_\_\_\_—an expression by which Bahá’u’lláh has \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ Him and which, while it does not by any means \_\_\_\_\_ us to assign to Him the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_, indicates how in the \_\_\_\_\_ of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá the \_\_\_\_\_ characteristics of



Bahá'u'lláh was among the papers carried off by Mírzá Muḥammad-‘Alí after His ascension. It has not come to light to date. The Guardian used the copy available to him and produced an English-language volume entitled *The Dawn-Breakers: Nabil's Narrative of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Revelation*, bringing into a cohesive form the content of the original draft written by Nabil. Its completion was the culmination of eight months of continuous labor by the Guardian. His hope in undertaking this task was “to present to the western friends the bare facts” of the early days of the Cause so that “the same spirit that animated its early servants” would again “inspire the friends and arouse them to further exertions and sacrifices.”

## SECTION 47

You know that, with the passing of Shoghi Effendi, the body of authorized interpretation in the Faith was complete. His voluminous written works, along with the many Tablets revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the authenticated transcripts of His talks, will be a source of guidance to humanity for generations to come, shedding light on the meaning and implication of Bahá'u'lláh's immense Revelation. You yourself will often have occasion to turn to the writings of the Guardian over the course of your life as a Bahá'í, and you are encouraged to draw up a personal plan for carrying out a systematic study of the volumes available to you, if you have not already done so.

A significant portion of the writings of Shoghi Effendi consist of letters and messages that he addressed to individuals, institutions and communities, in English and in Persian and Arabic. At present there are nearly 12,000 letters in English written by the Guardian, or at his instruction on his behalf, in the possession of the Archives Office at the Bahá'í World Centre and close to 10,600 in Persian and Arabic. The Office holds a further 10,400 cablegrams, bringing the total to some 33,000. Many of these are available in published works.

Given the nature of the Bahá'í world at the time, the Guardian carried on an extensive correspondence with the Bahá'í community of North America, on the shoulders of which had fallen such a tremendous share of the administrative and teaching work. His general letters to that community were collected into volumes according to time periods and given subtitles for ease of reference, following a pattern approved by the Guardian himself. Some of his letters were lengthy enough to be published individually as books. Today we continue to access a large percentage of his writings through these volumes.

Shoghi Effendi's general communications to the North American Bahá'í community written from the inauguration of the Guardianship in January 1922 to 1932 are found in *Bahá'í Administration*. It begins with selected extracts from the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, followed by the Guardian's first letter to the friends in the United States and Canada dated 21 January, and ends with his tribute dated 17 July 1932 to the Greatest Holy Leaf. There are two other volumes that bring together general messages sent to the Bahá'í community of North America. *Messages to America*, republished under the title *This Decisive Hour*, contains communications from the period 1932 to 1946 and represents a call to action, as does *Citadel of Faith*, a collection of messages from the period 1947 to 1957. There is also a separate volume entitled *Messages to Canada*. It includes communications from the period 1923 to 1947 addressed specifically to the people of that country, as well as those from 1948, when the first Canadian National Spiritual Assembly was formed, to 1957.

While carrying on such a voluminous correspondence with the Bahá'í community of North America, Shoghi Effendi wrote substantially to other national communities in existence at the time, and many have published similar collections of the letters and cablegrams addressed to them: *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community*; *Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent*; *The Light of Divine Guidance: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria*; *Messages to the Antipodes: Communications from Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'í Communities of Australia*; *Arohanui: Letters from Shoghi Effendi to New Zealand*; *High Endeavours: Messages to Alaska*; and *Afire with the Vision: Messages from Shoghi Effendi to Latin America*.

*Messages to the Bahá'í World: 1950–1957* is a similar volume of this kind. Containing the major communications addressed by the Guardian to the entire Bahá'í world, it possesses unique importance in reporting the achievements of the Ten Year World Crusade and in delineating its progressive unfoldment towards the fateful year 1963.

Besides these collections of messages, there are four other works of particular significance. *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh* contains seven letters, written between 1929 and 1936, addressed to the friends in the West that unfold a clear vision of the relation between the Bahá'í community and the process of social evolution under the Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh. *The Advent of Divine Justice*, which consists of one lengthy letter dated 25 December 1938 to the American Bahá'í community, sets forth the prerequisites of success in every activity undertaken for the advancement of the Faith—prerequisites related not only to our inner life but to all of the social interactions that are its outer manifestations. *The Promised Day Is Come*, a letter dated 28 March 1941 addressed to the Bahá'ís of the West generally, relates the history of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to the rise of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. In this, it gives an account of the historical proclamation of Baha'u'llah to kings and ecclesiastical rulers of the world at the time, describing the religious, political, and moral turmoil that resulted from their rejection of the principles and teachings of the Faith, as well as the stages that will eventually take humanity towards that world commonwealth destined to emerge out of the agony and carnage of this great world convulsion.

And finally there is his extraordinarily powerful history of the first hundred years of the Cause, *God Passes By*, which was published in 1944 and which provides an account of the spiritual drama that opened with the birth of the Bábí Revelation and continues to unfold in the world.

As with the North American Bahá'í community, the Guardian maintained a constant flow of communications to Persia, where there was the largest Bahá'í community in existence. Many of his Persian-language communications are available in published volumes, including an historical overview of the first one hundred years of the Faith, comparable in content to *God Passes By*, though shorter in length. Eventually many of the Guardian's communications in Persian and Arabic will be translated into English, and then into dozens of other languages, making them accessible to a much larger audience.

Below is some space for you to set out your personal study plan.

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“The unique and outstanding figure in the world today is Shoghi Effendi. Unique, because the guardianship of this great Cause is in his hands and his humility, modesty, economy and self-effacement are monumental. Outstanding because he is the only person, we may safely say, who entrusted with the affairs of millions of souls, has but one thought and one mind—the speedy promulgation of peace and goodwill throughout the world. His personal life is absolutely and definitely sacrificed. . . . The world, its politics, social relationships, economic situations, schemes, plans, aspirations, programs, defects, successes, lie under his scrutiny like infusoria beneath a microscope.

“. . . Shoghi Effendi is the Commander-in-chief of this great new army of faith and strength that is moving forth to vanquish the malevolent forces of life.”<sup>19</sup>

And here is an account from Hand of the Cause Dr. Ugo Giachery:

“Of all the characteristics that Shoghi Effendi possessed, the one that I believe was at the very core of his personality and was deeply rooted in his soul was the immense faith he had, his complete reliance on the efficacy of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation. He clung to His Teachings with a tenacity that cannot be likened to anything. His whole being was permeated with the power of the Revelation, and this is the reason that all who came near him or in contact with him felt so safe, so assured, so regenerated. For the same reason, scheming individuals who inclined towards evil-doing or deceit could not remain long in his presence and went away frightened, bewildered and chastened. . . .

“When he spoke of the labors, duties, plans, present and future, the inspiration, the decisions of the Guardian, he was so impersonal that one could have believed he was speaking of another person. This endeared him even more, because to find such a balance of humility and greatness, of objectivity and selflessness coupled with a fertile, creative and poetic mind is one of the rare happenings in thousands of years. I have used the word delicacy, because in all his thought and action there was no affectation or remote trace of pride or vainglory. . . .

“Humility of a kind not yet known elsewhere was one of Shoghi Effendi’s many unique virtues, a humility which came from the conviction that man’s faculties are not self-created but are a precious trust from God, not to be displayed or used overbearingly or with vanity. . . .

“. . . Shoghi Effendi, like a sensitive instrument connected to the Source of all powers, reacted involuntarily to the most imperceptible spiritual impulse which activated his organism, making him capable of executing and discharging all functions and responsibilities related to the Cause of God without the slightest probability of error.”<sup>20</sup>

In an address given by Hand of the Cause Mrs. Amelia Collins at an international Bahá’í conference held in Germany one year after the passing of the Guardian, she offered the following tribute:

“The Guardian had a profound and innate humility. Whenever the Faith was involved, he was fiery in its defense, king-like in the loftiness of his bearing, the authority with which he spoke. But as a human being he was self-effacing, would brush aside our adulation and praise, turn everything we wished to shower on him towards the central figures of our Faith. We all know this characteristic of his, how he would never allow

any photographs to be taken of himself, or give any of himself, but invariably encouraged the friends to place the Master's picture in their rooms . . .

“After the years of sorrow and trial he went through with the family, after his final separation from them, there came a new joy and hope to our beloved Guardian. The rapid progress made in the attainment of so many of the goals of the World Crusade lifted him up. How can I ever describe to you his eyes when he would come over to the Pilgrim House and announce to us a new achievement; they sparkled with light and enthusiasm and his beautiful face would be all smiles. Often he would send over one of his maps and when it was spread out on the dining table, his finger, full of infinite strength, insistence and determination, would point out the new territory opened, the new Ḥazíratu'l-Quds purchased, the new language translated, as the case might be. I feel it would be no exaggeration to say that it was the progress of the Ten Year Plan that gave him the encouragement to go on working so hard, for he was very tired. . . .

“His conscientiousness was like a fire burning in him; from his earliest childhood he showed the sensitive, noble, painstaking qualities that characterized him, and grew stronger as he matured and throughout his Guardianship.

“The friends should realize that Shoghi Effendi had no foreknowledge that he would be appointed the Successor of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. The shock of the Master's passing was followed by an even more terrible one—the shock of his own appointment as the 'Sign of God'. He grew in this supreme office, which we know was under the direct guidance of the Twin Manifestations of God, even as a tree grows to full maturity and bears goodly fruits, but at such cost to himself of sacrifice that no one will ever properly estimate. . . .

“The Administrative Order of the Faith, the provisions for which were laid down by Bahá'u'lláh Himself and amplified by 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi set out to build. When the Master passed away, there were few Spiritual Assemblies in the world, and only one national body functioning in a very rudimentary manner. The builder, however, had been provided by God; the Great Administrator, with an almost unique capacity for organization, with a wisdom vouchsafed from on High, with a world-encompassing vision, set about his task. Patiently, persistently, painstakingly, Shoghi Effendi reared strong national bodies. He brought into being the International Bahá'í Council—the embryonic Universal House of Justice. He kept the balance, the perfect balance, between a thing too loosely knit, too individualistic to function efficiently, and too much efficiency, too many rules and regulations, too much running into endless and unnecessary detail which is one of the great afflictions of present-day civilization. When he had created the system and reared the machinery of the Bahá'í Administrative Order, he suddenly shifted the whole mechanism into gear; he called for the first Seven-Year Plan, the first step in the Promulgation of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's Divine Plan, which is the instrument for the spiritual conquest of the entire globe. Plan followed plan. The scattered diversified followers of the Faith began to take shape as the army of Bahá'u'lláh; guided by the National Spiritual Assemblies. The pioneers, the vanguard as he called them of this great host, began to march out and over the world until, at the halfway point of the mighty Crusade he had launched, Shoghi Effendi could look upon a united, strong, enthusiastic, worldwide community of believers, who had already achieved the major part of the tasks he had set for them. . . .

“His was the vision which looked at the Cause as a whole, saw present and future as part of one mighty panorama. He not only collated the teachings, but, with a strong sense of history, assembled the most precious relics in the Bahá’í world into a religious archives such as no previous Faith has ever possessed. He saw to it that all the precious sites associated with the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh and the heroes and martyrs of this Cause were, whenever possible, purchased: the House where Bahá’u’lláh was born in Teheran, His father’s house in Tákur, the Síyáh-Chál, where the first rays of His Divine Mission fell upon Him in the blackness of a dungeon, the House He occupied in Constantinople, and one of the Houses He occupied in Adrianople; the bleak fortress of Máh-Kú, where the Báb revealed the Bayán, His shop in Búshíhr, and many other sites associated with Him and His companions. At Shoghi Effendi’s instructions an exhaustive photographic record was made of hundreds of these spots associated with the Heroic Age of the Faith. . . .

“. . . He made each believer feel that over him watched a just mind and a loving heart; that he had a part to play, was precious to the Faith, had duties to discharge, enjoyed privileges infinitely precious because he was a member of the Community of the Most Great Name.”<sup>121</sup>

## SECTION 49

Nothing, of course, will give you a greater sense of the Guardian’s person and station than delving into the many volumes of his own writings. If one considers the totality of Shoghi Effendi’s published works, one is struck by the depth and breadth of the guidance he gave to the Bahá’í world—guidance that describes for us what it means to be a Bahá’í, what our communities should look like, and how we should perceive the society in which the institutions of the Faith are evolving. The very language we use to talk about ourselves and to think about what we are doing, the kind of methods and instruments we employ to achieve our goals, the way we deal with challenges and obstacles—these are but a few of the many themes addressed in the vast body of his written works.

So much of what we will study in the remaining books in this series draws on the Guardian’s analyses of a society undergoing profound transformation through the forces released by God’s latest Revelation and on his illuminating statements regarding the distinguishing features of the gradually emerging divine Order anticipated by Bahá’u’lláh. For now, this unit would be remiss in reviewing the Guardian’s ministry if it did not make mention of the loving guidance and warm encouragement that continually flowed from his pen to individual believers in all parts of the globe. Many of the letters addressed to individuals were written at his instruction on his behalf by the few secretaries who assisted him over the years. One of the most priceless treasures of the Faith is the collection of small precious notes that he appended to such letters in his own handwriting, so often affectionately signed “Your true brother, Shoghi”. Below is but a sampling, with which we will end this unit. What will surely strike you above all is the depth of the Guardian’s love for each and every believer that he addresses, a love which no doubt extends to each and every one of us:

**“I wish to add a few words in loving appreciation of your strenuous, your intelligent and devoted efforts for the spread and consolidation of our beloved Faith. May the Almighty bless your endeavors, deepen your understanding of the essentials**

and requirements of our beloved Cause, and enable you in these difficult and challenging days to promote its interests and consolidate its institutions.”<sup>122</sup>

“The work you have recently accomplished is highly meritorious in the sight of God, and will no doubt attract fresh and still greater blessings from the Throne of the Almighty. You have, in the evening of your life, added fresh laurels to the crown of immortal glory which your many services to the Faith have won for you and which future generations will gratefully and joyfully remember. I will continue to pray for you, for your dear wife and your devoted collaborators in that land. Rest assured, be happy and persevere in your high endeavors.”<sup>123</sup>

“Your highly meritorious efforts in such an important field will no doubt bear the richest fruit in the days to come. Strive to consolidate the work already achieved, and proceed with the utmost care in widening its scope. The highest standard of purity and of integrity must be maintained by those who assemble and particularly the members of the youth group, who are destined to play such a vital and decisive part in the future orientation and spread of our beloved Faith. I will pray for you and your dear collaborators from the depths of my heart.”<sup>124</sup>

“I wish to assure you in person and reaffirm my deep sense of brotherly sympathy in your great sorrow. I will, I assure you, remember your dear mother at the holy Shrines, and will supplicate for her the Almighty’s special and richest blessings. She, no doubt, is now watching over you, and her soul, dwelling under the shadow of the all-encompassing mercy of Bahá’u’lláh, rejoices at the constancy and devotion with which you labor for His Cause. Do not grieve, nor allow any despondency to dim your vision or check the progress of your meritorious activities.”<sup>125</sup>

“I wish to add a few words in person and assure you of my keen and abiding appreciation of the spirit with which you are discharging your manifold duties as both teacher and administrator in the service of the Faith of Bahá’u’lláh. Your constancy, your exemplary devotion, your unswerving loyalty are assets that I value and am grateful for. I will continue to pray for the success of every effort you exert and the fulfillment of every desire you cherish in His service.”<sup>126</sup>

“I rejoice to learn of the formation of the first Spiritual Assembly in . . . , and I wish to congratulate you on the success that has crowned your devoted and painstaking efforts. I will specially pray for the protection of its members, the extension of its activities, and the consolidation of its accomplishments. You are often in my thoughts and prayers in these days of turmoil, of danger and strife, and I pray that the Beloved may shower His richest blessings upon you.”<sup>127</sup>

“How greatly I admire the spirit that has inspired, and impelled you to cross the seas and settle in such difficult surroundings, and initiate so glorious a phase in the unfoldment of a God-given Plan. Posterity will extol your present achievements and derive inspiration from your noble acts and services. You are often in my thoughts and prayers and the Beloved Master, the Author of the Plan, is truly well pleased with you. Persevere, be happy and grateful for so priceless a privilege.”<sup>128</sup>

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17. From a cablegram dated 16 December 1922 sent by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of Mesopotamia, *ibid.*, p. 65.
18. From a cablegram dated 16 December 1922 sent by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of Türkiye, *ibid.*
19. From a cablegram dated 16 December 1922 sent by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of France, *ibid.*
20. From a cablegram dated 18 December 1922 sent by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of Switzerland, *ibid.*
21. From a cablegram dated 19 December 1922 sent by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of Italy, *ibid.*
22. From a cablegram dated 19 December 1922 sent by Shoghi Effendi for the Bahá'ís of Australia, *ibid.*
23. Bahá'u'lláh, in *Bahíyyih Khánum: The Greatest Holy Leaf—A Compilation from Bahá'í Sacred Texts and Writings of the Guardian of the Faith and Bahíyyih Khánum's Own Letters*, made by the Research Department at the Bahá'í World Centre (Haifa: Bahá'í World Centre, 1982), no. 1, p. 3.
24. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, *ibid.*, no. 9, p. 11.
25. From a letter dated 30 March 1924 written by Bahíyyih Khánum to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in *The Bahá'í World: Volume V, April 1932–1934* (New York City: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1936), pp. 22–23; also in *A Compendium of Volumes of The Bahá'í World: An International Record, I–XII* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1981), p. 33.
26. Ella Goodall Cooper, “Bahíyyih Khánum—An Appreciation”, published in *The Bahá'í Magazine*, vol. 23, no. 7 (October 1932), p. 202; also cited by Janet Khan, *Prophet's Daughter: The Life and Legacy of Bahíyyih Khánum, Outstanding Heroine of the Bahá'í Faith* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 2005), p. 63.
27. Marjory Morten, “Bahíyyih Khánum”, published in *The Bahá'í World: Volume V, April 1932–1934*, p. 185; also in *A Compendium of Volumes of The Bahá'í World*, p. 39.
28. “Excerpts from Diary of Mrs. Keith Ransom-Kehler, the Last among Western Pilgrims to Meet the Most Exalted Leaf during the Closing Days of Her Life”, published in *The Bahá'í World: Volume V, April 1932–1934*; also in *A Compendium of Volumes of The Bahá'í World*, p. 40, and cited by Janet Khan, *Prophet's Daughter*, p. 207.
29. From a letter dated 17 July 1932 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in *Bahá'í Administration*, pp. 193–94.

30. Ibid., pp. 195–96.
31. From a letter dated 15 February 1922 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Local Spiritual Assembly of Tīhrán, cited, in part, in *Social Action: A Compilation Prepared by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice* (Evanston: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2020, 2023 printing), no. 163, p. 98. (authorized English translation from the Persian)
32. From a letter dated 5 March 1922 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, published in *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 20.
33. Bahá'u'lláh, in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book* (Evanston: Bahá'í Publishing, 1993, 2024 printing), par. 30, pp. 32–33.
34. From a letter dated 5 March 1922 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, published in *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 20.
35. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 1974, 2024 printing), pp. 526–27.
36. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, cited in a letter dated 5 March 1922 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, published in *Bahá'í Administration*, pp. 20–21.
37. Ibid., pp. 22–23.
38. From a letter dated 29 January 1925 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, *ibid.*, p. 80.
39. From a letter dated 12 March 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West, *ibid.*, p. 41.
40. From a letter dated 28 October 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, in *The Local Spiritual Assembly: Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings*, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (Ingleside: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 2021), no. 46, pp. 36–37.
41. From a letter dated 23 February 1924 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of America, published in *Bahá'í Administration*, pp. 63–64.
42. Ibid., p. 63.
43. From a letter dated 18 October 1927 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, *ibid.*, p. 142.
44. From a letter dated 27 February 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the East, in *The Sanctity and Nature of Bahá'í Elections: Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings*, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (Ingleside: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 2021), no. 1, p. 5.

45. From a letter dated 3 June 1925 written by Shoghi Effendi to the delegates and visitors to the National Convention of the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, published in *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 88; also in *The Sanctity and Nature of Bahá'í Elections*, no. 9, p. 10.
46. From a letter dated 27 December 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma, published in *Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent, 1923–1957* (New Delhi: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1995), p. 10; also in *The Sanctity and Nature of Bahá'í Elections*, no. 7, p. 9.
47. From a postscript by Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 11 August 1933 written on his behalf to an individual, in *The Sanctity and Nature of Bahá'í Elections*, no. 11, pp. 10–11.
48. From a memorandum dated 16 November 1988 written by the Universal House of Justice to the International Teaching Centre, in *The Sanctity and Nature of Bahá'í Elections*, no. 18, p. 15.
49. From a letter dated 14 May 1927 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to a Local Spiritual Assembly, published in *Bahá'í News*, no. 18 (June 1927), p. 9; also in *The Sanctity and Nature of Bahá'í Elections*, no. 25, p. 21; and also cited, in part, in a message dated 25 March 2007 to the Bahá'ís of the world, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022: The Fifth Epoch of the Formative Age* (Evanston: Bahá'í Publishing, 2024), no. 87.7, p. 168.
50. From a letter dated 4 February 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, published in *The Light of Divine Guidance: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of Germany and Austria* (Hofheim-Langenhain: Bahá'í-Verlag, 1982), vol. 1, p. 68; also in *The Sanctity and Nature of Bahá'í Elections*, no. 27, pp. 22–23; and also cited in a message dated 25 March 2007 to the Bahá'ís of the world, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022*, no. 87.5, p. 167.
51. From a letter dated 4 February 1935 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, published in *The Light of Divine Guidance*, vol. 1, p. 68; also in *The Sanctity and Nature of Bahá'í Elections*, no. 27, p. 23.
52. From a memorandum dated 16 November 1988 written by the Universal House of Justice to the International Teaching Centre, in *The Sanctity and Nature of Bahá'í Elections*, no. 29, pp. 24–25.
53. *Ibid.*, no. 18, p. 15.
54. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 527.
55. From a letter dated 8 February 1934 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West, published under the title “The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh”, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh: Selected Letters* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991, 2012 printing), p. 153; also in *The Universal House of Justice*, no. 39.1, p. 37.

56. From a letter dated 12 March 1923 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 41.
57. From a letter dated 11 March 1936 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 162.
58. From a letter dated 27 February 1929 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, p. 5.
59. From a letter dated 21 March 1930 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 22–23.
60. From the Riḍván 2010 message to the Bahá'ís of the world, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022*, no. 153.21, p. 312; also in *Framework for Action: Selected Messages of the Universal House of Justice and Supplementary Material, 2006–2016* (West Palm Beach: Palabra Publications, 2017), no. 14.21, pp. 84–85.
61. *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1944, 2013 printing), p. 54.
62. From a letter dated 17 October 1927 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assemblies of the West, published in *Bahá'í Administration*, pp. 138–39.
63. From a letter dated 30 August 1930 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual, published in *Bahá'í News*, no. 46 (November 1930), p. 9.
64. From a letter dated 21 March 1934 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in *Bahá'í News*, no. 83 (May 1934), p. 1.
65. From a letter dated 11 May 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria, published in *The Light of Divine Guidance*, vol. 1, pp. 135–36.
66. From a letter dated 19 March 1930 written by Shoghi Effendi to an individual.
67. Ibid.
68. From a cablegram dated 18 December 1937, published in *This Decisive Hour: Messages from Shoghi Effendi to the North American Bahá'ís, 1932–1946* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2002), no. 35.1, p. 19.
69. *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, p. 10.
70. From a letter dated 21 March 1930 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 15–16.

71. From a letter dated 5 March 1922 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the United States and Canada, published in *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 18.
72. From a postscript by Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 29 March 1945 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in *This Decisive Hour*, no. 140.1, p. 102.
73. From a postscript by Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 18 August 1944 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, *ibid.*, no. 131.1–2, pp. 97–98.
74. From a postscript by Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 4 November 1948 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of Canada, published in *Messages to Canada* (Thornhill: Bahá'í Canada Publications, 1999), pp. 109–10.
75. From a cablegram dated 3 February 1947 sent by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of Iran, published in *The Bahá'í World: Volume XI, April 1946–1950* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Committee, 1952), p. 35; also in *A Compendium of Volumes of The Bahá'í World*, pp. 405–6.
76. From a letter dated 25 December 1938 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of North America, published under the title *The Advent of Divine Justice* (Evanston: Bahá'í Publishing, 2006, 2023 printing), par. 70, p. 70.
77. From a letter dated 4 June 1937 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in *This Decisive Hour*, no. 30.1, p. 16.
78. From a letter dated 28 January 1939 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, *ibid.*, no. 46.5, p. 28.
79. From a postscript by Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 30 June 1949 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of Germany and Austria, published in *The Light of Divine Guidance*, vol. 1, p. 156.
80. From a postscript by Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 6 September 1949 written on his behalf, published in *The Unfolding Destiny of the British Bahá'í Community: The Messages from the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith to the Bahá'ís of the British Isles* (London: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1981), p. 233.
81. *Ibid.*
82. From a postscript by Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 23 November 1951 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, published in *Citadel of Faith: Messages to America, 1947–1957* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1965, 2014 printing), p. 105.
83. From a postscript by Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 9 April 1949 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of India, Burma and Pakistan, published in *Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 300.

84. From a letter dated 17 February 1939 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of India and Burma, *ibid.*, p. 178.
85. From a letter dated 25 December 1938 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'í of North America, published under the title *The Advent of Divine Justice*, par. 77, pp. 75–76.
86. From a letter dated 30 January 1948 written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual.
87. From a letter dated 5 June 1947 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'í of the West, published in *Citadel of Faith*, p. 23.
88. From a letter dated 23 December 1922 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 27.
89. Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By*, p. 571.
90. *Ibid.*, p. 653.
91. From a letter dated 22 April 1926 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West, published in *Bahá'í Administration*, p. 105.
92. From a cablegram dated 8 October 1952 sent by Shoghi Effendi, published in *Messages to the Bahá'í World, 1950–1957* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1971, 1999 printing), p. 41.
93. From a cablegram dated 4 May 1953 sent by Shoghi Effendi to the All-American Intercontinental Teaching Conference, *ibid.*, pp. 152–53.
94. *Selections from the Writings of 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Evanston: Bahá'í Publishing, 2010, 2023 printing), no. 207.2–3, pp. 360–61.
95. From a cablegram dated 28 May 1953 sent by Shoghi Effendi, published in *Messages to the Bahá'í World*, p. 49.
96. From a cablegram dated 24 December 1951 sent by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the world, *ibid.*, p. 20.
97. From a cablegram dated 8 October 1952 sent by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the world, *ibid.*, p. 44.
98. From a letter dated October 1957 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the world, *ibid.*, p. 127.
99. From a cablegram dated 4 June 1957 sent by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the world, *ibid.*, pp. 122–23.
100. From a cablegram dated 7 October 1953 sent by Shoghi Effendi to the Fourth International Teaching Conference in New Delhi, *ibid.*, p. 169.

101. From a cablegram dated 5 December 1939 sent by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in *This Decisive Hour*, no. 63.1, p. 44.
102. From a cablegram dated 9 January 1951 sent by Shoghi Effendi, published in *Messages to the Bahá'í World*, p. 7.
103. From a postscript dated 29 March 1951 by Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 18 February 1951 written on his behalf to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States, published in *Citadel of Faith*, p. 94.
104. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
105. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983, 2023 printing), XI, pars. 1–5, pp. 16–19.
106. From a letter dated April 1955 written by Shoghi Effendi to the delegates at the twelve National Conventions held throughout the world, published in *Messages to the Bahá'í World*, pp. 84–85.
107. From a cablegram dated 4 November 1957 sent by Rúhiyyih Khánum, cited in *The Priceless Pearl*, p. 447.
108. *Will and Testament of 'Abdu'l-Bahá*, pp. 39–40.
109. From a letter dated 21 March 1954 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the East, in *The Universal House of Justice*, no. 50.1, pp. 43–45.
110. From a letter dated 9 March 1965 to the National Spiritual Assembly of the Netherlands, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963–1986: The Third Epoch of the Formative Age* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1996), no. 23.5, p. 51.
111. From a cablegram dated 5 April 1974 sent to all National Spiritual Assemblies, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963–1986*, no. 144.1, p. 271.
112. From a letter dated 30 March 1976 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, published, in part, in *Crisis and Victory: Extracts from the Bahá'í Writings*, compiled by the Research Department of the Universal House of Justice (Ingleside: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 2022), no. 36, p. 33.
113. From a letter dated 24 July 2011 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual.
114. From a letter dated 27 June 2012 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to an individual.
115. From a letter dated 8 February 1934 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá'ís of the West, published under the title “The Dispensation of Bahá'u'lláh”, in *The World Order of Bahá'u'lláh*, pp. 97–98.

116. Ibid., pp. 112–13.
117. Ibid., p. 123.
118. Ibid., pp. 133–34.
119. Keith Ransom-Kehler, quoted by Ugo Giachery, *Shoghi Effendi: Recollections* (Oxford: George Ronald: 1973), pp. 192–93.
120. Ugo Giachery, *ibid.*, pp. 16, 18–20.
121. Amelia Collins, *A Tribute to Shoghi Effendi* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1958); also published on “The Bahá'í Faith: The Official Website of the Worldwide Bahá'í Community” ([www.bahai.org](http://www.bahai.org)).
122. Postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 11 February 1934 written on his behalf to an individual, published in *The Light of Divine Guidance*, vol. 1, p. 56.
123. Postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 19 February 1934 written on his behalf to an individual, published in *Messages of Shoghi Effendi to the Indian Subcontinent*, p. 110.
124. Postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 6 September 1934 written on his behalf to an individual.
125. Postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 5 November 1935 written on his behalf to an individual.
126. Postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 5 July 1944 written on his behalf to an individual.
127. Postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 30 November 1940 written on his behalf to an individual.
128. Postscript in the handwriting of Shoghi Effendi, appended to a letter dated 7 April 1947 written on his behalf to two individuals.





# The Universal House of Justice

## Purpose

To catch a glimpse of the way in which the Universal House of Justice,  
that unique institution directly under the care and protection of Bahá'u'lláh,  
is guiding the worldwide Bahá'í community  
in the fulfillment of its divinely ordained mission



## SECTION 1

On 21 April 1963, the first day of Riḍván and the hundredth anniversary of the Declaration of Bahá'u'lláh, the Universal House of Justice, ordained by Him in His Most Holy Book, was brought into being. That day two hundred and eighty-eight members of fifty-one National and Regional Spiritual Assemblies gathered in the main hall of the Master's house in Haifa and, following a brief address by Amatu'l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Khánum and the recitation of prayers, proceeded to fill out their ballots. In an atmosphere of silent reverence, the roll was then called—each Spiritual Assembly in alphabetical order—and the members present arose and placed their ballots in the ballot box. Those from absentee delegates were deposited as their names were read. Only five of the fifty-six National and Regional Assemblies in the world were not able to send a representative to that event, but ballots were received from all. The results of the election were announced the next day before a gathering of the delegates, and Bahá'í communities around the world were immediately informed of the outcome through a cable sent by the Hands of the Cause of God. It concluded with this statement:

**“TO JUBILATION ENTIRE BAHÁ'Í WORLD VICTORIOUS COMPLETION BELOVED GUARDIAN'S UNIQUE CRUSADE NOW ADDED HUMBLE GRATITUDE PROFOUND THANKSGIVING FOLLOWERS BAHÁ'U'LLÁH FOR ERECTION UNIVERSAL HOUSE JUSTICE AUGUST BODY TO WHOM ALL BELIEVERS MUST TURN WHOSE DESTINY IS TO GUIDE UNFOLDMENT HIS EMBRYONIC WORLD ORDER THROUGH ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS PRESCRIBED BY BAHÁ'U'LLÁH ELABORATED BY 'ABDU'L-BAHÁ LABORIOUSLY ERECTED BY SHOGHI EFFENDI AND ENSURE EARLY DAWN GOLDEN AGE FAITH WHEN THE WORD OF THE LORD WILL COVER THE EARTH AS THE WATERS COVER THE SEA.”<sup>1</sup>**

Thus had the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá written decades earlier come to pass:

**“At whatever time all the beloved of God in each country appoint their delegates, and these in turn elect their representatives, and these representatives elect a body, that body shall be regarded as the Supreme House of Justice.**

**“The establishment of that House is not dependent upon the conversion of all the nations of the world. For example, if conditions were favorable and no disturbances would be caused, the friends in Persia would elect their representatives, and likewise the friends in America, in India, and other areas would also elect their representatives, and these would elect a House of Justice. That House of Justice would be the Supreme House of Justice. That is all.”<sup>2</sup>**

## SECTION 2

The election of the Universal House of Justice galvanized the Bahá'í world. The “last and crowning stage in the erection of the framework of the Administrative Order of the Faith of Bahá'u'lláh—the election of the Universal House of Justice”—had been completed. It was now the center to which all the believers turned their gaze in love and loyalty. Described by Shoghi Effendi as the “last refuge of a tottering civilization” and the “supreme organ of the Bahá'í Commonwealth” of the future, it had assumed its rightful place on Mount Carmel and the affairs of the Faith were now firmly in its hands. “When this most great edifice shall be

reared” on the immovable foundation of Spiritual Assemblies, Shoghi Effendi had written, “God’s purpose, wisdom, universal truths, mysteries and realities of the Kingdom, which the mystic Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh has deposited within the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, shall gradually be revealed and made manifest”. “The unity of the followers of Bahá’u’lláh”, the Guardian had said, “will thus be realized and fulfilled from one end of the earth to the other. The explicit ordinances of His Most Holy Book will be promulgated, applied and carried out most befittingly in the world of creation, and the living waters of everlasting life will stream forth from that fountainhead of God’s World Order upon all the warring nations and peoples of the world, to wash away the evils and iniquities of the realm of dust, heal man’s age-old ills and ailments.” “When that central pivot of the people of Bahá shall be effectively, majestically and firmly established,” he had proclaimed, “a new era will dawn, heavenly bounties and graces will pour out from that Source, and the all-encompassing promises will be fulfilled.” And then, the Guardian had promised,

**“will the Throne of Bahá’u’lláh’s sovereignty be founded in the promised land and the scales of justice be raised on high. Then will the banner of the independence of the Faith be unfurled, and His Most Great Law be unveiled and rivers of laws and ordinances stream forth from this snow-white spot with all-conquering power and awe-inspiring majesty, the like of which past ages have never seen. Then will appear the truth of what was revealed by the Tongue of Grandeur: ‘Call out to Zion, O Carmel, and announce the joyful tidings: He that was hidden from mortal eyes is come! His all-conquering sovereignty is manifest; His all-encompassing splendor is revealed.’ ‘. . . O Carmel . . . Well is it with him that circlet around thee, that proclaimeth the revelation of thy glory, and recounteth that which the bounty of the Lord, thy God, hath showered upon thee . . . Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee, and will manifest the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names.’”<sup>3</sup>**

Before proceeding further, you are encouraged to complete the sentences below on the basis of the above-quoted passages:

- a. The establishment of the Universal House of Justice represented the last and crowning stage in \_\_\_\_\_ .
- b. The Universal House of Justice was described by Shoghi Effendi as the last refuge of a \_\_\_\_\_ .
- c. The Universal House of Justice, he advised us further, is the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Bahá’í Commonwealth.
- d. Referring to the Universal House of Justice, the Guardian indicated that when this most great \_\_\_\_\_ was reared on the \_\_\_\_\_ of Spiritual Assemblies, God’s \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of the Kingdom would gradually be \_\_\_\_\_ and made \_\_\_\_\_ .

- e. When the Universal House of Justice is brought into existence, the Guardian stated, the unity of the followers of Bahá'u'lláh will be \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ from one \_\_\_\_\_ of the earth to the \_\_\_\_\_; the explicit ordinances of His \_\_\_\_\_ will be \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ most befittingly in the world of creation, and the living waters of \_\_\_\_\_ life will \_\_\_\_\_ from that \_\_\_\_\_ of God's \_\_\_\_\_ upon all the \_\_\_\_\_ nations and peoples of the world, to \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of the realm of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ humanity's age-old \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
- f. Referring to the Universal House of Justice, the Guardian indicated that, when that \_\_\_\_\_ of the people of Bahá was \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ established, a \_\_\_\_\_ would dawn, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ would pour out from \_\_\_\_\_, and the \_\_\_\_\_ would be fulfilled.
- g. Referring to the time when the Universal House of Justice would be established, the Guardian told us that the Throne of Bahá'u'lláh's \_\_\_\_\_ would then be \_\_\_\_\_; the scales of \_\_\_\_\_ would then be \_\_\_\_\_; the banner of \_\_\_\_\_ would then be \_\_\_\_\_; and His Most Great \_\_\_\_\_ would then be \_\_\_\_\_ and rivers of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ would stream forth from this \_\_\_\_\_.
- h. Referring to the time when the Universal House of Justice would be established, the Guardian told us that the truth of the words revealed by Bahá'u'lláh would then appear: "Call out to Zion, O \_\_\_\_\_, and announce the \_\_\_\_\_: He that was \_\_\_\_\_ from \_\_\_\_\_ is come! His \_\_\_\_\_ is manifest; His \_\_\_\_\_ is revealed." "... O \_\_\_\_\_ ... Well is it with him that \_\_\_\_\_ around thee, that \_\_\_\_\_ the revelation of thy \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ that which the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Lord, thy God, hath \_\_\_\_\_ upon thee ... Ere long will God \_\_\_\_\_ His \_\_\_\_\_ upon thee, and will \_\_\_\_\_ the people of \_\_\_\_\_ who have been \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_."

## SECTION 3

Soon after the election, the members of the Universal House of Justice and Hands of the Cause of God traveled to London to attend the first Bahá'í World Congress from 28 April to 2 May. The gathering commemorated “the formal assumption by Bahá'u'lláh of His Prophetic Office” one hundred years earlier in 1863 and the successful conclusion of the “fate-laden, soul-stirring, decade-long, world-embracing Spiritual Crusade”, which had been launched by the Guardian. It had been the hope of the Guardian that the congress would be held in Baghdád, but circumstances did not permit the fulfillment of his wish. More than six thousand Bahá'ís from across the globe converged on London during those days of rejoicing. On the third day, one of the Hands of the Cause of God presented to the congress the members of the newly elected Universal House of Justice, who arose and stood before the friends assembled. The first statement of the Universal House of Justice was then read by one of its members:

*“All praise, O my God, be to Thee Who art the Source of all glory and majesty, of greatness and honor, of sovereignty and dominion, of loftiness and grace, of awe and power. Whomsoever Thou willest Thou causest to draw nigh unto the Most Great Ocean, and on whomsoever Thou desirest Thou conferrest the honor of recognizing Thy Most Ancient Name. Of all who are in heaven and on earth, none can withstand the operation of Thy sovereign Will. From all eternity Thou didst rule the entire creation, and Thou wilt continue forevermore to exercise Thy dominion over all created things. There is none other God but Thee, the Almighty, the Most Exalted, the All-Powerful, the All-Wise.’*

**“Beloved friends: On this glorious occasion, the celebration of the Most Great Jubilee, we raise our grateful thanks to Bahá'u'lláh for all His bounties showered upon the friends throughout the world. This historic moment marks at one and the same time the fulfillment of Daniel’s prophecy, the Hundredth Anniversary of the Declaration of the Promised One of all ages, the termination of the first epoch of the Divine Plan of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá designed to establish the Faith of God in all the world, and the successful conclusion of our beloved Guardian’s world-encircling Crusade, enabling his lovers and loved ones everywhere to lay this glorious harvest of victory in his name at the feet of the Blessed Beauty. This Most Great Jubilee is the crowning victory of the lifework of Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Cause of God. He it was, and he alone, who unfolded the potentialities of the widely scattered, numerically small, and largely unorganized Bahá'í community which had been called into being during the Heroic Age of the Faith. He it was who unfolded the grand design of God’s Holy Cause, set in motion the great plans of teaching already outlined by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, established the institutions and greatly extended the endowments at the World Center, and raised the Temples of America, Africa, Australasia and Europe, developed the Administrative Order of the Cause throughout the world, and set the Ark of the Cause true on its course. He appointed the Hands of the Cause of God.**

**“The paeans of joy and gratitude, of love and adoration which we now raise to the throne of Bahá'u'lláh would be inadequate, and the celebrations of this Most Great Jubilee in which, as promised by our beloved Guardian, we are now engaged, would be marred were no tribute paid at this time to the Hands of the Cause of God. For they share the victory with their beloved commander, he who**

raised them up and appointed them. They kept the ship on its course and brought it safe to port. The Universal House of Justice, with pride and love, recalls on this supreme occasion its profound admiration for the heroic work which they have accomplished. We do not wish to dwell on the appalling dangers which faced the infant Cause when it was suddenly deprived of our beloved Shoghi Effendi, but rather to acknowledge with all the love and gratitude of our hearts the reality of the sacrifice, the labor, the self-discipline, the superb stewardship of the Hands of the Cause of God. We can think of no more fitting words to express our tribute to these dearly loved and valiant souls than to recall the Words of Bahá'u'lláh Himself: 'Light and glory, greeting and praise be upon the Hands of His Cause, through whom the light of fortitude hath shone forth and the truth hath been established that the authority to choose rests with God, the Powerful, the Mighty, the Unconstrained, through whom the ocean of bounty hath surged and the fragrance of the gracious favors of God, the Lord of mankind, hath been diffused.'

“The members of the Universal House of Justice, all being in Haifa at the time of the election, were able to visit the Holy Shrines of Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb and of 'Abdu'l-Bahá where they prostrated themselves at the Sacred Thresholds and humbly sought strength and assistance in the mighty task before them. Later in London they have paid homage at the resting place of Shoghi Effendi, the blessed and sacred bough of the Tree of Holiness.

“As soon as the House of Justice is able to organize its work and deploy its forces it will examine carefully all the conditions of the Cause of God, and communications will be made to the friends. At this time we call upon the believers everywhere to follow up vigorously the opportunities opened up by the World Crusade. Consolidation and deepening must go hand in hand with an eager extension of the teaching work so that the onward march of the Cause may continue unabated in preparation for future plans. Now that the attention of the public is becoming more and more drawn to the Cause of God the friends must brace themselves and prepare their institutions to sustain the gaze of the world, whether it be friendly or hostile, eager or idle.

“The Universal House of Justice greets you all lovingly and joyfully at this time, and asks you to pray fervently for its speedy development and the spiritual strengthening of its members.”<sup>4</sup>

## SECTION 4

On 7 May 1963, in a message addressed to all National Conventions, the Universal House of Justice advised the Bahá'í world that, at Ridván 1964, it would embark on a second global collective enterprise:

“The Cause of God, launched on the sea of the Divine Plan of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, has achieved, under the superb leadership of its beloved Guardian, a spread throughout the world and a momentum which must now carry it forward on the next stage of its world-redeeming mission, the second epoch of the Divine Plan. The Universal House of Justice, in close consultation with the Hands of the Cause,

**is examining the vast range of Bahá'í activity and growth in order to prepare a detailed plan of expansion for the whole Bahá'í community, to be launched at Ridván 1964.”<sup>5</sup>**

On 6 October, in a message to all National Spiritual Assemblies, the House of Justice made a pronouncement of paramount importance, one with implications for the entire Bahá'í Dispensation, regarding the future of the Guardianship. As a matter not explicitly addressed “in the Book”, only the House of Justice could determine whether, in the absence of the appointment of a successor by Shoghi Effendi according to the provisions of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament, there was any way for the line of Guardians to continue. This short statement clarified the issue:

**“After prayerful and careful study of the Holy Texts bearing upon the question of the appointment of the successor to Shoghi Effendi as Guardian of the Cause of God, and after prolonged consultation which included consideration of the views of the Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land, the Universal 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.”<sup>6</sup>**

During that same month the House of Justice informed the followers of Bahá'u'lláh throughout the world that a Nine Year Plan would be set in motion at Ridván. “As the first step inaugurating this great undertaking”, it joyfully announced, nineteen new National Spiritual Assemblies would be formed. The global Plan would “include sixty-nine national plans”, and its goals would be forthcoming.

That the Ten Year Crusade would be followed by other Plans under the direction of the House of Justice had been foreseen by the Guardian many years earlier. Writing to the National Spiritual Assembly of the British Isles in 1951 concerning its Two Year Plan, Shoghi Effendi had stated:

**“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.”<sup>7</sup>**

With the announcement of its decision to launch the Nine Year Plan, the House of Justice brought into sharp focus the work of the Bahá'í community, and the way forward was clear.

## **SECTION 5**

Years have passed since the establishment of the Universal House of Justice in 1963. Every one of us today is blessed to be the recipient of its wise counsels and loving care. We are all participants in what is the greatest drama of the world’s spiritual history—the realization of

Bahá'u'lláh's purpose for humanity. Indeed, your participation in this course of studies suggests that you are fully engaged in the historical process that is unfolding in the world—a process steered by the House of Justice. You will, no doubt, remain in constant interaction with its guidance as you strive to contribute your share to the great transformation occurring in the life of humanity.

Our aim in this unit, then, will be modest. We will simply try to catch a glimpse of the way in which the Universal House of Justice guides humanity on the path towards the World Order conceived by Bahá'u'lláh. The nature of our study will not be historical. Instead, what we will do is to look first at the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice, a document which was hailed by Shoghi Effendi as “the Most Great Law of the Faith of Baha'u'llah” and which enumerates, among its provisions, some of the powers and duties that, according to the Sacred Text, are invested in that institution. We will then take, merely as examples, a few of these powers and duties and, for each, study a selection of passages over several sections that provide insight into the interplay between its guidance and the steady unfoldment of the processes giving rise to Bahá'u'lláh's World Order. In doing so we will acquire a more profound appreciation for the extraordinary gift bestowed upon humanity by God in the institution of the Universal House of Justice. In its entirety, the unit will, it is hoped, deepen even further our understanding of the power that the Covenant of Bahá'u'lláh exerts on our individual and collective lives, specifically as it pertains to the statement “the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant.”

## SECTION 6

The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice consists of two parts: a Declaration of Trust and a set of By-Laws. Together they outline in broad terms the major functions of the Universal House of Justice, as drawn from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and the written communications of the Guardian. In this unit we will examine only the Declaration of Trust, which is set out below. Even if you are familiar with the document, you are asked to undertake a study of it again, reading it more than once and following closely the flow of ideas.

<sup>1</sup> **IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE ONE, THE INCOMPARABLE,  
THE ALL-POWERFUL, THE ALL-KNOWING, THE ALL-WISE.**

<sup>2</sup> *“The light that is shed from the heaven of bounty, and the benediction that shineth from the dawning-place of the will of God, the Lord of the Kingdom of Names, rest upon Him Who is the Supreme Mediator, the Most Exalted Pen, Him Whom God hath made the dawning-place of His most excellent names and the dayspring of His most exalted attributes. Through Him the light of unity hath shone forth above the horizon of the world, and the law of oneness hath been revealed amidst the nations, who, with radiant faces, have turned towards the Supreme Horizon, and acknowledged that which the Tongue of Utterance hath spoken in the Kingdom of His knowledge: ‘Earth and heaven, glory and dominion, are God’s, the Omnipotent, the Almighty, the Lord of grace abounding!’”*

3       **With joyous and thankful hearts we testify to the abundance of God’s Mercy, to the perfection of His Justice and to the fulfillment of His Ancient Promise.**

4       **Bahá’u’lláh, the Revealer of God’s Word in this Day, the Source of Authority, the Fountainhead of Justice, the Creator of a new World Order, the Establisher of the Most Great Peace, the Inspirer and Founder of a world civilization, the Judge, the Lawgiver, the Unifier and Redeemer of all mankind, has proclaimed the advent of God’s Kingdom on earth, has formulated its laws and ordinances, enunciated its principles, and ordained its institutions. To direct and canalize the forces released by His Revelation He instituted His Covenant, whose power has preserved the integrity of His Faith, maintained its unity and stimulated its world-wide expansion throughout the successive ministries of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Shoghi Effendi. It continues to fulfill its life-giving purpose through the agency of the Universal House of Justice whose fundamental object, as one of the twin successors of Bahá’u’lláh and ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, is to ensure the continuity of that divinely appointed authority which flows from the Source of the Faith, to safeguard the unity of its followers, and to maintain the integrity and flexibility of its teachings.**

5       ***“The fundamental purpose animating the Faith of God and His Religion”, declares Bahá’u’lláh, “is to safeguard the interests and promote the unity of the human race, and to foster the spirit of love and fellowship amongst men. Suffer it not to become a source of dissension and discord, of hate and enmity. This is the straight Path, the fixed and immovable foundation. Whatsoever is raised on this foundation, the changes and chances of the world can never impair its strength, nor will the revolution of countless centuries undermine its structure.”***

6       ***“Unto the Most Holy Book”, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá declares in His Will and Testament, “every one must turn, and all that is not expressly recorded therein must be referred to the Universal House of Justice.”***

7       **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 Center of the Covenant and of 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. The authority of these Texts is absolute and immutable until such time as Almighty God shall reveal His new Manifestation to Whom will belong all authority and power.**

8       **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, and on it rests the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the unity and progress of the Cause of God. Further, there devolve upon it the duties of directing and coordinating the work of the Hands of the Cause, of ensuring the continuing discharge of the functions of protection and propagation vested in that institution, and of providing for the receipt and disbursement of the Ḥuqúqu’lláh.**

9 **Among the powers and duties with which the Universal House of Justice has been invested are:**

9a **To ensure the preservation of the Sacred Texts and to safeguard their inviolability; to analyze, classify, and coordinate the Writings; and to defend and protect the Cause of God and emancipate it from the fetters of repression and persecution;**

9b **To advance the interests of the Faith of God; to proclaim, propagate and teach its Message; to expand and consolidate the institutions of its Administrative Order; to usher in the World Order of Bahá'u'lláh; to promote the attainment of those spiritual qualities which should characterize Bahá'í life individually and collectively; to do its utmost for the realization of greater cordiality and comity amongst the nations and for the attainment of universal peace; and to foster that which is conducive to the enlightenment and illumination of the souls of men and the advancement and betterment of the world;**

9c **To enact laws and ordinances not expressly recorded in the Sacred Texts; to abrogate, according to the changes and requirements of the time, its own enactments; to deliberate and decide upon all problems which have caused difference; to elucidate questions that are obscure; to safeguard the personal rights, freedom and initiative of individuals; and to give attention to the preservation of human honor, to the development of countries and the stability of states;**

9d **To promulgate and apply the laws and principles of the Faith; to safeguard and enforce that rectitude of conduct which the Law of God enjoins; to preserve and develop the Spiritual and Administrative Center of the Bahá'í Faith, permanently fixed in the twin cities of 'Akká and Haifa; to administer the affairs of the Bahá'í community throughout the world; to guide, organize, coordinate and unify its activities; to found institutions; to be responsible for ensuring that no body or institution within the Cause abuse its privileges or decline in the exercise of its rights and prerogatives; and to provide for the receipt, disposition, administration and safeguarding of the funds, endowments and other properties that are entrusted to its care;**

9e **To adjudicate disputes falling within its purview; to give judgment in cases of violation of the laws of the Faith and to pronounce sanctions for such violations; to provide for the enforcement of its decisions; to provide for the arbitration and settlement of disputes arising between peoples; and to be the exponent and guardian of that Divine Justice which can alone ensure the security of, and establish the reign of law and order in, the world.**

10 **The members of the Universal House of Justice, designated by Bahá'u'lláh “the Men of Justice”, “the people of Bahá who have been mentioned in the Book of Names”, “the Trustees of God amongst His servants and the daysprings of authority in His countries”, shall in the discharge of their responsibilities ever bear in mind the following standards set forth by Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Cause of God:**

10a

**“In the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith, in the enactment of the legislation necessary to supplement the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the members of the Universal House of Justice, it should be borne in mind, are not, as Bahá’u’lláh’s utterances clearly imply, responsible to those whom they represent, nor are they allowed to be governed by the feelings, the general opinion, and even the convictions of the mass of the faithful, or of those who directly elect them. They are to follow, in a prayerful attitude, the dictates and promptings of their conscience. They may, indeed they must, acquaint themselves with the conditions prevailing among the community, must weigh dispassionately in their minds the merits of any case presented for their consideration, but must reserve for themselves the right of an unfettered decision. ‘God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth’, is Bahá’u’lláh’s incontrovertible assurance. They, 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 lifeblood and ultimate safeguard of this Revelation.”**

11

**The Universal House of Justice was first elected on the first day of the Festival of Ridván in the one hundred and twentieth year of the Bahá’í Era [21 April 1963], when the members of the National Spiritual Assemblies, in accordance with the provisions of the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, and in response to the summons of the Hands of the Cause of God, the Chief Stewards of Bahá’u’lláh’s embryonic World Commonwealth, brought into being this “crowning glory” of the administrative institutions of Bahá’u’lláh, the very “nucleus and forerunner” of His World Order. Now, therefore, in obedience to the Command of God and with entire reliance upon Him, we, the members of the Universal House of Justice, set our hands and its seal to this Declaration of Trust which, together with the By-Laws hereto appended, form the Constitution of the Universal House of Justice.<sup>8</sup>**

This exalted instrument was signed and sealed on 26 November 1972, the Day of the Covenant, in the Council Chamber of the Universal House of Justice. A cablegram was immediately sent announcing the adoption of this “profoundly significant step”. With these stirring words, it drew to a close:

**“FULLY ASSURED MEASURE JUST TAKEN WILL FURTHER REINFORCE TIES BINDING WORLD CENTER TO NATIONAL LOCAL COMMUNITIES THROUGHOUT WORLD RELEASE FRESH ENERGIES INCREASE ENTHUSIASM CONFIDENCE VALIANT WORKERS HIS DIVINE VINEYARD LABORING ASSIDUOUSLY BRING MANKIND UNDER SHELTER HIS ALL-GLORIOUS COVENANT.”<sup>9</sup>**

## **SECTION 7**

The Constitution of the Universal House of Justice is a stupendous document, and our appreciation of it increases as we witness the House of Justice act in the world and see with what consummate wisdom and love it guides humanity. At this point you may find it helpful to reread the passage written by the Guardian that is quoted at the close of the Declaration of Trust and then to complete the sentences below.

- a. In the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith and in the enactment of the legislation necessary to supplement the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the members of the Universal House of Justice are not responsible to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- b. In the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith and in the enactment of the legislation necessary to supplement the laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, the members of the Universal House of Justice are not governed by \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- c. The members of the Universal House of Justice are to follow, in a prayerful attitude, \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- d. The members of the Universal House of Justice may, indeed they must, acquaint themselves with \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
must weigh \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
but must reserve for themselves \_\_\_\_\_ .
- e. In this respect, Bahá'u'lláh assures us that God will verily inspire them with \_\_\_\_\_ .
- f. The members of the Universal House of Justice, and not \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, have been made the recipients of \_\_\_\_\_ .

## SECTION 8

The opening passages of the Declaration of Trust make reference to a concept that we have considered earlier in this book: that, in the institution of the Universal House of Justice, Bahá'u'lláh has provided humanity with an authoritative source of guidance under His protection, so necessary in this period of history when its collective life must undergo such profound change, when the structure of society must be entirely reshaped, when the essential relationships that bind people and nations must find new expression. Let us review what we have studied earlier and try to consolidate our understanding of this vital concept.

In Section 31 of the first unit of this book, we discussed the implications of the existence of the Universal House of Justice for the advancement of civilization. Among the quotations we studied in that section was the following from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh:

**“Inasmuch as for each day there is a new problem and for every problem an expedient solution, such affairs should be referred to the House of Justice that the members thereof 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. All matters of State should be referred to the House of Justice, but acts of worship must be observed according to that which God hath revealed in His Book.”**<sup>10</sup>

In Section 13 of the second unit, we read the passage below from a letter written by the Guardian:

**“It should also be borne in mind that the machinery of the Cause has been so fashioned, that whatever is deemed necessary to incorporate into it in order to keep it in the forefront of all progressive movements, can, according to the provisions made by Bahá'u'lláh, be safely embodied therein. To this testify the words of Bahá'u'lláh, as recorded in the Eighth Leaf of the exalted Paradise: *‘It is incumbent upon the Trustees of the House of Justice to take counsel together regarding those things which have not outwardly been revealed in the Book, and to enforce that which is agreeable to them. God will verily inspire them with whatsoever He willeth, and He, verily, is the Provider, the Omniscient.’*”**<sup>11</sup>

We know that by the “Book” is meant the Word of God revealed by His Manifestation and that to it are bound inextricably the pronouncements and written works of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian, both of whom provided “authoritative statements on the intent of Bahá'u'lláh’s Revelation”. Shoghi Effendi, we could in a sense say, wrote the final pages of the “Book” for this Dispensation. What we need to remember is that, in the institution of the Universal House of Justice, we have an entity, inspired directly by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, alive in the world through which guidance will continue to flow to humanity. It, and it alone, is invested with the authority to decide on all matters not explicitly revealed in the Text, to elucidate questions that are obscure, and to settle all disputes. It was created by Bahá'u'lláh in such a way that it acts, at all times, in complete and utter harmony with His Revelation; it is impossible for its guidance to depart from God’s Will or to veer from the path that leads to the achievement of His purpose for humanity. In this way, then, the establishment of that Divine civilization, ushered in by Bahá'u'lláh, is assured.

So important to our understanding are the two passages quoted above that it is suggested you review them again by filling in the blanks in the following sentences:

1. Bahá'u'lláh tells us that inasmuch as for \_\_\_\_\_ there is a \_\_\_\_\_ and for \_\_\_\_\_ there is an \_\_\_\_\_, such affairs should be \_\_\_\_\_ to the \_\_\_\_\_ that its members may \_\_\_\_\_ according to the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of the time. They that, for the sake of God, arise to serve His

Cause, are the \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_ from the unseen Kingdom. It is \_\_\_\_\_ upon all to be \_\_\_\_\_ unto \_\_\_\_\_. All \_\_\_\_\_ should be referred to the \_\_\_\_\_, but \_\_\_\_\_ must be observed according to that which God \_\_\_\_\_.

2. Shoghi Effendi reminds us that the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Cause has been so fashioned, that \_\_\_\_\_ is deemed \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_ into it in order to keep it in the \_\_\_\_\_ of all \_\_\_\_\_ movements, can, according to the \_\_\_\_\_ made by Bahá'u'lláh, be \_\_\_\_\_ therein. To this \_\_\_\_\_ the words of Bahá'u'lláh, as recorded in the Eighth Leaf of the exalted Paradise: "It is \_\_\_\_\_ upon the \_\_\_\_\_ of the House of Justice to \_\_\_\_\_ together regarding those \_\_\_\_\_ which have not \_\_\_\_\_ been \_\_\_\_\_ in the Book, and to \_\_\_\_\_ that which is \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_. God will verily \_\_\_\_\_ them with \_\_\_\_\_ He \_\_\_\_\_, and He, verily, is the \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_."

## SECTION 9

As we saw in its constitution, among the powers with which the Universal House of Justice has been invested is to "expand and consolidate" the institutions of the Bahá'í Administrative Order. In the second unit of this book, we traced the evolution of that Order through the ministry of the Guardian and acknowledged that it would continue to evolve under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. In 1968, the House of Justice took a major step in this respect, one that was connected to the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God.

You will remember that the first contingent of Hands was named in December 1951. The Guardian developed this dimension of the Administrative Order for the next six years until he passed away in 1957. Following his passing, it fell to the House of Justice to "devise a way, within the Administrative Order, of developing 'the Institution of the Hands of the Cause with a view to extension into the future of its appointed functions of protection and propagation'." This became a goal of the Nine Year Plan, and after long and prayerful consultations with Hands of the Cause, the Universal House of Justice wrote a letter dated 24 June 1968, describing the parameters that had guided it in the pursuit of this goal:

**"The Universal House of Justice sees no way in which additional Hands of the Cause of God can be appointed.**

**"The absence of the Guardian of the Faith brought about an entirely new relationship between the Universal House of Justice and the Hands of the Cause and called for the progressive unfoldment by the Universal House of Justice of the manner**

**in which the Hands of the Cause would carry out their divinely conferred functions of protection and propagation.**

**“Whatever new development or institution is initiated should come into operation as soon as possible in order to reinforce and supplement the work of the Hands of the Cause while at the same time taking full advantage of the opportunity of having the Hands themselves assist in launching and guiding the new procedures.**

**“Any such institution must grow and operate in harmony with the principles governing the functioning of the Institution of the Hands of the Cause of God.”<sup>12</sup>**

In the same letter, the Universal House of Justice explained that, in light of these considerations, it had decided to establish Continental Boards of Counsellors for the protection and propagation of the Faith. Their duties would include, the letter went on, “directing the Auxiliary Boards in their respective areas, consulting and collaborating with National Spiritual Assemblies, and keeping the Hands of the Cause and the Universal House of Justice informed concerning the conditions of the Cause in their areas.” The Auxiliary Boards for Protection and Propagation would now report to the Continental Boards of Counsellors, which would appoint or replace members of the Auxiliary Boards as circumstances required. As for the Hands of the Cause, the letter stated the following:

**“The Hands of the Cause of God have the prerogative and obligation to consult with the Continental Boards of Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies on any subject which, in their view, affects the interests of the Cause. The Hands residing in the Holy Land will act as liaison between the Universal House of Justice and the Continental Boards of Counsellors, and will also assist the Universal House of Justice in setting up, at a propitious time, an international teaching center in the Holy Land, as anticipated in the Guardian’s writings.”<sup>13</sup>**

Five years into the operation of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, on 5 June 1973, the cablegram below was sent by the House of Justice:

**“ANNOUNCE ESTABLISHMENT HOLY LAND LONG ANTICIPATED INTERNATIONAL TEACHING CENTRE DESTINED EVOLVE INTO ONE THOSE WORLD-SHAKING WORLD-EMBRACING WORLD-DIRECTING ADMINISTRATIVE INSTITUTIONS ORDAINED BY BAHÁ’U’LLÁH ANTICIPATED BY ‘ABDU’L-BAHÁ ELUCIDATED BY SHOGHI EFFENDI.”<sup>14</sup>**

The establishment of the International Teaching Centre brought to fruition the work carried out by the body of Hands of the Cause residing in the Holy Land, which acted as liaison between the Guardian as Head of the Faith and the Continental Hands, as mentioned in the preceding unit, and later between the Universal House of Justice and the Continental Boards of Counsellors. In thinking about the implications of the establishment of the Boards of Counsellors and the International Teaching Centre, decide whether the following statements are true:

\_\_\_\_\_ The establishment of the Continental Boards of Counsellors extended into the future the functions of the institution of the Hands of the Cause of God.

- \_\_\_\_\_ The institution of the Hands of the Cause of God was renamed the Continental Boards of Counsellors.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The Hands of the Cause of God and the Continental Boards of Counsellors were to carry out the same functions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The establishment of the Continental Boards of Counsellors ensured that the structure of the Administrative Order as delineated in ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s Will and Testament was maintained.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The Continental Boards of Counsellors are endowed with the capacity, as were the Hands of the Cause serving on each continent, to safeguard the Faith and to promote its steady unfoldment.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The establishment of the International Teaching Centre brought to fruition the work of the body of Hands of the Cause of God residing in the Holy Land.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The International Teaching Centre acts as liaison between the Continental Boards of Counsellors and the Universal House of Justice.

## SECTION 10

Today the institution of the Counsellors includes the following: the International Teaching Centre, the Continental Boards of Counsellors for the Protection and Propagation of the Faith, the Auxiliary Boards for the Protection and Propagation of the Faith, and assistants to Auxiliary Board members. We will take the evolution of that institution as an example and, over the next several sections, try to gain insight into what it means for Bahá’í administration to develop under the direction of the Universal House of Justice.

Before doing so, however, we will undertake, in this section, a review of some basic facts related to the institution’s present-day structure and functioning. We will use as a reference the document issued in 2001 by the Universal House of Justice entitled *The Institution of the Counsellors*, which brings together much of the guidance it had given about that institution over the preceding three decades.

We will begin our review with the International Teaching Centre. It has nine members appointed as International Counsellors by the Universal House of Justice from among all the adult believers in the world for a five-year term. Each term starts on 23 May immediately following the International Bahá’í Convention. Here is how the House of Justice describes the mode of functioning and duties of the Teaching Centre:

**“The work of the Teaching Centre is essentially corporate in character. Its responsibilities call on it to serve as a source of information and analysis for the Universal House of Justice and to provide guidance and resources to the Continental Counsellors. It is required to be fully informed of the situation of the Cause in all parts of the world and alert to possibilities for the expansion of the Faith, the consolidation of its institutions, and the development of Bahá’í community life. It has to analyze these possibilities in relation to global plans,**

**anticipating needs worldwide and ensuring that the necessary resources become available to national communities. In this context, it gives particular attention to the development of human resources, helping communities increase their capacity to endow growing contingents of believers with spiritual insight, knowledge of the Faith, and skills and abilities of service.”<sup>15</sup>**

The House of Justice notes further that the Teaching Centre is invested with the “mandate to watch over the security and ensure the protection of the Faith of God.” In this, it must be “attentive to the spiritual health of the Bahá’í community, urging the Counsellors and their auxiliaries to strengthen the believers to resist the influence of both external and internal sources of opposition to the Cause, and to assist National and Local Spiritual Assemblies in resolving questions that could raise doubt about the integrity of the Faith and its Teachings.” The Teaching Centre is also responsible for investigating any possible cases of Covenant-breaking, “employing, as necessary, the services of the Continental Counsellors and their auxiliaries.”<sup>16</sup>

As for the Continental Boards of Counsellors, there are presently five Boards serving the five major regions of the world: Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australasia, and Europe. The term of office of the Counsellors and the precise boundaries of the region in which each Board operates are fixed by the Universal House of Justice, as is the number of Counsellors on each Board. Every term currently lasts five years and begins on the Day of the Covenant, 26 November. Regarding the mode of functioning of the Counsellors, the House of Justice tells us:

**“In general, it should be borne in mind that, unlike other institutions of the Administrative Order, which must function as corporate bodies, Counsellors operate primarily as individuals. In handling most matters, they each have a wide range of possibilities available to them according to the flexibility inherent in their institution.”<sup>17</sup>**

In this light, in the performance of certain functions—“for example, in providing stimulus to different components of the Bahá’í community in a particular zone in the continent”—several Counsellors may “come together to consult and collaborate so that their abilities are used in a complementary fashion.”<sup>18</sup> There is an important principle that is involved here, the House of Justice explains:

**“Fundamental to the work of the Counsellors is the understanding that all members of the Continental Board bear responsibility for the entire continent and need to familiarize themselves, to the extent possible, with the conditions of the Cause in the countries therein. Through periodic reports from individual Counsellors, the Board is kept abreast of developments in every area of the continent and is able to offer guidance to assist its members in the execution of their duties. Whereas no Counsellor is to be regarded as having exclusive responsibility for any one territory, the detailed familiarity acquired by each through close interaction with the National Spiritual Assembly and Auxiliary Board members in a particular area represents a valuable asset to all the Counsellors on the Board.”<sup>19</sup>**

Each Board of Counsellors “holds a number of meetings during its term of service to consult on the various dimensions of its work in the propagation and protection of the Faith”, and “certain matters, such as the appointment of Auxiliary Board members and the allocation of funds, are decided by the entire Board.”<sup>20</sup> Every Continental Board of Counsellors also

assigns a specific territory or area to each Auxiliary Board member. In doing so, the Board of Counsellors ensures that “the entire continental area is divided up among the members of each of the two Auxiliary Boards”, so that the Bahá’ís in any one locality “have both a Protection Board member and a Propagation Board member to whom they can refer.”<sup>21</sup>

You know that two Auxiliary Boards were originally established by the Guardian, and today the number of members serving on each Board is fixed by the Universal House of Justice. They are appointed from among the believers in each continent, twenty-one years and older, by the Continental Board of Counsellors for five-year periods beginning on the Day of the Covenant of the year following the appointment of the Counsellors themselves. They have been authorized by the House of Justice to name assistants, who help them with various aspects of their work. As for their mode of functioning, we read:

**“The members of an Auxiliary Board are responsible individually to the Board of Counsellors which appoints them. They do not themselves constitute a decision-making body. However, Auxiliary Board members may confer and collaborate with each other as long as care is taken not to depart from this principle.”<sup>22</sup>**

Now, in the last unit, we examined the development of the institution of the Spiritual Assembly by looking at several important concepts and principles related to Bahá’í administration: consultation as a cardinal principle that should govern collective decision-making; the nature of the relationship between Spiritual Assemblies and the individual; the nature of relationships among the institutions of the Administrative Order; the nature of Bahá’í elections; and the nature of service on an Assembly. We will adopt a similar approach in our study of the institution of the Counsellors, examining its development in the context of certain concepts and principles—namely, the nature of the relationship of the institution of the Counsellors with the individual; the contribution of the Counsellors and their auxiliaries to the enhancement of diverse aspects of Bahá’í community life; and the nature of the relationship between Spiritual Assemblies and the institution of the Counsellors.

## SECTION 11

With the above in mind, let us take up the first of the three subjects mentioned—how Counsellors and their auxiliaries relate to the body of the believers. The Universal House of Justice explains in its 2001 statement *The Institution of the Counsellors*:

**“The administrative processes of the Faith are not only concerned with judicial matters, laws and regulations, and programs that direct action, but also embrace those measures that elicit from the friends wholehearted response and channel their energies. Counsellors and their auxiliaries bring to bear on all such administrative processes their ability as individuals of proven devotion and consecrated spirit. Similarly, they play a vital part in encouraging the friends and in fostering individual initiative, diversity and freedom of action. In their endeavors they strive to follow in the footsteps of the Hands of the Cause, whom ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called on ‘to diffuse the Divine Fragrances, to edify the souls of men, to promote learning, to improve the character of all men and to be, at all times and under all conditions, sanctified and detached from earthly things.’”<sup>23</sup>**

In a letter dated 3 May 1998 addressed by the Universal House of Justice to the Continental Counsellors, we read:

**“You represent an army of able and highly motivated servants of the Cause throughout the world. Yours is an institution which, in one respect, has a particularly intimate relationship with the Universal House of Justice; in another, it is able to exercise an influence that penetrates the very grassroots of the community. Its nature fits it, uniquely, to serve as a river of encouragement, example and love whose waters can refresh and invigorate the spirit of every believer they touch.”<sup>24</sup>**

Referring to the duty of the Auxiliary Board members to elicit from the individual wholehearted participation, the Universal House of Justice makes clear in *The Institution of the Counsellors*:

**“It requires building confidence and changing fear and hesitation into courage and perseverance. It asks of the Board members and those they serve alike to forget their own weaknesses and fix their reliance on the power of divine confirmations. Further, it implies accompanying the friends in their endeavors as they develop the capabilities of effective service.”<sup>25</sup>**

A letter dated 9 January 2001 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Continental Counsellors states:

**“Training alone, of course, does not necessarily lead to an upsurge in teaching activity. In every avenue of service, the friends need sustained encouragement. Our expectation is that the Auxiliary Board members, together with their assistants, will give special thought to how individual initiative can be cultivated, particularly as it relates to teaching. When training and encouragement are effective, a culture of growth is nourished in which the believers see their duty to teach as a natural consequence of having accepted Bahá’u’lláh. They ‘raise high the sacred torch of faith,’ as was ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s wish, ‘labor ceaselessly, by day and by night,’ and ‘consecrate every fleeting moment of their lives to the diffusion of the divine fragrance and the exaltation of God’s holy Word.’ So enkindled do their hearts become with the fire of the love of God that whoever approaches them feels its warmth. They strive to be channels of the spirit, pure of heart, selfless and humble, possessing certitude and the courage that stems from reliance on God. In such a culture, teaching is the dominating passion of the lives of the believers. Fear of failure finds no place. Mutual support, commitment to learning, and appreciation of diversity of action are the prevailing norms.”<sup>26</sup>**

And, in a message dated 28 December 2010, the Universal House of Justice writes of the Auxiliary Board members and their assistants:

**“They should stand shoulder to shoulder with the friends, supporting them through their struggles and partaking in their joys. Some of these friends will quickly move to the forefront of activity, while others will step forward more tentatively; yet all require support and encouragement, offered not in the abstract but on the basis of that intimate knowledge which is only acquired by working side by side in the field of service. Faith in the capacity of every individual who shows a desire to**

serve will prove essential to the efforts of those who are to elicit from the believers wholehearted participation in the Plan. Unqualified love free of paternalism will be indispensable if they are to help turn hesitation into courage born of trust in God and transform a yearning for excitement into a commitment to long-term action. Calm determination will be vital as they strive to demonstrate how stumbling blocks can be made stepping stones for progress. And a readiness to listen, with heightened spiritual perception, will be invaluable in identifying obstacles that may prevent some of the friends from appreciating the imperative of unified action.”<sup>27</sup>

And, a message dated 30 December 2021 addressed to the Continental Boards of Counsellors by the House of Justice underscores the importance of preserving and fortifying the vitality of the work unfolding at the local level and then states:

**“This critical responsibility is of special relevance to the members of the two Auxiliary Boards, whose numerous, demanding duties keep them closely connected to conditions at the grassroots and alert to anything that might affect the spirit of a community. Across different cultures and social environments, they must assist the friends to face different kinds of challenges: to help previously antagonistic groups find unity through pursuit of a common goal; to learn to put aside inherited customs and attitudes that belong to humanity’s period of adolescence, and to overcome prejudices of all kinds; to guard against any tendency to view matters with cynicism or an eye for faults, and instead sustain an eager and constructive outlook; to put the equality of women and men into practice; to cast off inertia and apathy through the exercise of individual initiative; to put one’s support of plans for collective action before feelings of personal preference; to harness the power of modern technologies without succumbing to their potentially enervating effects; to prize the sweetness of teaching the Faith and the joy of serving humankind above worldly interests; to reject the opiate of consumerism; to turn away from materialist ideologies and the worldviews they aggressively promote, and fix one’s gaze upon the bright beacon that is the laws and principles of God. These, and many more besides, constitute a formidable set of responsibilities for the company of the faithful to fulfill as they navigate what are sure to be tumultuous years in the life of humanity. Your auxiliaries, who have so creditably acquitted themselves in advancing the process of entry by troops, must be equal to all such challenges whenever and wherever they arise. Through the power of their good example and the clarity of their good counsel, may they help the friends to grow in faith, assurance, and commitment to a life of service, and accompany them as they build communities that are havens of peace, places where a harried and conflict-scarred humanity may find shelter.”<sup>28</sup>**

You should reread the above quotations several times and take a moment to reflect on them. Filling in the blanks will help you think about the nature of the institution of the Counsellors and its responsibilities towards the members of the Bahá’í community:

- a. The administrative processes of the Faith are not only concerned with \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_ that direct \_\_\_\_\_, but also embrace those \_\_\_\_\_ that \_\_\_\_\_ from the friends \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ their \_\_\_\_\_;

Counsellors and their auxiliaries bring to bear on all such \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ their ability as individuals of \_\_\_\_\_ and  
\_\_\_\_\_ and play a vital part in \_\_\_\_\_ the  
friends and in \_\_\_\_\_ individual initiative, diversity and freedom of action.

- b. In their endeavors, Counsellors and their auxiliaries strive to follow in the footsteps of the Hands of the Cause, whom ‘Abdu’l-Bahá called on to \_\_\_\_\_ the Divine Fragrances, to \_\_\_\_\_ souls, to \_\_\_\_\_ learning, to \_\_\_\_\_ the character of all, and to be, at all times and under all conditions, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ from earthly things.
- c. The nature of the institution of the Counsellors makes it uniquely fit to \_\_\_\_\_ as a \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ whose waters can \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ the spirit of every individual they touch.
- d. The demanding duties carried out by Auxiliary Board members keep them \_\_\_\_\_ connected to \_\_\_\_\_ at the \_\_\_\_\_ and alert to \_\_\_\_\_ that might \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_ of a community.
- e. Auxiliary Board members, together with their assistants, are to give \_\_\_\_\_ thought to how \_\_\_\_\_ can be cultivated, particularly as it relates to \_\_\_\_\_. In this, they are asked to remember that, when training and encouragement are \_\_\_\_\_, a culture of \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_ in which individuals see their duty to teach as a \_\_\_\_\_ of having accepted Bahá’u’lláh; in such a culture, teaching is the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ of individuals, in which fear of \_\_\_\_\_ finds no \_\_\_\_\_ and mutual \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ to learning, and \_\_\_\_\_ of diversity of action are the \_\_\_\_\_.

Now, complete the sentences below to think about what is involved, especially on the part of Auxiliary Board members, in nurturing the kind of relationship envisioned.

- a. It requires building confidence and changing \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.
- b. It asks of them to forget \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

- c. It implies that they accompany individuals in their endeavors as they \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- d. They are asked to stand shoulder to shoulder with the friends, \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- e. It is important for them to recognize that, while some of these friends will quickly  
move to the forefront of activity, others \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- f. They must understand that every individual requires support and encouragement,  
offered not in the abstract but \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- g. It is essential for them to have faith in the capacity \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- h. They must show forth unqualified love, free of paternalism, if they are to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- i. It is vital for them to have calm determination as they strive to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- j. They are encouraged to recognize that a readiness to listen, with heightened  
spiritual perception, is invaluable in \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- k. They must assist the friends, across different cultures and social environments, to  
face different kinds of challenges:
- to help previously antagonistic groups \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ;
  - to learn to put aside inherited customs and attitudes that \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ;
  - to overcome prejudices \_\_\_\_\_ ;

- to guard against any tendency to view matters \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ;
- to put into practice \_\_\_\_\_ ;
- to cast off inertia and apathy through \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ;
- to put one’s support of plans for collective action before \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ;
- to harness the power of modern technologies without \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ;
- to prize the sweetness of \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ ;
- to reject the opiate of \_\_\_\_\_ ;
- to turn away from materialist ideologies and the worldviews they aggressively promote, and \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .

1. They are called upon to, through the power of their good example and the clarity of their good counsel, help the friends \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## SECTION 12

Our reflection on the guidance of the Universal House of Justice in the previous section has given us insights into the nature of the relationship between the institutions of the Faith, particularly Counsellors and their auxiliaries, and the body of believers. Now let us take up the second of the three subjects we are exploring here—the contribution of the Counsellors and their auxiliaries to the enhancement of diverse aspects of Bahá’í community life.

We know that decision-making in the Bahá’í community is governed by the principle of consultation. This principle finds expression in all aspects of our community life—for example, in the meeting of the Spiritual Assembly and the celebration of the Nineteen Day Feast, at gatherings for the friends in an area to reflect on their collective efforts and among small groups of those working at the grassroots. Of course the institution of the Counsellors, which operates from the international to the local level, is ever present in such spaces, enabling

it both to contribute to consultations undertaken in the community and to invigorate the efforts exerted by the institutions and by the friends, individually and collectively, throughout the Bahá'í world. In the document *The Institution of the Counsellors*, the House of Justice explains:

**“Counsellors have the duty to stimulate on each continent the expansion and consolidation of the Faith and to promote the spiritual, intellectual, and social aspects of Bahá'í life. The spiritual health of the community and the vitality of the faith of the individual, the strengthening of the foundations of family life, and the study of the Teachings receive special attention from the Counsellors and those called upon to assist them. They are likewise concerned with enhancing the capacity of the friends and their institutions to devise systematic plans of action, to execute them energetically, and to learn from experience in the course of building the world civilization envisaged by Bahá'u'lláh. In this context, promoting a culture of growth within the Bahá'í community is fundamental to the work of the Counsellors.”<sup>29</sup>**

This passage suggests that, in participating in diverse aspects of community life and the consultative processes integral to them, the Counsellors and their auxiliaries seek:

- to stimulate on their respective continents \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- to promote \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- to give attention to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- to enhance the capacity of the friends and their institutions to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The passage quoted above gives us an indication of how critical and wide-ranging are the contributions made by the Counsellors and their auxiliaries to the processes of Bahá'í community life. Let us now narrow our focus and take a brief look at one aspect of this vital contribution.

The institution of the Counsellors is concerned with “learning”, including the capacity of the believers and the institutions to “learn from experience” as they strive to build the world civilization described in the Bahá'í writings. In this context, the Universal House of Justice states in the passage quoted above that “promoting a culture of growth” is fundamental to the work of the Counsellors. “Capacity building”, “learning” and “culture of growth” are all concepts that appear frequently in Bahá'í discourse, and you no doubt have a good grasp of their significance, especially as they relate to the global Plans of the Faith. Referring to the institution of the Counsellors in this connection, the House of Justice writes:



In the last unit, we sought insight from the Guardian's writings into the relationship that binds one institution of the Administrative Order to another and saw how every facet of this relationship is permeated by a spirit of reciprocity and mutual trust. The authority invested in each, or the degree of influence exercised, is appropriate to the sphere of action and responsibilities assigned to it. Conflict and estrangement are both foreign to this relationship. Allegiance to the whole, to the higher purpose of servitude to Bahá'u'lláh, animates every member of every institution. The nature of the relationship envisioned by the Guardian was understood by the friends over time as he helped them to see in practice how National Spiritual Assemblies and Local Spiritual Assemblies, as well as committees and agencies, were to function as a collective whole.

With the establishment of the Continental Boards of Counsellors in 1968, the Universal House of Justice began a similar process through which the nature of the relationship between the Spiritual Assemblies and the institution of the Counsellors has progressively become clearer. In the document *The Institution of the Counsellors*, this relationship is described in broad terms:

**“Acting in their respective roles, the two institutions of the Counsellors and the Spiritual Assemblies share responsibility for the protection and propagation of the Faith. The harmonious interaction between them ensures the constant flow of guidance, love and encouragement to the believers and invigorates their individual and collective endeavors to advance the Cause. The value of such interaction is underscored by words of the Guardian, in a cable message dated 4 June 1957, referring at the time to the Hands of the Cause and National Assemblies: ‘SECURITY PRECIOUS FAITH PRESERVATION SPIRITUAL HEALTH BAHÁ’Í COMMUNITIES VITALITY FAITH ITS INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS PROPER FUNCTIONING ITS LABORIOUSLY ERECTED INSTITUTIONS FRUITION ITS WORLDWIDE ENTERPRISES FULFILLMENT ITS ULTIMATE DESTINY ALL DIRECTLY DEPENDENT BEFITTING DISCHARGE WEIGHTY RESPONSIBILITIES NOW RESTING MEMBERS THESE TWO INSTITUTIONS . . .’”<sup>31</sup>**

And further in this same volume we read:

**“The relationship of the Continental Boards of Counsellors to National Spiritual Assemblies is one of loving cooperation between two institutions of the Faith that are serving the same ends and are eager to see the same divine confirmations descend upon the efforts of the friends to promote and firmly establish the Cause. It is an evolving relationship that becomes richer as the two institutions face the challenge of building Bahá’í communities and witness with pride the onward march of the Faith. . . .**

**“The attitude of the Counsellors and the National Spiritual Assemblies towards each other is not motivated by a legalistic application of the rules of their functional relationship. The discharge of joint responsibilities is only possible within the framework of the spiritual requisites for all successful Bahá’í relationships. Interactions between the two institutions flourish in an atmosphere of love and according to the dictates of genuine respect. Bahá'u'lláh's admonition is highly instructive in this regard; He says: ‘Abase not the station of the learned in Bahá and belittle not the rank of such rulers as administer justice amidst you.’”<sup>32</sup>**

On the basis of the above quotations, complete the following sentences:

- a. Acting in their respective roles, the two institutions of the Counsellors and the Spiritual Assemblies share responsibility for \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- b. The harmonious interactions between the two institutions ensure \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ and invigorate \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- c. The relationship of the Continental Boards of Counsellors to the National Spiritual Assemblies is one of \_\_\_\_\_ between two institutions of the Faith that are serving \_\_\_\_\_ and are eager \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- d. The relationship between the two institutions is an evolving one, which becomes richer as they face and witness with pride \_\_\_\_\_ .  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- e. The attitude of the Counsellors and the National Spiritual Assemblies towards each other is not motivated by \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- f. The discharge of the joint responsibilities of the Counsellors and National Spiritual Assemblies is only possible within \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .
- g. Interactions between the two institutions flourish in \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ and according to \_\_\_\_\_ .

Referring to the interactions between the institution of the Counsellors and the institution of Spiritual Assemblies, the Universal House of Justice has quoted in the passage above a cablegram written by the Guardian in 1957. As you saw in the previous unit, that passage leaves no doubt that each of the following depends on the proper discharge of the responsibilities resting on the members of these institutions:

- the security of \_\_\_\_\_
- the preservation of \_\_\_\_\_
- the vitality of \_\_\_\_\_

- the proper functioning of \_\_\_\_\_
- the fruition of \_\_\_\_\_
- the fulfillment of \_\_\_\_\_

## SECTION 14

Our discussion on the development of the institution of the Counsellors has provided us with one example of what it means for Bahá'í administration to evolve under the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. To focus on every one of the many elements of the Administrative Order and to discuss how the evolution of each has been guided by the House of Justice would be a challenging task indeed, far beyond the scope of this unit. Yet, for our purposes here, it may be instructive to look briefly at a few other examples.

In 1997, a new element of Bahá'í administration, operating between the local and national levels, comprising institutions of a special kind, designated “Regional Bahá'í Councils”, was formalized. In making clear the place of “this historic development” in the evolution of national and local Bahá'í institutions, the House of Justice noted: “One of the subtle qualities of the Bahá'í Administrative Order is the balance between centralization and decentralization.” The establishment of Regional Bahá'í Councils would, it stated, “greatly enhance the ability of the Administrative Order to deal with the complex situations with which it is confronted in a number of countries at the present time”.<sup>33</sup>

The development of Regional Councils in a country would call for a “corresponding increase in the capacity of the National Spiritual Assembly itself to keep fully informed of what is proceeding in all parts of the territory over which it has ultimate jurisdiction.”<sup>34</sup> In the sections that follow, you will see that, as institutional capacity at the national, regional, and local levels continued to grow, “geographic units” known as “clusters”, introduced by the Universal House of Justice in 2001, also became the focus of attention. Gradually, then, administrative structures for the expansion and consolidation of the Faith at the grassroots of the community, only broadly formulated during the ministry of the Guardian, have been taking shape under the guidance of the House of Justice.

On 9 November 2018, to provide another example, the Universal House of Justice announced its momentous decision to establish the Bahá'í International Development Organization, a “new world-embracing institution” that brought to fruition the work of the Office of Social and Economic Development over thirty-five years to promote and coordinate efforts to uplift the social and material conditions of communities. You will learn more about this area of activity in the thirteenth book in the sequence. For now, read the following paragraphs from the 9 November announcement:

**“Thirty-five years ago, circumstances within and outside the community combined to create new possibilities for greater involvement in the life of society. The Faith had developed to the stage at which the processes of social and economic development needed to be incorporated into its regular pursuits, and in October 1983 we called upon the Bahá'ís of the world to enter this new field of endeavor. The Office of Social and Economic Development was established at the Bahá'í World Centre to assist us in promoting and coordinating the activities of the**

friends worldwide. Bahá'í activities for social and economic development, at whatever level of complexity, were at that time counted in the hundreds. Today they number in the tens of thousands, including hundreds of sustained projects such as schools and scores of development organizations. The broad range of current activities spans efforts from villages and neighborhoods to regions and nations, addressing an array of challenges, including education from preschool to university, literacy, health, the environment, support for refugees, advancement of women, empowerment of junior youth, elimination of racial prejudice, agriculture, local economies, and village development. The society-building power of Bahá'u'lláh's Cause has begun to be more systematically expressed in the collective life of the friends as a result of the acceleration of the process of expansion and consolidation, especially in advanced clusters. Beyond this, of course, countless believers, through their professional and voluntary efforts, contribute their energies and insights to projects and organizations established for the common good.

**“Once again, then, we find that forces inside and outside the Faith have made possible a new stage in the work of social and economic development in the Bahá'í world. Therefore, on this sacred occasion of the Festivals of the Twin Birthdays, we are pleased to announce that the Office of Social and Economic Development now effloresces into a new world-embracing institution established at the World Centre, the Bahá'í International Development Organization.”<sup>35</sup>**

The discussion we began in Section 9 on the development of the Administrative Order, although limited to a few examples, has helped us to get a glimpse of the magnitude of what has been accomplished—the institutional capacity that has been created, the relationships that have been established, the processes that have been set in motion, the degree of administrative complexity that has been attained—since the establishment of the Universal House of Justice. Let us end our discussion on this theme by reflecting on the illuminating passage below written by that august body:

**“The institutions of the Administrative Order of Bahá'u'lláh, rooted in the provisions of His Revelation, have emerged gradually and organically, as the Bahá'í community has grown through the power of the divine impulse imparted to humankind in this age. The characteristics and functions of each of these institutions have evolved, and are still evolving, as are the relationships between them. The writings of the beloved Guardian expound the fundamental elements of this mighty System and make it clear that the Administrative Order, although different in many ways from the World Order which it is the destiny of the Bahá'í Revelation to call into being, is both the ‘nucleus’ and ‘pattern’ of that World Order. Thus, the evolution of the institutions of the Administrative Order, while following many variants to meet changing conditions in different times and places, should strictly follow the essential principles of Bahá'í administration which have been laid down in the Sacred Text and in the interpretations provided by ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian.”<sup>36</sup>**

## SECTION 15

The goal that we have set for ourselves in this unit is modest indeed: We are reviewing but a small sampling of passages from the vast body of communications of the Universal House of Justice, with the hope of increasing our understanding of what it means for humanity today to be the recipient of its divinely inspired, unerring guidance—this, within the context of our overall purpose to gain further insight into the statement “the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant.”

The preceding sections, taking the institution of the Counsellors as an example, have heightened our appreciation of how the House of Justice is steering the development of the Administrative Order. Among the many other powers and duties enshrined in its constitution is “to guide, organize, coordinate and unify” the activities of the worldwide Bahá’í community. In this connection, over the next several sections, we will attempt to catch a glimpse of how it is guiding the community in carrying forward the Divine Plan, originally conceived by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and set in motion by the Guardian.

As you know, the House of Justice, soon after its establishment, launched a nine-year global Plan, which was followed by others. Here we will look at a series of Plans that commenced in 1996 and concluded in 2021: the Four Year Plan (1996–2000), the Twelve Month Plan (2000–2001), and four consecutive Five Year Plans, from 2001 to 2021. While these Plans had several dimensions, we will focus our attention on those that are directly related to the growth of the Faith.

In December 1995, in its message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, the Universal House of Justice stated that the Four Year Plan beginning in Ridván 1996 would aim at “one major accomplishment: a significant advance in the process of entry by troops”, a process that the Guardian foresaw would come about as a result of a steady and sustained influx of new reinforcements and would be a prelude to mass conversion on the part of the peoples of the world. This aim, the House of Justice made clear, was “to be achieved through marked progress in the activity and development of the individual believer, of the institutions, and of the local community.” “Keen attention to all three”, it later explained, would “ensure a greatly expanded, visibly united, vibrant and cohesive international community by the end of the twentieth century.”

In the Ridván 1996 message, at the start of the Plan, the House of Justice commented on the nature of this aim and its implications for the three protagonists of the Divine Plan:

**“The phrase ‘advance in the process of entry by troops’ accommodates the concept that current circumstances demand and existing opportunities allow for a sustained growth of the Bahá’í world community on a large scale; that this upsurge is necessary in the face of world conditions; that the three constituent participants in the upbuilding of the Order of Bahá’u’lláh—the individual, the institutions, and the community—can foster such growth first by spiritually and mentally accepting the possibility of it, and then by working towards embracing masses of new believers, setting in motion the means for effecting their spiritual and administrative training and development, thereby multiplying the number of knowledgeable, active teachers and administrators whose involvement in the work of the Cause will ensure a constant influx of new adherents, an uninterrupted evolution of Bahá’í Assemblies, and a steady consolidation of the community.”<sup>37</sup>**

“The role of the individual is of unique importance in the work of the Cause”, the message stated. It then continued:

**“It is the individual who manifests the vitality of faith upon which the success of the teaching work and the development of the community depend. Bahá’u’lláh’s command to each believer to teach His Faith confers an inescapable responsibility which cannot be transferred to, or assumed by, any institution of the Cause. The individual alone can exercise those capacities which include the ability to take initiative, to seize opportunities, to form friendships, to interact personally with others, to build relationships, to win the cooperation of others in common service to the Faith and society, and to convert into action the decisions made by consultative bodies.”<sup>38</sup>**

“As for the institutions,” the message indicated, “entry by troops will act upon them as much as they will act upon it.”

**“The evolution of local and national Bahá’í Assemblies at this time calls for a new state of mind on the part of their members as well as on the part of those who elect them, for the Bahá’í community is engaged in an immense historical process that is entering a critical stage. Bahá’u’lláh has given to the world institutions to operate in an Order designed to canalize the forces of a new civilization. Progress towards that glorious realization requires a great and continuous expansion of the Bahá’í community, so that adequate scope is provided for the maturation of these institutions.”<sup>39</sup>**

And the “community, as distinguished from the individual and the institutions,” the message clarified, “assumes its own character and identity as it grows in size.” It went on to say:

**“A community is of course more than the sum of its membership; it is a comprehensive unit of civilization composed of individuals, families and institutions that are originators and encouragers of systems, agencies and organizations working together with a common purpose for the welfare of people both within and beyond its own borders; it is a composition of diverse, interacting participants that are achieving unity in an unremitting quest for spiritual and social progress. Since Bahá’ís everywhere are at the very beginning of the process of community building, enormous effort must be devoted to the tasks at hand.”<sup>40</sup>**

We will strive, through study of certain excerpts from its messages, to enhance our understanding of how the House of Justice nurtured the three protagonists of the Divine Plan during the series of global Plans under review and how the development of certain concepts, methods, instruments, and approaches impelled the progress achieved. As we start our exploration, it would be worthwhile for you to discuss the following questions with your fellow participants in light of the above guidance:

What makes the activity of each of the three protagonists indispensable in the implementation of the Divine Plan?

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How is the development of all three protagonists mutually reinforcing?

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**SECTION 16**

You are aware that the training institute soon emerged as a potent instrument for advancing the process of entry by troops. When the Universal House of Justice called for its establishment in every country at the start of the Four Year Plan, the pattern prevalent at the time for helping individual believers to deepen their knowledge of the Faith consisted principally of courses and classes of varying durations, addressing a variety of subjects. “That pattern”, the House of Justice later explained, “had satisfied well the needs of an emerging worldwide Bahá’í community, still relatively few in number and chiefly concerned with its geographic spread across the globe.” It made clear that “another approach to the study of the writings would have to take shape, one that would spur large numbers into the field of action, if the process of entry by troops was to accelerate appreciably.” The 1995 message to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors noted in this connection:

**“The development of human resources on a large scale requires that the establishment of institutes be viewed in a new light. In many regions, it has become imperative to create institutes as organizational structures dedicated to systematic training. The purpose of such training is to endow ever-growing contingents of believers with the spiritual insights, the knowledge, and the skills needed to carry out the many tasks of accelerated expansion and consolidation, including the teaching and deepening of a large number of people—adults, youth and children. This purpose can best be achieved through well-organized, formal programs consisting of courses that follow appropriately designed curricula.”<sup>41</sup>**

And a few months later, at Riḍván 1996, the House of Justice further clarified the concept of the institute:

**“As the term ‘institute’ has assumed various uses in the Bahá’í community, a word of clarification is needed. The next four years will represent an extraordinary period in the history of our Faith, a turning point of epochal magnitude. What the friends throughout the world are now being asked to do is to commit themselves, their material resources, their abilities and their time to the development of a network of training institutes on a scale never before attempted. These centers of Bahá’í learning will have as their goal one very practical outcome, namely, the raising up of large numbers of believers who are trained to foster and facilitate the process of entry by troops with efficiency and love.”<sup>42</sup>**

In the closing months of the Four Year Plan, the House of Justice brought to the attention of the friends the most crucial achievement of the Bahá’í community during that short period:

**“An impressive network of training institutes on a scale but dimly imagined at the start of the Plan has been established throughout the world. These nascent centers of learning have made significant strides in developing formal programs and in putting into place effective systems for the delivery of courses.”<sup>43</sup>**

And it further stated that the “effects of this systematic approach to human resource development are making themselves felt in the lives of all three protagonists of the Plan—the individual believer, the institutions, and the local community.”

In its Ridván 2000 message, the House of Justice pointed to an important development that was taking shape in the Bahá’í community. The numerical growth it had experienced—both in terms of the courses and programs it offered and the participants who took part in them—was the result of a profound change in its culture, a change that was discernible in the enhanced capacity of the three protagonists of the Plan:

**“The quantitative difference resulted mainly from a more critical qualitative difference. The culture of the Bahá’í community experienced a change. This change is noticeable in the expanded capability, the methodical pattern of functioning and the consequent depth of confidence of the three constituent participants in the Plan—the individual, the institutions and the local community. That is so because the friends concerned themselves more consistently with deepening their knowledge of the divine Teachings and learned much—and this more systematically than before—about how to apply them to promulgating the Cause, to managing their individual and collective activities, and to working with their neighbors. In a word, they entered into a learning mode from which purposeful action was pursued. The chief propellant of this change was the system of training institutes established throughout the world with great rapidity—an accomplishment which, in the field of expansion and consolidation, qualifies as the single greatest legacy of the Four Year Plan.”<sup>44</sup>**

A significant contributor to this change in culture was a rise in consciousness among the members of the community of the vital need for “systematization” and what it entailed:

**“The central theme of the Four Year Plan—that of advancing the process of entry by troops—produced a high degree of integration of thought and action. It focused attention on a major stage of the evolution of the Bahá’í community that must be**

attained during the Formative Age; for until entry by troops is more widely sustained, the conditions will not be ripe for mass conversion, that breakthrough promised by Shoghi Effendi in his writings. The thematic focus of the Plan bore implications for all categories of Bahá'í activity; it called for a clarity of understanding which made possible systematic and strategic planning as a prerequisite of individual and collective action. The members of the community came gradually to appreciate how systematization would facilitate the processes of growth and development. This raising of consciousness was a huge step that led to an upgrading of teaching activities and a change in the culture of the community.”<sup>45</sup>

The following excerpt, from a message written by the House of Justice towards the end of the Four Year Plan, shed further light on this theme:

**“Unremitting faith, prayer, the promptings of the soul, Divine assistance—these are among the essentials of progress in any Bahá'í undertaking. But also of vital importance to bringing about entry by troops is a realistic approach, systematic action. There are no shortcuts. Systematization ensures consistency of lines of action based on well-conceived plans. In a general sense, it implies an orderliness of approach in all that pertains to Bahá'í service, whether in teaching or administration, in individual or collective endeavor. While allowing for individual initiative and spontaneity, it suggests the need to be clearheaded, methodical, efficient, constant, balanced and harmonious. Systematization is a necessary mode of functioning animated by the urgency to act.”<sup>46</sup>**

We read in the message from the House of Justice above that the change in the culture of the Bahá'í community, witnessed at the end of the Four Year Plan, was noticeable in the “expanded capability, the methodical pattern of functioning and the consequent depth of confidence of the three constituent participants in the Plan—the individual, the institutions and the local community”. “The chief propellant of this change”, the House of Justice noted, “was the system of training institutes established throughout the world”. Drawing on the long-term experience you have now acquired, not only as a participant in the courses of the training institute but as one committed to advancing the transformative processes it sets in motion, say a few words about how it expands capabilities, encourages a methodical pattern of functioning, and deepens confidence in the three protagonists.

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Now reflect on the last passage above. How would you describe the systematic approach that has taken hold in the cluster in which you reside? How is it propelling the process of growth and developing human resources for this purpose?

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## SECTION 17

Upon the completion of the Four Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice set the Bahá'í world on a twelve-month endeavor, asking it to bring together “the forces, the capacities and the insights” that had so strongly emerged, in order to prepare it for a series of worldwide enterprises which would continue “to focus on advancing the process of entry by troops and on its systematic acceleration” and which would carry the Bahá'í community through the final twenty years in the first century of the Faith's Formative Age. Referring to the Twelve Month Plan, the House of Justice wrote at Ridván 2000:

**“Brief though it is, it must and will suffice to accomplish certain vital tasks and to lay the ground for the next twenty-year thrust of the Master's Divine Plan. What was so carefully begun four years ago—the systematic acquisition of knowledge, qualities and skills of service—must be augmented. Wherever they exist, national and regional institutes must activate to the full the programs and systems they have adopted. New institutes must be formed where such needs have been identified. Greater steps must be taken to systematize the teaching work undertaken through individual initiative and institutional sponsorship.”<sup>47</sup>**

A significant step was taken at the time when the Counsellors and the National Assemblies were tasked with establishing “Area Growth Programs”—this, in order to systematize a body of knowledge and experience for the “benefit of future Plans”.

One notable aim of that short Plan was to heighten awareness of the importance of the education of children and its complete integration into the process of community development. The House of Justice explained:

**“Strategies to advance the process of entry by troops cannot ignore children and junior youth, if the victories won in one generation are not to be lost with the passage of time. It is imperative, then, that at this point in the process of systematization of the teaching work, definite steps be taken to ensure that the vision of the community fully embraces its younger members. The education of children, an obligation enjoined on both parents and institutions, requires special emphasis so as to become thoroughly integrated into the process of community development. This activity should be taken to new levels of intensity during these twelve months and then be further raised in the years immediately after. That the**

**programs of most institutes in the world provide for the training of children’s class teachers represents an element of strength.”<sup>48</sup>**

And the House of Justice gave the following further guidance in this context:

**“Children are the most precious treasure a community can possess, for in them are the promise and guarantee of the future. They bear the seeds of the character of future society which is largely shaped by what the adults constituting the community do or fail to do with respect to children. They are a trust no community can neglect with impunity.”<sup>49</sup>**

The House of Justice also drew the attention of the Bahá’í community to a population within a specific age range, underscoring the need for appropriate programs that would release the immense potential of its members:

**“Among the young ones in the community are those known as junior youth, who fall between the ages of, say, 12 and 15. They represent a special group with special needs as they are somewhat in between childhood and youth when many changes are occurring within them. Creative attention must be devoted to involving them in programs of activity that will engage their interests, mold their capacities for teaching and service, and involve them in social interaction with older youth.”<sup>50</sup>**

Before moving on with our historical analysis, we should pause for a moment to reflect. Much advance has taken place since the Twelve Month Plan was launched in Ridván 2000 with regard to the spiritual education of children. Discuss with the other members of your group some of the developments that you have seen in your community as a result of systematic efforts in this area.

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## **SECTION 18**

The Universal House of Justice, in its message of 9 January 2001 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, referred to an analysis of the Four Year Plan prepared by the International Teaching Centre which made clear that the training institute was effective not only in enhancing the powers of the individual but also in vitalizing communities and institutions. Its continued development in the diverse countries and territories of the world became a central feature of the Five Year Plan (2001–2006) that followed.

What is more, the message commented on the elements of a system that had proved capable of meeting the training needs of large numbers of individuals, enabling them to advance the process of entry by troops:

**“Elements of a system that can meet the training needs of large numbers of believers have already been tested worldwide and have proven themselves. Study circles, reinforced by extension courses and special campaigns, have shown their ability to lend structure to the process of spiritual education at the grassroots. The value of a sequence of courses, each one following the other in a logical pattern and each one building on the achievements of the previous ones, has become abundantly clear.”<sup>51</sup>**

It was in launching this Plan that the House of Justice introduced the concept of a “cluster” as a geographic construct that would assist national communities, whose circumstances differed widely, to formulate plans for the systematic growth of the Faith. The January 2001 message to the Continental Counsellors explained:

**“There are many countries where increased institutional capacity, particularly at the level of the region, now makes it possible to focus attention on smaller geographic areas. Most of these will consist of a cluster of villages and towns, but, sometimes, a large city and its suburbs may constitute an area of this kind. Among the factors that determine the boundaries of a cluster are culture, language, patterns of transport, infrastructure, and the social and economic life of the inhabitants. The areas into which a region divides will fall into various categories of development. Some will not yet be open to the Faith, while others will contain a few isolated localities and groups; in some, established communities will be gaining strength through a vigorous institute process; in a few, strong communities of deepened believers will be in a position to take on the challenges of systematic and accelerated expansion and consolidation.”<sup>52</sup>**

Through the process of dividing their respective countries into clusters and analyzing the state of development of each one, national communities would be able, under the guidance of the House of Justice, to conceptualize an “intensive program of growth”—an evolution of what was called an “area growth program” in the previous Plan. The experience that had been gained in the course of the Four Year Plan in communities at various stages of development would prove valuable to the effort to launch intensive programs of growth, in an initial set of clusters.

One of the first steps in implementing such programs was to determine the strength of each locality in a given cluster. Among the initial goals was “the establishment of study circles, children’s classes, and devotional meetings, open to all the inhabitants of the locality.” The conditions that indicated a cluster was ready to launch such a program included

**“a high level of enthusiasm among a sizable group of devoted and capable believers who understand the prerequisites for sustainable growth and can take ownership of the program; some basic experience on the part of a few communities in the cluster in holding classes for the spiritual education of children, devotional meetings, and the Nineteen Day Feast; the existence of a reasonable degree of administrative capacity in at least a few Local Spiritual Assemblies; the active involvement of several assistants to Auxiliary Board members in promoting community life; a pronounced spirit of collaboration among the various institutions working in the area; and above all, the strong presence of the training institute with a scheme of coordination that supports the systematic multiplication of study circles.”<sup>53</sup>**

The aim of a program of growth, the message made clear, was to foster “sustainable growth by building the necessary capacity at the levels of the individual, the institutions and the community”. In this connection, the following advice was given:

**“Far from requiring grandiose and elaborate plans, these programs should focus on a few measures that have proven over the years to be indispensable to large-scale expansion and consolidation. Success will depend on the manner in which lines of action are integrated and on the attitude of learning that is adopted.”<sup>54</sup>**

And the 2001 message to the Counsellors reminded them of a concept central to such programs:

**“At the core of the program must lie a sound and steady process of expansion, matched by an equally strong process of human resource development. A range of teaching efforts needs to be carried out, involving both activities undertaken by the individual and campaigns promoted by the institutions. As the number of believers in the area rises, a significant percentage should receive training from the institute, and their capabilities be directed towards the development of local communities.”<sup>55</sup>**

Another element introduced in the Five Year Plan was cluster-wide meetings of consultation to be held periodically as friends pursued their efforts—this, in order to “reflect on issues, consider adjustments, and maintain enthusiasm and unity of thought”. In relation to the planning that takes place in such meetings, the House of Justice provided the following guidance:

**“The best approach is to formulate plans for a few months at a time, beginning with one or two lines of action and gradually growing in complexity. Those who are actively involved in the implementation of plans, whether members of the institutions or not, should be encouraged to participate fully in the consultations.”<sup>56</sup>**

It was clarified further that participants in intensive programs of growth, as they learned to systematize their efforts, would become better prepared to respond to the deep longing of the peoples of the world to draw upon Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation to achieve spiritual and material progress:

**“The friends who participate in these intensive programs of growth should bear in mind that the purpose is to ensure that the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh reaches the masses of humanity and enables them to achieve spiritual and material progress through the application of the Teachings. Vast numbers among the peoples of the world are ready, indeed yearn, for the bounties that Bahá’u’lláh alone can bestow upon them once they have committed themselves to building the new society He has envisioned. In learning to systematize their large-scale teaching work, Bahá’í communities are becoming better equipped to respond to this longing. They cannot withhold whatever effort, whatever sacrifice, may be called for.”<sup>57</sup>**

And it was underscored that “the nature of the planning process” that should characterize efforts during this Five Year Plan was rooted in a higher purpose:

**“At its core it is a spiritual process in which communities and institutions strive to align their pursuits with the Will of God. The Major Plan of God is at work and the forces it generates impel humanity towards its destiny. In their own plans of action, the institutions of the Faith must seek to gain insight into the operation of these great forces, explore the potentialities of the people they serve, measure the resources and strengths of their communities, and take practical steps to enlist the unreserved participation of the believers.”<sup>58</sup>**

What are some of the concepts and approaches that the House of Justice introduced or further elaborated in the Five Year Plan (2001–2006) on the basis of the learning that was gained during the Four Year and Twelve Month Plans?

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Say a few words, drawing on the experience you have acquired thus far as an active participant in the institute process, about the value of its “sequence of courses, each one following the other in a logical pattern and each one building on the achievements of the previous ones”.

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The House of Justice writes that at the core of an intensive program of growth “must lie a sound and steady process of expansion, matched by an equally strong process of human resource development.” How should this important principle shape planning at every level of the community, including in the neighborhood or village in which you reside?

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How does the development of capabilities to carry out increasingly complex acts of service, which we discussed to some extent in Book 7, expand the scope of activities in which we are engaged? How does such expansion open the way for the further enhancement of capacity in individuals, communities, and institutions?

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Read again the last excerpt above. In what sense is the process of planning that the implementation of a program of growth requires unique?

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## SECTION 19

In January 2003, close to two years into the Five Year Plan, the Universal House of Justice commented in a message to the Bahá'í world that the exercise carried out by national communities to divide their respective countries and territories into clusters and to categorize each according to its stage of development afforded them “a realistic means for viewing the prospects” of their communities. More importantly, it provided a way to assess the capacity for growth in a cluster in order to adopt “an approach compatible with its evolving development”. Focus, in almost every country, was placed on the movement of priority clusters from one stage of growth to the next, a movement which depended largely “on the efficacy of the parallel process aimed at helping an ever-increasing number of friends to move through the main sequence of courses offered by the institute”. Rise in activity was a testament to the effectiveness of the courses of the institute in “evoking the spirit of enterprise required to carry out the divers actions that growth in a cluster, at whatever stage, demands.” In the same message, the House of Justice wrote that, in most clusters, “movement from one stage of growth to the next” was being defined “in terms of the multiplication of study circles, devotional meetings and children’s classes, and the expansion they engender.” And, crucially, the coherence achieved through their establishment provided an “impulse” that gathered strength as these core activities multiplied in number. Campaigns that helped a sizable group of participants “advance far enough in the main sequence of courses to perform the necessary acts of service” lent impetus to the “multiplication of activity”.

Each of the participants in your group is part of a nucleus of friends laboring within a village or neighborhood to build a more vibrant community. At the same time, your efforts take shape within a cluster and contribute to its development. In the space below, try to describe, to



Boards of Counsellors in December 2005 with these words, drawing attention to the framework for action that had so decisively emerged:

**“Over the past four and a half years, as the believers throughout the world have striven to pursue the aim of advancing the process of entry by troops, it has become increasingly clear that the close of the present Five Year Plan will mark a decisive moment in the unfoldment of the historical enterprise on which the community of the Greatest Name is embarked. The elements required for a concerted effort to infuse the diverse regions of the world with the spirit of Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation have crystallized into a framework for action that now needs only to be exploited.”<sup>59</sup>**

It summarized in this way the achievements that had been made as the friends carried out the provisions of the Four Year Plan, the Twelve Month Plan, and the Five Year Plan:

**“Our 26 December 1995 message, which focused the Bahá’í world on a path of intense learning about the sustained, rapid growth of the Faith, described in general terms the nature of the work that would have to be undertaken in meeting the challenges ahead. As a first step, Bahá’í communities were urged to systematize their efforts to develop the human resources of the Cause through a network of training institutes. While every national community took measures to create institutional capacity to perform this essential function, it was not until the outset of the Five Year Plan that the significance of a well-conceived program of training became widely appreciated. The introduction of the concept of the cluster made it possible for the friends to think about the accelerated growth of the community on a manageable scale and to conceive of it in terms of two complementary, reinforcing movements: the steady flow of individuals through the sequence of institute courses and the movement of clusters from one stage of development to the next. This image helped the believers to analyze the lessons being learned in the field and to employ a common vocabulary to articulate their findings. Never before have the means for establishing a pattern of activity that places equal emphasis on the twin processes of expansion and consolidation been better understood. Indeed, so consistent has been the experience with intensive programs of growth, implemented on the basis of this understanding in diverse clusters, that no cause for equivocation remains. The way forward is clear, and at Ridván 2006 we will call upon the believers to steel their resolve and to proceed with the full force of their energies on the course that has been so decidedly set.”<sup>60</sup>**

Describe the learning that has occurred in your own cluster or one with which you might be familiar regarding the following elements of the framework for action:

- cycles of activity, each with its phase of expansion and consolidation
- movement of individuals through the sequence of courses
- engagement of growing numbers of individuals in acts of service
- the vibrancy of cluster reflection meetings
- the strength of the pattern of action, reflection, consultation, and study at various levels

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## SECTION 21

In its December 2005 message to the Counsellors, the Universal House of Justice went on to describe the remarkable developments that had taken place in the three protagonists of the Divine Plan over the preceding decade. In relation to the individual, the House of Justice, referring to earlier progress that had been made, observed:

**“Developments since then have served only to demonstrate further the efficacy of a sequence of courses that seeks to build capacity for service by concentrating on the application of the spiritual insights gained through profound study of the Writings. Participants are exposed to a body of knowledge that fosters a set of related habits, attitudes and qualities and are assisted in sharpening certain skills and abilities needed to carry out acts of service. . . . The spiritual context in which specific deeds are addressed endows them with significance. Confidence is patiently built as the friends engage in progressively more complex and demanding acts of service. Yet, above all, it is reliance on God that sustains them in their endeavors.”<sup>61</sup>**

The House of Justice drew attention to the influence the training institute had already exerted on large numbers of individuals, an influence that, it noted, would need to be extended to hundreds of thousands more:

**“That the spirit of faith born out of intimate contact with the Word of God has such an effect on souls is by no means a new phenomenon. What is heartening is that the institute process is helping such large numbers experience the transforming potency of the Faith. To extend this edifying influence to hundreds of thousands more should be the object of intense effort over the next five years.”<sup>62</sup>**

And it pointed further to a significant outcome of the focus that had been placed on “capacity building” by the training institute:

**“A discernible outcome of the emphasis on capacity building has been a steady increase in the exercise of individual initiative—initiative that is disciplined by an understanding of the requirements of systematic action in advancing the process of entry by troops. Endeavors are pursued in a humble posture of learning within**

**the framework defined by the Plan. As a result, activities that give expression to a diversity of talents become harmonized into one forward movement, and the stagnation caused by endless debate over personal preferences about approach is avoided. Commitment to long-term action grows, putting in context the initiatives undertaken by the believers at any particular moment.”<sup>63</sup>**

The House of Justice continued in its message by describing the changes that had occurred in the life of the community:

**“The enhanced vitality that distinguishes the life of the individual believer is equally evident in Bahá’í community life. The degree to which this vitality manifests itself depends, of course, on the stage of development of the cluster.”<sup>64</sup>**

The value of the coherence that the establishment of core activities brought to the process of growth was clearly evident in those clusters that had advanced appreciably. The steady multiplication of these activities, “propelled by the training institute”, gave rise to “a sustainable pattern of expansion and consolidation” that was “at once structured and organic”. The House of Justice observed:

**“What a close examination of clusters at this threshold confirms is that the coherence thus achieved extends to various aspects of community life. The study and application of the teachings become a pervasive habit, and the spirit of communal worship generated by devotional meetings begins to permeate the community’s collective endeavors. A graceful integration of the arts into diverse activities enhances the surge of energy that mobilizes the believers. Classes for the spiritual education of children and junior youth serve to strengthen the roots of the Faith in the local population. Even an act of service as simple as visiting the home of a new believer, whether in a village in the Pacific Islands or in a vast metropolitan area like London, reinforces ties of fellowship that bind the members of the community together.”<sup>65</sup>**

A notable development during the first Five Year Plan related to efforts aimed at the spiritual empowerment of junior youth. Commenting on the efficacy of such efforts, the House of Justice conveyed an important decision:

**“So impressed are we by the results already achieved, and so compelling is the need, that we will urge all National Assemblies to consider the junior youth groups formed through programs implemented by their training institutes a fourth core activity in its own right and to promote its wide-scale multiplication.”<sup>66</sup>**

It was also highlighted that, as in the case of the individual, learning was the hallmark of this phase of the development of the community. The Counsellors and their auxiliaries were urged to exert every effort to ensure that, “in cluster after cluster”, learning was “woven into the fabric of decision-making”. And, in this connection, the House of Justice provided them with the following guidance:

**“One of your primary concerns will be to strengthen appreciation for systematic action, already heightened by the successes it has brought. To arrive at a unified vision of growth based on a realistic assessment of possibilities and resources, to develop strategies that lend structure to it, to devise and implement plans of action**

**commensurate with capacity, to make necessary adjustments while maintaining continuity, to build on accomplishments—these are some of the requisites of systematization that every community must learn and internalize.”<sup>67</sup>**

As for the indispensable role played by the institutions of the Faith during the preceding Plans, it stated:

**“None of the accomplishments of the individual or the community could be sustained without the guidance, encouragement and support of the third participant in the Plan—the institutions of the Faith. It is heartening to see to what extent the institutions are promoting individual initiative, channeling energies into the teaching field, underscoring the value of systematic action, fostering the spiritual life of the community and nurturing a welcoming environment. In helping the community to remain focused on the aim of the Plan, they are learning in practical terms what it means to maintain unity of vision among the friends, to put mechanisms in place that facilitate their endeavors and to allocate resources in accordance with priorities wisely set.”<sup>68</sup>**

In relation to the increased institutional capacity to respond to the demands of growth, the House of Justice advised the Counsellors in its message:

**“Encouraging, too, are the determined steps being taken by National Spiritual Assemblies, in collaboration with the Counsellors, to respond to the administrative challenges brought by large-scale growth at the cluster level. Schemes that are emerging tend to call for one or more individuals named by the training institute to coordinate the delivery of courses in the main sequence, as well as programs for children and junior youth. An Area Teaching Committee appointed by the Regional Council, or by the National Assembly itself, is also required to administer other aspects of systematic effort to achieve accelerated expansion and consolidation. Auxiliary Board members work on both fronts to ensure that the two movements which have come to characterize the process of growth proceed unhampered. While these various components are being established in cluster after cluster, there is still much to be learned about the functions each is to perform and about the relationships among them. What is important is that the current degree of flexibility, which allows for the creation of new instruments as needed, not be compromised so that the scheme of coordination represents a response to the demands of growth itself. We count on you and National Assemblies to guide this learning process.”<sup>69</sup>**

The December 2005 message made clear that it was the sustained efforts on the part of the individual, the community, and the institutions to accelerate the institute process under diverse conditions that resulted in the launching of intensive programs of growth in all parts of the world. Indeed, the most significant advances in learning over the preceding five years, the House of Justice observed, were achieved in some two hundred clusters that had implemented such programs. It then made the following announcement:

**“We are convinced that this learning can now be systematically propagated in every continent, and at Ridván 2006 we will call upon Bahá’ís worldwide to establish, during the next Plan, intensive programs of growth in no less than 1,500 clusters.”<sup>70</sup>**

The message of the House of Justice mentions that the steady increase in individual initiative witnessed during the Five Year Plan was disciplined by an understanding of the requirements of systematic action. What does it mean for endeavors to be pursued in a humble posture of learning within the framework defined by the Plan?

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The message also outlines some of the requisites of systematization that each community must learn and internalize. Identify them by completing the following phrases. After doing so, discuss how, in the context of the cluster in which you reside, they are being developed through the institute process.

- a. To arrive at a \_\_\_\_\_ based on a \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ of possibilities and resources
- b. To develop \_\_\_\_\_ that \_\_\_\_\_ to a unified vision
- c. To devise and implement \_\_\_\_\_ commensurate with  
\_\_\_\_\_
- d. To make \_\_\_\_\_ while maintaining \_\_\_\_\_
- e. To build on \_\_\_\_\_

## SECTION 22

Much effort was exerted between 2006 and 2011, the period of the second Five Year Plan in the series under discussion, to implement programs of growth in cluster after cluster. After some fifteen years of strenuous labor, the Bahá'í community found itself at an important juncture—a juncture from which it could not only look back with joy at what had been achieved but, more crucially, take full advantage going forward of the approaches, the instruments, and the systems that had been so painstakingly developed.

Indeed, with one year still remaining before the conclusion of the Plan, the Universal House of Justice announced to the Bahá'í world in its Ridván 2010 message that the goal of launching 1,500 intensive programs of growth had already been secured. This achievement, it went on to say, stood as testimony to a number of developments within the Bahá'í community “at the more profound level of culture”. Chief among them was a rise “in the capacity of the friends to converse with others on spiritual matters and to speak with ease about the

Person of Bahá'u'lláh and His Revelation.” And the House of Justice noted further: “What the establishment of 1,500 intensive programs of growth has made evident is how courageous and deliberate the rank and file of the believers have become in stepping outside their immediate circle of family members and friends, ready to be led by the guiding Hand of the All-Merciful to receptive souls in whatever quarter they may reside.”

Alongside this development, it was found that, within numerous clusters, certain neighborhoods and villages showed great receptivity both to the teachings of the Faith and to its educational endeavors:

**“In every cluster, once a consistent pattern of action is in place, attention needs to be given to extending it more broadly through a network of coworkers and acquaintances, while energies are, at the same time, focused on smaller pockets of the population, each of which should become a center of intense activity. In an urban cluster, such a center of activity might best be defined by the boundaries of a neighborhood; in a cluster that is primarily rural in character, a small village would offer a suitable social space for this purpose. Those who serve in these settings, both local inhabitants and visiting teachers, would rightly view their work in terms of community building. To assign to their teaching efforts such labels as ‘door-to-door’, even though the first contact may involve calling upon the residents of a home without prior notice, would not do justice to a process that seeks to raise capacity within a population to take charge of its own spiritual, social and intellectual development. The activities that drive this process, and in which newly found friends are invited to engage—meetings that strengthen the devotional character of the community; classes that nurture the tender hearts and minds of children; groups that channel the surging energies of junior youth; circles of study, open to all, that enable people of varied backgrounds to advance on equal footing and explore the application of the teachings to their individual and collective lives—may well need to be maintained with assistance from outside the local population for a time. It is to be expected, however, that the multiplication of these core activities would soon be sustained by human resources indigenous to the neighborhood or village itself—by men and women eager to improve material and spiritual conditions in their surroundings. A rhythm of community life should gradually emerge, then, commensurate with the capacity of an expanding nucleus of individuals committed to Bahá'u'lláh’s vision of a new World Order.**

**“Within this context, receptivity manifests itself in a willingness to participate in the process of community building set in motion by the core activities. In cluster after cluster where an intensive program of growth is now in operation, the task before the friends this coming year is to teach within one or more receptive populations, employing a direct method in their exposition of the fundamentals of their Faith, and find those souls longing to shed the lethargy imposed on them by society and work alongside one another in their neighborhoods and villages to begin a process of collective transformation. If the friends persist in their efforts to learn the ways and methods of community building in small settings in this way, the long-cherished goal of universal participation in the affairs of the Faith will, we are certain, move by several orders of magnitude within grasp.”<sup>71</sup>**

The training institute as a system—its curriculum, its tutors, and its long-distance mode of delivery—was by now well consolidated in country after country, endowing the worldwide Bahá'í community with “the capacity to enable thousands, nay millions, to study the writings in small groups with the explicit purpose of translating the Bahá'í teachings into reality”. This capacity, the House of Justice observed, would carry the “work of the Faith forward into its next stage: sustained large-scale expansion and consolidation.” It wrote in this connection:

**“Let no one fail to appreciate the possibilities thus created. Passivity is bred by the forces of society today. A desire to be entertained is nurtured from childhood, with increasing efficiency, cultivating generations willing to be led by whoever proves skillful at appealing to superficial emotions. Even in many educational systems students are treated as though they were receptacles designed to receive information. That the Bahá'í world has succeeded in developing a culture which promotes a way of thinking, studying, and acting, in which all consider themselves as treading a common path of service—supporting one another and advancing together, respectful of the knowledge that each one possesses at any given moment and avoiding the tendency to divide the believers into categories such as deepened and uninformed—is an accomplishment of enormous proportions. And therein lie the dynamics of an irrepressible movement.”<sup>72</sup>**

This evolution in the culture of the Bahá'í community was also evident in the systematic way it pursued its efforts to provide spiritual education to the children of the world:

**“Concern for the spiritual education of children has long been an element of the culture of the Bahá'í community, a concern that resulted in two, coexisting realities. One, emulating the achievements of the Bahá'ís of Iran, was characterized by the capacity to offer systematic classes, from grade to grade, to children from Bahá'í families, generally with the aim of imparting basic knowledge of the history and teachings of the Faith to rising generations. In most parts of the world, the number who benefited from such classes has been relatively small. The other reality emerged in areas where large-scale enrollments took place, both rural and urban. A more inclusive attitude dominated that experience. Yet while children from households of all kinds were at once eager and welcome to attend Bahá'í classes, various factors prevented lessons from being conducted with the required degree of regularity, year after year. How pleased we are to see this duality, a consequence of historical circumstances, begin to fall away as friends trained by institutes everywhere strive to offer classes, open to all, on a systematic basis.**

**“Such promising beginnings have now to be vigorously pursued. In every cluster with an intensive program of growth in operation, efforts need to be made to systematize further the provision of spiritual education to increasing numbers of children, from families of many backgrounds—a requisite of the community-building process gathering momentum in neighborhoods and villages. This will be a demanding task, one that calls for patience and cooperation on the part of parents and institutions alike.”<sup>73</sup>**

Another expression of this cultural advance, the House of Justice observed, could be seen in the rapid spread of the program for the spiritual empowerment of junior youth:

**“The rapid spread of the program for the spiritual empowerment of junior youth is yet another expression of cultural advance in the Bahá’í community. While global trends project an image of this age group as problematic, lost in the throes of tumultuous physical and emotional change, unresponsive and self-consumed, the Bahá’í community—in the language it employs and the approaches it adopts—is moving decidedly in the opposite direction, seeing in junior youth instead altruism, an acute sense of justice, eagerness to learn about the universe and a desire to contribute to the construction of a better world. Account after account, in which junior youth in countries all over the planet give voice to their thoughts as participants in the program, testifies to the validity of this vision. There is every indication that the program engages their expanding consciousness in an exploration of reality that helps them to analyze the constructive and destructive forces operating in society and to recognize the influence these forces exert on their thoughts and actions, sharpening their spiritual perception, enhancing their powers of expression and reinforcing moral structures that will serve them throughout their lives. At an age when burgeoning intellectual, spiritual and physical powers become accessible to them, they are being given the tools needed to combat the forces that would rob them of their true identity as noble beings and to work for the common good.”<sup>74</sup>**

How does the first excerpt above describe those pockets of a population that could each become a “center of intense activity”?

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Call to mind the cluster where you reside. How many such centers are there where the friends are implementing the provisions of the global Plans? How does the guidance of the House of Justice help you to view your efforts in terms of “community building”? How is the process of community building described and what are some of its features? How does your experience resonate with that description?

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Now think of the various segments of the populations that are engaged in the community-building process in the centers of intense activity with which you are familiar, especially the youth. To what extent do they see themselves as treading a common path of service? How does the curriculum of the institute help them shed the passivity that is bred from childhood by the forces of society?

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What is the duality that the Bahá'í community has overcome in relation to the spiritual education of children?

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Can you describe how focus on the spiritual empowerment of junior youth has contributed to an advance in the culture that is being created in centers of intense activity in the cluster where you reside?

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## SECTION 23

The developments discussed in the previous section were all, as the Riqvân 2010 message explained, “reinforced, in no small measure, by yet another advance at the level of culture”. Here is how the message proceeded:

**“This evolution in collective consciousness is discernible in the growing frequency with which the word ‘accompany’ appears in conversations among the friends, a word that is being endowed with new meaning as it is integrated into the common**

**vocabulary of the Bahá'í community. It signals the significant strengthening of a culture in which learning is the mode of operation, a mode that fosters the informed participation of more and more people in a united effort to apply Bahá'u'lláh's teachings to the construction of a divine civilization, which the Guardian states is the primary mission of the Faith. Such an approach offers a striking contrast to the spiritually bankrupt and moribund ways of an old social order that so often seeks to harness human energy through domination, through greed, through guilt or through manipulation.”<sup>75</sup>**

Among the friends, this advance in culture transformed the quality of their interactions:

**“In relationships among the friends, then, this development in culture finds expression in the quality of their interactions. Learning as a mode of operation requires that all assume a posture of humility, a condition in which one becomes forgetful of self, placing complete trust in God, reliant on His all-sustaining power and confident in His unfailing assistance, knowing that He, and He alone, can change the gnat into an eagle, the drop into a boundless sea. And in such a state souls labor together ceaselessly, delighting not so much in their own accomplishments but in the progress and services of others. So it is that their thoughts are centered at all times on helping one another scale the heights of service to His Cause and soar in the heaven of His knowledge. This is what we see in the present pattern of activity unfolding across the globe, propagated by young and old, by veteran and newly enrolled, working side by side.”<sup>76</sup>**

Not only were interactions among individuals transformed by the advance in culture; it also affected the conduct of the administrative affairs of the Faith, as described in the Ridván message:

**“As learning has come to distinguish the community's mode of operation, certain aspects of decision-making related to expansion and consolidation have been assigned to the body of the believers, enabling planning and implementation to become more responsive to circumstances on the ground. Specifically, a space has been created, in the agency of the reflection meeting, for those engaged in activities at the cluster level to assemble from time to time in order to reach consensus on the current status of their situation, in light of experience and guidance from the institutions, and to determine their immediate steps forward. A similar space is opened by the institute, which makes provision for those serving as tutors, children's class teachers, and animators of junior youth groups in a cluster to meet severally and consult on their experience. Intimately connected to this grassroots consultative process are the agencies of the training institute and the Area Teaching Committee, together with the Auxiliary Board members, whose joint interactions provide another space in which decisions pertaining to growth are taken, in this case with a higher degree of formality.”<sup>77</sup>**

Managing growing complexity contributed to the steady maturation of the institutions of the Faith at all levels:

**“That the institutions of the Faith at all levels—from the local and the regional, to the national and the continental—are able to manage such growing complexity with greater and greater dexterity is both a sign and a necessity of their**

steady maturation. Evolving relationships among administrative structures have brought the Local Spiritual Assembly to the threshold of a new stage in the exercise of its responsibilities to diffuse the Word of God, to mobilize the energies of the believers, and to forge an environment that is spiritually edifying. On previous occasions we have explained that the maturity of a Spiritual Assembly cannot be assessed by the regularity of its meetings and the efficiency of its functioning alone. Rather its strength must be measured, to a large extent, by the vitality of the spiritual and social life of the community it serves—a growing community that welcomes the constructive contributions of both those who are formally enrolled and those who are not. It is gratifying to see that current approaches, methods and instruments are providing the means for Local Spiritual Assemblies, even those newly formed, to fulfill these responsibilities as they set about to ensure that the requirements of the Five Year Plan are adequately met in their localities. Indeed, the Assembly’s proper involvement with the Plan becomes crucial to every attempt to embrace large numbers—itsself a requisite for the manifestation of the full range of its powers and capacities.”<sup>78</sup>

The message went on to say that the future development of Local Spiritual Assemblies was made possible

“by the growing strength of National Spiritual Assemblies, whose ability to think and act strategically has risen perceptibly, especially as they have learned to analyze the community-building process at the grassroots with increasing acuity and effectiveness and to inject into it, as needed, assistance, resources, encouragement, and loving guidance. In countries where conditions demand it, they have devolved a number of their responsibilities in this respect to Regional Councils, decentralizing certain administrative functions, enhancing institutional capacity in areas under their jurisdiction, and fostering more sophisticated sets of interactions.”<sup>79</sup>

And, in relation to the institution of the Counsellors, the Universal House of Justice stated in the message:

“Without question, the evolution of the institution of the Counsellors constitutes one of the most significant advances in the Bahá’í Administrative Order during the past decade. That institution had already made extraordinary leaps in its development when, in January 2001, the Counsellors and the Auxiliary Board members gathered in the Holy Land for the conference marking the occupation by the International Teaching Centre of its permanent seat on Mount Carmel. There is no doubt that the energies released by that event have propelled the institution rapidly forward. The degree of influence the Counsellors and their auxiliaries have exerted on the progress of the Plan demonstrates that they have assumed their natural place in the forefront of the teaching field. We are confident that the coming year will bind the institutions of the Administrative Order further together in collaboration, as all strive to reinforce, each in accordance with its evolving functions and responsibilities, the mode of learning that has become a prominent feature of the community’s functioning—this, most urgently in those clusters experiencing intensive programs of growth.”<sup>80</sup>

The passages above discuss yet another advance in the culture of the Bahá'í community that had become apparent by 2010, towards the end of the second Five Year Plan. What was it and how did the House of Justice describe it?

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How is this cultural advance manifested today in the approach being taken in the neighborhood or village in the cluster where you reside? How does this approach offer “a striking contrast to the spiritually bankrupt and moribund ways of an old social order that so often seeks to harness human energy through domination, through greed, through guilt or through manipulation”?

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How does the guidance of the House of Justice describe the type of transformation that occurred in the functioning of the institutions of the Faith as they adopted a mode of learning?

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What did the House of Justice state are the indicators of the growing maturity of a Local Spiritual Assembly?

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How does managing growing complexity increase the capacity of the institutions of the Faith at all levels?

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## SECTION 24

In a message addressed to the Continental Counsellors gathered in the Holy Land in December 2010, the Universal House of Justice invited them to begin their deliberations on the next stage of the great enterprise on which the Bahá'í world was embarked. This stage, which stretched from Riḍván 2011 to Riḍván 2016, constituted the third of the four consecutive Five Year Plans that culminated at the centenary of the inauguration of the Faith's Formative Age. The House of Justice stated:

**“As made clear in our Riḍván message, in the system thus created to develop its human resources, the community of the Greatest Name possesses an instrument of limitless potentialities. Under a wide diversity of conditions, in virtually any cluster, it is possible for an expanding nucleus of individuals to generate a movement towards the goal of a new World Order.”<sup>81</sup>**

The rise in activity in myriad diverse clusters worldwide had endowed the Bahá'í community with a clearer vision of what a “program of growth” entailed, and its main features had been brought into sharp focus. It was now possible, the House of Justice explained, for the Bahá'í community to “conceive of the movement of a population” in a cluster “in terms of a rich and dynamic continuum”. The message went on to review “the process that unfolds in a cluster,” underscoring “its fundamentally organic nature”.

The process of growth often begins in a cluster when a few friends, seizing the opportunities available to them, enter into meaningful conversations with local residents and establish one or another core activity. Any one of these activities, then, could serve “as a stimulus to growth”. What happens next, the House of Justice observed,

**“follows no predetermined course. Conditions may justify that one core activity be given precedence, multiplying at a rate faster than the others. It is equally possible that all four would advance at a comparable pace. Visiting teams may be called upon to provide impetus to the fledgling set of activities. But irrespective of the specifics, the outcome must be the same. Within every cluster, the level of cohesion achieved among the core activities must be such that, in their totality, a nascent program for the sustained expansion and consolidation of the Faith can be perceived. That is to say, in whatever combination and however small in number, devotional gatherings, children's classes and junior youth groups are being maintained by those progressing through the sequence of institute courses and committed to the vision of individual and collective transformation they foster. This initial flow of human resources into the field of systematic action marks the first of several milestones in a process of sustainable growth.”<sup>82</sup>**

Regarding the agility needed on the part of the institutions and agencies, specifically the Auxiliary Board members, to guide the friends along a path that leads to the emergence of a nascent program of growth, the message stated:

**“To help the friends visualize this first important milestone, and the multiplicity of ways in which it can be reached, is central to the functioning of every Auxiliary Board member and an increasing number of his or her assistants. In this, as in all their work, they must display breadth of vision and clarity of thought, flexibility and resourcefulness.”<sup>83</sup>**

By the time a program of growth is established, a “sense of common purpose” will have begun to characterize the endeavors of the friends, whether scattered across the cluster or concentrated in a village or neighborhood. Whatever level of organization was needed to release the energy of the friends earlier in the process, greater administrative capacity is now required. A complement of coordinators for study circles, for junior youth groups, and for children’s classes will, accordingly, be appointed by the institute to serve the cluster—this, not in keeping with any preconceived order but in response to the potential that the educational process unfolding there demands. In parallel, other administrative structures, the House of Justice noted, start gradually to take shape:

**“Out of the occasional meetings of a few believers emerge the regular deliberations of an expanding core group of friends concerned with channeling into the field of service an increasing store of energy. As the process of growth continues to gather momentum, such an arrangement ultimately fails to satisfy the demands of planning and decision-making, and an Area Teaching Committee is constituted, and reflection meetings institutionalized. In the joint interactions of the Committee, the institute and the Auxiliary Board members, a fully fledged scheme for the coordination of activities becomes operational—with all the inherent capacity needed to facilitate the efficient flow of guidance, funds, and information. By now, the process of growth in the cluster will conform to the rhythm established by pronounced cycles of expansion and consolidation, which, punctuated every three months by a meeting for reflection and planning, are unfolding without interruption.”<sup>84</sup>**

Here the House of Justice emphasized that the institutions of the Faith must “ensure that administrative structures being forged in the cluster take on the requisite characteristics.” Specifically, the process of transformation that the institute’s sequence of courses fosters and the environment the courses create—an environment conducive to universal participation and mutual support—should eventually affect the administrative affairs of the Faith. The House of Justice described in this way what should occur:

**“As an increasing number of believers participate in the teaching and administrative work, undertaken with a humble attitude of learning, they should come to view every task, every interaction, as an occasion to join hands in the pursuit of progress and to accompany one another in their efforts to serve the Cause. In this way will the impulse to over instruct be quieted. In this way will the tendency to reduce a complex process of transformation into simplistic steps, susceptible to instruction by manual, be averted. Discrete actions are placed in context, and even the smallest of steps is endowed with meaning. The operation of spiritual forces in**

**the arena of service becomes increasingly apparent, and bonds of friendship, so vital to a healthy pattern of growth, are continuously reinforced.”<sup>85</sup>**

It is the growing capacity of the three protagonists of the Plan, the House of Justice indicated, that brings a cluster to the point when it can launch an intensive program of growth:

**“Within this landscape of unfolding processes, emerging structures, and enduring fellowship, that moment which has come to be known as the ‘launching’ of an intensive program of growth represents conscious recognition that all the elements necessary to accelerate the expansion and consolidation of the Faith are not only in place but also functioning with an adequate degree of effectiveness. It signals the maturation of an ever-expanding, self-sustaining system for the spiritual edification of a population: a steady stream of friends is proceeding through the courses of the training institute and engaging in the corresponding activities, which serves, in turn, to increase the number of fresh recruits into the Faith, a significant percentage of whom invariably enters the institute process, guaranteeing the expansion of the system. This constitutes another milestone that the friends laboring in every cluster must, in time, reach.”<sup>86</sup>**

In reviewing the process of growth that unfolds in a cluster, the House of Justice reiterated in its message much of what it had stated on previous occasions. Its purpose in doing so, the House of Justice explained, was to underscore “how readily the movement of a population, inspired by the purpose and principles of the Cause, can be nurtured, when not made the object of extraneous complications.” At the same time, it wrote:

**“We have no illusion that the path traced out so summarily above is devoid of difficulty. Progress is achieved through the dialectic of crisis and victory, and setbacks are inevitable. A drop in participation, a disruption in the cycles of activity, a momentary breach in the bonds of unity—these are among the myriad challenges that may have to be met. Not infrequently the rise in human resources, or the ability to mobilize them, will fall short of the demands of rapid expansion. Yet the imposition of formulas on the process will not result in a pattern of growth characterized by the desired equilibrium. Temporary imbalances in the progress of different activities are intrinsic to the process, and they can be adjusted over time, if dealt with patiently. Scaling back one activity that is flourishing, on the basis of theoretical conceptions of how balanced growth can be achieved, often proves counterproductive. While the friends in a cluster might well benefit from the experience of those who have already established the necessary pattern of action, it is only through continued action, reflection and consultation on their part that they will learn to read their own reality, see their own possibilities, make use of their own resources, and respond to the exigencies of large-scale expansion and consolidation to come.”<sup>87</sup>**

With the other members of your group, discuss the nature of the ongoing process of growth in a cluster in terms of a rich and dynamic continuum, as described by the Universal House of Justice. Write your thoughts in the space below.

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## SECTION 26

Vital to the capacity to engage hundreds, nay, thousands of individuals in activities that contribute to their spiritual and material progress was the development of certain approaches, attitudes, and habits that the Universal House of Justice had guided the three protagonists of the Plan to acquire. Examples of some of these characteristics have already been mentioned in previous sections: accompanying one another on the path of service, reflecting on action in light of guidance and experience, adopting a learning mode and a methodical pattern of functioning, avoiding the tendency to reduce a complex process of transformation into simplistic steps, and so on. The following excerpts point to a few others which, essential to the development of clusters at any stage, are manifested especially in the culture of those clusters that are advancing the frontiers of learning. Read each excerpt carefully and identify the habits of thought and action that it mentions. Then discuss in your group its implications for the process of growth underway in the cluster in which you reside. Write your conclusions in the space provided.

**“Apart from the spiritual requisites of a sanctified Bahá’í life, there are habits of thought that affect the unfoldment of the global Plan, and their development has to be encouraged at the level of culture. There are tendencies, as well, that need to be gradually overcome. Many of these tendencies are reinforced by approaches prevalent in society at large, which, not altogether unreasonably, enter into Bahá’í activity. The magnitude of the challenge facing the friends in this respect is not lost on us. They are called upon to become increasingly involved in the life of society, benefiting from its educational programs, excelling in its trades and professions, learning to employ well its tools, and applying themselves to the advancement of its arts and sciences. At the same time, they are never to lose sight of the aim of the Faith to effect a transformation of society, remolding its institutions and processes, on a scale never before witnessed. To this end, they must remain acutely aware of the inadequacies of current modes of thinking and doing—this, without feeling the least degree of superiority, without assuming an air of secrecy or aloofness, and without adopting an unnecessarily critical stance towards society.”<sup>89</sup>**

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**“It is heartening to note that the friends are approaching the study of the messages of the Universal House of Justice related to the Plan with such diligence. The level of discussion generated as they strive to put into practice the guidance received, and to learn from experience, is impressive. We cannot help noticing, however, that achievements tend to be more enduring in those regions where the friends strive to understand the totality of the vision conveyed in the messages, while**

difficulties often arise when phrases and sentences are taken out of context and viewed as isolated fragments. The institutions and agencies of the Faith should help the believers to analyze but not reduce, to ponder meaning but not dwell on words, to identify distinct areas of action but not compartmentalize. We realize that this is no small task. Society speaks more and more in slogans. We hope that the habits the friends are forming in study circles to work with full and complex thoughts and to achieve understanding will be extended to various spheres of activity.”<sup>90</sup>

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“Closely related to the habit of reducing an entire theme into one or two appealing phrases is the tendency to perceive dichotomies, where, in fact, there are none. It is essential that ideas forming part of a cohesive whole not be held in opposition to one another. In a letter written on his behalf, Shoghi Effendi warned: ‘We must take the teachings as a great, balanced whole, not seek out and oppose to each other two strong statements that have different meanings; somewhere in between, there are links uniting the two.’ How encouraged we have been to note that many of the misunderstandings of the past have fallen away as appreciation for the provisions of the Plan has grown. Expansion and consolidation, individual action and collective campaigns, refinement of the inner character and consecration to selfless service—the harmonious relationship between these facets of Bahá’í life is now readily acknowledged. It brings us equal pleasure to know that the friends are on their guard, lest new false dichotomies be allowed to pervade their thinking. They are well aware that the diverse elements of a program of growth are complementary. The tendency to see activities, and the agencies that support them, in competition with one another, a tendency so common in society at large, is being avoided by the community.”<sup>91</sup>

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**“Finally, a significant advance in culture, one which we have followed with particular interest, is marked by the rise in capacity to think in terms of process. That, from the outset, the believers have been asked to be ever conscious of the broad processes that define their work is apparent from a careful reading of even the earliest communications of the Guardian related to the first national plans of the Faith. However, in a world focused increasingly on the promotion of events, or at best projects, with a mindset that derives satisfaction from the sense of expectation and excitement they generate, maintaining the level of dedication required for long-term action demands considerable effort. The expansion and consolidation of the Bahá’í community encompasses a number of interacting processes, each of which contributes its share to the movement of humanity towards Bahá’u’lláh’s vision of a new World Order. The lines of action associated with any given process provide for the organization of occasional events, and from time to time, activities take the shape of a project with a clear beginning and a definite end. If, however, events are imposed on the natural unfoldment of a process, they will disrupt its sound evolution. If the projects undertaken in a cluster are not made subordinate to the explicit needs of the processes unfolding there, they will yield little fruit.”<sup>92</sup>**

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## **SECTION 27**

In launching the final Five Year Plan in the series under discussion, the Universal House of Justice elaborated on an important characteristic of those clusters where a heightened level of intensity was being sustained—that is, the enhanced capacity, cultivated through successive Plans, to engage in a wide range of activity aimed at applying the Revelation of Bahá’u’lláh to the manifold dimensions of social existence. Involvement in social action and participation in the discourses of society are topics of later books in the sequence. For now, suffice it to say that the capacity to engage with a population in these two areas of action, while inherent in the pattern of growth in a cluster from the start, becomes more pronounced in those that are advancing the frontiers of learning:

**“For the movement of a population to have come this far demonstrates that the process which brought it about is strong enough to achieve and sustain a high degree of participation in all aspects of the capacity-building endeavor and manage the complexity entailed. This is another milestone for the friends to pass, the third in succession since the process of growth in a cluster was begun. It denotes the appearance of a system for extending, in center after center, a dynamic**

**pattern of community life that can engage a people—men and women, youth and adults—in the work of their own spiritual and social transformation. This has already come about in around two hundred clusters, covering a range of socio-economic circumstances, and we anticipate that, by the conclusion of the coming Plan, it will be observable in several hundred more. It is a future to which the friends laboring in thousands of clusters elsewhere can aspire.”<sup>93</sup>**

Let us end here our historical overview of excerpts from messages of the Universal House of Justice, which was intended to deepen our understanding of how it guided the worldwide Bahá’í community throughout the series of global Plans that stretched from 1996 to 2021 and nurtured the three protagonists in their efforts to develop approaches, methods, and instruments that gave rise to progress. You may find it useful, before leaving this subject, to reflect on the final passage below. Written by the Universal House of Justice in the middle of the twenty-five year period, the passage places the accomplishments of Bahá’í community in wider historical context and points to the magnitude of the enterprises that still lie ahead.

**“What we have in described the preceding paragraphs and in so many messages over the last decade and a half can best be viewed as the latest in a series of approaches to the growth of the Bahá’í community, each suited to specific historical circumstances. This divinely propelled process of growth was set in motion by the fervor generated in the Cradle of the Faith more than one hundred and sixty years ago, as thousands responded to the summons of a New Day, and received impetus through the exertions made by early believers to carry the message of Bahá’u’lláh to neighboring countries in the East and scattered pockets in the West. It acquired greater structure through the Tablets of the Divine Plan revealed by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and gained momentum as the friends spread out systematically across the globe under the direction of the Guardian to establish small centers of Bahá’í activity and erect the first pillars of the Administrative Order. It gathered force in the rural areas of the world as masses of humanity were moved to embrace the Faith, but slowed considerably as the friends strove to discover strategies for sustaining large-scale expansion and consolidation. And, for fifteen years now, it has been steadily accelerating since we raised the call at the outset of the Four Year Plan for the Bahá’í world to systematize the teaching work on the basis of the experience it had gained through decades of difficult but invaluable learning. That the current approach to growth, effective as it is, must evolve still further in complexity and sophistication once it has taken root in a cluster, demonstrating ever more notably the ‘society-building power’ inherent in the Faith, few would fail to recognize.”<sup>94</sup>**

## **SECTION 28**

Among the powers and duties with which the Universal House of Justice has been invested are, as stated in its Constitution, “to promulgate and apply the laws and principles of the Faith” and “to safeguard and enforce that rectitude of conduct which the Law of God enjoins”. This is the next theme that we will take up. Two related items of correspondence will serve as examples that will help us appreciate how the spiritual and social implications of Bahá’í law are elucidated by the House of Justice. The first is a letter dated 19 April 2013 written on its behalf to a small group of individual believers, and the second a letter dated 23 April 2013

addressed to a National Spiritual Assembly. After considering these letters, we will take a moment to reflect, in a final section, on how the guidance of the House of Justice assists us in gaining a profound appreciation of the conception of Bahá'í law enshrined in the writings of the Faith and of its application to the civilization-building process at hand, raising our consciousness of the transformative powers that are released through obedience to God's command as humanity advances towards its stage of maturity.

We begin with the letter addressed to the individual believers, which was written in response to concerns they had expressed about what they felt were the difficulties experienced by young Bahá'í men and women in Western countries in adhering to certain of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings. The letter sums up the principal concerns of these friends: that the widening gulf between the sexual mores of contemporary Western society and the standard set forth in the Bahá'í writings poses a great challenge to members of their generation; that, for historical reasons, to abstain from sexual relations before marriage is viewed negatively in many countries today; that, not infrequently, those who profess ideals of chastity, as in the priesthood, fall prey to illicit behavior; that marriage is often delayed into the thirties after young people have completed their education and have saved money for a home; and that married life is more complex than in the past since both spouses usually work.

The letter written on behalf of the House of Justice acknowledges the challenge faced by young Bahá'ís in Europe in this respect. “Buttressed by its material and intellectual achievements and emboldened by a narrative of accomplishment and superiority that pervades its culture,” the letter states, “the West puts itself forward in various ways as a model and measure for others.” In this connection, reference is made to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s analysis of the limitations of European civilization in His treatise *The Secret of Divine Civilization* and to His many exhortations to the individual in that same volume to become a source of social good. Far from allowing themselves to be acculturated to the standards of society, the House of Justice underscores, Bahá'ís are called upon to be the champions of a new civilization.

The letter then discusses at the level of principle the main issues involved: It examines the current condition of society, elucidates the nature of Bahá'u'lláh's laws and teachings, describes the significance of obedience to them and then briefly looks at the role that the community and the institutions of the Faith play in reinforcing the efforts of the individual to uphold Bahá'í standards. We will adhere to the same sequence of ideas as we explore relevant passages in this and the next six sections. Some of the passages we will study are quite lengthy, but we will pause along the way and carry out exercises that will help us think about the guidance of the House of Justice. We start with the paragraph below related to the first concept, the current condition of society.

**“We live in an age when the role of religion in shaping human thought and in guiding individual and collective conduct is increasingly discounted. In societies that have bowed to the dictates of materialism, organized religion is seeing the sphere of its influence contract, becoming confined mostly to the realm of personal experience. Not infrequently the laws of religion are regarded as arbitrary rules blindly obeyed by those incapable of independent thought or as a prudish and outdated code of conduct hypocritically imposed upon others by advocates who, themselves, fail to live up to its demands. Morality is being redefined in such societies, and materialistic assumptions, values, and practices pertaining to the nature of humankind and its economic and social life are taking on the status of unassailable truth.”<sup>95</sup>**

To reflect on the significance of the paragraph above, you are encouraged to complete the following exercises:

1. The House of Justice tells us that we live in an age when the role of religion in shaping human thought and in guiding individual and collective conduct is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .

2. The House of Justice indicates in the paragraph above that, in societies that have bowed to the dictates of materialism, organized religion is \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .

3. Think for a moment about the characteristics of a society that has bowed to the dictates of materialism. Which of the following might be attributed to it?

- \_\_\_\_\_ The material aspects of life are glorified.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Economic activity is placed at the center of human existence.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The value of things is measured by the amount of wealth and comfort they produce.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Increase in material wealth is the sole measure of progress.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The wealthier one is, the more intelligent one is regarded to be.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Science is considered an industry, like those dedicated to the production of goods and services, and is treated as such.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The human being is defined as a consumer of goods and services.
- \_\_\_\_\_ To be free to pursue one's personal preferences is considered the highest ideal.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Powerful forces that operate in the human soul, such as attraction to beauty, are exploited for economic gain.

4. In societies that have bowed to the dictates of materialism, the House of Justice indicates, the laws of religion are often regarded as \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .

5. In such societies, the House of Justice explains, morality is \_\_\_\_\_  
and materialistic assumptions, values, and practices pertaining to the nature of human-kind and its economic and social life are \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ .

6. Which of the following statements are indicative of a morality defined by materialistic assumptions that have taken on the status of unassailable truths?

- If it makes me happy, it is good.
- No one can tell me what is right or wrong; it is for me to decide.
- I can do whatever I want so long as I do not hurt anyone.
- If it feels good, it is right.
- First and foremost I should look out for my own interests. If I do not know how to do that, how can I help anyone else.
- Honor and integrity are more important than personal gain.
- The merit of an individual lies in service and virtue and not in wealth and riches.
- If I can get away with stealing, why should I not do so.
- If we do not act with absolute trustworthiness and honesty, our good works will ultimately fail.
- Why should I not cheat when the system is corrupt.
- Privacy is a thing of the past; everything should be out there for everyone to hear and read.
- Nothing is hidden from God; He sees all our deeds and all that is in our hearts and judges us accordingly.
- To exert influence, a speaker should exaggerate and seek to appeal to the audience's emotions.
- It is purity of heart and detachment from all save God that infuse speech with potency, not personality and charisma.
- A good character is more valuable than all the riches of this world.
- The light of a good character shines brighter than the sun.
- Ends justify means.
- Resorting to means that are at odds with a noble goal divert us from the path towards its achievement.
- Noble goals should be pursued through means that are aligned with spiritual principles.
- Our time here is short; we should make the most of it by doing things that fill us with excitement—things that help us forget the unpleasantness of this life and its drudgery.
- Happiness comes to those who possess wisdom and act with pure intention to serve the common good and to those who adhere to the truth and are freed from the promptings of lower passions and desires.



2. Think about the many aspects of life and how they are affected when truth is bent to conform to personal desire. Friendship, married life, personal conduct, artistic expression, and business dealings are only a few examples.

a. What patterns of behavior emerge when an inordinate desire to stay young sets the standard for personal conduct?

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b. What are some of the characteristics of a friendship that is shaped by the desire to gain personal benefit?

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c. What kind of difficulties appear in married life when a spouse is seen as someone who should make it possible for the other to do whatever he or she wants and desires?

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d. What conception of beauty is propagated when the desire to be praised and idolized sets the standard for artistic expression?

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e. What kinds of injustices are committed when the desire for greater and greater profit is accepted as the fundamental operating principle of business?

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f. What kinds of attitudes are cultivated when the desire to be unrestrained in one's freedom defines how individuals relate to authority?

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- g. What are the effects on the environment and on the health of the world's population when the desire to have more and more defines humanity's relationship with nature?

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- h. How are sources of news and information to the masses of humanity affected when they are ruled by a combination of desires: to entertain and sensationalize, to sell things and ideas, and to promote the ideological interests of one or another group in society?

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3. Now look at the answers you gave above and draw up a list of some of the characteristics of a society where energy and resources are spent in an effort to bend truth to conform to personal desire. Two examples are given to assist you.

Everything becomes a contest, and competition is glorified.

Greed becomes a virtue.

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4. In such a society, the House of Justice explains, a culture has emerged that \_\_\_\_\_

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5. To think about the significance of the statement made by the House of Justice, look at the sentences below. Each reflects some aspect of the purpose and nature of human existence. By using the following phrases to complete the sentences, consider some of the ways in which the culture of many contemporary societies is distorting human nature and purpose: worldly possessions, opium of consumerism, surrender to base desires, love of luxuries and physical adornments, self-centeredness.

- a. Attraction to beauty, which should be directed towards the beauty of the Creator, finds expression instead in the \_\_\_\_\_ .

- b. The yearning of the human soul for freedom from the chains and struggles of material existence is confused with \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - c. Instead of being bound to God, the human heart, which was created to love, is attached to \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - d. The longing of every soul to find meaning for its existence is dulled by the \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - e. The quest for self-knowledge, which should give rise to an understanding of that which leads to loftiness and glory, leads instead to \_\_\_\_\_ .
6. The letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice goes on to explain that, rather than the pursuit of personal desire, the happiness and well-being of humanity depend upon \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. The House of Justice tells us next that divine teachings shed light on \_\_\_\_\_
8. The light provided by divine teachings, the House of Justice indicates, enables every soul to \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### SECTION 30

Before we continue with our study of the letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice, you may wish to pause here and reflect on what we have done so far. We have considered some of the conditions of contemporary society and have thought about the distorted perception of human nature and purpose that they perpetuate. Vast amounts of resources and enormous energy are being spent to convince human beings that their happiness and well-being depend on the pursuit of personal desire. A huge machinery is in operation worldwide dedicated to the propagation of this empty notion—indeed, to the spread of the materialistic dogma—and vested interests manipulate the course of events. It is not difficult to imagine how, over time, generations grow more and more forgetful of those attributes that are to distinguish human beings, trapped as they are in the “pursuit of idle fancies and vain imaginings”, “pliable objects in the hands of the powerful”. “What ‘oppression’ is more grievous”, Bahá’u’lláh asks, “than that a soul seeking the truth, and wishing to attain unto the knowledge of God, should know not where to go for it and from whom to seek it?” You may find it useful to write a paragraph or two about how this oppression is being systematically perpetuated in the world today and how humanity can break free from its yoke. In writing your thoughts, you will draw inspiration from the following words of Bahá’u’lláh, as well as those quoted in the passage in the previous section:



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## SECTION 31

Following its brief analysis of the current condition of society, the letter we are studying comments on the nature of Bahá'u'lláh's laws and teachings.

**“The object of every Revelation’, Bahá'u'lláh declares, is ‘to effect a transformation in the whole character of mankind, a transformation that shall manifest itself, both outwardly and inwardly, that shall affect both its inner life and external conditions.’ His appearance signals the emergence of ‘a race of men the nature of which is inscrutable to all save God’, a race that will be purified ‘from the defilement of idle fancies and corrupt desires’ and that will manifest ‘the signs of His sovereignty and might upon earth.’ The teachings of Bahá'u'lláh provide ‘such means as lead to the elevation, the advancement, the education, the protection and the regeneration of the peoples of the earth’. Thus, enshrined in His Revelation is a pattern for future society, radically different from any established in the past, and the promotion of His laws and exhortations constitutes an inseparable part of the effort to lay the foundations of such a society.**

**“It is evident that, if the body and mind are to maintain good health, the laws that govern physical existence cannot be ignored. So, too, for any nation to function properly, there are certain social conventions and laws that, everyone accepts, must be followed. In the same way, there are laws and principles that govern our spiritual lives, and attention to them is of vital importance if the individual and society as a whole are to develop in a sound and harmonious manner. In recognizing the Manifestation of God for today, a believer also acknowledges that His laws and exhortations express truths about the nature of the human being and the purpose of existence; they raise human consciousness, increase understanding, lift the standard of personal conduct, and provide the means for society to progress. His teachings serve, then, to empower humanity; they are the harbinger of human happiness, whose call, far from compelling obedience to an arbitrary and dictatorial regimen of behavior, leads to true freedom. ‘Were men to observe that which We have sent down unto them from the Heaven of Revelation,’ Bahá'u'lláh states, ‘they would, of a certainty, attain unto perfect liberty. Happy is the man that hath apprehended the Purpose of God in whatever He hath revealed from the Heaven of His Will, that pervadeth all created things.’ ‘Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws,’ He declares further, ‘Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power.’”<sup>102</sup>**

In the above paragraphs, the House of Justice reminds us of certain concepts fundamental to the Faith that we have considered in earlier courses in this series and which must have already been the subject of your personal reflections: the purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation; the profound change at the level of the individual and in the structure of society envisioned in His Revelation; the presence of laws in every dimension of existence; the inseparable twin duties of recognition and obedience; and our duty to adhere to God's commandments. Of course, our purpose here is not to examine the nature of Bahá'í law per se but to see how the guidance of the Universal House of Justice helps us appreciate its significance. With these thoughts in mind, then, you may wish to carry out the exercises below.

1. In recognizing the Manifestation of God for today, the Universal House of Justice tells us in the second paragraph above, an individual also acknowledges that His laws and exhortations
  - a. express \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. raise \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. increase \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. lift \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. provide \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. The House of Justice indicates that Bahá'u'lláh's teachings serve to \_\_\_\_\_ ; they are the \_\_\_\_\_ of human \_\_\_\_\_ , whose call, far from \_\_\_\_\_ obedience to an \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ regimen of behavior, leads to \_\_\_\_\_ .
  
3. The description of Bahá'u'lláh's teachings provided by the House of Justice differs greatly from the way religious laws are frequently viewed in society, where they are often regarded, as noted in Section 28, as arbitrary rules blindly obeyed by those incapable of independent thought or as a prudish and outdated code of conduct. To see just how sharp the distinction is, you may wish to complete the sentences below, using these words and phrases: understanding, means for social progress, true freedom, empower, human happiness, expressions of truth.
  - a. The laws of religion are often regarded as arbitrary rules whereas, in reality, they are \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - b. The laws of religion are considered by some a prudish and outdated code of conduct, whereas, in reality, they provide the \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - c. Not infrequently those who follow the laws of religion are seen as incapable of independent thought while, in reality, such laws increase \_\_\_\_\_ .
  - d. Far from demanding blind obedience, then, adherence to the laws of religion serves to \_\_\_\_\_ .

- e. They are not hypocritically imposed but lead to \_\_\_\_\_ .
- f. They do not place unreasonable demands on the individual but are the bearer of \_\_\_\_\_ .

What might be useful for us to do at this point is to examine one of Bahá'u'lláh's commandments in order to see how, as the Universal House of Justice mentions, it raises consciousness, increases understanding, lifts the standard of personal conduct, and enables society to progress. For this purpose, let us consider the commandment related to marriage. In the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, Bahá'u'lláh states:

**“Enter into wedlock, O people, that ye may bring forth one who will make mention of Me amid My servants. This is My bidding unto you; hold fast to it as an assistance to yourselves.”<sup>103</sup>**

And in a prayer, He declares:

**“And when He desired to manifest grace and beneficence to men, and to set the world in order, He revealed observances and created laws; among them He established the law of marriage, made it as a fortress for well-being and salvation, and enjoined it upon us in that which was sent down out of the heaven of sanctity in His Most Holy Book.”<sup>104</sup>**

What are some of the influences this commandment exerts on personal conduct? What implications does it have for a chaste and holy life? What does it tell us about the organization of society and its sound progress? How is it a fortress for well-being and salvation? You may wish to write down your thoughts in the space below.

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## SECTION 32

Now let us return to our study of the letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice. The paragraphs we examined in Sections 28 and 29 described for us some of the conditions of present-day society, particularly how the rise of materialism is contributing to moral bankruptcy. In the last section, we considered two paragraphs commenting on the nature of Bahá'u'lláh's laws and teachings. In the paragraph below, the letter turns to the question of the individual and discusses the responsibilities shouldered by every one of His followers in the face of mounting moral decay.

**“Throughout the world, in diverse cultures, Bahá'ís encounter values and practices that stand in sharp contrast to the teachings of the Faith. Some are embedded in social structures, for instance, racial prejudice and gender discrimination, economic exploitation and political corruption. Others pertain to personal conduct, especially with respect to the use of alcohol and drugs, to sexual behavior, and to self-indulgence in general. If Bahá'ís simply surrender to the mores of society, how will conditions change? How will the people of the world distinguish today's moribund order from the civilization to which Bahá'u'lláh is summoning humanity? ‘Humanity’, the Riḍván 2012 message of the House of Justice explained, ‘is weary for want of a pattern of life to which to aspire.’ ‘A single soul can uphold a standard far above the low threshold by which the world measures itself,’ the message noted. Young Bahá'ís especially need to take care, lest they imagine they can live according to the norms of contemporary society while adhering to Bahá'í ideals at some minimum level to assuage their conscience or to satisfy the community, for they will soon find themselves consumed in a struggle to obey even the most basic of the Faith's moral teachings and powerless to take up the challenges of their generation. ‘Wings that are besmirched with mire can never soar,’ Bahá'u'lláh warns. The inner joy that every individual seeks, unlike a passing emotion, is not contingent on outside influences; it is a condition, born of certitude and conscious knowledge, fostered by a pure heart, which is able to distinguish between that which has permanence and that which is superficial. ‘Wert thou to speed through the immensity of space and traverse the expanse of heaven,’ are Bahá'u'lláh's words, ‘yet thou wouldst find no rest save in submission to Our command and humbleness before Our Face.’”<sup>105</sup>**

The paragraph above contains many essential points that you may wish to make the object of your reflection. There is one, however, that we should explore further here. The House of Justice warns young people especially against adhering to Bahá'í ideals at some minimum level merely to ease their conscience or to satisfy the community. The warning implies that, if we allow the standard to which we aspire to become lower and lower, we will soon find ourselves in a state of constant struggle to obey even the most basic moral teachings of the Faith

and be powerless to act in this world and contribute to its transformation. What appears to be a less formidable path saps our strength and dulls our spiritual faculties, robbing us of the capacity to experience profound and enduring joy. Let us try to explore these ideas further by looking at one Bahá'í ideal—namely, Bahá'u'lláh's exhortation: “Verily I say, the tongue is for mentioning what is good, defile it not with unseemly talk. God hath forgiven what is past. Henceforward everyone should utter that which is meet and seemly, and should refrain from slander, abuse and whatever causeth sadness in men.” Decide whether you think the following statements are true:

- \_\_\_\_\_ Realistically speaking, it is impossible for us to escape the patterns of thought associated with backbiting and gossiping, since so much of the media—even news services—encourage us to focus on the lives of those around us.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If we take a middle approach and occasionally listen to gossip and backbiting, but do not actively take part, our friends and coworkers will not see us as fanatical or self-righteous.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Allowing our friends and coworkers to vent their frustrations to us about other people can be a means of strengthening bonds of trust.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Slander creates an environment of suspicion and mistrust.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In an environment of suspicion and mistrust, people become disempowered.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In an environment of suspicion and mistrust, people lose their motivation to exert effort for the good of others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ In a culture of slander and backbiting, it is easy to lose a sense of right and wrong.
- \_\_\_\_\_ While we should avoid abusive language, making sarcastic comments, all in good fun, is a legitimate way of getting a point across.
- \_\_\_\_\_ There is a difference between occasionally using statements in a humorous way to imply the opposite of what is intended and possessing a sarcastic tongue.
- \_\_\_\_\_ It is possible to develop a sarcastic tongue and possess a sin-covering eye at the same time.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sarcasm is acceptable so long as it is directed not at individuals but towards abstract entities such as social systems, institutions, and authority.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If we fall into the habit of being sarcastic, it is not difficult to end up using harsh language.
- \_\_\_\_\_ If we develop the habit of combining, in clever ways, harsh language with kind but cutting remarks, it is not difficult to end up becoming verbally abusive.

## SECTION 33

The next paragraph of the letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice addresses the question of obedience.

**“The duty to obey the laws brought by Bahá’u’lláh for a new age, then, rests primarily on the individual believer. It lies at the heart of the relationship of the lover and the Beloved; ‘Observe My commandments, for the love of My beauty,’ is Bahá’u’lláh’s exhortation. Yet what is expected in this connection is effort sustained by earnest desire, not instantaneous perfection. The qualities and habits of thought and action that characterize Bahá’í life are developed through daily exertion. ‘Bring thyself to account each day’, writes Bahá’u’lláh. ‘Let each morn be better than its eve’, He advises, ‘and each morrow richer than its yesterday.’ The friends should not lose heart in their personal struggles to attain to the Divine standard, nor be seduced by the argument that, since mistakes will inevitably be made and perfection is impossible, it is futile to exert an effort. They are to steer clear of the pitfalls of hypocrisy, on the one hand—that is, saying one thing yet doing another—and heedlessness, on the other—that is, disregard for the laws, ignoring or explaining away the need to follow them. So too is paralysis engendered by guilt to be avoided; indeed, preoccupation with a particular moral failing can, at times, make it more challenging for it to be overcome.”<sup>106</sup>**

The exercises below may assist you in thinking through the ideas set out by the House of Justice in this crucial paragraph describing the spiritual dynamics of obedience.

1. When we fail to live up to the Bahá’í standard, we should
  - \_\_\_\_\_ recognize that perfection is impossible and give up trying.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ remember that, if we continue to strive, we will overcome our weaknesses.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ confess publicly to our shortcomings to prove to others that we are not hypocrites.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ give in to our moral shortcomings in private, while maintaining the public veneer of propriety.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ withdraw from community life out of shame.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ not downplay the significance of observing Bahá’í laws but should strive to gain a deeper understanding of the vital role they play in our spiritual development.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ call ourselves to account and resolve to do better.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ have trust that God will forgive our shortcomings if we make earnest effort to overcome them.
  
2. When we focus a great deal on our moral failings and feel guilty about them, we
  - \_\_\_\_\_ show how much we love Bahá’u’lláh.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ show that we are trying to be good Bahá’ís.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ show that we are repentant and are striving to overcome our shortcomings.



**“What the friends need to remember in this respect is that, in their efforts to achieve personal growth and to uphold Bahá’í ideals, they are not isolated individuals, withstanding alone the onslaught of the forces of moral decay operating in society. They are members of a purposeful community, global in scope, pursuing a bold spiritual mission—working to establish a pattern of activity and administrative structures suited to a humanity entering its age of maturity. Giving shape to the community’s efforts is a framework for action defined by the global Plans of the Faith. This framework promotes the transformation of the individual in conjunction with social transformation, as two inseparable processes. Specifically, the courses of the institute are intended to set the individual on a path in which qualities and attitudes, skills and abilities, are gradually acquired through service—service intended to quell the insistent self, helping to lift the individual out of its confines and placing him or her in a dynamic process of community building.**

**“In this context, then, every individual finds himself or herself immersed in a community that serves increasingly as an environment conducive to the cultivation of those attributes that are to distinguish a Bahá’í life—an environment in which a spirit of unity animates one and all; in which the ties of fellowship bind them; in which mistakes are treated with tolerance and fear of failure is diminished; in which criticism of others is avoided and backbiting and gossip give way to mutual support and encouragement; in which young and old work shoulder to shoulder, studying the Creative Word together and accompanying one another in their efforts to serve; in which children are reared through an educational process that strives to sharpen their spiritual faculties and imbue them with the spirit of the Faith; in which young people are helped to detect the false messages spread by society, recognize its fruitless preoccupations, and resist its pressures, directing their energies instead towards its betterment. The institutions of the Faith, for their part, strive to ensure that such an environment is fostered. They do not pry into the personal lives of individuals. Nor are they vindictive and judgmental, eager to punish those who fall short of the Bahá’í standard. Except in extreme cases of blatant and flagrant disregard for the law that could potentially harm the Cause and may require them to administer sanctions, their attention is focused on encouragement, assistance, counsel, and education.**

**“Such an environment creates a very different set of dynamics than the one found particularly in the highly individualistic societies of today. Marriage, for instance, need not be long delayed, as it is in some parts of the world where the maturity and responsibilities of adulthood are deferred in pursuit of the license that a socially prolonged adolescence grants. For the individual, who both contributes to and draws strength from the environment that is the Bahá’í community, adhering to Bahá’í law is endowed with meaning and, though perhaps still difficult on occasion, does not pose the insurmountable challenge that you fear it will.”<sup>107</sup>**

With these three paragraphs, the letter enters into a discussion of the community and the institutions of the Faith and the responsibilities they shoulder in supporting individual efforts to uphold Bahá’í ideals. Many of the points raised will be taken up in our study of the letter addressed to a National Spiritual Assembly, which we will begin in the next section. For now, then, you may wish merely to review the ideas discussed by completing the sentences below.

1. In the first paragraph, referring to the efforts of the individual believer, the Universal House of Justice explains: What the friends need to remember in this respect is that, in their efforts to \_\_\_\_\_ and to \_\_\_\_\_, they are not \_\_\_\_\_ individuals, withstanding \_\_\_\_\_ the onslaught of the \_\_\_\_\_ operating in society. They are \_\_\_\_\_ of a \_\_\_\_\_ community, \_\_\_\_\_ in scope, \_\_\_\_\_ a bold spiritual \_\_\_\_\_—working to establish a \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ suited to a humanity entering its \_\_\_\_\_ of \_\_\_\_\_. Giving shape to the community's efforts is a \_\_\_\_\_ for \_\_\_\_\_ defined by the \_\_\_\_\_. This framework promotes the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ in conjunction with \_\_\_\_\_, as two \_\_\_\_\_ processes. Specifically, the \_\_\_\_\_ of the \_\_\_\_\_ are intended to set the individual on a \_\_\_\_\_ in which \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, are gradually acquired through \_\_\_\_\_—service intended to \_\_\_\_\_ the \_\_\_\_\_, helping to \_\_\_\_\_ the individual out of its \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ him or her in a \_\_\_\_\_.

2. In the next paragraph, the House of Justice describes the community-building process in which we are engaged at the grassroots, noting that every individual finds himself or herself \_\_\_\_\_ in a community that serves \_\_\_\_\_ as an \_\_\_\_\_ conducive to the \_\_\_\_\_ of those \_\_\_\_\_ that are to distinguish a Bahá'í life—an environment in which

- a spirit of unity \_\_\_\_\_
  - the ties of fellowship \_\_\_\_\_
  - mistakes \_\_\_\_\_
  - fear of failure \_\_\_\_\_
  - criticism \_\_\_\_\_
  - backbiting and gossip \_\_\_\_\_
  - young and old \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

- children \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
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- young people \_\_\_\_\_  
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3. The second paragraph continues: The institutions of the Faith, for their part, strive to \_\_\_\_\_ that such an \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_. They do not \_\_\_\_\_ into the \_\_\_\_\_ of individuals. Nor are they \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, eager to \_\_\_\_\_ those who \_\_\_\_\_ of the Bahá'í standard. Except in \_\_\_\_\_ cases of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ disregard for the \_\_\_\_\_ that could \_\_\_\_\_ the Cause and may require them to \_\_\_\_\_, their attention is focused on \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.

4. The final paragraph quoted above notes: Such an environment creates a \_\_\_\_\_ than the one found particularly in the \_\_\_\_\_ societies of today. \_\_\_\_\_, for instance, need not be \_\_\_\_\_, as it is in some parts of the world where the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of adulthood are \_\_\_\_\_ in pursuit of the \_\_\_\_\_ that a \_\_\_\_\_ grants. For the individual, who both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ from the \_\_\_\_\_ that is the Bahá'í community, adhering to Bahá'í law is \_\_\_\_\_ with \_\_\_\_\_ and, though perhaps still difficult on \_\_\_\_\_, does not pose an \_\_\_\_\_.

### SECTION 35

Over the past several sections, we have reflected on passages from a letter dated 19 April 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice that offers guidance to the individual believer on matters related to Bahá'í law. We are now ready to take up a brief study of the letter dated 23 April 2013 addressed to a National Spiritual Assembly in Western Europe that had inquired how it might best help the young members of its community uphold the standard of conduct set forth in the teachings. The letter was later shared with other National Spiritual Assemblies. We will confine our explorations of it to a few concepts, reading only two or three extracts and carrying out some corresponding exercises.

The letter begins by making reference to the one dated 19 April—a copy of which is provided as an attachment for the National Assembly—and expands on the ideas set forth therein. Indeed, it picks up, in a sense, where the other letter came to a close, acknowledging the challenges faced by the Assembly in helping the friends to understand the Bahá'í teachings and to apply them in their lives, as the forces of materialism continue to grow in strength. In this connection, it indicates that

**“the issues involved can best be considered in light of the relationships that the Administrative Order seeks to forge among the individual, the institutions, and the community. While responsibility for adhering to the Bahá'í standard rests primarily on the individual believer, it is incumbent upon the institutions of the Faith to support the individual, largely through educational endeavors, and to foster a pattern of community life that is conducive to the spiritual upliftment of its members. It is understood, of course, that in the assumption of these and other sacred duties, Bahá'í institutions may find it necessary at times to take specific action as a means of protecting the community and the integrity of Bahá'í law.”<sup>108</sup>**

The way the institutions of the Faith discharge their educational responsibilities towards the body of believers is the first topic considered. The institutions need to bear in mind, the House of Justice makes clear, that very little is accomplished when efforts are reduced to “repeated admonition” or to “dogmatic instruction in proper conduct”. Their aim should instead be to “raise consciousness” and to “increase understanding”. In this light, the letter describes briefly the educational process in which the training institute seeks to engage the individual. At the heart of this process, which focuses on building capacity for service, is “contact with the Word of God, whose power sustains every individual’s attempts to purify his or her heart and to walk a path of service with ‘the feet of detachment’.” “Virtuous conduct and self-discipline”, then, are developed in the field of action.

The letter goes on to discuss how the moral development of the individual is related to the degree of his or her efforts to enrich community life. In doing so, it quotes several passages written on behalf of the Guardian that encourage the individual believer to learn through “active, wholehearted and continued participation” in community activities and to become “a real part” of a “living organism”. “Such wholehearted participation in the work of the Faith”, the House of Justice explains, provides a valuable context for the exertions made by individuals “to align their lives with Bahá'u'lláh’s teachings.” “When the desire to uphold the Bahá'í standard is nurtured through service to the common weal in an environment of unflinching love and warm encouragement,” individuals faced with difficulties will not feel inclined “to withdraw from community activity out of a sense of shame or, worse, to cover the challenges they are experiencing with the veneer of propriety, living a life in which public words do not conform to private deeds.”

Here the House of Justice refers the National Assembly specifically to the letter dated 19 April, noting that it describes “some of the characteristics of the community life that Bahá'ís, guided by their institutions, are striving to create.” “At the most fundamental level,” the environment sought is “one of love and support, in which the believers, all endeavoring to achieve the Bahá'í standard in their personal conduct, show patience and respect to each other and, when needed, receive wise counsel and ready assistance.” The following warning is then given:

**“What is essential for every National Assembly to acknowledge in this connection is that, if mutual love and support within the community, important as it is, becomes the only focus, a stagnant environment engendered by an insular mentality will develop. The worldwide Bahá’í community is charged with an historic mission. It must acquire capacity to address increasingly complex spiritual and material requirements as it becomes larger and larger in size. The 28 December 2010 message of the House of Justice indicated: ‘A small community, whose members are united by their shared beliefs, characterized by their high ideals, proficient in managing their affairs and tending to their needs, and perhaps engaged in several humanitarian projects—a community such as this, prospering but at a comfortable distance from the reality experienced by the masses of humanity, can never hope to serve as a pattern for restructuring the whole of society.’ The current series of global Plans sets out provisions for gradually building individual and collective capacity for the community’s mission. The institutions of a Bahá’í community that has been allowed to become complacent will find it difficult to protect the younger members from the forces of gross materialism, with the accompanying moral decay, that are assailing society. This, then, points to the nature of the capacity-building process in which every Bahá’í institution must energetically engage.”<sup>109</sup>**

Below are a few exercises that may assist you in reflecting on some of the points raised by the Universal House of Justice in this passage, as well as in the paragraphs quoted in the previous section. You may wish to go back and reread those paragraphs before completing the exercises.

1. The House of Justice indicates that we are members of a purposeful community, pursuing a bold spiritual mission, a community which serves increasingly as an environment where we are able to cultivate the attributes that are to distinguish our lives as Bahá’ís. What are some of the characteristics of the environment mentioned by the House of Justice in the letters we are studying?

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2. How does an environment with the characteristics you described above assist members of our community in pursuing their spiritual mission “to establish a pattern of activity and administrative structures suited to a humanity entering its age of maturity”?

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3. The House of Justice explains that, “if mutual love and support within the community, important as it is, becomes the only focus, a stagnant environment engendered by an insular mentality will develop.” While such an environment might share certain characteristics with the one you described above, the two do not affect their members in the same way. What characteristics are present in the one that are lacking in the other?

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4. How does complacency make the members of a community vulnerable to the forces of materialism?

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5. In an environment characterized by a strong sense of purpose to effect change, morality and spirituality are not associated with passivity but with energy and activity. To think for a moment about the implications of this concept of morality, complete the five phrases below.

- a. Whereas goodness is often defined in terms of not causing harm to anyone, the Bahá’í community tries to create an environment which cultivates a kind of goodness that

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- b. Whereas humility is sometimes associated with lack of capacity and confidence, the Bahá’í community tries to create an environment which cultivates a kind of humility that

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- c. Whereas purity is often associated with frailness and naivete, the Bahá'í community tries to create an environment which cultivates a kind of purity that

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- d. Whereas truthfulness is often seen as simply not telling blatant lies, the Bahá'í community tries to create an environment which cultivates a kind of truthfulness that

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- e. Whereas justice is often defined merely in terms of not infringing on the rights of others, the Bahá'í community tries to create an environment which cultivates a kind of justice that

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Now, in light of the above exercises, discuss in your group what it means to uphold the Bahá'í standard during this period when humanity is approaching its stage of maturity. How does participation in community life help to foster the attributes of a morality suited to this age, attributes that enable us to combat the forces of moral decay unleashed in the world today?

## SECTION 36

In addition to their ongoing responsibilities in supporting the individual believer and in fostering a vibrant pattern of community life, the institutions may need to take specific action as a means of protecting the community and the integrity of Bahá'í law. Below are some of the points raised in this connection by the letter written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to the National Spiritual Assembly.

The circumstances in which action may be required by the institutions are stated plainly—that is, “when the breach of Bahá'í law is public and flagrant, potentially bringing the Faith into disrepute and damaging its good name,” or “when the individual demonstrates a callous disregard for the teachings and the institutions of the Faith, with harmful consequences for the functioning of the Bahá'í community.” Such cases should be approached “with the

utmost delicacy and wisdom”. On the one hand, Spiritual Assemblies “should not adopt a passive approach, which would be tantamount to condoning behavior contrary to the teachings and which would undermine the imperative to obey Bahá’í law in the eyes of the members of the community.” On the other, they should not “act rashly or rigidly to enforce the law, imposing administrative sanctions arbitrarily.”

If an individual’s situation or conduct becomes so blatant that it attracts the attention of the Assembly, it would generally offer “loving but firm advice to the friend involved”, after gaining “a relatively clear picture of the issues” at hand. It may first need to determine “to what extent the believer understands the Faith and its standards”, and it should stand ready to counsel him or her dispassionately, perhaps “over an extended period”, to increase appreciation for “the requirements of Bahá’í law”. It may prove necessary for the Assembly, often with the aid of the Counsellors or Auxiliary Board members, to help the individual “reflect on his or her particular circumstances, apply relevant principles, and explore available options.” Institutions are advised to exercise patience, allowing the friend concerned “sufficient time to bring about a change”. They are also encouraged to take care, lest an individual’s problem become “a source of backbiting or disunity in the community”. Other members of the community should “focus their energies on their own spiritual development and on overcoming their personal shortcomings.”

At all times, an Assembly is “guided by the understanding that its objective is to assist the friends to draw closer to the Faith while taking care to protect the Bahá’í community from the negative influence of those who have no intention of adhering to its standards.” Continued patience and loving advice are appropriate “when a believer demonstrates an allegiance to the Cause and a willingness to rectify the situation”.

**“Only in circumstances where a believer, ignoring all admonishments, persists in misconduct and knowingly and consistently violates the law, would it be necessary for the Assembly to consider applying administrative sanctions—this, after warning the individual of the consequences of his or her continued disregard for the teachings. The decision in such matters is left to the National Spiritual Assembly, which is to proceed with the utmost care and circumspection. What is at stake is the participation of the individual in those aspects of community life internal to the body of the followers of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings, not his or her civil rights. In some cases, partial sanctions may be adequate, allowing the Assembly to deal with a situation in a flexible manner. For example, if the hope is to reawaken in the individual a desire to participate in community life, full sanctions may be counterproductive; an appropriate partial sanction, such as suspending his or her right to be elected to an Assembly, may prove sufficient, for, in any event, it would not be reasonable for a person who flagrantly violates Bahá’í law to be in a position to govern the affairs of the community. Restricting the believer from other forms of service—for instance, acting as a tutor of a study circle or as a children’s class teacher—may also be considered. Full removal of administrative rights should be reserved for the most severe and intractable cases, especially when the protection of the community becomes a concern. The wise use of partial sanctions thus provides the Assembly with another means of strengthening the individual and the community. In letters written on behalf of the Guardian advising Assemblies on such matters, he explained that, ‘although it is sometimes necessary to take away the voting rights of a believer for purposes of discipline,’ this prerogative of the National Assembly ‘should be used only in extreme cases.’”<sup>110</sup>**

Let us think, if only briefly here, about the meaning of administrative sanctions in the Faith. As is clear from the above passage, sanctions, far from being punishment or retribution, are intended to help the individual, to protect the integrity of the Faith, and to safeguard the community. Even a Bahá'í who happens to receive some form of sanction understands it as a process necessary for his or her own personal growth and for the health and progress of the community.

This conception of “sanctions” requires some reflection. Look at the statements below. Each one carries with it certain assumptions about the nature of the human being and the purpose of punishment in society for the violation of laws. Are any of them, uttered by one or another member of a community, in keeping with the spirit and purpose of administrative sanctions? As always with this type of exercise, while the decision may appear obvious in some cases, the statements, in their entirety, will help you to think through a set of ideas and to see how fruitless it is to bring the standards of the world today to bear on the question of administrative sanctions.

- \_\_\_\_\_ That will teach him! He always has to learn his lessons the hard way.
- \_\_\_\_\_ He got what was coming to him!
- \_\_\_\_\_ Sometimes you have to make an example out of people.
- \_\_\_\_\_ He should pay a price for what he has done.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Human beings are selfish by nature; no amount of education will teach them to shun evil.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Human beings are selfish by nature; only fear of punishment will stop them from committing acts that bring harm to others.
- \_\_\_\_\_ God is the only real judge, not our institutions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ An individual's personal conduct is a matter between him- or herself and God.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The important thing is to keep up appearances; what other people don't know won't hurt them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Freedom to act as one pleases is a basic human right; it should not be taken away under any circumstances.
- \_\_\_\_\_ People are the best judge of their own deeds; they should be allowed to act according to what they think is right.
- \_\_\_\_\_ People learn correct behavior from what they see around them; if society has not provided an environment for people to learn proper conduct, how can they be blamed for their misdeeds?
- \_\_\_\_\_ By imposing administrative sanctions on individuals, our institutions create disunity in the community.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The Faith is all about unity; the imposition of sanctions goes against the spirit of loving acceptance that it is trying to promote.

A final point deserves mention here: In no way should we confuse in our minds the question of administrative sanctions, which is one aspect of a loving educational process, with the need to protect the community from the influence of those who hope to undermine the unity of the Cause or who have stepped outside the shadow of the Covenant. The Counsellors and

their auxiliaries, as well as Spiritual Assemblies, are ever ready to take action in coordination with one another, should the need arise. The burden falls on them to counsel individuals so bent, recognizably few in number, and to counteract their schemes, as necessary. And conscious that the institutions of the Faith are vigilant in guarding over the community as a whole, each one of us is prepared—through study of the writings and daily prayer, through the bonds that connect us to the community and its institutions, and through our constant reference to the guidance of the Universal House of Justice—to protect ourselves, should we ever become the object of such machinations.

## SECTION 37

Though the discussion that we began in Section 28 has given us many insights into the question of Bahá'í law, this was not its primary purpose. Our exploration was about the promulgation and application of the Law by the Universal House of Justice as the Head of our Faith. With this thought in mind, consider for a moment the two letters we have just studied. Think about how lovingly the House of Justice addresses the individual. Underlying the care and precision with which it sets out its comments, is it not possible to see the respect and tender feelings it has for each and every one of us? Look at how it speaks to the institutions of our Faith and look at the language it employs in discussing Bahá'í law. Whereas so many institutions that wield authority revel in laying down long lists of injunctions, the House of Justice places the question of law in a comprehensive context. Whereas oftentimes authoritative bodies are accusatory, the House of Justice reminds us of our nobility. It helps us to see how Bahá'í law is central to individual and social transformation and to the process of civilization building. Its guidance brings into ever sharper focus a new conception of the individual, the institutions, and the community and the relationships that bind them—relationships that will bring forth civilization-building powers which can only be released through conformity with His decree. Reflect, then, on how exquisitely and with what majesty the Universal House of Justice is upholding, for all of humanity to witness, these and so many other statements found in the writings of our Faith:

**“Think not that We have revealed unto you a mere code of laws. Nay, rather, We have unsealed the choice Wine with the fingers of might and power. To this beareth witness that which the Pen of Revelation hath revealed. Meditate upon this, O men of insight!”<sup>111</sup>**

**“The primary purpose, the basic objective, in laying down powerful laws and setting up great principles and institutions dealing with every aspect of civilization, is human happiness; and human happiness consists only in drawing closer to the Threshold of Almighty God, and in securing the peace and well-being of every individual member, high and low alike, of the human race; and the supreme agencies for accomplishing these two objectives are the excellent qualities with which humanity has been endowed.”<sup>112</sup>**

**“Who can doubt that such a consummation—the coming of age of the human race—must signalize, in its turn, the inauguration of a world civilization such as no mortal eye hath ever beheld or human mind conceived? Who is it that can imagine the lofty standard which such a civilization, as it unfolds itself, is destined to attain? Who can measure the heights to which human intelligence, liberated**

**from its shackles, will soar? Who can visualize the realms which the human spirit, vitalized by the outpouring light of Bahá'u'lláh, shining in the plenitude of its glory, will discover?”<sup>113</sup>**

## SECTION 38

Also among the powers and duties with which the Universal House of Justice has been invested, as expressed in its Constitution, are “to ensure the preservation of the Sacred Texts and to safeguard their inviolability” and “to analyze, classify, and coordinate the Writings”.

Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation is universal in character. It belongs to the entire human race, not to any one group of people. Every human being and every human group can benefit from the pearls of wisdom contained therein. In this new Day, humanity is blessed not only with the Word of God revealed by His Manifestation but also with a vast body of written works from the authorized Interpreters of His Words, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá and the Guardian after Him, which affirm “the true meaning, the real significance, the innermost secret” of the revealed Verses. We will dedicate this and the next two sections, then, to a theme of utmost importance: how the House of Justice is providing humanity with access to the Word of God.

The Writings of Bahá'u'lláh comprise more than one hundred volumes in the original Persian and Arabic languages. ‘Abdu'l-Bahá's written works, too, are in Persian and Arabic, though a few are in Turkish. And while much of the correspondence of the Guardian was penned in English, a significant percentage was sent to the believers in the East as well. If the peoples of the world are to have access to Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, in order to study the teachings and apply them to their individual and collective lives, the writings must be translated into scores and scores of languages. This is an enormous enterprise. Let us think about some of its implications here.

To begin, we should remember that many texts in the original Persian and Arabic have been generally available for a long time. Both Bahá'u'lláh and ‘Abdu'l-Bahá addressed Tablets to individuals, and over the years nearly all of these have been collected at the Bahá'í World Centre, along with the communications of the Guardian. Further, we know how much importance Shoghi Effendi attached to the translation work, since he, as a young man, studied English with the hope of assisting his beloved Grandfather through this service. When, as Guardian of the Faith, he immediately set about translating the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu'l-Bahá, he initiated a process that continues to unfold under the direction of the Universal House of Justice. The many passages and Tablets he translated into English, from which, he advised, they could be rendered into a myriad other languages, serve as a standard for the preparation of translations today.

The House of Justice has established agencies at the World Centre to assist it in analyzing, classifying, and coordinating the Persian, Arabic, and English texts and in facilitating the English-language translation work. Such delicate work, we can well appreciate, requires not only a command of the relevant languages but also a dedication to acquiring a profound understanding of the purpose and character of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation and the historical circumstances in which it progressively unfolded. To translate even a single verse, one needs to draw on a great deal of knowledge and experience, if the final rendition is to resonate in the hearts and minds of readers and remain faithful to the original.

Periodically, then, the House of Justice will announce the completion of a new English-language compilation or publication with selections from the writings, chosen specifically by it, from the immense range available, on the basis of their “immediate relevance to the work of the Cause at this stage of its development”. From the English version, every selection is then taken into other languages, with the assistance, as necessary, of reference to the original Persian or Arabic. There are only a few exceptions where the translation is to be made directly from the original, for example, Turkish and Urdu, languages closely related to Persian and Arabic. The translation work usually proceeds under the aegis of National Spiritual Assemblies, but for certain languages widely spoken in the world that cross national borders, the House of Justice has set up international panels to oversee the translation of the Bahá’í writings. It has also placed special funds at the disposal of the Counsellors to help National Assemblies in their efforts to ensure basic Bahá’í literature is available in as many languages as possible. Now highly organized, the translation work moves with impressive speed in all parts of the Bahá’í world.

## SECTION 39

As a means of illustration of what we have studied in the last section, let us look at the trajectory that the translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas has followed. Our discussions will draw largely, though not exclusively, on the introduction written by the Universal House of Justice to the first authorized English translation of the Most Holy Book, from the original Arabic, completed in 1992.

First we should remind ourselves that “Bahá’u’lláh revealed the Kitáb-i-Aqdas around 1873, some twenty years after He had received, in the Siyáh-Chál of Tíhrán, the intimation of His Revelation.” He eventually had “manuscript copies sent to Bahá’ís in Iran,” and, towards the end of His life, around 1890–91, “He arranged for the publication of the original Arabic text of the Book in Bombay.” ‘Abdu’l-Bahá “anticipated its publication in various languages”, and Shoghi Effendi himself “translated substantial portions of it into English which he diffused through his letters and in his compilations of Bahá’u’lláh’s Writings”. Further he,

**“as an essential prelude to the eventual translation and publication of its entire text, initiated steps in 1955 for the preparation of a Synopsis and Codification of the Laws of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. This was a task on which he made considerable progress and which was completed by the Universal House of Justice in 1973 . . .”<sup>114</sup>**

Then, in its Riḍván 1986 message, the House of Justice reviewed the accomplishments of the Bahá’í world, commented on the Faith’s emergence from obscurity and on the maturation of the institutions of the Cause, and announced its decision to prepare the English translation of the complete text of the Most Holy Book. It considered this undertaking “both possible and essential”.

The introduction to the final published volume provides a description of the subsequent work involved. Of course, the style had to be in keeping with the significant portions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas already translated by the Guardian, who had “faced the challenge” of finding a style that would not only “faithfully convey the exactness of the text’s meaning” but also “evoke in the reader the spirit of meditative reverence which is a distinguishing feature of response to the original.” “The form of expression he selected”, the House of Justice states, “captures the elevated mode of Bahá’u’lláh’s Arabic, while remaining accessible to the contemporary

reader.” The following passage offers us valuable insight into the nature of the translation process that unfolded under the direction of the House of Justice:

**“Although both Arabic and English are languages with rich vocabularies and varied modes of expression, their forms differ widely from one another. The Arabic of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas is marked by intense concentration and terseness of expression. It is a characteristic of this style that if a connotation is obvious it should not be explicitly stated. This presents a problem for a reader whose cultural, religious and literary background is entirely different from that of Arabic. A literal translation of a passage which is clear in the Arabic could be obscure in English. It therefore becomes necessary to include in the English translation of such passages that element of the Arabic sentence which is obviously implicit in the original. At the same time, it is vital to avoid extrapolating this process to the point where it would add unjustifiably to the original or limit its meaning. Striking the right balance between beauty and clarity of expression on the one hand, and literalness on the other, is one of the major issues with which the translators have had to grapple and which has caused repeated reconsideration of the rendering of certain passages. Another major issue is the legal implication of certain Arabic terms which have a range of meanings different from those of similar terms in English.**

**“Sacred Scripture clearly requires especial care and faithfulness in translation. This is supremely important in the case of a Book of Laws, where it is vital that the reader not be misled or drawn into fruitless disputation. As had been foreseen, the translation of the Most Holy Book has been a work of the utmost difficulty, requiring consultation with experts in many lands. Since some one-third of the text had already been translated by Shoghi Effendi, it was necessary to strive for three qualities in the translation of the remaining passages: accuracy of meaning, beauty of English, and conformity of style with that used by Shoghi Effendi.**

**“We are now satisfied that the translation has reached a point where it represents an acceptable rendering of the original.”<sup>115</sup>**

The translation of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas was even more demanding than most other volumes because, as stated by Shoghi Effendi, it had to be “copiously annotated”. So, not only was it necessary for the remaining text of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas to be translated, but accompanying notes and an index had to be prepared, work meticulously carried out under the guidance of the House of Justice. The final volume, bearing the title *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book*, also contains supplementary texts from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh, the compilation of questions put to Him by early followers and the answers He revealed, and the Synopsis and Codification of the Laws and Ordinances of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas. The full volume has since been translated into a reported forty-six languages as of December 2025, making its content accessible to nearly seven and a half billion people and enabling some four and a half billion to study it in their own languages, as noted in the table on the next page.

### Languages in which “The Kitāb-i-Aqdas: The Most Holy Book” is available<sup>1</sup>

Language	Native speakers (in millions)	Total speakers (in millions)	Language	Native speakers (in millions)	Total speakers (in millions)
1. English	390.35	1,527.92	25. Polish	43.19	45.28
2. Chinese (Mandarin)	989.87	1,183.80	26. Burmese	34.37	44.39
3. Hindi	345.37	609.13	27. Oriya (Odia)	34.46	39.53
4. Spanish	483.98	558.46	28. Malayalam	37.37	38.18
5. Arabic (original)	410.55	410.55	29. Nepali	19.10	33.11
6. French	74.17	311.91	30. Dutch	23.74	25.39
7. Bengali	241.83	284.35	31. Romanian	23.71	23.73
8. Portuguese	249.54	266.63	32. Cebuano	21.40	21.40
9. Russian	145.17	253.36	33. Singhalese (Sinhala)	16.21	20.22
10. Indonesian	75.16	252.43	34. Czech	9.76	12.47
11. Urdu	77.68	246.00	35. Hungarian	12.14	12.15
12. German	76.09	134.04	36. Hebrew	6.12	10.48
13. Japanese	123.64	125.64	37. Bulgarian	6.76	7.92
14. Vietnamese	86.13	96.98	38. Slovak	5.39	7.44
15. Telugu	82.80	95.81	39. Albanian	6.17	6.17
16. Turkish	85.19	91.26	40. Danish	5.81	5.82
17. Swahili	3.87	87.16	41. Finnish	4.96	5.62
18. Tagalog	32.77	86.91	42. Norwegian	5.49	5.50
19. Tamil	78.72	86.34	43. Lao	3.85	4.65
20. Persian <sup>2</sup>	80.62	82.65	44. Tok Pisin	0.13	4.13
21. Korean	81.19	81.65	45. Icelandic	0.33	0.33
22. Thai	27.18	71.38	46. Greenlandic	0.05	0.06
23. Italian	62.94	66.22	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4,669.02</b>	<b>7,443.26</b>
24. Kannada	43.70	58.71			

<sup>1</sup> List based on information available to the Department of Statistics at the Bahá'í World Centre as of December 2025. Population figures were obtained from *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*.

<sup>2</sup> In accordance with directives from the Guardian, the text remains in the original Arabic. Some of the supplements as well as “Questions and Answers” were revealed in Persian; the introduction, the “Synopsis and Codification”, and Notes have been translated into Persian.

## SECTION 40

In the example we have taken of the release of the English translation of the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, we have seen that there is an expanding effort, unfolding under the direction of the Universal House of Justice, to translate the writings of the Faith and make them available to all of humanity, an effort so central to the mighty enterprise “to build anew the whole world”. What we should do now is consider the implications of this effort for our exertions as individuals to deepen our knowledge of Bahá’u’lláh’s teachings.

Of course, as we study the books of the training institute, and perform the corresponding acts of service, our knowledge of the teachings steadily increases, as does our understanding of their significance for our individual and collective lives. In addition to imparting knowledge and strengthening skills and abilities, qualities and attitudes, however, the institute courses strive to reinforce in participants many a desired habit. To recite “the verses of God” every morning and every evening is one of these.

Reflect for a moment on how much one’s thoughts and deeds are illumined through forming the habit of daily reading, and then write a short paragraph about how you are organizing your time to ensure you receive the bounties that flow from this exhortation of Bahá’u’lláh.

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One of the disciplines that it is hoped participants will gradually develop, as they form the habit of reading the verses of God every morning and evening, is systematic study of the writings. In the previous two units of this book, it was suggested that you draw up a personal plan to study the many written works and talks of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and the communications and statements of the Guardian. Although Bahá’u’lláh’s Revelation is no doubt the object of your constant reflection, you may wish to take the opportunity here to devise a similar plan that focuses on His Writings, if you have not already done so. The following overview of some of His major works will help you in this respect:

The *Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, of course, holds a special place in Bahá’í literature. As with the Will and Testament of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, you will refer to it time and again throughout your life. The Guardian emphasized that the *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* and the Will and Testament “are not only complementary, but that they mutually confirm one another, and are inseparable parts of one complete unit.”<sup>116</sup> Shoghi Effendi indicated, as you know from your study of the second unit, that together they constitute “the chief depository wherein are enshrined those priceless elements of that Divine Civilization, the establishment of which is the primary mission of the Bahá’í Faith”,<sup>117</sup> and he encouraged the friends to study the provisions of both these weighty documents.

As for the other translations into English prepared by the Guardian, though the titles were enumerated in the last unit, we should say a few words about each here. You are already

familiar with the Hidden Words and with the Kitáb-i-Íqán, both of which, as mentioned in the fourth course in this series, were revealed by Bahá'u'lláh during the period of His exile to Baghdád. Shoghi Effendi translated the former in 1923—followed by subsequent revisions—and the latter in 1931. Four years later, in 1935, his work on *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh*, described by him as “a selection of the most characteristic and hitherto unpublished passages from the outstanding works of the Author of the Bahá'í Revelation”, reached completion. This was followed by the release in 1938 of the equally substantial volume *Prayers and Meditations by Bahá'u'lláh*. The fifth and final translation given by the Guardian to the Western readership, the Epistle to the Son of the Wolf, was published in 1941. Addressed to a prominent Islamic cleric who had persecuted the Bahá'ís in Persia, this Tablet was Bahá'u'lláh's last major written work and contains a selection of passages from His Writings which He Himself made towards the end of His life.

Regarding the volumes prepared thus far under the supervision of the Universal House of Justice, almost all of which, like the Kitáb-i-Aqdas, have incorporated key passages translated by Shoghi Effendi, the first carried the title *The Proclamation of Bahá'u'lláh*. Bringing together a selection of Tablets and passages addressed by Bahá'u'lláh to the kings and rulers of the earth during His exile to Adrianople and in the early years of His banishment to 'Akká, it was released in 1967, in conjunction with the commemoration of the centenary of His Proclamation and with the worldwide effort of the Nine Year Plan to widely proclaim the Faith, which, as you know, was launched in 1964 and built on the accomplishments of the Ten Year World Crusade. In 1978 the publication *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas* was made available. It contains sixteen Tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh in the latter years of His life. In these Tablets, as noted in the preface, He enunciates precepts and principles that lie at the core of our Faith, reaffirms truths He had previously proclaimed, elaborates and elucidates some of the laws He had already laid down, reveals further prophecies and warnings, and establishes subsidiary ordinances designed to supplement the provisions of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas.

*The Summons of the Lord of Hosts* was the next major volume to be released after the completion of the Kitáb-i-Aqdas in 1992. Published in 2002, it provides the full texts of Bahá'u'lláh's major Tablets to the kings and rulers of the world. Later that same year *Gems of Divine Mysteries* was published. This short work revealed in Baghdád, in reply to questions posed by a seeker, deals with a number of themes related to the recognition of the Manifestation of God. In 2006, *The Tabernacle of Unity*, which contains five letters addressed by Bahá'u'lláh to individuals of Zoroastrian background, was made available.

These were followed in 2017 by *Days of Remembrance: Selections from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh for Bahá'í Holy Days*, which contains forty-five selections from His Writings revealed for, or relating to, nine Bahá'í Holy Days. Just two years later, in 2019, *The Call of the Divine Beloved: Selected Mystical Works of Bahá'u'lláh* was published. Comprising English translations of seven Tablets revealed by Bahá'u'lláh on mystical themes, it includes newly authorized translations of the Seven Valleys and the Four Valleys, two Tablets addressed to different individuals by Bahá'u'lláh while in Baghdád that refer to the stages through which the spiritual wayfarer passes in seeking the Beloved. As you may know, during the Guardian's ministry, an English translation of these two Tablets, prepared by two early believers, was published with his knowledge under the title *The Seven Valleys and The Four Valleys* by the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States.



## SECTION 41

In drawing up a personal plan for the study of Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation, we have brought to a close our reflections on the theme of humanity's access to the Word of God and on some of the powers and duties with which the Universal House of Justice is invested in this respect. It seems appropriate, at this point, for us to take a few moments to remind ourselves that, apart from our ongoing study of the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as well as those of the Guardian, we are in constant interaction with the guidance of the Universal House of Justice. Its messages to the Bahá'í world and others made widely available are also the object, then, of our systematic and intense study. Among them are its Ridván messages and the general messages it issues on occasion regarding the global Plans of the Faith. What excitement is generated in the Bahá'í world every time one of these messages is released, and we are able to catch a glimpse of the vision of the House of Justice, from such a lofty perspective, of what has been achieved and what can be accomplished in weaving a pattern of life that embodies the principle of the oneness of humankind—not unlike witnessing the progressive unrolling of the most exquisite tapestry. Sometimes its messages of this kind are gathered into volumes covering certain time periods, which we can also study. Let us read again, then, the excerpt quoted in Section 26, provided here for ease of reference, in which the House of Justice describes the posture it hopes we will assume in studying its guidance as we strive to put it into practice:

**“It is heartening to note that the friends are approaching the study of the messages of the Universal House of Justice related to the Plan with such diligence. The level of discussion generated as they strive to put into practice the guidance received, and to learn from experience, is impressive. We cannot help noticing, however, that achievements tend to be more enduring in those regions where the friends strive to understand the totality of the vision conveyed in the messages, while difficulties often arise when phrases and sentences are taken out of context and viewed as isolated fragments. The institutions and agencies of the Faith should help the believers to analyze but not reduce, to ponder meaning but not dwell on words, to identify distinct areas of action but not compartmentalize. We realize that this is no small task. Society speaks more and more in slogans. We hope that the habits the friends are forming in study circles to work with full and complex thoughts and to achieve understanding will be extended to various spheres of activity.”<sup>118</sup>**

The House of Justice in the above passage encourages the friends to strive to understand the totality of the vision its messages convey. In this connection, it asks the institutions of the Faith to help the believers to develop certain habits and avoid others. You may find it useful to write down the habits to which the House of Justice refers—both those we should develop and those we should develop the discipline to avoid. Having done so, discuss how the requisite habits are being nurtured in the setting of the study circle and how they contribute to putting into practice the guidance of the House of Justice and to our capacity to learn from long-term consistent action.

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## SECTION 42

Our explorations over the course of this unit have led us back to a subject that we took up during the early part of our study: that, in the institution of the Universal House of Justice, we have an entity, inspired directly by Bahá'u'lláh Himself, alive in the world through which guidance will continue to flow to humanity and through which the achievement of the purpose of His Revelation is assured. From its Seat standing at the apex of the Arc on Mount Carmel, which it occupied in 1983, the House of Justice carries out its functions and issues its communications. So it is that, from the Bahá'í Spiritual and Administrative Center, permanently fixed in the twin cities of 'Akká and Haifa, the supreme governing Body of our Faith—with its Council Chamber oriented towards Bahjí, the most sacred spot on earth, and situated in close proximity to the Shrine of the Báb—exercises the powers and duties with which it has been invested.

One of these powers and duties is, of course, “to preserve and develop the Spiritual and Administrative Center of the Bahá'í Faith” itself. The evolution of the World Center is closely linked, as we noted in the preceding unit, to the progress of the global Bahá'í community; an expanding number of agencies operate from there under the supervision of the House of Justice in the discharge of their responsibilities. In this connection, a letter written on its behalf explains: “As the work of the Bahá'í World Centre steadily increases, the Universal House of Justice, in order to concentrate on matters requiring its direct attention, has progressively referred to various Departments subjects that can be handled in other ways.”<sup>19</sup> The Office of Public Discourse and the Office for the Development of Administrative Systems, established in 2012 and 2014 respectively, are just two of these. So, too, there are offices that maintain relations with government agencies in Israel and that tend to the needs of the thousands of pilgrims who make their way to the Holy Land each year to pray and meditate in the Sacred Shrines.

There are, moreover, several agencies that directly support the work of the House of Justice, most notably its Secretariat, through which its correspondence flows to the world. The Secretariat also writes to individuals and institutions on behalf of the House of Justice at its instruction. So voluminous had such correspondence become that, in 1999, it announced its decision to pass to an auxiliary office, called the Office of Correspondence, a certain range of communications, more routine in nature, which would be handled according to set policies.

We also know from the messages of the House of Justice that, at any given moment, there may be any number of projects underway at the World Center to expand, maintain, and beautify the physical premises. The development of the gardens surrounding the Shrine of Bahá'u'lláh, the erection of the International Teaching Centre Building and the Centre for the Study of the Texts, the restoration of the International Archives Building, and structural repairs to the Shrine of the Báb have all been among them.

As with other themes we have considered, then, we will necessarily have to content ourselves with one example in our efforts to gain insights into the implications of the developments taking place at the World Center of the Faith under the watchful eye of the Universal House of Justice. Its statement dated 22 May 2001, read at the official opening of the magnificent flight of terraces that embrace the Shrine of the Báb, has been chosen for this purpose:

**“With joyful and thankful hearts, we welcome all who have come from near and far to join us on this auspicious occasion for the Bahá’ís of the world. We acknowledge with deep appreciation the presence of so many distinguished guests.**

**“A century and a half have passed since that unspeakable tragedy in the northwest of Persia when the Báb faced the volley fired at Him from the rifles of 750 soldiers. The soldiers had followed the orders of the highest authorities in the land. The Báb’s mangled body was then thrown on the side of a moat outside the city, abandoned to what His cold-blooded persecutors thought would be a dishonorable fate. They had hoped thus to put an end to the growing influence of His teachings on masses of people throughout the country. These masses had accepted, in the face of intense persecution, the Báb’s claim to prophethood, and their lives were being transformed spiritually and morally as He prepared them for what He said was the dawn of a new age in which a world civilization would be born and flourish. The expectations that stirred countless hearts were heightened even more sublimely by the Báb’s announcement that One greater than He would soon arise, One who would reveal the unparalleled character of the promised world civilization that would signify the coming of age of the entire human race.**

**“We are met not to lament the tragedy of the Báb’s martyrdom and the persecutions that followed; rather have we come to celebrate the culmination and acknowledge the meaning of an unprecedented project that had its beginning over a century ago. It was then that Bahá’u’lláh, Whom the Ottoman authorities had banished to Acre to serve out His days in confinement, visited Mount Carmel and selected the spot where the remains of His Herald would be interred. We humbly trust that the wondrous result achieved by the completion of the nineteen terraced gardens, at the heart of which rises the Shrine of the Báb, is a fitting fulfillment of the vision initiated by Bahá’u’lláh.**

**“The sufferings sustained by the Báb so as to arouse humanity to the responsibilities of its coming age of maturity were themselves indications of the intensity of the struggle necessary for the world’s people to pass through the age of humanity’s collective adolescence. Paradoxical as it may seem, this is a source of hope. The turmoil and crises of our time underlie a momentous transition in human affairs. Simultaneous processes of disintegration and integration have clearly been accelerating throughout the planet since the Báb appeared in Persia. That our Earth has contracted into a neighborhood, no one can seriously deny. The world is being made new. Death pangs are yielding to birth pangs. The pain shall pass when members of the human race act upon the common recognition of their essential oneness. There is a light at the end of this tunnel of change beckoning humanity to the goal destined for it according to the testimonies recorded in all the Holy Books.**

**“The Shrine of the Báb stands as a symbol of the efficacy of that age-old promise, a sign of its urgency. It is, as well, a monument to the triumph of love over hate. The gardens which surround that structure, in their rich variety of colors and plants, are a reminder that the human race can live harmoniously in all its diversity. The light that shines from the central edifice is as a beacon of hope to the countless multitudes who yearn for a life that satisfies the soul as well as the body.**

**“This inextinguishable hope stems from words such as these from the Pen of Bahá’u’lláh: ‘This is the Day in which God’s most excellent favors have been poured out upon men, the Day in which His most mighty grace has been infused into all created things.’ May all who strive, often against great odds, to uphold principles of justice and concord be encouraged by these assurances.”<sup>120</sup>**

## **SECTION 43**

At this point we should admit that the study we have undertaken of selected passages from messages and statements of the Universal House of Justice, organized according to several broad themes, has been far from comprehensive. If we glance back to the Declaration of Trust from its Constitution in Section 6, we will see how short our study has fallen in capturing the magnitude of its functions. This supreme institution is, the Guardian tells us, “the wellspring of the actions and undertakings of all the Bahá’ís”. He states further: “Through that body will the hopes of the people of Bahá be fulfilled. Through it the pillars of the Faith on this earth will be firmly established and its hidden powers be revealed, its signs shine forth, its banners be unfurled and its light be shed upon all peoples.”<sup>121</sup>

Indeed, the themes addressed in future courses in this series will all be concerned, in one way or another, with processes gathering momentum under its direction. Our exploration of these themes will serve, it is hoped, to deepen still further our understanding of the implications for our individual and collective lives of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s statement “the pivot of the oneness of mankind is nothing else but the power of the Covenant.”

For now, then, let us end this unit by remembering that the Universal House of Justice, the Head of our Faith, is “the exponent and guardian of that Divine Justice which can alone ensure the security of, and establish the rein of law and order in, the world.” The selection of passages in this section, as always a small fraction of the relevant communications from the House of Justice, will help us to reflect on the nature of its guidance in this respect.

It is incumbent upon the House of Justice, Bahá’u’lláh has stated, “to have the utmost regard for the interests of the people at all times and under all conditions.” So, too, it is “to do its utmost for the realization of greater cordiality and comity amongst the nations and for the attainment of universal peace”. The extract below from a statement dated October 1985 addressed by the House of Justice to the peoples of the world, on the occasion of the United Nations International Year of Peace, offers us an example of its guidance in this connection.

**“It is out of a deep sense of spiritual and moral duty that we are impelled at this opportune moment to invite your attention to the penetrating insights first communicated to the rulers of mankind more than a century ago by Bahá’u’lláh, Founder of the Bahá’í Faith, of which we are the Trustees.**

**“The winds of despair,’ Bahá’u’lláh wrote, ‘are, alas, blowing from every direction, and the strife that divides and afflicts the human race is daily increasing. The signs of impending convulsions and chaos can now be discerned, inasmuch as the prevailing order appears to be lamentably defective.’ This prophetic judgment has been amply confirmed by the common experience of humanity. Flaws in the prevailing order are conspicuous in the inability of sovereign states organized as United Nations to exorcise the specter of war, the threatened collapse of the international economic order, the spread of anarchy and terrorism, and the intense suffering which these and other afflictions are causing to increasing millions. Indeed, so much have aggression and conflict come to characterize our social, economic and religious systems, that many have succumbed to the view that such behavior is intrinsic to human nature and therefore ineradicable.**

**“With the entrenchment of this view, a paralyzing contradiction has developed in human affairs. On the one hand, people of all nations proclaim not only their readiness but their longing for peace and harmony, for an end to the harrowing apprehensions tormenting their daily lives. On the other, uncritical assent is given to the proposition that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive and thus incapable of erecting a social system at once progressive and peaceful, dynamic and harmonious, a system giving free play to individual creativity and initiative but based on cooperation and reciprocity.**

**“As the need for peace becomes more urgent, this fundamental contradiction, which hinders its realization, demands a reassessment of the assumptions upon which the commonly held view of mankind’s historical predicament is based. Dispassionately examined, the evidence reveals that such conduct, far from expressing man’s true self, represents a distortion of the human spirit. Satisfaction on this point will enable all people to set in motion constructive social forces which, because they are consistent with human nature, will encourage harmony and cooperation instead of war and conflict. . . .**

**“A candid acknowledgement that prejudice, war and exploitation have been the expression of immature stages in a vast historical process and that the human race is today experiencing the unavoidable tumult which marks its collective coming of age is not a reason for despair but a prerequisite to undertaking the stupendous enterprise of building a peaceful world. That such an enterprise is possible, that the necessary constructive forces do exist, that unifying social structures can be erected, is the theme we urge you to examine.”<sup>122</sup>**

In the statement below, the House of Justice expounds, as it has on many other occasions, on the role of religion in shaping human affairs. Indeed, the House of Justice has been called upon by Bahá’u’lláh to do the utmost in its power to “safeguard” the “position” of religion and to “promote its interests and exalt its station in the eyes of the world”.

**“The endowments which distinguish the human race from all other forms of life are summed up in what is known as the human spirit; the mind is its essential quality. These endowments have enabled humanity to build civilizations and to prosper materially. But such accomplishments alone have never satisfied the human spirit, whose mysterious nature inclines it towards transcendence, a reaching towards an invisible realm, towards the ultimate reality, that unknow-**

**able essence of essences called God. The religions brought to mankind by a succession of spiritual luminaries have been the primary link between humanity and that ultimate reality, and have galvanized and refined mankind's capacity to achieve spiritual success together with social progress.”<sup>123</sup>**

And again, addressing the world's religious leaders in a message dated April 2002, the House of Justice writes:

**“Religion, as we are all aware, reaches to the roots of motivation. When it has been faithful to the spirit and example of the transcendent Figures who gave the world its great belief systems, it has awakened in whole populations capacities to love, to forgive, to create, to dare greatly, to overcome prejudice, to sacrifice for the common good and to discipline the impulses of animal instinct. Unquestionably, the seminal force in the civilizing of human nature has been the influence of the succession of these Manifestations of the Divine that extends back to the dawn of recorded history.**

**“This same force, that operated with such effect in ages past, remains an inextinguishable feature of human consciousness. Against all odds, and with little in the way of meaningful encouragement, it continues to sustain the struggle for survival of uncounted millions, and to raise up in all lands heroes and saints whose lives are the most persuasive vindication of the principles contained in the scriptures of their respective faiths. As the course of civilization demonstrates, religion is also capable of profoundly influencing the structure of social relationships. Indeed, it would be difficult to think of any fundamental advance in civilization that did not derive its moral thrust from this perennial source. Is it conceivable, then, that passage to the culminating stage in the millennia-long process of the organization of the planet can be accomplished in a spiritual vacuum? If the perverse ideologies let loose on our world during the century just past contributed nothing else, they demonstrated conclusively that the need cannot be met by alternatives that lie within the power of human invention.”<sup>124</sup>**

And time and again, the House of Justice, which is “to foster that which is conducive to the enlightenment and illumination of the souls of men and the advancement and betterment of the world”, upholds the role played by the rational faculty in building civilization and proclaims the principle of harmony between science and religion. Its message to the world's religious leaders reads in this respect:

**“Together with the crumbling of barriers separating peoples, our age is witnessing the dissolution of the once insuperable wall that the past assumed would forever separate the life of Heaven from the life of Earth. The scriptures of all religions have always taught the believer to see in service to others not only a moral duty, but an avenue for the soul's own approach to God. Today, the progressive restructuring of society gives this familiar teaching new dimensions of meaning. As the age-old promise of a world animated by principles of justice slowly takes on the character of a realistic goal, meeting the needs of the soul and those of society will increasingly be seen as reciprocal aspects of a mature spiritual life.**

**“If religious leadership is to rise to the challenge that this latter perception represents, such response must begin by acknowledging that religion and science**

are the two indispensable knowledge systems through which the potentialities of consciousness develop. Far from being in conflict with one another, these fundamental modes of the mind's exploration of reality are mutually dependent and have been most productive in those rare but happy periods of history when their complementary nature has been recognized and they have been able to work together. The insights and skills generated by scientific advance will have always to look to the guidance of spiritual and moral commitment to ensure their appropriate application; religious convictions, no matter how cherished they may be, must submit, willingly and gratefully, to impartial testing by scientific methods."<sup>125</sup>

The House of Justice has been exhorted by Bahá'u'lláh "to ensure the protection and safeguarding of men, women and children", and in message after message we can perceive its deep concern for the plight of the masses of humanity and their long-suffering. To the friends in Iran, for decades the object of persecution, it writes, for instance:

**"No one would contend that you are alone in the ordeals you are enduring. The victims of injustice today number in countless millions. Each year, the agendas of the human rights organizations are overwhelmed by appeals from spokespersons for oppressed minorities of every type—religious, ethnic, social and national. In the words of Bahá'u'lláh, 'Justice is in this day bewailing its plight, and Equity groaneth beneath the yoke of oppression.' What has more alarmed perceptive observers of such situations than even the physical and material anguish caused is the spiritual damage done to the victims. Deliberate oppression aims at dehumanizing those whom it subjugates and at delegitimizing them as members of society, entitled to neither rights nor consideration. Where such conditions persist over any length of time, many of those affected lose confidence in their own perception of themselves. Inexorably, they become drained of that spirit of initiative that is integral to human nature and are reduced to the level of objects to be dealt with as their rulers decide. Indeed, some who are exposed to sustained oppression can become so conditioned to a culture of brutalization that they, in their turn, are ready to commit violence against others, should the opportunity offer itself."**<sup>126</sup>

That the Bahá'í community, in the face of such oppression, has been preserved from "spiritual corrosion of this nature", the message goes on to note, is not lost on the world. And here, as on so many other occasions, the House of Justice holds out to a beleaguered humanity, hungering for righteousness, the experience of the Bahá'í community as "living proof that faith in God and confidence in social progress are in every sense reconcilable; that science and religion are the two inseparable, reciprocal systems of knowledge impelling the advancement of civilization." In this light, the above message issues the following warning:

**"Ruling elites can make no more serious error than to imagine that the power they have managed to arrogate to themselves provides an enduring bulwark against the relentless tides of historical change. Today, in Iran as everywhere throughout the world, these tides roll in with insistent urgency and tumultuous force. They are not merely at the door of the house, but rise up irresistibly through its floors. They cannot be diverted. They will not be denied."**<sup>127</sup>

In all such messages, then, we see how uppermost in the mind of the House of Justice is “the preservation of human honor”, to which it is called upon to “give attention”. Its 1985 message to the peoples of the world, to take but one example, lays much of the blame for the lamentable situation in the world today and for the abasement of humankind on materialism:

**“The time has come when those who preach the dogmas of materialism, whether of the east or the west, whether of capitalism or socialism, must give account of the moral stewardship they have presumed to exercise. Where is the ‘new world’ promised by these ideologies? Where is the international peace to whose ideals they proclaim their devotion? Where are the breakthroughs into new realms of cultural achievement produced by the aggrandizement of this race, of that nation or of a particular class? Why is the vast majority of the world’s peoples sinking ever deeper into hunger and wretchedness when wealth on a scale undreamed of by the Pharaohs, the Caesars, or even the imperialist powers of the nineteenth century is at the disposal of the present arbiters of human affairs?”**

**“Most particularly, it is in the glorification of material pursuits, at once the progenitor and common feature of all such ideologies, that we find the roots which nourish the falsehood that human beings are incorrigibly selfish and aggressive. It is here that the ground must be cleared for the building of a new world fit for our descendants.**

**“That materialistic ideals have, in the light of experience, failed to satisfy the needs of mankind calls for an honest acknowledgement that a fresh effort must now be made to find the solutions to the agonizing problems of the planet. The intolerable conditions pervading society bespeak a common failure of all, a circumstance which tends to incite rather than relieve the entrenchment on every side. Clearly, a common remedial effort is urgently required. It is primarily a matter of attitude. Will humanity continue in its waywardness, holding to outworn concepts and unworkable assumptions? Or will its leaders, regardless of ideology, step forth and, with a resolute will, consult together in a united search for appropriate solutions?”**

**“Those who care for the future of the human race may well ponder this advice. ‘If long-cherished ideals and time-honored institutions, if certain social assumptions and religious formulae have ceased to promote the welfare of the generality of mankind, if they no longer minister to the needs of a continually evolving humanity, let them be swept away and relegated to the limbo of obsolescent and forgotten doctrines. Why should these, in a world subject to the immutable law of change and decay, be exempt from the deterioration that must needs overtake every human institution? For legal standards, political and economic theories are solely designed to safeguard the interests of humanity as a whole, and not humanity to be crucified for the preservation of the integrity of any particular law or doctrine.’”<sup>128</sup>**

The House of Justice in a message dated 1 March 2017 describes how the forces of materialism are adversely affecting the economic lives of a growing majority of the peoples of the world. The line of thinking promoted by such forces distorts the true worth of a human being and denies the capacity of the human soul to reflect all the attributes of God. “The vision of Bahá’u’lláh”, the message states, “challenges many of the assumptions that are allowed to shape contemporary discourse—for instance, that self-interest, far from needing to be

restrained, drives prosperity, and that progress depends upon its expression through relentless competition.” It further points out that “seductive messages fuel an increasingly entrenched sense of personal entitlement, which uses the language of justice and rights to disguise self-interest. Indifference to the hardship experienced by others becomes commonplace while entertainment and distracting amusements are voraciously consumed.” The House of Justice explains in the same message:

**“The welfare of any segment of humanity is inextricably bound up with the welfare of the whole. Humanity’s collective life suffers when any one group thinks of its own well-being in isolation from that of its neighbors or pursues economic gain without regard for how the natural environment, which provides sustenance for all, is affected. A stubborn obstruction, then, stands in the way of meaningful social progress: time and again, avarice and self-interest prevail at the expense of the common good. Unconscionable quantities of wealth are being amassed, and the instability this creates is made worse by how income and opportunity are spread so unevenly both between nations and within nations. But it need not be so. However much such conditions are the outcome of history, they do not have to define the future, and even if current approaches to life satisfied humanity’s stage of adolescence, they are certainly inadequate for its dawning age of maturity. There is no justification for continuing to perpetuate structures, rules, and systems that manifestly fail to serve the interests of all peoples. The teachings of the Faith leave no room for doubt: there is an inherent moral dimension to the generation, distribution, and utilization of wealth and resources.”<sup>129</sup>**

So it is that, in messages to the followers of Bahá’u’lláh across the globe, the House of Justice draws our attention time and again to “the accelerated disintegration, fitful but relentless, of a world order lamentably defective”. But it also constantly reminds us, as it did in its Ridván 2011 message, that

**“discernible too is its counterpart, the constructive process that the Guardian associated with ‘the nascent Faith of Bahá’u’lláh’ and described as ‘the harbinger of the New World Order that Faith must ere long establish.’ Its indirect effects can be seen in the outpouring of feeling, especially from the young, that springs from a longing to contribute to societal development. It is a bounty accorded to the followers of the Ancient Beauty that this longing, which wells up inexorably from the human spirit in every land, is able to find such eloquent expression in the work the Bahá’í community is carrying out to build capacity for effective action amongst the diverse populations of the planet. Can any privilege compare with this?”<sup>130</sup>**

“To usher in the World Order of Bahá’u’lláh”—whose “watchword is unity”, whose “animating power is the force of Justice”, whose “directive purpose is the reign of righteousness and truth”, and whose “supreme glory is the complete, the undisturbed, and everlasting felicity of the whole of humankind”—is among the powers and duties with which the Universal House of Justice has been invested. We are, of course, well familiar with its guidance in this connection, as so many of its messages to the Bahá’í community are related, in one way or another, to the establishment of the Order conceived by Bahá’u’lláh. Among such messages are those that the House of Justice addresses to Bahá’í youth from time to time describing the responsibilities which each generation must shoulder in this ongoing enterprise. Below are its words to the participants in a series of youth conferences held across Latin America in 2000.

**“At the end of the twentieth century, the majority of the population of Latin America is under the age of 30. As this generation of youth assumes the responsibilities of conducting the affairs of society, it will encounter a landscape of bewildering contrast. On the one hand, the region can justly boast brilliant achievements in the intellectual, technological and economic spheres. On the other, it has failed to reduce widespread poverty or to avoid a rising sea of violence that threatens to submerge its peoples. Why—and the question needs to be asked plainly—has this society been impotent, despite its great wealth, to remove the injustices that are tearing its fiber apart?”**

**“The answer to this question, as amply evidenced by decades of contentious history, cannot be found in political passion, conflicting expressions of class interest, or technical recipes. What is called for is a spiritual revival, as a prerequisite to the successful application of political, economic and technological instruments. But there is a need for a catalyst. Be assured that, in spite of your small numbers, you are the channels through which such a catalyst can be provided.**

**“Be not dismayed if your endeavors are dismissed as utopian by the voices that would oppose any suggestion of fundamental change. Trust in the capacity of this generation to disentangle itself from the embroilments of a divided society. To discharge your responsibilities, you will have to show forth courage, the courage of those who cling to standards of rectitude, whose lives are characterized by purity of thought and action, and whose purpose is directed by love and indomitable faith. As you dedicate yourselves to healing the wounds with which your peoples have been afflicted, you will become invincible champions of justice.”<sup>131</sup>**

And, in a message announcing the convocation of a series of youth conferences which were held in 2013 in some one hundred locations spanning the globe, the Universal House of Justice writes:

**“Beloved friends: To every generation of young believers comes an opportunity to make a contribution to the fortunes of humanity, unique to their time of life. For the present generation, the moment has come to reflect, to commit, to steel themselves for a life of service from which blessing will flow in abundance. In our prayers at the Sacred Threshold, we entreat the Ancient Beauty that, from out a distracted and bewildered humanity, He may distill pure souls endowed with clear sight: youth whose integrity and uprightness are not undermined by dwelling on the faults of others and who are not immobilized by any shortcomings of their own; youth who will look to the Master and ‘bring those who have been excluded into the circle of intimate friends’; youth whose consciousness of the failings of society impels them to work for its transformation, not to distance themselves from it; youth who, whatever the cost, will refuse to pass by inequity in its many incarnations and will labor, instead, that ‘the light of justice may shed its radiance upon the whole world.’”<sup>132</sup>**

Let us conclude our study with the following passage from the Riḍván 2024 message of the Universal House of Justice:

**“Where else but in Bahá’u’lláh’s principle of the oneness of humankind can the world find a vision broad enough to unite all its diverse elements? How else but**

**by translating that vision into an order based on unity in diversity can the world heal the social fractures that divide it? Who else can be the leaven through which the peoples of the world can discover a new way of life, a pathway to enduring peace? Extend then to everyone the hand of friendship, of common endeavor, of shared service, of collective learning, and advance as one.**

**“We are conscious of how much vibrancy and strength is generated in any society by its youth being awakened to the vision of Bahá’u’lláh and becoming protagonists of the Plan. And so, with what immense kindness, courage, and complete reliance on God must Bahá’í youth resolve to reach out to their peers and bring them into this work! All must surge, but the youth must soar.”<sup>133</sup>**

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96. From a letter dated 19 April 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to three Bahá'ís, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022*, no. 197.5, p. 440; also in *Framework for Action*, no. 51.4, pp. 290–91.
97. Bahá'u'lláh, *The Hidden Words* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 2003, 2022 printing), Arabic no. 3, p. 4.
98. *Ibid.*, Persian no. 72, p. 47.
99. *Gleanings from the Writings of Bahá'u'lláh* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983, 2023 printing), XIV, par. 18, p. 41.
100. From “Lawḥ-i-Burhán” [Tablet of the Proof], published in *Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh Revealed after the Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, no. 14.4, p. 253.
101. From a talk given on 24 September 1912, published in *The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing, 2012), par. 3, p. 474.
102. From a letter dated 19 April 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to three Bahá'ís, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022*, no. 197.6–7, p. 441; also in *Framework for Action*, no. 51.5–6, p. 291.
103. Bahá'u'lláh, in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, par. 63, p. 44.
104. Bahá'u'lláh, in *Bahá'í Prayers: A Selection of Prayers Revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, the Báb, and 'Abdu'l-Bahá* (Wilmette: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 2002, 2022 printing), p. 116.
105. From a letter dated 19 April 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to three Bahá'ís, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022*, no. 197.8, pp. 441–42; also in *Framework for Action*, no. 51.7, p. 292.
106. From a letter dated 19 April 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to three Bahá'ís, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022*, no. 197.9, pp. 442–43; also in *Framework for Action*, no. 51.8, pp. 292–93.
107. From a letter dated 19 April 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to three Bahá'ís, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022*, no. 197.10–12, pp. 443–44; also in *Framework for Action*, no. 51.9–11, pp. 293–94.
108. From a letter dated 23 April 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022*, no. 199.1, p. 452; also in *Framework for Action*, no. 52.1, p. 295.
109. From a letter dated 23 April 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022*, no. 199.5, pp. 453–54; also in *Framework for Action*, no. 52.5, p. 297.

110. From a letter dated 23 April 2013 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to a National Spiritual Assembly, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022*, no. 199.8, pp. 455–56; also in *Framework for Action*, no. 52.8, pp. 298–99.
111. Bahá'u'lláh, in *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, par. 5, p. 25.
112. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Secret of Divine Civilization* (Wilmette: Bahá’í Publishing, 2007, 2016 printing), par. 109, p. 79.
113. From a letter dated 11 March 1936 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá’ís of the West, published in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 206.
114. From a message dated 5 March 1993 to the Bahá’ís of the world, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1986–2001*, no. 150.3, p. 324.
115. From the introduction written by the Universal House of Justice to *The Kitáb-i-Aqdas*, pp. 12–13.
116. From a letter dated 27 February 1929 written by Shoghi Effendi to the National Spiritual Assembly of the United States and Canada, published in *The World Order of Bahá’u’lláh*, p. 4.
117. *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.
118. From a message dated 28 December 2010 to the Conference of the Continental Boards of Counsellors, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022*, no. 164.37, pp. 356–57; also in *Framework for Action*, no. 16.37, p. 115.
119. From a message dated 9 November 1999 written on behalf of the Universal House of Justice to all National Spiritual Assemblies, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1986–2001*, no. 312.1, p. 694.
120. From a statement of the Universal House of Justice dated 22 May 2001 read on the occasion of the official opening of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022*, no. 2.1–6, pp. 8–10.
121. From a letter dated 27 November 1929 written by Shoghi Effendi to the Bahá’ís of the East, published in *The Universal House of Justice*, no. 33.3, p. 30.
122. From “The Promise of World Peace”, a statement dated October 1985 written to the peoples of the world on the occasion of the United Nations International Year of Peace, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963–1986*, nos. 438.5–7 and 438.10, pp. 682–83.
123. *Ibid.*, no. 438.12, pp. 683–84.
124. From a statement dated April 2002 written to the world’s religious leaders, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022*, no. 23.13–14, pp. 42–43.

125. Ibid., no. 23.20–21, p. 45.
126. From a message dated 26 November 2003 written by the Universal House of Justice to the Bahá'ís of Iran, *ibid.*, no. 45.19, p. 80.
127. *Ibid.*, no. 45.25, p. 83.
128. From “The Promise of World Peace”, a statement dated October 1985 written to the peoples of the world on the occasion of the United Nations International Year of Peace, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 1963–1986*, no. 438.21–24, p. 686.
129. From a message dated 1 March 2017 to the Bahá'ís of the world, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022*, no. 278.2, pp. 635–36.
130. From the Ridván 2011 message to the Bahá'ís of the world, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022*, no. 168.4, p. 372; also in *Framework for Action*, no. 18.4, p. 124.
131. From a message dated 8 January 2000 to the friends gathered at the youth congress in Paraguay, published in *Turning Point*, no. 20.3–5, pp. 123–24.
132. From a message dated 8 February 2013 to the Bahá'ís of the world, published in *Messages from the Universal House of Justice, 2001–2022*, no. 194.4, p. 427; also in *Framework for Action*, no. 22.4, p. 147.
133. From the Ridván 2024 message to the Bahá'ís of the world, published in *The Nine Year Plan, 2022–2031, Messages of the Universal House of Justice* (Ingleside: Bahá'í Publications Australia, 2025), no. 3.5–6, p. 20.